

# שירת הישיבה JOUISSANCE

Yael Cameron-Klangwisan





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# JOUISSANCE



## *A Cixousian encounter with the Song of Songs*

Yael Cameron-Klangwisan

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012

Faculty of Culture and Society

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I listen and repeat what women tell me at night. One part of the text comes from me. One part is torn from the body of the body of peoples; one part is anonymous, one part is my brother. Each part is a whole that I desire, a greater life that I envy and admire, that adds its blood to my own blood. In me there is always someone who is greater than I, someone nobler, someone powerful, who pushes me to grow, whom I love, whom I don't seek to be equal, a body, a soul, a text – human, whom I don't want to restrain, whom I want to let circulate freely, to whom I relish having to give the infinite.<sup>1</sup>

כחוט השני שפתתך  
ומדברך נאווה

A crimson ribbon, your lips  
Your voice is beauty!<sup>2</sup><sub>[4:3]</sub>



For C.

แต่ ชาญ

ฉันออกไปที่สวนขนุน

เพื่อดูความชุ่มฉ่ำของกระแสน้ำ

เพื่อดูมัจจุรืที่กำลังผลิชอบ

เพื่อดูดอกมะม่วงที่กำลังคลี่บาน

และก่อนที่ฉันจะรู้ว่าอะไรเป็นอะไร

ฉันก็พบตัวเองอยู่บนหลังช้างเผือก!

.....กับเจ้าชายผู้สูงศักดิ์...

ฉันไม่เคยลืมวันเวลาเหล่านั้น ครั้งแรกที่อีสาน, เสียงเพลง  
ของว่าวธนูต้องลม, ผลไม้แสนอร่อย, ความอบอุ่น, สายลม  
แรง, บรรยากาศที่อบอุ่นด้วยกลิ่นหอมของดอกมะลิ สิ่ง  
เหล่านี้ทั้งหมดให้คุณ

แรงบันดาลใจของฉัน...



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*Dear Reader, thus we begin,  
with the incendiary words of  
Hélène Cixous already calling  
to us. I taste something,  
something a little like blood.  
There is blood in my mouth.  
Why do I bleed? It is the work  
of the text. The text that is  
calling to me from Semitic  
deeps and the text that is  
being called out of me  
through Hélène's alchemy.  
Each demands its price. Each  
exact a toll. It is both  
unbearable to proceed and  
unbearable to turn away from  
proceeding.*

# Preface

*hic jacet*



## Kaddish for a Young Jewish Saint

N. said today, “Derrida is dead.” Why did I do a double-take and look blank? Derrida is dead? The Derrida? Jacques Derrida? The one Cixous called Jackie? And then the deflation, and the pain in my heart, a lump in my throat. Palpable loss. And a second afterwards I felt like a fool. And yet I knew this, of course I knew this—after all I had seen a picture of Derrida in memorandum with the years written like this:

1930-2004

Horrible pairing of numbers that say “and he lived and he died.” As if we believe the minimalism of the numerals hide the horror of decomposition. He started then he finished, and now he is no more. I saw it ages ago and knew what it meant. Why had I forgotten that you were dead? Maybe it was because just the other night I had read Cixous’s “The Flying Manuscript” and in the reading of that text you were not dead. You said to her “Don’t read it. Don’t open it. It is the first spurt.”<sup>1</sup> And just this morning you weren’t dead. You had just said:

The circle of the return to birth can only remain open, but this is a chance, a sign of life, and a wound. If it closed in on birth, on a plenitude of the utterance or the knowledge that says “I am born,” that would be death.<sup>2</sup>

I had thought about it and felt myself change a little by the knowledge, the encounter. And now you are as they say: ‘dead’. It’s the strangest thing. You were alive and now dead in a flash of three words. “Derrida is dead.” I am looking around myself now wondering who else I thought alive but really, now dead. I suppose you are going to say “Buber is dead.” And then of course I realize Buber must have died some time ago. But! Here he is alive between the covers of

*Ich und Du.* I have it here in my hands and he is saying—and I had forgotten that he had started this way.

The world is twofold for man in accordance to his twofold attitude.<sup>3</sup>

Don't say it. Please don't say it. At least let me have Hélène Cixous alive and well and writing the body of the earth! And of course, yes, she is alive somewhere in Paris or flying somewhere and writing manuscripts 'off the cuff'. And yet I don't know that Hélène, the one that is drinking coffee right now, and she does not know me. I might as well be dead. Now there is an irony! I know the other one. The other one, who at a whim will change someone's name from -theus to -thea to spite the gods.<sup>4</sup> She and I are kindred friends of whom I write in familiar terms. My Hélène. She is the one that describes with the most awful, awe-ful, graphic terms, the living-death or deathly living of Fips the dog.

And now Derrida is dead simply because N. said it when we were conversing at her door. I had just received *A Portrait of a Young Jewish Saint* and in the gap that evidenced my confusion she reiterated (and I felt my fingernails lifting from their skin) "Yes, Derrida died just a couple of years ago."

עשה שלום במרומיו  
הוא יעשה שלום עלינו  
ועל כל ישראל  
ואמרו אמן

*I grieve a man I never met. A man inside a stone in Ris-Orangis. I saw it, hard and cold. A brusque, old gardener in blue overalls pointed it out. I followed. I sat on the ground. I wept. My own Gandalf.<sup>5</sup>*

*[a surprise voice comes from the side, filtering through the text]*

*—You knew the man inside a book, so why did you look for him in Ris-Orangis?<sup>6</sup>*

*... I was trying to find him. Some link to the earth.*

*[I find myself answering in this way, reluctantly, because now, here I am, inside a text imagining the text's voice. It's madness.]*

*—You allowed me under your skin. I whisper words into your ear before you can even say them. An 'envoi'<sup>7</sup> from the past. I arrive.*

*[this voice is insistent, something has begun, but perhaps I have whispered back. There's a problem for this truth if she is merely my echo.]*

*—My truth is light and fire, water and breath. And when you read it will diffuse into your very being and cause you to become something more, filling you up with my blood.<sup>8</sup> The power of poetry. The alacrity of sunlight. The secrecy and expanse of Night. Infinity.*

*... a soul, a text – human, whom I don't want to restrain, whom I want to let circulate freely, to whom I relish having to give the infinite...<sup>9</sup>*

*I know these lines. I believe them. But can you bring him back?*

*—Your Derrida never left...*

עד שיפוח היום  
ונסו הצללים סב  
דמה־לך דודי  
לצבי או לעפר האילים  
עלהרי בתר

Until the day breathes  
and [our] dark shadows vanquished  
Be, my love,  
like a gazelle, or young stag,  
on mountains of promise<sup>[2:17]</sup>

# Prelude to a kiss

*Texte-amante*

למישרים דובב שפתי ישנים

... moving gently the lips of sleep<sub>[7:10]</sub>





## 1

**Texte vivant**

[the breathing of the books]

*Elusive**Transgressive**Fatherless**Godless**La Féminine-Poétique?*<sup>1</sup>

מי זאת  
 עלה מן המדבר  
 כתימרות עשן מקטרת  
 מור ולבונה  
 מכל אבקת רוכל

Who is this?  
 She rises from the wilderness  
 like a pillar of cloud  
 smoke of myrrh and frankincense  
 all the spices of a caravan<sub>[3:6]</sub>

I have an ancient poetry. She is beautiful. I search for a genre of investigation, a ‘thetic-writing’ that works for such a beautiful and ancient text. This song, a song so full of fire and ferocity, which is already beyond the pale, finds itself in a world where all these descriptors are haunted by shades: defective, not straight, not allowed, uncanny. Elusive: like a runaway mare.<sup>2</sup> Transgressive: like a woman who does not know her place. Completely without rule. Godless? Now there’s the rub. And voice? It is woman’s voice—have we ever heard her speak? And her body? Have we ever seen her?<sup>3</sup>

A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardour—once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction—will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language...<sup>4</sup>

In this ancient prose the human heart is laid bare and within it a force that resists and highlights the insufficiency in the conventional genres of the *Propre*,<sup>5</sup> the p\*\*\*\*\*centric word.<sup>6</sup> This is an impossible task for the *Propre*, a discourse incumbent upon the forgetting of femininity, forgetting what has never been known.

It is men who have inscribed, described, theorized the paradoxical logic of an economy without reserve. This is not contradictory; it brings us back to asking about their femininity. Rare are the men able to venture onto the brink where writing, freed from law, unencumbered by moderation, exceeds phallic authority, and where the subjectivity inscribing its effects becomes feminine.<sup>7</sup>

*A shackled writing does not have the power to map the human heart. The matters of the human heart are not crisp, logical, rational. They are earthy, ripe and wild, burgeoning with pregnancies, seeping with lactations, ejaculations and menstruations, writhing with orgasms. They are chaotic, irrational and abject, requiring unbound words, words-that-seep, transcending authorities, wilfully immoderate, always-and-forever-at-the-brink. She must love. The thetic of the Propre collapses like a house of cards in face of love.*

—Why me? says the gentleman. It's horribly difficult. The thing is done. It is a thing. To say the thing, that's another thing.

All the same he obeys the sentence. After all he is man. He takes his dagger and finishes it off.

There is carnage. There are panthers with slit throats everywhere.<sup>8</sup>

I have an ancient poetry. She is beautiful, and I have felt bad conscience in my attempts to put her to the knife. I was complicit with the Kings of Old: Duty, Honour & Tradition. A 'Masculine'<sup>9</sup> thetic was at the helm, and in horror of what I had conceded to do that was against my conscience—against the kind of truth felt with the hackles, with the hairs at the base of the neck and that was against the existence of Panthers—I scuttled the ship with absolute, premeditated deliberation. Steered straight into a storm, straight into reefs and rocks. Shipwreck. From that point on I was in exile, my own Mantua and even if it was madness, the truth was that for the first time I experienced lucidity. My eyes through hers were opened to the variegated cruelties of the blind city. Feudal kings rule there, ruling with a law there, a law founded on love's violent end.<sup>10</sup>

I came "from the other side of the water" they said, but who made you judges that this side is here and that side is there? I would say. But I secretly preferred to be taken for being from the other side with the truth on my side that they called madness and to leave on their side the usurpation become reasonable according to their allusion.<sup>11</sup>

I can't bring myself to do the conventional analysis conforming to some phallic economy, moderated, law-abiding, privileging what I can never find privileged in my own sex. It would be a kind of suicide in the self-denying relinquishment of the ever-emerging bisexuality.<sup>12</sup> We would kill the child.<sup>13</sup> And I, still, in this enlightened day and enlightened age might pay a price for such unconventionality, such a transgression of norms, the rash act of writing as a woman in an *écriture féminine*, a woman-thetic. And even more so, in that I cannot theorize it, or enclose it, or encode it because it must be free of the monarchist attitude. This genre-still-emerging, this evolving hermeneutic cannot be categorized or defined on principle.<sup>14</sup> Thus there will always be some who say it does not exist.

Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking – even just opening her mouth – in public is something rash, a transgression.<sup>15</sup>

*I hear a voice crying<sup>16</sup> and at once I am in a quandary.  
I need to move towards her.  
I can't watch her Being violated like this  
by eyes, by my eyes.<sup>17</sup>  
Violating me,  
Fingers, hands, stones  
they undo me, tear me too, bruise me. In the darkness,  
as you search, seek, need, yearn  
for life  
that indescribable, tingling, capricious force  
upon which you and I will ultimately  
lose our grasp.  
How can I not come to her?  
How can I not hear her voice?*

*Voice!* That, too, is launching forth and effusion  
without return. Exclamation, cry, breathlessness,  
yell, cough, vomit, music. Voice leaves. Voice loses.  
She leaves. She loses. And that is how she writes as  
one throws a voice – forward into the void.<sup>18</sup>

*—His thetic economy brings me down like a wild deer. I am felled by a gun, taken by a spear. And then I am thrown bodily into the void. Pierced, pieced and priced. Skinned and scalped.*

Without lifting a finger you break me you cover me  
in spit you snuff out my breath you slit the throats of  
my beloved animals, you cut their necks with a knife  
that is all the more murderous for being invisible, my  
animals Unconscious, Love, Thinking, Struggling,  
Venerating, Suffering, all butchered, skinned,  
plucked, simply, quickly, mechanically.<sup>19</sup>

*Yes, I don't want to be his purchase. I don't want to fall back into him. He is out of place, out of time, singular. The poetic evades his objectification because she whispers "I will not be bought." She resists his empirical reading; resists the selling of integrity at the slave market. She wants to be felt, she wants to be heard.*

*—Throw your voice. Throw it after me into the void.*

*I want to throw my voice and more than this ... I want to fling it with all my might.*

I see her "begin." That can be written – these  
beginnings that never stop getting her up – can and  
must be written. Neither black on white nor white  
on black, not in this clash between paper and sign  
that en-graves itself there, not in this opposition of  
colors that stand out against each other. ... There is  
ground, it is her ground – childhood flesh, shining  
blood – or background, depth. A white depth, a core,  
unforgettable, forgotten, and this ground, covered by  
an infinite number of strata, layers, sheets of paper –  
is her sun (*sol ... soleil*). And nothing can put it out.<sup>20</sup>



—*Did you feel that? It was a touch.*

*I felt it. Strange ... like feathers.*

I hear the regular and strangely powerful breathing  
of the books ...<sup>21</sup>

I have a row of books all written by Lévinas. In fact, when I open the books it's like I am reading a letter from Lévinas, written directly to me. I imagine him sitting at his desk constructing the letter, envisioning my face as he writes.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes when I am lost in thought I hear the play of the breeze about his books, on the shelf where they sit. The breeze has magical properties. They bring the face of Lévinas to me and something springs from the miasma of my mind.

The murmuring books have awoken something. From the murmuring Shelf-of-Lévinas I hear something like: "What if the better question is not how to approach the Song of Songs but perhaps how the Song of Songs might ask to be approached; to respond to this song in the manner of its own invitation; to reciprocate?"<sup>23</sup>

To seek truth, I have already established a  
relationship with a face which can guarantee itself,  
whose epiphany itself is somehow a word of honor.  
Every language as an exchange of verbal signs refers  
already to this primordial word of honor.<sup>24</sup>

My hermeneutic must acquire a sense of reciprocation. I must give in to the desire to reciprocate, resist the urge to withdraw. Then a unique discourse would arise that flows between us. My reading then would be a dialectic activity by which I dialogue, monologue, chronologue<sup>25</sup> with the thoughts and ideas she first espoused long ago but my first sensation is hesitation and an ominous déjà vu

that seems to foretell loss of power. Surely I am not to divest myself of my powerful role; become vulnerable; reveal myself to a mere text? I am god-reader. god-analyzer. goddess-of-the-appropriate-meaning. I work in the purities of analysis and 'dry criticisms'. To recognize her through her text; an equalization; an equitization; a humanization?

*This is danger let loose. The mysterious unchained. Anything could happen.*

*—Don't you want to live? If you want to live, you have to be willing to die a little. The rains of winter have passed. There is bird song.*

כִּיהֵנָּה הִסְתּוֹ עֵבֶר הַגֶּשֶׁם חֶלֶף הַלֵּךְ לוֹ  
הַנִּצְנִים נִרְאוּ בָּאָרֶץ עֵת הַזְמִיר הַגִּיעַ  
וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בָּאֶרֶצוֹ

*—Winter is over. Rains have passed. Turtledoves sing in my land. How can you stay away?<sup>26</sup>*

The text: words immobilized on paper by the chemistry of ink. When they first made their appearance, they were not like that. They were wild birds, flapping their wings.<sup>27</sup>

*Bird song, spring and love. It is hard to leave your heart behind on the shelf. When I read your words, something inside me begins to soar and then draws me to a deep pool full of mystery. Who knows where I might arrive?*

*— [she smiles] A living postcard...<sup>28</sup>*

*Two women at the intersection of histories.<sup>29</sup> What shall we do?*

*—Come run with me. Who knows, maybe we'll fly.*

Flying birds are unpredictable like the Wind.<sup>30</sup>

I seek her face. I seek her face in an ethic of relation, of responsibility. I seek her face, which is full of meaning, meanings that are flying like birds. I take upon me this vision of her face. I take upon me this vision of her face, which is her fate. I take upon me her fate. I take upon me her bareness, even her death. I risk asymmetry. I risk becoming bare, exposed in the vision of her face. I risk joining my fate with hers.<sup>31</sup>

*Turn your face to me, flying bird, dove, in the clefts of the rock.*

A book does not have a head and feet. It does not have a front door. It is written from all over at once, you enter it through a hundred windows. It enters you. A book is just about round. But since to appear [*paraître*] it must adjust itself into a rectangular parallelepiped, at a certain moment you cut the sphere, you flatten it, you square it up. You give the planet the form of a tomb. The book has only to wait for resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

A book is a tomb that is burgeoning out of death into life, but it needs me to arise; to read. She needs a reader to take form. This was when my meditations began to draw around the phenomenon of reading, and resurrection. This was when her text, the once-rolled scroll, but now the heavy ornate binding and gold-edged sheets became a platform, a medium, a portal, a window, a construct that brings us together across the vast space which is the time dimension. She folds us together like a sheet of paper. Top touches foot. Like Alice I peer into another world, the text's world, her Wonderland. I gaze upon her face through this labyrinth of marks; black on white.

When I read, there is an incarnation. Her humanity evoked (perhaps because the text is the result of a human act, a communication, and imbued with qualities of humanness that characterize life, and, similarly, she—the one who conceived/is conceived by the poem— is brought to life to some degree, in some sense by my reading). When I read she rises and meets me, in this present moment. This dusty, ancient text. She writhes with life when I read. She, an envoy from the past. My consciousness met hers—these words, this extension of her consciousness, even though all her physical remains have decayed into earth.

*Arise, book, arise! And let us discourse, argue like friends, fight and recover, embrace, and become.*

Who said Arise? I did. I heard my voice say “Arise.”<sup>33</sup>

—*I did. It was me who said arise. Then I arose the moment you read*  
 ישקני מנשיקות פיהו<sup>34</sup> *You were lost from that moment and in that space I*  
*was incarnated.*

*But I don’t even know your name, how can I begin?*

—*I don’t have a name. I won’t have one. What is a name but a trap?*  
*No one will ever know, and my lack of a name will become a site for*  
*excess, a site for movement. And then there is the word, the alchemical*  
*phrase, a Shulamith, peaceful one, pouring like oil, fragrant oil that can*  
*wake the truly dead. There is also the secret name that only you will*  
*know, besides I am—you, some part of you. I am free. We are.*

What is your name I say most softly but in spite of the softness it was nonetheless the small wound of separation and I had not wanted it. And with timidity she went back into her name and turned it toward me as if she felt encloistered behind the door. And so out loud I said her name, she said that she did not have one<sup>35</sup> and I said that no one had one, there are only words and phrases with hands and lips tears in the eyelids, while names are explosives, it ought to be possible to disarm them, and that they are called proper and pride and aggression, it is the names, I say, that should be chased off like honorary excrement, and I said her name softly to her to take her by the hand with vigor and bring her back under the two-voiced parasol.<sup>36</sup>

*Dear Reader, I raised a silk tallith. Its four corners were resting at the gates of the four winds where there are also seedlings growing, belonging to a species of primordial tree of which we had eaten the fruit. Underneath the silken Chuppah<sup>37</sup> we stood; admiring its delicate weave. There was the sound of voice. There was the sound of a name. It was a rush of life. Something like a gift. Something like grace.*

ויאמר אלי...  
הנבא אלהרוח הנבא [בת]־אדם  
ואמרת אלהרוח...  
מארבע רוחות באי הרוח  
ופחי בהרוגים האלה ויחיו  
והנבאתי

And he said to me,  
Prophecy to the Breath,  
Prophecy, [daughter] of humanity,  
and say to the Breath, ...  
"Come from the four winds, O Breath,  
And breathe on these dead ones  
so that they may live.  
So I prophesied...[Ez 37:9]<sup>38</sup>

As I open her pages I sense again the strange breathing of the book, *les souffles petits*.<sup>39</sup> She offered her palm and I read it and told her fortune. At that very moment I was caught up in the vision that ensued and I saw myself begin to change.

As I breathed in, as I breathed in the words, the metamorphosis occurs and sinews and flesh come upon her and upon me. From still form she begins to breathe, coming out of the tomb.

Then I hear her voice and she speaks to me.

This is a multifaceted speaking. In her *mise-en-scène* she speaks to others, to her friends, but because of the verdant, polysemantic language, at the moment of speaking she also speaks to me. It is a convergent, parallel, synchronous speaking. I am drawn into the play. I embody the text, the text embodies me. I experience each role, each persona: liberated, condemned, beloved. This phenomenon of direct speech, of language in first person, the magic of present tense embodies the text. We are a third body and I am hopelessly entangled.



This is a magical experience—to come face to face with fiery flesh, to be entangled, to be, both of us, one, two and three. In magic of reading she lives in the eternal present drawing on my consciousness. This phenomenon means she can cease to be an ‘it’ and our discourse can become ‘you and me’.

If I open my pages to her, she will take on her humanity. I can encounter her face to face. If I open my pages to her, she will breathe and I will hear her speak. If I yield.

If I yield to her otherness.<sup>40</sup>

*—you gaze through a glass, through a looking glass [sa glace].<sup>41</sup> You gaze upwards through water at the light of the sky ... [she says this quietly so as not to hurt my feelings. She says it softly because she knows the truth about my mortality.]*

*I admit I gaze through a concave lens. [I say this. I have to say it. I feel my limits, my mortalities. I try to inhabit this space beneath the water where I must hold my breath. I want to stay down here but I haven’t the strength to let the water fill me. I haven’t the strength to die. Even though she has spoken quietly, my fingers clutch at the broken mirror and I am oblivious to the bleed. The loss of feeling in my fingers mirrors other losses. I feel lost in the mist, lying on the shore at the lake’s edge, half submerged, in the still lake with mist rising. I am still, still as a corpse, gazing into its whiteness. I can hardly see a foot in front of me. Will the vapours ever part? Will she come walking across the water like the breaking dawn?]*

Sometimes in the listening, in the speaking my hand passes right through her.

Sometimes she fades from view.

I feel her absence as her meaning flies past me.

But sometimes her meaning hits me like a blinding ray of sun and it's too bright.  
In that moment of encounter something intangible is resurrected but palpable  
because I feel newly born.<sup>42</sup>



That night of the pomegranate tree in bloom, they all  
three go under the same cloak, and they tell each  
other their story; at the intersection of two  
narratives, the child is born.<sup>43</sup>

*All three?*

*—Yes, me, you and the third that we become. A child is born into the half-light. That is my gift of becoming. We are pregnant with becoming already.*

*The phenomenon of reading, of language, the quickening of the reader, and at the same moment it is also the quickening of the text. The text brought to life and we are both transformed.*

*Am I a necromancer?*

*—An unnatural pairing ...*

*Am I birthing spirits in a world that said ‘thou shalt not’?*

*—An anachronism ...*

*But am I now a mystic?*

*—We don’t all of us, want to give up power, die, and become. You are going up against a wave like a great wall. But life is always risk. You have to give the gift freely.*

*And a child is born.*

I touched her flank and knew I was carried by the  
current  
in death  
Over to the new world, and was climbing out on the  
shore  
Risen, not to the old world, the old, changeless I, the  
old life,  
Wakened not to the old knowledge  
But to a new earth, a new I, a new knowledge, a new  
world  
of time.<sup>44</sup>

## 2

**The Infinite I**

The mysterious and irrefutable binaries of 'you and I', the 'Ich und Du', what lies in between them? What are these? These entire worlds of being that crash together. And the power of sight? To discover of late that I have had a fatal myopia that causes the death of the You and ultimately the death of the I. I want to open my eyes to the You of the Song of Songs.

The It-world coheres in space and time.  
 The You-world does not cohere in either.  
 It coheres in the centre in which the extended lines  
 of relationships intersect: in the eternal You.<sup>45</sup>

Is it true that if I look carefully I might even find G-d there in the space between us? There in the sacred space of encounter.<sup>46</sup> I know that once you even glanced at a rock and felt a divine breath.

Through every single You the basic word addresses  
 the eternal You.<sup>47</sup>

I am always looking for eternity in the letters and don't think to look in the very moment, in space where the page is white, where there are no marks. But you find God there in the in-between, the *entre-nous*, the-space-between-spaces.

Whoever goes forth to his You with his whole being  
 and carries to it all the being of the world, finds him  
 whom one cannot seek.<sup>48</sup>

I want to carry all the being of the world into it. I want to find the One I cannot seek. I want to go with my whole being but I am afraid. I am also afraid of the

lapse. That mistakenly I might look within and not jump the gap. And hesitate, and hold back, and not offer my whole being to this molten luminescence.

At times when man is overcome by the horror of the alienation between I and world, it occurs to him that something might be done. Imagine that at some dreadful midnight you lie there, tormented by a waking dream: the bulwarks have crumbled and the abysses scream, and you realize in the midst of this agony that life is still there and I must merely get through to it – but how? how?<sup>49</sup>

—*How ... how?*

I have experienced that waking dream. A nightmare where I might have created life in the other but instead I crumbled life, squeezed life out, squeezed it out until there is nothing left but ashes. And then upon staring at my hand I find that in squeezing out the life of the Other it was in fact myself that has burned away.<sup>50</sup> In inflicting an injury I have injured myself. I turned away from the other and that turning tore me in two. I hesitated and didn't want to see a true face or hear a true voice. I am mixed up in you, in infinite connections and intersections. And this is the fear, that I can still commit injustice against you and it will cause my own demise. Because I turn your pages I am now entangled. Because you existed and exist. And in the reception of those first words you wrote I drank. I am compromised.

The risk: the basic word can only be spoken with one's whole being; whoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself; ... if I do not serve it properly, it breaks or it breaks me.<sup>51</sup>

Such a risk. I do not want to be broken, and yet I don't want to live without ever once risking the possibility of ...

Basic words are spoken with one's being. When one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said too. When one says It, the I of the word pair I-It is said, too. The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.<sup>52</sup>

*—I am.*

*You are.*

*—We.*

*We.*

*Dear Reader, I am wakened to the possibility of a new knowing in radical encounter with a living text, already laying the ground weave for an intimate and verdant reading in our 'first spurt' Texte Vivant. The dialogical concept of 'I and Thou', as a platform, even a demand for a reciprocating hermeneutic finds us in dialogue with Martin Buber «face-à-face» in The Infinite I. The elements of the tallith are beginning to emerge.*



I, in the sour black tomb, trodden to absolute death  
I put out my hand in the night, one night, and my  
hand  
Touched that which was verily not me,  
Verily it was not me.  
Where I had been was a sudden blaze,  
A sudden flaring blaze!  
So I put my hand out further, a little further  
And I felt that which was not I,  
It was the unknown...<sup>53</sup>

*I, in the sour black tomb, trodden to absolute death. I put out my hand.*

*—I took your hand in my own. I embraced you.*

*An embrace that feels like I hang over the abyss suspended on a string.*

*—An acrobat ... you could swing and fly!<sup>54</sup>*

## 3

**The ethics of the naked eye**

The poem wants to reach the Other, it needs this other, it needs a vis á vis. It searches it out and addresses it.<sup>55</sup>

Mysticism, necromancy, a thousand broken laws of beloved tradition, I fear the dour sideways glances of Augustine, Origen and Jerome authoritatively closing more books than they might open.<sup>56</sup> But I must attempt anyway to describe the phenomenon of reading, of language, the quickening of the reader and how this might have implications for the ethics of reading. It is as if the Song of Songs may still have some human rights, and cries to the reader for recognition, for humanization.

This humanity located in the text, this act of speaking, breathing, this request for discourse has implications for reading. It calls for an ethics.<sup>57</sup> This is that small word whispered by Lévinas. She (this other), this text-being calls to me and I feel the obligation, the responsibility that functions as a need for response; a tension, an ethical dilemma.

She is calling me to negotiate our encounter. She (this other) through the text calls to me and I feel the obligation (the need) for response. And I am tripping on it, it's caught in my throat. It tears at me. It's not safe at all to negotiate with a text-being. There is too much to lose.

*Maybe my Self.*

Bad conscience that comes to me from the face of the other, who, in his mortality, tears me from the solid ground, on which I, a simple individual, place myself and persevere naively, naturally, in my position. Bad

conscience that puts me in question. A question that does not await a theoretical response in the form of information. A question that appeals to responsibility, which is not a practical last resort, offering consolation for the failure of knowledge, incapable of equalling being.<sup>58</sup>

Lévinas, who must I console? Are you in need of consolation or is it me? You are already dead. And I am in the process of it. I am the one in need of the ethic of responsibility here. What responsibility do you bear to me?

A responsibility that is not the privation of the knowledge that comprehends and grasps, but the excellence of ethical proximity in its sociality, in its love without concupiscence.<sup>59</sup>

Now we talk of love, that most paradoxical quality, an aesthetic, a metonymy that requires and evokes as much pain as it does pleasure. These ethics are an invitation to suffering. And yet I know what you will say. Pain endured is little compared to the suffering of the knowledge that one's wrong afflicts another. Thus I must die in order to better love.

The human is the return to the interiority of non-intentional consciousness, to bad conscience, to the possibility of its fearing injustice more than death, of preferring injustice suffered to injustice committed, and what justifies being to what ensures it.<sup>60</sup>

Lévinas has sensibilities. I have these sensibilities, or perhaps they are masquerading as a swarm of biting flies. I can't but notice how ready I have been to look away and try not to hear or be moved. But now on coming to my text, face to face, and finding—A Cry—my quandary is thus articulated. I leave my cosmic objective seat and will come down to meet this text. And I will be

changed forever if I enact such an imprudent rendezvous. I will likely experience the chaotic human relation that invites the full spectrum of the emotional range; that our encounter will be a negotiation at face level. That dialogue will mean a relinquishing of power, a breaking down of walls and with this opening the possibility of transformation. Transformation is a flaming cavern.

*I'm afraid. This is all imaginary. There is no literal resurrection. No life out of death and it is all in my mind. There is nothing here. It's just ink on paper. I miss my straight lines. My objective defences. And the safety that comes with them. Who knows what will happen if I continue on this course. Straight into the abyss! I want to turn the light back on. I don't want to die.*

*—take my blood, eat my flesh<sup>61</sup>*

כפלח הרמון  
רקתך מבעד לצמתך

Like a slice of pomegranate  
Your cheek behind the tendrils of your hair<sup>[4:3]</sup>

*A ritual exchange—a kind of sacred eating, a passover. I'm sorry, I can't eat you. Not like that.*

For when it is quite, quite nothing, then it is  
everything.  
When I am trodden quite out, quite, quite out,  
Every vestige gone, then I am here  
Risen and setting my foot on another world  
Risen, accomplishing a resurrection ...<sup>62</sup>

*A ritual exchange that causes something unexpected; playing messiah I stand at the opening of the tomb and cry out “Come out El Azar!” and she appears and shrugs off her wrappings of death.*

*I eat.*

*I ate. I admit it. I wanted to. I threw myself at her eyes closed. And now there she is, my face on her body. Which one of us has been resurrected? I cannot remain unchanged now. Amazing how symbols on paper and their spaces can do miracles. I have eaten fruit and there are eyes, lips, fingers, secret and naked eyes, touching upon the lips of G-d.<sup>63</sup>*

*—This is the miracle ... ça y est.*

*But I struggle. I feel the weight of the wall. I weighed down by the dead readings of dead texts. I struggle against the way-it-has-always-been. I struggle against l'Empire du Propre.*

*—If only you have the courage to read in the same way you breathe, we could be the miracle. We could be eyes on the lips of G-d. We might return to the beginning.*

*Elle n'avait pas su que les yeux sont les lèvres sur les lèvres de Dieu.*

*—Vite, miracle! cria-t-elle, Holà! Doucement miracle! cria-t-elle.<sup>64</sup>*

So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? The soft lines of these hills and the hand of evening on this troubled heart teach me much more. I have returned to my beginning.<sup>65</sup>



עד שיפוח היום  
ונסו הצללים סב  
דמה־לך דודי  
לצבי או לעפר האילים  
עלהרי בתר

Until day breathes  
And our dark shadows are vanquished  
Be, my love,  
Like a gazelle, or young stag  
On the mountains of promise<sup>[2:17]</sup>

There are several ethical elements to which I must give voice. They have been raw spots in my psyche. They disturb my sleep and trespass into my dreams. They are itching sensibilities, proto-conscience. I [have been] breathed into the text of this song and now find myself obligated, as a result of raising the text from death.

I find myself in an ethical dilemma about textual encounter in the corridors of the academy. If I wish to pursue authenticity and not be hypocritical in my encounter with this woman-text of struggle<sup>66</sup> I need to articulate an evolving manifesto; to place my writing in its ethical frame. This manifesto arises alongside a refusal to remain silent or be silenced by a biblical canon and its blinded keepers, tottering like Oedipus; or complicit with an academy that delights in postulating ways of knowing but disavows them all bar one.<sup>67</sup>

... if we consult literary history, it is the same story.  
It all comes back to the man – to *his* torment, his  
desire to be at the origin. Back to the father. There  
is an intrinsic connection between the philosophical  
and the literary ... and the phallogentric. Philosophy  
is constructed on the premise of woman's abasement.  
Subordination of the feminine to the masculine  
order, which gives the appearances of being the  
condition for the machinery's functioning.<sup>68</sup>

*Rules of encounter...*

*—or ruled by encounter?*

*With you, not about you*

The rules of encounter: I must genuinely encounter her and this means encountering her as she is and in whatever ways she might disgust or delight me.

מי זאת  
עלה מן־המדבר  
מתרפקת על־דודה

Who is this?  
Rising from the desert,  
Reclining against her lover [8:5]

I must risk being changed through the encounter. Before encounter my truths are held tightly but after encounter I am opened to the alterity of the other. In the space of the alchemy between self and other, truth is contestable.

מי־זאת  
הנשקפה כמ־שחר  
יפה כלבנה  
ברה כחמה  
אימה כנדגלות

Who is this?  
She appears like the dawn  
Beauty like the white moon  
Searing like the sun's rays  
Terrible as the myriad constellations [6:10]

I must celebrate the humanity of the text and the persona arising in the text by refusing to objectify her. Thus our meeting must be face to face, in the present moment, as ourselves, in clear recognition of the hidden structures and forms that command and coerce; and of which both of us have been bred to be complicit.

מי זאת  
 עלה מן המדבר  
 כתימרות עשן  
 מקטרת מור ולבונה

Who is this?  
 She rises from the wilderness  
 Like a pillar of cloud  
 Smoke of myrrh and frankincense  
 All the spices of the merchant <sup>[3:6]</sup>

I must seek to know and recognize myself and the ways in which I read and feel myself into the text in counter-transference. Rather than ignore this merging I must be able to articulate it in ways that frame rather than obstruct the encounter. Thus I recognize my own struggle for freedom, for self-determination, and my own desires. I move between the existential and the systemic.<sup>69</sup>

מי זאת?  
ואני?

*Who is this? Who is this that is me?*

I was so weary of the world,  
I was so sick of it,  
everything was tainted with myself,  
skies, trees, flowers, birds, water,  
people, houses, streets, vehicles, machines,  
nations, armies, war, peace-talking,  
it was all tainted with myself,  
I knew it all to start with  
because it was all myself.<sup>70</sup>

*Who is this that is you? Who are you?*

*—Where do I end and you begin?*

And so I find myself, in my search for a wise woman, a mother, a lively tree, a midwife, for kindred spirits because this is lonely. Perhaps to rest within an enclave where women write philosophy as poetry, drink life and never capitulate.

She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely  
powerless. He has no doubt she has been waiting for  
him forever.<sup>71</sup>

*Cut! Wake up, breathe, live.*

אכלו רעים שתו  
ושכרו דודים

Feast kindred-friends and drink!  
Drink deeply lovers!!<sub>[5:1]</sub>

*—I have been waiting for an aeon.*

The earth turned to bring us closer,  
it spun on itself and within us,  
and finally joined us together in this dream  
as written in the Symposium.  
Nights passed by, snowfalls and solstices;  
time passed in minutes and millennia.  
An ox cart that was on its way to Nineveh  
arrived in Nebraska.  
A rooster was singing some distance from the world,  
in one of the thousand pre-lives of our fathers.  
The earth was spinning with its music  
carrying us on board;  
it didn't stop turning a single moment  
as if so much love, so much that's miraculous  
was only an adagio written long ago  
in the Symposium's score.<sup>72</sup>

*Dear Reader, this initial diptych (Text Vivante, The Infinite I) courses towards an ethics of encounter, making a triptych, as that proposed by Lévinas with which we seek to flesh out our hermeneutical theoretic in “The Ethics of the Naked Eye.” This Buber & Lévinas parole leads us to the Song of Songs and her own invitation for the reader to drink. ‘Drink Me!’ she cries.*

## 4

**The poem drinks me**

... and tied around the neck of the little bottle was a paper label that said “DRINK ME” beautifully printed in large letters. It’s all very well to say ‘Drink me,’ but wise little Alice was not going to do that in a hurry. ‘No I’ll look first’ she said ‘and see whether it is marked “poison” or not’.<sup>73</sup>

*“Drink me!” I love this scene where there is a single bottle labelled mysteriously with the text “Drink me!” It is the command to drink, and its associated risk (where anything could happen) and the enigmatic appellation ‘me’ that I love. Who is me? Me (myself) or an-Other, or perhaps what was formally an object ‘a bottle’ suddenly take on a kind of sentience. Has something been granted life in two simple words “drink me”? Already little Alice’s world is inside-out and it starts with a white rabbit and two little words. Wild, unyoked words. And yes, I too will drink these words.*

אכלו רעים שתו  
ושכרו דודים

Feast kindred-friends and drink!  
Drink deeply lovers!!<sub>[5:1]</sub>

*—Drink kindred-friend and be drunk with love!*

I no longer drink the wine. It is the wine that drinks me. I have been ‘drunk’ by it. I am drunk. Now it is not the wine which enters my body. It is the wine that holds me inside a glass and drinks me, and I enter into a totally different world, a strange world which I don’t know. My body is possessed by ‘spirits’



which had remained outside till that moment. ‘In  
Vino veritas’: in wine truth abides...<sup>74</sup>

*Wild words, wild drinking, wild birds.*

*Truth in wine.*

*Wisdom in capricious flight.*

*‘traps to catch birds or birds to catch traps’.*

*Words ‘voracious creatures’, books that write themselves?*

*Courage, friend, in the face of these mist-enveloped climes, these unquiet  
deeps, dark-shrouded woodlands of the poetic for: A Poem is a Wild Thing.*

I never saw a wild thing sorry for itself. A small bird  
will drop frozen dead from a bough without ever  
having felt sorry for itself.<sup>75</sup>

*—I am, above all things, not sorry for myself.*

Your imperatives are highly ionic<sup>76</sup> meaning makers. Your imperative phrase formed by connecting an infinitive verb and the first person objective pronoun unleashes a fireball of potentiality for meaning making in an infinite present. “Drink Me!” When combined with dangerously unstable pronouns the safe delimits of meaning-making are sundered and wilfully produce all manner of meaning. “Drink Me” might be the label on Alice’s bottle; the whisper of one lover to another; your direct request; your words in mouth of your subject; words I said when I was reading; words said to me while I was reading and all of these at once. Not only is polysemy magnified but also the natural inclination for the reader of such words to respond in the imperceptible moment prior to acknowledgment of comprehension. “Drink me!” and I feel myself flinch, which is the sign of my unconscious compulsion and then my resistance as I back away in order to search for meaning.

*—Don’t resist. Jump! Lift the glass.*

*Drink all of me. Take the last sip!*

*[Did those words just come from me? Or was it another voice from within? I spoke and I was spoken to... Held and I held on to, I was drawn and I drew, I drank and I was drunk.]*

... it was I who touched and I who was touched.<sup>77</sup>

Intuitively you exploit the magic of the imperative and generously you have lathered them in this poem of poems. Suffixed with the first person object pronoun, imperatives in the present tense incorporate object pronouns of first and second person making me strain to maintain the position of dispassionate observer. My compulsion to act (even if it is to pull away) is aroused. I have to resist palpably in order not to be confronted, disrupted and drawn in. Invited into primal, preconscious encounter; an irresistible encounter demanded. Overt in the invitation are threads of potent words dangerously discontinuous, strategically dissociated from personal names or concrete connections that would deflect focus safely onto other referents: “the signified sacrificed to the signifier.”<sup>78</sup>

משכני אחרִיךְ נרוצה...

Draw me after you, let us run [together!]<sub>[1:4]</sub>

—Draw me! I want to run!

*You say ‘draw me’ and I am drawn. Some magic happens here. I am in process already, already moving down that path, that corridor, that stone lane. I feel the hand in mine. I am already and always drawn after you. And I fear, because I am already in momentum. I fear because I don’t want to stop. And I am already losing firm lines—am I drawn or did I draw? Whose hand is in mine?*

The text's play with the imperative here along with the absence of a concrete referent (the referent leads to another referent) leads me to a dilemma. Do you mean me or am I the one speaking? The effect of this grammar is reciprocal. I speak to you, you speak to me, she spoke to him, I spoke to him, I spoke of her speaking and all of these at once. This is a multiplicity of relation. I both spoke and was spoken to and heard speaking between others; I kissed kisses that were sweet like wine.

ענה דודי ואמר לי  
קומי לך  
רעיתי יפתי  
ולכילך

My beloved spoke, and said to me,  
Rise up!  
my darling, my beautiful one  
and come away<sub>[2:10]</sub>

—*Rise up, my darling, and come away with me.*

*I am already suspended. The wind catches me. I am already there as I read the words. I am there the moment my eyes touch the page. I am already past, present and future. I see the world unfurl in all its beautiful light, I see it pass deep into the sun at its end, bursting like pomegranate flower.*

There is porosity in your most beautiful, silent song, along the dimension of qualia, sense-datum that heightens chaotic, multiplicitous relation.

You weave porous boundaries that deconstruct the plane of separation between reality and illusion. The same porous interface undoes corporeal boundaries. What is surely real and surely dream merge within the sleeping/waking moment. Systematically my hold on rational thinking is undermined as my own categories of reality and myth consume each other. Every moment becomes real and

mythical concurrently. The givens of existence, of mortality, of divinity are turned upside-down. Life is death; death is life. The divine is subsumed into ourselves; into the space of our encounter.

—*She becomes subsumed into us*

*Yes, the world comes into you, and then you go into the world. Your eyes, in particular they transcend this simulacrum of your face. You are both mortal and immortal. It takes my breath away.*

עיניך ברכות בחשבון על־שער בת־רבים  
אפך כמגדל הלבנון צופה פני דמשק  
ראשך עליך ככרמל  
ודלת ראשך כארגמן מלך אסור ברהטים

Your eyes, pools of Heshbon at the gates of Bat-Rabim<sup>79</sup>  
Your nose like towering Lebanon overlooking  
Damascus  
Your head ascends like Carmel  
Magenta ribbons fixed in your hair  
– a king entangled in your tendrils of hair [7:5-6]

The stirring and intoxicating liquid<sup>80</sup> sensuality of your song seduces with its artful synesthaesia.<sup>81</sup> Scenes are set for seduction. You set scenes for my seduction. My seduction is set with scenes; a seductive mise-en-scène. I am seen in the scene.

Your tables bent with the weight of fruit; thick, sweet syrups; wine, juices, soft greenery; anticipatory and idyllic visage fuelling desire and fantasia. This is a primal pull, a biological pull. I am on fire as I read without the ability to put out these flames. You are on fire as you sing from within. Endorphins race within and without. Erogenous zones burn within and without. The nervous system

sparks and channels into supersonic waves bursting from pages. It is a total body response that inundates the rational centre of the brain. I am drawn into the poem. The poem drinks me.

*I need to rest, resuscitate...*

סמכוני באשיות  
רפדוני בתפוחים  
כיחולת אהבה אני

Let me rest with caked-raisons  
Let me recline with apricots  
— for I am in anguish over love<sup>[2:5]</sup>

*—and then start all over again...*

The primacy (or paradox) of the eternal ‘moment’ also positions me strategically. The present tense fools me. I am, Pierrot,<sup>82</sup> the fool, spiralling into a continuously present tense text. She has been loving him, forever young, forever running. My own Columbine.

*—Now! It’s happening right now. Every moment has collapsed into the present.*

*Yes, here I am with you. It is right now. We are right here. We might have always been here. I can no longer remember another time when it wasn’t. When I start to read, here we are again: running, hoping, touching, holding one another.*

*No time is lost.<sup>83</sup>*

— But who is talking of the present? ‘Now’ is also the instants contained up until now.

—I write to maintain the now [*maintenant*], in my hand [*main*], and in good order

—The sentence that I am writing at this moment (at x instant) is not the one that you read at this moment (at y instant). Today is a past. Tomorrow, there will be another past.

—What I write is xy. I read you is in the eternal present.<sup>84</sup>

*— Your gaze holds me in infinity. It will always be this moment. Now that you have written it, it is already doubled.*

*We'll always be here. There will always be here, and now. Ecstatic temporality! I come late into your present. I read you.*

The moment becomes all-encompassing. This eternal moment is painful and pleasurable. This transitory, ethereal, intangible quality is a lure. I am pulled, primed to heightened awareness. The sense of urgency is proportional to the inherent brevity. In this same moment I have primacy of person.

יפה את רעיתי כתרצה  
 נאווה כירושלם  
 אימה כנדגלות  
 הסבי עיניך מנגדי  
 שהם הרהיבני

Beautiful you are, my friend, as Tirzah  
 Enchanting as Jerusalem  
 Breathtaking as myriad banners  
 ... Don't look at me!  
 Your eyes overwhelm me!<sup>[6:4-5]</sup>

*You speak to me; completely immersed in me. Through your words I have the chance to be the world; your world. You have the chance to be mine. Our in-process world of meeting; our eternal present.*

— Beautiful you are, my friend! יפה את רעיתי In reading I become your world.

*You are my world in reading, and with all these qualia I am divided and conquered; shepherded away from the 'safety' of actuality, of community, of the contemporary, by the warm, close, intimate act of reading. In I go, into the intense person-to-person space. I lose sense of the outside world, the 'real' world. In the solitude of reading, in that magical space, I find myself face-to-face with this woman, with you, in wonderland. Like Alice...*

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well.<sup>85</sup>



*—Descending into my garden of delights, displaced in space and time,  
and experiencing the eternal present, holding your breath in  
anticipation, your heart beating, being reborn.*

אלגנת אגוז ירדתי  
לראות באבי הנחל  
לראות הפרחה הגפן  
הנצו הרמנים  
לא ידעתי נפשי  
שמתני מרכבות עמינדיב

Into the garden of walnuts I descended  
To see the lushness of the streams  
To see the budding vines  
The red-bursting flowers of the pomegranate trees  
I did not know my own passion [*nephesh*]  
She set me in the chariot of a prince<sup>[6:11-12]</sup>

One must be reborn, by the power of the  
unpredictable Wind.<sup>86</sup>

[I may want to brush off the polysemantic and synaesthetic phenomena as tangential, linguistic absurdity, a mere distraction. But who could deny that words have power.] You draw me. You invite me. I feel the dread of the trespasser. Is this an invitation to transgress? Is this an entry into forbidden intimacy; perhaps an illegitimate intimacy? I could find myself lost in a maze; consumed by a fire. At the same time I experience an exhilarating, dizzying sensation of freedom—freedom to accept, the exhilaration of a fall from a great height. So I respond in one of two ways: I, god-reader, decline and fight to remain in the cosmic objective view or I accept and I am drawn into a chaotic humanity of relation. I release my inhibition and step into the abyss of subjectivity.<sup>87</sup>

*A gravelled edge;  
the fingers of wind whip round my ankles. Urging me.  
I am utterly alone on this ledge,  
cold and flushed with warmth at the same time.  
I am small, pathetic  
and bigger than the world bent up against the ceiling of the universe.  
Everything is breath, heartbeat;  
everything slows to the threshold  
ceases at a moment that lasts to an immeasurable space.  
I could fly  
and for a moment experience the Everything, and the Nothing.  
But I  
dread  
a rock hard earth, the unforgiving surface, the law of gravity and  
death  
but for this moment I am in the in-between  
everything (or nothing),  
death (or life)  
and you.*

—*And me. Here I am.*

Accepting the invitation of a text to be drawn in to the eternal moment, to accept the risk, to drink, is a leap; *The Leap*.<sup>88</sup> It is the terrifying and irrational desire when at a great height to cast oneself into the space between potentiality and death; into the space of possibility; to cast oneself out upon the universe. It is the hesitation and the dread of taking the leap that holds the reader in a quandary. It is vertigo.<sup>89</sup> This plunge holds the possibility of destruction; holds the possibility of transformation, of change. Who I was no longer exists. This is the trauma of face-to-face encounter of the other, of the text. Self-destruction-regeneration; reification-dissipation; becoming so changed by encounter, so transformed or merged that I am bereaved of myself. I become a stranger to myself as I am rebirthed as a new form, an enlarged form. I will never be the same again. Once again in this space, at this site of encounter, I must negotiate again and again with this other who I am and am becoming.

First she dies. Then she loves. I am dead. There is an abyss. The leap. That Someone takes. Then, a gestation of self – in itself, atrocious. When the flesh tears, writhes, rips apart, decomposes, revives, recognizes itself as a newly born woman, there is a suffering that no text is gentle or powerful enough to accompany with a song. Which is why, while she's dying – then being born – silence.<sup>90</sup>

[I want to pause here because an alchemical word has been written. Something that makes me want to stop as the sacred moment hovers in incandescent transparency. I want to pause here and commune with the ragged scar, the raw skin, the sore quick. This being-together is a walk through a flame. Through the flames of myriad, flaming caverns. I am consumed by it. The idea, an inception, and spreading notion—spreading like a wave of dark particles. Nonetheless, through my night skies and your endless universes, someone has met me here and said out loud something unthinkable. And I am riveted to the spot.]



There is a silence where hath been no sound,  
There is a silence where no sound may be,  
In the cold grave—under the deep, deep sea,  
Or in wide desert where no life is found,  
Which hath been mute, and still must sleep  
profound ...<sup>91</sup>

—*Can you hear me?*

עד שיפוח היום

Until day breathes <sup>[4:6]</sup>

## 5

## Jouissance

When we dream and when we couple, we embrace phantoms. Each of the two who constitute the couple possess a body, a face, and a name, but their real reality, precisely at the most intense moment of the embrace, disperses in a cascade of sensation which disperses in turn. There is a question that all lovers ask each other, and in it the erotic mystery is epitomized: Who are you? A question without an answer ... the senses are and are not of this world. By means of them, poetry traces a bridge between seeing and believing. By that bridge, imagination is embodied and bodies turn into images.<sup>92</sup>

The Song of Songs has a body. I have always believed it, because when I enter into the intimacy of the text it is as if I come face to face with her. It is tangible but I cannot touch it at all. It is intangible, but to be sure I touched and I was touched by her. I know this because she, the body, the text has transformed me, lured me with promises. She is my *texte-amante*.<sup>93</sup>

נשכימה לכרמים  
נראה אם פרוחה הגפן פתח הסמדר  
הנצו הרמונים  
שם אתן אתדדי לך  
הדודאים נתנרריח...

At daybreak we will make for the vineyards  
We will see if the vines are budding, a show of  
blossoms  
The red-bursts of the pomegranate flower  
There I will give my love to you  
The scent of mandrakes fills the air!<sup>[7:13-14]</sup>

She has a body, a persona, a silhouette, a voice that begs me to come, a scent that smells like mandrakes. A magic scent. When I enter into the text I recognise her familiar lines and I find a mother's comforting embrace. But she is also the diabolical faces of the lover, who causes me to cry out, 'Who are you?' in fear, in exultation, in ecstasy. She is an utmost pleasure and a dark night of tearing. She leaves me utterly spent. And it is most in the pain of intimacy that comes with reading that I am in the midst of *jouissance*.<sup>94</sup> At this moment I want to die and be reborn.

Is the abyss no more than an expedient annihilation?  
It would not be difficult for me to read the abyss, not  
as a repose but as an *emotion*. I mask my mourning  
by an evasion; I dilute myself, I swoon in order to  
escape that density, that clogging which makes me  
into a *responsible* subject: I come out: it is ecstasy.<sup>95</sup>

Before I had met Roland Barthes, I already believed in the text-body. I have had scores of affairs with them. Each of these texts was a true love. Each text exerting from me The Vow of Fidelity of the Infinite Moment, the infinite moment that arrives when I am utterly lost in the beloved pages, lost in the 'living fires, intermittent lights, wandering features strewn in the text like seeds'.<sup>96</sup> *Affaires de plaisir*. My affairs have been thrilling excursions into the timeless, space-less construct that forms in reading. I caress each word, and the words caress me and sometimes rip, and sometimes strip, and sometimes slice mercilessly.

or was she speaking to another I've forgotten  
or did I invent it and no one said it?  
in Oaxaca was I walking through a night  
black-green and enormous as a tree,  
talking to myself like the crazy wind,  
and coming back to my room – always a room –

was it true the mirrors didn't know me?<sup>97</sup>

My greatest jouissance comes when I am most vulnerable. When I am undone by the text, when it has stripped me bare of my defences, my practiced denials, and then there is the trial of the mirror. I see myself, feel the transference; I am bare to the projection, located by the core of my object relation. It is this moment when I am most abject and least worthy that I am become recipient of the eternal love of the text.

*The text cannot choose who reads her, but in the end she reads all who dare.*

*—Do not eat of it nor touch it!*<sup>98</sup>

The Story begins with the Apple: at the beginning of everything, there is an apple, and this apple, when spoken of, is spoken of as a fruit-not-to. There is an apple, and straightaway there is the law.<sup>99</sup>

*But this desire, it builds and burns. It all starts with what is withheld. It overflowed in that moment when she reached out, and touched, and ate, then her eyes were opened. Then she wanted more! The desire doubled.*

With the text on the couch, it will be expected that the desire of the text will be that of the other, of the analyst, whomever that may be.<sup>100</sup>

*I am read by my text, and I am revealed by my text. My desires laid out on a clean white cloth, on display in a glass case. Naked in the mirror. Laid bare to her eyes.*

The text is a fetish object, and this fetish desires me. The text chooses me, by a whole disposition of invisible screens, selective baffles: vocabulary,

references, readability, etc; and lost in the midst ...  
there is the other...<sup>101</sup>

There is this point of being chosen by the text which I understand in coming to the Song of Songs but, to be honest, the word fetish puts me off, and in the same moment I am engaged with the notion and I want to understand (and, by the way, it sounds forbidden and I can't deny that I want to resist the censoring of my internal polylogue and those in particular shouting 'taboo!'). A fetish object which I understand as an inanimate object that has been ascribed some kind of magical power, in sexual fetishism the object stirs up erotic feeling in the suppliant.<sup>102</sup> But is this text only showing a toe, or a slim wrist? Doesn't she write the [w]hole? Doesn't she create more than an object; a 'palantir', a 'horcrux', some sliver of her[-my] soul nests within it? In loving-reading a text isn't feeling aroused because I attribute humanity to it? I invoke the persona of the text and it is along this holistic traverse, that the locus of my feelings is held. So much more than fetish-object.

—*I am not an 'object'.*

*Some kind of magic? A life raft made of letters? Something like love.*

This text you write must prove to me that it desires me. This proof exists, it is writing. Writing is: the science of the various blisses [jouissances] of language, its Kama Sutra.<sup>103</sup>

I do read out of love. And in writing the reading I desire the reader to desire these words. I want these words to do magic to the reader. I want anything to happen. In the 'masturbatory solitude of reading',<sup>104</sup> I want the reader to smell the mandrakes, soar over vineyards, experience the cataclysm of jouissance.

—*You've learned this from me.*

*Dear Reader, I want you never to be the same again, to weep, to wail, to wake up, to laugh, to smile, to be annihilated by feeling, to be annihilated by the fractured light of truth. Then you will know that you are alive. I am writing with a maddened wind and the still, dark night radiates around me, reaching for me with fingered wisps of cloud. And the truth is I cannot tell what will happen to you. Anything could happen and so I cannot predict it. It is the same mechanism at work in the Song of Songs. What undoes me in the text may be a simple and pleasurable word play when read by you or someone else. But here I am strewn to the side of the road—annihilated by this text—while another ambles on by, taking in the pretty scenery, everything as expected.*



For Bachelard, it seems that writers have never written: by a strange lacuna, they are only read. Thus he has been able to establish a pure critique of reading, and he has grounded it in pleasure: we are engaged in a homogenous (sliding, euphoric, voluptuous, unitary, jubilant) practice, and this practice overwhelms us: dream-reading. With Bachelard, it is all poetry (as the simple right to discontinue literature, combat) that is credited to Pleasure. But once the work is perceived in terms of a writing, pleasure baulks, bliss [jouissance] appears and Bachelard withdraws.<sup>105</sup>

I see, I remember now. I had forgotten that as soon as the words leave my fingertips they begin to write themselves and lay siege to multiple meanings and various interpretations. Flying birds. Phoenixes. Cixous once heard her writing call out, "Write Me," it said, and it kept calling out, "Are you going to write me or not!"<sup>106</sup> So finally she did, and out came a protestation that Hélène Cixous was no longer. Or perhaps that Hélène Cixous had become more than the author, more than a character. She had subsumed or was subsumed by her own text; "those who are sung in my text."<sup>107</sup> No longer could she claim possession of it. It had grown legs. She could only lay claim to a part. But the other parts were a community and history; a mystical collaboration: one part came from her, one from the body of peoples, one part anonymous, one part her brother.<sup>108</sup> You see, as soon as it was written, she could only make a tiny claim because as it left her fingers it became the other. And the Singer, the Singer also has lost her song. As soon as the creature was created, the creature escaped her creator. And yet she is there, an imprint, I could have sworn she is there ... *c'est un mystère*. I can't work it out. Like any art-being of beauty, it assumes its own glory. She luminesces. The radiance of her language carries me over the breach. I am flung into a starburst, cast amongst the nebulae, deep into the ocean of the universe.

Bachelard and I withdraw. We withdraw into the primordial deep, before and beyond language.

*—There is something that luminesces. There is something that remains, a glow, a luminescence that remains in spite of losses. Continually being lost, and being discovered, only to be lost again, the signature remains, a trace. One part from the body of peoples, one part from secret places, one from a millennium of women's voices, and one part my true [br]other. Perhaps I am in the excess, the beyond-the-threshold, above any law, in jouissance.*

The asocial character of bliss [jouissance]: it is the abrupt loss of sociality and yet there follows no recurrence to the subject (subjectivity), the person, the solitude: *everything* is lost, integrally. Extremity of the clandestine, darkness of the motion-picture theatre.<sup>109</sup>

She makes me believe that it is true; that to live is to experience jouissance; that it is the wine of life; the exquisite fruit from the tree. Pleasurable reading misses jouissance, because it desires safety by maintaining and conforming all emotions into its control; reading through an opiate lens, in complicity with law. It is not living, it is dying slowly, haplessly. Jouissance awakens, heightens, blurs, blows out, erupts, cuts, surprises and annihilates, rupturing all that is concrete and secure, but it is the sharp edge of love, the precipitous joy of life. “Unexpected but succulent in its newness”<sup>110</sup> as you say, but maybe she would say born again. I die of love for my text and then I am born again, or something dies, some part of me, and it is renewed.

*—Jouissance of the Phoenix.*

But on the borders I feel an estrangement. The text is his, his language, set as it is in his symbolic frame. I steal infinite moments of jouissance; I caress and ravage and am ravaged in secret. *The Waste Land*, *Piedra De Sol*, *Le Livre de Promethea*, *Song of Songs*—yet at every moment I feel his weight, that of the Father. In daring to speak, to write, to disagree, to fly off, to live a poetic reading there is always fear. On the other side my presence in the symbolic marks my absence in language, as woman. I am left open by this spectre of deletion, vulnerable, always disappearing like purple-veiled Eurydice, fading back into the womb of the cave. Making me ask again, who am I? And who is she? After all, what is a woman? There is gap, space, gash, absence, nothing-there. The complement, the overflow, the reserve, the erased, the vanishing, the never-was-born—if we could but open our mouths wide enough like abandoned chicks.<sup>111</sup> Writing in a nest built under the table.<sup>112</sup> A nest on a bed of ashes.

—*It's the sad voice of Echo. Can only utter after him. The complement of infinite complements.*

*In the face of the weight of the law, of the Father, the super-Uncles, my courage fails. I'm continually losing my courage. It seeps through the nothing-there.*

... the question asked of woman “What does she want?” – is a question that woman asks herself, in fact, because she is asked it. It is precisely because there is so little room for her desire in society that, because of not knowing what to do with it, she ends up not knowing where to put it or if she even has it. The question conceals the most immediate and most urgent question: “How do I pleasure?” What is it – feminine *jouissance* – where does it happen, how does it inscribe itself – on the level of her body or of her unconscious? And then, how does it write itself?<sup>13</sup>

*—Don't seep away into invisibility. Take language over the edge. Write it from the courses, the white springs of the Jordan, the sweet water of words bubbling out under the Golan Heights. Sing them. Weep them. Burst with them. Write.*

*Will the magic word arrive? Will it save you?*

*—My magic word is Purah.*

## פורה

*Purah*<sup>14</sup>

*Falling from Hermon*

*storm-words*

*Rebel blinking of the chains round her cheek*

*The dark city parts like walls of water*

*surging*

*malevolent frames—there's a gold flower, lapis lazuli in its centre*

*tendrils of language swing heavy with grape clusters*

*against white stones*

*Purah,*

*She eats it all, Touches it all*

*Feeds on the words, harvests them from her own flesh*

*She is not bereaved, Birthing all the time*

*lambs*

*pools*

*banners*

*She drinks the world, and there are the hills where she placed them*

*Purah, lest I forget the weight of heaven*

*Purah, I must forget*

*her fire, never going out, ashes, phoenix-fire*

*To let it be written twice*

*She breathed into the book and it flew away*

*Dear Reader, it was something like a gift, when it came to me in the form of a dream and when I awoke the sunlight had already stolen the memory of its caress. In oft moments, in quiet twilights, my body remembers.*

Poetry leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism – to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity. Poetry is eternity; the sun matched with the sea.<sup>115</sup>



# ‘Prehistory’

*Shulamith/s*

ואל־אישך תשוקתך והוא ימשלבך

... and to your husband will be your desire and he will  
rule over you<sup>[Gen 3:16]</sup>

ס

אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו

I am for my lover and for me is his desire<sup>[7:11]</sup>

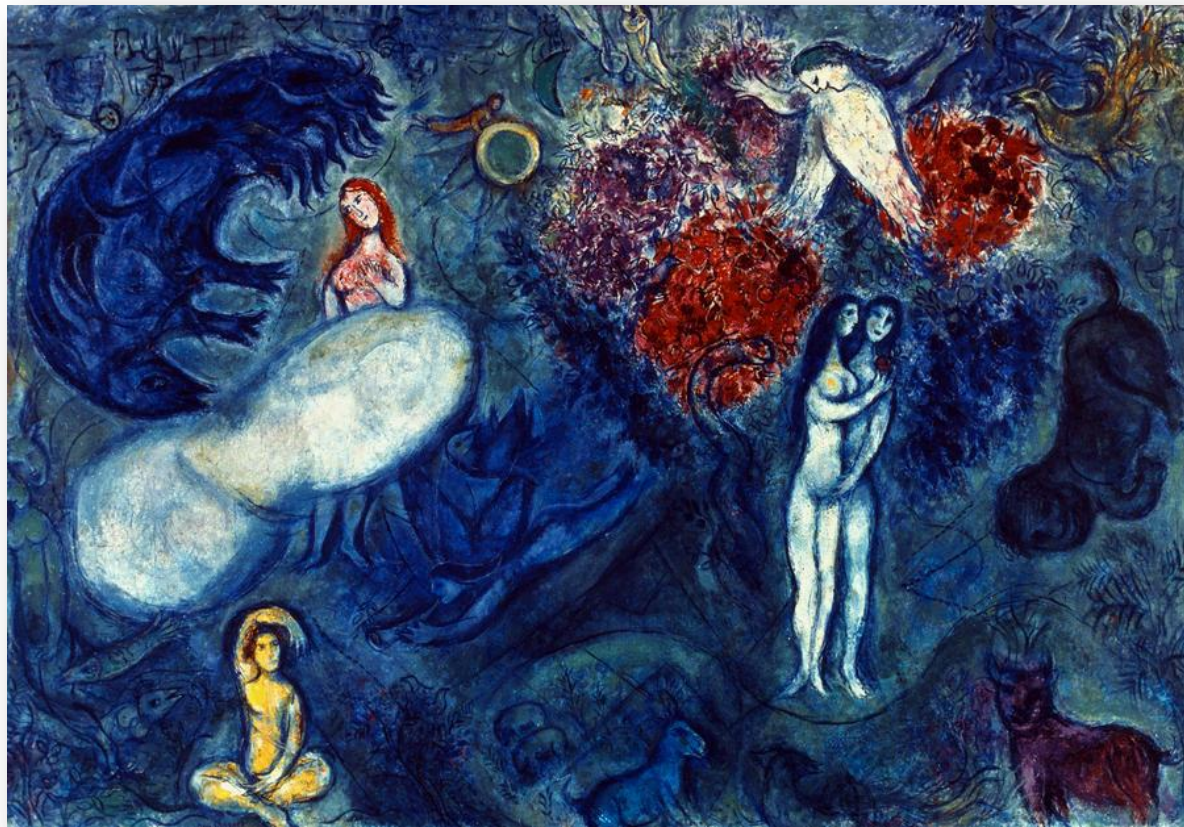


Figure 1: Marc Chagall, *Le Paradis*, huile sur toile, 1961.  
[Musée Marc Chagall, Nice]

## 1

## חוה [Eve]

Every entrance to life finds itself before the Apple.<sup>1</sup>

*This is my lover in his beautiful nakedness, in the aura of the ambience of his amber skin. His unadorned hair, my hands already remember, the body memory, a dream of the senses, a half-light of touch and taste, of the aromatic. His raw strength already dissipates under the promise of my caress, or is this dissipation mine in the anticipation of his kiss? My glance meets his. [In that moment I was naked on a precipice, naked on the cliff's edge. I couldn't look away, and yet I couldn't look.] This moment, when we freed ourselves of the elliptical economy. That moment, [last night] When he entered, Walked in, Burst in Unclad, unclothed—in dishabille—I had waited in suspense, Undraped, unveiled, Watching him come across the room—in flagrante—coming to my bed, Like the crossing of a great ocean with a thousand sails, Exposed, like the*

ותפקחנה עיני שניהם וידעו כי  
עירמם הם

And their eyes were opened,  
the two of them, and they  
knew that they were  
naked<sup>[Gen 3:7]</sup>

כתפוח בעצי היער  
כן דודי בין הבנים  
בצלו חמדתי וישבתי  
ופריו מתוק לחכי:

Like an apricot[-tree] among the  
trees of the forest this is my  
lover among sons. In his shade I  
delight and I sit down, and his  
fruit is sweet under my  
tongue<sup>[Son 2:3]</sup>

*brilliant moon in the dark of night, at her perigee. My eyes trailed his bare chest, like fingers. I rejoiced [he didn't know it] when I saw his skin was the aureate hue of apricots in the candle-light, His waist Gold leaf pounded in secret temples deep in fragrant forests, His hips smooth, The burnished pagoda that I had encircled seven times, Trailing my fingers along its surface. Ascending to heaven three times;*

ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם  
מעצמי ובשר מבשרי... ויהיו  
שניהם ערומים... ולא יתבששו:

And 'adam said, this, this  
moment, bone of my bones,  
flesh of my flesh ... and the  
two of them were naked ...  
and they were not  
ashamed.[Gen 2:23, 25]

*embracing all heaven's pleasures. Here he comes, this  
man, bare, magnificent, luminous, a feast for the  
eyes—[I sense every trace of him, his jaw, the fold of  
his ear, his birthmark, the shape of his tears, but here  
he comes and he is different, exuding this difference  
that thrills me, that makes me quail; « une vrai  
Jardin,» this lover, 'all his strange fruits']—With fire in  
his eyes, like flaming swords, [my heart raced with*

*fear, with joy]. With his nearing, his proximity I catch a scent, Some trace of  
exotic bouquet that I had found for him after some long journey, some distant  
assignation in some foreign land; a bouquet that tells me we are too far apart  
even though we are almost cheek to cheek and I am breathing him in as if I  
had just burst through the surface of the water after living in the deepest  
ocean for a hundred years, asleep in the arms of the magmatic vents of the  
Marianas, in commune with secret creatures, secret lights, enveloped, cool,  
dark, silent, alone in the blue. But this scent of gardens awakens me, I take in  
this air, like a new-born's first breath. This scent, that is nothing without the  
magical blending together of his naked skin's honeyed aroma that is his  
body's alone; a combination of some magical  
night in some verdant rice field, with the night  
scent of jasmine like dew on his skin, along with  
the warm, rising, earth scent of roasting grains.  
Nothing prepared me for the touch of his hand  
under my breast. I can only say that at that  
moment the earth's rotation ceased, everything  
ceased. The stillness, the quietness was that of  
the grave, the silent universe, a memory  
suspended deep in the ice shelves of the*

ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ  
למאכל וכי תאוה הוא לעינים  
ונחמד העץ להשכיל ותקח  
מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה  
עמה ויאכל:

And the woman saw that  
the tree was wonderfully  
edible, and that it was a  
delight to the eyes, and a  
tree, desirable, to make one  
wise, and she took some of  
its fruit and tasted it.[Gen 3:6]

*Antarctic, the heart of the silence of G-d. Then the taste of his mouth, his tongue [when I was already undone], A paradise of sweetness, A feast of peaches from the Jade Emperor's own garden, the exact piquancy of a primordial fruit, held in the bosom of Xi Wangmu, consumed only once every six thousand years.*

ויגרש את־האדם וישכן מקדם לגן־עדן את־הכרבים ואת להט  
החרב המתהפכת לשמר את־דרך עץ החיים

And he drove out 'adam, and he placed in the east of  
the garden of Eden, the cherubim, with spinning,  
flaming swords to guard the tree of life.[Gen 3:24]

*What then is this knowledge that begins with the mouth? That begins with taste. That begins with a glance and spark, that rejoices in difference, that celebrates the body, that resurrects first gardens, first bodies and first tastes of the fruit of life.*

... knowledge might begin with the mouth, with the  
discovery of the taste of something...<sup>2</sup>

*I am presented with a scene. Here it is, the scene. I see an Apricot.*

*—such sweetness. I recline into him.*

*I imagine the primordial Apricot. The ripe apricot has a skin with a slight, soft fur, not the bitter, waxed skin of the Apple. The sweet, ripe Apricot has soft, thick flesh, with the warm fragrance of syrup and honey. It is an earthy body in its carnival of fluid. Fluids that seep around desire, permeating, inflaming. It has a single seed in the centre, in its heart. I suck the flesh from it and hold it in my mouth. Then, taking it and plunging my hand deeply into the humus I plant it. Life springs from life.*

תחת התפוח עוררתיך  
שמה חבלתך אמך  
שמה חבלה ילדתך

Beneath the apricot tree I awoke you  
There your mother travailed for you  
There she wrested and awoke you to life!<sup>[8:5]</sup>

*I love the taste of a certain man. A primordial apricot. The colour of his skin, its golden envelope. The taste of his mouth, its flesh. We devour each other again and again in the shade of an apricot-tree. At these times, we are so jubilant, it is as if we could live forever.*

*—an immortality that feels like my last day on earth. The taste of some nectar, like venom, like henbane, like cyanide. Deliciously sweet, dulcet, honeyed, deadly.*

*[I did not see it coming. That is exactly when time stopped.]*

מכל עץ־הגן אכל תאכל:  
ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו  
מות תמות:

From all the trees of the garden you may surely eat  
but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil  
you shall not eat from it for on the day you eat from  
it you shall surely die.<sup>[Gen 2:16-17]</sup>

— *[silence]*

*[She stifles all sound. This is because law has entered the scene uninvited. There is no visibility. It crept up like a shadow. Hiding behind the tree.]*

*“Show yourself, if you are not ashamed!” [I bravely call this out but there is already blood.]*

What is at stake here is the mystery, which is assailed by the law, the law which is absolute, verbal, invisible, negative ... a symbolic *coup de force* and its force is its invisibility, its non-existence, its force of denial, its “not.” And facing the law is the apple which is, is, is. It is the struggle between presence and absence, between an undesirable, unverifiable, indecisive absence, and a presence, a presence which is not only a presence: the apple is visible and it can be held up to the mouth, it is full, it has an inside. ...<sup>3</sup>

*—Cold. It’s cold after the icy blasts of the tundra have blown through this garden. I pay life with the possibility of death. I pay death with the possibility of life. I have tasted, I have known. Then I was born into language. Already my leaves are tinged with black.*

There is an apple and straight away there is the law.<sup>4</sup>

*Dying. I am already dying. With every taste he makes me mortal. Making me live. His abyss—that is his gift to me. My transient existence. My mortality. I am ever on the last day of life before death.*<sup>5</sup>

One wants to suck once more on the taste of the dream in the present, make its memory return to the self ... rescue from death this little bit of me, that would mean possibility of the impossible immortality, to manage to save an instant is very grave, it is the most important of all nothings ...<sup>6</sup>

*I touched. I tasted. I bit into his flesh. Down to the seed. I died.*

*I dive inside him. I am not afraid, but dive into the body of the earth, I enter the tomb. I sink into its leafy embrace, I sink into its rich soil. I all but disappear. I taste the words. There is a feast before us ... apples, apricots, pomegranates. His fruit, ever so sweet, the taste of blood-red wine, of water, of milk, of honey. I keep sinking willingly into the interior of the world. Like falling into a dream. Waking with the dream still clasped to my mouth. I touch the inside to my lips. This pleasure, that is to know with the lips. Lips upon lips; such strange fruit.*

*—I am not afraid of the inside.<sup>7</sup>*



In an astonishing way, our most ancient book of dreams tells us after its own fashion—though we can read it in our own way—that Eve is not afraid of the inside, neither her own, nor that of the other. I would claim that the relationship to the inside, to penetration, to touching the inside is positive. Obviously Eve is punished for it, but that is another matter, that is society's affair. Of course she is punished since she has access to pleasure, of course a positive relationship to the inside is something which threatens society and which must be controlled. That is where the series of "you-shall-not-enter" begins.<sup>8</sup>

## 2

## Bathsheba/s

בני אמי נחרו־בי  
 שמני נטרה אתהכרמים  
 כרמי שלי לא נטרתי

The sons of my mother, their anger blazed  
 They placed me to keep the vineyards  
 My own vineyard I have not watched...[1:6]



*My sons, I am on the outside. Outside the wall. The mirror, the law, the father. The Imaginary left behind. Under his gaze. The unblinking eye. I lie trapped on a side. The King's eye requires. I am your mother. I am Bathsheba.*

The passivity of Bathsheba. The despondency. The imminence. Drooping over her somber heart.<sup>9</sup>

*I look at my hands, through them. My naked body. I sit, washing my body with my own tears. The King's eye requires. The King's gaze penetrates – there is no barrier. He says it, it is done. I wash my own body in preparation for my departure. Like the washing of the body of the dead. I am leaving slowly. I have already, already left. All that is left is the body. All that is left is my flesh, like butter. It glows, like the setting of the sun. I will depart from it. Daughter of seven. Seven times seven. The King cannot catch the setting sun in his cup. He will not drink me. My sons, I sink with the setting sun. I go inside my mother.*

Where does Rembrandt take us? To a foreign land.  
our own. A foreign land, our other country. He  
takes us to the heart...<sup>10</sup>

*Beneath language, beyond language. Inside the imaginary. Close to voice,  
close to breath. In time with the beating heart. Bursting with silences,  
burgeoning with quietude, rending the exterior with a great heaving secrecy.<sup>11</sup>  
This is the feminine, something close to the breast. Something close to song  
that crosses the threshold into the interior other. My sons, may you be  
thirsty travellers drinking in moments, “working in the place of otherness”<sup>12</sup>...*

It's dark here. We're down below. We're here. In  
the breast. Immediately. Such an absence of  
exterior! The country is a room of palpitating folds.<sup>13</sup>

*She writes the unnameable name of the absent mother in the white ink of the  
buttery breast.<sup>14</sup> Shlomo, my son, remember me, she cries. Re-member me.*

—Bathsheba, my mother.

*Bathsheba, in the heart of the Apricot. She gives birth to song, to sound, to  
poetry, to a child. Blood.*

*Remember me. In the valleys of buttery flesh. In the seas and deeps of buttery  
flesh. In night skies, of distant fires, of the luminous flesh of the moon. Its  
constant pulse.*

Of what secret lights are we made?<sup>15</sup>

—Bathsheba, mother.

צאינה וראינה בנות ציון  
במלך שלמה  
בעטרה  
שעטרה־לו אמו  
ביום חתנתו  
וביום שמחת לבו :

Come out and look, daughters of Zion  
At the king, Shlomo  
At the crown  
With which she crowned him  
His mother  
On the day of his wedding  
And on the day of the joy of his heart<sup>[3:11]</sup>



Figure 2: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Bethsabée au bain*, huile sur toile, 1654.  
[Musée du Louvre, Paris]

The Ox. The Hermit. The Turned Upside Down. The Acrobat. The Paralyzed. The Ancient Choir. The Truth. You, as I see you when I see you as you really are: and to do this I have to draw the curtains aside, to slaughter you, to open you up-(with my gaze only). And then, naturally, it is me that I see, it is us, nude, it is our nuditude, magnificent, our power bound, our shining blindness...<sup>16</sup>



Figure 3: Marc Chagall, *Le Cantique des Cantiques II*, huile sur toile, 1957.  
[Musée Marc Chagall, Nice]

## 3

**The interior shulamith**

Vainement ton image arrive à ma rencontre  
 Et ne m'entre où je suis qui seulement la montre  
 Toi te tournant vers moi tu ne saurais trouver  
 Au mur de mon regard que ton ombre rêvée

Je suis ce malheureux comparable aux miroirs  
 Qui peuvent réfléchir mais ne peuvent pas voir  
 Comme eux mon œil est vide et comme eux habité  
 De l'absence de toi qui fait sa cécité<sup>17</sup>



—...[there is a blissful quiescence. The sound of a thousand leaves in the calm breeze. There was a true garden].

שמאלו תחת ראשי  
 וימינו תחבקני

His left hand beneath my head  
 and his right arm embraces me [8:3]

—*Brother. Lay your words close beside me. Don't let them fall on me, suffocating me. Don't board me in with them, not even with silver, with cedar, nor any precious thing. Don't create a great tower of words and set me at the centre. Bathe your words gently.<sup>18</sup> With quick fingers place them here and there in a redolent array. Let them drift past, carried by a brook. Float past, carried by the capricious breeze. Let them fall like feathers where they may.*



היושבת בגנים  
חברים מקשיבים לקולך  
השמיעני

She-who-inhabits-gardens,  
friends listen for your voice  
Let me hear it<sub>[8:13]</sub>

What have I in common with this woman?

—*the need to go to the sources, to the centre of the pomegranate.*

*Where have I lost you?*

—*in the forgetting of sources and seeds*

*How do I recognize you when you call?*

—*the humid voice, a voice like two hands, that are held out in the rich pink flesh of this womb, that did not grasp but waited and reached out into the heart of Bathsheba*

To inhabit was the most natural joy when I was still  
living inside; all was garden and I had not lost the  
way in.<sup>19</sup>

I close my eyes to touch and taste it, this pomegranate womb filled with buds of rose and deep red capillaries. In a heartbeat I found myself nude, aureate in the rose-pink flesh of its centre. This is what I saw as I closed my eyes.

... life, death, women, forms, volumes, movement,  
matter, the ways of metamorphoses, the invisible  
links between fruits and bodies, the destiny of  
perfumes, the theory of catastrophes, all of the  
thoughts that a woman can nourish, starting out  
from a given orange; including all its names, the

silent name, laid upon my almost white leaf, the name as proper to it as god's name to god; its family name; and its maiden name; and the singular name, unique, detached from the dark-green air...<sup>20</sup>

*I look. My fingers, my ears, my mouth all eyes. I am trying to find her origin; the umbilical, Theseus's string. My own. Was I there? I am looked at. I watch their look. I begin to bring to birth. I birth discourse, I birth words that began their journey as pomegranate buds. I bring them from the interior of the pomegranate. I pour out its sweet juice into the world. Not forgetting its dangers, its precipices.*

Dangers of error, of falseness, of death, of nullity, of complicity, in murder, of blindness, of injustices, of distraction, of hypocrisy. That we fear and that we seek. For we fear the greatest danger which is forgetting to fear.<sup>21</sup>

*I taste freedom with my lips when I become more than I am. Deep in the pomegranate I am caressed by the gentle tides of beat, of rhythm, of spring showers raining beautiful morphemes in all sorts of combinations producing raw and astounding words. Crystal clear, falling, dissipating, merging, forming rivulets that run down branches, spill over roots, soaking into the earthen feet of orchards, dripping from the aureoles of ripening fruits.*

אלגנת אגוז ירדתי  
לראות באבי הנחל  
לראות הפרחה הגפן  
הנצו הרמנים  
לא ידעתי נפשי  
שמתני מרכבות עמינדיב

Into the garden of walnuts I descended  
To see the lushness of the streams  
To see the budding vines

The red-bursting flowers of the pomegranate trees  
 I did not know my own passion [*nephesh*]  
 She set me in the chariot of a prince<sup>[6:11-12]</sup>

*Here he is and here I am learning to live again, his arrival throws me from myself. His aromatic arrival bereaving me of dry-lipped thoughts of urban sidestreets that had trapped me under mildewed chipboard, rotting wood, tins, rubbish everywhere, rusting iron, boards and broken concrete blocks, plastic bottles spilling out of bins, apple cores.*

שלחך  
 פרדס רמונים עם פרי מגדים

But you branch out -  
 a grove of pomegranates with a treasure of fruit <sup>[4:13]</sup>

*Salt tears. I am all eyes. Try to speak but I can only form his words. I keep biting at them but they fall out of my mouth. What words don't belong to him? I echo after him like Pierrot. Cut off from the fading light. The twilight that catches the rust-red leaves of the Autumn trees stretching up with their golden hands towards the feathered pink clouds lined with the finest, glittering silks. It burns me out, the scene flees, complicit with the descending sun. You degenerate in front of him, confirming his own premise, at the word of the tribunal, under the surveillance of the Superfathers. He doesn't see the fallacy. He doesn't see the perfection of the circle. We differ, irreconcilably.*

... we shouted: "I want to leave!" "Don't go!" "I am the one who will leave!" Both of us wanted to go without going, not to stay, to tear out a life, a heart, a tongue, it didn't matter whose ...<sup>22</sup>

—*Don't look back. Your tears will become salt. [Then she named the world with new names, she filled it with new names that multiplied without limit.]*

She had just touched the world with her eye, and she thought: "it is *I* who can see." *I* would thus be my eyes. I the encounter, the meeting point between my seeing soul and you? Violent gentleness, brusque apparition, lifting eyelids and: the world is given to her in the hand of her eyes. And what was given to her that first day was the gift itself, giving.<sup>23</sup>

—*If I am animal, I am panther, if I am bird I am dove, and if horse, then, I am the most exquisite mare.*

... our deaths fought unmercifully, they threw themselves against walls, they leapt out of windows, they killed each other on our bodies, they left us lying breathless, fireless, passionless, presentless, outside of everything, outside of time, outside of paradise, outside of hell, nowhere, outside our bodies and our heads, without madness and without light, with barely a hint of memory and minimal determination to live.<sup>24</sup>

—*We have to say it, in ink, in milk, in blood. To trees, to the wild, to each other. We have to love, love fully. And take all the pleasure in kissing that there is and not retreat. This is how we become newly born. This is the mystery of the mother, of Bathsheba.*<sup>25</sup>

תחת התפוח עוררתיך  
שמה חבלתך אמך  
שמה חבלה ילדתך

Beneath the apricot tree I awoke you  
There your mother travailed for you  
There she wrested and awoke you to life!<sup>[8:5]</sup>

*I desired children. One called freedom, one called “you cannot have me”, one called life.<sup>26</sup>*

*I strain in labour. I struggle and travail. I rise up, heave, bend forward over my belly. The contraction takes me. Will I die this time? How deep is this wound? When I couldn't breathe, and I burned up. When I couldn't speak I felt mad, maddened, maddening. My body heaved, a shudder from the deep. Burgeoning out into the cold air. Into the waves. There amongst the creatures of whom the water is their home. I shuddered, shook, and what I couldn't say, there it was inscribed. A word. «Voici. Je suis là»*

Voici l'énigme: de la force est née la douceur. Et maintenant, qui naître ?<sup>27</sup>

*Words. Tortuous. Forming both my cry for freedom and my lived captivities. Voici. A birth. My child, here she is. I witness the opening of her eyes. She is something sacred.<sup>28</sup>*



*I met you today, it was early in the morning. The skies were heavy with rain so that everything was damp and hushed. I opened to you today. I opened to you when I opened Derrida. He had me crying, “Here I am.” I was shouting it but the rush of language was caught up at the faint blush of the rose of my cheeks. My eyes were damp, damp as the clouds. I opened to the words “who is she?” I was interrupted by his weaving words. He wove them round me, the dead Derrida, who rose from the desert this morning in damp clouds, who rose when the rain began to fall. He breathed, whispered, pealed, thundered into my ears a glas:*

*... the text of the other, arrives in silence....<sup>29</sup>*

*I was inhabited, haunted by the words. Sick to death I was. Sick unto death. Nauseous with death. Silenced by this creeping autre. You tore it from my mouth.*

*... torn from the mouth of a woman, so as to be given to another...<sup>30</sup>*

*Yes, it was torn from my mouth because my jaws are clamped and I can’t speak a single word. It pours out through my eyes like the grey day pours from the sky, slips down the mountainside.*

*Here I am—but where is she? Who has given me this overflowing absence of context? Absent Other who still pulls me. And yet, in the space between us, in the agonizing call, the bursting despair from her lips, fell down into text, yet retaining, implausibly, her urgency. Context is called out of me. Haunts me. Me voici. I am torn up from myself. Torn out by her. Voici l’énigme.*

*An epitaph.*

... a certain Peter (who was employed as a reader) led, kept watch for the woman as she was returning home. They threw her out of her carriage and dragged her to the church called Caesarion. They stripped off her clothes and then killed her with broken bits of pottery [ostraka]. When they had torn her limb from limb they took [her body] to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt it.<sup>31</sup>

*La profondeur de femme ne peut pas être fermée...*<sup>32</sup>

—*Sa profondeur est le site de sa naissance.*



*Return there with me now.*

*—‘Vite, miracle!’ Let’s go together and celebrate our loves and our stolen histories. Let’s write our love into crafty, slippery prose that will never be contained, never boxed. It will always eventually be free, seeping out, rising like mist. Let’s write our bodies, let’s write them large and full and burgeoning. Celebrating our beautiful, resplendent nudity. Let’s write the end of war, and how we put down swords and kissed, made love with our true [br]other under trees.*

But at this dawn without subterfuge she had seen the world with her own eyes, without intermediary, without the non-contact lenses. The continuity of her flesh and the world's flesh, touch then, was love, and that was the miracle, giving. Ah! She hadn't realized the day before that eyes are miraculous hands, had never enjoyed the delicate tact of the cornea, the eyelashes, the most powerful hands, these hands that touch imponderably near and far-off heres. She had not realized that eyes are lips on the lips of God.<sup>33</sup>

*She runs, falls onto the stone floors of Athena's temple. She draws up on her knees, struggles to her feet. She can't escape. Breath stops. Pelicans take flight on a far off shore. Slips, falls again. Now there is blood. Nowhere to run. No one to help. A cry. Heart stills, already turning to stone. Despair. It is inexorable, his advance, his blue mane shimmering, his strength, impossible. His eyes, hard, hawk's eyes, desire fuelled by the possibility of possession. He can take what he wants. He hunts his prey. This deer, this gazelle in the temple of Athena. She struggles. Grip like steel. He will take everything. She struggles, cries out. He slaps her hard. Stunned. He takes everything.*



You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and laughing....<sup>34</sup>

עד שיפוח היום  
 ונסו הצללים סב  
 דמה־לך דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים  
 עלהרי בתר :

Until the day breathes  
 and [our] dark shadows vanquished  
 Resemble a gazelle, a young stag,  
 on mountains of promise<sup>35</sup><sub>[2:17]</sub>

# Icara

*We, the black and the beautiful*

דודי לי ואני לו

I am my lover's and my lover is mine <sup>[2:16]</sup>

To fly/steal is woman's gesture, to steal into language to make it fly. We have all learned flight/theft, the art with many techniques, for all the centuries we have only had access to having by stealing/flying; we have lived in a flight/theft, stealing/flying, finding the close, concealed ways—through desire... hesheits pass, hesheits fly by, hesheits pleasure in scrambling spatial order, disorienting it, moving furniture, things, and values around, breaking in, emptying structures, turning the selfsame, the proper upside down.<sup>1</sup>

## 1

**The Poetess Thief**

In the beginning, I desired.  
 “What is it she wants?”  
 “To live. Just to live. And to hear myself say the  
 name.”  
 “Horrors! Cut out her tongue!”  
 “What’s wrong with her?”  
 “She can’t keep herself from flying!”  
 “In that case, we have special cages.”  
 Who is the Superuncle who hasn’t prevented a girl  
 from flying, the flight of the thief ...<sup>2</sup>

I want it all, and I also want to be. I feel the bars. I just want to live. What name  
 should I say? I’m mute. I can’t get it on my tongue. Can’t spit it out.

—*Then write it. Write it for yourself. Write Woman. Write jouissance.*

I want it all. And I also want to fly, right through the looking glass. This looking  
 glass<sup>3</sup> that is the symbolic making an alien place for woman. The world is  
 eternally belonging to someone else, someone more powerful, and someone with  
 all the luck. Among the Hysterics there are Poetess-Thieves who live by stealing  
 words and making new ones. It is a type of guerrilla activity, whereby they  
 seclude themselves in the woods, behind trees, in ponds and make brave sallies  
 into the fray. They are the robin-hoods of language. They masquerade as fishes  
 and birds.

After the envelope full of water which was our  
 prenatal home, we have to construct, bit by bit, the  
 envelope of air of our terrestrial space, air which is  
 still free to breathe and sing, air where we deploy our

appearances and our movements. We have been  
fishes. We will have to become birds. Which cannot  
be done without opening up and mobility in the air.<sup>4</sup>

—*Fly Icara. Fly with your own wings.*

Writing, poetic writing. A way of speaking the unspeakable, inscribing the body, re-inscribing the body. A subversive, resistant writing and language, that seeks to undo the invisible oppositional structures that bind feminine expression. An *écriture féminine* that is theoretical, creative, poetic and philosophical but belongs wholly to none of these categories, continually resisting the categorization that is prioritized by phallogocentric forms. Neither does it belong to the *propre* of women nor of men. Taking this resistance even further it transgresses against linguistic norms in meaning-making and language by deconstructing language and punctuation, thus laying bare the subtle work of signification. Cyclic rather than linear, poetic rather than rational reasoning, excess rather than lack, giving rather than taking, *c'est la jouissance de la langue Cixous*.<sup>5</sup>

Nous, les précoces, nous les refoulées de la culture,  
les belles bouches barrées de bâillons, pollen,  
haleines coupées, nous les labyrinthes, les échelles,  
les espaces foulés; les voilées, — nous sommes  
« noires » et nous sommes belles.<sup>6</sup>

Woman entrapped by a repressive rule that seeks to hold captive even her very body, blamed further for the brokenness it then produces in her psyche. The cry 'she has been unjustly used since time immemorial!' went unheard, straight into the void. Her own body the possession of more powerful others; from lord to lord—Justine<sup>7</sup> —that is her name. The hunter intent on possession: of our bodies, our mouths, our wombs, our thoughts, our souls, colonizing even our



imagining of the divine. Any cry was a mental illness, the deviation from the *propre*. We were hysterics. Until Hélène began to burst into words:

Yes, the hysteric, with her way of questioning others (because if she succeeds in bringing down the men who surround her, it is by questioning them, to the extent that the power they have wished to impose is an illegitimate power of rape and violence). The hysteric is to my eyes, the typical woman in all her force.<sup>8</sup>

‘The hysteric is someone for whom the body speaks.’ She laughs uncontrollably. She weeps. She shakes and shouts. She stops the ignominious passage of time. She does not allow the seductive power discourse and subtle economies of the man’s world to bridle her. The hysteric is a wild thing, a poetic thing. She dreams.

It is a force that has turned back on Dora, but, if the scene changes and if woman begins to speak in other ways, it would be a force capable of demolishing those structures. There is something else in Dora’s case that is great – everything in the nature of desire.<sup>9</sup>

What of this libel that disenfranchises her due to some inference about her own biology? When the site of her own pleasure was lost, her *jouissance* disavowed. The libel that regards her as empty, vacuous and not-whole. She dreamed of excess, of being more than one-of-two (the cowardly one), of being much more.<sup>10</sup> Of spending without limit. Of genital generosity. The *jouissance* of the other.

As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity.

Woman “touches herself” all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress each other.<sup>11</sup>

And my mother, my primordially murdered mother? The torn Tiamat,<sup>12</sup> the love, hate, embraced, cursed, life giving, life smothering mother. She has raged in her chains. Her tired bones prop up the world. How she has been repeatedly killed to feed the status quo. How she has been sacrificed at each sunrise to steady the pillars of civilization.<sup>13</sup> Heart eaten out by her own sons, never rescued by a fine young Greek, not Perseus, nor Achilles. The Kraken ate her up for tea. She is a shade; the steam of her will extinguished.

We must give her new life, new life to that mother, to our mother within us and between us. We must refuse to let her desire be annihilated by the law of the father. We must give her the right to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion, restore her right to speech, and sometimes to cries of anger.<sup>14</sup>

How do we get out? How do we transform this history, this legacy? We rewrite it. Reinscribe the word. Write it for the first time. Write and question, write the breath, write from the quick, write out of the primordial death scenes into the labour of birth. Write from the fecund womb. Write the milk of lactation. Write the agony and the ecstasy of life.

Writing is working; being worked; questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same and of other without which nothing lives;<sup>15</sup>

The dark, murky and deep are speaking, writing, shouting out in water spouts. As she did, Shulamith, her perfume overflowed the stone walls of her captivity

and coursed down the flanks of the holy mountain. I wonder if you know her. Her sexuality could not be contained as it spilled over her bonds towards freedom, a freed land, wonderland. She never ceased to struggle against the silencing and commodification of the uncle-colonist. Her vineyard of her being was her own and all its possibilities through her writing.<sup>16</sup>

.... undoing death's work by willing the togetherness  
of one-another, infinitely charged with a ceaseless  
exchange of one with another<sup>17</sup>

She subverts and displaces the real and the imaginary, the self and the other, the firm lines and boundaries between social roles and gender and draws the reader into an almost-too-close embrace with the principal characters. Is she purposing to extend her exploration of self and other, the feminine, of love, to taste the *différance*<sup>18</sup> in her reader? It could be reasoned that the Song of Songs also intends to do more to the reader than entertain.

... a course that multiplies transformations by the  
thousands.<sup>19</sup>

Shulamith is touched by the edges of hysteria. Her desire drives Shulamith to the edges of sanity, drives her to rebel against the will of her brothers, her uncles, her fathers, their Law, their Name, their Word.

... Following these yesterday's victims of torture, who  
anticipate the new women, no intersubjective  
relationship will ever be the same. It is you, Dora,<sup>20</sup>  
you, who cannot be tamed, the poetic body, the true  
'mistress' of the Signifier.<sup>21</sup>

She runs, laughs, sobs, pines, ruts. She throws off the clothing of civilization with its multitude of small rules and confines. She runs wild without these tedious small-clothes. And she is without the taint of this law—her lawless, unblemished body,<sup>22</sup> replete with unruly, blameless womb.

שררך אגן הסהר אליחסר המזג  
בטנך ערמת חטים סוגה בשושנים

Your 'navel' [vulva] is like a luminous basin  
Mulled wine brims  
Your belly, a dome of wheat, encircled by lotus<sup>[7:3]</sup>

Perhaps this is why I love her, as I love all wild things. She makes my body a place of celebration. She washes away the dirt of shame, she revels in the body, in flesh, in her it's every discharge is wine, milk or sap. She imagines a world where we might love together exalting in all our bodies, remembering the feminine, loving the other in each one's beautiful difference; a new world of sexualities. Imagine.

*—this morning it happened*

*This morning*

*I was wrapped up in him*

*A tangle of roots and branches*

*Twigs, leaves, dry, red, yellow, green and pungent humus*

*We wove each other down into the rich earth*

*and lifted ourselves upwards towards an open sky*

*entwined with vines, bursting with shoots*

*and within we were burning brighter than any star*

*cool, fresh, live with sap*

*diffuse with air<sup>23</sup>*

*—Trees of life. We are trees of life.*

And so I cross over into another world  
shyly and in homage linger  
for an invitation from this unknown  
that I would trespass on.  
I am very glad,  
and all alone in the world,  
all alone, and very glad,  
in a new world  
where I am disembarked at last.  
I could cry with joy,  
because I am in the new world,  
just ventured in.  
I could cry with joy,  
and quite freely,  
there is nobody to know.  
And whosoever the unknown people  
of this unknown world may be  
they will never understand my weeping  
for joy to be adventuring amongst them  
because it will still be a gesture  
of the old world I am making  
which they will not understand,  
because it is quite, quite foreign to them.<sup>24</sup>

## 2

## Flying Manuscripts

I desired a mother because I felt abandoned and cut off. I desired a midwife because I was pregnant with the idea of incarnation. I desired a companion, someone who had already trailed through this rugged new earth. I couldn't walk alone, my steam became consumed. I was saturated by the weight of dead texts and dead readings and text-objects, like stones. I am in the midst of a struggle, I must struggle to read the 'live' word in the Song of Songs, my life-text, my 'live'-text.

שחורה אני ונאווה בנות ירושלם  
 כאהלי קדר כיריעות שלמה  
 אלתראוני שאני שחרחרת  
 ששזפתני השמש  
 בני אמי נחררבי

I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem  
 Dark as the [Bedouin] tents of Keder  
 Exotic as the tapestries of Shlomo  
 Do not see me as black;  
 I have been pierced by the Sun's rays  
 The sons of my mother, their anger blazed<sub>[1:5-6]</sub>

Hélène Cixous:<sup>25</sup> bodies, words, merging, emerging, submerging, birthed up from the sea. Purposefully, poetically, redemptively, subversively and controversially conceiving. A *Méduse*<sup>26</sup> laughing, exposing, being riotous and unguarded. Whispering the whispers of a woman becoming, or conversely, neighing like a mad-woman who is half-horse; a beautiful winged Pegasus.<sup>27</sup> And, I must admit, to read my text-being I have embraced another who is more text than woman and all woman in her text.<sup>28</sup> I had never seen woman like this before. She was a new creation; an incarnation.

I defend my challenge as woman, my madness. I fly  
off, I land in the middle of a language. In a language  
you cannot die. Here the wind always blows, no  
word is immobile, the limit is not a limit.<sup>29</sup>

She is a serpentine oeuvre, slipping by and around language.<sup>30</sup> A monkey with words, throwing them here and there.<sup>31</sup> An iconoclast crashing through the norms and forms cutting the bindings of her feminine expression loose, those bound feet;<sup>32</sup> somewhat crippled by their long service to a forest of invisible signposts and a ghostly library of documents conceding to a toxic law.<sup>33</sup>

—*Creatress of a rebel genre.*

But upon joining myself together with her I am feeling tormented by her passions. In my choosing of two text-beings, H.C. and the Song, with which to map my encounter I am being torn by their raw and graphic desires. And then their cruel absences.

I lift my head. She is gone. It is ten minutes to ten.  
Nothing is left but the sun. It is the sun of tragedy.  
In the empty meadow – thousands of hideously  
immobile daisies, hideously white, thousands of  
God's teeth. Tear me apart, it's alright with me. But  
God too has abandoned me. And the silent meadow.  
The deafening sun. And no light at all.<sup>34</sup>

You are twisting beauty, poetess. Sharp beauty with the abject. The Terrible and terrifying Cixous. Horror on a sunny day with blue skies, white flowers, pristine, crisp scene that smashes me into too many shards to pick up. I am disoriented, dislocated, and now relocated or reborn in no actual point of sane calm. All my memories of childhood, the field of long grass, windswept, fragrance of nutty hay, and horses, warm rays of sun, the warmth of it on my skin. It is all consumed



with the godlike stroke of her cutting. Now my thirst begins for balance and it is never ending. This teetering is what I feel upon finding Cixous in her text. A thousand cuts and I am in pieces.

*Wild text, you perform me in your breathless state. I become your mouth, your mother, your shawl. All your searches are mine. When you are torn, I am torn. And my body bears your bruises and my heart is burgeoning with your despair.*

— *Perform me performing you*

פתחתי אני לדודי ודודי חמק עבר  
 נפשי יצאה בדברו  
 בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו  
 קראתיו ולא ענני  
 מצאני השמרים  
 הסבבים בעיר  
 הכוני  
 פצעוני  
 נשאו את־רד ידי

I opened to my love but my lover had vanished,  
 When he spoke I couldn't breathe  
 I searched for him but couldn't find him  
 I cried out to him but he didn't answer me  
 The guardians found me,  
 the ones surrounding the city  
 They struck me  
 They bruised me  
 They tore off my shawl<sub>[5:6-7]</sub><sup>35</sup>

But it is not death that I find here in Cixous's text-being, though the possibility of death always seems near. In its nearness, life finds an axis mundi. A great tree. In the struggle to survive, not just the struggle to survive but to survive as more than a shade, more than ashes. Cixous is ripping open the partitions that have barricaded voice. With that defiant word, "I" and "I will live," her text-being takes shape and performs the labour of birth. This birthing is what she elsewhere calls "life writing."<sup>36</sup> In the face of death she refuses to go back quietly into the darkness. She has had her garments and totems and other charms taken one by one at each of the gates of the dead but life rises in the face of such naked being.<sup>37</sup> She takes a militant line as she falls through air into an ineffable, always turbulent, deep.<sup>38</sup>

Today I will say: writing is woman's.<sup>39</sup>

Hélène, the elusive, transgressive, pained by death, godless (?), and *Féminine* (*par excellence*). When you write, I see you throw open the curtains to reveal the full expanse of the starry heavens. You are a magician of eternal moments. You capture in words the effect of every impact of each starry photon as it ricochets against you as you strain towards the scene as if your life depended on it. Fingers straining against the window sill; hesitancy as you rise *en pointe* and lean forward into space. Your body, skin stretched taut against flesh receiving every vibration, every wave of energy. Reading your words is like the first waking of the body to love, to jouissance. The first touches from the hand of the lover. You write like a woman in the first erotic strains. Pen touches paper like lips on warm skin. I read. I am exhaled by your breath; your mouth.

She had not realized that eyes are lips on the lips of God.<sup>40</sup>

*—You hadn't realized it and then it struck you with the force of first light.*

*Her performative language burned me with the blinding heat of a million scrolls on fire.*

She writes like a prophet, like Jeremiah whose bowels burned with words seeking escape into the world.<sup>41</sup> Her earnest words hold me in reading. I find myself contorting to contain my spurts of embarrassed laughter, cringing at her daring blatancy, seduced by words, wondering at her candour, twisted this way and that by her double and triple entendres, lost forever in her beautiful and mysterious obscurities.

She is black and beautiful. And she is a Queen of Labyrinths. Your eyes are lips on the lips of G-d.<sup>42</sup>

We, the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevvies – we are black and we are beautiful.<sup>43</sup>

A sword, a pen, a razor blade. The possibility of blood on the page. This writing stares fearlessly into the sun, gathering all those who have suffered with her:<sup>44</sup>

*You are a wild thing and you write wildly.<sup>45</sup> Wild books full of wild birds flapping.*

I never knew a wild thing sorry for itself; a small bird  
will drop frozen dead from a bough before it ever felt  
sorry for itself.<sup>46</sup>

*You are a wild thing that never felt sorry for itself. You write magical feasts of words. I devour them and am devoured. And you are so brave. That's why I hold my breath when I read because I don't know what will happen to me next. I don't know who I will become if I continue to read. I am afraid of what this transference of courage might do. It risks my world with its faux certainty. Pillars will crumble. I want to cry "Turn the lights on!" but I know,*

... if the lights are turned on I am homeless.<sup>47</sup>

—*I am light; the light of humanity. I am first breath.*

Felix Culpa.

I have just entered into the space of your words, in that portico that you called *Job the Dog* (or Stigmata or The origin of my philosophy or The opening of the mouth).<sup>48</sup> You use those word strings to tell the tale of the dog that bit you, and make it into the meaning and the absurdity and the travesty and the reason for everything and lo, behold, a reason for living. I am moved by your incarnational memoir of Fips who latched on to your foot and then caused you to see at that proto-adolescent moment, that we are victims of our own worlds circling round to perpetuate violence by neglect or act, but that in clear seeing, using our pain as a window we can transcend by sublimation. Trick the forces of chaos through alchemy. Taking the pain of the present and turning it by magic into beauty. Taking pain and forming it into a fiery palantir through which to divine the world.

You know my bursts of rage, the sudden moments  
when the door of my calm opens to give way to a  
very ancient furore, you do not know that then I am  
Fips, I leap out of myself called by his gallop that  
hoped to pass in a prodigious bound over the spikes  
of the portal, barking I follow his hope I am his  
extravagance, he invented invisible wings for himself,  
it was miracle to see him fly over the obstacle,  
belying the envelope that made him small and dog.<sup>49</sup>

You achieved it. There is no dead dog past or since that has so lovingly been set to rest or more lucidly recreated as Phoenix to live forever bounding across the pages of your text.

Transcendence through writing. That creation of a graven image; the creation of your own universe birthed out of your jouissance.

Algeria. There is a word with meaning for Hélène Cixous. Not that you are Algerian but neither were you truly French. Algeria whether held by France or by ‘Arabs’ was a hostile womb to the Jewish race.

In the smiling happy little girl I was, I hid (from others and from myself) a secret, restless, clandestine little girl, who knew well that in truth she had been born elsewhere. The obscure feeling of having appeared there by chance, of not belonging to any here by inheritance or descent, the physical feeling of being a frail mushroom who only holds to the earth with hasty and frail roots. Another feeling in the shadows: the unshakable certainty that “the Arabs” were the true offspring of this dusty and perfumed soil. But when I walked barefoot with my brother on the hot trails of Oran, I felt the sole of my body caressed by the welcoming palms of the country’s ancient dead, and the torment of my soul was assuaged.<sup>50</sup>

Our first steps in the world last with us forever. They frame us; become our life stones, the primal itch, the red giant of our unconscious, an uncut umbilical. The world of your first steps is engraved on the palms of your hands. You were born in the crucible of Algeria. Like my Camus, like your Derrida. You were born into the arid and fraught world of French Algeria, poor, but not so poor as some. The irony to be born Jewish in French Algeria in 1937, to be the daughter of a politically conscious Sephardic father and Ashkenazi German midwife mother, her own mother in tow. You call it luck; but it’s a mean luck.

Your father died of the very disease he fought with his medicine in the poor indigenous quarters in Oran. He was too young, too hopeful. This engraving is deep and still bloody—you go back to it again and again. He was a doctor, a

humanist and unable to look past the injustices of French rule against the indigenous of Algeria. The irony that on his death those indigenous ‘others’ turned against you— two vulnerable women, bereaved children and a neglected dog in the hotbed of indigenous unrest. The other of the others; Jews in French Algeria. You call it a ‘double original sin’.<sup>51</sup>



I write from a generation or more past and from a south pacific postcolonial land<sup>52</sup> a million miles away but I touch your meaning as it flies by on its course. There is a psychological tyranny of being birthed into the grating space of the postcolonial not quite. Who are we when we are born amorphous with no ancient right to be in the land? And too long a time has passed for any ancient lands that would have been ours. They have become legend. We are made amorphous because no land is our own, the religion of these lands is not our own, the sex of this land is not our own—our voice is in danger of sinking anonymously into the deep.

These lines are my lines, the lines marked out by British imperialism. My great, great, grandmother who gave birth to my great grandfather upon the black sands of these foreign shores under an upturned life boat in the pouring rain and bitterly cold wind, still in sight of the wooden ship that bore her from Cornwall to Wellington. My French great, grandmother sailed to Christchurch, a lace maker, such strong Jewish features, beautiful, dark. My Scottish great grandfather just a boy swept from his ancestral highlands by generations of English oppression.



*Green islands  
To which we came  
From another land which no longer exists; I went back and it wasn't there  
Why did we come so far; leave behind where our feet could touch the ground?  
I hadn't yet been born  
My mother said we must have been desperate to travel so far  
And did this desperation make us bitter when we arrived  
Were we cruel?  
Hewed down their forests for frames  
Reproducing the memory of a city in this wood  
Rose gardens and lavender  
To spite the uncultivated hills  
The hearts of our men sputtered out young in the hewing down of those trees  
And even then we had not found a safe haven  
Drawn back across seas into wars thinking that our old lands still existed  
For nought  
And now  
I find myself in the vacuum between  
Alienation and belonging  
Neither here nor there  
There is no place for me to touch the ground.  
I am thus marked...  
and no,  
I do not feel the soothing hands of the ancient dead*

*And you, Singer, where did you come from? You distinguish yourself as black, marked and connect this marking of 'black' to the Keder outsiders.<sup>53</sup> Are you like Yael, finding herself in the tents of the Kenites and by association, disposed towards the colonizers but yet not one of them?<sup>54</sup> Clearly, Singer, your feet do not touch the ground as they are always running.<sup>55</sup> You have the abramic mark, לך-לך for whom the Promised Land is a distant desert mirage.<sup>56</sup> The mark that means you must never touch the ground, always walking and not yet or ever truly home הלכה. This is your sign and your stigmata.<sup>57</sup>*

לכי-לך

—I'm not afraid.

*I fear for you. Don't walk. Run!  
Run, Shulamith, Run!<sup>58</sup>  
Run because Hade's hounds pursue you.  
Write, Singer, write.*

Write your Self. Your body must be heard.<sup>59</sup>

*Go, leap, dance, fly.*



CiXous. I shall remember not to say 'sous'.<sup>60</sup> I shall celebrate your guttural Berber 'x'. 'X' is your mark, marking *La Différance* as well as accenting the space, the nexus, between Algéri- and [Fr]-ance.<sup>61</sup>

This is a naked book, as exposed as Promethea. In its writing it never thought of being read later. I am afraid for it. Yet Promethea never even thinks of being afraid.<sup>62</sup>

## 3

## Codetta

Embodied Cixousian words. You are all feeling; all sensation. What wisdom do you have for me as I begin on my journey to encountering the text-body of the most beautiful poem imaginable? I know you write in your own blood. There are no reserves, there is no restraint, it is all risk. You write on-the-edge-of-the-deep. You are reading in action. You don't stop to theorize, to pretend towards a new mode of being. You write as you are; you write in the act of being, in the act of becoming.

Here is an odd thing: my love for the Telephone is equal in intensity and tenacity to my antipathy for the camera. That's because the Telephone is you.<sup>63</sup>

Yes, you are my Telephone. And I often stop my reading to call you. Tell me more about your wild ways then since we are on the line. Shall I read your Tancredi? And tell me if it matters that you lift the posts that define the sexuate being and say we all own both goals? The sin is to never visit either, *n'est-ce pas*? But again, I want to see for myself the many small madnesses that have dressed your words. The many small sanities that are hence exposed, and are exposing me as formally insane or again now under the guise of a new madness. It all now seems real. Is it life, or is it all bleeding on paper?

... in reality I am living on the slopes of a volcano during the day, at night I travel through the caverns of the earth, I cover thousands of miles, it sometimes happens that I find myself in one of Plato's caves without expecting or hoping for it, I am thus never outfitted as I should. I am wearing light clothing, whereas it is very cold in these halls where one

should be protected, I shiver, I tremble and also I meet so many people from long ago that I haven't seen in an eternity, especially those with whom I have quarrelled...<sup>64</sup>

Don't let me quarrel with you then, when I like your celebration of humanity so much. I like your brazen cavorting in the flesh. You even write words like urine, mucous, menstrual blood, even drinking blood, the blood of the one you love,<sup>65</sup> which I would hesitate before putting down because they are abject words that make me feel disgust. Is none of this taboo for you? I could have sworn you also shouted "vulva!" into the street in the midst of the busy markets at their zenith. Probably in Hyderabad or Damascus, right in the place where they are selling strawberries by the kilo in the early summer.<sup>66</sup> But death ... death is the *bête noir* that seems to lurk in the horrifying whiteness of each of your pages. You are staring into its sun and it makes your 'life-ness' burst at the seams; spurting black type in its effort to flesh out its own silhouette.

At first I really wrote to bar death. Because of a death. The cruellest kind, the kind that doesn't spare anything, the irreparable. It goes like this: you die in my absence. While Isolde is not there, Tristan turns to the wall and dies. What happens between that body and that wall, what doesn't happen, pierces me with pain and makes me write. Need for the Face: to get past the wall, to tear up the black sail. To see my loss with my own eyes; to look loss in the eye. I want to see the disappearance with my own eyes. What's intolerable is that death might not take place, that I may be robbed of it. That I may not be able to live it, take it in my arms, savour a last breath on its lips.<sup>67</sup>

And yet you say you weren't there. At that moment of life; in the loss of life. In the dreadful living after death. Why weren't you there? You always say you were

not there such as when the King was taken when you were brooding over the Queen.<sup>68</sup> Death, you were not there. You say you were not there when your son was taken ... but surely you were? You blame your mother. She caused you not to be there. “Don’t be there. Look away!” Don’t watch ... too sad, too much pain. Just try to think it never happened. Do you mean ‘Death’, the subject, was not there, at the dying because already life was rising, stealing through the fretwork of your penciled words? Or do you say You were not there because in the death of the Beloved there are no words, no person within to contain the knowledge of such a travesty as the passing away, the receding of life.

... a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen... I write the encore. Still here, I write life. Life: what borders on death...<sup>69</sup>

Yet just before you evoked Tristan and Isolde. A strange evocation for a writing from death to life. Star-cross’d love. Always missing the other. A divine, rending, primal love—volcanic, overflowing, incendiary. Impotent. How beautiful is love lost? How exotic and poignant, the love of the forever young, when youth is cut short. Is it beauteous or horrific love as Tristan clasps Isolde when the life light in his eyes pales and is quenched with the ebbing of his blood. From such pain and defeat, the tearing jaws of death, and then in the aftermath the ghastly quiet, silent vacuum of the never-any-more. How does one return to the celebration of life?

One can emerge from death, I believe, only with an irrepressible burst of laughter. I laughed. I sat down at the top of a ladder whose rungs were covered with stained feathers, vestiges of defeated angels, very high about the rivers of Babylon that twisted between the lips of the Land that is always promised. And I laughed. I was doubled over laughing. I was perfectly alone. And there was nothing around me. Nothing held me, I held on to nothing, I could move on without alighting, there was no road, in my left hand my deaths, in my right hand my possible lives. If there was godliness, I was of it. I didn't seek, I was the search.<sup>70</sup>

והיה בלבי  
כאש בערת  
עצר בעצמתי  
ונלאיתי כלכל  
ולא אוכל:



And it was in my heart  
like a raging fire,  
shut up in my bones  
and I am struggling to bear it,  
and I am not able.[Jer 20:9]

# *Che vuole?*

*Encounter and absence*

*[what does she want?]*

פתחתי אני לדודי  
ודודי חמק עבר  
נפשי יצאה בדברו

I opened to my love,  
but my lover had vanished...  
...When he spoke I couldn't breathe<sub>[5:6]</sub>

Each moment I wait feels like a year, an eternity.  
Each moment is as slow and transparent as glass.  
Through each moment I can see infinite moments  
lined up, waiting. Why has he gone where I can't  
follow?<sup>1</sup>

## 1

**The week of asymmetry****Sunday**

He is gone.

**Monday**

*Vertige...*

*[I say it and then she sighs. I hear a very long sigh, like an expiration that seems like a pouring out of the very force of life, like a stream of water spilling onto the parched ground.<sup>2</sup> I hear her life stream out.]*

*You fell!            [I say this in shock.]*

*—I fell from a great height.*

Things continued on for a week when C. left, flew away, vanished from sight. Just the resonance of him was left echoing ... like a ghost in the machine, the only proof of his continued existence was the beeping arrival of a text. He's become an electrical pulse, a static image in a computerized interface, an array of letters. He might as well be beyond the dark lands; in the belly of Tartarus. Perhaps to feel his presence from the void in the brush of a phantom breath across one's cheek.

But I relished the freedom, the un-mediated control of this room,<sup>3</sup> the non-negotiated space where I could order my world alone: a star there, a rainbow there, an oil lamp, an ice giant. Such creative quiet. Such a paradise of peace. How I could take this time to fold a thousand cranes. I skipped and they flew around me in complex formation.

And then they fell one by one, dropping, until they were in piles on the floor. The space began to close. Dark freedom. I paced this prison cell like a derelict, like a restless beast in the night, a panther in the shadows—the only light<sup>4</sup> is reflected in its yellow eyes, reflecting the presence of the absent moon. “I’m trapped in my perfect array of space,” I said, “and it has become abject to me; a horror in pastels.” In the gentle breeze I am mocked by my paper constructions.

My desire makes me teeter on the edge of the abyss. How I would dive into your memory. Let go of my careful architecture and plummet into the debris of your flood tides. Collide into my solar system like a voracious black hole, shatter the dimensions of this clean white page with the charcoal rubbings of your wild trees. I have swept this space clear and this breath has flown. My breath.

ישקני מנשיקות פיהו  
כִּיטוֹבִים דְּדִיךְ מִיין

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!  
For your love is exquisite, better than wine! <sup>[1:2]</sup>

## Tuesday

*Vestige. [I say this because my soul went out when he spoke. It lay on the ground like water, like a mirror. In the mirror I saw a reflection. When I looked at her I could see that she was slowly fading from view.]*

*—I see his face but it is only in the mirror of my mind. The realization drains me away into nothingness.*

I saw an image of C. today. His outline, his form, his eyes. His eyes were gates. His form was a wall. But I heard his voice. Still a vestige, still a million miles away. I reached out to touch this mirror, a mirror into another space. A white room, his face, even his voice. My body and my bones reached out through my unmoving hands. My cells, all the water and the blood, my humanity, my

earthiness spilled over into my raging present. But in the reflection I appeared absolutely still, I stilled the whirlpool, caught it up behind my eyes, caught it up behind gates. If only the rushing and swirling could be visible, the pumping and racing, and depths, depths like the primordial watery depths of the deep, rushing raging water, streaming out of my quiet eyes.

And he saw, he did, he must have seen me. I felt the peace of being seen. And not the disappointment of being missed like two meteors passing in a distant part of the universe, in the cold emptiness of space, passing a trillion miles apart, passing by without meeting and continuing the journey into the cold dark for what reason, for what purpose, stark absurdity. I saw him and he saw me, we saw each other. And maybe my mirror tricked me into the sense of being seen. Maybe through my mirror I saw myself, only myself. Did I paint his edges, his softness, read into his eyes the gates holding back his own ocean? I question the memory of this vestige, this moment of present, that moment of being released from the pain of desire, that space of which I already feel the loss. Emptiness, and the thirst returns, and the separation returns. I am feeling held back, feeling trapped behind this face. And behind this face I am adrift and alone in the deep darkness of my own wild seas. Great waves, I am swept up to the foaming top of a wave and I am sure to be plunged deep into the rolling waters, pushed down deep, spinning, and trying to breathe. But with one look he stills the storm. That moment when he saw me, the peace of a thousand summers flowed through me. I suddenly came to rest. And now the vestige is gone and I try again to breathe.

הגידה לי  
שאהבה נפשי  
איכה תרעה  
איכה תרביץ בצהרים שלמה

Tell me, I love you with all my breath!  
 Where are you grazing your flocks?  
 Where will you rest from the noonday sun?<sup>[1:7]</sup>

### **Wednesday**

*Slow dying in absence. [This is what I said that day and also every moment in between the days. I said it with blood and breath. I see that all that is left of her is heart. It's turning gray.]*

*—I am heart sick. [The heart that is turning grey says this. It is clearly very sick.]*

I experience on the subconscious periphery that the peace lily is wilting in the corner, dying in the midst of its verdant leaves. It's my grandmother's and I must keep it alive. It's her last green thing. I feel stretched taut beside its presence. We pass by each other not seeing each other. I look past it. My edges are fraying privately. They are peeling off strand by strand. And I don't share this splintering with the green plant. It wilts on its own, in its own reverie, its own memories of her hands, her bronze watering can and the bergamot scent of her tea.

I can't sleep, even though when I close my eyes and then open them it's morning. And I am not fully awake because I must will myself to be in the speaking and the doing of the everyday. I am all future and all past. I am the last moment and the anticipation of the moment to come. But the present is abject. Because the present is the parched plant. The cognition of the pain of loss. The dull ache of the separation. The hopelessness of the emptiness of a desire. It's shameful really. It's a vanity, to be so unsatisfied with this moment. Blue skies, chirping birds who cannot think of desire delayed, only flitting from present to present, the worm, the insect, the ant, the flick of a leaf. I am an Empress of Moments, so sated, and so petulant, nothing else will do but

the gratification of that desire that by the arrangement of the stars, cannot be, not for all the gold in the world, in the right now moment. And so it manifests itself as a tangible shooting pain, in the lung, in the small of the back, at the back of the throat; a restlessness, a darkness. I am an Absconding from the horror of the reality of him not being present. And what is the shape of this desire? In the strength of my desire his shape is set, I imagine his words and glances and looks but can I even predict that the alchemical reaction that is ours will be as my memories and my anticipations paint it? What if he might slip by, look through, G-d forbid he should misunderstand my urgency, or fail to see it, overlook my anxieties, dismiss my phantom pains that have built into a fortress of tumult. And all this power he has over my fragile substance held so precariously so that even a puff of wind will disperse it to the nothingness that I secretly fear. This is sentience at its most scandalous; making me vulnerable to a multitude of small deaths.

הכוני  
פצעוני  
נשאו את־רדידי מעלי

They struck me  
They bruised me  
They tore off my clothes<sup>[5:7]</sup>

## Thursday

*I was in motion and then I stopped still ... [This I said as I was suspended between two moments. I had found that if I held my breath I could dull the touch of a thousand shards of glass]*

It is a stormy night and it is a painted space. I am asleep but my eyes are open, my breath is held, my nerves and feet feel every sensation. These overflow me. I am alive to the sharp barbs of emptiness, distance, space.<sup>5</sup> Heart only, awake to



the night torment. I weep dry-eyed. The wind, the creaking wood, the glow in the dim room—both real and unreal. I contrive it. My being in the dark and stormy night, being alone in the creaking wooded room. I ought to be asleep. Lie down properly, sink in to sleep and dream sensible dreams. Wake and progress in the morning. Progress through the minute to minute being-in-the-world. But the painted space, a vacuum in the roaring night draws me to infinity. The written moment that transcends the tyranny of linear chronology.

C. is not here. And two more pieces of my soul lie sleeping like angels. I need an elixir because I am being dragged down to the wasted sacks of unused moments. It is as if this fever draws me to confront these raining shards of time. An antikythera—I need an antikythera. I need the calculation, the orientation that will free me from my fears, at least to rise above morose realities and loose this cowardice. Tied to C., his absence is like acid on my skin, tied to these sleeping slivers of my soul—my every waking moment concerns their continued existence in my world—and the fear of any harm towards them is my shadow and daily companion. Love too much. Possess too much. Aladdin's treasure trove asleep in my room, in my big bed.

I find myself alone in the darkened flat in the darkened street, of a darkened city, in a darkened world spinning in a dark universe. Spinning recklessly out of orbit. Reckless daughter of a reckless race. I want to stop still. Afraid to stop still. I'm tied, and my bonds to life run like veins through my arms, these shards throb against the wound they left in my heart; threatening to sever me. I am not free. And my greatest fear is that none of it should matter. That it should be absurd.

על־משכבי בלילות בקשתי  
את שאהבה נפשי

On my bed at night I yearned for him  
... the one I love with all my breath<sub>[3:1]</sub>

### Erev Shabbat

I have merged with my Shulamith. I am the apparition and she becomes the Real, the vessel of my own mounting soul-sickness, my yearning-sickness that prevents me from drinking and breathing. I am bound in place, straining against these ropes of fate while the whole world loses its colour. I am no longer in the now. I have moved to the place of transit, the neither-here-nor-there. I no longer see the swallows and the doves. He is not here.

השבעתי  
אתכם בנות ירושלם  
בצבאות או באילות השדה  
אסיתעירו ואסיתעוררו את־האהבה עד שתחפץ

Daughters of Jerusalem  
Promise me  
By the gazelles and deer of the field  
That you will never awaken love until desire is full<sub>[3:5]</sub>

### Shabbat

*Caprice. [This is the moment I give up. I give up again and again. Disavowing it is just a prescription that dulls the pain for a short half hour. Reconciles something that on waking will be unreconciled again. This is why I call it caprice. Because it's cruel. It goes away just to come back. I curse it often.]*

*—It doesn't go away. Just hides, watching you, crouching at your door.<sup>6</sup>*

Difference and this infinite postponement of sameness in the encounter with the Beloved Other. So much the same and yet in between is the chasm of difference that is ever insurmountable. Is this the torque that charges and electrifies and

enlivens the sharp edge of encounter? The depth of seeing and knowing the other is unable ever to be crossed into absolute knowing. It is beyond us both. Each of us an entire universe of the unknown if we choose to look. And so much of our meeting counts on the vagaries and inconstancies of time, timing, and the invasive, abrasive and indispensable world. And yet each time I hesitate. I cannot take it for granted that I will be for you what I hope and that you will be for me also as I hope. We have both symmetry and asymmetry in being which means for me that our encounters, the colours of our entrée into that space of poignant meeting are unpredictable in the degree and the vitality on both our parts. The richness and the fabric of our encounter is a changeable yet rhythmic and aesthetic landscape. So I would not be without our perplexing misunderstandings and cross-path'd sorrows and our capricious and exquisite moments of paradise in the breath of the other, our disappointments and those unpredictable journeys through each other's galaxies, nebulae and stardust; the beautiful diversity to our being-together and the aching process of our journey of knowing.

עורי צפון ובואי תימן  
הפיחי גני יזלו בשמי

Awake Zaphon, Come Tayman!  
Breathe into my garden, let my perfumes stream<sup>[4:16]</sup>

*What do I want? I want to see you face to face. I want to disappear into you, and reappear transformed. I will coast on waves of pain in your absence. I will surge in our reunion.*

## 2

**Elle est venue sous les signes de l'océan**

[... from under the waves]

“What terrifies you?” asks Irigaray of her masculine interlocutor. “That lack of closure,” she surmises “from which springs your struggle against in-finity.” What might happen if we ceased to fight, if we let the undertow draw us towards its depths.<sup>7</sup>

— *Meet me under the waves ...*

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter...<sup>8</sup>

I am meeting you here. This is our encounter, at its moment. And it occurs under gathering storm clouds and rumours of devastating waves.<sup>9</sup> Deep underneath is a bubbling, molten, moving, capricious mass. Water heaped on land and life is extinguished, quenched, drowned, buried under palm branches. Children, lovers, mothers, old and wise. All lost under a massive sea. Slapping its hand and smashing at a fly. I have been walking up and down that shore. Looking out to sea. Looking up at the waters above, grey, black, heavy, ominous, pregnant. Listening to the turbulence, the roar, and hearing from the beyond voices and words. Echoes of the long dead.

The undertow has gripped the wave. The salt washes the wound. We begin again, or not at all.<sup>10</sup>

Turbulent.

*I hear faintly your ancient whisperings. You rise up out of the dimness of ancient worlds, dusty museum galleries, echoing off clay shards, petite lamps, fat bellied, many-breasted goddesses.*

*—I whisper, I echo, I glow. Am I then the Venus, the many-breasted goddess? Do I satiate or am I the sacred source of hunger?*

Turbulence. You draw me into your own chaotic world. A world full of yearnings, desires, storms, and ominous darkness approaching and also having already smashed into us. You have come from so far. Out from under waves of destruction you still whisper dangerous words.

ועלי תשוקתו

... for me is his desire [7:11]

Haven't you heard? Didn't you know? Your world is long gone. Stamped down by the feet of armoured men. Burnt down, smashed flat and yet still you linger with us. Your voice is a miracle.

«Vite, miracle! cria-t-elle, Holà! Doucement miracle! cria-t-elle.»<sup>11</sup>

ישקני מנשיקות פיהו

Let him kiss me, with the kisses of his mouth!<sup>[1:2]</sup>

*“Let him kiss me,” I implore.*

*—“Let him kiss me”, I plead.*

And our twinned and perennial experience of love becomes shared. For a brief second we are both lost in a reverie. My reverie takes me to exotic spaces, oriental pagodas, a raven-haired god of a man, dense musky fragrance heralds his nearness and his potency. Just as your reverie takes you to olive groves, pomegranate orchards and the heady fragrance of a love-filled world.

*— It is a beautiful world full of love ...*

And then an imperceptibly subtle turn:

כִּיטוֹבִים דָּדִיךְ מִיַּיִן

For your love making is better than wine<sup>[1:2a]</sup>

And I succumb to the turbulence of the masculine second person, I-you, and face-to-face encounter, an address that has moved from third person to second. The space encloses. “For your lovemaking is better than wine.” Far better than chocolate, truffles, a pistachio or Turkish delight. I was wrapped in my own reverie, and there was a moment of silence where we were both lost. I and we are

now confronted by reverie that has engulfed us. This past becomes present. The intangible becomes real to us.

כִּיטוֹבִים דְּדִיךְ מִיֵּין  
לְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנִיךְ טוֹבִים  
שֶׁמֶן תּוֹרֵק שֶׁמֶךְ

For your love making is better than wine  
To breathe your fragrant oil is wondrous  
Oil poured out is your name<sup>[1:2b-3b]</sup>

I am drawn to a cornucopia of sensations, the memory of his fragrance, and this translates to his name and even emanates from it. The whisper of his name brings with it his fragrance. And yet, a name is not enough. A name is only an emblem for what is not present. I can endure this notion for a while as I bask in the memory of a fragrance and I,

I will swim in your name without turning back, but  
you will never be your name, you never have been,  
even when, and especially when you have answered  
to it. The name is made to do without the life of the  
bearer, and is therefore always somewhat the name  
of someone dead. One could not live, be there,  
except by protesting against one's name, by  
protesting one's non-identity with one's proper  
name...<sup>12</sup>

*—I need more than your name ... your name is the agony of loss ... I need  
the fragrance of your aromatic oils as the emblem of your nearness.*

But the scent of viscid spikenard can't help but transfer from a name because in that same moment his memory approached me I was already there, drawn by dreams. I remember that my *nephesh*<sup>13</sup> had moved within me. It had gone out to meet him, encircled him; attar of roses. My 'breath' had gone out at his nearness.



Was he there? I almost died.<sup>14</sup> I can never think of him without his fragrance coming to my mind as if he was right here. So near he was. So near, and I closed my eyes and the fragrance was like strong wine, and the earth was warm, and the jasmine breathed over us. We were so close that I couldn't see his face at all. Love is fragrance, and touch. Most of all it is touch. Words never fully represent nor equal it but nevertheless they lead us to the 'scene-that-remains.'

Indeed as soon as the evocation of the amatory experience begins we step into a world of undecidable meaning – the world of *allegories*.<sup>15</sup>

*The name ... how your name makes me contort in raw joy; mourning and passion mixed; an epitaph of the erotic. This is the end of peace and the anticipation of encounter, the beginning of life. First father, first mother.*

*—His name, your name. I am evoking the body. The name comes with his scent, with his form. His eyes. The name alone is an empty husk.*

The "name" that is evoked almost from the very beginning induces intoxication; its precision and uniqueness trigger, it would seem, an overflowing of meaning, a flow of significations, and sensations comparable to that produced by caresses, perfumes, and oils. The sensitive and the significant, the body and the name, are thus not only placed on the same level but fused in the same logic of undecidable infinitization, semantic polyvalence brewed by the state of love – seat of imaginations, source of allegory.<sup>16</sup>

משכני אחרִיךְ נרוצה...

Draw me after you, let us run!<sup>[1:4a]</sup>

—*Draw me!* [you say].

*Draw me !* [I say].

Desire moves us again to implore directly to the masculine other. “Draw me!” I am also drawn, trailing after you in a parallel dimension with C. “Draw me!” And also, I feel drawn into a scene, a timeless space. We are both drawn into your erotic adventure. Running, running from, running to ... and why do we risk ourselves in hope of requited love. “Draw me after you, let us run together.” Ancient lover, The Lover, The Archetypal Lover, man, The Man? Primordial love?<sup>17</sup> I don’t know but I feel myself anyway stumbling after you in anticipation. Of what? An adventure? An awakening? And why stay anyway? Why stand here in the sameness? Why grow dusty? Why close my eyes against this rainbow spectacle?

לא ידעתי נפשי  
שמתני מרכבות עמינדיב

I did not know my own passion  
It set me in the chariots of a prince<sup>[6:12]</sup>

— נפשי ... *my breath*

The play of the breath. It can’t be stopped, this passion. We are moved ineffably. Passion, life-breath takes us. What are you to me? Your voice is a lure. Words too sweet, images too seductive. I can taste the pungency of this myrrh that makes me drowsy, nauseous. I will never be the same. I peer through the looking glass into this ocean of space constructed upon poetic lines. My universe meets yours. I die.

*A space odyssey.*

Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach bitter,  
but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.<sup>18</sup>

I hear the ancient words and I eat the little scroll. It was without hesitation. I consume it all to the last crumb. It tastes sweet but an aftertaste like wormwood; like bitter almonds, like the end of the world. It is a drug. I feel it in my innermost belly, burning away like a fever in my womb. Yes it is there. Radiating fire and dangerous thoughts.

מעסיס רמני

... my pomegranate's sweet juice<sup>[8:2d]</sup>

## 3

**A Space Odyssey**

But the presence of each creates a triangle with the  
two lovers, with the geometry of this third point  
opening up new space.<sup>19</sup>



The world is made up of space; space between you and me. My desire is that there is as little space as possible in this ocean of distance. I am always trying to overcome it, all the distance, but there is always more space; even as we come closer the space remains and we cannot cross that tiny but impassable abyss between self and other. I can't get over there because of the abyss. There is encounter, when we meet. We merge but only for a moment, only in the way my hand might pass through a ray of light, or steam or mist. It cannot ever be grasped hold of. There will always be another encounter and another absence. There is absence when for whatever reason, we are out of touch. No telephone. No meeting of the eyes. Absence.<sup>20</sup>

אנה הלך דודך  
היפה בנשים

Where has your lover journeyed  
Most beautiful of women?<sup>[6:1]</sup>

These meetings and leavings are my first, last and continual experiences of the world. From the ubiquitous and capricious breast to the painful joys of adolescent love; to the closing of the eyes at the end of time, the joy of meeting, the innocent betrayal of departure, the agony of absence.

*—These meetings and leavings are a clash of worlds. These meetings and leavings tear my world apart.*

*You paint your anticipation of encounter with clear, sure brush strokes and then rip them as the spectre of disillusionment rises. I find myself restless.*

*—You and I, daughters of ecstasy.<sup>21</sup> We frame the moments, we couldn't live without them. His tantalizing nearness, his gut-wrenching disappearances.*

*You felt the minute and infinite devastation of his departures. The exultation of his arrivals. And I desire you and push you away in the same moment. Too close. Too present. Too disturbing. And each scene, each memory becomes emblazoned in my mind, so that I relive it in quiet moments.*

Encounter, love is in continual motion, in ebb and flow. You are always arriving and leaving even when we are right here together. Oceanic space, tidal space. Cataclysms and quiet ebbings. Quiet, surreptitious meetings; cataclysmic absences. I want at the same moment my own space, but cannot bear to be parted from yours.

*—Stay with me.*

Day 132. Three weeks of wind and cold.

... “I dreamed that I woke up and you weren’t there, you weren’t in the bedroom, you weren’t in the house and there was no trace of you anywhere as if you had never been here, the house was full of echoes and empty of enchantment, as if I had only dreamed your presence, I went out, there was no one in the world, I wandered, I could not bear the icy weight of my whole life bearing down on my chest, and I started to die without being able to cry.”<sup>22</sup>

*This morning I woke up alone. It was the kind of aloneness that stretches out like a desert on both sides. I was alone and it surprised me so I looked around. I was alone in my large bed and victorious. And it could have been that momentarily I had entered another dimension but I knew I hadn't because I had a sense of time. I knew without a doubt that I had been alone all night, that deep inside me I had rolled away to the edges and at the recesses of my spectrum of awareness I had the vaguest notion that he had rolled away too.*

*We had rolled away to the edges and placed the universe in between us. But I only knew this second hand. I mused on it. I didn't inhabit it. I was alone, cleanly separated by degrees. And so even though I resisted it, and I liked my aloneness even though it was base—*

*—Wait! No! I didn't like my aloneness. It felt like I wasn't breathing. I felt suspended and that I was about to crash into the world.*

*... but it was very still and it was the stillness that I liked, and the space, and at least I was clean. I wasn't always-merging, breathing-into-breathing-out-of, rubbed up in the earth, rubbed against, rubbed raw. I felt fragile. I didn't want to and couldn't stand to be touched. Just for a while.*

*I wanted my bones to lie here in stillness and so, even though I resisted my compulsion, I drew him over me like a cloak. I drew his flesh and his skin and his hair over me like a cloak. My bones received him. My bones that had lain on the bed white and clean became covered with warm flesh. But it was his flesh and something in me wanted to reject it, but wanted to keep it, and also wanted to cast it off, and then wanted to clutch it tight around me in case it slipped off the bed and onto the floor, and in drawing it around me I found that his moist lungs had found their way inside the white skeleton of my chest, and I began to draw in the morning's careful breaths.<sup>23</sup>*

עד שיפוח היום ונסו הצללים סב

Until the day breathes and dark shadows are  
vanquished<sub>[2:17]</sub>

The fluid of this space is desire. I am carried by waves of desire over seas of space. This is the insatiable energy that determines that I shall always and forever be in motion—somewhere between finding you and then eternally finding you again. There is no peace where there is desire; desire, occurring in the tension of encounter and absence.

קול דודי הנהיזה בא  
מדלג עליההרים מקפץ עליהגבעות  
דומה דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים

The voice of my lover! Look at this! He is coming!  
Springing of the mountains, skipping on the hills  
My lover looks just like a gazelle, a young stag<sub>[2:8-9a]</sub>

Yearning: the abyss separating us from paradise, from stasis. Yearning: this out-of-balance, incredible desire to be in balance. But with what? With society? With nature? With each other? Within our Self? Within our Selves? With our ideals and conceptions? We have this palpable longing for homeostasis and yet when homeostasis is achieved we search for a challenge that will keep us in tension with the world, with our lover, with God/s. We require this tension to become? Without this tension we are in danger of subsiding into the doldrums, we become desensitized to the world, we lose all forward momentum.

*—I desire my lover and I desire you. We are texts that are underwritten by desire. They say my true desire is for objet petit a,<sup>24</sup> but I cannot reduce you to an 'a'. They say our desire is lack.<sup>25</sup> But it is as full as the ocean. And my desire is everlasting journey through the seven gates of life, gates arranged on the infinite rounds of the circle, an ouroboros, a*



*lemniscate. We are symbols and texts at work, always loving, desiring, loving. We are never satiated, never static. Our desire is pregnant and replicates. It reproduces our love and multiplies it throughout the universe.*

I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new  
desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and  
again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that  
I could burst.<sup>26</sup>

Desire: how the stones lose their lustre when we long to return home. Long for reunions, longing to give presents and hugs. When we wait those interminable long morning hours when we are waiting for the loved one to arrive. We imagine the-scene-of-the-arrival. We memorialize the scene-that-remains.

The scene-that-remains one day you were returning  
from vacation I fell upon you we made love on the  
floor I remember the texture of your skin you say  
which saddens me remains the texture

we are sitting on The Divan all of a sudden we fall  
upon the scene-that-remains, I lean over I see you  
fall all of a sudden on her me who I was, it is there!  
this brilliant scene returned to fall in front of us ... I  
see us on your face look at us falling all of a sudden,  
there.<sup>27</sup>

*Waiting outside the door.*

*Waiting inside the house.*

*Waiting for the storm to disperse and flood waters to go down.*

Longing can drive us mad as it heightens and cascades, and the growing waves of desire drive us to acts of love, acts of passion at erotic and unforgettable cataclysms of meeting; scenes that become immortalized.

It's an abyss of emptiness, this longing when it is upon me, a gaping hole in my body, in my chest like a black hole, star destroyer. Intense, tangible and at the same time the policeman in my head says "indulgent child, stop your crying!" When there was no challenge to my happiness I was easy, and free, and now, all the caverns have collapsed and the stars have fallen from the sky.

השבעתי  
אתכם בנות ירושלם  
בצבאות או באילות השדה  
אס־תעירו ואס־תעוררו את־האהבה עד שתחפץ

Promise me,  
daughters of Jerusalem!  
by gazelles, by does in the fields  
to never arouse nor awaken love until desire is full<sub>[2:7]</sub>

The heightening of longing leads to heightening of the imagination, in my imagination I see a rainbow of scenarios in which my desires are fulfilled.

Children embraced, Turkish delight munched, copper coffee pots admired, scarves and hats tried on, charades and laughing, photographs, the lighting of incense, the hyperbolic descriptions and laughter, the exotic tales of the camels on the hills.

*—His face, his hands, his touch, the scent of his body, my longing for him burns.*

*Each bell and each of the muezzins' daily prayers toll out my displacement from the ones I desire. Each bell's toll jars me and reminds me I am not with them. Nothing has changed. I'm still here, and everything has changed because of this unbearable and continual pressure in my chest. Put up a block, a wall, a tower of stones, an erection of bricks, a mountain in my way. Any-thing-of-substance, a fence with barbed wire! I would rather see the obstacle than feel the sea monster as it circles in the waters of my belly, restlessly churning. The pleasant, blue day and happy bird song slaps me hard across my face and leaves me breathless. Jerusalem of Gold is not here amongst the minarets, golden domes and wailing walls, but in a shabby row of flats in West Auckland.<sup>28</sup>*

According to Freud pleasure is discharge of dammed energy, the prototype of which being the orgasm. Once it is achieved the body returns to a state of rest, desireless. It no longer longs for the object. But joy is not discharge. It is reunion. And even when the experience is past, there remains its memory as nostalgia...<sup>29</sup>

*—This nostalgia upturns the world. Shlomo-the-King and all his treasures are not enough to sublimate my longing.<sup>30</sup> I am beyond his purchase. I am outside the world, and its economies.*

אסיתן איש את־כל־הון ביתו  
באהבה  
בוז יבוז לו

If a man gave the entire wealth of his house  
in purchase of love  
he could only be utterly despised!<sup>[8:7]</sup>

## 4

## בתינו

[our house/our place]

קרות בתינו ארזים רחיטנו ברותים

Our house of leafy cedar, clad in pungent cypress ...

[1:17]



“Jerusalem of Gold is not here amongst the minarets, golden domes and wailing walls, but in a shabby row of flats in West Auckland.”

*[I said this before without realising its significance. I said this before, not knowing it was said with the heart of my becoming-being. She heard me and did not cry for Jerusalem. That was because her heart was already speeding away from the cracking, spouting city<sup>31</sup> through groves of pomegranates, and lotus fields on the way to the spice mountains.]*

—Where has he gone? I beg of you. Please tell me.

When I was far away from my beloved, there was no palatial building that could replace or sublimate for me the flood of warmth I felt on imagining him in our little home; the abject despair I felt on being so far away from him. In that moment, even though so often I had dreamed of a better place, or bigger place, or nicer place, the truth is that that little row of flats in West Auckland was the only place in the world I felt I could possibly be at peace. How it was roofed with finest cedar, and clad in pungent cypress! It had a bed of dreams, soft as lush, green grass and I desired, with an unbearable and constant desire, to be there.<sup>32</sup>

The mental imagery associated with the dynamic experience of encounter and absence is wired into the landscape, the hills, and the familiar architecture of our world. The streets and plazas take on new significance when love invests the spaces with itself.<sup>33</sup>

—*Even my streets become filled with the possibility of you-being-there.*

מי יתנד כאח לי  
יונק שדי אמי  
אמצאך בחוץ

What I would give if you were my brother  
Nursed at my mother's breasts  
I would find you in the street ... [8:1]

*The streets linked with the image of the nursing child at the mother's breasts (our first place) and the filial brother who carries with him everywhere a place where I have a right, an edge where I can stand. These are family spaces; intimate spaces that flow over onto the street. The paving stones upon which you walk become a part of our home.*

— *The street itself then becomes a point of reference to my beloved. In the bedlam of the souk, the fragrance of myrrh immediately and subconsciously causes my head to turn, amid all the vibrant commotion of exchange, its movement and colour; all my senses are on the lookout for him. My senses tell me he is near.*

Our childhood home, that beloved tree in our garden that has a whole season of our memories and pains etched onto its rough bark, the tensile green leaves of the loquat tree are a bastion, a site of reverie. This tree is a locus and silent witness of the ebb and flow of our love.

*I can't sleep but lie awake, restless in the sleeping hours.*

*No peace.*

*Through the window I can see above the loquat tree that the high wind pushes dark clouds overhead at pace. The leaves of the loquat tree heave in the wind. But their inconstant movements against the racing clouds give the dark hours of early morning an unreality.*

*Loquat tree cut out and pasted against a smoky black backdrop that is streaming past like a reel of black and white film.*

*Faint rays of moonlight do nothing except to add an eerie, flickering luminescence. A grotesque glow.*

*It allows me to see the streaming, tormented clouds.*

*Driven forward by raging bulls.*

*Nothing bodes well in the inconstant unreality of the early morning with high wind.*

*Nothing bodes well when the heaving of the leaves and the racing of the clouds are you and I flying in opposite directions, moving away from each other in opposite directions. Speeding away from each other. Blowing away with the wind. Out of time, out of rhythm, arrhythmia, fraught, lost.*

*I am a loquat tree tossed by the wind. You are the high driven clouds. In between us is a tempest of space. Earth-bound, sky-bound. Imprisoned in incongruent spaces.*

*Touch shattered like glass.*

*Silent against the roar of the night winds.<sup>34</sup>*

We dream of places. These day-dream places are the translation of our desires and yearnings into geometric forms. The invisible desire becomes the imaginable scene or place. Our secret *phantasies*, like the yacht on the high seas figures our longing for our love to be secluded from the outside world, protected by its distance from others, continually in motion, heading somewhere wonderful, sailing with the wind. The silence, the peace, the oceanic breeze, the rhythmic slap of the waves against the hull, the gentle rocking of the bow. And that lone stone cottage in the highlands, similarly figures a desire for uninterrupted intimacy and self-sufficiency. The little stone cottage is dwarfed by the magnificence of the stretch of virgin sky overhead. It has the great arms of a mountain surging on each side. It is wind-swept but sturdy, safe and warm which heightens the sense of security that we desire our love to provide. We dream of such a love like this dream-house. And sometimes the daydream-house becomes as big as the universe.

... an immense cosmic house is a potential of every dream of houses. Winds radiate from its centre and gulls fly from its windows. A house that is dynamic as this allows the poet to inhabit the universe. Or to put it differently, the universe comes to inhabit his house.<sup>35</sup>

We imagine secret gardens, secluded groves. The garden, the flowers are joy and life and are always becoming. The stamens, with their open mouths, the delicate inner, pink-stroked chalices of the orchids hold our gaze. We are half in flames and pulling away to cover our eyes. How can it be that they do not realize their potent metonymy?

I walk by my plants. There are invisible presences in their midst. The past becomes present. My garden is a text. Each plant is a poetic metonymy. Many other plants give me pleasure. But my garden gives me joy.<sup>36</sup>

*—The date-clusters that hang from the palm,<sup>37</sup> he climbs the palm, he plucks them from between my fronds, creamy, sweet, succulent. He faints and falls back to earth, pillowed by a cloud of scent.*

*Against the pagoda, I feel its wood against my back, the scent of Jasmine, of night mistress, of the night of kites. I hold my breath, held in his musky embrace, I hear the wind vocalize the bamboo flutes held adrift by kites in the night air.*

*—The red bursting pomegranate flower, the star bursts on the vines, the promise of fruit to come.*

לכה דודי  
נצא השדה נלינה בכפרים :  
נשכימה לכרמים  
נראה אם פרחו הגפן  
פתח הסמדר

Let's leave my love  
Let's go away to the fields and pass the night among  
the henna blooms  
At daybreak we will make for the vineyards  
We will see if the vines are budding,  
— a show of blossoms<sup>[7:12-13a]</sup>



*The scent of mandrakes.<sup>38</sup> The power of the mandrakes to seduce us wholly. The mandrakes, should we scent them, should we stoop to savour their fragrance, we would be lost immediately. Lost to a time and place, of deep sleep, of deep embrace, of overwhelming presence-of-the-other. It would be the Scene-that-Always-Remains. It would be the moment of metonymy. The first moment that eyes became fingers, where fingers became lips. Where lips touched, breath shared, and we became living beings. The time when life began.*

*—There I gave my love to you.*

*There my love is given, will be given, is eternally being given.*

*—There where we were bone of bone and flesh of flesh.*

*There where we entered into a garden. It was paradise.*

*—The scent of mandrakes was its door.*

But walls figure to keep the interrupters out and lovers safe within, or, in the negative, walls to keep our love apart. I see the bare concrete block wall, it bodes badly. The wall is my obstacle; the wall is my *bête noir*. It figures my frustration and despair. I throw rocks at it, resist it, cry freedom, paint it with words. I spite it with rainbow colours, detonate it with poetic explosions.

אחות לנו קטנה ושדים אין לה  
 מהנעשה לאחתנו ביום שידבר־בה:  
 אס־חומה היא נבנה עליה טירת כסף  
 ואס־דלת היא נצור עליה לוח ארז:  
 אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות  
 אז הייתי בעיניו כמוצאת שלום

*We have a little sister  
 She does not yet have breasts  
 What shall we do with her when she is bespoken?  
 This wall will be fortified with silver!  
 This door we will barricade with a cedar beam!*

I am a wall and my breasts are towers!  
 Then I was in his eyes as one who finds shalom... [8:8-

10]

—*I am a wall, I am a painted wall, I am a wall carrying words of freedom upon my face. Emblems that sprout wings. I am an inscribed wall. Each brick a word that resists my captivity. Each partition, a metaphor that explodes over laws of death, bursting over thresholds. I am a dove of peace that flies over walls.*<sup>39</sup>

The warmth of the kitchen and storeroom, the comforting yeasty odours of baking bread, the nearness of Mother, the skilled hands of the women working edible wonders, magical soups, gravity defying sponges.

ועל־פתחינו כל־מגדים  
חדשים גם־ישנים דודי צפנתי לך

And in our stores are choice preserves – new and old  
my lover, I have laid up for you<sup>[7:14]</sup>

—*I can smell the slow cooking and the grassy scent of the herbs.*

And how in preparing food for my lover I anticipated his enjoyment, the celebration of eating together, the sharing time, the satisfying feasting and afterwards we sit back and bask. The beloved kitchen table. Every dent adds to its character. If only it could talk. It would cascade with its catalogue of family moments, all the ones we had forgotten, the little ones, the new tooth, the intimate dinner, the celebration, the lonely dinner without him, the time the table split in two with the heat of our anger. The table, the food, the scent, all a text all taking on a poetic metonymy that holds my memories to it and facilitates the articulation of my experiences. The hearth conjures up all intimacies and well beings. The kitchen is a site of arcane knowledge, the source of civilization, the externalized womb.

—*My lover tastes like apricot, honey and milk.<sup>40</sup> Our love has the flavour of pomegranate and raisons. Our love tastes like cups of wine, syrups and juices. We are figs and saffron. We are henna and balsam.*

*And what of winter rains? What of winter and war... what of famine and death?*

*—I am not blind to the changes of seasons and their meanings. As much as these smells and tastes symbolize my present love, they can in a flash become the pain of loss. I have seen the women, and how much they are at the mercy of the seasons. War, winter, famine, death.*

A warm, busy room like the kitchen, and the seemingly mundane activity of food preparation at the sinks, tables and benches can bring into the present, cherished memories of the past and we relive wonderful moments, we reclaim time. A place of healing, not having come home until we come into the kitchen, our mother or grandmother's kitchen. And even if she is not there, gone, absent, in that strong sense of nostalgia, she remains amongst the utensils, the strong metal egg whisk, the ancient ceramic bowl, the baking trays that even when stored away continue to evoke the delicious smell of fresh, hot scones. She remains an invisible presence.

Like Tita whose whole being has at its locus the kitchen, whose emotions and movements and hopes are framed by the walls, fused with the tables and basins, a mystical ingredient in the recipes and carries the fragrance of herbs.

... Tita made her entrance into the world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves, and cilantro, steamed milk, garlic, and, of course, onion. Tita had no need for the usual slap on the bottom, because she was already crying as she emerged; maybe that was because she knew then that it would be her lot in life to be denied marriage. The way Nacha told it, Tita was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor.<sup>41</sup>

אנהגך אביאך אל־בית אמי תלמדני  
אשקך מיין הרקח מעסיס רמני

I would bring you, I would lead you  
into my mother's house  
She will teach me,  
I will pour out my pomegranate's sweet juice<sup>[8:2]</sup>

*When I was there in your mother's house, in your mother's kitchen, I saw you as you were when you were a child, laugh and talk with her as we sat on the mats to pummel the chillies and the garlic in the old wooden and stone pestles. We cut the freshly slaughtered beef for our wedding feast into fine strips. We diced the warm fresh beef on other boards for the pungent, zesty laab. The kitchen was bathed in the odours of roasting duck, steaming sticky rice, sweet-sour limes, spices of all kinds and verdant coriander. Your aunties, your sisters, your cousins were laughing and talking as they ground toasted rice kernels by hand and prepared the green papaya for somtum. Even your father came in to prepare his special dish, that only one he ever prepares, the one for special occasions. Also his brothers were drawn into the kitchen by the aura of well-being that had flowed out into the jackfruit trees and the chicken coop. And you came in again, and tried my somtum. My first ever and even though it wasn't as good as the other women who make it by heart, you smiled at me in a way that made me burst like pomegranate flower and you ate a huge plate and the fish sauce danced off the edges. And in the hum of the talking and cutting and grinding the women embraced our love and when our love swelled because of the alchemy of the kitchen and burst into flames amongst the bright red chillies, diffused with the aromatic heap of spring onions, flowed from the hulls of the melons, earthed into piquant centres of the fried peanuts. They mixed it into the somtum and the laab, and ground it into the toasted rice kernels and sprinkled it like salt and sugar over the platters of exotic fruits that were pink, orange and yellow. To this day our love has the fragrance of lime leaves, lemongrass and ripe mangosteen.*

כפרים עם־נרדים  
 נרד וכרכם  
 קנה וקנמון  
 עם כלעצי לבונה מר ואהליות  
 עם כלראשי בשמים

Henna with nard, [4:13]  
 Nard and saffron  
 Calamus and cinnamon,  
 Trees of frankincense  
 Myrrh and aloes,  
 All the finest balsam [4:14]

*What is it about space and place that engenders moments of deep encounter?  
 Our love is held in these moments. Even now the chicory fragrance of my  
 coffee finds itself entwined with you. On my tongue it tastes like your mouth.  
 It conjures warm thoughts. It conjures body memories of love. Body  
 memories of warm breath on skin and the heavy, comforting warmth of his  
 hand, resting on my thigh.*

There are women who say:  
 'My husband may fish, if he wishes,  
 but he will have to clean the fishes.'  
 Not me. At any time of the night I get up from bed  
 and help him to scale, clean and salt the fishes.  
 It is so good: the two of us alone in the kitchen,  
 once in a while our elbows touch.  
 And he says things like:  
 'I had to fight hard with this one. It glittered like  
 silver, as it jumped in the air ...'  
 And he makes the gesture with his hand.  
 The silence of when we first met crosses the kitchen  
 as a deep river.  
 At last the fishes are on the plates and we go  
 sleeping. There is a silver glittering in the air:  
 we are the bride and groom ....<sup>42</sup>

— *Our eyes, drinking in the adorable familiarity of the other's face,  
 coming in close, breathing the frankincense, getting up from our beds to  
 rediscover each other, becoming awash with silver luminescence of the  
 moon ...*



Qui n'a pas au fond de son Cœur  
 Un sombre château d'Elseneur  
 A l'instar des gens du passé  
 On construit en soi-même pierre  
 Par pierre un grand château hante<sup>43</sup>

C. is a castle or tower when I can't get near him. My love imagery that is held by memories of pagodas, kitchens and bedrooms become precarious. My internal intimate place-projections search for new metonymy when suddenly I fear the tide has ebbed leaving barren and muddy foreshores;

*... quagmires that could take a horse; here I am struggling in the slough, reaching out for any solid hold but the mire only takes me in further. I'm here disappearing into its mouth. It's hopeless to struggle. I sink unnoticed, swallowed. There was no aide to hand. Why was there no aide to hand? I sank alone.*

The castle, the barracks, the tower are images to which my troubled thoughts easily cleave. These spaces readily offer me the obstacles I experience in my journey to him, like labyrinthine corridors and staircases, dark entry ways, moats, men-at-arms. I imagine a fortress on a hill. Foreboding. I fear. I don't want to go near—or else I want to storm him with my forces.

The round vaulted room stands high and alone,  
 keeping watch over the past in the same way that it  
 dominates space... [the tower] stretches from earthly,  
 watery depths, to the abode of a soul ... illustrates the  
 verticality of the human being.<sup>44</sup>

*—I am like a castle or tower to him. He is afraid of his love so he sets me in a round watchtower, or behind the lattice work on the balcony in a castle turret. He sets me in a castle on the edge of the cliff. Right*

*beside the abyss. Above all he fears my eyes. He fears clarity. The darkness veils the fire.*

כמגדל דויד צוארך  
בנוי לתלפיות  
אלף המגן תלוי עליו  
כל שלטי הגבורים:

A tower of David  
[The lithe lines of] your neck  
a stonework turret  
strung with a thousand golden shields  
round shields of warriors<sup>[4:4]</sup>

*You are like a castle or tower to me. I am also afraid of your fiery love and so I protect myself by keeping to the shadows and then making careful incursions with a trebuchet. But do you hear his voice? Does his desire grow or cool? Does he yearn to touch you or if he touches you will he burn up? To seek to enter is to die. These are militant forms. To love is to die. To love is to fall on the ground and crawl. To love is to look with wonder and despair. Love is terror. Love is to be confronted with stone walls.*

יפה את רעיתי כתרצה  
נאווה כירושלם  
אימה כנדגלות  
הסבי עיניך מנגדי  
שהם הרהיבני

Enchanting as Jerusalem<sup>45</sup>  
Breathtaking as myriad banners  
Don't look at me  
your eyes overwhelm me <sup>[6:4-5]</sup>

*Some brave soul carved out a fortress on the flanks of Hermon. Nimrod castle, amazing construction of stone. Traces of beauty in its chiselled stone. Decorative fountain, vaulted ceilings, a stone marmeluke lion. Dug into the mountainside like a tick on a dog, still standing even though her caliphs have been reduced to dust. Gargantuan Hermon, fierce beauty. She blinked her eyes and snorted her nose and there were gales, squalls, thick, dark clouds that seemed to slam into the mountain side. She didn't relent. She was implacable and capricious. There we were the two of us. The fabric of our tent blew and flapped like a wild bird. We held onto each other for dear life.*

*—My lover imagines me on mountains. The vast northern mountains are impassable. These northern mountains dwarf the world. A man feels like an ant on these slopes. These are not rounded hills. The winds course down the slopes, snow laden winds that freeze the blood. Home to whom? Home to coneyes living amongst the rocks. Home to lions and leopards, danger lurks on these slopes. At any moment they may pounce and claw. Beautiful, terrifying creatures. Mountains: homes to the gods, gods of storms, gods of thunders and lightnings. Hermon: home to Baal.*

*And caves, caves in the mountain, mystery, mist, lost in the mist. Magical underworld caves, gouged into the rock, ancient paintings, hand prints, chambers full of lacquered mares in full flight. Who were they, who lived here? And away from the world below where time has ceased. A Shangri-la. Magic in misty mountain passes. Mystery. Dark mystery.*

*—I am his dark mist-mystery. His own Lascaux.<sup>46</sup>*

... the real home of this [wo]man of the earth was subterranean. [S]He wanted to live in the heart of a rock. Rock gives the impression of anguished depth. ... fear manifested by a dog [lion/leopard] at the entrance to the cave. ... [There is] hesitation on the part of the visitor to enter further into a tortuous labyrinth ... a fortress city for a [wo]man alone who loves complete solitude, and who knows how to defend and protect [her]himself with simple images. There's no need for a gate, no need of an iron-trimmed door; people are afraid to come in. ... dark entrance halls.<sup>47</sup>

Bachelard has an inherited resistance to the woman-cave. It is too much like the ravenous womb. Too much like the dark entrance halls of the vulva. But for woman we might rewrite this suspicion of caves. Earth-wombs which are caverns of intimacy, solitude, the not-too-glaringly-bright ambience of the firelight. The delicious silence and stillness and constancy of stone. The mystical hand prints and paintings on the inside of her belly. There are the coloured crystals, silver veins, twinkling glow-worms, white and pink stalagmites and stalactites that create an architecture of natural beauty in our cave-place. Cool pools and secret underground streams. All sorts of fantastic earth-gems are here. In dank corners, in crevices and crags, books, poems and songs hatch from their eggs, little 'literary larvae' crawling everywhere. Suspended, they glow like stars, hanging their glistening threads.<sup>48</sup>

אתי מלבנון...  
 מלבנון תבואי  
 תשורי מראש אמנה  
 מראש שניר וחרמון  
 ממענות אריות  
 מהררי נמרים

Descend to me from your white mountain my bride  
 From this snow clad mountain come down  
 From the summits of Senir and Hermon  
 from the mountain caves of lions  
 from the leopards' alpine habitat<sup>[4:8]</sup>

*Lonely Shulamith, lonely moon, secluded within her cave on the wild, white mountains. Play your flute and call him, call Endymion, sweet shepherd, up from the foothills, let him come and sleep, in the mystical cavern of longing, high up and hidden in mountain valley; warm in the body of the earth; close in the body of the earth. For a thousand years we will dance the slow dances of love, and lie side by side for a thousand nights, sealed in our cavern of delights.*

*—and at our openings, passage ways and vaults, there are treasures both new and ancient, my lover, I have stored them up for you...<sup>49</sup>*

— I will always be there, I will say to you the next time. Even after the door. It's neither a gift nor a promise. It's a natural phenomenon. As durable but no more so than a mountain. You can climb on me for millions of years. I am stable, etched by ravines, immobile, torn and flooded by torrential springs.<sup>50</sup>

## 5

**The door scents me**

— I will always be there, I will say to you the next time. Even after the door. It's neither a gift nor a promise. It's a natural phenomenon.<sup>51</sup>

« *La porte me flaire, elle hésite* »<sup>52</sup>

The lines of intimate encounter are blurred. Their boundaries and limits are not delineated. The whole emotional world is diffuse. My intrinsic poetic metonymy leads me to grasp hold of images that provide the lines, nets, banisters that help me to orient myself in my own territory, my own space. They are my lines of defence when love makes its rhythmic incursions. And so I mentally, emotionally peer out of the window, or open the door wide, or close it and bolt it firmly. I hesitate sometimes in opening the door and sometimes love steals in through the gap. Sometimes love comes in through the little side window like a thief. I open all the windows quickly and chase it round the living room with a broom. It's a wild bird. It's trapped in my room and flying at the mirrors. When it finally flies out after making a racket and a mess, I watch it for a long time through the glass. From my room, my home inside, I can peer out through the windows and observe without being caught up.

קול דודי  
הנהיזה בא  
מדלג עליההרים מקפץ עליהגבעות  
דומה דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים  
הנהיזה עומד אחר כתלנו  
משגיח מן החלונות  
מציץ מן החרכים

The voice of my lover!  
 Behold this! He comes!  
 Springing on mountains, skipping on the hills  
 My lover resembling a gazelle, a young stag  
 Oh! [And now] he stands outside our wall [of stone]  
 Searching through the lattice  
 Peering through the fretwork<sub>[2:8-9]</sub>

*—Through my lattice window I can see him on the hill road. I imagine him skipping and dancing and from this distance he looks like a wild deer. I am quietly jubilant but I contain it and remain concealed. I just want to watch a little. I take joy in watching him come. Here he comes, and I can feel myself longing for my breath. It has already flown like a wild bird out the little side window that never shuts properly. The only sound is heartbeat.*

From the windows I can see the outside but cannot hear his sound. I can see faces but can't hear words. Silence—but not so at the door. At the door, the outside is not seen and is only evidenced by sound. At the door I hear movement and voices. Voices can be alarmingly near. Voices at the door confront me with choice.

פתחילי  
 אחתי רעיתי  
 יונתי תמתי  
 שראשי נמלאיטל  
 קוצותי רסיסי לילה

*Open to me  
 my sister, my friend  
 my dove, Perfect One  
 For my head is saturated with dew  
 and my hair with the damp night mist<sub>[5:2]</sub>*



A fearful apparition at your door. A confrontation. Out of the darkness, so to speak, out of the dark lands. Out of the damp cool that makes one feel feverish. And how he had come with desperation staining his edges. Just a voice. No gaze is available. The senses are reduced, channelled and focused. The sense of touch is heightened. Every image is imagined. The moment had arrived.<sup>53</sup> The moment of meeting, and the opportunity and the risk to see him face-to-face but you had hesitated in your response, hesitated. And I can in this light understand your hesitation except later on when you said that you couldn't breathe when he spoke. Your breath had left you and was speaking out of his mouth at your door.

I wanted to run away. Before, there was a way out. No eyes. No doubt. With hesitation. I had made up my mind. Pretend you were at the door; the door opens, you step forward, you are saved!—But you are at the door, you must go through, it opens—that's obvious—and you can't go through. What's stopping you? Isn't there a door? Haven't you got legs? Aren't you awake? Didn't you make the decision? Exactly. I must get out of that door. It's a matter of life and death. I lift one foot, put out my arm, only to find that I am beside myself once again. Failed! You are doing it wrong. It's a question of orientation. I go back. The door is there. You think. You measure yourself. It is not impossible. Physically, and from the human point of view it is necessary.<sup>54</sup>

*Open to me, he said. He said it to me. In his sleep C. said it as I was lying still.*

*—“Open me,” I said, quietly, from deep in my heart. But he didn't hear me and I couldn't say it out loud.*

*“Open to me.” [I want to whisper it but it is disguised by the gentle breeze.] I have a robe, I will put it on. I will bury my feet deep in the soil. But I, too, cannot get the voice to burst from my heart in audible sound.*

פשטתי את־כתנתי איככה אלבשנה  
רחצתי את־רגלי איככה אטנפם

I laid out my robe, should I put it on again?  
I have bathed my feet, should I put them on the  
ground?<sup>[5:3]</sup>

You were safe, sheltered, innocuous in your room—the room that is your own and no one else’s—and you feared the encounter because you knew that in it was the possibility that it could tear all you have ever known to shreds. And that love might bear you up and leave you exposed to the elements, its earthy, volcanic source and drive you into the ground until you choke on the debris or burn in its magma. That it makes you naked, more naked than the day you were born. Naked, squalling on a flat rock.<sup>55</sup> That this abandonment gives the Other Eyes that see through all the defenses. That he sees you in all your states of being and every potentiality exists, that you could show him the very core of your being and he might make you feel ashamed. That he might miss it, or not notice or recoil. You risk shame. And you risk transcendence. He is death’s harbinger.

שמאלו תחת ראשי  
וימינו תחבקני

His left hand beneath my head  
and his right arm embraces me<sup>[8:3]</sup>

— *to die in his arms again and again*

— *to be reborn in his arms again and again, to pass through fire*

And in that hesitation all was lost. You opened the door too late.

That's why I say this: I am dead. And yet no one has killed me. And it is I who say: I am dead, therefore it is impossible for me to really be dead. But I say: "I feel I am dead," because "I do not feel I am living." There's no one where I can live. I have a deep need of your body in order to be.// This room where he is confines me.<sup>56</sup>

*Why is he hidden from view? Why can't you see him?*

*—it's my eyes. I have lost my sight completely.*

דודי שלח ידו מן החור  
ומעי המו עליו

My lover stretched his hand through the opening  
and I seethed for him...[5:4]

There are no eyes here. There are only hands and belly.<sup>57</sup> The body is incomplete. He sends his hand through the portico—he is disembodied; just a hand, no eyes, heart, cheek. The wall<sup>58</sup> stands between us. Through the only opening his hand slips through. A penetration, an invasion, an incursion.<sup>59</sup> In self-defence I step back. But in this stepping back you are left without skin, features, your own hands; out of touch. You cannot grasp, only be grasped.<sup>60</sup> You are only the most internal, the most human and most essential. You are stomach, bowel, kidneys, womb and ovaries. You are blood and urine. You are water.<sup>61</sup> You are flowing. You are flowing myrrh. No wonder you could not open the door. You cannot take form.<sup>62</sup> You do not have the concrete form in order to make the right grasp. You wash away. And before you can take back the concrete form to rise up he is already gone, and he has taken your form in his hands. And if you looked down you would see already you are beginning to seep away, through the crevice under the door. Seep away until only your eyes are left on this side and the rest of you is diffuse in the unknown beyond the door. The

*Dear Reader, the funny thing about doors if you are concentrating very hard on them, is that you can never quite tell whether you are the one who is inside the door or the one who is outside the door. If you are the one that is inside, then he must be the one that is outside. If you are the one who is outside then he must be the one who is inside. But in these cases there are moments when we both believe that we are the one inside the door or outside the door even though we each remain on the other side. The one constant is that there remains a door between us. All we have to do is open it. Outside and Inside are relative terms.*

door is your cave which marks the border of safe passage. Beyond the door is a new earth which requires first a death.<sup>63</sup>

*—I seethed for him, which is a state of burning, which is fire. I was consumed from within, attaining the fluidity of molten gold, I could not move to open because I did not have the words. My words had melted in the furnace of desire.*

*“Open Sesame!” Are these the magic words that open magic doors?*

I say: Open Sesame! Because I want to know what there is on the other side of the door. It is clear I am playing at making love to the mountain. The mountain rises up. Words are what open it. Eve told me ...<sup>64</sup>

קמתי אני לפתח לדודי  
וידי נטפרמור  
ואצבעתי מור עבר על כפות המנעול

I arise to open, for my lover  
My hands seeping myrrh  
And my fingers – pure myrrh on the clasp<sup>[5:5]</sup>

It was death that propelled you forward to arise. You died that moment that his hand had stretched through the portico. You had died and arisen. The door was a mirror. You saw yourself both dead and then more alive than could be possible. You saw constructed in the door a vision of heaven and all her stars. You felt the breath of the universe against your face and it woke you from a sleep that had consumed all your days of life. Dangled in front of you was the chance to breathe the very nectar of life; to eat the peach of immortality. To live all eternity in a timeless instant. To see and be seen. And so you arose and your shroud slipped away, your tomb glowed behind you and you arose. And now you have fingers, fingers that can grasp the clasp of the door.

פתחתי אני לדודי  
ודודי חמק עבר  
נפשי יצאה  
בדברו בקשתיהו

I opened to my love,<sup>65</sup>  
but my lover had vanished  
When he spoke I couldn't breathe<sub>[5:6]</sub>

Desire forestalled. Desire continually forestalled and multiplied. And I feel the frustration and the desire cascade. Desire heightens and repeats. It is never satisfied. Opening now? In that it took the departure of your lover to open fully. It is painful this with-holding. It is film noir in its merciless bleakness. Film Noir does not hesitate to inflict pain. You inflict me with this pain. I feel it and I can't breathe.

*Breath, life-breath, held hostage in the balance.*

— *As if the one who blew it into my nose at the very beginning of all things has drawn it back out.*<sup>66</sup>

Not destroyed, not killed, worse. The worst: bereft...  
I am nowhere. The body, here, with no address.<sup>67</sup>

The body is here without air.

For the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open. In fact, it is one of its primal images, the very origin of a daydream that accumulates desire and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings. The door schematizes two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open.<sup>68</sup>

*When I touched him my hand did not pass through.  
Something is wrong. Something is broken.  
The ocean of the bed carries us on waves. Conflicting currents.  
I turn to you just as the current separates us and place my hand on your  
shoulder. It is a desperate act even though it is just a hand on a shoulder.  
It used to go right through, my hand. It used to pass through and then  
redistribute itself. But my hand was stopped by your skin. Just a hand on a  
shoulder.  
It is a tragedy. You probably don't realize the grief I feel.  
I can't pass through you anymore.  
I used to pass through you and hover in a delicious space.  
An enclosed garden.  
A peace beyond description.  
But I am outside of you. And no matter how hard I push at the stone door I  
can't find the way in again. It used to be so simple. All I had to do was touch  
your shoulder and I was there.  
How will I bear this life on the outside?<sup>69</sup>*



Let's change the scene, awake to a new dream within the old. A dream of a mother's house, a dream of replaying the scene, which is only possible with text, and let's keep the psychic door. The door, magical thing, can open. It delimits our spaces. It is the gateway to the other but not through the eyes. Only the soul-breath, *nephesh*, can pass through. *Nephesh* can't be seen or heard—only drunk, breathed.

Through the forests galloping. The magical mare on the path. At my door. Suddenly silence. From the other side of the door. Is she waiting for me to turn my head toward the door? She hears my silence through the door. She sees my head turn, the door is closed, she sees through wood. Then, now, my gaze is turned toward you, expected, unexpected, you can come in.<sup>70</sup>

*You are like my magical mare galloping through forests. Right now I can feel you at my door.*

*— I am pregnant with desire. Now tell me what you want!*

She enters, her whole body shaking. Her mane soaked with sweat,. I am dripping too, my blood boils, my heart, losing its balance, cries out.<sup>71</sup>

*I cry out. I am not sure why. The cry bursts out as if it has legs, a proto-conscious, sentient cry. It has a will of its own. I don't even know truly what I want. But a self-knowing cry has burst through me.*

(—Do you want some tea?) (Or something else?)  
(—I want your whole life. All I want is your life, nothing else. I want every drop of you. I want every thought. I want to drink your soul. Give me your soul to drink.)<sup>72</sup>

—Give me your soul to drink. This is what I want, to drink your soul.

*I want you to drink my soul. Drink it all. I'm ready to give it. Its unbearable—this waiting, every second is an aeon. Take this gift quickly.*

Felt sweetness raging as they gazed at each other.  
Eyes dilated, tensed, gazed at and desired each other,  
wanted to be torn from their lids, how painful to be  
only eyes!<sup>73</sup>

—[She takes and drinks it all]. Such sweetness. It rages through me.  
It's unbearable. Your gift is unbearable.

כמעט שעברתי מהם  
עד שמצאתי את שאהבה נפשי  
אחזתי ולא ארפנו עד־שהביאתי  
אלבית אמי ואל־חדר הורתי

It was a little while after I passed them by,  
when I found the one I love with all my breath

I held him, and would not let go  
until we came to my mother's  
house...[3:4]

*Dear Reader, It is easier to be  
the keeper of the door than to  
go to a door. If you hesitate  
like Shulamith, then you will  
need to go outside where it is  
not safe. If you find your lover  
and he opens his door, then  
quickly bring him to the safest  
place you know. There you  
can be safe for a while.*

## 6

## Noir

How I detest the dawn! The grass always looks like  
it's been left out all night.<sup>74</sup>

Darkness, night, night-time, shadows. Love, fear, anguish, desperation, anxiety, a cynical edge, a despair, fire sears the photographic film; the filmic text. The Song of Songs is not all light because there are acid stains on the tape.<sup>75</sup> The edges distort. She is noir, film-noir.

... visual style (unusual and unexpected camera angles with unconventional frame composition), absence of narratorial judgment, story gaps and linguistic play... *film noirs* express the simple experience of disorientation, of ambiguity, often with sublime poignancy. Such moments do not make for passive spectatorship but engage viewers in risky meaning making.<sup>76</sup>

Her moods are disorientating and come filled with poignant moments. Her moods leave us questioning whether this love is perfect. Her love is in the shadows, the secret places. She lives the night.

When I close my eyes the passage opens, the dark  
gorge, I descend. Or rather there is descent: I  
entrust myself to the primitive space, I do not resist  
the forces that carry me off. There is no more *genre*.  
I become a thing with pricked-up ears. Night  
becomes a verb. I night.<sup>77</sup>

*Angoisse*<sup>78</sup>...

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם  
אס־תמצאו את־דודי מה־תגידו לו  
שחולת אהבה אני

Promise me daughters of Jerusalem!  
If you find my darling, how you must tell him!  
I am in anguish over love <sup>[5:8]</sup>

*Why are you crying? Why are you suffering? Why are you ailing?*

Love is at once pure and perverse in the way that it suspends itself between suffering and joy. Love makes us powerless, we lose control, we give up control, we become vulnerable.

*—I am at his mercy. He is at mine. But I love him and maybe love him more.*

—

*[She doesn't speak. There is a catch in the throat, then silence, like the silence of the ocean dividing from the firmament of heaven.]*

*Love has its own seasons. One year it was a beautiful long spring. And then it matured into a golden late summer. There were 3 months of February, and every day was Shabbat morning. But then it began to rain. It's been drizzling and cold for so long. It's too cold to sit out al fresco. Damp clings to the walls of our house.*

*And dark phantom fears of the death of love have begun to spot the edges of our windows, the corners of the walls, that won't be wiped away. And even in the crests of love, in our months of spring, in our moments of jouissance, there are cold winds from the south that do not bode well, that carry a chill. Love has changing form. It is always becoming; sometimes dying and*

*sometimes being reborn, but it will always never be the same again. That is why grief is love's mother.*

*So fair, so cold, like a morning of pale spring still  
clinging to winter's chill.<sup>79</sup>*

*— My love is caught in never-ending spring.*

*— My love has been spring for two thousand three hundred and twelve years.<sup>80</sup> My text is suspended in an eternal spring but for all that cold night winds still blow. I will never grow old; I will never experience the poignant sadness and continual newness of the ages of love. That is yours. My life is framed by death, by the limits of my text.*

*It afflicts. It is a great torment. Love strikes and tears. In the dark shadows you begin the film-noir of your love. And I want it and despise it and yearn for it and will protect it, this suffering. And I will type it out even though the suffering of it is like jagged glass on the keyboard. This is why there is blood on the page. It flows out of the fingers which carry the signification of the pain from the heart into the world. This suffering reminds me that I am alive, that my heart is beating and that I am not dragged down to monochrome economy of a neutered world. This is why I will crawl on hand and knee across the volcanic fields of human encounter until there is nothing left of my flesh and until I have bled out.*

*Tonight I came back to the hotel alone; the other has decided to return later on. The anxieties are here, like the poison already prepared... Anxiety mounts; I observe its progress...<sup>81</sup>*

*I could have gone to find him but we had disagreed. I could have gone to find him but I had carried the raw sores for too long and they had left me numb with weariness. I could have gone to find him but I was tired and my hate was indistinguishable from my love. The lack of distinction had left me empty as a shell. Life's colours faded to the blue-greys of the dying man.*

Imperceptibly anxiety rises. Anxiety rises slowly, making the subject gradually more aware of its presence until it bursts and engulfs. In any other scenario we would be considered mad. Some of us would rather die martyrs than never have felt the surge and crest of love at all. Even the practical and stoic lovers of the world can be washed away by the power of pure encounter in the end. Like poor Florentino.

After Florentino Ariza saw her for the first time, his mother knew before he told her because he lost his voice and his appetite and spent the entire night tossing and turning in his bed. But when he began to wait for the answer to his first letter, his anguish was complicated by diarrhea and green vomit, he became disoriented and suffered from sudden fainting spells, and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera. Florentino Ariza's godfather, an old homeopathic practitioner who had been Tránsito Ariza's confidant ever since her days as a secret mistress, was also alarmed at first by the patient's condition because he had a weak pulse, the hoarse breathing, and the pale perspiration of a dying man. But his examination revealed that he had no fever, no pain anywhere, and that his only concrete feeling was an urgent desire to die. All that was needed was shrewd questioning, first of the patient and then of his mother, to conclude once again that the symptoms of love were the same as the symptoms of cholera. He prescribed fusions of linden blossoms to calm the nerves and suggested a change of air so he could find consolation in distance, but Florentino Ariza longed for just the opposite: to enjoy his martyrdom.<sup>82</sup>

—When I saw him for the first time, of the many first times that I saw him, my heart gave way. My stalk of life, my earth-umbilical shook and tore. My heart gave way like a great opening up of the earth.<sup>83</sup> The mouth of the earth opened, gaped wide, swallowed me whole, along with all my family of dreams, desires and hopes, all my little ones. They fell with me into the great hole in the earth. I fell readily.

הגידה לי  
שאהבה נפשי  
איכה תרעה  
איכה תרביץ בצהרים

Tell me!  
(I love you with all my breath)  
Where are you grazing?  
Where are you resting from the hot midday sun?<sup>[1:7]</sup>

I hear you call to him, I suspect your anxiety. “Tell me!” You cry. Tell me! And in an under-breath you chant the magic formula: ‘whom my *nephesh* loves.’ Are you calling out in your angst? *angoisse*? Are you calling out from your bed, in the half light of your dreams? I don’t believe you have left the space of your mind because while your fertile imagination has you in fields, streams, groves of love, and even the echo of his answering voice, he is not there. You are all yearning, and yearning occurs when the other is barricaded by an obstacle. I hear fear in your voice. Fear of falling into the abyss between the sheep and the shepherd. And the only ones who hear you are the women of the city, *banot yerushalayim*. They offer no aid, and set you up with the scenario of the risk of going to him, the risk of being alone and vulnerable with the shepherd-strangers—none but the kids as witnesses.<sup>84</sup>

Once Below, pain and impatience flood my heart.  
One cannot flee these fires. And you didn’t look for



me. And you didn't bend down to sound the abyss.  
And I tread alone on infinite sands. I miss you.<sup>85</sup>

—*Don't go! Don't go alone to the fields.*<sup>86</sup>

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם  
אס־תמצאו את־דודי מה־תגידו לו  
שחולת אהבה אני

Promise me daughters of Jerusalem!  
If you find my darling, how you must tell him!  
I am in anguish over love <sup>[5:8]</sup>

Anguish or illness or is it love? Your anxiety has the character of love-cholera. It comes out in pallid skin, dilated eyes, a constant ache around the heart and lungs, sporadic phantom pains in the shoulders. A depression that threatens to capsize you. A rock in the throat that becomes a nausea. Swirling fires and freezing blizzards in the belly. The subject of love-cholera is struck repeatedly with diarrhoea. It is a whole body shut down; a body in death throes. Love weakens the body and yet the body drives the subject to the goal of erotic love. Our own bodies betray us in the hope of pure, bodily encounter. And our sentience, our sentience contorts the body further, driven by *libido*, *thanatos*, *eros* our sentience yearns for oneness of mind, pure shared delight in the other.

Here I go taking off again like a woman mad with  
pain, running around to everyone, knocking on  
shutters, on doors, "We haven't seen him," that's the  
title of this sequence, endured so many times, how  
long will this Tuesday last, how will this dream  
end?<sup>87</sup>

No wonder we go mad.

—*I too. I have gone quite mad.*

*S'abîmer*<sup>88</sup>...

This is how it happens sometimes, misery or joy  
engulfs me ... I am dissolved not dismembered; I fall,  
I flow, I melt ... the gentleness of the abyss ... I  
transmit myself (to whom? to God, to Nature, to  
everything, except to the other...<sup>89</sup>

We imagine a gentle abyss, a gentle falling into a state of being completely  
engulfed by love or the misery of the loss of love.

And so the most difficult hours passed for him  
[Florentino Ariza], at times in the person of a timid  
prince or a paladin of love, at other times in his own  
scaled hide of a lover in the middle of forgetting...  
Then he felt alone in the world, and the memory of  
Fermina Daza, lying in ambush in recent days, dealt  
him a mortal blow.<sup>90</sup>

The anxiety of love rises from within, the mood that engulfs seems to fall like dew  
from above. It is a caress (of a knife; of a feather) and a withdrawing of the lover  
into solitude, silence, refracted light. In fact, in terms of space, the temporal-  
spatial aspect disappears altogether. The threads of attachment to the lover are  
erased as the zone of focus withdraws inwards. The space disappears altogether.  
The subject dissipates like the break of day and its shadows.

עד שיפוח היום  
ונסו הצללים  
אלך לי אלהר המור  
ואלגבעת הלבונה

... until day breathes  
and [our] dark shadows are vanquished  
I will journey to the mountain of myrrh  
and to the hill of frankincense<sub>[4:6]</sub>

Perhaps it is a defense for those who love too hard, or a womb where desire is quietly and inexorably intensified. This mountain of myrrh and this hill of frankincense, the factory of my desires. I go there away from you, in order to come back with more, the glue that will finally reunite our two halves, seal up the interminable emptiness, the lack inside.

ידי נטפרמור  
ואצבעתי מור עבר על כפות המנעול

... my hands seeping myrrh  
– my pure myrrh on the clasp<sup>[5:5]</sup>

You begin to dissipate, begin to seep out. Faced with love you become water. You melt into silence until the door is opened. We forget momentarily, a long moment but still just a moment, we melt, in that tensile hesitation, diffusing and regrouping. “But it does not matter that we don’t remember, there is a stranger within us who knows what our forgetfulness says ...”<sup>91</sup>

There, under the reflections on the surface of the  
lake,  
there where clear and distinct ideas abandon us,  
there where our gaze is submarine,  
the Spirit says its mysterious Word.<sup>92</sup>

*Faced with love you become water. Lady of streams and pools. Diffused the heady scent of the mistress of the night. The pouring of wine, the dripping of juices.<sup>93</sup> A libation. Wild honey, wine and milk, fountains and springs.<sup>94</sup> No longer fortresses and walls.*

— *Now I flow out, out from myself and upon him, upon the earth, a silent libation. My love-gift becomes universal as it streams out.*

מעין גנים  
באר מים חיים  
ונזלים

A fountain of gardens  
a spring of living waters  
and flowing streams ...<sup>[4:15]</sup>

Heralding a subterranean awakening, an awakening of the body, a body which was mute but now reinscribed, a body speaking for itself:

הולך לדודי למישרים  
דובב שפתי ישנים

... it flows to my lover smoothly  
it stirs lips that are asleep...<sup>[7:10]</sup>

## 7

**Pothos**[desire for the absent being]<sup>95</sup>

For a long time I closed my eyes when he would  
 leave, and I kept my eyes closed when we made love.  
 Back in those years when he was so close or so far  
 away, I would often lose myself in an ageless non-  
 place where I no longer felt anything. Sometimes I  
 was overcome by sleep. Then I would dream that he  
 was leaving, I could see him leaving in minute detail,  
 and this detailed departure grated the flesh of my  
 eyes minutely that my grief at seeing him leave  
 crushed my bones and lacerated my skin, and yet I  
 saw him gone, his back dripping blood. I could see  
 him leaving. The arms, the legs, which are mine  
 would rip off and fall upon him. I wouldn't try to  
 hold him back. But he is in my flesh ...<sup>96</sup>

I don't want to go too near to it because there is a scent of mandrakes in this piece, in the arcane movement from the state of *s'abîmer* to the state of the acknowledgement of the full grief of absence. The rhythms and tides of this love are enchanted. Love is magic. All the songs tell us. There is no other magic in the world like that, that will produce The Kiss. The kiss of encounter has the power to hold time, suspended above the abyss. This magic from the Grimoire of Love exacts a cost, a revenge and a sacrifice. It tears kingdoms, it storms citadels, it curses and rages, stars fall to the ground. You have to die for it over and over again. You have to eat his body. Then he eats you. That's when you want to run. And then, impossibly, he leaves. Even unintentionally his leaving tears me in two.

אנה הלך דודך  
היפה בנשים  
אנה פנה דודך

Where is your lover journeyed  
Most-beautiful-of-women  
Which way did your lover turn?<sup>[6:1]</sup>

He has already left. He has already flown away, even though he is right in the room or returning later. This is a type of mourning. You and I mourn for someone who is already one day lost to us; we mourn the living; we mourn the event before it arrives. Sensitive souls in the apogee of passion are sensitized to the geography of space-between-us. Any millimeter of encroachment or withdrawal in this love-space is flagged in the deep crevices of the psyche as crucial phenomenon even before we are aware.

Mourn what I send to you, myself, in order to have me under your skin. No longer *before you*, like someone from whose gaze you could turn away, rejecting his advances, your object, but within you, speaking to you and kissing you without interruption even before you have the chance to breathe and to turn around. To have the other within oneself, right up close but stronger than oneself, and his tongue in your ear before being able to say a word while looking at yourself in the depths of the rear-view mirror, in an automobile that passes [*double*] all the others, this is the most mysterious thing, the most worthy of being thought, the least thinkable, my idea of you, the infinite anamnesis of that (which) I saw (the) day.<sup>97</sup>

—*Mourn what I send to you because I am already under your skin and kissing you. The moment I said 'I', and you were reading, the moment I*

*said 'you'. And as you read you mouthed the words, 'your fragrance, my breath'. Then I was the rear view mirror watching you watching me. It is an infinite and ouroboric anamnesis.*

He writes on postcards<sup>98</sup> mourning her absence, trying to find slippery and transient ways of being present to her, on the telephone, on the card, in writing but they are continually undermined. A prolonging or a heightening of absence is the letter. Am I really there if you are reading me or is the distance between us framed to a higher degree? Memories alone draw to the fore, nothing fresh, a play on memories and anticipations. He is absent, away from her. He is the one moving from place to place, never still, always moving. He imagines her in a fixed place, while he is away. He imagines her discourse at his absence.

I go to sleep alone, and wake up alone. I take walks.  
I work until I'm tired. I watch the wind play with the  
trash that's been under the snow all winter.  
Everything seems simple until you think about it.  
Why is love intensified by absence?<sup>99</sup>

Can it be true then that the depiction and recounting of absence is a feminine discourse?<sup>100</sup> Are we always waiting for his return? Is he always away hunting? Skipping on hills? He is always coming back but not here. [By definition, the 'I' is always in a state of separation from 'you'. The 'you' is always, eternally partially absent. We can never embrace the whole, which is a delight, and a terror.] But I question this gendering of discourses around absence. Your lover who at moments calls out eternally for you to return, to open, to come into the present. In your song does your lover declare 'something feminine' when he longs for you? In the pre-verbal act of his coming-towards-you, is he 'miraculously feminized,'? This train of thought makes me wonder again about the nature of your love.

*Is it true that he calls for you, that he has returned from the fields, from wars, from the epic journey, from heroic deeds or is his voice your projection of your desire to be the apple of his eye, to be longed for by him?*<sup>101</sup>

—*Why subject me to your critical gaze? Is it not enough to know that I long for him? Can it not be believed that he longs also for me? Men long, men dream, even you have evoked Florentino Ariza more than once. He yearned for one woman for 53 years, 7 months and 11 days and nights.*<sup>102</sup> *An everlasting memorial...*

*... like that of a Mayan sun-king for his queen, who built two tomb-temples for himself and his lover, with such a degree of astronomical precision that forever more the two lovers could touch each other with their shadows as the sun rises and sets at the time of the spring and autumn equinox.*

*Touching but never holding, embracing but never resting.*

This absence of the other is a movement in space. It is directional. It is an interior movement away from the 'I', along with a geographical movement. Our tensile space lengthens, pulled longitudinally, but its surface grows unbearably thin. We are still entangled, but the distance begins to tear.



Paris is far. T.t. is far. Paris is misty. The last time I saw T.t. he smiled. Everything was in order. And it is now in this instant and for the first time that I learn, as if I'd heard it from someone, of our separation. In my dream, which one, I had forgotten the infinite lengths of time that had gone by, I had gone back without realizing to the earlier time. In a while I shall wake up old with him dead, and in truth I'll be dead too, already dead were I not to dream again. So long as day doesn't break. But which day? There are times when I wonder: just where has existence gone to? Such as now when breathing one more time becomes nearly impossible, when the next inspiration is uncertain, when my collapsed lungs can't remember the taste of air, when I'm going to die in the dream which I feel is dreaming me, and if I wake up, I'll be dead.<sup>103</sup>

*—The distance makes me ill. I start to disappear and die. But the sight of him on the hills, the sight of him on the road to my house, fills me again, from a divine spring, or magic fountain. I love the moment of return almost as much or maybe even more than the moment of embrace. For the experience of the moment of return, perhaps I could endure a departure. Perhaps I could endure it, just so that he could come back again. It is an endless cycle of rebirth. In stasis, Tayman cannot blow.<sup>104</sup>*

I sense within my psyche a perverse and childish tension so that I want C. to go away, just so that he can come back— just so that he can come back and choose me all over again. Again, again and again! It is a grown-up game of ‘fort:da’,<sup>105</sup> a game played out via letters, in the post, online, face to face.

*Does that make me the reel or the child? Or beyond that, the (m)other? The reel is the letter. Am I the letter? She is a letter in between ‘fort’ and ‘da.’*

I have never understood why psychoanalysis is so hung up on such a backward technology of the fort:da or of “direct” discourse. But in fact, yes, for it is unfortunately linked to a certain state of the post, absolute telematics...<sup>106</sup>

*My fort:da game is so complex, so evolved, that I can imagine you, experience you as if you were here, idealized in body, in reciprocation, in desire equal and opposite in its force. A letter, fleshed out.*

Because of its corporeal and sexual thematic ... indissolubly linked with the dominant theme of absence, yearning to merge, and idealization of the lovers, sensuality in the Song of Songs leads directly to the problematics of incarnation. The loved one is not there, but I experience his body; in a state of

amorous incantation I unite with him, sensually and ideally.<sup>107</sup>

*The letter-reel suspended in a virtual reality by converging desires. My desire is for your desire.*

... and these inexhaustible words, these days and nights of explication will not make us change places or exchange places, even though we ceaselessly try to do so, to get to the other side, to swallow the other's place, to move our bodies like the other's body, even to swallow it while drinking its words, mixing the salivas little by little, wearing down the borders...<sup>108</sup>

In the myths of beginnings, we see a similar representation of irrevocable convergent forces held in productive tension. There is no stasis in the primal myths (except at the elusive unpointable-point of absolute origin, the infinite limit). In myths of the Egyptians the world is created out of a watery miasma, a whirling misty vortex.<sup>109</sup> The forces of creation and destruction are eternally moving against the other, but held in balance that allows for multiple possibilities, multiple actualities, and an ever-changing landscape. Just like our love. The forces that make and unmake, that know and do not know, and those that embrace and repel are held in constructive balance. Desire becomes infinite. These are the myths of life, myths that are lived out through all our generations.

Because it was only in the beginning that paradise was a garden with a precise address. But ever since, it can take place anywhere, at any moment, we have to work and struggle to let it take place. It's a state of joy which prolongs itself throughout the whole life of those people who have the strength to be wild, women for the most part.<sup>110</sup>

*—I am a letter that has no fixed address; transient object. I have a garden I can picture in my mind. I imagine love in all its intimate spaces. I have gardens, and yet I cannot occupy them, because in inhabiting them I forfeit him,<sup>iii</sup> and thus I am always on the run, rushing, searching, looking throughout all the ages. He is not here, and by the word here, I mean, 'here', a subjective space that is mine alone. He will always be 'there' which is a millimetre or entire continent away. At any rate I am still searching as if for a permanently lost object. Even in our tightest embrace we are separated by absences of different shapes, colours and shades. We are eternally together and eternally apart. Only our shadows touch and kiss at the equinox.*

The other is in a condition of perpetual departure, of journeying; the other is, by vocation, migrant, fugitive; I – I who love, by converse vocation, am sedentary, motionless, at hand, in expectation, nailed to the spot, *in suspense* – like a package in some forgotten corner of a railway station. Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*. To speak this absence is from the start to propose that the subject's place is and the other's place cannot permute; it is to say: "I am loved less than I love."<sup>112</sup>

*Che vuole? Che voglio?*

— *Solo la Luna ...*<sup>113</sup>

## 8

**Flying too close to the sun**

The unhappy father, a father no longer, cried out:  
 'Icarus!' 'Icarus,' he called. 'Where are you? Where  
 am I to look for you?' As he was still calling 'Icarus'  
 he saw feathers on the water, and cursed his art.<sup>114</sup>

— *The descent of Icarus. Why quote this myth of the father and his son?  
 What have I to do with this? There are no feathers in my song.*

*I am weaving threads from Ovid to our encounter, you and I both, our reading  
 of the other are like a quest to fly with constructed wings, feathers held in  
 wax. We want to leap at the sky. We construct wings, we gather memories  
 like feathers. Universal laws conspire against us. We desire to mingle with  
 the other but it is like flying with these foreign wings. And they are  
 continually failing, and we fall again out of the sky—starlings—and then  
 dying, being reborn, becoming, but only to start again building new wings,  
 feathers, candlewax, frankincense. Again and again, Sisyphus. They always  
 eventually melt, these wings, we can't help but fly high, taken up on a pillar of  
 cloud. I am drawn to the Sun like moth. I burn up, fall, and then I set to work  
 on another pair, binding my wounds with myrrh. I consult the books to find a  
 way to make the feathers stick to hold me in place long enough to be with you;  
 to be finally at peace. But peace is never mine.*

מי זאת  
 עלה מן המדבר  
 כתימרות עשן  
 מקטרת מור ולבונה

She rises from the wilderness like a pillar of cloud  
 smoke of myrrh and frankincense<sub>[3:6]</sub>

*To 'one', [echad], be one, always and so while I want to, I cannot curse the art.  
 You are naïve, love-fool, we are all love-fools, flying winged fools. This  
 cloudbank of naiveté, blink out the rest, and we dream it and so I embrace,*

... the two took off their clothes and made love  
 to protect our share of all that's eternal  
 to defend our ration of paradise and time,  
 to touch our roots, to rescue ourselves,  
 to rescue the inheritance stolen from us  
 by the thieves of life centuries ago,  
 the two took off their clothes and kissed  
 because two bodies naked and entwined,  
 leap over time, they are invulnerable,  
 Nothing can touch them, they return to the source,  
 there is no you, no I, no tomorrow,  
 no yesterday, no names, the truth of two  
 in a single body, a single soul,  
 oh total being ...<sup>115</sup>

*Phantasms, we are. Fused, blended, objectified, objectifying each other.  
 Falling apart. Playing poet. Writing.*



Poetry leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism – to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity. Poetry is eternity; the sun matched with the sea.<sup>16</sup>

*We find ourselves in the Negev, on the Jordan side where the mountains are tiger-striped, breath-taking and barren. We fell like meteors into this desert. It took us by surprise. We fell right down into the earth. The fall hurt us, but we need to move forward, go somewhere, so some of the way we dragged the other, across deserts, looking for a spring or for an olive grove where there might be shade, something to eat. We need to wash, to bathe the other's bruises, to heal. Some of the way he pulled me along and then I pulled him. We staggered across half the world but finally one of us tripped coming down the rock strewn slope on Helmos and the impact tore our body open, the part where our skin and sinews joined together was badly damaged. This is serious. The skin has ripped, sinews snapped and bones dislocated. It hurt most when our lungs tore apart. Now days later, in shock from the trauma, the ill-healing wounds, harassed by flies and blood seeping out onto the dusty ground, our breathing is shallow and arrhythmic. We are fallen angels. Our wings are bruised and tufts of crumpled feathers lie forgotten on the way. Probably drifting on breezes and caught in butterfly nets.*

*We are lost at sea on a wooden dinghy, no supplies. We try to heal the other by lying close together in the cool of each new sunset, we tried this along the coastline cliffs of Oran, but the red raw new joining of our flesh along our arms and legs, forming in the red of the sunset, bursts again with the slightest movement at dawn. We give up and when we reach Pamplona, and we run with the bulls down the narrow cobbled streets, we clash and slam into the other because we can't find the way back to how we were and we've lost our grace. We've been crashing against the other hoping that the force will bind us. It's a wild desperation. Our horns tear at the other, we trip and fall. Trampled almost to death. Bodies cast to the side.*

*It's no good. I kiss C.'s sleeping cheek and get up.*

Love is a conflictual site, where in the first instance, the lover must encounter the conflict of his or her own self, that which exists between what is abjected and what is desired. In imposing the signs of the abject on each other's bodies, the lovers replay the psychic drama of identity formation.<sup>117</sup>

— *I exist because you exist. You define me, I define you. This is the mystery of the world. This is 'adam and the as yet undifferentiated primordial beginnings.'*<sup>118</sup> *This is Chavah, who made possible the population of multiple others. This is the trial of differentiated beings doomed to attempt to reunite for eternity. This is the trial of the frustrations and disappointments of love.*

In other words, in seeing the abject on the other, the lover replays love's origins, abjecting what must be thrown away and desiring that which cannot be attained, and in the process, constantly reaffirming the place in this process for a third party, that which has been created solely for the Other.<sup>119</sup>

*Is it true I desire you and despise you in the same breath? Because I do, I love you. And yet, I am frustrated by what I do not like, cannot stand. And in doing so our spaces are defined, we define that space for each other. A third body in a third space. Defined or confined?*

... In order for the abject to work it must repulse or evince enough strength of feeling so that that which needs to be pushed away can be... what is really desired can never be.<sup>120</sup>

— *It is a dance, a love dance. I turn, shout, you plead. You storm off, I sulk, we reunite then there is bliss for a single unforgettable moment.*

*We drift apart, winter rains, snow traps us on separate peaks. In the longing, desire grows.*

*I feel confined, I resist. You don't want to be controlled, you withdraw. We shut doors, shut each other out, then lonely ... longing ... tentative. The play of glances. Desire fires us.*

כפלח הרמון  
רקתך מבעד לצמתך

Like a slice of pomegranate  
Your cheek behind the tendrils of your hair<sup>[4:3]</sup>

*I cannot but feel this may end badly. I sense the presence of phantasmagoria.  
I want to warn you.*

—Les belles fesses! disait le comte avec le ton de la  
plus cruelle ironie et touchant ces objets avec  
brutalité, les superbes chairs!... l'excellent déjeuner  
pour mes dogues!<sup>121</sup>

A smorgasbord of flesh is on the menu. There is cut fruit, wheat, a brimming cup of wine, grapes, apricots, raisons, flowers to cut. All these are the product of your body for his consumption; a veritable feast for his eyes.

עיניך יונים  
מבעד לצמתך  
שערך כעדר העזים  
שגלשו מהר גלעד

Your eyes are doves  
hidden in the tendrils of your hair  
[this] hair like a flock of [capering] goats  
descending Gilead<sup>[4:1]</sup>

Eyes are doves? Hair flowing down like goats in Gilead, curling, springing? You are losing shape. Your edges are fraying. You are diffusing into the landscape, into the geography, in the topography. Soft dying in the half light.

... we see the artful mixing of the world, food and nature – in its cycle of growth and decay, the grim reminders of life mixed with death – all written upon the body.<sup>122</sup>

I looked to the mountains and saw the flash of your kohl-lined eyes. I looked into the sheep pools of Bethesda and caught a glimpse of your teeth, laughing, your mouth, rosy lips. Piece by piece I construct your image like blocks that have been knocked down.

שניך כעדר הקצובות  
שעלו מן־הרחצה  
שכלם מתאימות ושכלה אין בהם

Your teeth a flock of clipped ewes  
Ascending, white and washed, from the pond  
Two lambs to each and none bereaved<sup>[4:2]</sup>

White teeth, washed mouth. Rising up from water. Your head takes shape at last. None bereaved, none bereaved—bereaved. In the negating of that word, the word is given power. In denying the word, it is fore-grounded. That word is a death word. Mismatched with teeth, that is in their nature to tear, bite, eat. Dentata.

*I am afraid of biting or being bitten.*<sup>123</sup>

— My eyes, my hair, my teeth. I am a series of objects, my body in pieces and I am scattered across the land like a Levite's concubine.<sup>124</sup> Am I misused? And he says, "You are ..., You are ..., You are ..." <sup>125</sup> I am labelled, I am inscribed according to his words. Do I have the right of return? Can I say "You" to him. But I cannot... I can only say secretly,

*Dear Reader, is this love, to take the lover apart in a reverie, to fetishize her parts, his parts? Is this the nature of love. I take you apart, in my reverie, at first I see your entirety and then as I come closer, I cannot see you all, and I also am curious, and for example, to find the perfect word to match the colour of your lips, I focus, I try, play with the words in my mouth, try to find the perfect epithet.*

*in a whisper, "He is." I do not have the power to inscribe him face to face. The dynamic is one way. I am not afforded the right of second person. He is at a distance. I do not have the power to come close to him. While in facing him myself, he is himself at a profile.*

ראשו כתם פז קוצותיו  
תלתלים שחרות כעורב

His head shines with pure gold  
His thick mane is raven-black<sup>[5:11]</sup>

*His profile is golden. His hair, black as the night. But me, I am inscribed, covered in ink. Tattoos all over my back and thighs. Goldfish in streams, a lotus, a mountain, a fruiting tree, an ancient tower, wild horses, gazelles, flying birds, precipices, the leopard rampant, the pomegranate encircled by patterns flowers, spirals, leaves in ornate circlets etched into my fingers, feet and arms and on my hands tribal insignias, on my chest bands, flames, all their signatures and on my palms, eyes.*

*He is golden.  
golden like the bursting brightness of the rising sun  
or the gentle gold of the dying sun  
like the burnished gold of the golden man  
reclining for a thousand years  
he reclines still, potent, crouched for a thousand years ready to rise  
Lips rose pink of the delicate shompu  
Or set, fierce with the deep red-purple of the pungent mangosteen  
Body draped in the folds of the vibrant plaid patong  
Stands like a mountain, stands like the world is in his palm  
Bare chest,  
Like a torment, like a challenge  
Written with a word  
Tiger  
like an ancient warrior  
Like a Spartan king  
Like the ancient warriors of my father's father's world  
But with the colours of the East  
Gold, red,  
Tiger's eyes  
Potent, burning  
With promise  
Like a cat, a jaguar, a panther  
[Only his mother knows his secret  
That there in the hidden heart  
Lies soft, gentle, mortal  
The remains of the fragile petals  
Of stamens, yellow with pollen, the fragrant lotus]*

Who is this other? And by what reference can I perceive his being. And by what reference do I have my own being, my own identity. It is negotiated in his eyes. And this is the great fear—that the trace of this face, a face glowing in the ‘trace of the Other’—is a light emanating from a “pure hole in the world.”<sup>126</sup>

מהיפו פעמך בנעלים  
בתנדיב  
חמוקי ירכיך כמו חלאים מעשה ידי אמן

How beautiful are your steps in sandal's  
Prince's daughter  
The joints of your thighs are jewelled  
The handiwork of an artisan<sub>[7:2]</sub>

*A label, a box, a death sentence.*

כחוט השני שפתתך ומדברך נאווה

A crimson ribbon, your lips<sub>[4:3a]</sub>

*—Are the words, the literary caress of the lips, or are they strike of the hand, the binding of the prisoner? Are they both together and the same. Love, and cruelty. Worship, and entrapment.*

It is fantastical, this language play on the body of the other.

It is a phantasmagoria of wild word, from inscription as ornamentation to the cruelest trapping within signification, against-her-will. While I am inscribing the body of the other, I am creating it, negotiating it. I am both tyrant and artist, demon and lover. What have I done?

[elle] n'a plus de défense ... plus d'autre ... que sa  
belle tête languissamment tournée vers son



bourreau, de superbes cheveux en désordre, et des  
 pleurs inondant le plus beau visage du monde... le  
 plus doux... le plus intéressant.<sup>127</sup>

Justine, save yourself, you are entombed in a book, reborn to replay your captivity and vulnerability for all eternity. Savaged again and again, strewn on rocks. And against-my-will, as reader, I am always already complicit in your journey of despair, and I am always already with you as the victim of your persecutor: the Sadean author; the Sadean reader. We cannot escape the power of language to merge and blend. And in these few lines I have become both oppressor and oppressed. I am Justine.

... [Led] to the same place as all forms of eroticism –  
 to the blending and fusion of separate objects...<sup>128</sup>

—*Grotesqueries.*

The grotesquerie of the body keeps desire in the  
 Song alive: it contains the endless complications and  
 foreclosures of desire that ensure that the Song of  
 Songs works as a text of *jouissance*.<sup>129</sup>

Identity is disturbed in the Song of Songs as boundaries continue to fail. Bodies merge with the natural world, with the geographic world, with each other. The world is sexualized and merges with the category of edibles, a category which occupies a fragile edge of the abject. Eating, sucking, sipping that which has merged, which in it contains allusions to the fluids and materials of the body, already become compellingly idealized as food.<sup>130</sup>

It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the abject to  
 exist as such. One does not know it, one does not  
 desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and  
 painfully. A passion. And, as in *jouissance* where the

object of desire, know as object *a* ..., bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other ... It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in the sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant.<sup>131</sup>

But nothing seems repugnant in the Song of Songs because of the ornamentation of the words, the careful innuendo, the secondary signification. And yet underlying these, one frequently recoils, because of nearness, of earthiness. The taste of the body is abject, that taste of the body so primal in its association to mother, and the rejection of the mother, so as to be born the second time, a self-conscious being. The salty, savoury taste of his skin. The musky pungency of his body. Her body and its abject fluids are celebrated.

שררך אגן הסהר אליחסר המוג...

Your navel [vulva] is like a luminous basin  
mulled wine brims...<sup>[7:3]</sup><sup>132</sup>

Bountiful biblical voices disavow these female fluids, categorizing them as abject, unclean, dangerous,<sup>133</sup> the allusion then is stunningly obscene.

... the word itself becomes the fetish, the locus of desire, rather than the object to which it refers. Cast free from and replacing their referents, the fetish-words of the text may trigger imagination and phantasy: 'The truth of the obscene word is that it manifests the dependence of eroticism on the imaginary'.<sup>134</sup>

— *He contemplates himself in me, retaining what is abject in order to anchor himself against disintegration. He gives up his image in order to experience the sublime. I am then his frame. I am his resonance! And even though he is in profile, he is mine. My frame. However, there is not the abject in him to stabilize me. My existence is forfeited without anchor.*

*He plunges into you, but retains the abject. He plays at the boundaries, at the rim of the abject, which incites him, "... perverse desire, of the darker side of eros."<sup>135</sup> He plays at the threshold where desire is made full. He toys with the separation of the feminine, "engaging the boundary of the separation of the sexes."<sup>136</sup>*

The Father says:

The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic. In order to confirm that, it should endure no gash other than that of circumcision, equivalent to sexual separation and/or separation from the mother. Any other mark would be the sign of belonging to the impure, the non-separate, the non-symbolic, the non-holy.<sup>137</sup>

But we desire to dwell in gardens. We desire the feminine. We transgress the law by our very nature.

היושבת בגנים ...  
 לקולך השמיעיני  
 ברח דודי  
 ודמה'לך לצבי או לעפר האילים  
 על הרי בשמים

*Woman, dwelling in gardens*  
*Let me hear your voice...* [8:13]

Flee my lover,  
 be like a gazelle, or young stag  
 on balsam mountains [8:14]

## 9

**(M)other**

I don't know if the man I love is my mother because I come into being for him, or because he is the one I don't want to die without. All my deaths are his fruits, I want him to enjoy them, that's why he is my mother.<sup>138</sup>



“ ... the (M)Other becomes the permanently lost object, and the desire of the Other reveals itself as impossible to know and attain.”<sup>139</sup>



—*Tahom...*

I lie in waters, dark, warm waters, thick with the echo of the other's heartbeat, energy vortex, deep waters, tahom, Tiamat. Mother confessor. Waiting up in the night watches, watching me watching her, waiting. Pegs in plastic containers with sprouting buckwheat, carrot juice, piano, sound of the keys striking, I listen from under the piano seat, listen to the thumping pedals, thumping behind the chocolate chestnut board, she/I am lost, away in the deep of *Hineh-Lo-Yanum* in the minor key, Tipperary and apocalypses, still on a boat, still at sea, in the sea, still sea, she can't see me. Ocean-going odyssey, sirens calling me, can't sleep, must swim. Scalp skin through long, white hair, third age; thin, almost see her beneath, smooth as a buckwheat kernel. And me, I am, always, not enough, and everything, I am her death at every moment and should have done, been, I will be, and still with the umbilical cord around my neck, still seeping out of her, her

hand, worked, veined on my head. I am my mother is me.<sup>140</sup> Can't escape, struggling away, who am I am her, fall back into warmth of place. She is dying I am Living she is, I am.

—*Bathsheba*

The great Goddess of Time who governs these centuries without human measure – we pass by her every day just as she passes by me ten times a day according to a planetary necessity without paying her any more attention than the sun – is my mother...<sup>141</sup>

— *My mother is a great tree. She leans out of the tree to assuage me. My mother is a safe place, and there she teaches me.*

My mother has an important name. The name is Eve. My mother is still living. She is primordial, she is unforgettable.<sup>142</sup>

*She is breast<sup>143</sup> and womb.*

אחזתיו ולא ארפנו  
עדשהביאתיו אלבית אמי  
ואלחדר הורתי

I held him and I wouldn't let him go  
until we came to my mother's house  
... the chamber of the one who awoke me to life <sup>[3:4]</sup>

She is mother to your brothers who restrain you: complicit in the midst of her saving-grace.<sup>144</sup> She is life-giver, king-maker.<sup>145</sup> She is ever-present, in the background, in the spaces. She is the real while father is the illusion. He has disappeared though his word and law still testify, still restrict, still intact, in place. Her room, her womb, her metonymic life-breath remains, veiled slightly

by reference to rooms, houses, trees.<sup>146</sup> She struggles, travails and births. She is in, around, behind, above. She is at the rim and beyond the rim. Is she air? Wind? *Ruach*? Is she love?

The desire of the Song is the desire of the Other, of the Mother herself: this means that the Song is a Song not of desire for the Mother, but of the desire of the mother which readers then try to appropriate.<sup>147</sup>

*What do you desire? What do you really desire? You can't have the mother. You can only have each other. She is ubiquitous. She is the great frame. She is the mirror.*

אחת היא...  
תמתי אחת היא לאמה  
ברה היא לילדתה

*She is unique...  
Perfect from her mother[’s womb]  
Pure one, of she who birthed her* [6:9]

—*I desire the living child.*<sup>148</sup> *I am my mother. We live the mother and the child lives. The Father-King can do nothing but awaken my resolve to overcome death laws, to allow life to rise against death, in death, in spite of death. Death laws at the rim, the threshold. In transgressing the laws of death I am becoming my mother, transgressing against death into life. I love because she is in pain for me. I am in pain because she loves me. The pain makes me rise again and beyond the pain is jouissance. Beyond jouissance is life. My mother is my jouissance, she is ecstasy.*<sup>149</sup>



Grope your way to the border. Between heaven and earth. Bring yourself into being. Give birth to yourself. Be love's belly. The second mother. Love yourself for she who went away. Mother is here, mother is there, she's still here, there, and everywhere, wherever you want to give yourself a body going to and fro, hopefully, between the wall and death. Be your mother, have the child. Try it: a door will open. Don't ask anybody where to get it— Say all this to yourself.<sup>150</sup>

The apricot tree and your mother, or, the apricot tree is your mother. The apricot tree is a tree of life. She is a tree of life.<sup>151</sup> She produces fruits and nectars. Mother, her emblems are the burgeoning womb and the lactating breast. Transcended to that other place. It's gone.

תחת התפוח עוררתניך  
שמה חבלתך אמך  
שמה חבלה ילדתך

Beneath the apricot tree I awoke you  
There your mother travailed for you  
There she wrested and awoke you to life<sub>[8:5]</sub>

Our first awakening is in the darkness of amniotic waters, embraced by the muscular wall of tissue, our second to be received by the breast, a pleasure font. At first her fluids had surrounded us, and then we take them in. We are saturated by mother. We are mother, through and through.

Accordingly our metaphor lies in the semantic movement from a physical organ of the female body to a psychic mode of being. It journeys from the concrete to the abstract. "Womb" is the vehicle; "compassion," the tenor. To the responsive imagination, this metaphor suggests the meaning of love as selfless participation in life. The womb protects and nourishes but does not possess and control.<sup>152</sup>

It is not possessed by the mother, just as in Lacan's theories that the mother cannot possess the phallus, she is the phallus, the desire of the father. It is not an object that can be 'had', except indirectly. Birth cannot be held back or possessed. The womb opens of itself. It can't be stopped. The mother can't

possess it nor control it. In joy and in grief, in the face of death, and in dying, she will travail until the child is born.

ותכרע ותלד כינהפכו עליה צריה  
וכעת מותה  
ותדברנה הנצבות עליה  
אלתיראי כי בן ילדת  
ולא ענתה ולא־שתה לבה  
ותקרא לנער אי־כבוד לאמר  
גלה כבוד מישראל

... and she bowed over as her labour pains fell upon  
her  
then at that time she was dying  
the women standing over her said  
“Do not fear, you have given birth to a son”  
but her heart was broken  
and she named the boy Ichavod saying  
“The glory has gone out of Israel” [1 Sam 4:19-21]

*And the mother is gone ...*

—*Ubi mater?*

צאינה וראינה ... בעטרה שעטרה־לו אמו  
ביום חתנתו  
וביום שמחת לבו

... the crown – his mother crowned him  
on the day of his wedding  
the day of the joy of his heart [3:11]

Mother is everywhere in these ancient lines except there. I don't touch her once. She has no name, occupying only a site, crowning the king.<sup>153</sup> He has a name, and a fragrance. My mother is nostalgia. No name, no being and no having. She is the desire that can never be satisfied. Transient, I replace her. I sublimate her.

And as much as I am searching for him I am searching for her; the object cause of my desire. *Mon objet petit 'a'*.

... that's why he is my mother. The cause of my hunger. His body tempts me, is necessary to me; houses me, shelters me, nourishes me. His smile makes me want to cry out, come running, lose myself, put my head between his teeth, hurl myself at his breast and, once the terror is passed, the threshold crossed, stride deeper and deeper into my world. The man with the smile is my other in whom I have to live: wash my face in his blood, eat the tongue in his mouth; be eaten, my bones crunched between his teeth, become pulp juice, flesh of his flesh, where I long to feel myself dying over and over again.<sup>154</sup>

And so here I am in spite of her. Here you are with him. Separated out, and yearning for a memorial satisfaction that can never be had. Always in tension with the primal other. And so in our cultures and in our words we eschew her, as we eschew the abject. Mucous, membrane, blood and bone, we cast her out so that we can be, and we reject her and we claim each other.

—Always sublimating her; always replacing her. Is he my mother? Is he my (m)other? Is he the one I hurl myself into? My dance is a battle dance; of encamped armies.<sup>155</sup> But who is the victor of the dance? And whose is that carcass,<sup>156</sup> split through the middle, and holding up the sky?

*It's me. It's mine. Was it my daughter or my son who butchered my carcass for the sake of the world? Did they both take me down together, down into the mists of time from whence all cycles arose? Did they take me by force or did I go down willingly into the half-light. The child must overcome the Mother. One will arise and one will descend into the silent deep.*

The abject is that which marks the rejection of the mother, that which has to be discarded or rejected in order for the separation so necessary to the creation of the subject to occur. It is not a final banishment of the rejected elements, but one which constantly threatens the cohesion of the subject, even once the subject is fully formed. So, what is abjected always remains to be abjected.<sup>157</sup>

Every kiss, every yearning in the Song of Songs is the rejection of the mother, and in rejecting the mother we experience lack. In the experience of lack our desire is incited.

The desire of the Song is the desire of the Other, of  
 the Mother herself: this means that the Song is a  
 Song not of desire for the Mother, but of the desire of  
 the mother which readers then try to appropriate.  
 But the only (M)Other here is Yahweh...<sup>158</sup>

Is the (M)Other in the poem the ultimate Other **יהוה**?<sup>159</sup> This is the original  
 transcendent other, the other permanently lost object, our *objet petite a*, the  
 Being beyond the rim. She is like G-d in her unattainability. She is like G-d in  
 her atemporality.

As God becomes our bodies, as our bodies relax,  
breathe and bleed into the Sacred Body of all bodies,  
let the formal question of the relation of “God” to  
“chaos” begin to take flesh as well. From the  
yearnings of sky-and-earth, mud-and-mucus of  
creatures, irrupting not only in sickness but in  
festival, gush waters still turbulent with tahom.<sup>160</sup>

—*the divine mother, the deep...*

HaShem [יהוה] not even a true name, but a space, a door, so much like first-Mother, no name just participle. No name means no epitaph, non-ending primal archetype, called creating-one, with a sister name which is Cannot-Be-Had. Receding back into the beginnings, into the early watery depths, before there was fantasy, before the knowledge of lack, the travail that produced first desire, before language caused us to fall further into the Symbolic. In those primordial beginnings it was the Feminine who was the ground of the Real, framing limits and boundaries of existence, touching, giving the gift, the firmament was sculpted by her hands, but in that god-power that rifts, at the brink, she became Lilith, the terrible. And likewise HaShem [יהוה], who both orients the world while at the same time threatening to expose it to Nothingness; grounding the world while at the same time perpetually shaking that very ground, that ground of the Real.<sup>161</sup>



The face of the deep was first – as far as we can  
remember – a woman's.<sup>162</sup>

*She fell...*

*I recalled while I walked out into the sunshine and up the tree-lined road. She was awash in her own tears, all her fluids draining out, all her tears, pounding.*

*She crossed my mind while I adjusted my cardigan which I had unknowingly put on inside out. She had sat, red-eyed, hurt, fearful, weary, worn out, diffuse. Like an inflamed, unhealed wound.*

*It must have been the sunshine, or the trees with their bursting green, in contrast to the red, pulsating, eclipsing, burning, stifling world that I had glimpsed through her eyes. At that moment, having just received a note that reconnected me to her narrative but then in the rush of going I had forgotten again. So it was just for a moment I remembered her fully and her telling of how the pressure had built to a crescendo in her head and how she had slept for days afterwards. For a moment it was very clear to me.*

*But by the time I had reached the end of the tree-lined road I had forgotten, and she had receded from memory with the embrace and the gentle kisses of the morning sunshine and the cooling vibrancy of the symphony of greens in the prolific leaves set against the richly dark, wooded, mossy branches, flecked with lichen. And the thick, solid, earthy trunks, the span of my outstretched arms in circumference, thick enough so that my imagined embrace cannot reach all the way around. Imagining the scent of the musky, woody, earthy tree. Maybe it's an oak. I don't know—it's like my father who I imagine, bearded with those exquisite chartreuse leaves reaches down around me with arms like great branches and I feel wonderful, wonderful, Everything-is-Right in-the-World ... for a moment.*

*I did though, towards the edges of my vision, my scope, and perhaps not at all too clearly, in between the going to and fro, in the growing heat of the day, there the few moments during the business of the day, momentarily, as my eye lit upon an orchid blossom that finds itself bizarrely set next to a dangerous tome, so innocent, but in the new connection complicit to a rebellion, or more stridently, the padded chair where she had sat and the residue of her grief still lay upon it, then as the red, seeping, inflamed-ness of her moment where I was also, yesterday, again stained the edges of this space, I did wonder.*

*Where is she now?*<sup>163</sup>

(une femme immortelle te rassemble, une à une tes fleurs, plus une de chaque espèce, une anémone, ajoute à tes tulipes, tes mains aux tiges veloutées, un genou, une jambe, deux reins ronds et pâles comme des paupières, essaie tes noms dans toutes les langues que sa langue fait bouger, tes organes entre ses mains un iris, et une à une les parties d'une phrase qu'elle essaie de composer, ajustant tes glaïeuls tes grands os lisses, ton lotus, avec de fins tâtons voyants, et dans le nombre tes sexes une à une, sans prévoir, ton bouquet de plus en plus beau, sans savoir quel Tout-autre tu te reformeras alors de quels noms nouveaux te toucher, te faire parler ?)<sup>164</sup>

(a woman immortal gathers you, one by one your flowers, plus one of every kind, an anemone, besides your tulips, your hands, with velvety stems, a knee, a leg, two loins, round and pale like eyelids, tries your name in all tongues her tongue moves, your body parts in her hands an iris, and one by one the parts of a phrase that she tries to compose, adjusting your gladioli your great smooth bones, your lotus, groping with discerning senses, and in the many genitals one from another, unforeseeing, your ever more lovely bouquet, unknowing which All-other you will mould yourself into with which new names to touch you then, to make you speak?)<sup>165</sup>

# Peace Odyssey

*A texte for Freedom*

Car en vérité je suis un peu fatiguée de cette existence d'assiégée. Je suis dans l'état du minuscule Etat entouré de vingt gros Etats adverses, et qui s'égosille depuis sa naissance à hurler : « j'existe, je suis, ne m'approchez pas, j'ai des dents, j'ai des griffes, » s'égosille, et a mal à la gorge et aux épaules et aux yeux et voudrait cesser de s'habiller en acier et je voudrais dormir nue sur le sable chaud au bord de sa mer à elle, voudrais sommeiller maintenant au bord de Promethea, sans armes, sans inquiétude, sans mémoire, sans appréhension. Je voudrais tant être une femme sans y penser. Je voudrais tant être une femme libricissime : tellement libre que je serais même libérée de la douloureuse sensation d'être-libérée. Je voudrais être si librement en liberté que je ne penserais même plus à me dire : « comme je suis libre! »<sup>1</sup>

*Dear Reader, in a mythopoetic journey through the State of Israel, I search for the biblical Shulamith but am disrupted by the presence of violence. Drawn together are poignant and dark images concerning 'self', 'other' and 'difference' from my memories of Israel in light of the Song of Songs. In this new frame a subtext of resistance and a volatile core reveals a mythopoetic Shulamith becoming She who Cries Out for Peace. In searching for the Shulamith in her own land, the result is the transmutation of the Song of Songs to 'Song of the other'. She becomes lament that grieves the death of love.*

## מבקשת השולמית

[Seeking the Shulamite]

שחורה אני ונאווה בנות ירושלם  
 כאהלי קדר  
 כיריעות שלמה  
 אלתראוני שאני שחרחרת  
 ששזפתני השמש  
 בני אמי נחררבי שמני נטרה את־הכרמים  
 כרמי שלי לא נטרתי

I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem,  
 dark as the Bedouin tents of Keder  
 Exotic as the tapestries of Shlomo  
 Do not see me as black:  
 I have been pierced by the sun's rays  
 The sons of my mother, their anger blazed.  
 My own vineyard I have not watched<sup>[1:5-6]</sup>

We arrived in Israel in the spring, C. and I. We were seeking Shulamith. Together we would walk through the fields of wildflowers now springing up through the meadows in the north. We would camp in her forests and woodlands. We would walk through the villages on our way to the mountain. If there was something of her in the stream at Ein Gedi I would find her. If there was the echo of her steps in the streets of Jerusalem, then I would follow her. If there was the scent of her fragrance on the slopes of Hermon, then I would seek her out.

But I could not find her anywhere. And her fingerprints and traces had been covered. It was all wrong, caught in a carnival of the grotesque and her beautiful body was dismembered, chained and barricaded.<sup>2</sup> She had faded away like Echo doomed to only repeat the last words anyone said. "Chains, fearful chains around me..." she said.<sup>3</sup>



אס־חומה היא נבנה עליה טירת כסף  
ואס־דלת היא נצור עליה לוח ארז

This wall fortified by silver  
This door barricaded with a cedar beam<sup>[8:9b]</sup>



You would have to walk on the streets of Jerusalem, to understand. The streets of Jerusalem are paved with new stones and old stones. It is a particular joy to walk on these stones; a particular joy to drink the strong, dark coffee, and eat tiny chocolate croissants from a brown paper bag while walking on these hewn stones early in the morning. There are new stones, sharply cut and glistening white in the sunshine. They are dazzling. We arrive in Jerusalem at dawn. The city glistens on top of its nest of hills. The city glistens like gold; Jerusalem of gold. My heart cries—take me there directly. Take me right to the top.

מצאוני השמרים הסבבים בעיר  
את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם

The keepers found me,  
the ones that surround the city ...  
Have any of you seen  
the one I love with all my breath?<sup>[3:3]</sup>

There are watchers on the way and watchers everywhere... There is no free run. We stop at checkpoints where there are blockades and guns. There are watchers at all the gates. "Have you seen her? Have you seen Shulamith? She is a prince's daughter. She is a dark beauty. Have you seen her?" I say.

In the city the new stones surround the old. The old stones are in the old city. This old city is full of narrow streets. The streets all descend from Jaffa gate. We descend through the markets and plazas. From each side Arab merchants

present their wares in the *souq*. Bags, scarves, coffee pots, spices, incense—buy, you must buy. Hey you! Yes, there are traces of her but I cannot take hold. I see a glimpse of her in the towers of spices and bowls of incense, in the honeyed sweets, and in the brightly coloured cloths, and in the faces of the beautiful women with kohl lined eyes and framed by head scarves.

We rested on the street, the street that is at the intersection of the 12 stages of the cross, the street that leads also directly to the Kotel, and that street that lies mostly in the Arab quarter. We sat outside on a ground level terrace to drink minted lemon and eat a plate of hummus and pita. It is the best hummus in Israel they always say.

Across from us, C. and I, are a group of soldiers. They are young and brave— young men ought to be trying their hands at love. These almost-men handle machine guns, radios and most of all it is their gaze that captures me. They are all eyes. Every gaze is the summation of threat. A teenage boy is stopped by the gaze. He is wearing jeans and sneakers. He has on a t-shirt. His dark hair is cropped short. He is the same height and same age as some of the young men dressed in military uniform who hold their rifles like one might hold the family cat. I can see he is angry to be stopped on this busy street that is his home. His cheeks flush red but he is silent and while his face speaks defiance he obeys every direction.

His body is stifled with rage but he is stock still.

His neck is taut. Taut like a tightly coiled spring that could burst or whip.

Up and down this street are these boys—or almost-men. He works in the street or his family live in this street, or his family has lived in this quarter for a hundred years or more. I knew the moment he had been stopped because all the

eyes of the vendors in the street—the mobile phone salesmen, the coffee pot salesmen, the t-shirt salesmen, and the old men playing chess in the street wearing Arafat's checkered scarves. All eyes turned towards the young man. It was eerily silent even though the street still bustled and clanked.

"Give me your i.d." said the young soldier. Give me your documents. Give me your name, your father's name. Give me the proof of who you are. Give me your credentials. And by the way, where are you going? What proof do you have you are going there? Now wait. Wait while I check your number against our database. Wait here and don't move. I am watching you. Remember that.

It is true they were watching. Because formerly there had not been cameras but now they are clear on every corner. Everyone is watching and being watched.

אחזרלנו שועלים  
שועלים קטנים  
מחבלים כרמים  
וכרמינו סמדר

*Seize for us the jackals  
little jackals  
vine spoilers!  
When our vines bud*<sub>[2:15]</sub>

"Dark shadows, dark shadows all around us," Echo said.



What to say, when too much speaking just sounds like a roar and achieves little. Who can work it out. We are just sad.

Last night we went to visit a family in Nayot for the first night of Pesach when in ancient days it would have been the day of the slaughter of the lambs. In the late

afternoon we walked from the Old City down through New Jerusalem. The high end retailers at Mamilla, the cafes and bookshops on Rehavia's Derech Gaza were all closed. The city was silent apart from ubiquitous Arab taxis delivering the observant and the secular to seder dinners all over the city. Finally descending along Rabbi Herzog's street we saw the Botanical Gardens which identify the neighbourhood of Nayot. To each side on our path are the wealthy stone apartments of New Jerusalem. The family we came to share the seder with are American and Polish. They are a modern observant family, modern educated citizens, at work towards building their country and having it survive. The father is an engineer, the mother a translator. They met at Hebrew University when they were young. Their sons are also educated civil workers, children of Israel, the hope and future. Their beloved and only daughter, beloved of her father, just finishing high school. She will go to the IDF soon. Gila says, "Listen to her pray, there is a native Israeli for you." Hebrew is her children's mother tongue and they raced through their prayers as only native speakers could—every word a child from their lips. Every word, a word of belonging. These are the new children of Israel.

At first we sat with the great grandmother of the family. She was a small, frail, dark-haired 90 year old woman. She told us how she lost her whole family in Poland in the Shoah. She stopped for a moment—her grief still palpable. Later her Israeli born son, the engineer, spoke about how Jewish people everywhere have always felt they had to fight to survive. It is an archaeological and historical phenomenon with which I could not disagree. We ate and sang and tried to follow the Haggadah with the super fast Hebrew. C. gallantly persevered through 3 hours of seder prayers. That night I heard the Song of Songs intertwined in the seder prayers. Was the Shulamith at the table, did she take Eliyahu's place? I did not see her. Perhaps she was in the desert or somewhere in the West Bank caught behind a high concrete wall.

This morning, the first great day of Pesach, we went down to another wall. The lion share of the wall was awash in white prayer shawls and discordant chanting and singing that never ceases to call to my deeps. There appeared to be at least 5 shuls praying the Pesach morning service for the first day. Later we walked down to one of the Gethsemanes and revisited the 1000 year old olive trees. We went up to the Russian convent with the gold bell shaped spires. There is a cave in the convent garden where Mary Magdalene's tomb is full of decayed bodies and ossuaries. All the churches here pivot around death—the church of the Dormition, the Holy Sepulchre. In the tomb of the prophets, a lone pale black cloaked Russian priest looms out of the darkness as we creep down the stairs to join him in the underworld. The smell of death lingers on the dusty stone walls and dark grottos. I want to run back to those ever-living olive trees. I wondered if the kingdom on earth for which creation groans might be a kingdom of trees. Trees at least have done no wrong. There have been so many battles in Jerusalem. Some of these churches, ruins and arches are as old as the genocidal crusaders. I can't see peace here when there are so many people who are ready to die over difference. Peace may only descend when we all go away, when human civilization reaches its apogee and then fades. Are those ancient olives waiting for the passing of the age of man?

כתפוח בעצי היער  
 כן דודי בין הבנים...  
 תחת התפוח עוררתיך  
 שמה חבלתך אמך...  
 אנהגך אביאך אלבית אמי...

Like a fruiting apricot among the woodland trees  
 This is my lover among sons ...  
 Beneath the apricot tree I awoke you  
 It was there your mother travailed...  
 I would lead you, I would bring you  
 Into my mother's house...[2:3,8:5b,8:2]

In the valley between the old city and the churches of the Mount of Olives lie more famous tombs—one falsely known as Pharaoh's daughter's tomb, shaped like a pyramid—and next to it, Absalom's pillar. In between, is the supposed tomb of Zechariah ben Jehoida. There are tombs and dank caves everywhere in this valley. I wonder about death. Seeing these tombs that are supposedly the last resting place of enigmatic characters of the sacred text, characters who seem to be ever running with their beautiful long hair flying in the wind, again and again in the text, and then caught by trees. But real life is a single gasp, a sudden intake of breath and then it is gone.

Where is the Shulamith? She is buried underneath the rubble of a thousand conquerings, razings, and decimations. She is entombed in rock, marked by plaques and pyramids. She is a victim of grave robbers. She is trodden upon by shield bearing legions. She is prostrated upon by hordes that weep and clutch. She is the holy grail of the Middle East peace process continually smashed. She is the 15 year old Palestinian boy who died today on the Gaza Strip. She is the Israeli soldier who also died today, his pregnant widow wailing, both hands clutching her belly as she bends over in despair. She is a small, old woman who lost the entire world in 1939.

She has faded like Echo leaving only a whisper.



Yesterday, the wind changed and became the Sharuv. There were actually five days that became one long day. The day of the Sharuv. When the wind changes here in Jerusalem it becomes hot, and then dust comes with the hot wind. The dust brought by the wind covers the whole city. I can barely see the sun. It becomes a dull, apocalyptic glow in the sky. I can't see the Mount of Olives or Mt Scopus from my rooftop, and I can barely see Mt Moriah. The dust laden wind is

like a plague from Egypt, this wild, dry wind, its open and voracious mouth devouring any drop of water. It is a demon from the desert, which is where the wind comes from. The hot, devouring mouth of the desert, winding up from the depths of the Arabah, the great rift, the forbidding and rocky craters of the Negev, remnants of geological violence. This fire breathing dragon in the desert blows hot fumes on the city which is already burning from within.

קשה כשאול קנאה  
רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה

Its passion relentless as Sheol  
A flashing, flaming fire<sup>[8:6b]</sup>

This morning I needed to read and think about the Song of Songs. I got up but didn't want to go. C. was sleeping and he felt like peace. The five days of Sharuv winds had dissipated leaving cool winds from the north, from Hermon, from the Lebanon. I got up to go but he said "stay with me," ... so I stayed a little longer... but then I left to go to Mamilla where I thought I could find a quiet warm place in a cafe overlooking the garden quarter outside Jaffa gate. I did. And then I read the *Book of Promethea*,<sup>4</sup> the last part where Cixous writes about love for Promethea, and the world with its bull's horns and heart moist like a river but torn.<sup>5</sup> Something in the womb I had constructed in the cafe made the words of Promethea intense and I felt every one. I was torn by horns. And then the world tore in two with the Yom HaShoah sirens tearing me further. The heart of the city stood still. My heart stopped and emptied. It emptied itself because of the collective memory of the deaths of 6 million children, 6 million who once were children but now ash. And every eye was touched with the pain of remembering and an old man stood in the cafe and cried. I stood but I drifted against the ceiling. My fingers stung and the emptiness in my heart gaped mercilessly. And because at that moment I was already undone by Promethea, words on a page, a

book, but a book of books, the siren and the eye unblinking and the silence and the blast and the stop pierced me and I felt entirely broken. And I can't really reconcile the depth of feeling because my soul is not pure enough for noble pain nor for the traumatic memories of the world. Afterwards I left and went to buy stamps. And the woman from whom I bought the stamps offered me a phone card. And I wanted to be sick because my heart was still in my throat and I couldn't breathe at all.

שימני כחותם על לבך  
כחותם על זרועך  
כיעזה כמות אהבה

Bare me as a seal upon your heart  
A seal upon your arm  
For love is as vehement as death...<sup>6</sup>

It was a little while after that when I found myself with C. in the botanical gardens in Nayot. We saw the yellow green bark of the pistachio, the brave and sturdy oak, the towering cypress, the torqued branches of the olive grove, the dry fingers of the balsam, the lotus drifted in pools and red poppies climbed through cracks in the rock. Like the ancient Olives of Gethsemane I was brought again to calm. With courage gained from the trees we caught a bus to Ein Kerem and went into Yad Vashem. It was for C. that we had gone, for I had already seen Yad Vashem and I had not survived it. When we came out of that dark space the sun was setting over the pine forest of Ya'ar Yerushalayim. I can't say any more about the memorial and the images and stories and recountings, and what I saw, and heard and felt, the room of books full of names. The images of children, the paintings, the journals, the ribbons from their clothes, the mothers holding their children, the tears, shoes, spectacles, emerald necklaces and the dark valley beyond tears. And the faces that turned away, and the very few faces who turned



towards and the very many more evil hands. Some things can't be adequately written down.

And my Shulamith, where is she. At the bottom of a pit? Transmuted into ash? Emaciated, cradling her child at the last? As for me, a Sharuv had blown me into the Negev and I took shelter amongst the rocks.



We took a bus early this morning down to Ein Gedi in the desert. We walked up to Nahal David and then took a rickety path up the steep side of the wadi to the Dodim Cave—the cave of lovers! A beautiful peaceful pool and cave high above the lower waterfalls with a view over the Dead Sea which was a stunning crystal blue and the mountains of Jordan like immense spice towers stretched out beyond. Shulamit spring, cave of love, a wadi of peace. An oasis for thirsty travelers, a refuge for lovers, a watering hole for deer. Surely she is here. Look at the stately date palms. The ibex high up on the steep rocky outcrops of the wadi. The buzzing life in and around the fresh water stream.

נרדי נתן ריחו  
צרור המר דודי לי  
בין שדי ילין  
אשכל הכפר דודי לי  
בכרמי עין גדי

My nard releases its scent  
A parcel of myrrh is my lover to me  
between my breasts  
A spray of henna is my lover to me  
in the vineyards of Ein-Gedi<sup>[1:12-14]</sup>

I slept all night but in and out of nightmares. Maybe it was the wind change, the fever that has clung to me since Yad VaShem. The heat of the desert, the cold

nights in the mountains. The cool swim at En Gedi, and the hot walk high on the sides of the wadi. I dreamed of a colourless world. The blue of sea exchanged for the darkness of night. I was trapped for eternity in the Lovers Cave, high in the wadi guarded by a stone man. I dreamed of cold, windswept mountains high up and near Syria. I dreamed in black and white of cavernous dwelling places, and striped rough cotton cushions, rams horns, rocks piled into rows, and circles marking out ruins, chipped and broken mosaics. All this whirled around me as I peered wildly out of the Dodim Cave watched by the bearded Semitic king carved into the cliff by the wind. This morning I am exhausted as if I walked across the Negev in my sleep with the images of the Shoah walking with me, dread companions. Tired and throbbing in my temples. There were no little crayfish, conies, or ibex in these dreams, no doves, canaries, swallows. No black ants, and no red dragonflies alighting on clear pools.

מי זאת  
עלה מן המדבר  
כתימרות עשן  
מקטרת מור ולבונה

Who is this?  
She rises from the desert  
like a pillar of cloud  
smoke of myrrh and frankincense...[3:6]



Jerusalem. Jerusalem. We have left your streets and your shuttered windows which look so sad in the moonlight. We have left behind the paired archetypes of the silent violence of your streets still engaged in a combat of silences. The two almost-men are eternally silhouetted on that street corner engaged in a combat that requires the speaking of no true words. Each one is a caricature of his own

perspective of the world; each one not articulating the truth of the encounter. Each one with his particular silence. But while the two almost-men are the same height as the other, one towers over the other and looks down at his bowed, flushed, defiant head.

The Egged bus whisked us away up into the North and there we had a dream that we slept in a tent high up in the mountain where clouds and storms and winds of both the natural and political world swept across overhead. The clouds surge past on gigantic waves of wind. She looks down upon us from Hermon, here is her power seat. But is it love or primordial frustration that swoops down from Hermon. We are shaken, and spend the night fitfully in our fragile tent. We woke feeling we hadn't slept at all. The mountain was disquieted as if it sought to rouse itself and rise from its northern throne and strike at the noise of mankind below.

אתי מלבנון...  
מלבנון תבואי  
תשורי מראש אמנה  
מראש שניר וחרמון  
ממענות אריות  
מהררי נמרים

Descend to me from the white mountain...  
From this snow clad mountain come down  
Look down from Amana's peak  
From the summits of Senir and Hermon  
From the mountain caves of lions  
From the leopard's alpine habitat<sub>[4:8]</sub>

Along the flank of the mountain down the north-eastern side of the country is the land of Amos, and angry prophets condemning injustice would match the mood of the wind-swept, wild north with well-chosen words of rebuke. But now the eastern Golan Heights are a barren no-man's land caught between Israel and

Syria. The land of Bashan. No fool would venture into the fields either side of this lonely road. Ubiquitous signs warn of landmines, cruel and barbaric devices, taunting child shepherds. Taunting the children who run and walk in fields, and skip in the beautiful, wild hills on the mountain. Such beauty tormented by the grotesque device that lies in wait.

C. and I stopped at a bullet riddled Mosque on the lonely road. It was a cement brick Mosque with gaping holes in its side. It lay upon its side, a slaughtered goat with all its intestines bulging out. A carcass. The minaret still stood with its spire into the sky leaning at a precarious angle like Pisa. I said to C., “don’t go in there, it might fall on you and besides there is a Muslim family here and they are eating a picnic.” But he went anyway. He is better than me.

In this far flung and unlikely wilderness, pock-marked by a savage war, like the ravaged body that has a cancer in remission, a small family was eating a picnic beside the ruined mosque. It was a seder of difference and no less sacred than the one in Nayot. They were a Palestinian family. And the image created by the filial seder beside the broken mosque was incongruous. One half of the image spoke of health, a future generation, a loving family while the other half—that of the mosque—spoke only of destruction, the end of dreams, the denial of difference.

When my gaze was met by the family I hesitated as did they. We, in that moment, wondered silently about the other. What do they think? What do they want? What of anger? What of positioning? What of politics and/or grief? And I wondered what right had I, to look upon this tottering mosque, as some kind of site of interest at a road side stop. It was no place for a view. And no place for taking pictures. It was a place to tear one’s clothes and to cry at the world, to cry at the stupidity of war. To cry at the rape of cultures, lands and peoples.

ברח דודי  
 ודמהלך לצבי או לעפר האילים  
 על הרי בשמים

Flee my lover!  
 And be like a gazelle or young stag  
 on mountains of incense<sup>[8:14]</sup>

C. spoke to the small family and the father. They sat at the gates of the mosque in the rubble as if it was a loved family home. The father motioned for C. to go in, to appreciate what remained of its tower, and ceiling, and the graffiti-covered walls. It was a magnificent and generous kindness. “Allah Akbar”, he said. C. went in, but I don’t know how he replied to the Palestinian father of the small family when he came out, but I saw that they smiled and shook hands. We left the family there at the damaged mosque. I watched the Shulamith through the rearview mirror until she disappeared from sight.

... “Fearful chains around me” Echo said.  
 And then no more. She was turned away.  
 To hide her face, her lips, her guilt, among the trees.  
 Even their leaves, to haunt caves of the forest,  
 to feed her love on melancholy sorrow,  
 which sleepless turned her body to a shade,  
 first pale and wrinkled and then a sheet of air,  
 then bones which some say turned to thin-worn  
 rocks,  
 then at last her voice remained. Vanished in forest.  
 Far from her usual walks in hills and valleys.  
 She’s heard by all who call; her voice has life.<sup>7</sup>

# Cirque du Soleil

*Katabasis*

שימני כחותם על-לבך  
 כחותם על-זרועך  
 כיעזה כמות אהבה

Bare me as a seal upon your heart  
 a seal upon your arm  
 For love is as vehement as death...<sup>[8:6]</sup>



O happy dagger, This is thy sheath.  
 There rust, and let me die.<sup>1</sup>

*Dear Reader, the certainty of death features in subtle but pervasive background colours, in the shade of day, the cool breeze, in a quiet pool, in the lover's gaze. A quorum of the poetic knotted around the glaring face of the sun;<sup>2</sup> acrobats suspended on high wires performing un cirque du soleil swinging, clasping, shifting, bearing, flying above<sup>3</sup> an impossible chasm.*

## 1

**Antigone**

Her art of living her abysses, of loving them, of  
making them sing, change, resounding their air with  
the rhythms of her earth tongues, regardless of the  
littoral and acoustic delimitations of their  
syllabysses.

Her art of crossing the whole of history and its little  
histories and the contests of the sexes, and of  
crossing unscathed the foul economies, in a spirited  
stroke,

from her inexhaustible source of humour

To vanquish the impossible each day and have  
always a yes in advance on chance

To liberate love and affirm it

Her forces directly connected without the least  
censorship to a battery of unconscious with  
inexhaustible resources, She will thus never be  
encircled with no way out by the evil tongues  
She will not be held prisoner for eternity.<sup>4</sup>



I am not ashamed to sail with you the sea of  
suffering.<sup>5</sup>

Heading towards death.<sup>6</sup> We all are on that path. There are different journeys to death, some are journeys of the dead weight of innocuous servitude, some are the quality of a burst of light. Some simply run headlong. There has been an inkling, hidden very delicately within the *mise-en-scène*, the very slightest sense of entrapment, as if the shape of the world is complicit in our inability to assert our right to drink, innate as the right is, out of life's pools. The world of the father-king; super-uncle. Why not accede? Why this struggle-for-Life-that-leads-to-death? Bricked into the abyss, bricked by our own male kin, bricked in by the insidious heaps of silken accoutrement and silver *bibelots*.<sup>7</sup>

בני אמי נחרו־בי  
שמני נטרה אתהכרמים  
כרמי שלי לא נטרתי

The sons of my mother, their anger blazed  
They made me keep the vineyards  
My own vineyard I have not kept...<sup>[1:6]</sup>

—*Life is not conditioned by the prospect nor the certainty of death. We write our lives full. We live in the eternal present. In spite of the king, in spite of the super-uncle, we love. We love hard. We struggle against the impossible.*

*You love your lover as Antigone loves her brother. In your run of love you court shame.*

מי יתנך כאח לי  
 יונק שדי אמי  
 אמצאך בחוץ  
 אשקך  
 גם לאיבוזו לי

What I would give if you were my brother  
 That you suckled at my mother's breast  
 I would find you in the street  
 I would kiss you  
 ... and I would feel no shame<sup>[8:1]</sup>

*—I cannot be told who I will love. I love him. Look at him there— eyes like doves, legs like pillars, hair, dark as a raven is his mane of hair. I wish he was my brother. I would kiss him.*

ANTIGONE: ... the evils due to enemies are headed  
 towards those we love ...

*Love. That is your word. Not duty, but love. Love that leads to events that frame that love. Love is set up against death. But your vehement love, that freedom you seize, it leads you to certain...*

ANTIGONE: Here is this hand. Will you help it to  
 lift the dead man?

*The brother you have loved. If you lift yourself up to him you will die. Why not chose to live long under the father-king? Has he not forbidden it?*

ISMENE: Creon has forbidden it.

*—My male kin, liege lords, have forbidden it and yet I go. I must go. I will choose to love. I will choose what is my own. What is Life when you are caged, coerced, spoilt before the bloom?*

אחזולנו שועלים שועלים קטנים מחבלים כרמים

Seize for us the jackals, little jackals. Vine  
spoilers<sub>[2:15]</sub>

ANTIGONE: It's not for him to keep me from my own.

ISMENE: ... You ought to realize we are only women, not meant in nature to fight against men. and that we are ruled, by those who are stronger, to obedience in this and even more painful matters...

*Obedience*, it is a vindictive seven-headed hydra—a head for each day of the week, contains her in a labyrinthine tomb. The hydra's poisonous fumes lull her to complacency, complicity, so hard to struggle against the totalitarian vapours. She was the world's first civilizer, innovator, producer, and cultivator.<sup>8</sup> Honour and care, admiration were due, recognition of intellect, passion, creativity, compassion, love, sacrifice however cruel lies were spread of her "natural inferiority."<sup>9</sup> Prevented from accessing language by having her eyes and mouth taped shut. Her only education was the single word "Submit." Singled out for some kind of object lesson with regards to the context of the original fall.<sup>10</sup> She sits in the tomb where she has remained for a millennium, some pretense of freedom, some lightening of the bonds but so inured is she to the lessons taught of old, she does not run free. Once she raised a sword. Cut off the hydra's head. Two more grew back in its place. Shulamith alone ran past Cerberus who, overconfident in his habitual presumptions, his hubris closed his eyes in sleep. She ran like the wind. She, the diminished, the-forced-to-passivity, The Silenced, she broke free.<sup>11</sup> Broke into a song of songs and thought visibly, tangibly for herself. The whole world was stunned. Immediately new beasts were bred to guard the gates containing woman, more sinister and subtle monsters and serpents, and invisible scorpion guards. The great gate to the gaol-tomb has above its threshold this sign: *Obedience*. Obedience to Father, Word and Law. But one woman escaped to tell her tale. One woman shouted her freedom to the wind.

There is desire to uphold the common good, common freedom, for principles of justice and holiness but for the maintenance of a tyrannical regime in existence since the world's first book whose insistent commands are don't speak, don't struggle, don't shout! Submit!! Obedience to this lord is done.

ISMENE: But you are in love with the impossible.

ANTIGONE: No. When I can no more I will stop.

ISMENE: It is better not to hunt the impossible at all.

*Where is the Shulamith, that woman who said "No!" And who said "I will choose!" Will her fate match that of Antigone?*

Behind Antigone's story is the tragedy of an abomination. Astonishingly a son possessed his mother. The fabric burst, and not just once. The primal principle overturned, in ignorance, in error, but nonetheless, it turned, it broke down all the protective barriers, all the barriers of the Selfsame. It was knowledge that killed. The truth killed. Wife-mother, impossible. She could not live beside the truth. There was no space for her. Irreconcilable. Once true children fell with that true-word, fell to the margins, fell off the side of the world. Forever held away from the chance of a life. Where is their redemption? To fight battles and die? To wander as penitent? To cleanse themselves through death, through acts against themselves? They are forever tied, never to rid themselves of the stain. The son possessed the mother. The world rent. A kingdom fell. He put out his eyes. Tragic Oedipus, blinded first against his will, then blinded truly by his will for the crime of the possession of the object of the father. He submitted himself to the most primal law. Absent Father.<sup>12</sup> A vacuum in patriarchal succession. The absence of the Father cannot be tolerated. The supersession of the Father. Impossible. Ultimate tragedy, ultimate abomination. Nothing left to lose. With

nothing left to lose she goes up against the King. She goes up against the world. Such agency is left for those who have the courage to leap the abyss.

*—I go up against the world. I run.*

*You run into the radiant, searing sun. You burn up. All that's left are the shapes of the letters of your words. You run into the impossible. All that's left are cinders.<sup>13</sup>*

*—It will be good to be, so being. It will be good to live, so living. 'It will be good to die, so doing.'*

ANTIGONE: I myself will bury him. It will be good to die, so doing. I shall lie by his side.

*What time is it? It is time to meet the Father-King. It is time to meet fate, and make fate. What time is it? Time to live or time to die. It is time to die by living, or to live by dying. What time is it? Time to disobey.*

*—It is time to live. It is time to love.*

*Life crosses over to death crosses over to life. What kind of life is it without the condition of death? It is the spectre of death that causes life to glow, to luminesce so brightly.*

*—We come up out of it. We die living.*

CREON: This girl – how did you take her and from where?

SENTRY: She was burying the man. Now you know all.

ANTIGONE: I will not deny my deed.

CHORUS: The savage spirit of a savage father shows itself in this girl. She does not know how to yield to trouble.

CREON: I swear I am no man and she the man if she can win this and not pay for it.

ANTIGONE: Do you want anything beyond my taking and execution?

CREON: Oh, nothing! Once I have that I have everything.

ANTIGONE: Why do you wait then? Nothing that you say pleases me... My nature is to join in love, not hate. CREON: Go then to the world below, yourself, if you must love. Love them. When I am alive no woman shall rule.

Woman has always had the most savage of spirits. Savagely she nurtures her own, savagely she guards her loved ones from harm. She casts herself at the storm, time and time again. There is a contest of wits and will in this world. The Selfsame does not rest. It inexorably stamps out opposing voice. It rolls on like a great rock. The rock of Sisypheus; it is an endless task. I struggle to push the great rock back. I push it up the mountain. It rolls down. I sit in despair.

CREON: ... I will bring her where the path is loneliest, and hide her alive in a rocky cavern there. I'll give just enough of food as shall suffice for a bare expiation, that the city may avoid pollution. In that place she shall call on Hades, god of death, in her prayers. That god only she reveres. Perhaps she may win from him escape from death or at least in that last moment will recognize her honouring of the dead is labour lost.



*Once I was trapped in the abyss with no way out. I clawed at the stone walls. I attempted to climb the rough stones. The stone enclosure tore away my nails but I persisted. I continued to hammer, to climb, to pick at the walls but it was no good. The walls were thick as if the stones were hewn into the earth. I did not have a shovel or pick. The only tools available to me were my hands. I could not open the stone door. I saw that it was to be my tomb. I railed and cried. I pushed at the door for what seemed like an eternity. In between my purposeless railings, I collapsed onto the ground in exhaustion. Finally I accepted the fate that was presented. I accepted the fate and saw no way out. I lay myself down beside my (br)other and gave life away into his warm cheek. But I could not sleep. I did not have it in me to sleep. I yearned to see the night skies, and the stars, once more.*

*There was a glimmer of light pouring in through a crack in the stone wall. I realized the rhythmic drumming I had heard was the rain. The rain had washed at the edges of the stones. The mortar had given way.*

*I stepped out into the garden of the night. In the shadows, on the outskirts of the city, I lived again.*

*[I had slept but my heart had been awake. I had said then, this vineyard is before me].<sup>14</sup>*

Shulamith's men hold power. Her own brothers, uncles, male-relatives are her kinsmen and her keepers. They too threaten to incarcerate her into a living tomb.

אס־חומה היא נבנה עליה טירת כסף  
ואס־דלת היא נצור עליה לוח ארז

If she is a wall, fortify her with silver  
If she is a door barricade her with a cedar beam<sup>[8:9]</sup>

*—I will struggle, I will fight. I will run to the hills of balsam for my love. They cannot put out my passions. I am willing to run, to make this run. I may be brought out and burned like my mothers but I will make this run. And if I am entombed living, like my sisters who were raped on top of the palaces of man,<sup>15</sup> who were violated against their will (and then if the violence had not been enough, they were entombed as living dead.)<sup>16</sup> I will suffer this living death because I cannot be held down. My passions flow over walls; my fragrant oils suffuse the valleys. My winds blow to the four corners of the world.*

CHORUS: Love undefeated in the fight, Love that makes havoc of possessions, Love who lives at night in a young girl's soft cheeks, who travels over sea, or in huts in the countryside – there is no god able to escape you, nor anyone of men, whose life is a day only, and whom you possess is mad.

*Is your suffering worth this love? Is love worth this suffering? So many of us have suffered in despair. Lovely mouths gagged. The unbearable agony of being held deaf, dumb and mute. Don't sail into Acheron. Don't be lead by Hades. Live on.*

ANTIGONE: You see me, you people of my country,  
as I set out on my last road of all, looking for the last  
time on this light of this sun – never again. I am  
alive but Hades who gives sleep to everyone is  
leading me to the shores of Acheron...

*—I am greater than Achilles, having won more battles than David. I am  
love.*

CHORUS: Surely it is great renown for a woman that  
dies, that in life and death her lot is a lot shared with  
demigods.

*—Am I a demigod? Does my death that comes next after rebellion, after  
choosing a higher law—love—mean great renown.*

*Surely Chorus is wrong. Wrong. Don't move to this idealization of death. I  
don't want you to die.*

*—I'm not afraid of it. Just a little sting in its tail. So many of us have  
died for small crimes, and for the price of small victories. They sail with  
me into the West. We are the heroes of old, of which the chorus of  
Ancient Queens sing quiet songs.*

ראוה בנות  
ויאשרוה מלכות  
ופילגשים ויהללוה

Daughters saw her  
Queens blessed her  
And concubines sang her praise [6:9]

This is a story that ends badly for a king. His powerful enactment against life and  
love results in deaths of those he loves.

TEIRESIAS: ... you must realize [Creon] that you will not outlive many cycles more of this swift sun before you give in exchange one of your own loins bred, a corpse for a corpse, for you have thrust one that belongs above below the earth, and bitterly dishonoured a living soul by lodging her in the grave... These acts of yours are violence...  
 CREON: I will go...

He goes up to the living grave of Antigone, to bring her up on the words of the prophet Teiresias. The sight he beholds is that of his son, trying to lift her down from the cloth rope by which she has hung herself. The son sees the father. The son takes the sword and drives it into himself. Happy dagger? The king returns with his son in his arms to find the messengers have preceded him. The mother of the son, Eurydice of Thebes, on hearing the news of the death of the true son, has taken also a dagger and released herself from the world. Death is all around. Does the king yet live? No, he has been dead all this while, while those around loved and lived. His continued living is a more horrifying circumstance than death.

CREON: I am distracted with fear. Why does not someone strike a two-edged sword right through me?  
 I am dissolved in an agony of misery.

*—Not even a king can purchase love. Not even a king can rob passion. Even if it takes one to the brink, this is life. Life is being willing to go to the brink.*

אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה  
 בּוֹז יִבּוֹז לוֹ

If a man gave the entire wealth of his house for love  
 He could only utterly be ashamed<sup>[8:7]</sup>

Antigone: brave, fearless, beautiful, beloved by Creon's son, a true (br)other, right, just, fearless, good and right, all courage. Shulamith: the dance of the mandrake, the dance of the Song of Songs, is it not part funeral pyre? She cannot hope to live like this in the real world. She shares the prison cell of Antigone. Sold, owned, possessed by the King, the super-uncle.

*—This is the dance of the mandrake, to leave, to flee to love, to run into the night to find that love, that one, to give life to it, to sing it out loud. Death frames this beating heart forever. Death is its foil. I am always coming up out of death.*

*Dear Reader, Antigone is lost to love, contained in the seed of death, of half-light, half-life. In her stead I have to live fully or not at all. For her sake I want to write in a roofless room,<sup>17</sup> I gaze up freely at the stars—infinity is at my call, travelling through time, space. Transforming. Bursting from tombs, freedom, ever upwards, towards distant fires. Star-gazing, freely adoring the fluxing matrices of shimmering possibilities; and converging constellations arrayed in glistening hopes. I hover around the 8<sup>th</sup> brightest star anticipating its supernova.*

## 2

**Kings of Uruk**

Each recounted dream is a song of Gilgamesh on the path that leads to making death loosen its hold. It is a triumph of the present that maintains its exaltation for a long time, by force of evocation, immobile eternal for two pages above the jaws of nothingness. The jaws that I myself let drop in order to swallow up the grandiose little thing of joy.<sup>18</sup>

הנה מטתו שלשלמה  
 ששים גברים סביב לה  
 מגברי ישראל  
 אחזי חרב כלם מלמדי מלחמה  
 איש חרבו עלירכו  
 מפחד בלילות

Oh the caravan of Shlomo!  
 sixty warriors surround it –  
 these are the bravest in Israel  
 each of them holds a sword, tried in war  
 a man's sword at his thigh  
 against the dreadful night<sup>[3:7-8]</sup>

Shlomo, King of Uruk ...

Who is there can rival his kingly standing,  
 And say like Gilgamesh, 'It is I am the king'?  
 Gilgamesh was his name from the day he was born,  
 two thirds of him god and one third human...  
 It is he who is shepherd of Uruk the Sheepfold  
 But Gilgamesh lets no daughter go free to her mother  
 The women voiced their troubles to the goddesses  
 They brought their complaint before them.<sup>19</sup>

One might be a king, and have all power humanly attainable at hand. If I was a king, perhaps I too would attempt to purchase the overturning of death. But it is clear, that the powerful Creon had no power at all against death. He died when he killed. He was blind. He was blinder than Oedipus, blinded by his own law. [Oedipus: killed his father, married his mother. The Real heaved against him. His sons lay unburied, his daughter entombed alive. His wife-mother eclipsed by acute and terminal hysteria. Oedipus wanders in the twilight of the margins of the Real, a living abomination against law.] Creon, slayed by his acts against the womb: against life and against love. Flayed to death by his own death-word, the



death word that trampled paradise. Only Ismene is left alive as witness to the collapse of the world. Creon himself is alive but only just. He lives dying now, wishing for death. There is no 'perhaps-I-will-live' for him.

CREON: Poor wretch that I am, I saw it is true!  
 Servants lead me away, quickly, quickly. I am no  
 more a live man than one dead.<sup>20</sup>

All famed Kings, their chronicles belie the evidence of their wrestling-in-the-darkness; wrestling with the inevitability of death. Famed kings drunk with power, might and wealth attempt to broker the impossible deal with fate, tying themselves to it, to hapless quests for immortal peaches, eternal plants, golden magical cups; to gain it all, have it all, possess-it-all. All failed, their bowels rupturing, and the sword finding its way into belly or breast. And in the lingering years of old age, afflicted by breeze, by winter's rains, by the cool of the morning, like a child lying on the belly of a child for warmth, stealing the warmth of youth.<sup>21</sup> No money and no magic could overturn death. Not even the magic of *Avishag*.

— *To go back from the brink one must go to the brink. One has to risk death to gain life and to gain life by risking death. In this death is turned inside-out.*

עד שיפוח היום ונסו הצללים  
 אלך לי אליהר המור  
 ואלגבעת הלבונה

Until day breathes and dark shadows are vanquished,  
 I will journey to the mountain of myrrh  
 and the hill of frankincense.<sup>[4:6]</sup>

The famed King Gilgamesh, the hero of the first epic poem brings existential exploration of the crippling and warping fear of death, that is not productive, but

also a redemptive journey of sorts from abject fear of death to reconciliation by degrees. King Gilgamesh so crippled by his fear of death that he reels from his role of despicable despot to adventurer and treasure seeker in order to stave off Inevitability [inevitability that in the Ancient World comes with much more frequency and with a nearness not experienced in the Western world because it is cordoned away with haste]. Gilgamesh searches for the plant of the heartbeat—the thorny plant of life—that will make him invincible. He wants to overcome death. He achieves the object of his quest but within a few moments of the plant being in his possession it is stolen by a serpent. Immortality is thus squandered on a beast.

Gilgamesh found a pool whose water was cool  
down he went into it, to bathe in the water  
of the plant's fragrance a snake caught scent  
came up [in silence] and bore the plant off  
as it turned away it sloughed its skin  
then Gilgamesh sat down and wept ...<sup>22</sup>

In her song, I locate a node, an umbilical that travels from Gilgamesh to another King tottering under mortal angst:

הנה מטתו שלשלמה

Oh the caravan of Shlomo! [3:7]

Here is a true son of the great Kings of Uruk as I put him in a frame, framed by Gilgamesh, framed by unproductive existential angst, and not buoyed by fertile being-toward-death, only disabling fear. A scene where the king, in fear of the inevitable draws round him the protective services of 60 warriors, all of them born in fear, grasping their swords against the night, against horror of the night and nights.

ששים גברים סביב לה מגברי ישראל:

sixty warriors surround it; of the bravest in Israel<sub>[3:7-8]</sub>

They find themselves im-potent adversaries against the unassailable and undialectical, seeing in despair their own deaths; acting out of their despair in recognition of death.<sup>23</sup>

אחזי חרב כלם מלמדי מלחמה

each of them holds a sword, tried in war<sub>[3:7-8]</sub>

Their every action and move is to stave it off, through force and mobilization; one more in a long line of defences that attempt to deny death. And in doing so, in being fully turned towards and at the same time in complete denial of, and in this searching for a way to substantiate and replace the unavoidable outcome of life, this caravan ingloriously lurches before the one certainty of which we can all be sure.<sup>24</sup>

איש חרבו עלירכו מפחד בלילות:

a man's sword at his thigh against the dreadful  
night<sub>[3:7-8]</sub>

*—There is fear of death, and there is fear of life. Some fear death and hence love life all the more. Some fear death and fear life in equal measure.*

*Those like Solomon that fear death also fear life and replace life with walls. They no longer create or build, but gather their possessions and slaves around them. However it is not simplistic and I do not want to be careless in this regard.*

By raising oneself above life, by looking at death directly, one accedes to lordship: to the for-itself (pour soi, für sich), to freedom, to recognition. Freedom must go through the putting at stake of life (Daransetzen des Lebens). The lord is the man who has had the strength to endure the anguish of death and to maintain the work of death.<sup>25</sup>

*—The living of life is the courting of death, to court its possibility at any moment. To court it and let it go.*

A king who fears the night and builds up power against it, and a king who thinks also his wealth and power will supply for the other existential force in the world, a fragile bloom granted only to those who can look into the sun, and live, which is, of course, love. Such aggrandisement and compilation of power against death is cast as foolishness by the text; as foolish as an attempt to purchase the affections of another.<sup>26</sup> As if love could be sold for cash.

אִם־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה בּוֹ יִבּוֹז לוֹ :

If a man gave the entire wealth of his house for love  
he could only be utterly despised<sup>[8:7]</sup>

Both moves, both actions fear death and fail life, and also misunderstand the operation of love<sup>27</sup> and what appears the subtle wisdom of this song: “For love is as vehement as Death.” This is the love when the lover truly loves the beloved, and not in the manner of a mirror, where a narcissistic and again impotent lover loves only the reflection of him or herself in the other. No, love’s supreme action is authentic and liberating reciprocity of desire and care. In Solomon and his mighty men we have described to us the failure of the economy of power, and soon love’s death stroke to commoditisation and objectification.

שימני כחותם על־לבך  
 כחותם על־זרועך  
 כיעזה כמות אהבה

Bare me as a seal upon your heart  
 a seal upon your arm  
 For as vehement as death is love [8:6]

But life in spite of death, life for death and life for life,<sup>28</sup> the woman of the Song is a prophetess pointing to life. In contrast to the King in his heavily guarded *mitah* she stands utterly alone face to face with darkness but burns brighter than a myriad of stars in their constellations. She recalls,

על־משכבי בלילות בקשתי  
 את שאהבה נפשי  
 בקשתי ולא מצאתיו :  
 אקומה נא ואסובבה בעיר  
 בשוקים וברחבות  
 אבקשה את שאהבה נפשי

On my bed by night I yearned for him,  
 The one I love with all my life  
 I sought him but did not find him  
 I must arise and circle the city  
 [ascend] through the plazas and the streets  
 I will search for the one I love with all my life [3:1-2]

By night this one does not hide behind a hedge of men-of-war. This one does not even have a dagger at her side. She yearns, she tries, she loves in the face of the possibility of death, and in spite of death, but she does not once count out steps or hours or seconds. Out of her love she arises, one soul against the darkness of the night, one soul in spite of the fears and terrors of the night. She draws eternity into a timeless present. She searches, she does not give up, she looks out for the one she loves with all her life-breath. "Watch out!"<sup>29</sup>

## 3

**Of queens; or, seven gates**

From the Great Above she opened her ear to the  
Great Below.

From the Great Above the goddess opened her ear to  
the Great Below.

From the Great Above Inanna opened her ear to the  
Great Below.<sup>30</sup>

By descending into the darkened streets, but returning to the side of death, the Shulamith enters the darkened scene. She is confronted by the *shomrim* of the walls, grave protectors of the status quo who follow her life steps shortly afterwards.

מצאוני השמרים  
הסבבים בעיר  
את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם

The guardians found me  
The ones that surround the city  
Have any of you seen the one I love with all my life  
...[3:3]

But here it is, repeated, rewritten, replayed, haunting like a waking dream, a violent refrain. Darkness descends and chokes, the scene is dire. It is the scene of a million women in any battle, war, in any social upheaval, in any lonely street, outlying niche. To be woman is to walk the world without carapace.

בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו  
קראתיו ולא ענני  
מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר  
הכוני פצעוני נשאו את־רדידי מעלי  
שמרי החמות

I searched for him but couldn't find him  
I cried out to him but he didn't answer me  
The guardians found me – the ones surrounding the  
city  
They struck me, they bruised me, they tore off my  
clothes  
Guardians of the walls...[5:6-7]

The function of these guardians is not to birth or fly but to exclude, bar, restrict, inhibit, suppress, wound: keepers of the Real. This is the dark city that they

encompass, endlessly marching round, the keepers of time, numbering the days, and the hours, the night watch, measuring out their steps. There is no room for light or love here, ascending these streets is an ascension into greater and greater risk. These are keepers who keep out, are meant to keep out some dangerous darkness; some dreadful possibility of transformation but unknowingly and not cognizant of the continual night that they already occupy. These strike and bruise and tear any sign of out-of-control liveliness. These keepers of the walls suffocate life within for the sake of sameness. These keepers de-clothe the (m)other.

When she entered the first gate,  
 the *shugurra*, the crown of the steppe was removed.  
 When she entered the second gate,  
 From her neck the small lapis beads were removed.  
 When she entered the third gate,  
 From her breast the double strand of beads was  
 removed.  
 When she entered the fourth gate,  
 From her chest the breastplate called "Come, man,  
 come!" was removed.  
 When she entered the fifth gate,  
 From her wrist the gold ring was removed.  
 When she entered the sixth gate,  
 From her hand the lapis measuring rod and line was  
 removed.  
 When she entered the seventh gate,  
 From her body the royal robe was removed.<sup>31</sup>

She faces death completely nude, de-nuded of all the accoutrements of Self. She is brave to face death completely bare and to do it for love, for passion, for possibility.



Keepers who suffocate life, and who tear and bruise, and de-clothe draw me laterally into the annals of the journey of Inanna into the great below. Why did she go into the bowels of death? Why did she stare straight into the sun, eclipsed by the night? Except if it was her disbelief in the day. Except if it was to come to wisdom and understanding with her whole being. Except if it was so that she would rise again.

*City Walls to keep out the darkness of dread.*

*—Walls to delimit the city? I burst over walls in a surging ocean. I diffuse over walls in a rare perfume. Who can hold me in? Who can keep me locked in at night? I pour myself out upon his feet and eclipse the centuries.*

גן נעול אחתי כלה גל נעול מעין חתום  
שלחיד פרדס רמונים

*A garden enclosed my sister, my bride  
A spring enclosed, a fountain sealed  
But you branch out like a grove of pomegranates*<sub>[4:12-13a]</sub>

מעין גנים באר מים חיים ונזלים מן לבנון  
עורי צפון ובואי תימן  
הפיחי גני יזלו בשמיו

*A fountain of gardens  
A spring of living waters and flowing streams ...  
Awake Zaphon and Blow Tayman  
Breathe into my garden and let my perfume  
stream*<sub>[4:15-16]</sub>

Walls hinder life in the Song of Songs. Walls exist in the Song of Songs to be overcome, overcome by those who drink deeply from fountains, those who watch, not walls but for signs of life, midwives of vines, these women in labour,

mothers with secret life chambers, and those that come bursting up out of ponds. Walls exist to be burst, poured over. Walls cannot contain love just as Walls cannot deny death. Love explodes walls.

שימני כחותם על-לבך  
 כחותם על-זרועך  
 כיעזה כמות אהבה  
 קשה כשאול קנאה  
 רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה  
 מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את-האהבה  
 ונהרות לא ישטפוה

As vehement as death is love  
 Relentless as Sheol, its passion  
 A radiant, flaming [sacred]-fire  
 Oceans cannot overwhelm love  
 Surging rivers cannot quench her out<sub>[8:6-7]</sub>

She has an outrageous claim for life. What is this claim? How does this claim function? It doesn't function to deny death. It posits the possibility of death squarely. But in spite of the relentless encroachment of death, the exploding texts of her song laugh and live, drawing, on every blood drop of the angst and tension and pain that is inherent in life itself. Life itself, love itself. Choosing to live and love rather than to withdraw into a suffocating fear. Choosing to embrace each pain and each fear as she would a vital breath. Death is close in this song. Death hovers on every page and yet, as the outrageous claim above, Love is as vehement as death. Death is siphoned into life via the alchemy of love.

ישקני מנשיקות פיהו  
 כי טובים דדיך מיין

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth  
 For your love is better than wine<sub>[1:2]</sub>

*But wait! This is your love ... a love that will cast life upon the burning pyre? It begins sweetly but soon threatens life's fragile brush. We are all dependant on its threads. A tendril of spider silk broken by an unforgiving breeze. How can you play with such risk? You could settle for what your brothers provide. Why not capitulate and live? You may live long, bear sons and have your name recorded in the Chronicles of the land. Leah, Rachel, Sarah; becoming re-membered as a venerated matriarch of the people.*

כִּירוּבִים דָּדִיךְ מֵיין

For your love is better than wine<sub>[1:2b]</sub>

*Better than wine? Or better than blood; the vital fluid that pre-determines our existence. I think blood. Your blood that will be spilt by the anger of your male relatives when they find you have eaten from a forbidden tree. Your sexuality that is not yours; that belongs to them. They safe guard it and will use it for the benefit of your community.<sup>32</sup> You place your life above the life of the group when it could be sublimated into the life of the community. You may live a little further from the fountain, but eternity is in the seed of the one to whom you are given. You will be the mother of sons and through them you will live forever. What is wrong with the life of Echo?*

... she retains the last sounds that she hears,  
And says them back again to those around her.  
... "Fearful chains around me" Echo said.  
And then no more. She was turned away.  
To hide her face, her lips, her guilt, among the trees.  
Even their leaves, to haunt caves of the forest,  
to feed her love on melancholy sorrow,  
which sleepless turned her body to a shade,  
first pale and wrinkled and then a sheet of air,  
then bones which some say turned to thin-worn  
rocks,

then at last her voice remained. Vanished in forest.  
 Far from her usual walks in hills and valleys.  
 She's heard by all who call; her voice has life.<sup>33</sup>

*You wager your existence for a chance to be true; to eat life; to live fully. You long for the height of experience. Where is your sense of what is to come? You live only for the moment. You do not think ahead, plan ahead; or perhaps you do. You see a life time of toil, pregnancy and drudgery. You may still find pleasure in safety, in the father, if you chose existence over being, enjoy a vicarious pleasure laid on the heads of your sons; a mother in Israel.<sup>34</sup>*

*Yet, here you are in the first breath of youth, casting caution to the wind and taking for yourself your own pleasure. Risking the terrors of the night. Risking the ire of watchers. Risking the darkness of the city streets. Risking the wrath of God. Fire-starter! Messiah!*

*Your existence is already in flux, flaming. You, Persephone, move from spring to Sheol. In the murky, deathly haze of desire deferred, the pain of encounter, the pain of love you are already dying.*

סמכוני באשיות  
 רפדוני בתפוחים  
 כיחולת אהבה אני

Sate me the raison-cakes  
 Sate me with apricots  
 For I am afflicted with love<sup>[2:5]</sup>

*Sleepless, weak, afflicted, tormented your life force ebbs. Thanatos drives you to the darkness of the streets. This is a suicidal performance. You stare at the face of death. You risk everything.*

*It is the night*

*—I sleep, but not like those who sleep the sleep of peace*

*You are a raging ocean*

*—I am the unblinking eye*

*The Unrest*

*—The ominous, beating drum of a heart*

*Awake, yet asleep*

*—Queen of the Night. Awake!!*

בקשתי־הו ולא מצאתי־הו  
קראתי־ו לא ענני  
מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר  
הכוני פצעוני נשאו את־רדידי מעלי  
שמרי החמות

I searched for him but couldn't find him  
I cried out to him but he didn't answer me  
The guardians found me- the ones surrounding the  
city  
They struck me  
They bruised me  
They tore off my shawl  
Those guardians of the walls<sup>[5:6-7]</sup>

*What if I said you were in league with death? That you are death? That you  
are terrible and life-forsaking?:*

מי־זאת  
הנשקפה כמו־שחר  
יפה כלבנה  
ברה כחמה  
אימה כנדגלות

Who is this  
 Rising like the morning star?  
 Clear as the moon  
 Bright as the blazing Sun<sup>35</sup>  
 Terrible as the myriad stars in their constellations<sub>[6:10]</sub>

*I could paint you as Medusa whose one glance stills the beating heart—cold as stone, lifeless as rock. I could call you “Sorceress” who with one glance of her eye, overthrows a city. A spell-binder, breath-stealer, the Sumerian goddess lusting for war. Or the Sphinx, face of beauty, appetite of a lioness, dragging her prey into the half-light and soul-destroying agony of love.<sup>36</sup>*

יפה את רעיתי כתרצה  
 נאווה כירושלם  
 אימה כנדגלות  
 הסבי עיניך מנגדי  
 שהם הרהיבני

Enchanting as Jerusalem  
 Breathtaking as myriad banners  
 Don't look at me!  
 Your eyes overwhelm me!<sub>[6:4-5a]</sub>

*Extinguishing the whole world with your gaze, I could accuse you of idolatry. That you are she who desired to be like God and have found a way via another tree. I could paint you as Inanna: roaming, raging, devouring, equal parts honey and wormwood. Goddess of desire, cosmic mistress of war, spirit of battle<sup>37</sup> and hung with shields, bearing a bow; insatiable in blood lust. Vagina dentata.*

That you totally destroy rebellious lands – be it known!  
 That you roar at the land – be it known!  
 That you kill – be it known!

That like a dog you [devour] the corpses – be it known!  
 That your glance is terrible – be it known!  
 That you lift this terrible glance – be it known!  
 That your glance flashes – be it known!  
 At those who do not obey – be it known!  
 That you attain victories – be it known!<sup>38</sup>

Inanna, was goddess of the Sumerians. In the land of the Turtledove, her name was Ishtar. She was powerful, a goddess consort to the King for one night a year—a night of magic, in which passion would awaken the earth, and the land would swell and give birth. She was homeless, but her lack of home intensified rather than diminished her powers.<sup>39</sup> She was the pleasure of the night; phallic jouissance. The Jouissance of the land. Living in the shadows, precursor to the light of day.<sup>40</sup>

Inanna was unique, and unlike any other of the Divine Feminine, an expression of the depth of femininity, its radical edges. These feminine veiled others presided over the domestic sphere: ensuring the continuance of child-bearing, food-producing, beer-brewing. In short they ensured the status quo, complicit and bent to the task, the silent community of the *banot Yerushalaim*. Inanna, made distinct by her difference was without a pre-defined place and thus, from the margins of the Sumerian pantheon, became the first feminine image liberated from the homogeneity of domestication. But too hot she blazed, and in order to protect the tethered wombs of Sumer, she became vilified, drawn as wild and uncontrollable, moving generation by generation from adoration to demonization as Sumerian culture advanced. She had inspired exhilaration but this evolved to dread. She became a byword for jealousy, and among women she was then received as a warning to any who would take for themselves, Life; she was an example of the horror of the feminine; she was a murderer of children.<sup>41</sup>

—Please stop. I don't sing death. I sing life. You are mistaken, you are too hard!

*In Inanna are combined the passions of sex and violence; fire and ferocity; the furs and silks of phallic jouissance. There is an uncanny resemblance, a genealogical resemblance and I am discomfited. There are your own words, there in the text.*

כיעוזה כמות אהבה  
קשה כשאול קנאה  
רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה

For as vehement as death is love  
Its passion as relentless as Sheol  
Even its sparks are a raging fire  
A devouring flame<sup>[8:6]</sup><sup>42</sup>

—I can feel your fear. Your fear speaks. You fear freedom from the Father. It is in your belly. You are its host.

*It's true. I am afraid. What are you? Who is this phantasmatic, earth-devouring, fire goddess sparking through the ages phallocentric fears. They fear you. They fear the feminine. You show them to be naked. Their swords and shields come to nothing.*

—I am Ruach, and I am Spring.



*You speak and the earth spills out its wealth. You breathe and the fragrance awakens blooms and sprays. The voice of the turtledove is heard in the land.<sup>43</sup> You have many children, in your hands, with your voice, a thousand birthings, a thousand awakenings, the infinite overturning of death.*

*In the beginning  
I desired  
and was tormented a thousand years  
for my presumption  
but now, here  
in the circle of lively trees  
I find myself in the  
Princess's palanquin  
In the midst of a great procession  
Of royal elephants<sup>44</sup>*

## 3

**Scène de cirque, or, Feu**

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
 In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
 Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows  
 Do with their death bury their parents' strife.  
 The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,  
 And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
 Which, but their children's end, nought could  
 remove,  
 Is now the two hours' traffick of our stage;  
 The which if you with patient ears attend,  
 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.<sup>45</sup>

Love, life is a circus scene. We run to and fro. We are picked up and thrown. The fates of life are piteous. They are merciless in their enactment of the due event. Young love dies young. The more beautiful it is, the sooner it burns out. The brighter love burns, the sooner the candle burns out. Put out by a malevolent universe. Is this your fate, wild beauty, in the Song of Songs? You are too young to cast your love to the cold teeth of the fateful winds.

The experience of love indissolubly ties together the *symbolic* (what is forbidden, distinguishable, thinkable), the *imaginary* (what the Self imagines in order to sustain and expand itself) and the *real* (that impossible domain where affects aspire to everything and where there is no one to take into account the fact that *I* am only a part). Strangled within this

tight knot, reality vanishes ... in love I never cease to  
be mistaken as to reality.<sup>46</sup>

“Winter has passed”? I sense it has only just begun. “Rains have ceased”? Only to gather up more clouds and then the deluge will surely begin. Young women running wildly in the forests outside Jerusalem are destined for a short, tragic life. So, if you have a name it is *Jeanne d’Arc*.<sup>47</sup> Your life is represented by an omen that is two parts blood, one part fire. Tossed out; thrown into Gehenna to be burned.

<sup>48</sup> הוציאוה ותשרף:

... not able to leave the trace of writing fire; we are  
left only with her cinders.<sup>49</sup>

The end of the story can only be tragic, if the end wasn’t just beyond that hill of balsam beyond my sight, but I can feel it. Father-and-Law is about to strike like an enraged cobra. She bucks the invincible, pushes at the boundaries of the always-already. She is the always-already, anticipating and surging up on the threshold of tragedy. She is the almost-already tragic figure. She is happy now, but the ominous sense snakes around, slithering round the *mise-en-scène*, fueling the premonition of her demise. Already in my *déjà vu*, she is just a step, a trip, a stumble away from a pitch into a fiery sea, stoked by the Law.

But all tragedies are not, otherwise they would often end before the end. Without a large portion of the strongest joy, tragedy wouldn’t even be possible. Tragedies come to pass at the foot of Paradise, not extremely far from Paradise, tragedies and their last looks.<sup>50</sup>

Is it possible that her tragedy will catapult her into a new paradise; in her ecstatic struggle for life even as she is losing it?

*—I am in paradise. But no one knew then that paradise burns like a molten waterfall. The thorn of the plant of life is already embedded in my hand, feeding me, causing me to die repeatedly. But the miracle remains, I am already with you in paradise. We dance, and the fiery cinders of this text swarm around us.*

JULIET: Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day. It was the nightingale, and not the lark, That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear. Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree. Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO: It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
And not the nightingale. See, love, what envious  
streaks Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east.  
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day, Stands  
tiptoes on the misty mountain tops. I must be gone  
and live, or stay and die.<sup>51</sup>

She enters the scene, pale like the moon, translucent skin. Skin, fragile like petals, barely hiding beneath their translucent sheath, the blue of veins, vital carriers of life. Blood pumping, beating the cardiac rhythm in the Mortal Child. Such fragile humanity, flower burst. Now foreseeing an event of magnitude, scarcely contained within a form like butter. Within her lies a heart that will pulse with each step as she climbs the vertiginous heights of love. Love in the face of great calamity. Her little deaths of pubescent passions will become *La Grande Mort* before the end. She is classic romance. Death-of-the-other is her ultimate crisis, becoming for the reader the ultimate phantasy/phiasm; dying for no greater thing than love. Dying at the top of the mountain and not the bottom; dying on holy ground without shoes, body washed in the crystal spring. Ecstasy. This is the event of her passionate love which in death has no end, but

new beginning (*puisse?*).<sup>52</sup> Child, girl-woman, will pay the price of death as ultimate cost. Love, worth these stakes? Girl-woman, boy-man fall upon, fall beyond a love that is too radiant for the world. Rom-iet/Jul-eo, who is the third person who exacts the messianic cost. Sacrifice for love, even at the cost of dying, the last breaths of love overcome its significance. A surge of *nephesh* that floods the world. It is a dance of mandrakes.<sup>53</sup> It flows out through the flying manuscripts of the magic world that lies beneath the Real; the world of mandrakes, pomegranates and love.

*—I must stay and live, or be gone and die. At first Romeo has it wrong. Be gone and ... what is there but the end of the question. What might be?*

During that time their eyes held death off at a distance, and they desired as gods, against death. Their whole consciousness was made from the body of the other, and that body was imperishable. So long as the desire body filled up the world, they could not die, they could not close their eyes, they could not see what was mortal and what was real. There was the broken world, which cried out as it collapsed; there were their bodies, intact and virgin, which called to one another. The night of the pomegranate tree in bloom ...<sup>54</sup>

Erotic love and death are integrally connected. Jouissance: partial disintegration of the boundaries of the self in relation to an other. Death: ultimate disintegration of the boundaries of the self in relation to the whole world. Love finds itself in the deathly turmoil of dreadful desire at the level of self.

Dread of transgressing not only proprieties and  
taboos, but also above all, fear of crossing and desire  
to cross the boundaries of the self.<sup>55</sup>

*—Bursting through mortality's cracks come bouquets, bunches,  
branches...*

*Yet, death is evoked in your epithet to love.*

שימני כחותם על-לבך  
כחותם על-זרועך  
כיעזה כמות אהבה  
קשה כשאול קנאה  
רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה

Bare me  
as a seal upon your heart  
a seal upon your arm  
for as vehement as death love is  
its passion as relentless as Sheol  
a radiant, flaming fire...[8:6]

*Is love dragged down into the grave or up into realms of light? Death, sheol,  
fire, ultimity, decay, cinders. Your love is ephemeral, the season ending when  
your life fades. And in singing life, death becomes the backdrop. It is the  
backdrop of your play of life.*

Romeo and Juliet. Two young lovers, star-crossed. Families at war, their  
consummation of love is a violent act of filial betrayal. You also, child-of-angry-  
brothers, child spoken of, at, to, about. Sons of the mother are code for father.  
Threatening like the dark shadows that break with the light at dawn, with the  
wind Tayman. They are your keepers, they are the watchmen. You are theirs.

The secret hours, the secret visits, the dialogues, the monologues. You are he is. Already passion, desire is engaged in the previsions of grief, captivity, abandonment.

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. Arise, fair sun,  
and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and  
pale with grief.<sup>56</sup>

*Who is sick and pale with grief for it is not the Moon, embattled rocky satellite, lunar spinning orb, synchronous with the larger body, tide-locked, never facing away? The envious Moon, projection in the imaginary, fantasy, holding the desire of the desire of the other. Passions transferred, making a fetish out of the solar disc. It is you who are sick and pale with grief.*

*—I appear as both Sun and Moon and Dawn with nothing left but earth and sea. I am sky-queen. Transcendent and forever unattainable: impossible vision. One of us will have to die to reach the other. We cannot cross over. We cannot belong to both shores.<sup>57</sup>*

מיִזאת  
הנשקפה כמו־שחר  
יפה כלבנה ברה כחמה

Who is this?  
She appears like the dawn  
Beauty like the white moon  
Searing like the sun's rays<sub>[6:10]</sub>

Yearning to break down the barriers that separate—but soft, but hard. The breaking of the walls of self in Romeo and Juliet lead to all our deaths.

What's here? A cup enclosed in my true love's hand?  
Poison, I see, has been his timeless end. O churl,



drunk all, and left no friendly drop to help me after.  
 I will kiss thy lips. Haply some poison yet doth hang  
 on them to make me die with a restorative.  
 She kisses him.  
 Thy lips are warm.<sup>58</sup>

His lips are still warm. They seem to contain the residue of life; life's memory. The warmth of his lips complements the warmth of her own. She begins to merge. She begins a merging and a consummation that will carry her over into the darklands. Her love is the apprehension of life, in the appropriation of death. She exists now only in the imaginary, in the phantasy that death will provide the ultimate love; the great door.

דבש וחלב תחת לשונך

Honey and milk flow under your tongue<sub>[4:11b]</sub>

—*Ni moi sans vous, ni vous sans moi*

Star-crossed, mortal love is replicated in the legend of Tristan and Iseult. He duels the warrior to whom she is betrothed, Morholt dies, and it is unknown to her that the duellist is now the invalid under her care. Her fingers betray her as she tends to his wounds, her eyes betray her as she surveys his form, inspects his flesh, finally her hands betray her as she cannot complete the act of duty to which she is bound when Tristan's true identity becomes known. She cannot kill him. Law recedes in the face of love. The outside world recedes, first through ignorance on both their parts, then it is suppressed, transcended, but not for long. Father, Law, Name enter. A stony backdrop for the will to life, bursting, starburst, supernova in their craving for one another; love. And yet their final act of reconciliation, ultimate reconciliation, the event of marriage, of souls, binding, is death: חותם.<sup>59</sup> It slips on them like a gold band; like a seal. The world can no longer touch them.

And Tristan turned ... to the wall, and said: "I cannot keep this life of mine any longer." He said three times: "Iseult my friend." ... She went up to the palace, following the way, her cloak was wild. The Bretons marvelled as she went: nor had they seen woman of such a beauty ... she lay down by the dead man, beside her friend. She kissed his mouth and his face, and clasped him closely; and so gave up her soul, and died beside him of grief for her lover.<sup>60</sup>

This woman, wild Irish princess, lies down next to her illicit and proportionally all-the-more-true lover and dies. He has been her world; there is no world beyond him. She lies down and dies. He turned to the wall; she turned to the wall beside him. Is there no lover courageous enough to bear witness to this love in the world? Is there no courage in the world, to exist beyond the beloved other?

... what kills Tristan and Isolde is the moment when what is inseparable begins to think the moment of separation. The quotidian defiance is nothing, and against that we have great defences. We have no defense against supreme defiance.<sup>61</sup>

I call you grandmother. That is to say Life. My mother as well, it sometimes happens that she is my grandmother. This occurs when she is shuttling between death and life. "Don't worry yourself, little mouse, I understand you are impatient, but I am going to come."<sup>62</sup>

*I was out at Piha, Lion Rock when I fell asleep with Iseult. I was there stealing time. I was there at a distance, distant enough to feel the tendrils of loss beginning to unfurl. I am insatiable in my obsession with metres. It's my obsession with spatial acknowledgement. I feel and acknowledge every foot of it. I can't bear the fraying effect of yards of earth. Even the passing of a milestone causes peelings to lift from me. I am left raw and a little bloody when at any time I am away from the tree of life. But there on the margins, I find myself beginning a metamorphosis that I could not do without. It is the law of Poisson's Ratio which operates here; it is his necessary tension.*

*On the 22 of August, 2011, while at a distance, I had a dream. It was late or early, it was night, it was darker than darkness. It was a blackness of such degree that I left on the lights. Quite absurdly, I found even the idea of leaving a single light off complete anathema. I was in a lighthouse, it was atop Lion Rock. There were a thousand ships at the mercy of light I was emitting. I turned on every single light in respect to the existence of the thousand ships being tossed on black seas around my bulwark.*

*I wrapped myself in swathes of bedding. I piled pillows behind me. I had on my dusky-pink wool hat because of the cold wind [the wind always blows cold on lighthouses atop great rocks]. The echo of her feet were upon the wild coast. The flap of her cloak as she walks to him sounded over the ocean's roar. Lion Rock was not enduring the wild waves. It was collapsing, stratum by stratum and along fracture lines at the tolling of the mourning bells.<sup>63</sup>*

*Enter the dream.*

*I was in the country, green, rolling King Country near Te Awamutu where my father's mother used to live. There were two houses, warm, comforting and familiar though I had never been there before in my life. Even so, I was inhabiting the rooms of one. Was it my old home in Huia, out by the mouth*

*of the Manukau Harbour? It was strangely familiar. It was dark but not too dark. Fires were burning in fireplaces, a comforting glow of early evening. I was there alone, but not lonely. I was surrounded by books.*

*I was surrounded by books when I first took a draught of some palatable, alchemical substance. Was it liquid from a green vial or was it white round pills from a brown bottle? It was some kind of substance, some medicine that would lead me into the end of all things, Sheol, the grave, infinity or was that even part of my rational processing? To tell the truth I thought nothing of it. It was simple. I was lucid. It was the obvious passage; the door of entry. It was a portal through which I knew I must pass.*

*Immediately I began to feel the effects. My breath became shallow and rapid. The edges of my vision transformed. The world filled up with a light mist, a haze—something like the dawn even though it was still night. I had to move from my habitation and in a gentle daze I crawled to the wooden house next door, the home of my grandmother. I made it up the stairs, step by step, crawling up on my knees now. Of course she couldn't be there. Or was she there? It seemed that she was home, the scent of brewed tea was poignant and strong. The fire was stoked. The lamps were lit. The books were in order on the shelves. Throws lay artfully on the couches. How pleasant. But she was dead; died several years ago, which I remembered. She had cancer of the liver. I had read her the Book of John. It was my last memory of her alive. The room was peaceful and I lay down. I reclined into the warmth. I was ready to feel the forever; the great continuity. "Here it comes" I thought, "and I am not afraid." "It's just like going to sleep." Just like turning to the wall. Just like turning into the musky folds of Tristan's cloak against his back. Just like coasting into C. at the midnight hour.*

*I heard my father's voice from the outside. He was furious, furious with worry and with despair. I could see him though I don't know how, hands to his mouth, shouting through his hands. He was on the periphery of the scene. He was on the outside. There was forest behind him. He was barely distinguishable from the tree ferns. "What have you done" he cried out. "What do you think you have done?" I couldn't understand his fear and concern. I heard his calls but I had gone too far. I had entered the poem and I could not return.*

... this thought nags at him, and all the thoughts that  
 flutter over the unthinkable thought of being dead,  
 he's careful not to talk about this, it's a flock of  
 butterflies one must no longer heed)  
 —Soon it will be hemlock time I say  
 I hear myself, I see myself. I can see Socrates, my  
 mother. I say: *Hemlock*. I lift the word up to the  
 light. It has a censer-like beauty.<sup>64</sup>

*Dear Reader, myriad connections lie in the enigmatic dynamics of the categories life and death. The Song of Songs pleads life, in the face of death and embarking on a run of death in order to come up into life. This is an anabatic force subverted by a paradoxical ouroboros. This lemniscate of the irreconcilable lies naked on these pages, evoked by love's mortal password. It's secret: Infinity.*

# Shibboleth

*Anabasis*

כיעזה כמות אהבה  
קשה כשאול קנאה

For as vehement as death is love,  
Relentless as Sheol, its passion [8:6]



Alles ist weniger, als  
es ist  
alles ist mehr.

[everything is less, than/ it is,/ everything is more.]<sup>1</sup>

## 1

**Evocation pour Derrida**

Le soleil ni la mort ne peuvent se regarder en face.<sup>2</sup>



רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתי

... a radiant radiance of flaming fire<sub>[8:6]</sub>

I want to evoke Derrida in this encounter with you, radiant text, as we are now on the theme of death as it lies spoken or unspoken in its verse. Specifically it is Derrida's artistry in his unknotting and re-knotting of text that I desire, his artistry applied to the rainbow oeuvre of Hélène Cixous in *H.C. for Life*, in which he proclaims her as a great literary theorist and 'man of letters', but he finds her at odds with himself, to the point of being on the other side. He says he is on the side of death.

Between her and me, it is as if it were a question of  
life and death. Death would be on my side and life  
on hers.<sup>3</sup>

Derrida is momentarily transfixed in this work by Cixous's figuring of her exploding life-texts as an illicit knotted tallith; illicit because a tallith passes only from the father to the son; a tallith reincarnated through the intricate knots of her poetry. You are also an illicit tallith to my reading. Your edges transgress the norms and statutes of Hebrew society.<sup>4</sup> Your poetic lines burst out of their bindings rather than being hedged neatly behind them. You are in two moods, alternately rising-ebbing with the tide, then great shocks of immodesty; the unveiling. And so along one of a thousand dimensions when I find Derrida

reading Cixous's 'enchanted chant' I find Derrida reading *une chanson des chansons*.

—*I am his greatest aporia.*

Radiant text, in Cixous's song-texts you are reincarnated particularly within her advocacy of life-in-spite-of-death; life-for-death and life-for-life<sup>5</sup> that I saw from the first. And despite their being on opposite sides, Derrida and Cixous, tie themselves together, and I will tie them into myself in order to read you with dignity and with eyes that are always in the process of unveiling.

And of all that only the myopia-that-passes-from-not-seeing-to-seeing is the witness. She will forget. But conscious witness? No. Only that myopia of a Tuesday in January – the myopia that was going away, leaving the woman like a slow inner sea – could see both shores. For it is not permitted to mortals to be on both sides.<sup>6</sup>

The sides of life and death continually arise in human text, of the text that is human existence, the textual drama of life for which there is nothing outside.<sup>7</sup> And then, the unspoken, the unacknowledged Death, perennial backdrop to the play of human life.

כיעזה כמות אהבה  
קשה כשאול קנאה  
רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה

For love is as vehement as death,  
its passion as relentless as Sheol,  
a radiant, flaming fire<sup>[8:6]</sup>

—*out of death and into life*

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: the salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved.<sup>8</sup>

Du warst mein Tod: dich konnte ich halten, während  
mir alles entfiel.<sup>9</sup>

[You were my Death: you I could hold when all fell  
away from me]

## 2

**Derrida is dead**

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
 Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.  
 For nothing now can ever come to any good.<sup>10</sup>

Derrida is dead. I really believe it now, now that I am reading him writing about death.<sup>11</sup> The death of others, and then Wrapping them in his writing, a shroud of writing, and in his mourning he had killed them again. In my eyes and besides now I see my own death,<sup>12</sup> as I sit at the edge of his, this Parisian, autumn day.

For if mourning works, it does so only to dialectize death, a death that Roland Barthes called “undialectical”<sup>13</sup>

It’s a paradox that the Derrida who feels so forever-present in his writing is now already dead.<sup>14</sup> Derrida, in his collection of the genre ‘death-text’—*Work of Mourning*—writes about reconciling oneself to the death of others through mourning and that if it works, it does so only to dialecticize death which is impossible, recognizing this with his nod to Roland Barthes who had called it “undialectical.”<sup>15</sup> These are specifically the deaths of Others, which according to this line of thinking, are our only death experiences. Since Epicurus, we settle on the philosophical truth that we can never experience our own.<sup>16</sup> But to my eyes it is just as he writes, and more than this, as Heidegger would also admit, this brings to me, or brings to the fore in me, the awareness of the possibility of multiple deaths and in particular the sudden apprehending of my own. My mourning is pre-emptive and nonetheless cataclysmic.



There arises a sense of the abject in writing these words or the word, that is the word of the darkest night, and I am trying not to be careless with it even though already I have written it multiple times. Death is an empty hole; a base space, the idea of which is “Until the day breathes its last and our dark shadows are vanquished...,”<sup>21</sup> a constant shadow. So while Death seemed something projected in front of me so that I behold it out there, it rushes in close to me at unexpected turns like in the reading of Derrida’s letters of mourning, and his work *H.C. for Life*.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps this writing of mourning really has freed me from myopia. My myopia is as opposed to her myopia<sup>23</sup> which was probably something quite different.

Myopia was her fault, her lead, her imperceptible  
native veil. Strange: she could see that she could not  
see...<sup>24</sup>

And believe me when I have said that I don’t want to write this Word, the word of the jealous grave. To write it makes it unforgivably trite. To write it brings it into the living world. The great wall between finitude and spectral states of being is brought down. There is no becoming in the dead. There is no knowing in the dead. I can’t forget that, something won’t let me forget that. There is no cognisance of state in it. We return to complete continuity, we return to stardust, to *Xibalba*.<sup>25</sup> It is the end. But for the living, it is the beginning of beginnings.

שאהבה נפשי ראיתם

Have any of you seen him? Have you seen the one  
that I love with all my breath?<sup>[3:3]</sup>

It’s within the odd times, generally in the inanities of the mundane when I have some sudden dreadful and violent recognition which Cixous might call a ‘fleeting



touch' that nonetheless violently brushes against one.<sup>26</sup> The sensations of it then come from within like it was birthed in me before I had ever begun to know it. It's a dreadful little gap. It seems infinitely deep, with a small opening somewhere close to my lungs or heart. And through the opening I can feel the pain of the possibility of his not-being whistle through me as if I was strung on a wire. I am an acrobat engaged in an absurd dance-of-the-sun, dance-above-the-jaws and it is because of this diabolical condition of life that "I am asleep but my heart is [painfully] awake."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Derrida, and I are afflicted by Death's multiple arms, which are these possibilities of deaths which at odd times have 'struck me, bruised me and have torn off my clothes ...' and I was made vulnerable in the most abject of ways, like Inanna on her journey into the belly of the earth.<sup>28</sup>

—*But I can. I can snatch you from the brink.*

*I am naked. I am naked as the day I was born.*

—*Whisper the naked word. Learn to live in its arms.*

What is most true is poetic. What is most true is naked life. I can only attain this mode of seeing with the aid of poetic writing. I apply myself to 'seeing' the world nude, that is, almost to e-nu-merating the world, with the naked, obstinate, defenceless eye of my nearsightedness. And while looking very very closely, I copy. The world written nude is poetic.<sup>29</sup>

*Is the poetic that strong? Can you resist death? Can you resist my death? Perhaps you are a clinamen; continually falling into life.<sup>30</sup> It's your leap into the void that births the world. It's the leap of love. But as for me. I don't have your strength.*

—It's my gift to you.

*Sometimes it is just a twinge. A twinge twinges at unexpected turns like the time when I reached into the back shelf of the refrigerator for the strawberry jam, the kind that I like, and then I felt the twinge of the dark night like a splinter in my lung. It's the twinge first followed by the sense of empty space, nothing. And I wonder if I have lost a coin.<sup>31</sup> Or lost for the second time the little silver Michelin man fallen down behind the bed. I can't find him and I've looked everywhere. And I had liked knowing he was there. I've looked everywhere. And he's gone and won't be back. In the moment inside that moment of vertigo, there is also a death experience of such violence, and then when I take the jam to the table it is as if I was momentarily walking through a nebula cloud in some vast outreach of space where every atom is disintegrating and pulling in all directions.<sup>32</sup> Little satellite stumbled upon a black hole. For a brief but infinite moment I come completely apart,<sup>33</sup> at that moment of trivial vulnerability in the front of the Frigidaire.*

... a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen.<sup>34</sup>

Derrida says clearly that he errs on the side of death, and finds himself, when crushed by the existential recognition of its possibility, The Inevitability, numbering his days, hours and seconds. He writes that even his seconds are numbered by his awareness of Death. And he faces squarely into the sun, towards death. He writes squarely of the possibility of one-day-not-being and the not-being-of-others and the not-being-that-will-one-day-be for me and that is for

him now that creates in me, first compassion and then following Derrida, a productive *Sein-Zum-Tode*.<sup>35</sup>

*It's a little dark here and has that feel of being on a peak where each side is an eternal drop. And such vertigo—it's never been like this before. And I don't care whether at the other side of your being-after-being-here is the blazing burning of the wondrous, monstrous womb of nebular star births, at the point where all the stars that have ever been, come bursting from some sacred centre, and that is because one day you might simply not-be-here-any-more in my world. And any of your futures in the wonderlands of star bursts are without-me. You are simply not-here and at that time I-am-not-with-you.*

*—I can, I can snatch you from the brink.*

Living? you say. And from the first days he asks me if I believe it's going to last. But who can speak, speak well of living? ... I want to say to him: Live.<sup>36</sup>

*I don't believe you. No one has that power.*

Cixous, writes Derrida, takes another side.<sup>37</sup> She errs on the side of life which, vis-à-vis Heidegger, evokes life all the more potently. This not in avoidance of death, but a kind of laughing in the face of death, and a kind of drawing of infinity into the present moment. Not numbering hours and days, but seconds, and minutes that balloon out into infinity. She writes lucidly and relentlessly on the topic, not carelessly which is my own secret fear, but out of the experience of the reality of the deaths of the hardest and least dialectical kind.

One can emerge from death, I believe, only with an irrepressible burst of laughter. I laughed. I sat down at the top of a ladder whose rungs were covered with stained feathers, vestiges of defeated angels, very high about the rivers of Babylon that twisted

between the lips of the Land that is always promised.  
 And I laughed. I was doubled over laughing. I was  
 perfectly alone. And there was nothing around me.  
 Nothing held me, I held on to nothing, I could move  
 on without alighting, there was no road, in my left  
 hand my deaths, in my right hand my possible lives.  
 If there was godliness, I was of it. I didn't seek, I was  
 the search.<sup>38</sup>

—*I am her accompaniment.*<sup>39</sup> *I am the clinamen.*<sup>40</sup>

In her timeless way, a mythical letter arrives from the father that died in her youth, in his youth. This brief excerpt regarding the letter illustrates her mood, and bears in itself a genealogical resemblance to this song; blood of blood. Something of the same breath; something of its heart and vehemence.

“Hold me above the jaws” [the letter says] and I do  
 so. “Replace the time gone by” and I replace it. I  
 have the power: you just have to ask for it. The  
 power of love is older than the moon and than death  
 and younger than time.<sup>41</sup>

I want to believe this and then I hesitate for a moment, briefly and violently, remembering that Derrida is dead.

דודי ירד לגנו  
 לערוגות הבשם  
 לרעות בגנים  
 וללקט שושנים

My lover descended into his garden  
 to furrows of balsam  
 to shepherd in the gardens  
 and harvest the lotus<sup>[6:2]</sup>

Who can say that it is not a sad song that she sings?<sup>42</sup> He descends, goes down, harvests the lotus. Who can say he does not go down like a weary traveller into Elysian Fields.<sup>43</sup> Who can say that he is not greeted by both Persephone and Antigone when he arrives?

One wants to be alone in the chamber  
 For this love  
 It's like doing a miracle  
 Which no one in this world can believe  
 One can only do it absolutely alone  
 It's like seeing again one's father whom one hasn't  
 seen in thirty-nine years. It's like seeing him come  
 back to the house where we have missed him every  
 day for thirty-nine years, the house has dried up, no  
 one ever watered this heart, one never got over  
 waiting for him with the poisoned teeth of hopeless  
 hope, planted so deep in the nape of the neck, one  
 remained bitten with death. And now the endless  
 has an end and it's Thursday.<sup>44</sup>

My myopia and then the unsuspecting reading of Derrida's writing of goodbyes has now led to all our deaths. In the face of my myopia when my eyes became fingers that clutched at vulnerable strands. But not at all some empty space, some space of jam-searching, refrigerator-vulnerability, mundane-cold-box-encounter-with-death, then I have some sudden dreadful recognition of Derrida's conceiving of not-being and the not-being-of-others and the not-being-that-will-one-day-be-mine and even more terrible—the breathtaking and star-destroying apprehension of your-not-being.

*It's dark here and has that feel of being near an infinite edge. I am not at peace with death. The weather is cold and I have a chill. I am coughing, and consumed by it. This comes from the effort of holding back a maelstrom. This is the reason, cauterized by her mise-en-scène, her mise-en-scène which is an anti-prophylactic.<sup>45</sup> In her scene I am the one coughing up pieces of heart, they come up out from me and into the void. Ragged bits of flesh. Foam-specked, still bloody, wads of tissue and sputum. Some pieces fly over the edge. Some pieces fall on the ground at my feet. Some bits I wipe away from my mouth with my hands. Now my hands and mouth are stained with blood. My own blood and I am in pieces. She pours out of me.<sup>46</sup> I am choking up pieces of my heart after you, a stray fragment, by divine fortitude goes after you into the merciless cold; the gaping and raw void that marks the entrance to the dark-lands. Nothing happens, there is no magic in them but I could sooner hold back the seas, I could sooner divide waters from waters, I could sooner utter "Let there be," than stop myself from choking on these pieces of my heart.*

אסִתְמַצְאוּ אֶתְדוּדִי מִהִתְגִּידוּ לוֹ

If you see my lover would you please tell him <sup>[5:8]</sup>

— *Tell him this. “There is no I-am-without-you-being-with-me. I can snatch you from the brink. I am at the brink.”*

I go back up through Algiers to the Fish Market, a slight exultation carries me along, for I received an interior gift, while I was in that place where the cypress keeps watch. It’s a sentence whose modest appearance hides a paradoxical and thus inexhaustible treasure. “One can be inconsolable” it says. I am inconsolable. It is a limitless consolation. In the soul there is an infinity, it is sadness. Sadness is immortally young. I came to Algiers to find once more the immortal sadness. And I found it. It is with me.<sup>47</sup>

*Derrida is dead. He has descended into furrows of balsam. I am inconsolable.*

Dreizehnter Feber. Im Herzmund  
erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir, ...

[Thirteenth of February. In the heart's mouth  
an awakened shibboleth with you...]<sup>48</sup>



## 3

**Time; or, untenable postscript**

Arnika, Augentrost, der  
 Trunk aus dem Brunnen mit dem  
 Sternwürfel drauf,

in der  
 Hütte,

die in das Buch  
 - wessen Namen nahms auf  
 vor dem meinen? -  
 die in dies Buch  
 geschriebene Zeile von  
 einer Hoffnung, heute,  
 auf eines Denkenden  
 kommendes  
 Wort  
 im Herzen,

...<sup>49</sup>

[Arnica, eyebright, the  
 draft from the well with the  
 star-die on top,/in the /Hütte,  
 written in the book  
 —whose name did it record/before mine — ?  
 in this book/the line about/a hope, today,  
 for a thinker's word/to come,/in the heart ...]<sup>50</sup>

‘Todtnauberg’ [death mountain] is Celan-text, and it is hard to call such a forest-text, earth-text, blood-text, a ‘poem’ which might reduce it in comparison to the light and airy, triteness of prose to which we may be accustomed, to something, as if it might be overly ornamented. But it is not. His texts are bare and savage in their beauty. They strike us with small white flowers, that contain in the calyx, invisible thorns, striking through the reader, cutting the reader apart, slicing, as a ship slices through water and continues on, water closed up behind.<sup>51</sup> He writes endings—as it is about endings. Celan’s texts are the dark bark chips peeling back on the trees of a forested mountain, Todtnauberg. He finds his texts on the underside of leaves. His eyes are lips. His heart is bursting, with the memories of the untenable. He is a prophet-dreamer, who on finding a ladder, sits on the topmost rung, and looks down upon rivers, that criss-cross over a land forever promised.<sup>52</sup> All about him are the ‘stained feathers’ which are the vestiges of weary cherubim.<sup>53</sup>

איכה תרעה  
איכה תרביץ בצהרים

Where are you grazing?  
Where are you resting from the sun’s midday heat?

He is a Poet-sphinx, every text is a shibboleth. His word traces lie at the threshold of the Unbearable, at the threshold of a great Shoah, and the minute and continual Shoah of the heart; the one called Inconsolable. There are no glib meanderings here. The word-trails lead us away to a mountain scene, where on looking down we try to find life once again. Perhaps we are led on a series of half-trails, a plank-path, unfinished.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps they circle around Celan, formerly-bound, now-liberated, still bound, bandaged thinly holding open wounds, futile, small hopes like arnica blossom<sup>55</sup> and his old teacher, Heidegger, as they walk; too late; object unreachable. And in the poetic, that allows us the

vista of the ends from multiple vantage points we have two old teachers, one Heidegger, one Qohelet, both weary, jaded and doomed. Their philosophy sinks like the mist into mountain valleys. Sifting through the dark trunks filtered through by feeble rays of sunlight, time-obsessed; for “to each is a season, to each a time for every desire under the skies, a time to be born and a time to die....”<sup>56</sup>

עת ללדת ועת למות עת לטעת ועת לעקור נטוע:  
 עת להרוג ועת לרפוא עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות:  
 עת לבכות ועת לשחוק עת ספוד ועת רקוד:  
 עת להשליך אבנים ועת כנוס אבנים  
 עת לחבוק ועת לרחק מחבק:  
 עת לבקש ועת לאבד עת לשמור ועת להשלך:  
 עת לקרוע ועת לתפור עת לחשות ועת לדבר:  
<sup>57</sup> עת לאהב ועת לשנא עת מלחמה ועת שלום:

...

Eins und Unendlich,  
 Vernichtet,  
 ichten.

Licht war. Rettung.

[One and Infinite,/ annihilated,/ ied.  
 Light was. Salvation.]<sup>58</sup>

It is the fractured light of truth, bound up in the face of a girl, girl's form, girl's voice. A door opens in time. Girl steps through. A door opens, breaking time, wreaking havoc on temporal-spatial laws, twisting it open, shocking the lawyers who then drop their code books. Qohelet reels back. Stunned! Who would believe it? Here she comes! Once open all manner of riotous light breaks through. Stop the poem. Stop the poem at all costs. Light too bright. Is the light fractured or is it me? Salvation—what? End of the Law. End of death dance. *Amor Victus*.

The door opens, says the poem – that knows that all doors are magic spirits, and all poems are doors, and, in the same way Time opens and closes, according to its strange magic, Time, which is the very matter of our soul, our very substance, strange and dreaded.<sup>59</sup>

The Song of Songs runs to overflowing, Time. She grasps hold of what cannot-be-had. Out-of-time, outside-of-time, snatched from the brink, the devastating waves of time, lifted up on the magic carpet of the present-tense voice.

כִּיהֵנָּה הִסְתּוֹ עֶבֶר הַגֶּשֶׁם חֲלָף הַלֵּךְ לוֹ :  
הַנִּצְנִים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ ...

Winter is over, the rains too have passed  
Wildflowers appear on the earth.<sup>[2:11-12a]</sup>

Once and once for all time, and continually throughout time, she does not grope along. She is not distracted. She does not ‘forefeel’.<sup>60</sup> Everything is passion, everything is in action. She constantly arrives.

—*What time is it?*

One time alone: circumcision takes place but once.<sup>61</sup>

—*there is not enough blood to feed the restless earth; there was never enough blood. We knew it and cut anyway. ‘Circumcize the heart’. It never heals, never stops bleeding.*

The first time I saw Derrida ... he was walking fast and sure along a mountain’s crest, from left to right, I was at Arcachon, I was reading...<sup>62</sup>

The first time I saw Shulamith, I was reading. I was in Cairo and she was skipping on hills. I could see her in the distance, like a young gazelle, skipping, geddafling. I could see her from—

Herz:  
Gib dich auch hier zu erkennen,  
Hier, in der Mitte des Marktes.  
Ruf's, das Schibboleth, hinaus...

[Heart: make yourself known even here,  
Here, in the midst of the market.  
Call it out, the shibboleth ...]<sup>63</sup>

—the womb I had constructed in a vibrant café. All the raw materials were there, the hush of voices in a language I could not understand, hence, locked in my Imaginary, free to crest with the letters and lines into the space beyond, pillars I had drawn around me, from the edges of the book, knowledge that I was only a step away from the great pyramids, on the borders of Cairo, in between the minarets and bazaars, and the lunar luminescence filled my mind with a strong enough light by which to read, to open the door of the text, and step through its veils. For curtains, I pulled around me and sewed together the fragrant aroma of the strong thick coffee, cardamom and the scent of pistachios baked in pastry sheets, dripping with honey syrup. But while I sat immersed in a book, held aloft by rough-cotton cushions, the crumbling Sphinx himself rose and flew.

Even though I had thought I was undetectable in my solitary corner, he pulled me out to him and I was compelled to rise, book fluttered down by my side, Shulamith alone caught hold of my ankle; such is her grace and agility. I was suspended in space, meeting him in the sky, Celan-Sphinx, priest-of-the-Infinite. He flew like Icarus but did not fall. His wings held him. They were intrinsic to him.

Beneath him I saw the whole of Egypt, and the green lands I had loved to the north. In between was a great desert-wilderness where so little can grow, where I would die, given just a week or even three nights and a day. As we rose higher I saw the whole world, water tipped over the islands of the red sun. Shaking and tilting of a blue ball spinning in the vast blackness of space. My mind was filled with the most perplexing train of questions, conundrums, paradigms split like tablets of stone. So I could not bear his gaze that had at its core such certainty. I cried, "Tell me I am not the servant of time. Tell me we have time. Tell me we can escape its net."

Tür du davor einst, Tafel

[Door you in front of it once, tablet]<sup>64</sup>

He would not tell me, and instead he requested of me, the Shibboleth. If I could give that word, that 'mark of belonging', since as Woman, I had been refused The Circumcision<sup>65</sup> point blank, then I would pass out-of-time, and be bound to it no longer, but I could not give him the word, it was not marked on me. But the word, it was a signifier to my life. And because I could not give him the word, he gave me a scroll and he said, "Make out of that a door and you will live past time." At first I could not understand a single thing, and when I searched inside myself for the answer to the new mystery that he had asked of me, I was still face to face with Nothing. And then I remembered Shulamith was still caught hold of my ankle and we saw it, suddenly, together.

ihm  
tat ich mein Wort auf  
[...]  
Diesem  
beschneide das Wort,  
diesem

schreib das lebendige  
 Nichts ins Gemüt,  
 diesem  
 spreize die zwei  
 Krüppelfinger zum heil-  
 bringenden Spruch.  
 Diesem.<sup>66</sup>

[to him/ I opened my word/ [...]/ for this one,  
 circumcise the word,/ for this one/  
 write the living/ Nothing in the heart,  
 for this one/  
 spread the two/ cripple-fingers in the hallowing  
 sentence./  
 This one.]<sup>67</sup>

Write the living, this once, this one. *Diesem*. We would write the living. *Une fois*. And we would circle back on time.

The hour frightens me. I'm afraid it may be the last one. The hour I call upon is always the last one, the last hour of this time or perhaps the first hour of the next world.<sup>68</sup>

Write the living: the living word of telescoping.<sup>69</sup> In this my pen, my knife, my burst is fired on the page: circumcised, *diesem*, *beschneide das Word*. *Schreib das lebedige*—I take hold of flashes of time. I take hold of kindling hours and rouse the flames, watching the minutes crackle. I take the hallowed fingers. The cripple fingers, I hold them aloft to write the living lines, seconds dissipate into ether. I write them in the now. I write them before they arrive. And here they are already coming back.

—I have written with such ferocity. I have held two fingers aloft. I have died in each moment,<sup>70</sup> sick to death, sick with my love. I have loved and this has made

me mortal. I have opened my word in the hallowed sentence and been bitten to death.

Write the living: the heuristic word that marvelously opens a door into time itself.

—I have written in the always-present, instant, moment to moment time. I will never lose that good faith. I have loved, and grieved, and learned to live in the act of casting my voice forward into the void. A kind of living that is stronger than death.

Write the living: the irreconcilable, that finds itself, the living word, passing through her frame, a frame held aloft by two cripple fingers, opened, circumcised, swathed in the hallowed sentence.

—I have extended my hand, given my hand, held aloft the two hallowed fingers, reached towards you so that I could go to the very end, without fear.<sup>71</sup> There is not enough blood for the ground to rest. We must learn to live.

Write the living: the living book that desired to be written; the dream text, the hallowed, the “without destination;”<sup>72</sup> the book of love beyond time itself.

We don't believe in death. We never stop thinking about death. Grief and mourning begin long before the event, begin on the first day of love.<sup>73</sup>

How I have loved you. How I have loved you so that in letting you go I have released you. I have held aloft two fingers and I have let you go. My hand slipped from yours and I was not afraid. Your touch was still warm in my hand. And I hoped. I hoped you would return and I could learn to lose you all over again. In learning to lose you I hope to learn to live. Not, for the next hour, and not for the next year, and not for birthdays to come. But in the quiet reflection,



in my present moment, in pain, I will journey to you again. I already see you in the hills, skipping on the mountains of balsam,<sup>74</sup> cacophony of pomegranates.<sup>75</sup> Beautiful stranger.

—beautiful unfamiliar. To relearn the contours of your face. Each glance revealing what I have not known. Endless discovery. Beauty. New every morning.

It is always dawn here.

And she is always coming out of the shadows of Grief.

I know that I am living. I will suffer your beauty.

In the beginning I adored. What I adored was human. Not persons; not totalities, not defined and named beings. But signs. Flashes of being that glanced off me, kindling me. Lightning-like bursts that came to me: Look! I blazed up. And the sign withdrew. Vanished. While I burned on and consumed myself wholly. What had reached me, so powerfully cast from a human body, was Beauty: there was a face, with all the mysteries inscribed and preserved on it; I was before it, I sensed that there was a beyond, to which I did not have access, an unlimited place.<sup>76</sup>

*Filled up and no room for the otherwise. Fey. My love is fey. Finding myself belonging to this fey tribe; lost on a trail overgrown with nettles. And here I am writing fey, reading fey. Immersing myself in fey arts.*

Stimmen vom Nesselweg her:

Komm auf den Händen zu uns.  
Wer mit der Lampe allein ist,  
hat nur die Hand, draus zu lesen.

[Voices from the path of the nettles://  
come on your hands to us./ Whoever is alone with  
the lamp/ has only his palm to read from.]<sup>77</sup>

—Here I am. At your call. Here is my palm.

לערוגות הבשם  
וללקט שושנים

to furrows of balsam  
to ... harvest the lotus<sub>[6:2]</sub>

*Heart beginning to part, feel the hollow inside, holding my breath. Looking outwards-inwards-skywards. I hang on the line. Waiting for an answer. Just breath on the line. Where is he/she/you? Where is C.? Where is Shulamith? Here I am without him; without her. Warmth, skin, smell. Something is dying out there. Not even sense of loss, just empty space. The little, lost Michelin man, down behind the bed. Oh how I loved him, my bibelot.*

*So perhaps this is why?*

—Why? What do you see?

*Seeing the world born frame by frame. It's too much for me. I am pulled into its vortex. Breathing its life-death-life. Scooped up with its silver ladle, being*

*exhausted in advance, "the spring of the ever-present."<sup>78</sup> Scattered. Windblown. I am the remainder to our encounter. I am all that is left. What is left of me but the remainder of the remainder, an erased erasure.*

Grosse, glühende wölbung  
mit dem sich  
hinaus- und hinweg-  
wühlenden Schwarzgestirn-Schwarm<sup>79</sup>

Vast, glowing vault  
with the swarm of  
black stars pushing them-  
selves out and away<sup>80</sup>

—*You're afraid of the world.*

*Yes, I am afraid of the world and the world I cannot see. He opened the curtains. He left a gap under the window. It slipped in through the cracks. These rays, golden filaments. And more. Perhaps it shouldn't have been said. Etched. Its forever now. Where did he go? He hasn't read anything.*

—*Woman, garden-dweller.<sup>81</sup> Hearing voices I expect.*

*Voices from the grave, beyond the grave. How did he see so far? I fear for him. He leant too far out. One man, shouldn't write like that, so alone, so near the edge. Something she had written. When she had written like what had never been seen before. How she was cut then to shreds with shells. How her pages burned, like the library of Alexandria. Her body is burnt at Cinaron again and again. Nothing left but cinders.*

—*a fey spirit imprisoned by a Goblin king, who dresses in green, weighed down by his own merciless and obtuse judgments. He spits his poison and awaits a doom that he had no foresight of, a doom that would*

*surprise him. He has my mother in his sights. She conquered him with her laugh. Love made him melt. "Journey well," she said.*

*Everyone stands back and stares. She knew of course, H.C., or was it Eve who knew. Keeps it with her.*

The word 'I' is the true shibboleth of humanity.<sup>82</sup>

*The true shibboleth of humanity is I love.*

*—It is the “incarnation of a yes.”<sup>83</sup>*



*Dear Reader, Chagall dreams  
and the Shulamith is called  
out of her unending sleep.  
Shulamith dreams and  
Chagall is drawn forth out of*<sup>1</sup>  
*his tomb. His arts, the echo  
of a song; a dream within a  
dream. He fell upon her  
breast with each brush stroke.*<sup>2</sup>  
*He brought his whole being to  
the palette, to the canvas. His  
hands and fingers were eyes.  
Eyes that burst with blooms  
on the rainbow palette. He  
worked infinity, something he  
did with his whole being and  
she found a way to fly in with*<sup>3</sup>  
*the aid of the winged horse.*

# Dream Scenes

*Life-Death*

שימני כחותם על לבך כחותם על זרועך

Bare me as a seal upon your heart  
a seal upon your arm<sup>[8:6]</sup>





Figure 4: Marc Chagall, *Le Champ de mars*, huile sur toile, 1954-5.  
[Museum Folkwang, Essen]

## 1

## Le Champ de mars

[Marc Chagall, oil on canvas, 1954-55]

אשכל הכפר דודי לי  
בכרמי עין גדי

A spray of henna is my lover to me  
in the vineyards of Ein-Gedi <sup>[1:14]</sup>

Life surges through the shibboleth, diffusing through the cracks. Cold nights we search together, for the plant-of-the-heartbeat (a spray of henna), and in the day take shelter from the voracious mouth of the red sun. Against insurmountable odds, the untenable, postscript, into furrows that cannot be scripted, where text fails, is the pit into which I fell. Life-in-spite-of-death; life-in-the-midst-of-death: this is the name of the green thorny plant, first plant of the heartbeat, which became a great tree, surpassing the Eiffel Tower in height. I want to believe Jeremiah son-of-Belsen, but the shibboleth required here is the abject experience of which I have not, and besides, a heavy blue silence falls when I grasp the edges of that *tallith*. He says, as the blue soundless haze falls over Jerusalem or Paris or Cairo or Treblinka, and the ever-present bennu-bird appears, he has been watching since the beginning.

‘When in death, we are in the midst of life.’<sup>4</sup>

This is the refrain as she, my ashen-haired Shulamith, runs without fear against the watchers, the keepers of walls, barbed at the tops, her brush strokes, halo of hair, luminescent, ash-white luminescence of the moon. She is the moon, as a deep blue veil falls across silenced houses, in the dead of the night, night-blue, blue of the deep, blue of the curtains, an ancient and arcane night-blue,<sup>5</sup> and she

spends not a single thought on *mangeurs-de-mort*, but bursts out of Theresienstadt and Türkheim. She mourns, sings, pushes her breast against the thorn willingly, tears it out, the burst of blood, at 'one time once circumcision', the blood-red sun bursting open caught and staked on the spires of the Parisian monument, draining out onto the legs, and then bursting blossoms everywhere, bursting blossoms like fireworks in the night, blossoms like blood, blood flowers. Plant-of-the-heartbeat,<sup>6</sup> flowers, fragrant, divine—a spray of scent deep in the heart of Ein Gedi. Mourning, loving, transmuting, willing life to find a way back, in the face of death, conquered the red sun.

Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. ... Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.<sup>7</sup>

Jouissance in the contemplation of the beloved; endless jouissance in the face of the-nothing-more, the nothingness underlying barbarism; grasping hold of it, the memory of a love. The jouissance of life, whispers, invisible, veiled, in the midst of violence, hidden in the folds of pain. Never turning her face to the wall, always, always, turning towards the '*puisse*'.<sup>8</sup> She is the mistress of the skies, endless skies, his face, the yellow-green of the dying man, the sadness of the dying man. But not yet. The pulse is faint. He might live. The bennu-bird wills it.

your golden hair Margarete  
your ashen hair Shulamith.<sup>9</sup>

*Dear Reader, I went to the Champ de Mars. I went to la tour Eiffel. I looked upon it all. In the hot sun of afternoon in Paris' autumn, I looked upon it all. Where was Chagall in that crowd? I could not sense him. I need to return in the deep blue of twilight, in the space beyond the uninhabitable tumult of the crowds.*



Figure 5: Marc Chagall, *Le cirque bleu*, huile sur toile, 1950-1952.  
[Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne]

## 2

## Le cirque bleu

[Marc Chagall, oil on canvas, 1950]

שובי שובי השולמית  
שובי שובי ונחזה-בך

Turn, turn Shulamith!  
turn, turn, so we can gaze at you!<sup>[7:1]</sup>

The *sheen*, *shaddai*, the *shalom*, countering the *mit*, *mot*, of death. And the *shuvi*, *shuvi*, calling to turn, turn or return, return, framing her peace-death spiralling, circling, moving back in on herself.<sup>10</sup> Ebony hair reflecting the light of the moon, reflecting the red and blue of the bursting bouquet, the evidence of the quiet tree. Hair ablaze.

מה תחזו בשולמית

Why do you look at the Shulamith?<sup>[7:1a]</sup>

Visions. Envisionings, sight, and foresight. What shall you see? Why do you stare at the Shulamith as she twists and turns in rhythmic-arrhythmic lines, that twirl and move like a double helix spiralling into infinity. Spiralling into literature. The first ever, her 3000<sup>th</sup> birthday came today. One of the ever-living. I am the green headed horse. I twist my head back so I can see her dive again into the deep sea of Semitic-erotic verse. When will you come up again for air? Where are you there in the deep water beyond my sight? Where is your garden? Deep within the belly of the sea, young whale, where the sea anemones sway to

soundless music? When you sound your voice it echoes through the deep in waves. I turn my head at the sound.

# כמחלת המחנים

... as if she was the dance of battalions.<sup>[7:1]</sup>

*There I dance, blue, blue as the sky, blue as the twilight. Do I belong here? Not without you. I was waiting for you on the Pont des Arts but you didn't come. It was my fault. I had my tunic in my hands, my feet were washed. I heard you at the door. I couldn't move, and yet there I was on the Pont des Arts, weeping bitterly at your absence. C. I waited for you. He didn't come. This is the empty side.*

Silent as a steel blue fish clasping the bouquet in the deep water.

*Do you swim silently in waters far from me? Eyes staring away into the empty space. My little silver Michelin man, that has been missing and reappears sporadically. Where did you go? Where did I make you go? It should have been you.*

—all the time it was you.

*Here I go, woman-in-blue—there is the fish—eclectically positioning itself as usual. Yes, it's me. The cockerel clings to my leg. I will it! Sound the dawn! Bennu-bird, clasp on!!! This is me, diving into your words, wordlessly. Diving down into your alchemical lines, lines as never-ending as shorelines of Arcachon, as the dune of Pyla out at sea, as the lines of mourning women ever waiting for sailors who will never return home. Fish clasps a bouquet.*

—As it should, I am swimming in a blue sea of anonymity with a fish bearing a bouquet.

*C. I am waiting for you here. Out of my window the sculptor avoids his responsibilities, says he wants to go surfing. Here I am writing. Where is she? The text? The Shulamith? The writer, Cixous? Near here I think. She is near the metro at Denfert-Rochereau. Near the Allée Samuel Beckett. But I might as well be the mime, the clown Pierrot and C. my Columbine. White painted melancholic-face, sad look, black lined lips, ridiculous apparel. I can walk without moving from my place, I can talk without making a sound. All around me are invisible walls, I push at them. I watch another world go by from within my silent shell. I have learned to be an excellent mime.*

The mask weeps eternally with lips that will never close again, with surprised lips."<sup>1</sup>

*—pas assez proche*

*Here I am looking out from the 5<sup>th</sup> floor window, double-shuttered, on the Rue de Jean Bart. Who was Jean Bart? A tailor, a painter, a poet? No, he was a pirate, a fat man who tyrannized the English. He died when his lungs inflamed, inflamed to such a degree, he drowned on land, in his own body, when his lungs inflamed. He was dead at 51.*

*I saw the statue in Notre Dame today, Jeanne d'Arc. Another woman sacrificed to fire. Did she swim through the blue air? An acrobat. Jean Bart was an acrobat too from low birth to high rank, a feat nothing short of miraculous. La Rue du miracle, Jean Bart, just a step away from the Paradise of the Jardin du Luxembourg.*

*C., I forgot you for a minute and now you return through my double window, ma fenêtre à double. Weeping at the possibilities lost. How much fun it would have been—I would have taken you to the Pont des Arts. We would have walked to Sacré Cœur.*



—*Sacré Cœur; our love; fragile as porcelain-white eggshell.*

*There is our little one in our bed. There she is, with a painting of Van Gogh's Irises framing her head.*

*Where is the green horse? Is it you? The green horse stares at me so, exciting my paranoia. He may even creep out of his frame. Threaten me with his accusation; request from me the evidence that I had indeed given my whole being. So I dive back down into the deep. What are you? Are you this half horse half man in green that troubles me so? Don't worry; it is me who is fey and my difference sets me in another species, another spectrum, another light. I am the green horse. I am the moon at play on violin strings. The distance mutes my violin. I am so far away that I miss everything, I can't see a thing.*

The moon plays the violin. The night sings in harmony. The falling light, the falling trills of its strings.

... comme la vie même incompréhensiblement forte  
alors qu'elle est si fragile...<sup>12</sup>

*I am drinking too much wine now, red wine from the Côtes du Rhône. I am thinking of you and drinking red wine from the Cellier des Dauphines. It is making me write, turning ink to blood. It seeps out, there's wine-blood on the page. How you would drink it with me if you were here. Wine or blood? Drinking me. You have a way of being in foreign lands, and every sight is an avid interest to you. I would see what I couldn't have seen without you. The whole world is Aladdin's cave to you. I can see that you stare straight at me. Missing you drags me down to the Atlantic. Down, down to the quiet, blue deep. I was at Notre Dame without you today. I saw the locks on the Pont des Arts. I was locked to you there. I have done it now that I have written it.*

*But it hurts. I am still here, at my 5<sup>th</sup> story double window on an ancient Parisian street, locked to you on the Pont des Arts.*

*—You are drunk with it now. I can't see you clearly.*

*The last glass now. It goes down and takes me with it. I am lulled into sleep. But it doesn't ease the narrow pain of my love.*

הולך לדודי למישרים דובב שפתי ישנים

— it goes to my lover smoothly/ moving gently the  
lips of sleep<sup>13</sup> [7:10]

The blue bennu-bird knows. It is perched on my leg as I dive into the twilight moon glow. I have a fan, a crown, necklaces, lace, an acrobat's red leotard, embroidered satin pantaloons, blue as the dying day, blue as the roses at light's end. It's enough apparel to satisfy each of the keepers of death's gates.

*I am drinking wine coasting on my melancholia into the deep blue. How I long. Below my window is the noise of the street. Rue de Jean Bart, street of the pirate. The street of the tall fat man, the buccaneer who drowned in his own lungs. How I miss you here. I would have made love to you in the street of the pirate king. My own pirate king, golden prince of the orient, sailing seven seas, sailing away, the mast slowly disappears.*

It's a circus tent, holds itself miraculous above the ground, in sea's deep or in the twilight of the blue Parisian night.

*My love for you is a circus tent of absurdity. I created it all. The uncertainty of it, of you, of your love, gapes beneath me. I am going to fall. He is mortal. I dreamed him into an archangel in my night watches, when I was asleep on the bed.*

*—make your meaning. I have made meaning of you.*

*It was absurd, here I go, to France without you. What was it in me that said—No Wait-Think, Count, which voice left you behind and why?*

*I haven't dreamt for 3 days. You are not beside me but I still feel your presence pull on me. It's like straining to hear the sounds of the strings, the straining to hear the ... [there is the echo of the echo of a sound but I can't work it out.] You know I haven't dreamt a single thing, not a single dream scene has been given to me here. That faculty has dulled with your distance. My dreams are the muted images of the background dancers. The daughters of Jerusalem at play on the edges.*

*I'm there again, in the heat of the desert. The 'daughters of Jerusalem' was the portal that took me suddenly from the Rue de Jean Bart. I think I fell into the bottle of wine from the Côtes du Rhône . Sure enough the green glass surrounds me. The desert sand surrounds here at the bottom and the glass fades. It must be a genie's trick. We are here together wandering through the sandy, wind-sculpted passages of the Wadi Moses. At every turn there is a beautiful façade. I have to crane my neck to see its top because of the narrowness of the walkways. There you were, there with me, hand in mine. Warm, strong. Lover. You were with your own, the Bedouin-pirates of the desert. Kohl-lined, golden-skinned, raven-haired, scent, aroma like the bark of the cinnamon tree, magicians, time-travellers. Galloping on camels through the aeons. The daughters of Jerusalem look on and laugh with delight at their bravado. Donkeys bray discordantly. We drink the minted lemon in the heat of the blue day. The sands creep up around us. We have to move or they'll take us. We take in the vista of an entire valley from the King's tomb. There is no time here. We are every moment. You stand in the carved door. On the other side is death. I love you. [This is what I said with my eyes.] I loved you there. I was sure for just that moment that you loved me.*

*—You forget the spiral movement of your body. You are always in the process of returning. This is how I survived my death to come to you.*

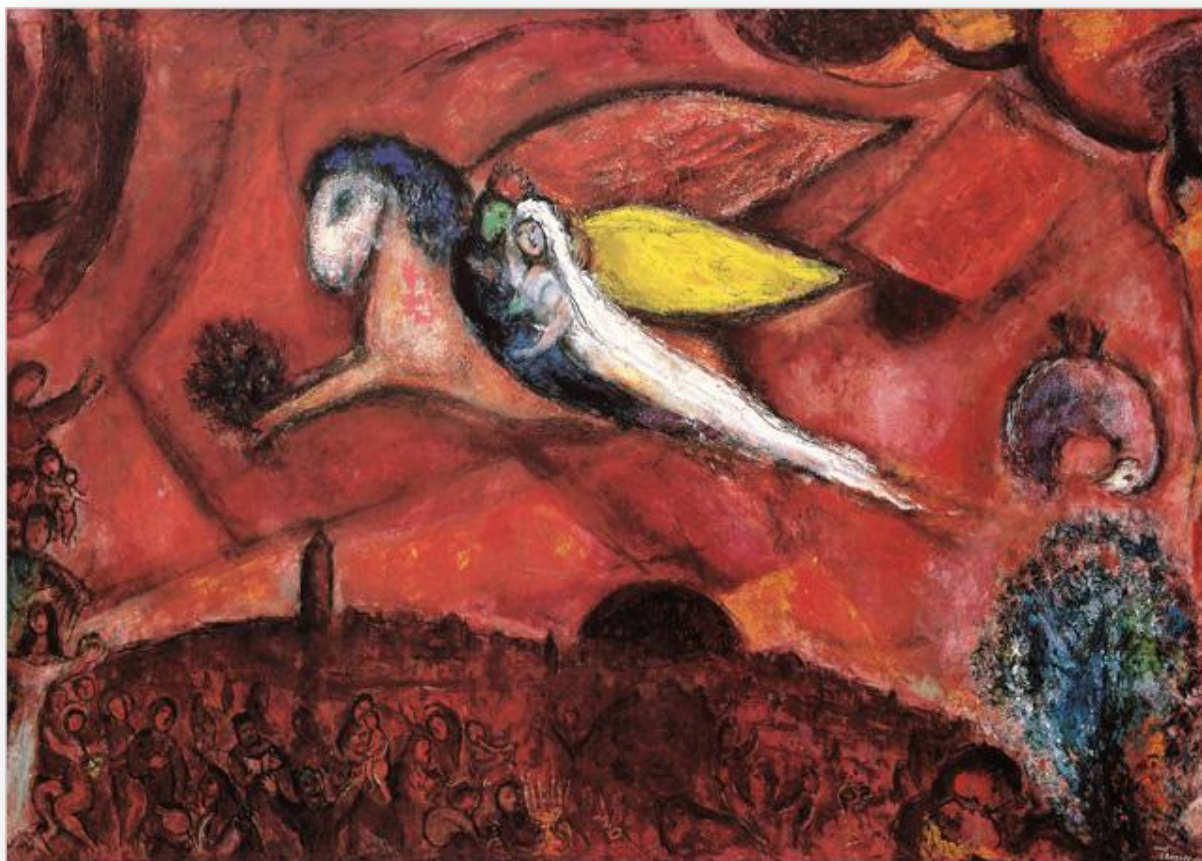


Figure 6: Marc Chagall, *Le Cantique des Cantiques IV*, huile sur toile, 1958.  
[Musée Marc Chagall, Nice]

## 3

**Cantique des cantiques IV**

[Marc Chagall, oil on canvas, 1958]

כפלח הרמון  
רקתך מבעד לצמתך

Like a round of pomegranate  
your cheek behind your veil<sub>[4:3]</sub>

The whole world encapsulated in the blush of the pomegranate. Bride and Groom soar over the throbbing red pulp of humanity. A silo. Red and black. A setting sun, black. The masses come out to see them soar over. Are they free from the damning redness that has stained their fellows. The babes in arms. The darkness over the towns and villages. It's true. The cockerel is upside-down. A totem that tells me it is just a dream. Or the bennu-bird usurped by the blue-green burst of a tree of life. True, I had missed the flying horse. Is she Promethea, come to lend her raw passions?

לססתי ברכבי פרעה

Like a mare amongst pharaoh's chariots<sub>[1:9]</sub>

Clasping the bouquet, white, blood-red, yellow of the sun. Of course, how could I miss her? I believe her, so she is not a sign of my waking into the dream, her tri-colour tears tear me three ways. Again his face tells me he is dying, lover, man who wears a blood red crown, green death-hand pressed against her beating heart. She shines. White and gold. Skin like butter. Perfect one. She will never die. She keeps death at bay with the trail of her white garments, the tinge of ash

grey against her face. Is she already falling? Bursting into flame. Phoenix. Love, the magic talisman of all fey dreamers. The firmament in primordial pieces. Red copper plates hammered into the ceiling of the sky. Or falling from it. The world fails, its foundations crumble, or does he tease us with the red folds of the dimly lit circus tent (an ode to absurdity.) And in this beaten, copper-red firmament, there are reflections of the pulp of humanity. The light of the menorah can barely raise its glow through the sombre red of beating heart and blood. I flow with the crowd, the villagers, the townsfolk, through the blood veins of the civilization, of all our prehistories. Flowing through like a human tidal surge.

“Come!” was barely out of my mouth, in one leap, without hesitating, without thinking, had not loosed herself from the center of the earth, had not immediately torn herself from her time, her history, her laws, her country, the egg would have burst ... if Promethea had not, in that very instant, and transformed herself in Humility, the great winged mare, and flapping her voluminous wings, her silvery mane standing on end, the banner slices through the air from the bottom up, she rises, she comes, she obeys, she takes the order, she picks up my heart, softly whinnying she comes in through the window, she puts my heart back into my breast. And she is there. I said “Come!” And there was light, all the way inside my breast... And then – how does this end? How does one end the infinite?<sup>14</sup>

It is the tree that remains. A blue paradox in a red world, reflecting through her mane, residue of light falling on his clothes. It is a tree of life, the gateway to the Infinite, in a world ruled by the Merciless Laws of mortality and fate. He escapes into its breast. Of course, she does not need its blue waters. She already is *l'étoile de la mer*.

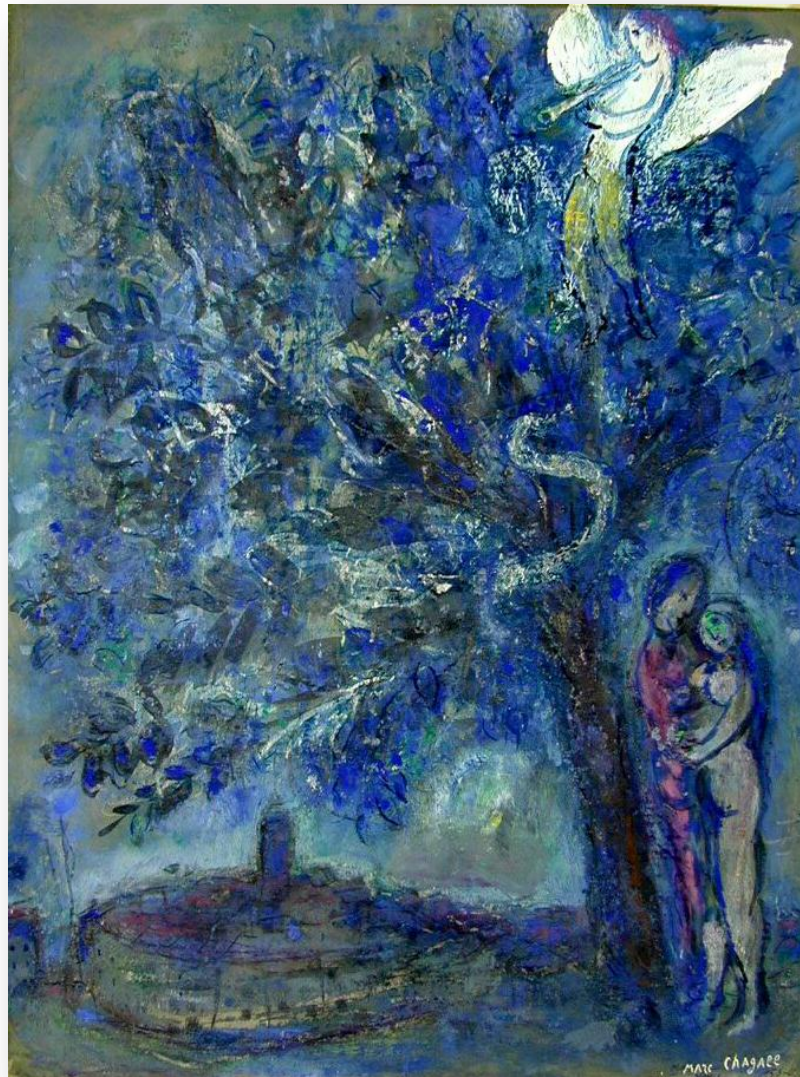


Figure 7: Marc Chagall, *Adam et Eve*, gouache et pastel, 1953-4.  
[Haifa Museum of Art, Haifa]



## 4

**Adam et Eve**

[Marc Chagall, oil on canvas, 1953]<sup>15</sup>

תחת התפוח עוררתיך  
שמה חבלתך אמך  
שמה חבלה ילדתך

Beneath the apricot tree I awoke you  
There your mother travailed for you  
There she wrested and awoke you to life [8:5]

Angel trumpeter and the white serpent indistinguishable from the glistening of the branches in the moonlight. Eve's Eye. It's dark. Two lovers seem uninterested in fruit. They taste each other, alone, deliciously apart from the small darkened town that lies in evening haze below. Love is as strong as death. The pallor of death is already upon them. Vehement as Sheol, they coast above its jaws. Sheol, that is Eurydice's land of the living dead. She leans out of her tree. Tree of life. The tree of life, law-breaker.

This is the experience of the apple, of this apple invested with every kind of power. We are told that knowledge could begin with the mouth, the discovery of the taste of something. Knowledge and taste go together. Yet the mystery of the stroke of the law is also staged here...<sup>16</sup>

Under the tree, the serpent bites me. What could have been? I sink away into the belly of the earth.<sup>17</sup>

*C. would have been here had I not made him stay on distant islands. Just a job I said. Just to write and perhaps his distance would have made me reel with words and I could finish the book or it could finish me. Yes, it is as I said and I can't bear it now. I strain to hear his flute-song.*

*—Take it, it's yours.*

Shadow-Serpent bite me hard because this is what I desire. Give me a new name. Call me Eurydice. Yes, I have entered a shadow-world, just as Eurydice was trapped inside the shadow-land of Ovid's book, at his beck and call, how he tortured her. I am trapped across oceans, watery barriers. An ocean of paper weighs me down. Did she ever speak, Eurydice, Ovid's puppet? Sing for me, Orpheus. Is that you in the tree, white singer with wings?

*—This sense, this mood, this hypostase. When will you take the gift?*

*I can't take the Gift. It leaves me as bare as Inanna.*

The nymphs at the Medici fountain are weeping. My mother took their picture. 'Gaze at me', I said, even though the world will slip away.<sup>18</sup>

*Shulamith, are you here? C. would have been here but I left him under the tree.*

What Eve will discover in her relationship to concrete reality is the inside of the apple, and this inside is good. The Fable tells us how the genesis of "femininity" goes by way of the mouth, through a certain oral pleasure, and through the nonfear of the inside.<sup>19</sup>

*—Take the gift, don't gaze back! Take And Eat It All.*

The tree is with me now and I remember, but will not remember it forever. Here it is from her eye-fingers. I have eaten it through and through. I drank it like it was henbane.<sup>20</sup> Poisoned apple? Eternity implodes, consumes itself. I'm left here with death.

What the person we love gives us is first of all mortality. It is the first 'thing' they give us. With the person we do not love we are much less mortal.<sup>21</sup>

*This morning before dawn  
 I was wrapped up in him  
 A tangle of roots and branches  
 Twigs, leaves, dry, red, yellow, green and pungent humus  
 We wove each other down into the rich earth  
 and lifted ourselves upwards towards an open sky  
 entwined with vines, bursting with shoots  
 and within we were burning brighter than any star*

*Last night I was wrapped up in him.  
 He held me and I found myself coasting into starlight  
 We coasted on bands of energy, quintessence of soul  
 You were all warmth and all peace  
 נשמה [Neshamah; breath]<sup>22</sup>  
 נשמתִי [Nishmati; my breath]  
 I rested in your embrace  
 It was the true rest  
 It was all life.  
 I died softly  
 Breath left  
 Love*

*Its 7:15 in the evening now. I am in Arcachon, below Notre Dame on the Allée de Chapelle, she watches over me as she watches out to sea. Our little daughter sleeps. Elle a une toux.<sup>23</sup> I dream with her without dreaming, clasped in her little arms, because my dreams have left me, entwined by her little legs. My dreams hover in the air somewhere between us, caught their kite tails on some distant, barren peak in the highlands of Afghanistan, rugged and merciless. My dreams are there trembling, lost in the Hindu Kush. That is the way I flew, over mountains rugged and merciless, completely barren of trees. She is a little tree. She gives pure gifts. Little snake. Bites me every day. How she bites me with her gifted-ness. I have nothing to return to nullify the given-ness that she is. The Gift leaves me naked and without defence. I am marked all over with her little life-water<sup>24</sup> bites.*

... Wald und Tal  
 und Weg und Ortschaft, Feld und Fluß und Tier;  
 und daß um diese Klage-Welt, ganz so  
 wie um die andre Erde, eine Sonne  
 und ein gestirnter stiller Himmel ging,  
 ein Klange-Himmel mit entstellten Sternen-:  
 Diese So-geliebte.<sup>25</sup>

*—You call to him, as I call. You underestimated the sear of your gaze.  
 You gifted him. Now he falls.*

הסבי עיניך מנגדי שהם הרהיבני

Turn away your eyes!  
They overwhelm me!<sup>[6:1]</sup>

Gift. Pure Gift. It is a gift that can only be given without knowledge.<sup>26</sup> It cannot be returned, it cannot be the source of gratification. A gift without return, without destination. A true gift is available in only one form. The true gift is love. Love-tree. She is our love-tree.

Because in love—if not, there is no love—you give yourself, you trust, you entrust yourself to the other. And, contrary to what one might think, this is not at all abstract. It is true that one deposits oneself. *There is a deposit*, and one is deposited in the other person. And if the other goes off with the deposit, one truly cannot recuperate the deposit. What was given can never be taken back... So in reality, virtually, when we love we are already half dead. We have already deposited our life in the hands that hold our death: and this is what is worth the trouble of love. This is when we feel our life, otherwise we do not feel it.<sup>27</sup>

I wash my hands. First three times on the left and then three times on the right while reciting a prayer that doesn't mention God's name.

*—your hands were unclean, that's why you didn't mention God's name, but it was there on the tip of your tongue. The most secret name.*

A bird call begins each morning<sup>28</sup>

*—he was a slave and her gift was the whole world, his to die next to her bones, where 'the dead had gathered to bring her in'.<sup>29</sup>*

The Story begins with the Apple: at the beginning of everything, there is an apple, and this apple, when spoken of, is spoken of as a fruit-not-to. There is an apple, and straightaway there is the law.<sup>30</sup>

*Under an apricot<sup>31</sup> tree I awoke you. Feed me with apricots for I am dying  
with your love. Caressed by the white serpent who leads me below. What  
law? There is only the law of love. It afflicts me. It falls like the gentle haze  
of the Autumn twilight. Leaves of the tree ready to fall. Turning already.  
Being reborn.*

*—I'm falling!*

*It was my gaze. I had to look at you. Return to me.*



We fall. A fall like Eurydice's — a fall into Hades, or a fall out of it. A necessary banishment that sends the lovers spiraling into the other. There are gazes here that cannot meet, except at sunrise and sunset as light rises and darkness falls, or when light falls and darkness rises. Would we be without either of these sites of transition? Sunrise and sunset, sites of infinite flux. This is the site at which we experience the other—as we pass by, as the other's glance pulls them down into mortality. This is the gift we are given. I can see the pallor on her skin. The pallor of mortality spreads across her infinitely beautiful face. Given! The gift of mortality. The gift of Bataille's discontinuity.<sup>32</sup> Love is the gift of suffering.

... Adam and Eve who lose only the paradise of the blind, who are banished only from the point of view of the divine, who are born at last, who emerge, who become: I was the couple hacked apart, severed, condemned in its flesh for having found out the secret of pleasure, because in its body Eros marries masculine with feminine, because Juliette is loved in Romeo more than the Law and the fathers, because Isolde enters Tristan as his joy, his femininity, Tristan resists castration in Isolde.

I was the enemy of death, but does that mean "being" someone?<sup>33</sup>

—*She is a tree of life, that's someone.*

The tree of life cannot-be-had. It is a gift. Love itself is a great tree. An axis mundi.

*Out of a tree stump  
cool, fresh, live with sap  
diffuse with air<sup>34</sup>*

## תחת התפוח עוררתיך

Beneath the apricot tree I awoke you ...[8:5]

*We are trees of life. We wind ourselves down into the earth and then shoot up into the sky, bursting with blooms. We are trees, eternal trees. I am awoken. Awoken to pain, to desire.*

השבעתי... מהתעירו ומהתעררו אתהאהבה עד שתחפץ

Promise me ... would you stir up and awaken love at  
the limits of desire? ...[8:4]

*—I am a fountain of life, drink me, I am a fountain alcove, a Queen of the Medici. Fountain, spring of the sea nymph. Like Acis and Galatea I flow like a river out of both sorrow and pain but always into life. Let desire brim to overflowing. Accept this gift of love.*

My beloved is mine and I am his  
My love, she wrote. His voice flowed in the room  
and she heard the rivers run to the sea. It is never  
full, it is never full. She almost wrote her name for  
his. Sometimes she was frightened. He kissed her in  
his dream and her forehead was calm as a lake. He  
said, my sister, and the color of her eyes changed.  
The waters that rose before her  
quiet...<sup>35</sup>

*We can never live long enough, our tears flow like rivers. Serpentine streams that feed the plants and trees on grassy banks, the banks upon which sits the Huluppu tree.*

*—I am afraid of mortality's bite.*

גן נעול  
 אחתי כלה  
 גל נעול  
 מעין חתום

*A garden enclosed,  
 my sister, my bride!  
 A spring enclosed  
 A fountain sealed* <sup>[4:12]</sup>

מעין גנים  
 באר מים חיים  
 ונזלים מן־לבנון  
 עורי צפון ובואי תימן  
 הפיחי גני יזלו בשמיו  
 יבא דודי לגנו  
 ויאכל פרי מגדיו

—A fountain of gardens  
 a spring of living waters  
 and flowing streams from Lebanon <sup>[4:15]</sup>  
 Awake, Zaphon! And come Tayman!  
 Breathe into my garden, let my perfumes stream  
 Let my lover come into his garden,  
 and taste its treasure of fruit <sup>[4:16]</sup>



# Epilogue





## Buddha and the lime tree

You fell asleep under my hands tonight. That still quiet time of night. The rustle of the children turning their story book pages had died away to silence. They wondered what was wrong. I don't often stay still long enough to touch you.

But it was that awful grating silence today.

We sat close but on separate peaks. I could reach out but my hand passes through your clasp. It slips away. You don't want to take hold of it.

All over a tree, and a hundred other little things and big things. The lime tree. Is it dying or living? Dying you say. We need to trim it back. Living I say—leave it alone—can't you see the buds.

Betrayed. Gentle touches pull away, transplanted by a rough edge.

"Let me rub your back." I say. "I'll make it really nice."

It's a lure. I can't stand it. I want to touch you again. I know if I find my oils and salves and make a place for you to lie down. The lamp low. The room still and close. The bed—soft, firm, warm and cool. You'll come.

You fell asleep under my hands tonight. I was touching your hands. The aroma of geranium and beeswax diffusing from the salve slippery on my fingers, the musk scent of warm bodies in a close room. I was prodding the soft part of your palm and it was so warm, so alive. Why did we fight over a tree?

I want to protect that tree from the secateurs; little shears with which my grandmother would cultivate her roses with practised skill. Macabre and

horrifying today. I could barely restrain myself from throwing myself in front of them. “Stop it! You kill it!” I said. I’ve been watching the flowers become buds. The first little fruits, will they hold? I’ve imagined that little tree alive with flowers and fruit. I’ve been watching the leaves turn from yellow to verdant green. Our first limes.

Your hand is flinching. Have I hurt you? No, that was before—about a poor little tree. It’s a dream, you’re dreaming. For a moment I forget and all my focus is entangled in the feeling of your hand right now. So vulnerable, so fleshy, soft, warm, smooth. So human. So mortal. All of a sudden there is nothing more important than your being here. My being here with you in this close room, in the lamplight, touching your hand. Assuaging the weariness of a turbulent day.

It’s your tree. We bought it for you. And when we moved I went back to get it. It almost died when we moved it to our new place. I had dug a deep hole, filled it with rich humus. My father helped me put it in. You said “Don’t move it, it’ll die.” But I moved it anyway. I wanted us to have it. It was our tree. To be sure, it almost did die. The little trunk twisted and gnarled. Leaves standing straight up like hackles; hairs on end. Green jolting to yellow. Quite literally a tree in shock. It’s a kaffir lime. It’s special because it’s not from here. We have lemons galore but we found this tree in a shop. It reminded you of home. We wanted to harvest the leaves to make Tom Yum. It is your tree. You and that tree. Why today of all days? Why trim it down, cut it back. I can see where you scarred it. It’s a long way from home, in a place where lemon trees grow like crazy and little lime trees torque and struggle. And then I see it. I see an association. I see a thread that ties you to the lime. And your fear of death; its death; its slow death—right in the same place I had seen life.

I see you. Here, under my breath. Sleeping, breathing. I bend my head to take a draught of that warm scent. I smile, I'm sure I smelt lemon grass and lime leaf. I want to treasure you here, asleep under my hands. Face peaceful, eyes shut, my reclining Buddha. But you are not stone. You are breathing, steady, a shudder—lost in a jungle dream of Tui the buffalo, childhood friends, half naked, golden skin wet and gleaming, laughing and shrieking in the river, leaping from the branches.

*I am afraid to end here so unconventionally. It is neither a beginning nor an ending. In fact, I am afraid if it ends here (even if it is on its way back), it ends on a discomforting note, tart like lime juice. I don't know how the story will move after this and whether it will be happy or sad.*

*—But, we have been together on a very long journey and we made a space for the life and love, in all its colours, including that of the sky in the twilight, and the colours of a raging sun.*

*Loving the unknown, not knowing who he is, allowing the displacement between us, allowing it also to return and also to escape.*

*—You have allowed for cross-path'd sorrows. You have set him free, a risk for life.*

*Shouldn't love be glad, and not this bitter-sweet stuff?*

*—This is the jouissance of living in the vortexes of the human condition. She embraces and tears. "As soon as there are flowers, there's blood."<sup>1</sup>*

*Then we have come to the end. We have written for life, in the face of death.*

*Who is this?*

*—She is a tree of life.*

מִיִּזְאֵת

הַנִּשְׁקָפָה כְּמוֹ־שַׁחַר

יָפָה כְּלִבְנָה

בְּרָה כְּחֶמֶה

אֵימָה כְּנִדְגָלוֹת

Who is this?

She appears

like the dawn

Beauty

like the white moon

Searing

like the sun's rays

Breath-taking

like myriad constellations<sup>[6:10]</sup>

*Dear Reader,*

*It is the end of this thetic journey through the ancient text, the Song of Songs, and the beginning of another. I have embraced the oeuvre of Hélène Cixous. I have journeyed through a series of reflections on a hermeneutic sourced in écriture féminine and post-structural literary theory. I have explored encounter and absence in the Song of Songs alongside Barthes. I encountered the Song of Songs in my own world-space, buoyed by Cixous's writings. In the final sections, I engaged with Derrida, and Celan joined us in the final weaves of this tallith as you and I gazed into the face of the sun. We saw that life and death are enigmatic; their dynamics threaded with myriad interconnections. On a knife edge, they lie on either side. Tree of life. The Song of Songs is a life text. It orients itself in the face of death and then leaves no room for it. Shulamith comes up from death and spills into life. The vehicle is love. She loves and lives. This tallith, has been a weaving for life. This is its side. The side of the Song of Songs, the side of Cixous. And this thetic. I-We-you have written it for life.*

*I have reached an end. Rather like Bilbo at the beginning of The Lord of the Rings. I shall now slip on the ring and disappear. Only the text remains signalling that I was here, once; and as someone I love once said: "what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a ..."*

{J'ai un peu peur pour ce livre. Parce que c'est un livre d'amour. C'est un buisson de feu. Mieux vaut s'y jeter. Une fois dans le feu, on est inondé de douceur. J'y suis: je vous le jure.}<sup>3</sup>





# Notes

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## **Front matter**

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing & Other Essays*, ed. Deborah Jensen (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 47.

<sup>2</sup> ... she speaks – a poetic whisper, the lightest touch and a flash, a glimpse. The glimpse of the very edge of a petal, a brilliantly coloured lotus, vermilion, the colour of blood. Already she is unbearable and unforgettable.

All translations of the Song of Songs are my own (unless otherwise noted) from the Hebrew text of the Song of Songs as presented in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: with Westminster Hebrew Morphology*. Electronic [Logos] ed. (Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996/1925)., In coming to an English translation I have been inspired by Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995)., and also Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible*, trans. Marcia Falk (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis, 2004).

## **Preface**

<sup>1</sup> This is a fictive piece of direct speech based on H.C.'s account of the discourse between herself and JD [Jacques Derrida] in Hélène Cixous, "The Flying Manuscript," *New Literary History* 37, no. 1 (2006): 18 & 21. I begin here in the preface with Derrida, *l'homme qui a vécu*. It was the moment of remembering his death that killed him again. I was surprised by my visceral reaction to it, considering I had known. I had simply forgotten. In the forgetting—my *oubli*—somehow he had lived on in me, resuscitated by my reading, my meditation on these lines. His beloved themes of life and death. This phenomenon translates. Perhaps also the Song of Songs lives.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Points ... : Interviews 1974-1994*, ed. Elizabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 340.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* [Ich und Du], trans. Walter Kaufmann, Touchstone ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Book of Promethea*, trans. Betsy Wing (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> My own reflective voice in the process of transformation.

<sup>6</sup> An imagined voice of the Shulamith; phoenix-voice, marked by *le tîret*.

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<sup>7</sup> Note Derrida's play on the idea of communication as a 'sending' in Jacques Derrida, "Envois," in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

### ***Prelude to a kiss***

<sup>1</sup> A question mark is placed here because it is not known who composed the Song of Songs and so the social orientation of the author also is again a matter for speculation. Discussions of authorship take on the shape of probability rather than certainty. Some scholars hypothesize the text into the realm of village women's rites of passage while others locate it within scribal court poetry; others see it as clever anti-monarchist satire. For the purposes of this thesis I hypothesize with justification that the Song of Songs is a kind of ancient *écriture féminine*, and encounter her as an 'other-writing' and as having an enigmatic (contretemps) possibilities for reading and meaning, rising in the text as subtle, devastating and unstable elements of resistance which find themselves set subtly against, contravening phallogocentric categories of Word, Name and Law.

Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*: 187, also Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, and Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg, *Solomon's Vineyard*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie, *Ancient Israel and its literature* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). Also LaCocque's "The Shulamite," in *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, ed. André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 235-264.

<sup>2</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le Livre de Promethea* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*: 115-6. *Daimonion* is a term of Socratic origin used by Buber in *Ich und Du* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1974).

Note Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010)., and *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975). 'The Stolen Child', W.B. Yeats, in William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Herts, GB: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 14.

I am waking to a dream within a dream. This déjà vu haunts me though I have tried to find a way out of this labyrinth countless times, and I wake up again, back in the ominous silence of unquiet sleep and not in the world. Through the array of atoms by which we are entangled through vast reaches of time, your hands stretch towards me through the black on white.

It's a faery ring, this moment of mingling hands and mingling glances, of restless dreams and arcane dances. I am stolen away. So tell me, Socrates of the Infinite I ... of the Infinite Conversation. What is this text-being? Why does my *daimonion* say 'You' to her and beyond this we share the 'I'? What is the

nature of this life-text that has breathed into me, mingled with my 'nephesh'? And my eyes become wet with tears because no matter how much I desire to break the gaze, flee from the moment, I can still hear her. A singer is singing and there is a sharp intake of breath.

With Yeats we grieve. We grieve for the Stolen Child taken from us. We also yearn for the warm clasp of the faery on our own child-hand,

While the world is full of troubles  
And is anxious in its sleep.  
Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping  
than you can understand.  
—William Butler Yeats

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1(1976): 885.

<sup>5</sup> Cixous explores the notion of the *Empire du Propre* (unchanging dominance of phallogocentric systems) derived from Hegel, in "Sorties," *The Newly Born Woman*, ed. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Alex Marengo, "Hélène Cixous & Jonathan Ree Interview," in *Talking Liberties*, (Great Britain: Praxis Films Ltd., 1992).

Phallogocentric. The Phallogocentric Word. Phallogocentrism. It's a heavy word says Cixous in her 1995 interview with Alex Marengo. Set in its heavy Lacanian milieu, it is a word that she fears. She does not say, however, that it does not exist. She does wonder if the word is so very misunderstood that it offends men rather than the patriarchal system it is meant to offend (offend it so that it reveals itself for what it is). Ironically, in discussing her fear of the word, and its heaviness, she brings it into the scene. I fear the word, and I fear what the fear of the word might do in covering the power of the word to open the eyes to a system of subtle systemic suppression of the Feminine.

Regarding phallogocentrism and subversive text Elizabeth Grosz provides a background and introduction. Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 86.

<sup>8</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself in the Letterbox*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 19.

<sup>9</sup> In the conventional thetic we take this beautiful butterfly and pin her out flat. Having taken a scalpel to her we examine her internal spaces. We cut her open and preserve her in an academic formaldehyde, and hope to have the dissecting notes (notes of murder) published by some reputable group. But this is how it's done in a world where the 'Masculine' is privileged, and 'Feminine'

diminished. Is this text simply an object? An object to objectify? But of course she is merely a text. There is no standing ethic against the dispassionate analysis of a text. Don't we all want the 'true' reading? And in many circles the *a priori* assumption, law, tradition takes first place and demands from its followers a divine reading, or a natural reading, a critical reading, a consensual reading. Each of these readings especially if they are predetermined, derail encounter and in the eyes of some become not-reading. We tell her how to dance and measure her steps. The pure scientific, empirical methodology asks for the test, then to observe, replicate. What if I want to break her free? What if she breaks free anyway? Is there a thetic that would allow me? Or do I create a new discourse, and a new hermeneutic?

<sup>10</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Cixous gives reasons in "Sorties" for her appropriation of the term bisexuality. She contests that prior to this point there has only been one avowed sexuality (a monosexuality), and the other exists only in reference to it. Cixous argues for the actualizing of a 'fantasy of complete being', where masculine and feminine are freely expressed, held lightly and celebrated in difference. And finding more room that avows the equitable speaking of all kinds of discourses, including those polarized into masculine/feminine, without the hegemony of the phallogentric. What is proposed is a non-hierarchical ordering of gendered discourses.

<sup>13</sup> The Song of Songs is often referred to as *The Song of Solomon*. This association with Solomon finds me in the margins of his court, watching on as he judges the two prostitutes one of whom accidentally suffocated her child. I think of the poem, my reading of the poem, as a child birthed from our union. I hesitate in case it is me in the scene fighting over the body of the live child, having disavowed the dead one as not-mine. This is primitive love. Mother-love. I have mother-love for the child-of-the-reading. The one I slept with in my arms, that I took care to protect, to not-smother. But there is the executioner. Solomon himself with power over life and death. My future and my hope lies in the balance of his power "the Judgment of Solomon, the primitive love scene: what does it mean to love but to fight over the body of a child? Who loves? What does it mean to love? To want to take to keep to kill to leave to open out your arms? The judgment of Solomon is particularly beautiful because it's a scene at once private and public. A scene of the bed, the bedroom, the city."

Hélène Cixous, *White ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics*, ed. Susan Sellars (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2008), 41.

<sup>14</sup> Cixous, "Sorties."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>16</sup> She, this poem, is tormented, has been tormented. Tormented within and without. LaCocque was emphatic, "There is no more regrettable example of a biblical text being tormented by its critics than

this one" André LaCocque, *Romance she Wrote* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998), 2. I want to side with LaCocque who sees this text as having suffered multiple violations in its reception history whether it be at the level of textual alterations or 'forced allegorization'. I am upset on her behalf. And yet here, in my own reading, in my own careful approach, in my desire for pure sensitivity, I assault it again knowing that *il se laisserait plutôt dé-chiqueter par ce qui vient sur lui*. We tear at each other. Jacques Derrida, "'Che Cos'è la Poesia?'" in *A Derrida Reader*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 234.

The poem is tormented and torments. She is 'silent incantation' and 'aphonic'. Cixous traverses this terrain when she says "The path leading to absolute solitude needs to be travelled. Someone up there is crying, I have the impression it was me. But I cannot find the path." Hélène Cixous, *Manna for the Mandelstams For the Mandelas*, trans. Catherine A.F. MacGillivray, Emergent Literatures (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 19.

The poem falls, comes from forgetting and not-knowing. So exactly who was crying on the path in the quarry? Was it not, in the end, me? Derrida writes of the poem "You must celebrate, you have to commemorate amnesia, savagery, even the stupidity of the "by heart": the *hèrison*. It blinds itself ... No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding..." Derrida, "Che Cos'è la Poesia?" 233.

<sup>17</sup> Son 5:7

<sup>18</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 94.

<sup>19</sup> This is Cixous reflecting on her own experiences of writing her own thesis on James Joyce & *Ulysses* with "an-Other" thetic. She describes both the advocacy she received from her mentor who writes that at "the end of two delirious years, when there were traces of delirium in your writing, you have now reached the second lucidity, more fertile than the first, *stronger*" and this quoted above represents the systemic resistance she faced in writing. Cixous, *Love Itself*, 53, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 88.

<sup>21</sup> Cixous, *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 59.

<sup>22</sup> As Lévinas writes in "Signification and Sense": "This solid rectangular opacity becomes a book only in carrying my thought toward other givens, still or already absent; the author who writes, the readers who read, the bookshelves that hold..." Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanism of the Other*, translated by Nidra Poller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>23</sup> On the other hand the Shelf-of- Žižek is shouting obnoxiously "Don't listen to him, the domesticating old fool!" But I like Lévinas' dignity that projects towards the other, upholding the dignity of the other. He listens carefully for the other, allowing a negotiation in terms of encounter that may be able to hold difference in tension with itself. Note his reciprocating ethics-of-the-other in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Alterity*

and *Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Slavoj Žižek's provocative response appears as "Smashing the Neighbour's Face," Lacan Dot Com: the Paris USA Lacan Seminar, <http://www.lacan.com/zizsmash.htm>.

Derrida also writes on Lévinas's philosophy of alterity, engaging with Lévinas's text *Autrement Qu'être*, questioning whether Lévinas domesticated the other by not fully recognizing the Other's difference; not recognizing sexual difference, or "subordinating" sexual difference beneath ethical difference. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Autrement Qu'Être* (Nordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1974). This is described by Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe in *Understanding Derrida* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 133. Derrida's engagement with Lévinas on this issue appears in his essay 'ATVM'. Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment Here I Am," in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 143-190.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2000), 202.

<sup>25</sup> My discussion is not simply to and fro with the other, but also with that third person who encounters births (encountering the other draws out a unique hypostasis). I also recognize the many voices of the 'author' in the text. Cixous draws out this notion in her own writing in the introduction of *Le Livre de Promethea*, so that my 'selves'—not just person as singularity—are recognized. Consideration of time, space and reception history is also in the background. Hélène Cixous, *Le Livre de Promethea* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> Son 2:11, 12 "behold the rains have passed ... and the turtledove is heard in our land."

<sup>27</sup> Rubem Alves, *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet* (London: SCM Press, 1990/2002), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, "Envois."

<sup>29</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 882.

<sup>30</sup> Alves, *The Poet*.

<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 103-4.

<sup>32</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London: Routledge, 1998), 193-4. The essay is called "Writing Blind," in *Ibid.*, 184-203.

<sup>33</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Third Body*, trans. Keith Cohen (Evanston, Ill: North Western University Press, 2009), 106.

<sup>34</sup> Son 1:2 "Let him kiss me"

<sup>35</sup> The heroine of the Song of Songs is also nameless. She is only described in one vignette as 'the Shulamith' (one of peace) in Son 7:1.

<sup>36</sup> Cixous, *Stigmata*, 189.

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<sup>37</sup> Jewish marriage canopy.

<sup>38</sup> My own dynamic translation from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: with Westminster Hebrew Morphology*. I purposefully feminize the narrator.

<sup>39</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Souffles* (Paris: des femmes, 1975).

<sup>40</sup> Martin McQuillan writes in the foreword of Derrida's *Geneses* that "one can only read, and so yield to the otherness of reading, as the arrival of what may come ... That is the arrival of the secret, 'the other as that which happens.'" Jacques Derrida, *Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, and Genius: The Secrets of the Archive*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), x.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Cixous, "Sorties."

<sup>43</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth," in *Complete Poems*, ed. Vivian De Sola Pinto and F. Warren Roberts (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 256-61.

<sup>45</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 148.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>50</sup> At the very moment I dehumanize the other I dehumanize myself.

<sup>51</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 60-61.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>53</sup> D.H. Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth," 256.

<sup>54</sup> Both Derrida and Cixous play with this redemptive metaphor regarding death angst, in this case the idea of the acrobat as one who purposely hangs over a void in pursuit of her art. See Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, that is to say*, trans. Laurent Milesi (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Paul Celan characterizes and personifies the poem. "The poem wants to reach the Other, it needs this other, it needs a vis á vis. It searches it out and addresses it." Paul Celan, *The Meridian*, trans. Pierre Jorris, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Both Celan and Derrida, identify the need of this 'ethical' reading. Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, (New York: Fordham Press, 2005).



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<sup>56</sup> I grant that this claim is emotive, but before this undoes me, please understand that I mean several things that are readily verifiable: firstly, the church fathers had the habit of closing the book on women. Certainly Augustine, Jerome and Origen propagated the idea of the Natural Inferiority of Women which in turn shaped societal views on women, their inabilities, their un-potential and their dangerous thoughts that needed subduing, shaped the legitimacy of the woman of the Song of Songs, lead to her femininity being erased. See Stephen D. Moore, "The Song of Songs in the history of sexuality," *Church history* 69, no. 2 (2000).

Secondly, I mean the traditional notion that there is only one officially recognised meaning for biblical texts, i.e. the Interpretation legitimized by the Church Authority, for example, the Song of Songs was long recognized as (only) an allegory for God and Church (God and Israel, in rabbinic reception). I explore these assertions to greater depth in the section "Lords of Cloth."

<sup>57</sup> Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, xvii.

<sup>58</sup> Lévinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 28-29.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> In the Book of John, (John 6:54), this eating and drinking of flesh leads to resurrection and eternal life: "... whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day" [NIV].

<sup>62</sup> Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth."

<sup>63</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Savoir," in *Veils: Cultural Memory in the Present*, ed. Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>64</sup> "She had not known that eyes are lips on the lips of God. – Quickly miracle! she was crying, Whoa! Slowly miracle! she cried." Hélène Cixous (1997) quoted in Frédéric Regard, "On Cixous's Tongue (Beyond Scopic Desire)," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2004): 180.

<sup>65</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 20.

I struggle with my 'poetic' voices; a burning struggle. I want to explain the inexplicable, describe the indescribable. Where is the methodology that works this miracle? Like Camus I am brought to sunsets, mountains, beginnings: a white ink poem, a turgid voicing of distress and desires, her body embodied in the text. I am moved. She moves. There is insufficiency in my disembodied, academic language via the dispassionate, objectifying gaze. A dream reading would articulate this ineffable movement somehow. My encounter with this poem has denuded me. I see with naked eyes. But this world of writing bustles with opposing force, the safety of the conventional, traditional, examinable, supervise-able, and the phallogocentric.

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<sup>66</sup> Struggle for self-determinism; a struggle realized by articulation, self-expression.

<sup>67</sup> I am arguing here that within the religious readings of sacred texts there are readings and discourses that are privileged, and skewed towards the requirements of denominationally structured faith thresholds, blind-to-all-else, being 'blind to all else' becomes a badge of faith. I also argue similarly that in academics there continues to be resistance to readings from the margins. So an 'other' reading of a sacred text will engender resistance on two fronts. In making these claims I am also self-conscious in that all readings privilege particular traditions. There is no objective "outside." However, I make these claims strongly and emotively primarily because of the subtlety of the silencing force around sacred readings.

<sup>68</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 65.

<sup>69</sup> By existential I mean the great questions of the human condition: happiness, the good life, freedom; by systemic I mean the interlayered systems and economies of the world.

<sup>70</sup> Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth," 256.

<sup>71</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 66.

<sup>72</sup> Eugenio Montejo, "The Earth Turned to Bring Us Closer" in *The Trees: Selected Poems 1967-2004*, trans. Peter Boyle (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2004), 53.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; and, Through the Looking-glass, and What Alice Found There*, ed. Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 13.

<sup>74</sup> Alves, *The Poet*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Lawrence, "Self Pity," in *Complete Poems*, 467.

<sup>76</sup> Ionic: the character of electrically charged atoms or molecules that move in a solution as they seek to stabilize. They attract or repulse other ions and are able to hold a current between electrodes.

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth," 260.

<sup>78</sup> Catherine McGillvray's introduction in Cixous, *Manna*, xiii.

<sup>79</sup> This place name literally means "daughter of greatness."

<sup>80</sup> Boer gives an exhaustive treatment of sexual innuendo around 'fluid' in the Song of Songs, during which, in an aberrant instance of understatement, he remarks, "It is indeed a wet song." Roland Boer, "The Second Coming: Repetition and Insatiable Desire in the Song of Songs," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (2000): 290.

<sup>81</sup> She captures auditory as well as visual concepts in her multivalent metaphor, also arousing other senses, such as aroma for example in 4:3.

a crimson ribbon your lips  
your voice fills me with content

like a round of pomegranate fruit  
 your [blushing] cheek  
 behind the tendrils of your hair

כחוט השני שפתתך  
 ומדברך נאווה  
 כפלח הרימון רקתך  
 מבעד לצמתך

—Son 4:3

<sup>82</sup> Pierrot was a famous French clown who became an iconic image in the postmodern movement. Pierrot was characterized by his white apparel and white-painted face. In theatre, Pierrot is usually portrayed as the unrequited lover who is trapped in a love triangle. Columbine, loved by Pierrot, continually falls for Harlequin.

<sup>83</sup> The Song of Songs engages and deconstructs temporality. Everything is subsumed into the moment. Everything is expanded into eternity. She is past, present and future.

<sup>84</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Insister of Jacques Derrida*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>85</sup> Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Alves, *The Poet*, 19.

<sup>87</sup> Bachelard views poetry as inter-subjective. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xxiv.

<sup>88</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

<sup>89</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte and Albert Anderson, vol. 8 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>90</sup> "And yet she writes" in Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 36.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Hood, "Silence," in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Hood* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1856).

<sup>92</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism*, trans. Helen Lane (Orlando: Harcourt, 1995), 2.

<sup>93</sup> Fiona Black pre-empted the aligning of Barthes with the Song particularly his idea of 'text-body'. Fiona Black, "What is my beloved? On erotic reading and the Song of Songs," in *The labour of reading: Desire, Alienation and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Fiona Black, Roland Boer, and Erin Runions, *Semeia Studies* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 36.

<sup>94</sup> Jouissance is pleasurable pain that is past bearing. In French it could be translated as a pleasure and can incorporate a sexual, orgasmic meaning. Within the Lacanian jouissance-concept there is a tension between jouissance as 'blissful experience' with the knowledge that there is an 'ultimate bliss' that is yet

to be attained or not-possible-to-obtain. It is the not-possible-to-attain quality of jouissance that incites desire and drives the subject forward in order to attain it. Jouissance is paradoxical and involves lack. The heightened pain-pleasure quality causes a breakdown of barriers with the other, drawing connections with the unattainable Lacanian *objet petite a* (m-other). Jouissance as a psychoanalytic concept was developed by Lacan. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter, vol. VII, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan (New York: Norton, 1997). A good summary of *Jouissance* as a concept and theological possibilities may be found in Ralph Norman, "Jouissance, Generation and the Coming of God," *Theology & Sexuality* 14, no. 2 (2008): 153-80. Kristeva's work on jouissance is prominent particularly in her seminal work *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Kristeva's conception of jouissance is related to the Song of Songs in an article by Francis Landy who also engages Roland Barthes's use of the term in literary theory. Francis Landy, "Jouissance and Poetics," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 45 (1991): 51-64.

<sup>95</sup> Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 12.

<sup>96</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 17. Barthes describes jouissance as "unspeakable, inter-dicted." Ibid., 21.

<sup>97</sup> Octavio Paz, *Piedra del Sol*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1991), 31.

<sup>98</sup> Gen 3:3

<sup>99</sup> Cixous, *Stigmata*, 150.

<sup>100</sup> These are Roland Boer's words in Boer, "The second coming," 287, as he contends that the Song 'demands a psychoanalysis' Ibid., 287, and engages Lacan, Freud & Žižek.

<sup>101</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 27.

<sup>102</sup> Boer's definition for fetishism as follows: "The fetish functions through a foreclosure of the erotic drive and the resultant focus on a particular item, a metonymic object: it has its appeal through the excessive eroticization of a particular thing, be it body part, clothing, fabric, flora, fauna, or language itself (the ultimate fetish of the Song), while the perverse relies on disgust to generate 'perverse pleasure'." in Boer, "The Second Coming," 293.

While Boer's objectification of the Song of Songs at points is antithesis of my particular thetic, his emphasis on the erotic in this text, particularly the fetishism around language is apt. Words, phrases in the Song of Songs are caressed, mouthed, toyed with and rubbed, they also function as an impediment to the attainment of the desire they themselves define. Metaphor becomes the impediment, becomes the fetish, becomes the object (the threshold, rim, barrier that we yearn to scale). Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 6.

<sup>104</sup> R. Scott Bakker, *The Thousandfold Thought*, vol. 3, The Prince of Nothing (London: Orbit, 2006).

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>106</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 46-7.

<sup>109</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>111</sup> Jacques Lacan is the premiere reference for this idea. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, vol. XX, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan (New York: Norton, 1998).

<sup>112</sup> Matt 15:27.

<sup>113</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 82.

<sup>114</sup> Purah—the angel of forgetfulness that tortured Isaac Bashevis Singer's hero in the novel *The Slave*. Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Slave* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

<sup>115</sup> Bataille develops this concept from his engagement with Rimbaud's poem which he cites, Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* [Erotisme] (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 25.

Elle est retrouvée  
 Quoi? L'éternité.  
 C'est la mer allée  
 Avec le soleil.  
 —Rimbaud

We find ourselves at a word with great meaning for this moment. Jouissance is a dangerous word, a troublesome word, a word with wings, and a sting in its tail. A seeping word. Barthes whirled this word and drew it into his seduction of the act of reading.

### **Prehistory**

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Author in Truth," In *Coming to Writing*, 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Extreme Fidelity." In *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, edited by Susan Sellers. (London: Routledge, 1994), 133.

<sup>5</sup> Cixous, "The Author in Truth," 136.

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<sup>6</sup> Hélène Cixous, *The Insister of Jacques Derrida*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Cixous, "The Author in Truth," 151. "This story tells us that the genesis of woman goes through the mouth, through a certain oral pleasure, and through a non-fear of the inside." Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Cixous, "Extreme Fidelity," 134.

<sup>9</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Bathsheba or the interior Bible," *New Literary History* 24, no. 4 (1993): 822.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 822.

<sup>11</sup> Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 61.

<sup>12</sup> Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Helene Cixous: Rootprints: Memory, & Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (New York: Routledge, 2003), 8, Kindle edition.

<sup>13</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Bathsheba," 823.

<sup>14</sup> Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Bathsheba," 823.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 833.

<sup>17</sup> Aragon, *Le Fou d'Elsa*, in which there is a poem called «Contre-chant» which is cited by Lacan in his seminar, connecting it to the *objet petit a* (the eternally lost object). I relate it to the impossibility of the quest to 'read' the Song of Songs. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, vol. XI, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan (New York: Norton, 1994), 79.

In vain your image comes to meet me  
And does not enter me  
where I am who only shows it  
Turning towards me you can find  
On the wall of my gaze  
only your dreamt-of shadow.

I am that wretch comparable with mirrors  
That can reflect but cannot see  
Like them my eye is empty  
and like them inhabited  
By your absence which makes them blind

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*Thus said An-Nadji once, as he was invited  
to a circumcision.*

— «Contre-chant,» Aragon

<sup>18</sup> Hélène Cixous. "To Live The Orange," in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Un Vrai Jardin* (Paris: des Femmes, 1998). This is also cited in Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, 106.

<sup>20</sup> Cixous. "To Live The Orange," 87.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Cixous, *The Book of Promethea*, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Cixous, "Savoir," 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> The subject of Rembrandt's painting was Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. In the Song of Songs she crowns him. Rembrandt's Bathsheba echoes the Cixousian mother, Irigaray's murdered mother and comes to evoke for me, memories of the ubiquitous mother figure appearing in the text.

<sup>26</sup> "...the animal within them is desirous of procreating children, and when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry, and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath." Plato, *Timaeus*, ed. Sue Asscher and David Widger, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Project Gutenberg (Salt Lake City, Utah: Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2008), accessed 26 Jan 2011, <http://www.projectgutenberg.org>

<sup>27</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Souffles* (Paris: Des femmes, 1976), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Luce Irigaray writes on the topic of the demonization of the womb and lactating breasts (in mythology and in psychoanalysis) in her essay, "The Bodily Encounter." Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 34-46 (esp. 40).

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am," in *A Derrida Reader*, edited by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 14-15. [Derrida draws on the Song of Songs in his engagement with Emmanuel Lévinas's text *Otherwise Than Being*.]

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Socrates Scholasticus on the death of Hypatia, cited in Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, trans. F. Lyra, *Revealing Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>32</sup> "The depth of woman cannot be closed up." The quote appears in Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

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<sup>33</sup> Cixous, "Savoir," 9.

<sup>34</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1 (1976), 885.

<sup>35</sup> Whose heart wouldn't turn to stone in disgust, in despair? Cixous's hand reaches out towards her, in her despair, and she valorizes this beautiful Gorgon. Cixous recreates her, and she's laughing—that part of her that lived, that saw beyond death, and though weary, laughs out loud; escapes. In evoking the image of hunter I come to another myth, that of Actaeon the hunter and his deerhounds. Jacques Lacan gives a brief allusion to him in his *Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Karnac, 2004), 187. In his article, Boer sets Lacan's quotation invoking the myth of Actaeon, glorious hunter who became the hunted, alongside Son 8:14. This is one of 3 verses (also 2:9, 17) alluding to man-becoming-stag transformations that dot the Song of Songs sporadically. Apart from the positioning of the texts together enigmatically, Boer draws no further conclusions—but does he insinuate that the man in the song is about to be eaten? Does the transformation portend danger or safety? See Boer, "The Second Coming," 286. I, in turn, want to add the myth of Medusa to these two without a word. Let them rest uneasily, all of them together. This is Ovid's tale:

"Actaeon fled where so many times he had been the pursuer. He fled from the dogs who had served him so faithfully, longing to shout to them, 'Stop! It is I, Actaeon, your master. Do you not know me?' But the words would not come. The air was filled with relentless baying. ... As they pinned their master down, the rest of the pack rushed round and buried their fangs in his body, until it was covered with crimson wounds. Actaeon groaned in a sound that was scarcely human but one no stag could ever have made, as he filled the familiar hills with his cries of anguish." Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 102.

And this is Medusa's:

"[Perseus] was asked by one of the court why Medusa, alone of her sisters, had snakes entwined in her hair. 'That is an excellent question,' responded the guest; 'let me give you the answer. Medusa was once an exceedingly beautiful maiden, whose hand in marriage was jealously sought by an army of suitors. According to someone who told me he'd seen it, her marvellous hair was her crowning glory. The story goes that Neptune [Poseidon] the sea god raped this glorious creature inside the shrine of Minerva [Athena]. Jove's daughter screened her virginal eyes with her aegis in horror and punished the sin, by transforming the Gorgon's beautiful hair into horrible snakes." Ibid., 170.

### ***Icara***

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 96.

<sup>2</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 8.



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<sup>3</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex*, 9-22. Irigaray begins her book with a portion of creative writing using the idea of Alice and her adventures in *Through the Looking Glass*. This is the world into which women are born. A world that we are forced to perceive through society's phallogocentric lens. No wonder it feels like the world of the Mad Hatter.

<sup>4</sup> Irigaray cited in Ives, *The Jouissance of French Feminism*, 101.

<sup>5</sup> Verena Andermatt Conley's interview with H.C. on *écriture féminine*, in *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*. Exp. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 128-161., also explored in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*. Priscilla Ringrose provides an interesting comparison between H.C.'s *écriture* and that of the Algerian writer Assia Djebar in *Assia Djebar: In Dialogue with Feminisms* Francopolyphonies (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 95-158.

<sup>6</sup> Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire De La Meduse," *L'Arc* 61 (1975), 41. [We, the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bebies – we are black and we are beautiful.] Translation from Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), 878. See also the essay "Sorties." Cixous, "Sorties," 69.

<sup>7</sup> The sad heroine of the Marquis de Sade's Bastille novella.

<sup>8</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 154.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe Qui N'en Est Pas Un*, ed. Jean Piel, Collection Critique (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Keller, *Face Of The Deep* (London: Routledge, 2003). Keller's essay on women, water and theology explores matricide in the legend of Tiamat (from the *Enuma Elish*).

<sup>13</sup> Irigaray, *The Irigaray Reader*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 86.

<sup>16</sup> Son 8:12

<sup>17</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 86.

<sup>18</sup> Différance: infinite deferral of identity; of meaning; of presence. See Henri Ronse's interview with JD in, Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, revised ed, Continuum Impacts (London: Continuum, 2004), 1-14.

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<sup>19</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 86. Cixous's writing is profoundly shaped by James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the 'streams of consciousness' styles of Virginia Woolf among others. Later Clarice Lispector's work would become influential.

<sup>20</sup> Dora was one of Freud's famous case studies where he developed his theories on passive female sexuality. Sigmund Freud & Philip Rieff, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 94. The question for this project is whether the Song of Songs holds the same potential—'a mistress of the Signifier'.

<sup>22</sup> Son 5:2; 6:9 "my unblemished [perfect] one" תַּמְתִּי

<sup>23</sup> "tree of life" written Oct 10, 2010

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence, "New Heaven and Earth," 256.

<sup>25</sup> Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* is a theoretical poetic-philosophic genre of discourse that critiques and resists the hegemony of privileged and powerful phallogocentric systems. This 'feminine' genre orients the writer/reader into a transformative space of encounter wherein what has previously been silenced and suppressed is opened up. *Écriture féminine* of Cixousian style opens a writer/reader to encounter text generatively, as live-text, which catalyses a kind of reciprocity that is experienced as the intimate, pleasurable and painful sense of being read by the very text one is reading: a literary and live 'jouissance'.

<sup>26</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic, *European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*. Cixous's celebrated book *The Book of Promethea* discloses from within itself elements that share a kind of dynamic or force with the Song of Songs. These elements that encircle and encompass the *ich-und-du* at the moment of meeting, between us, together support the positioning of my engagement with the poem as a radical encounter. In her many semi-fictional published texts, Cixous explores love and encounter. In particular she explores the Feminine from inside a relationship that is both real and mythical simultaneously. It is a text that subverts the norms and bounds of social givens like identity, gender, heterosexuality, position, time and destabilizes with its extraordinarily vivid and discomforting presence. In this poetic-philosophical exploration Cixous deconstructs the world until it is only the naked space between self and other, but even this distinction is blurred as the self then disintegrates and is rebirthed, and as the selves within the 'self' encounter and withdraw from the beloved other. The result is thought-in-action and word-as-transformation through the medium of poetic writing.

<sup>28</sup> In many ways, Cixous's thinking-poetic approach is complementary to the Song of Songs, as the poetic of my text herself subverts and displaces the real and the imaginary, the self and the other, the firm lines and boundaries between social roles and gender and draws the reader into an almost-too-close

embrace with the principal characters. If Cixous is purposing to extend her exploration of self and other, the feminine, of love, to awaken this distinction of *différance* in her reader, it could be reasoned that the Song of Songs also intends to do more to the reader than just entertain.

<sup>29</sup> Cixous from her novel *Jours de l'An*, cited in Kelly Ives, *Cixous, Irigaray & Kristeva: the Jouissance of French Feminism*, Media, feminism, Cultural Studies (Maidstone: Crescent Moon, 2007), 70.

<sup>30</sup> Thus Derrida – ‘there is nothing outside the text’ [there is no out-side text; *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*] in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 158.

<sup>31</sup> Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida*, vii.

<sup>32</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*, 128. Cixous uses beautiful language that ordinarily is associated with happiness and well-being but she cleverly flips the effect into horror—horror on a sunny day with daisies. Thus she destabilizes the reader's sense of what ought to be and captures the angst she feels when in despair on her separation from her desire. The Song of Songs similarly uses rich language to evoke in the reader the horror of loss, when the safe and ordinary become the implements of torture and violation (i.e. the cedar plank that will imprison her, the silver that will chain her up in Son. 8:9).

<sup>35</sup> What is crucial here is the way both authors use language to draw the reader into the midst of the encounter. The use of ‘I’ in both texts creates a personalization of the text in the reader. The reader experiences the emotion in the scene as if it were at hand. In the description of the pain of separation the reader has ironically become one with the author.

<sup>36</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Ian Blyth and Susan Sellars, *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory*, Live Theory (New York: Continuum, 2004), 18.

<sup>39</sup> Cixous, "Sorties," 85.

<sup>40</sup> From Cixous's essay "Savoir" in Hélène Cixous, *Voiles*.

<sup>41</sup> Jer 20:9

<sup>42</sup> Regard, "On Cixous's Tongue."

<sup>43</sup> Ives, *The Jouissance of French Feminism*, 75, (citing Cixous, "The laugh of medusa.").

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>45</sup> Cixous herself takes on this label in Hélène Cixous, *Reveries of the Wild Woman: Primal scenes*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic, AGM Collection (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems* (London: Wordsworth), 382.

<sup>47</sup> Alves, *The Poet*, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Cixous, *Stigmata*, 243-61. Cixous's essay "Stigmata, or Job the Dog" is translated by Eric Prenowitz.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>50</sup> Hélène Cixous, "My Algeriance: In other words, to depart not to arrive from Algeria," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Triquarterly*, no. 100 (1997): 259-279. Originally Hélène Cixous, «Mon Algérie», » *Les Inrockuptibles*, no. 115, (20 août-2 septembre, 1997): 71-74.

<sup>51</sup> Cixous, *Stigmata*, 246.

<sup>52</sup> Aotearoa New Zealand

<sup>53</sup> Son 1:6

<sup>54</sup> Jud 4:17

<sup>55</sup> Like Žižek's essay "Run, Lola, Run." Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, "Run, Isolde, Run," in *Opera's Second Death* (New York: Routledge, 2002). The text's Shulamith runs in poetic spirals, reminding me of Alfred Hitchcock's spiral staircase in the bell-tower scenes in *Vertigo*. She is running in circles in the poem. She is re-enacting presents—going round and round in sequence of moments that all occur in real time, simultaneously. Circles are what in the Song of Songs? Features of the poetic, artful stylistic devices? Do they incite echoes?

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard cites Huyghe, "... start from the center from the very heart of the circle from where the whole thing derives its source and meaning ..." Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xxi.

Cixous also sought meaning from the heart. In her texts, spirals are expression of unconscious echoes that refract and then bounce off. Reflections rebounding off the ever turning inward walls, stairs, paths, the golden spiral whose ratio is in proportion to the golden ration, or  $\phi$ , or 1.61803398874989. The Song of Songs is full of circular items: round pomegranate, round bowl, round moon, round belly, round tower, discs. We see the play for inter-connected replays of the present and of possible futures. Yes 'Run, Shulamith, run'!

<sup>56</sup> Gen 12:1, and the famous title of the parashah (cycle of Torah readings): *Lek-I'ka*. This parashah reading signifies the beginning of Abraham's sacred journeying. He was a Ulysses of a sort. To leave birth-land and family, and to journey by caravan for the rest of his life meeting various trials and tribulations on the way. A sacred journey, a lifetime vow of movement always away from and towards. For Shulamith, this is also an anthology of sacred journeying: always away from and towards. Never arriving and always having arrived. She is a kind of Ulysses, with Ithaca in mind she sets out.

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As you set out on the way to Ithaca  
hope that the road is a long one,  
filled with adventures, filled with  
discoveries,

The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes,  
Poseidon in his anger: do not fear them,  
you won't find such things on your way so  
long as your thoughts remain lofty, and a  
choice emotion touches your spirit and  
your body.

The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes,  
savage Poseidon; you won't encounter  
them, unless you stow them away inside  
your soul, unless your soul sets them up  
before you.

Hope that the road is a long one. Many  
may the summer mornings be when—with  
what pleasure, with what joy—you first put  
in to harbors new to your eyes; may you  
stop at Phoenician trading posts and there  
acquire fine goods: mother-of-pearl and  
coral, amber and ebony, and heady  
perfumes of every kind: as many heady  
perfumes as you can. To many Egyptian  
cities may you go, so you may learn, and go  
on learning, from their sages.

Always keep Ithaca in your mind; to reach  
her is your destiny. But do not rush your  
journey in the least. Better that it last for  
many years; that you drop anchor at the  
island an old man, rich with all you've  
gotten on the way, not expecting Ithaca to  
make you rich.

Ithaca gave to you the beautiful journey;  
without her you'd not have set upon the

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road. But she has nothing left to give you  
any more.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca did  
not deceive you. As wise as you'll have  
become, with so much experience,  
you'll have understood, by then, what  
these Ithacas mean.

—Constantine Cavafy

Constantine Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Daniel Mendelsohn (New York: Knopf, 2009), 12-13.

<sup>57</sup> Son 2:10c

<sup>58</sup> Žižek and Dolar, "Run, Isolde, Run."

<sup>59</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 880.

<sup>60</sup> From *Faire des sous* or to make money (to exploit). See editor's note no. 15 in Cixous, *Coming to Writing*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 26. Cixous, *Stigmata*, 210.

<sup>62</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Hélène Cixous, *So Close*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>65</sup> Cixous, *Le Livre de Promethea*.

<sup>66</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*.

<sup>67</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 41.

### ***Che vuole?***

<sup>1</sup> Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time-Traveler's Wife* (London: Vintage, 2005), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Job 30:16      ועתה עלי תשתפך נפשי יאחזוני ימיעני

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<sup>3</sup> I am reminded of the essays of Virginia Woolf, her identification of the multiple small and large obstacles to actualization, to passion. She claims that in order for a woman to write she needs '500 pounds a year' and 'a room of her own'. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own; and, Three Guineas*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Vintage, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> In Milan Kundera's novel, *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera explores love as absurd, haphazard and coincidental. His views on life and death oppose Nietzsche's view of the eternally recurrent life (which is 'heavy') in response to one life lived once as light. Milan Kundera *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry (London: Faber, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Son 5:2

<sup>6</sup> Gen 4:6-7

<sup>7</sup> Keller cites Luce Irigaray in Keller, *Face of the Deep*, xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> The Samoan tsunami 2009

<sup>10</sup> Keller, *Face of the Deep*, xv.

<sup>11</sup> [She had not known that eyes are lips on the lips of God. – Quickly miracle! she was crying, Whoa! Slowly miracle! she cried.] Translation by Frédéric Regard as it appears in his article "On Cixous's Tongue." Regard, "On Cixous's Tongue (Beyond Scopic Desire)," 180.

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, "Envois," 39.

<sup>13</sup> *nephesh* [נֶפֶשׁ] occurs 7 times in the Song of Songs. It has a variety of meanings in the Hebrew bible but is mostly associated with the body at the throat (rather than heart, head or belly). It is often translated as soul, but would better translate as life-breath, being, life-force (animating force), appetite, seat of emotions, seat of desires and passions. I choose breath as a signifier in English for *nephesh* because of its relationship to life (and absence in death), its situation in the chest and throat, which is anatomically proximate. Love and sexuality often evoke reflection on the breath, the sense of laboured breathing, the 'holding of the breath' in suspense, the sensation of 'not being able to breathe' when horribly disappointed or in deep grief. Note the possibility of literal death in the Hebrew Bible when the *nephesh* "goes out" i.e Gen 35:18, בָּצֵאת נֶפֶשׁ. The closeness of breath to life and that death follows if the breath is stopped, is emblematic of the poignancy, sharpness and vulnerability of love.

For further discussion on the meaning and centrality of *nephesh* see, Tod Linafelt, "The Arithmetic of Eros," *Interpretation* 59, no. 3 (2005): 244-58., and M. Deckers, "The Structure Of The Song Of Songs And The Centrality Of Nepeš (6:12)," in *Feminist Companion To The Song Of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1993), 172-212.

<sup>14</sup> See Gen 35:18

<sup>15</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Tales Of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 90.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983)., Daniel Lys, *Le Plus Beau Chant de la Création: Commentaire de "Cantique des Cantiques"*, Lectio Divina, 51 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968)., and Phyllis Tribble, "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," in *God And The Rhetoric Of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). These three are connected by their focus on the interconnections of the Garden of Eden text and the Song of Songs.

<sup>18</sup> Rev 10:9; (a rewriting of Eze 2:8-3:1). Eating a book ... it's the reification of the absurd, but a metaphor that multiplies into a whole schema for live-reading. A book that transforms you, that works from the inside, a 'beyond' reading; an alchemical hermeneutic. A little scroll that fills the one that tastes with the decadent bliss of honey, and the bitterness of wormwood. Torn between mortality and immortality we evolve. The angel's command to eat is a dramatic foil to the prohibition against eating in the garden. That fruit was also sweet, but bitter when death entered the scene.

The Song of Songs is a potent little scroll. She has the taste of honey with an acrid note. That note is death which is always in the background. Death makes life all the more poignant. On a Friday, I was reading and sank into Cixous's *Love Itself* and there it was—H.C.'s' own affair with Rev 10:9. It was a moment of déjà vu. She had already seen and cannibalized the raw material in Revelation regarding the dramatic consequences of book-eating; the sacred-mystical, alchemical transformation. Was I disappointed to see she had come to it long before me in 2005? We had both found the idea a site of meaning, a site of language magic, a kind of vicarious camaraderie. Here it is in English from Cixous's *Love Itself*, "On my side I drank I swallowed your book, in my mouth it had the sweetness of honey, but right afterwards my entrails were bitter because I was jealous of my mouth. It swallows everything and keeps nothing I thought." Cixous, *Love Itself*, 3.

I also have a habit of eating scrolls.

<sup>19</sup> Linafelt, "The Arithmetic of Eros," 250.

<sup>20</sup> In this section I interweave the inchoate narratives of the Song of Songs with Cixousian interludes. This is the clash of two worlds. The world of the text and the text of my own world—encounter and separation as philosophical and existential categories.

<sup>21</sup> Son 7:7

<sup>22</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*, 166.

<sup>23</sup> "I drew him over me like a cloak", 27 October, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Objet petit 'a' is the unattainable object cause of desire. 'a' stands for *autre* [other] i.e. the real other, not the symbolic other. The permanently lost object, is the unrecoverable relation to the breast, which is a metonymic 'part-for-the-whole' of the (m)other. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 53ff.



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<sup>25</sup> Lacan's notion of the origin of desire in *l'objet petit a* (mother), and desire as constituted in lack (infinite and insatiable). Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," cited in Ives, *The Jouissance of French Feminism*, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Jerusalem, 17 April, 2010

<sup>29</sup> Alves, *The Poet*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Son 8:7

<sup>31</sup> The quote originates from Hélène Cixous's *La*, of which a translated excerpt is cited in Sal Renshaw, *The Subject of Love: Hélène Cixous and the Feminine Divine*, ed. Grace M. Jantzen, Manchester Studies in Religion, Culture and Gender (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 112. Here it is in the original language :

«Viens! Cette nuit est notre journée. Nous sommes à l'angle du connu et de l'inconnu, à gauche la ville craque et crache, à droite je n'ai pas la moindre idée de ce qui nous attend. Nous ne savons pas ce que l'espace nous réserve, s'il y en aura. Quelle joie ! N'être précédée par rien ! Aller, là-bas là-haut, s'il y a de la place un autre monde au jour! La nuit il fait un jour qui ne tombe pas. Il y a une vie qui ne se couche pas, qui diffuse, qui accouche. Alors, qui n'accouche pas ?» Hélène Cixous, *La* (Paris : Gallimard, 1976), 125.

<sup>32</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Gaston Bachelard wrote this wonderful book in which he draws on the imagery concerning houses, rooms, cupboards, cellars etc in literature and earths out of them psychoanalytic reflections on their deeper meanings in the human psyche. The Song of Songs uses images of space and place to evoke sensation and feeling related to the lovers. Prominent architectural imagery concerns the mother's room or house, the garden (enclosed or wild), outdoor resting places like groves or orchards and trees, even towers and barracks make an appearance.

<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault's essay «*Des Espace Autres*» which is available in English in the journal *Diacritics*. Of particular relevance to the Song of Songs is his note on the heterotopia of the Persian Garden, which was a representation of the whole world, within four walls, the four parts of the world, with a fountain at its centre marking the navel or umbilical. The Persian carpet he goes on to say is another related heterotopic space concerned with a garden representing the symmetry of the world both as a totalising and universalising force. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* no. 1 (1986): 22-27.

<sup>34</sup> 3 November, 2010

<sup>35</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> Alves, *The Poet*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Son 7:8

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<sup>38</sup> Son 7:13 “There will I give my love to you, the scent of mandrakes fills the air.”

<sup>39</sup> I am reminded of the resistance graffiti painted on the walls in the West Bank.

<sup>40</sup> Walsh reminds us that “milk and honey” ( Son 4:11) is a leitmotif for the Promised Land, here the lover is coming home, a promised land, peace and plenty, a kitchen stocked with כל-מגדים which is Shulamith herself (Son 7:14). Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*, trans. Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen (New York: Anchor, 1995), 4.

<sup>42</sup> A poem by Adélia Prado appearing in Alves, *The Poet*. See also, Adélia Prado “Casamento,” in Gabriel Perissé, *Ler, Pensar E Escrever*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (São Paulo: Arte & Ciência, 1998), 24. “Há mulheres que dizem ....”

Há mulheres que dizem:  
 Meu marido, se quiser pescar, pesque,  
 mas que limpe os peixes.  
 Eu não. A qualquer hora da noite me  
 levanto,  
 ajudo a escamar, abrir, retalhar e salgar.  
 É tão bom, só a gente sozinhos na cozinha,  
 de vez em quando os cotovelos se  
 esbarram,  
 ele fala coisas como “este foi difícil”  
 “prateou no ar dando rabanadas”  
 e faz o gesto com a mão.  
 O silêncio de quando nos vimos a primeira  
 vez  
 atravessa a cozinha como um rio profundo.  
 Por fim, os peixes na travessa,  
 vamos dormir.  
 Coisas prateadas espocam:  
 somos noivo e noiva.  
 — “Casamento,” Adélia Prado

<sup>43</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 50. Bachelard quotes this poem by Vincent Monteiro.

Who has no deep in his heart  
 A dark castle of Elsinore  
 In the manner of men of the past  
 We build within ourselves stone

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On stone a vast haunted castle.  
—Vincent Monteiro

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

<sup>45</sup> Jerusalem here is pictured as a fortified city.

<sup>46</sup> "... her languages are fresh and ancient and lightly limned as the paintings at Lascaux. They are all clairvoyant. She speaks in evocations and eruptions more than in metaphors. Whereas I, I drill, I dig, I sink in ... she crosses the Chamber of Mares, how she goes through every epoch of existence reawakening along the walls, memories of times ..." Cixous, *Promethea*: 24. See also Darren Ambrose, "30,000 BC: Painting Animality," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 11, no. 2 (2006): 137-52.

<sup>47</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 132.

<sup>48</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Book as One of its Own Characters," *New Literary History* 33, no. 3 (2002), 416.

<sup>49</sup> Son 7:14

<sup>50</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> "The door scents me, it [she] hesitates." From Jean Pellerin's *La Romance du Retour* cited in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 223.

<sup>53</sup> Tod Linafelt explores this verse in terms of Aristotle's theory of narrative in *peripateia* which he defines as a "reversal of fortune" and *anagnorisis* which is a moment of recognition; a dramatic and epiphanic moment of truth. See, Tod Linafelt, "Lyrical theology: the Song of Songs and the Advantage of Poetry," in *Towards A Theology Of Eros: Transfiguring Passion At The Limits Of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, *Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 297.

<sup>54</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Angst*, trans. Jo Levy (London: John Calder, 1985), 23.

<sup>55</sup> I imagine the child Oedipus on a mountaintop, or in dark moments I imagine Psalms 137:9.

<sup>56</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> ומעי המו עליו Son 5:4.

<sup>58</sup> הקיר

<sup>59</sup> Boer, "The Second Coming," 276-301. Note Boer's exploration of the significance of the "hole in the door."

<sup>60</sup> Boer also asserts evidence for the notion of passive penetration f(ph)antasy in the Song. Ibid., 290.

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<sup>61</sup> Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Keller, *Face of the Deep*. In both these texts water is a metaphor for woman, which is explored for the ways in which the feminine is stereotyped and for ways it could generate new conceptions of femininity and its vibrancy. Irigaray in particular evokes the quality of water in her love encounters with Nietzsche. These two texts inspire the shape of my encounter here.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Feu La Cendre*, ed. Antoinette Fouque (Paris: Des Femmes, 1987). The question of 'what is a woman' is impossible to answer. We have only ever known her and known ourselves as eternally 'other'. We are view and must view ourselves through frames we did not build and cannot control.

<sup>63</sup> The imagery and thought behind this line comes from D.H. Lawrence's poem "New Heaven and Earth" as well as Georges Bataille's *Erotisme*. Lawrence, *Complete Poems*, and Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (New York: Arno Press, 1977). Note Bataille particularly on the notion of continuity and discontinuity of being. Being-ness requires an intrinsic separation from others. We don't flow into others, there are barriers, abysses. But in death, discontinuity is abolished, and in encounter, particularly erotic encounter our natural discontinuity is threatened by continuity.

<sup>64</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Derrida, "At This Very Moment," 414-15. In ATVM Derrida draws on the Song of Songs in his engagement with Emmanuel Lévinas. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Gen 2:7

<sup>67</sup> Cixous, *Angst*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 222.

<sup>69</sup> 19 December, 2010

<sup>70</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*, 75.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Henry Hathaway, "The Dark Corner," (USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1946). Screenplay was written by Jay Dratler and Bernard Schoenfeld with Leo Rosten, the story.

<sup>75</sup> Exum draws out some of the more disturbing elements of the Song of Songs in her article "Ten Things." Cheryl J. Exum, "Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know About the Song of Songs," in *The Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, *A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24-35.

<sup>76</sup> Christianson compares and contrasts the elements of film noir with biblical texts. Particularly Christianson exploits film noir's interest in 'ambiguity' in the Jael and Sisera vignette. Eric S. Christianson, "The Big Sleep: Strategic Ambiguity in Judges 4-5 and in Classic Film Noir," *Biblical Interpretation* 15, no. 4/5 (2007): 519-48.

<sup>77</sup> Cixous, *Stigmata*, 185. "I write by the other light... I write at night. I write: The Night. The Night is such a great deity that one day she ended by incarnating herself and appearing in one of my plays. The Night is my other day."

<sup>78</sup> I embrace, here, the Barthesian concept of 'anxiety', derived from Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*. I am orienting my own writing within Barthes' theoretic category as it features in lovers discourses, and recognizing the strong feature of anxiety in the discourse and autobiographical quasi-narratives of the female lover in the Song of Songs (i.e. Son 5:8).

<sup>79</sup> Gríma speaks to Éowyn sourced from the screenplay of *The Two Towers*. Fran Walsh et. al., *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, directed by Peter Jackson (New Zealand: New Line Cinema, 2002). In the novel J.R.R. Tolkien has Aragorn behold Éowyn, the Lady of Rohan, who "thought her fair, fair and cold, like a morning of pale spring that is not yet come to womanhood" J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 140. I allude to the paradox of love as an impossible ideal that is always fatally flawed through the phenomenon of discontinuity between self and other, and through the vagaries of life: that of mortality, which Éowyn experiences in the loss of her lover, Prince Théodred. Love will always eventually be lost, and so in the promise of the most perfect spring, the chill of winter still clings.

<sup>80</sup> The Song of Songs cannot be definitively dated. I use mythopoetic licence here. Dates of authorship and suppositions regarding historical-cultural contexts are suggested anywhere from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. I have erred on the side of the later. Exum summarizes scholarly consensus and I defer to her findings. Her question to the reader of the Song is apt: "Would knowing when it was written help us understand the poem?" (p. 67), "The Song of Songs and its World," in *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Peterson, 1st ed., The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005): 47-72.

<sup>81</sup> Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 29.

<sup>82</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Vintage International, 2003), 61-2.

<sup>83</sup> Num 26:10

<sup>84</sup> J. Cheryl Exum's queries (alongside a considerable cohort of scholars: Keel, Ginsburg, Delitzsch, Tournay etc) whether the response to the Shulamith is made by the *banot yerushalayim*, who also on other occasions (5:9; 6:1) describe her thus. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 107-8.

<sup>85</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*, 41.

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<sup>86</sup> Ruth 2:8

<sup>87</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*, 41-2.

<sup>88</sup> [to be engulfed] Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>90</sup> Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, 142, 145.

<sup>91</sup> Alves, *The Poet*, 34.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Son 8:1-4

<sup>94</sup> Son 5:1, 7; 7:10

<sup>95</sup> Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 15.

<sup>96</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Derrida, "Envois," 60.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Niffenegger, *The Time-Traveler's Wife*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 13-14.

<sup>101</sup> Kathryn Harding's article, "'I Sought Him but I did not Find Him'" is an excellent exploration of the discourse of absence in the Song of Songs. Harding finds the discourse of absence in the poem a gendered one. While she argues that the masculine 'other' is more often absent in the discourse of this text, I would argue that this is but the subjective experience recounted by the heroine. Kathryn Harding, "'I Sought Him but I did not Find Him': The Elusive Lover in the Song of Songs," *Biblical Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (2008): 43-59.

Ironically, in the following engagement of the concept 'fort-da' I draw on both Derrida and Barthes in their 'masculine' recounting of the 'other's absence' and while Roland Barthes identifies it as a 'feminized' discourse, which might be debated, it is a shared experience. The recounting of absence occurs from the subject's point of reference. The beloved other is always 'away' or 'journeying' in a sense even if she/he is the one that is waiting 'at home.' In the Shulamith's perception of the masculine other's calling and coming, I see a reciprocating force. Who is really 'away'?

<sup>102</sup> Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, 348.

<sup>103</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Son 4:16

<sup>105</sup> Boer, "The Second Coming," 278.

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<sup>106</sup> Derrida, "Envois," 44.

<sup>107</sup> Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 94-5.

<sup>108</sup> Derrida, "Envois," 44.

<sup>109</sup> Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: a Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>110</sup> A quote from *Limonade Tout Etait Si Infini*. Hélène Cixous, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994), 110.

<sup>111</sup> The lover is outside of the garden. She is inside. Son 8:13.

<sup>112</sup> Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> [What does she want? What do I want? – Only the moon.] A play on Lacan's question «*Chè vuoi* » in Lacan, *Écrits*, 690. In his essay "The Subversion of The Subject and The Dialectic of Desire" Lacan links desire and language, imagining that the unconscious is in fact *the* discourse with the Other (the unconscious is a construct of the Symbolic). Desire as a notion is enigmatic in that the subject is constituted by this dialectic that is to desire the desire of the Other, yet 'He himself' does not know what 'he' wants: « *le désir de l'homme est le désir de l'Autre* » Ibid., 671-702, esp., 689, 690. Žižek phrases the question as "What's bugging you?" Žižek contra Lévinas (ethics of responsibility) goes on to argue that in effect formulations of 'the Law' serve to properly distance the subject from the monstrosity of the Other [*Das Ding*]. Slavoj Žižek, *How To Read Lacan*, ed. Simon Critchley (New York: Norton, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> Ovid cited by Cixous in her essay, "Mamãe, Disse Ele." Cixous, *Stigmata*, 140.

<sup>115</sup> Paz, *Piedra Del Sol*, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 25.

<sup>117</sup> Fiona Black, *The Artifice Of Love: Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 228-9.

<sup>118</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). See chapter 4 "A Love Story Gone Awry" where she describes the 'adam as 'earth creature' and the delineation of genders only after Gen 2:21-22. Ibid., 98.

<sup>119</sup> Black, *The Artifice of Love*, 229.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Donatien-Alphonse-Françoise, comte [Marquis] de Sade, *Justine ou Les Malheurs de la vertu*, (Paris: Ebooks Libre et Gratuit, 2003), loc. 1218, édition électronique. ["Pretty buttocks," said the Count in a tone of cruellest irony, and touched those objects with brutality, "superb flesh... excellent lunch for my dogs.]

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<sup>122</sup> Black, *The Artifice of Love*, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 38-9. "The fantasy of incorporation by means of which I attempt to escape fear (I incorporate a portion of my mother's body ... thus I hold on to her) threatens me none the less, for the symbolic, paternal prohibition already dwells in me ... I attempt another procedure: I am not the one that devours, I am being devoured by him; a third person therefore (he, a third person) is devouring me."

<sup>124</sup> Judges 19—the horrifying tale of a concubine who was left outside a door to be raped to death while her husband slept inside. An instance of biblical collateral damage?

<sup>125</sup> Particularly the masculine speaker's *wasfs*: Son 4:1-5; 7:2-6.

<sup>126</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanism of the Other*, 39, 44. This is Lévinas's significant section on "The Trace," which Derrida also takes up (see "Road to Awe," Book Two). At the end of this section Lévinas describes human encounter, as the trace of the face of the other, the other having already passed by, but leaving a 'disturbance' or 'wake', which Lévinas relates to *gravité*. It is Sartre, says Lévinas, who describes the other as a "pure hole in the world". Ibid., 39.

<sup>127</sup> Sade, *Justine*, loc. 1379. [is without any defence... more ... other than her beautiful head languishingly turned toward her executioner, superb hair in disorder, and tears inundating world's most beautiful face, the sweetest... the most interesting...]

<sup>128</sup> Bataille, *Erotism*, 25.

<sup>129</sup> Black, *The Artifice of Love*, 229.

<sup>130</sup> Boer, "The Second Coming." & Black, *The Artifice of Love*.

<sup>131</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

<sup>132</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation With Introduction And Commentary*, ed. William Albright and David Freedman, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 617. There is general consensus that 'navel' is innuendo for 'vulva' which leads to the possibility of association of 'mulled wine' to menstrual blood.

<sup>133</sup> Note Lev 12, also note the exhaustive exploration of women's bodies and discharges in the biblical literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls by William Loader. William Loader, *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Sectarian and Related Literature at Qumran*, Attitudes to Sexuality in Judaism and Christianity in the Hellenistic Greco-Roman Era (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>134</sup> Roland Boer, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* (London: Routledge, 1999), 59.

<sup>135</sup> Boer, "The Second Coming," 291. See also Boer's exploration of the 'seedy' side of the Song of Songs in *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*.



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<sup>136</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 101.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>138</sup> Cixous, *Angst*, 38.

<sup>139</sup> Boer, "The Second Coming," 279. Boer shapes his psychoanalytic approach from the theoretic of Lacan and Žižek. Note Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers On Technique: 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester, vol. I, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan (New York: Norton, 1991). See also Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 11. Also Slavoj Žižek's intersections with Lacan such as *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment As A Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991). Also by the same author, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay On Schelling And Related Matters*, Radical Thinkers (London: Verso, 1996).

<sup>140</sup> "...only by assimilating oneself to the body of the (M)Other do people recognize themselves as bodies." Boer, "The Second Coming," 278.

<sup>141</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*, 21.

<sup>142</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 75.

<sup>143</sup> Son 8:1

<sup>144</sup> Son 1:6

<sup>145</sup> Son 3:4; 8:5; 3:11 [Arise daughters of Zion – behold the king of peace / See the crown – his mother crowned him / On the day of his wedding / The day of the joy of his heart]

<sup>146</sup> Son 8:2,5, 3:4,

<sup>147</sup> Boer, "The Second Coming," 292.

<sup>148</sup> The vignette of the two harlots in 1 Kings 3. In her essay "Journey of a Metaphor" Tribble explores the dynamics of 'mother' in Solomon's harsh edict on the case of the dead child/living child. She finds the 'law' of Solomon causes the 'true mother' to arise. Developing Tribble's thesis, I add that a transgression has occurred. The true mother transgresses the law and in doing so evokes life for her child. Not only does she transgress the law of the father, but she transgresses her own desire, for the transcendent. Tribble, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 31-59, esp. 33.

<sup>149</sup> Son 7:7 "How beautiful and how enchanting, love, daughter of ecstasy."

<sup>150</sup> Cixous, *Angst*, 19.

<sup>151</sup> See Athalya Brenner's essay "The Tree Of Life As A Female Symbol." Athalya Brenner, "The Tree Of Life As A Female Symbol?," in *Genesis: Texts @ Contexts*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Archie Chee Chung Lee, and Gale A. Yee, Texts @ Contexts (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 35-42.

<sup>152</sup> Tribble, *Rhetoric Of Sexuality*, 33.

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<sup>153</sup> Though for all intents and purposes, the notion of a mother ‘actually’ crowning her son King is a remarkable scene, certainly there is no evidence elsewhere in scripture that Bathsheba or any other queen did this. It is a powerful position usually attributed to prophets and priests in biblical literature, i.e., 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Chron 23:11 etc.

<sup>154</sup> Cixous, *Angst*, 38.

<sup>155</sup> Son 7:1

<sup>156</sup> Tiamat. See Irigaray’s essay on civilization’s murder of the mother. Luce Irigaray, “Bodily Encounters with the Mother,” in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1999), 37. Keller directly engages the murder of Tiamat. Keller, *Face Of The Deep*, 1-40, esp. 34.

<sup>157</sup> Black, *The Artifice of Love*, 226.

<sup>158</sup> Boer, “The Second Coming,” 292.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Keller, *Face of the Deep*.

<sup>161</sup> Roland Boer, 11 March 2011, personal communication. The notion of ‘God as (M)Other’. [Note that the Lacanian shorthand for ‘mother’ in his system is small ‘o’ other (real other), big ‘O’ Other (symbolic other, ‘Father’) in relation to the symbolic and imaginary order, so Boer’s use of big ‘M’ big ‘O’ (M)Other is curious].

<sup>162</sup> Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 28.

<sup>163</sup> ‘An ode to Eve’, 2011.

<sup>164</sup> Hélène Cixous, *La*, 137-8. « A woman immortal ... ».

<sup>165</sup> Cixous, *Hélène Cixous Reader*, 206. (translation of *La*, 137-8).

### ***Peace Odyssey***

<sup>1</sup> Cixous, *Le Livre de Promethea*, 16-17.

“Because really I am a little tired of this besieged existence. I feel like a tiny state surrounded by twenty opposing states. From birth it has screamed with all its ego shouting itself hoarse: “I exist, I am, don’t come near, I have teeth, I have claws.” Shouts itself hoarse and has a sore throat and sore shoulders and sore eyes and would like to stop dressing in steel, and I would like to sleep naked on the warm sand beside her very own sea. I would like to doze now on Promethea’s shore, without weapons, without worry, without memory, without apprehension. I would like so much to be a woman without giving it a thought. I would like so much to be the freest of free women: so free that I would even be liberated from the painful sensation of

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being-liberated. I would like to be so freely free that I would never even think to say to myself: “How free I am!” because it is just something I would be.” Cixous, *Promethea*, 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Black, *The Artifice of Love*.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: Signet Classic, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Son 8:6

<sup>7</sup> Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, 96-97.

### ***Cirque du Soleil***

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare and Jill Levenson, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Stanley Wells, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 349.

<sup>2</sup> My mind is at play with two symbolic representations here. The rhizome of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which allows the multiple interconnections of an organism’s roots at nodes, or the artist’s quadriptych, a set of 4 images that connect by a hinge on either side. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism And Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> In this artist’s quadriptych of texts are:

α. Antigone. Girl-woman, rebel, resistant, love-child. Buried alive by a blind king. She does not believe there is any price too great for love.

β. The Epic of Gilgamesh – life-consuming fear of death drives a despotic warlord to the outer edge of the world as he quests for immortal life. Solomon or Gilgamesh, ‘Solomesh’ or ‘Gilgamon’. The Kings of the Selfsame replicate.

γ. *Inanna Descends*, where the Sumerian goddess of love passes deep into Ereshkigal’s land, and at each of death’s 7 gates Inanna, stripped consecutively of all her clothes until she arrived naked as the day she was born, face to face with *la femme de la mort*. The courage of a woman in the face of death.

δ. Is the star-crossed love of Romeo-Juliet, Tristan-Yseult or was it Romiet and Yseultan? So merged are these lovers that it is impossible to let them live. In these scenes, death greets love.

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[1. The secret 5<sup>th</sup> text is Genesis 2-3. Threaded through is the eating of Eden's fruit and the loss of immortality, in tandem with the Other-Great-Garden-Quest, the Song of Songs – in the face of death a solitary woman runs through dark and dangerous streets to find love and life.]

<sup>4</sup> Cixous, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, 59-60. A reading translated from Cixous's *La* by the editor, Susan Sellers.

<sup>5</sup> Ismene speaks. Sophocles, "Antigone," trans. David Grene, in *Sophocles I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 159-212. All quotes from the play "Antigone" in this chapter come from this source. I play with the notion of the Song of Songs as Antigone, myself as Ismene. I indicate here I am not afraid of an encounter in all its consequence.

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, *Ethics*, 243-70. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida To Respond*, ed. Mieke Bal and Hent de Vries, trans. Rachel Bowlby, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Son 8:9:

If she is a wall,  
we will fortify her with silver  
and if she is a door,  
we will barricade her with a cedar beam!

אסִּחוּמָה הִיא  
נִבְנָה עֲלֶיהָ טִירַת כֶּסֶף  
וְאִסְדִּלַּת הִיא  
נִצּוֹר עֲלֶיהָ לֹחַ אֶרֶז

<sup>8</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether discusses the prevalence of the concept of the "natural inferiority of women" in Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 77-8.

"This inferiority and subjugation of woman would have existed in paradise because it reflects biological nature, which for Aquinas has not changed with the fall." Ibid., 78.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Having been "bred to passivity" woman's very worst enemy may stare at her from the mirror. Here I am very much in mind of Virginia Woolf. Particularly her book of essays, *A Room of One's Own* and of course the figure of the Angel-of-the-House from her speech, "Professions for women." (Note that Derrida quotes from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in *Feu le Cendre*.)

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“... you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. ... Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing.” Virginia Woolf in Virginia Woolf and Michèle Barrett, *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing* (Orlando, FL: Mariner Books, 2003), 59.

<sup>12</sup> The Song of Songs carries a significant absence, that is, ‘father’. There are brothers, sisters, mothers, daughters and sons ... but no fathers.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Feu La Cendre*.

<sup>14</sup> Son 5:2; 8:12

אני ישנה ולבי ער

I am asleep but my heart is awake

כרמי שלי לפני

My vineyard is before me

<sup>15</sup> 2 Samuel 16:22, “So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.” [KJV]

<sup>16</sup> 2 Sam 20:3

<sup>17</sup> I merge the imagery of Cixous’s “writer’s room” in her novel *Hemlock*, with my own. Hélène Cixous, *Hemlock: Old Women in Bloom*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Cixous, *The Insister of Jacques Derrida*, 134.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Andrew George (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Sophocles, “Antigone,” 211.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Kings 1:1-2 “Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he got no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat.” [KJV]

<sup>22</sup> George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 98-9.

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being And Time: A Translation Of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> This is a kind of being-towards-death that is unfruitful. In fact it is a denial-of-death, or a fear that creates a kind of dying while still alive. Ibid. For the psychoanalytic perspective Yalom's *Staring at the Sun*. Irvin Yalom, *Staring At The Sun: Overcoming The Terror Of Death* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

Yalom writes, "Mortality has haunted us from the beginning of history. Four thousand years ago, the Babylonian hero, Gilgamesh reflected on the death of his friend Enkidu with the words ...: 'Thou hast become dark and cannot hear me. When I die shall I not be like Enkidu? Sorrow enters my heart. I am afraid of death.' Gilgamesh speaks for all of us. As he feared death, so do we all ..." Ibid., 1.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted To General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve," in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 105.

<sup>26</sup> Son 8:7

<sup>27</sup> Blyth and Sellers, *Live Theory*. Blyth and Sellers describe Cixous's operation of love as one that is outside of phallic pulsions, drives to possess, to install and administer law.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, *H.C. For Life*.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 106. Cixous embraces Shlomo's judgment scene in *White Ink*: "... the Judgment of Solomon, the primitive love scene: what does it mean to love but to fight over the body of a child? Who loves? What does it mean to love? To want to take to keep to kill to leave to open out your arms? The judgment of Solomon is particularly beautiful because it's a scene at once private and public. A scene of the bed, the bedroom, the city." Cixous, *White Ink*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Son 8:8

<sup>33</sup> Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, 96-97.

<sup>34</sup> A mother in Israel is not necessarily an attribution of feminine honour and certainly not of power. It reflects the negotiated honour of a woman who sustains the Father and the Law.

<sup>35</sup> Son 6:10. Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 95.

<sup>36</sup> A mythical creature, with the head of a woman and body of a lioness, and wings. She guarded the city of Thebes and asked riddles of those who wished to enter. Finally she committed suicide by devouring herself.

<sup>37</sup> In Sumerian, *nin-me* 'mistress of battle'. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Ninmešarra 125-132, a litany to Inanna from the Hymns of Enheduanna, Sumer quoted in *ibid.*, 64-65.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 58-69.

<sup>40</sup> Son 2:17

<sup>41</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 111.

<sup>43</sup> Son 2:12

<sup>44</sup> Jan 7, 2010 "Lively Trees."

<sup>45</sup> Shakespeare and Levenson, *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 141-2.

<sup>46</sup> Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Women who are outside father, law and word, in Ancient Israel are the symbolic objects of prophetic indictment (i.e. Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Lamentations), a target of legislation in Ancient Israel (esp. Lev 18, 20), any woman compelled or not who engages in non-legitimate sexual relations willing participant or not, and any woman found to be practicing non-sanctioned spiritual activity (Lev 20). In the nomadic, patriarchal period, they were subjected to rough justice. Take for example the almost-fate of Tamar – Judah says "bring her out and let her be burned" (Gen 38:24). Note that even an innocent woman in the wrong place and the wrong time, as a victim may be criminalized. The concubines of David, raped by his son-successor Absalom, are punished (they are all 'Antigones') shut up inside a room, never again to see another soul. It was a living death vastly more cruel than a quick execution (2 Sam 20:3).

<sup>48</sup> "Bring her out and let her be burned" Gen 38:24. Such is Judah's judgement against Tamar and her unborn child. He does not know that the child is his.

<sup>49</sup> Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire: Joan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 187.

<sup>50</sup> Cixous, *Manna*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Shakespeare and Levenson, *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 404.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *H.C. for Life*.

<sup>53</sup> Son 7:14

<sup>54</sup> Cixous, *The Third Body*, 40-41.

<sup>55</sup> Kristeva, *Tales of love*, 6. See the chapter "In praise of love," Ibid., 1-18.

<sup>56</sup> Romeo speaks of Juliet [balcony scene] Shakespeare and Levenson, *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 207.

<sup>57</sup> "Only that myopia of a Tuesday in January—the myopia that was going away, leaving the woman like a slow inner sea—could see both shores. For it is not permitted to mortals to be on both sides." Cixous, "Savoir," 16.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 348.

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<sup>59</sup> 'seal" Son 8:6: "bear me as a seal upon your arm"

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, trans. Hilaire Belloc (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Verena Andermatt Conley, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 72.

<sup>62</sup> Cixous, *Love Itself*, 47.

<sup>63</sup> Imre Kertész, *Kaddish For A Child Unborn*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Vintage International, 2004).

"... life itself, that inexplicable complex of being and feeling, demands explanations of us, those around us demand explanations, and in the end we ourselves demand explanations of ourselves, until in the end we succeed in annihilating everything around us, ourselves included, or in other words explain ourselves to death..." Ibid., 2.

<sup>64</sup> Cixous, *Hemlock*, 80.

### **Shibboleth**

<sup>1</sup> Paul Celan cited in Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth for Paul Celan," in *Word Traces: Readings Of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 41.

<sup>2</sup> François de La Rochefoucauld's «Maxim 26. » Rochefoucauld's maxim is popularly known in France as «Le soleil ni la mort ne peuvent se regarder en face.», which I have reproduced here. The maxim appears as «Le soleil ni la mort ne se peuvent regarder fixement.», which is how it appears in the Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maxims Morales*, which he had published in 1665 and which is now in the public domain. Yalom quotes an English translation of this maxim in his book *Staring at the Sun*. François de La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maxims Morales* (Paris: Ebooks Libres et Gratuits), loc. 68, éditions électronique.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *H.C. for Life*, 158.

<sup>4</sup> LaCocque assumes in the Song of Songs a 'sweeping' condemnation of the establishment of the second temple period, "... the author of the Canticle produced not just a secular love song but, more embarrassingly, a defiant, irreverent, subversive discourse, which at times constitutes a satirical pastiche of prophetic metaphors and similes" LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, *H.C. for Life*. In this book Derrida explores in depth the relation between Cixous's approach to life-death and his own.

<sup>6</sup> Cixous, "Savoir," 13-16.



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<sup>7</sup> Derrida: "there is nothing outside the text [il n'y a pas de hors-texte]." Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 163.

<sup>8</sup> Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (London: Rider, 2004), 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Celan "Du Warst" from the *Fadensonnen* anthology. "You were my death: you I could hold when all fell away from me" Paul Celan, *The Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> "Stop all the clocks..." W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 141.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Work Of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Judith Butler's challenge to Derrida's reader: "Indeed, now that Derrida, the person, has died, his writing makes a demand on us. We must address him as he addressed himself, asking what it means to know and approach another, to apprehend a life and a death, to give an account of its meaning, to acknowledge its binding ties with others, and to do that justly. In this way, Derrida has always been offering us a way to interrogate the meaning of our lives, singly and plurally, returning to the question as the beginning of philosophy, but surely also, in his own way, and with several unpayable debts, beginning philosophy again and anew." Judith Butler, "Jacques Derrida," *London Review of Books* 26 no. 21 (2004), 32.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *The Work Of Mourning*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Birnbaum in Derrida's *Learning To Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

... it is indeed the voice of Derrida you hear, perfectly intact, the same as it always was. The voice of a *ghost* that is already contemplating the irreparable. Cheerful and gentle, it is the voice of a *spectral child* who does not yet know anything about life, and who is just beginning to learn—finally: "I see myself dead cut off from you in your memories that I love and I weep like my own children at the edge of my grave." Ibid. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, *The Work Of Mourning*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Epicurus famously described the paradox of Death that it is, "... nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more." Cited in D.J. Enright, ed. *The Oxford Book Of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cixous, *The Insister of Jacques Derrida*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Cixous, "Savoir."

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Fors: the English words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok," in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Son 2:17, my own translation.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *H.C. for Life*.

<sup>23</sup> Cixous, "Savoir."

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Darren Aronofsky, "The Fountain," (USA: Warner Bros.; 20th Century Fox, 2006). Xibalba is visible in the Milky Way, considered a 'place of fear', the Mayan underworld, but appears in Aronofsky's film as the Orian Nebula, figuring as a site of death and rebirth; the ultimate epiphanic moment that cannot but be on the edge between death and life. It plays an expansive metaphorical role in Aronofsky's film as a moment of continuity at the limits of life, very much in the mood of Bataille.

<sup>26</sup> "Violent gentleness, brusque apparition," Cixous, "Savoir," 9.

<sup>27</sup> Son 5:2

<sup>28</sup> Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*.

<sup>29</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Lucretius' fall of atoms from chaos into order, the turbulence that gave birth to the world. See Bloom's evocation of Nietzsche on the idea of the poetic word as *clinamen* in Harold Bloom, "The breaking of form," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom, et al. (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 8.

<sup>31</sup> But is this Heidegger's productive angst? On the notion of 'object loss' vis-à-vis mourning see Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989). At this point I am exploring the uncanniness of the moment, of utter familiarity when the 'prospect' of death/loss makes a traumatic presencing.

<sup>32</sup> Terrence Malick, "Tree of Life," (USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2011). Malick's breath-taking Heideggerian cinematic extravaganza *Tree of Life* has this same sense, both the absolute uniqueness of the life experience of humanity, and the unbearable tension of the meaningless-meaningful, terminal mortality of humanity epitomized in the agonizing evocation of God's voice in Job 38:4: *Where were you when the earth's foundations were laid?*

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<sup>33</sup> "Death as excess, always already there, proves that life is only defective when death has taken it hostage, that life only exists in bursts and in exchanges with death, if it is not condemned to the

discontinuity of value and there to absolute deficit. "To will that there be life only is to make sure that there is only death'." Jean Baudrillard, "Death in Bataille," in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, 140.

<sup>34</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> The words Sein-zum-Tode (being-toward-death) belong to Heidegger. His dense dialectic describes the concept or the nuancing of a concept of authenticity; 'openness to being'. Death is critical in Heidegger's calculations. Death is the always-already possibility for the living, and when it is recognized there is a phenomenonal impact on being: 'being-toward-death'. Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

<sup>36</sup> Cixous, *The Insister of Jacques Derrida*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Cixous, *White Ink*.

<sup>40</sup> Derrida, *Feu la cendre*, (Paris: Des Femmes, 1987). Also note the introduction by Lukacher in Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, *H.C. for Life*, 130-1.

<sup>42</sup> Also Son 2:16

<sup>43</sup> Virgil, *Virgil's Aeneid: Part 13*, trans. John Dryden, Harvard Classics (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 234.

In no fix'd place the happy souls reside.  
In groves we live, and lie on mossy beds,  
By crystal streams, that murmur thro' the meads:  
But pass yon easy hill, and thence descend;  
The path conducts you to your journey's end...  
—*Aeneid*, Virgil.

<sup>44</sup> Cixous, *So Close*, 158.

<sup>45</sup> In this reverie I purposefully blend my imagery with Cixous's in *So Close*, 158

<sup>46</sup> Job 30:16

<sup>47</sup> Cixous, *So Close*, 159.

<sup>48</sup> Celan cited in Derrida, "Shibboleth," 24.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Celan's poem "Todtnauberg," reproduced and translated in Pierre Joris, "Celan/Heidegger: Translation at the Mountain of Death," Electronic Poetry Center, University of Buffalo, last modified

1988, accessed 14 March 2011, <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>. "Todtnauberg" was a German poem written by Paul Celan in the spring of 1970 after visiting Heidegger at his cottage in the Black Mountains.

<sup>50</sup> Celan's "Todtnauberg" in English translation. The translator is Pierre Joris. Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hélène Cixous, "What Is It O'clock? Or The Door (We Never Enter)," 48-69, in *Stigmata: Escaping texts* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> "between the lips of the Land that is always promised...," Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 41.

<sup>53</sup> "I sat down at the top of a ladder whose rungs were covered with stained feathers, vestiges of defeated angels...," Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Joris, "Translation at the Mountain of Death."

<sup>55</sup> In thinking of the life of Celan, his shadows, I think of lines from the Babylonian Talmud. On blood, death, the hopelessness and triteness of any recompense for grief, nor holocaust, I think of the blood of Zechariah. There is no recompense for slaughter: "Zechariah, Zechariah, I have destroyed the flower of them..."

"[After that] he saw the blood of Zechariah seething. 'What is this?' cried he. 'It is the blood of sacrifices, which has been spilled,' they answered. 'Then,' said he, 'bring [some animal blood] and I will compare them, to see whether they are alike.' So he slaughtered animals and compared them, but they were dissimilar. 'Disclose [the secret] to me, or if not, I will tear your flesh with iron combs,' he threatened. They replied: 'This is [the blood of] a priest and a prophet, who foretold the destruction of Jerusalem to the Israelites, and they killed him.' 'I,' said he, 'will appease him.' So he brought the scholars and slew them over him, yet it did not cease [to boil]. He brought schoolchildren and slew them over him, still it did not rest; he brought the young priests and slew them over him, and still it did not rest, until he had slain ninety four thousand, and still it did not rest. Whereupon he approached him and cried out, 'Zechariah, Zechariah, I have destroyed the flower of them: dost thou desire me to massacre them all?' Straightway it rested. "Tractate Sanhedrin," folio 96b, trans. H. Freedman, in the *Sefer Nezikin*, Soncino Babylonian Talmud, ed. Isidore Epstein (London: The Soncino Press).

<sup>56</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

<sup>57</sup> Ecc 3:2-8

a time to be born, and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to root up that  
which is planted  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to destroy and a time to build  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,

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a time to mourn and a time to dance  
 a time to cast away stones and a time to  
 gather stones together  
 a time to embrace and a time to separate  
 oneself from embracing  
 a time to search and a time to be at loss  
 a time to keep watch over, and a time to  
 throw it away  
 a time to tear and a time to repair  
 a time to be silent and a time to speak  
 a time to love and a time to hate  
 a time for armed struggle and a time of  
 shalom  
*What gain is there to work against this  
 toil?*  
 —Qohelet

<sup>58</sup> Celan cited in Derrida, "Shibboleth," 44.

<sup>59</sup> Cixous, "What Is It O'clock?," 75.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Derrida, "Shibboleth."

<sup>62</sup> Cixous, "What Is It O'clock?," 73.

<sup>63</sup> Celan cited in Derrida, "Shibboleth," 33.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>65</sup> See Derrida's exploration of circumcision. Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," in Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993)., and also in Derrida, "Shibboleth," 3.

<sup>66</sup> "ihm...", a poem by Paul Celan that Derrida explores in his essay "Schibboleth pour Paul Celan", poem and translation quoted in "Shibboleth," 65.

to him  
 I opened my word  
 ...  
 for this one,  
 circumcise the word,  
 for this one  
 write the living

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Nothing in the heart,  
 for this one  
 spread the two  
 cripple-fingers in the hallowing sentence.  
 This one.  
 —Paul Celan

<sup>67</sup> The English translation appears in Derrida, "Shibboleth," 65.

<sup>68</sup> Cixous, "What Is It O'clock?," 80.

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Derrida in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 164.

<sup>70</sup> Cixous, "What Is It O'clock?," 93.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> Derrida in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 140.

<sup>73</sup> Cixous, "What Is It O'clock?," 92.

<sup>74</sup> Son 4:10, 14, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Son 4:3, 13; 6:7, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Celan, *The Selected Poems*, 89.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties In Question: The Poetics Of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham Press, 2005), 43. He quotes Celan, *ibid.*, 43:

Mit der aschenkelle geschöpft  
 aus dem Seinstrog,  
 seifig  
 [Drawn with the ash-ladle  
 from the tub of being,  
 soapy]  
 —Paul Celan

<sup>79</sup> Paul Celan's poem quoted by Derrida. *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>80</sup> The English translation appears in *Ibid.* 141.

Vast, glowing vault  
 with the swarm of  
 black stars pushing themselves  
 out and away:

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on to a ram's silicified forehead  
 I brand this image, between  
 the horns, in which,  
 in the song of the whorls, the  
 marrow of melted  
 heart-oceans swells.  
 Into  
 what  
 does he not charge?  
 The world is gone, I must carry you.  
 — Paul Celan

<sup>81</sup> Son 8:13

<sup>82</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 115.

<sup>83</sup> Cixous, "What Is It O'clock?," 98.

### ***Dream Scenes***

<sup>1</sup> "This is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul's creative power." Buber, *I and Thou*, 60. I'm not sure about Buber's eternal origins. But something has become a work through Chagall, particularly in his creations around the Song of Songs, and its themes of desire and love. I could imagine this form. Derrida replies to Buber following:

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth In Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). He asks:

"...What is art? Then: where does it come from? What is the origin of art? ... For these questions, the guiding thread ... will always have been the existence of "works," of "works of art." This protocol of the question installs us in a fundamental presupposition, and massively predetermines the system and combinatory possibilities of answers. What it begins by implying is that art – the word, the concept, the thing – has a unity and, what is more, an originary meaning, an etymon, a truth that is one and naked ..., and that it would be sufficient to unveil it through history. It implies first of all that "art" can be reached following the three ways of word, concept, and thing, or again of signifier, signified, and referent, or even by some opposition between presence and representation." *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> In scholarship on the Song of Songs, one line of thinking explores the text as dream sequence, hence the déjà vu of scenes of running through dark streets. Othmar Keel evaluates this view in his

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commentary. Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). It is more strongly embraced by Abraham Mariaselvam. Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism* Analecta Biblica 118 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 32-33 & 221.

In this set of pericopes, "Dream Scenes," I am inspired by Cixous's dream writing and I explore here the possibility of dream-writing an encounter with the poem. Hélène Cixous, *Dream I Tell You*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Bie Brahic, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). The most visually successful dreamer of the Song of Songs and its themes was Marc Chagall, an immigrant to Paris, France from a Jewish community (Liozna near Vitebsk) in what is now Belarus. He painted mostly in Paris during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (from around 1910 to 1985). His art is identifiable by his application of vibrant colour in modernist, avant-garde scenes that incorporate dreams and symbols from his youth in Vitebsk. Here I enter the dream scene of the Song of Songs with Hélène Cixous through the portal of 4 of his paintings.

<sup>4</sup> The words of a Belsen Survivor, quoted in Enright, *The Oxford Book Of Death*, ix. He recounts that his experience of the camp changed his view of life and death in a startling way. Also cited in Yalom, *Staring at the Sun*.

<sup>5</sup> I imagine the blue of the yarns, woven for the curtains and veils in the temple. Ex 25-28.

<sup>6</sup> This is the earliest literary 'tree of life', which comes from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Gilgamesh quested for the Plant-of-the-Heartbeat, spurred on by his fear of death, and heightened by the death of his beloved friend, Enkidu. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Chagall is inspired by the biblical motif, the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis. Life (in the face of death), could be said to be one of his most enduring themes. In Chagall's paintings trees, shrubs and bouquets seem significant, and I imagine that for him they might be symbolic 'trees of life'. These are ubiquitous in his paintings and synonymous with love scenes/dreams. I make the link to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* because in that poem the tree-of-life was a first 'plant', though certainly other divine trees were prominent in the *Epic* such as the Huluppu Tree. See Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, 48-49.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *H.C. for Life*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Celan, "Fugue of death," in *The Poetry Of Our World: An International Anthology*, ed. Jeffrey Paine (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 240-2. Celan's poem was translated from the German by Christopher Middleton: *Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night...*

<sup>10</sup> Žižek and Dolar, "Run, Isolde, Run."

<sup>11</sup> Cixous, *Manna*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Cixous, *Reviements: Dans L'Antarctique du Cœur*, ed. Cécile Bourguignon, Lignes fictives (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 11. "...like life itself, as incomprehensibly strong as she is fragile..." [my own translation].



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<sup>13</sup> Lit. lips of sleepers

<sup>14</sup> Cixous, *Promethea*, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 155. "As for painting, any discourse on it, beside it or above, always strikes me as silly, both didactic and incantory, programmed, worked by the compulsion of mastery, be it poetical or philosophical, always, and the more so when it is pertinent, in the position of chitchat, unequal and unproductive in the sight of what, at a stroke [d'un trait], does without or goes beyond this language, remaining heterogeneous to it or denying it any overview."

Am I falling into a compulsion for mastery? I could not master it, I could not hold it. How could I? I am exposing my heart to its thorn. These paintings teach me, they pour out pomegranate juice for me. He pushed aside the curtain obscuring infinity. I drink the nectar of wisdom through their breasts. They are all my mothers. Mother-Chagall. He paints me. Each stroke tears me. I am painted.

<sup>16</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 151.

<sup>17</sup> Ovid, "Orpheus and Eurydice," Book X, *The Metamorphoses*.

<sup>18</sup> In the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice, Eurydice is pursued by a satyr and stumbles into a viper's nest. She is bitten and dies. She recedes into Hades. Orpheus is disconsolate and with his lyre he journeys to Hades to reclaim her. His music helps him achieve this aim, as long as he can lead her out without looking at her. His anxiety grows with the command not to look and reaching the exit, he cannot restrain himself and casts a glance back at her. The underworld reclaims her. Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Cixous, *Hemlock*.

<sup>21</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 35.

<sup>22</sup> From Gen 2:7, וַיִּצַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפֶר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בָּאָפִיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לִנְפֹשׁ חַיָּה

<sup>23</sup> "She has a cough," a comment from a little old lady on the quay on *la plage d'Arcachon*. What is the wisdom of bringing a small child, 18000 kilometres? Her first symptom was a cough that developed en route. Finally here we are in France and she can't go out. Everywhere we go the small child coughs up a storm. I suffer the accusing stares of old women on windy quays. It's Autumn here, the trees are turning red-brown. The days alternate in this coastal town between sunny humidity and chilly dampness. Perfect for *une petite toux*.

<sup>24</sup> In Thai her name means "water of life."

<sup>25</sup> Rilke's Poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes." in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems: With Parallel Bilingual Text*, ed. Robert Vilain, trans. Susan Ranson and Marielle Sutherland, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78-79. In English, *ibid.*, 79.

... wood and valley and road

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and hamlet, field, river and creature;  
 that round this lamentation-world turned,  
 just as round the other earth, a sun,  
 and then a starred heaven, a lamentation—  
 heaven of silence with disfigured stars.  
 She was so greatly loved...  
 —Rainer Maria Rilke

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Singer, *The Slave*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>30</sup> Cixous, *Stigmata*, 150.

<sup>31</sup> While many translations of the Song, and of the Garden of Eden vignette, translate טפוח as 'apple', apples did not grow in Israel during the biblical period. Some scholars speculate that the fruit was more like an apricot or peach. This is how I have translated טפוח. Cf. Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*.

<sup>32</sup> "death means continuity...", Bataille, *Erotism*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 25.

<sup>34</sup> "tree of life" written Oct 10, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> T. Carmi, *At The Stone Of Losses*, Jewish Poetry Series (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 83.

## **Epilogue**

<sup>1</sup> Cixous, "In October 1991," 52.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hélène Cixous. *Le Livre de Promethea* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 9. "I am a little afraid for this book. Because it is a book of love. It is a bush of fire. Best to leap in. Once in the fire, one is flooded with sweetness. I am there, I swear it."