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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Department of English

**Nietzsche and Modernism: Nihilism and Meaningless Suffering in D. H. Lawrence,
Franz Kafka, and Samuel Beckett**

by

Stewart Smith

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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English

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NIETZSCHE AND MODERNISM: NIHILISM AND MEANINGLESS SUFFERING IN D. H. LAWRENCE, FRANZ KAFKA, AND SAMUEL BECKETT

Stewart Smith

While Friedrich Nietzsche's explosive impact on literary modernism is widely acknowledged, the existent critical literature overlooks modernist writers' shared engagement with Nietzsche's governing preoccupations, namely of nihilism and meaningless suffering. Departing from the tendency to consider Nietzsche's relationship to modernism largely in terms of his revolutionary, iconoclastic appeal, I shall argue that works by D. H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, and Samuel Beckett dramatise and explore the problem of nihilism, and its inextricable tie to suffering, in terms that echo Nietzsche's analysis of this psycho-physiological phenomenon. I shall therefore invoke Nietzsche's thought as a heuristic tool to examine Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and Beckett's *Endgame*.

I shall begin by arguing that Nietzsche's most consistent usage of the term nihilism denotes the failure to experience oneself as an agent. As the cognitive and the physiological intertwine in Nietzsche's thought, I shall contend that Nietzsche identifies suffering to precipitate feelings of nihilism. While observing that Nietzsche defines his philosophical project in opposition to the Christian interpretation of suffering, I shall note that he nevertheless acknowledges the role of the ascetic ideal in averting suicidal nihilism: Christianity provides a means to appropriate senseless suffering and enables its adherents to conceive of themselves as willing agents. I shall proceed by examining Nietzsche's discourse on excessive suffering given that he considers those traditional means to counter nihilism as redundant. Doing so, I shall attend to the discordant

postures in Nietzsche's thought which, I argue, gravitate around the problem of unbearable suffering.

Turning to the aforementioned modernist texts, I shall demonstrate that the need to ascribe value to suffering weighs heavily in each of the fictional landscapes characterised by illness, exhaustion and powerlessness: Lawrence, Kafka, and Beckett dramatise the frailty of the modern subject denuded of the traditional means to justify or redeem one's suffering. Relatedly, I shall invoke Nietzsche's notion of the self-preservative economy to analyse the recurrence of defensive, self-protective subjectivities in these respective texts, observing the characters' reactionary recoil from the other. Furthermore, registering that the characters' experience of suspended agency provokes a compensatory negation of the other, Nietzsche's thought on cruelty and *ressentiment*, or the vindictive spirit of the impotent, shall feature prominently in my study of literary modernism.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, STEWART SMITH

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

NIETZSCHE AND MODERNISM: NIHILISM AND MEANINGLESS SUFFERING IN D. H. LAWRENCE, FRANZ KAFKA, AND SAMUEL BECKETT

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signed:

Date: 28/01/2016

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Abbreviations of Nietzsche's Works

<i>BGE</i>	<i>Beyond Good and Evil : Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future.</i> trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 1990).
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Birth of Tragedy : Out of the Spirit of Music.</i> trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993).
<i>D</i>	<i>Daybreak : Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality.</i> trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, repr. 2007).
<i>EH</i>	<i>Ecce Homo : How One Becomes What One Is.</i> trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, repr. 2004).
<i>GS</i>	<i>The Gay Science : With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs.</i> trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, repr. 2003).
<i>HAH</i>	<i>Human, All Too Human.</i> trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehman (London: Penguin, repr. 2004).
<i>OGM</i>	<i>On the Genealogy of Morality.</i> trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
<i>TSZ</i>	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One.</i> trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 2003).
<i>TI & AC</i>	<i>Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ.</i> trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, repr. 2003).
<i>WTP</i>	<i>The Will to Power.</i> trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

Introduction: Nietzsche, Nihilism and Modernism

Nietzsche and Modernism

In 1913 the tormented Franz Kafka wrote to break off his engagement with Felice Bauer:

It certainly was not my intention to make you suffer, yet I have done so; obviously it will never be my intention to make you suffer, yet I shall always do so. [...] Felice, beware of thinking of life as commonplace, if by commonplace you mean monotonous, simple, petty. Life is merely terrible; I feel it as few others do. Often - and in my inmost self perhaps all the time - I doubt whether I am a human being.¹

While acknowledging that life is constituted by inevitable suffering, Kafka reveals his own particularly sensitive nature. Furthermore, his confession to possessing such an acute sensibility, and the juxtaposition of this acknowledgement with a condemnatory evaluation of life, evokes a passage from the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*. This entry is revealing of Nietzsche's perception of modernity:

Knowledge of distress. - Perhaps nothing separates human beings or ages from each other more than the different degrees of their knowledge of distress - distress of the soul as well as of the body. Regarding the latter we moderns may well, in spite of our frailties and fragilities, be bunglers and dreamers owing to lack of ample first-hand experience, compared with an age of fear, the longest of all ages, when individuals had to protect themselves against violence and to that end had themselves too become men of violence. [...] But that is how most people seem to me to be these days. The general inexperience with both sorts of pain and the relative rarity of the sight of suffering individuals have an important consequence: pain is hated much more now than formerly; one speaks much worse of it; indeed, one can hardly endure the presence of pain as a thought and makes it a matter of conscience and a reproach against the whole of existence. (GS, pp. 60-61)

¹ Quoted in Idris Parry's 'Introduction' to *The Trial* in Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (London: Penguin, repr. 2000), p. xiii.

This passage may be used to corroborate the views of those who see Nietzsche as a cruel philosopher, insensitive to human suffering.² I shall argue, however, that Nietzsche remained consistently sensitive to the issue of human suffering, that his central doctrines revolve around this theme, and his analysis of various cultures rests upon their respective responses to suffering. Moreover, what I wish to stress with regards to this particular passage is that Nietzsche regards the modern sensitivity to distress to foster ‘a reproach against the whole of existence’: the experience of suffering is bound to one’s evaluative interpretation of life and, in our case, according to Nietzsche, ‘suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled *against* life’ (*OGM*, p. 47). Suffering is thus entwined with nihilism, the pessimistic view that life is not worth living.

Nietzsche’s explosive impact upon literary modernism is widely acknowledged. However, there is a paucity of critical literature exploring these central aspects of his thought with regards to its relationship to modernism. It may be argued that all four of the writers I am exploring in this thesis, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka, D.H. Lawrence and Samuel Beckett, were particularly sensitive to suffering, and perhaps therefore predisposed to experience feelings of futilitarian resignation.³ But this biographical point aside, what I wish to do in this study is to examine their shared concern with suffering and nihilism as it is presented in their respective work in order to offer a new perspective of modernist cultural output. By taking Nietzsche’s thought on suffering and nihilism as a heuristic lens through which to explore these modernist figures, I shall diverge from related studies that chart Nietzsche’s relation to modernism.⁴

A common entry point for critics discussing the heterogeneous streams of modernist literary practice and outlook is to emphasise its discontinuity with previous cultural forms: the complex phenomenon of literary modernism can be generally understood as an ardent response to the imperative enunciated by one of its leading promoters, the poet

² Nietzsche ends this passage: ‘the recipe against this ‘distress’ is: *distress*’. I shall consider some of these views below.

³ See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, repr. 2003), pp. 191-92. On Beckett, see James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 27; On Lawrence, see David Ellis, *Death and the Author: How D.H. Lawrence Died, and Was Remembered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 57.

⁴ I shall be primarily speaking of Nietzsche’s reception within the Anglophone tradition below. For further discussion of Nietzsche’s reception in Germany see Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990* (London: University of California Press, 1994).

and critic Ezra Pound, to '[m]ake it new!'. This call to aesthetic innovation, with its implicit critique of traditional forms, is considered to be paralleled in Nietzsche's philosophical project. Otherwise put, critics studying Nietzsche's seminal impact upon modernist literature primarily figure the thinker as an iconoclast, as a revolutionary prophet.

The putative view of Nietzsche's heretical programme is evident within studies that discuss Nietzsche's relationship to early twentieth-century literary culture. Robert B. Pippin, for instance, claims that Nietzsche is a 'paradigmatic "modernist" ' insofar as he embodies the 'irremediable break with the past' that defines modernist work.⁵ Robert Gooding-Williams, in his *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, similarly argues that Nietzsche's relationship to literary modernism is premised on an unprecedented 'creative break with the past'.⁶ Roger Griffin identifies Nietzsche as the paradigmatic figure in what he calls programmatic modernism. This term considers modernism as 'a mission to change society, to inaugurate a new epoch, to start anew. It is a modernism that lends itself to the rhetoric of manifestos and declarations'.⁷

Nietzsche's early reception corroborates this aforementioned dominant view of the thinker and his relation to literary modernism. Nietzsche's thought first came to prominence in European intellectual circles in 1888 when the esteemed Danish critic Georg Brandes lectured upon Nietzsche, and, noting both his elitism and iconoclastic appeal, defined his work as expressing an 'aristocratic radicalism'.⁸ Nietzsche himself eagerly approved of this epithet. In terms of the early Anglophone response to the philosopher, accounts of his reception and dissemination reinforce this interpretation. Unsurprisingly, Nietzsche's radical voice was primarily disseminated in publications emphasizing the pursuit of individual expression: Nietzsche arrived at a time when aesthetes were involved in a struggle to overcome the expectations of an ethical or didactic commitment proscribed by Victorian moralism. Nietzsche thus featured heavily,

⁵ Robert B. Pippin, 'Nietzsche and the Origin of the Idea of Modernism', *Inquiry*, 26 (1983), 151-52.

⁶ Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 3.

⁷ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 2. Griffin also registers an 'unresolved tension in Nietzsche's creative response to modernity' marked by a turning inward and 'the cultivation of special moments.'

⁸ Malcolm Bradbury and James Walter McFarlane, *Modernism: 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 79.

for example, in journals such as *The Eagle and the Serpent*, *The Egotist*, and *The New Age*, along with other iconoclastic writers such as Emerson and Carlyle.⁹ Contributors such as A.R. Orage, Bernard Shaw and Havelock Ellis celebrated Nietzsche's radical emancipatory rhetoric not only because Nietzsche emphasised a rejection of what were held to be the prevalent nineteenth century ethics of altruism and self-abnegation, but also as he was seen to privilege an individualistic or aesthetic engagement in its place. Thus Malcolm Bradbury points out that Nietzsche was part of the wider cultural shift in which the newer emphasis upon individual expression existed in conflict with outlooks which implicitly demoted the value of the individual.¹⁰ Writers revolting against the twin hegemonies of Victorian religiosity and the generalizing, abstracting theories of scientific discourse, as exemplified by scientific positivism and Darwinism, thus found in Nietzsche's romantic heroism, with its grand rhetorical gestures and devastating critiques, a renewed poetic resilience and a celebration of individual creation.

For the most part, then, Nietzsche is seen to be adopted as an elitist, sceptical voice celebrating individual self-creation and calling for a radical reappraisal of dominant social codes and conventions associated with traditional religion and mass democracy. Patrick Bridgwater thus argues that '[f]or most of those who fell under his spell, Nietzsche's aristocratic idea, his anti-democratic stance, was at the centre of his appeal'.¹¹ Another way to put this is to align the modernists with Nietzsche's notion of an 'active nihilism', or his project of carrying out a 'revaluation of all values' (*WTP*, p. 3): Nietzsche encourages a renewal of values through an active deconstruction of existent values; those participating in this project would similarly contribute to the ongoing 'devaluation' of our hitherto highest values most famously encapsulated in the declaration of God's death, uttered by Nietzsche's fictional madman in *The Gay Science* (*GS*, pp. 119-20). Both John Burt Foster's *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism*, and Keith M. May's *Nietzsche and Modern Literature* make this argument. Foster works from the premise that Nietzsche's thinking 'is nothing if not radically distrustful of continuity, since he envisions

⁹ See Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglo-Saxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Influence on English and American Literature* (Bristol: Leicester University Press, 1972); David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England, 1890-1914: The Growth of a Reputation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Bradbury and McFarlane, pp. 75-79.

¹¹ Bridgwater, p. 243.

a total revaluation of values'.¹² May, too, argues that 'Nietzsche's overwhelming concern was always with values',¹³ and that the writers whom he considers in relation to the thinker echo 'the madman's opinion about the "greatness" of the deed of killing God'.¹⁴

Nevertheless, there are critical voices that contest this celebratory assessment of Nietzsche's pertinence to literary modernism. For instance, in his discussion of modernist poets, J. Hillis Miller considers Nietzsche's 'revaluation of all values' to reflect the modern, imperious subject's totalizing annihilation of otherness: 'Nietzsche's transvaluation of values is the expunging of God as the absolute value and source of the valuation of everything else. In the emptiness left after the death of God, man becomes the sovereign valuer, the measurer of all things'.¹⁵ Miller sees Nietzsche's notion of God's death to give expression to the modern 'deification of man': the human subject merely displaces God as the centre of absolute values; this amounts to a complete anthropomorphising of existence, or the annihilation of otherness and the objective world. According to Miller, Nietzsche's active nihilism thus reflects 'man's limitless hunger for conquest'.¹⁶

Furthermore, Nietzsche's call for a radical break from all traditional values may implicate the thinker with the programmatic modernism of Nazism. This point is made by Griffin who sees the Holocaust as the most extreme example of the logic of 'creative destruction' espoused by Nietzsche's active nihilism.¹⁷ John Carey's polemic, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, is more insistent on the point of Nietzsche's connection to the Nazi atrocities. Carey's reading argues that Nietzsche's elitism and revolutionary programme, as it is both destructive and individualistic, necessarily involves the rejection of the community. That is, Nietzsche's aristocratic radicalism provides the necessary steps towards the rejection of otherness which culminates in the brutalities associated with totalitarian politics.

¹² John Burt Foster, *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹³ Keith M. May, *Nietzsche and Modern Literature: Themes in Yeats, Rilke, Mann and Lawrence* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 150.

¹⁵ J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹⁷ See Griffin, pp. 59-60.

Carey echoes those studies that stress that Nietzsche's aristocratic individualism is celebrated by literary modernists insofar as he appealed to their shared anti-democratic zeal. Where Carey's highly contentious reading of literary modernism diverges from most, however, is in his identification of Nietzsche as the precursor to a reactive, fear-driven perspective which dominates literary and intellectual culture. Carey thus sees Nietzsche as a champion of the strong and predatory individual who resists feelings of pity. Indeed, Carey argues that the philosopher advocates the annihilation of the weak majority: 'Nietzsche's message in *The Will to Power* is that a "declaration of war on the masses by higher men is needed".'¹⁸

Despite the partiality of these views, Carey is not the only voice within literary studies arguing that Nietzsche's thought is associated with cruelty, appropriation, and the exclusion of otherness. Among the critics I have invoked thus far, Bridgwater also asserts that one of Nietzsche's key doctrines, the will to power, can be understood as 'an exploitative drive for self-aggrandisement'.¹⁹ Furthermore, Nietzsche's response to pessimism, according to Bridgwater, was to 'idealize the predatory type'.²⁰ Margot Norris and Peter Childs similarly echo this view, identifying Nietzsche with a reactive or imperious ethic which seems to be founded on the domination of others.²¹

It is worth pointing out that the term nihilism itself, and the examination of its various meanings, is, however, mostly absent in discussions that observe Nietzsche's seminal impact upon literary modernism: the heroic dynamic of this thought, associating Nietzsche with an active nihilism or an aristocratic radicalism, is privileged to either praise or condemn the philosopher; further connotations of Nietzsche's writing on nihilism remain relatively unexplored in the discourse. In this thesis I am motivated to provide a more considered account of Nietzsche's thought on nihilism. By investigating this aspect of the philosopher, I thus concur with Mark Warren who contends that:

¹⁸ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 4.

¹⁹ Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony: A Study of Nietzsche's Impact on English and American Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), p. 228.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 241.

²¹ Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, & Lawrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 58; Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 57.

Knowing a thinker's problematic is perhaps the most important thing we can know about this person's thinking as a whole. [...] knowing what [Nietzsche] meant by the problematic of "nihilism" is the most important thing we can know about the nature and implications of his thought.²²

Moreover, I hold that knowing Nietzsche's 'problematic' of nihilism entails charting his preoccupation with suffering. With regards to Nietzsche's relation to literary modernism and the critical responses he provokes, I contend that examining Nietzsche's complex writing on nihilism through its relation to suffering evinces the strains operating at the heart of his affirmative project. Otherwise put, investigating the place of suffering and its integral relation to nihilism in Nietzsche's thought shall provide a more nuanced reading of the reactionary elements present in Nietzsche's work than those provided by critics such as Carey and Bridgwater.

Nietzsche and Nihilism

Shane Weller's recent study, *Modernism and Nihilism*, does much to address the paucity of critical attention given to the issue of nihilism within modernist studies. Charting the shifting definitions of the term nihilism from its advent in the eighteenth century to the present day, Weller offers a valuable appraisal of modernist literature in relation to the fluid, protean usage of the concept. Furthermore, Weller observes that it is Nietzsche who not only 'exerts an influence greater than that of any other philosopher of the period', but that it was he who 'deployed the concept of nihilism to capture the essence of modernity'.²³ Charles Glicksberg, in *The Literature of Nihilism*, makes a similar claim: '[p]ractically the entire history of twentieth-century thought, its transvaluation of the values of the past, its rejection of the gods, is foreshadowed in Nietzsche's work. He predicted the eventual triumph of nihilism'.²⁴ Yet despite the fact that the concept of nihilism has been closely identified with Nietzsche, scholars have picked up on the subsequent interpretative difficulties arising from Nietzsche's own polyvalent usage of the term. For instance, observing that the lack of clarity stems from Nietzsche, Karen L.

²² Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), p. 13.

²³ Shane Weller, *Modernism and Nihilism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 6.

²⁴ Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Literature of Nihilism* (London: Bucknell University Press 1975), p. 20.

Carr contends that '[u]nfortunately, Nietzsche was ambiguous, vague, and not entirely consistent in his usage of the term; this legacy was transmitted, so that much twentieth-century discussion is also ambiguous, vague, or inconsistent'.²⁵ Noting that some of the usages in Nietzsche's work are 'in tension with one another', Carr attests to Nietzsche's multifarious deployment of the term in which nihilism is variously described as 'a historical process, a psychological state, a philosophical position, a cultural condition, a sign of weakness, a sign of strength, as the danger of dangers, and a divine way of thinking'.²⁶ Along similar lines, Nietzsche scholar Bernard Reginster asserts that '[n]ihilism is the central problem of Nietzsche's philosophy. Although this view is not new, its nature and implication have not been well understood. One reason is that Nietzsche's conception of nihilism itself remains elusive.'²⁷

Another dominant tendency when accounting for nihilism in Nietzsche's thought is to privilege the entries on this subject that appear in an edited selection of his unpublished notebooks, posthumously published as *The Will To Power*. For instance, Carr asserts that 'his discussion of nihilism is restricted almost entirely to his notebooks.'²⁸ Weller also contends that this unpublished text gives 'centre-stage' to the issue.²⁹ These entries certainly offer key insights into Nietzsche's presentation of nihilism. However, over-reliance on these unpublished passages provides only a partial appreciation of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought by considering nihilism solely as an intellectual or theoretical problem. Warren summarises this tendency and its ramifications:

Nihilism is usually understood as a philosophical doctrine (there exist no objective grounds for truth) from which follows an ethical doctrine (there exist no objective grounds for moral judgment). It follows from these doctrines that the world offers no guidance or limits to human activity. Accordingly, a nihilist usually is taken to be one

²⁵ Karen Leslie Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth-Century Responses to Meaninglessness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 15.

²⁶ Ibid. pp. 26-27.

²⁷ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 21.

²⁸ Carr, p. 26.

²⁹ Weller, p. 27. Weller argues: 'While the term "nihilism" occurs repeatedly in the works of 1887-8,[...] it is only in *The Will to Power* that the concept of nihilism takes centre-stage in Nietzsche's critique of modernity'.

living a life without intellectual grounds of conduct, a life in which "everything is permitted".³⁰

I contend that what becomes evident when examining Nietzsche's writing on nihilism, particularly in his published work, is that nihilism must be understood in relation to embodiment, to affective-erotic being. I shall argue that Nietzsche's repeated emphasis upon the interdependency of the somatic, or affective, and the cognitive, means that nihilism must be approached in relation to the embodied experience of agency, and the embodied experience of suffering. Daniel Conway's observation is relevant: '[Nietzsche] alternately refers to nihilism as psychological state and a physiological condition, both of which are marked by exhaustion, pervasive pessimism, a dissipation of will, and an unprecedented erethism.'³¹ I hold this notion of nihilism, denoting the incapacity to experience oneself as an agent of deeds, to be the overriding and consistent usage of the term in Nietzsche's discourse. It is this depiction of nihilism, one that registers a state of paralysis, a condition that precipitates or gestures towards suicide, which permeates the modernist texts that I shall discuss in later chapters.

The significance of agency in Nietzsche's thought cannot be overstated: his psychological thesis of the will to power, as it is articulated in the *Genealogy*, postulates that our most basic, natural need is to experience a pathos of power which, in the primary instance, is attained through the performance of 'deeds' (*OGM*, p. 81). While this concept of the will to power is modulated by considering the development of man's consciousness, nihilism is repeatedly signalled by a loss of willing, or the feeling of dissolution of efficacious being.

As Weller notes, Nietzsche most often refers to nihilism in the context of religion.³² Yet contrary to the putative view of Nietzsche's hostility to religion, the philosopher repeatedly holds religion to combat the state of paralysis or depression that continually threatens humanity: for while Nietzsche claims '[m]an is often fed up, there are whole epidemics of this state of being fed up' (*OGM*, p. 94), he lauds Christianity's success in

³⁰ Warren, p. 13.

³¹ Daniel W. Conway, 'Heidegger, Nietzsche, and the Origins of Nihilism', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, (1992), 14.

³² Weller, p. 28.

combating this ever-present threat: '[f]or, to speak generally: with all great religions, the main concern is the fight against a certain weariness and heaviness which has become epidemic' (OGM, p. 102). In that human beings are both 'sensuous, worldly beings who suffer, feel, and act' and 'conscious, cultural beings who constantly interpret and evaluate the world and themselves', the ascetic ideal provides 'an orientation toward existence' whereby individuals 'fit experience and interpretation together to form a "will" to act'.³³ One way the ascetic ideal does this is by providing a goal or purpose: namely, of becoming one with God and attaining transcendent bliss. For, in line with Conway's observation that '[o]ur reliance on consciousness requires us to pursue goals, in order to sustain a threshold level of affective investment',³⁴ the transcendental telos succeeds in engaging the will: the externally posited transcendental goal provided by the ascetic priest, and held attainable through adherence to the prescribed ascetic procedures, allows us to reflexively experience ourselves as agents. As Nietzsche puts it,

Within it, suffering was given an interpretation; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism. [...] - man was *saved*; he had a *meaning*, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of 'non-sense'; from now on he could *will* something, - no matter what, why and how he did it at first, the *will itself was saved*. (OGM, pp. 127-28)

Accounting for the modern European experience of nihilism through the demise in the value of the ascetic ideal, Warren argues that this primarily arises because there is a practical dislocation between experience and interpretation:

Nietzsche's structural definition of nihilism [is] something that results from disjunctions between experiential and interpretive conditions of acting. Theoretically, a disjunction might be caused by changes in experience. Or it might result from failures of an interpretive schema. Or it might be caused by some combination of the two.³⁵

Interpretation and agency are bound together. That is, the cognitive and the affective, or physiological, are intertwined. Thus one way in which the human animal succumbs to the threat of paralysis is through an internal crisis of interpretation such that the existent orientation becomes inappropriate to experience: modern, secularized science has

³³ Warren, p. 17.

³⁴ Conway, p. 33.

³⁵ Warren, p. 18.

rendered the existent interpretation of life provided by Christianity as redundant. Otherwise put, as a consequence of rigorous self-scrutiny, we moderns have come to the realization that the metaphysical picture does not have a transcendental origin, but is one constituted by material, psycho-physiological needs: namely to experience ourselves as effective agents, and to appropriate unbearable suffering through the notion of a rational, just God. On this devaluation of the existent interpretative schema, Nietzsche comments:

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind. Thus the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim - and meaninglessness, is the psychologically necessary affect once the belief in God and an essentially moral order becomes untenable. Nihilism appears at that point, not that displeasure in existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any "meaning" in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain. (*WTP*, p. 35)

With the discrediting of the prevalent interpretative schema, one overriding question now facing modernity is how to account for the suffering which had been hitherto rendered significant by traditional discourses. Reginster identifies the problem that presents post-theological culture as he notes that '[t]he rejection of the "Christian interpretation" has "terrifying" implications simply because this interpretation gave an answer to the problem of suffering - it gave suffering a meaning.'³⁶ Furthermore, as Warren suggests, the interpretative schema itself may be discredited by experience. I hold that it is the experience of unbearable or excessive suffering that dismantles the value of the available interpretive framework. This experience may relate to a personal emotional trauma, or it may signal the undergoing of extreme or persistent, chronic physical pain. It may also reflect a collective trauma, such as the experience of war. In each case, the existent interpretative orientation of existence is undermined. This not only provokes the evaluation that 'existence in general' is 'inherently worthless', but this cognitive appraisal is attended by feelings of apathy and indifference (*OGM*, p. 67). I shall

³⁶ Reginster, p. 161.

therefore diverge from existent studies on Nietzsche's relation to literary modernism by bringing this dynamic of Nietzsche's thought into consideration.

Modernism, Senseless Suffering and Nihilism

In Chapter One, I shall focus on the relationship between suffering and nihilism in Nietzsche's thought by examining the issue of senseless or excessive suffering. I will argue that his work can be understood to gravitate around the question of the 'interpretation of suffering'. Nietzsche, I shall show, was preoccupied with this particular issue, of how to render one's suffering meaningful, and thus avert the threat of a nihilistic loss of willing.

In the first part of this chapter I shall examine Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche presents a paradigm of life-affirmation in the form of ancient Greek tragedy. Arguing that the ancient Greeks were particularly sensitive to distress and suicidal nihilism, Nietzsche nevertheless claims that through their tragic art they are able to confront life's horrors and yet redeem them. What I shall highlight in this discussion is that Nietzsche contends that tragic experience itself induces an encounter with life's ephemerality and senselessness, and its value lies in delivering the Greeks from such debilitating insights. Nietzsche, I shall show, holds the ancient deity associated with tragedy, Dionysus, to symbolize this capacity to affirm life despite, and indeed because of, its senselessness.

In the next segment of this chapter, however, I shall complicate Nietzsche's affirmative, heroic rhetoric. I shall probe Nietzsche's relation to senseless suffering and point to the tensions arising in his thought as he simultaneously wishes to embrace the horror of suffering, which by its very nature is senseless and unbearable, and also appropriate suffering, to bestow it with significance. I shall point out that by insistently seeking to embrace suffering as integral to life, Nietzsche defines his philosophical project in opposition to Christianity: Nietzsche discerns that Christianity is characterised by, and indeed bequeaths to modernity, the goal of abolishing suffering; this hedonic orientation accounts for modernity's mediocrity as suffering, for Nietzsche, is inseparable from the processes of self and cultural enhancement.

Examining the discordant positions surrounding Nietzsche's thought on suffering in the next section of the chapter, I shall investigate Nietzsche's analysis of the ascetic ideal as

he presents it in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*. I shall read this text in terms of the need to give suffering meaning: Christianity accordingly appropriates senseless suffering in terms of punishment, or guilt. And while I shall argue that Nietzsche is engaged in overcoming this interpretation of suffering, I shall point to the persistence of reactive sentiments in Nietzsche's thought, particularly in relation to others' useless suffering. By attending to the conflicting stances that beset Nietzsche's work, particularly in his discourse on suffering and nihilism, I shall engage with critics who echo Carey in aligning Nietzsche with the Holocaust.³⁷

The primary aim of this chapter is to tease out insights that shall guide my reading of the modernist literary works under consideration. I do not claim to offer a comprehensive picture of Nietzsche's complex, and often confusing, philosophical genius. Indeed, Nietzsche insistently resisted offering any systematic, coherent philosophy. However, I will argue that the consistent and dominant strands that I discern operating in his work are present in the modernist works I engage with: these texts are centrally concerned with the response to suffering and, in particular, the issue of attributing meaning to senseless suffering.

Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and Beckett's *Endgame* are texts that depict fictional landscapes characterised by illness, exhaustion, impotence and a heightened sensitivity to suffering. The need to ascribe meaning to suffering weighs heavily in each of these fictional worlds with each work registering the frailty of the modern subject denuded of the traditional means to justify one's suffering. As each text discloses the characters' exposure to the problem of excessive, useless suffering and the nihilism this precipitates, paralysis, stasis and repetition are seen to dominate the respective worlds. Therefore, I will read the portrayed responses to the issue of incomprehensible suffering in each text in line with Nietzsche's various writings on senseless suffering and nihilism.

In Chapter Two, I shall show that D.H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, explores the trauma that afflicts post-war culture. Depicting England in the aftermath of World

³⁷ I shall particularly focus on the argument presented by Giles Fraser. Giles Fraser, *Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief* (London: Routledge, 2002).

War One, Lawrence portrays individual and collective responses to this experience of senseless suffering as the existent means to justify the war experience fail. In the first part of this chapter, I shall register the novel's presentation of the various responses to this experience. This will include accounting for, at both an individual and a collective level, the denial or repression of this experience; a growing sense of depression and loss of willing; a consuming indignation and bitterness; a defensive withdrawal from the other. I shall appeal to Nietzsche's thought in order to illuminate this discussion.

Discerning Lawrence's presentation of the propensity to recoil from relations with others as particularly central to his depiction of post-war culture, I shall note strong affinities between Lawrence and Nietzsche: both saw modernity as characterised by a hedonic orientation to existence; both appeal to notions of a defensive, self-protective subjectivity. Aligning Lawrence's notion of a self-preservative economy with Nietzsche's analysis of the ascetic ideal, in this segment of the chapter I shall consider the character of Clifford Chatterley in particular to exemplify one of prudential life-denial: while Clifford is a victim of the war, he also connives at his own negation of embodied-erotic being. This ascetic rejection of embodiment has nihilistic consequences: the novel focuses upon his wife Connie's developing nihilistic pathos and consequent estrangement from her husband.

I shall then consider Lawrence's protagonists, Connie and her lover, Oliver Mellors, to epitomize Nietzsche's ideal of self-overcoming: the couple courageously relinquish their respective defensive postures deriving from previous emotional-erotic wounds; embracing affective-erotic vulnerability, the depiction of the couple's sexual fulfilment gesture towards the attainment of a Nietzschean life-affirmation and the constitution of new meaning. Nevertheless, I shall challenge Lawrence's vision of erotic revitalisation by pointing to similar strains that beset Nietzsche's work: defensive and reactive postures continue to reassert themselves and highlight the fragility of Lawrence's affirmative vision, perhaps gesturing to suffering's excessive force.

In Chapter Three, I shall focus upon Kafka's novel *The Trial*. Here I shall primarily interrogate the protagonist Josef K.'s recourse to guilt as a means to assimilate his suffering. Doing so, I shall draw on Nietzsche's analysis of the ascetic ideal in terms of its crucial role of providing a purpose for suffering. In the first part of this chapter I shall

highlight K.'s experience of inexplicable distress: K. is subject to indeterminate charges and his attempts to understand the nature of the accusation are repeatedly thwarted.

The role of interpretation shall be central throughout this discussion. Stressing the point that one's interpretative position is reflective of one's will to power, or pathos of agency, in Nietzsche's thought, I shall argue that the court strips K. of his exegetical capacity: the court's arbitrary, mysterious proceedings induce great psychic distress and the pathos of impotence. Also, by noting that K. exhibits the self-defensive, prudential perspective that both Nietzsche and Lawrence consider to be ubiquitous in modernity, I shall highlight that K. is driven by the need to comprehend his suffering in logical terms, or in absolute, indisputable terms. This restrictive posture renders him particularly vulnerable to extreme disjunctions between interpretation and experience.

I shall also chart the ways in which Kafka's novel evokes Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism. This doctrine, which challenges traditional notions of absolute objectivity or disinterestedness by arguing that knowledge claims are reflective of one's embodied and socially embedded position, is particularly relevant to considering K.'s dispute with the priest in 'The Cathedral Chapter'. This theme is also flagged at K.'s first tribunal, here prompting a consideration of the ways in which K. experiences feelings of resentment and attempts to assuage his senseless suffering. Examining these aspects of *The Trial*, I shall thus invoke Nietzsche's thought on cruelty and punishment to demonstrate that Kafka's fictional world is pervaded by the reactive compensatory desire to punish others, even if this is largely imaginary.

In the final part of this chapter I shall examine K.'s self-incrimination and his complicity in his execution to stem from his experience of overwhelming, senseless suffering. Drawing on the masochistic dimension of Nietzsche's analysis of guilt, I consider K.'s recourse to guilt as a means to assimilate his suffering and to maintain a sense of agency by perpetrating cruelty upon himself. Nevertheless, no totalising reading of this novel is possible: the radical indeterminacy that characterises the work persists until the end, and even K.'s attempts to attain a pathos of agency in his own suicide appear uncertain. It seems to fall upon the imagined spectator, or reader, to redeem some significance in K.'s abject execution.

The theatricality of suffering comes to the fore in Beckett's play, *Endgame*, the focus of my fourth chapter. As in Kafka's novel, I shall read the characters' appeal to a witness to signal the self's incapacity to assimilate experiences of unbearable suffering: the performative dimension of one's suffering, I shall argue, suggests that other means to appropriate one's distress have been exhausted or fallen short. Here I shall discuss the various strategies deployed by Beckett's characters to bear their suffering in a fictional world that is permeated by physical pain, by aging and decay, and by feelings of frustrated powerlessness, or what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*.

I shall also register a tension in Beckett's play that is evident in Nietzsche's work, namely of the desire to be true to suffering's senselessness, and of the contrary need to master suffering and to render it significant. Beckett's pseudo-couple Hamm and Clov present contrasting approaches: Clov echoes Kafka's protagonist by interpreting suffering in terms of punishment, thus pointing to the continued pertinacity of the ascetic ideal; Hamm gestures towards a rejection of theological discourse, yet struggles to confront a Dionysian vision of existence, shorn of value. Hamm also evinces the need for creative, interpretative activity, evoking Nietzsche's valorisation of self-artistry. Yet Hamm's attempts to render aesthetic self-coherence through his narrative is itself continually ruptured by a sense of impotence marked by a loss of willing.

Parallels also abound between Beckett's play and the other literary texts I am discussing in this thesis. For instance, Beckett's characters exhibit the restricted, self-preservative postures that appear in Lawrence and Kafka. Here this self-defensive economy develops and intensifies as a result of the characters' experience as chronic sufferers. And by drawing on Nietzsche's thought on the experience of prolonged pain, I shall consider Beckett's characters to be particularly sensitive to suffering, and to the other. Furthermore, sadistic actions, often incited by others' maltreatment, and often seemingly arbitrary, proliferate in the relations between the characters in *Endgame*. By bringing Nietzsche's thought on cruelty to bear upon my analysis of the drama, I shall show that both Nietzsche and Beckett serve to complicate conventional ethical notions: both figures seem to suggest a fundamental narcissism, or ontological isolation, which precludes the possibility of truly identifying with the other's distress.

I shall conclude this chapter by considering the role of the audience. Noting similarities between the reader's position in *The Trial*, I shall contend that the characters in this play

share their exegetical impasse with the audience. Together with the disturbing content matter of the play, this experience of the excessive, that which escapes interpretative closure, contributes to the 'agony' of watching *Endgame*.³⁸

I shall focus upon literature's affective dynamic in the conclusion of my thesis. Here I shall invoke Virginia Woolf's essay, 'On Being Ill', in order to evoke some of the salient points of my thesis, particularly with regards to others' suffering and its tie to suicidal nihilism. Examination of Woolf's essay, I shall show, proves to be particularly fruitful in highlighting a series of tensions that I see to be operating in Nietzsche and the modernist works that I have considered. Most pertinently, Woolf's desire to valorise the experience of one's illness or suffering simultaneously demonstrates an implicit awareness of suffering's excessive, useless character and the nihilism this precipitates. With this notion of the excessive in mind, I shall turn now to examine Nietzsche's engagement with suffering.

³⁸ I allude here to Beckett's comment to Alan Schneider that he wanted to provide a 'full evening's agony' with the performance of *Endgame*. See p. 185 below.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Nihilism and Meaningless Suffering

I again return to the place from which I set out – *Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values: with that I again plant myself in the soil out of which I draw all that I will and *can*- I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus.

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Introduction: The Interpretation of Suffering

Friedrich Nietzsche tells us in the preface of *On the Genealogy of Morality* that ‘as a thirteen-year-old boy, I was preoccupied with the problem of the origin of evil’ (*OGM*, p. 5). His early concern with this traditional religious question anticipates his continued exploration of the cognate issues of ‘senseless’ suffering and nihilism throughout his oeuvre. This preoccupation is evident in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a text that I believe pivots around the issue of meaningless suffering and the nihilistic threat to subjectivity this poses. Indeed, as I shall argue, Nietzsche presents a paradigm of life-affirmation in this work which is inextricably and paradoxically bound to the experience of excessive, inexplicable distress: his examination of ancient tragedy propounds that the Pre-Socratic Greeks are able to surmount the potential nihilistic collapse induced by the confrontation with useless suffering in this quasi-religious experience; they are accordingly able to fully embrace the reality of human existence with its horror and suffering. He returns to this model throughout his career and associates it with Dionysus, the Greek deity at the centre of ancient tragedy.

That Nietzsche holds this association with tragedy and Dionysus to be vital to apprehending his work is reinforced, no less, in the final lines of his final published text, the self-styled autobiography *Ecce Homo*. Here he directs the reader to the significance of this alignment by pronouncing, ‘[h]ave I been understood? – *Dionysus against the Crucified*’ (*EH*, p. 104). This crucial, self-defining opposition can be elucidated by turning to a notebook entry which employs a similar combative rhetoric:

Dionysus versus the “Crucified”: there you have the antithesis. It is *not* a difference in regard to their martyrdom - it is a difference in the meaning of it. Life itself, in its eternal

fruitfulness and recurrence, creates torment, destruction, the will to annihilation. In the other case, suffering - the “Crucified as the innocent one” - counts as an objection to life, as a formula for its condemnation. - One will see that the problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning. (WTP, p. 563)

This passage indicates the importance that the hermeneutic of suffering assumes in Nietzsche’s thought: the desire to propose an antithetical Dionysian interpretation of suffering to the one he attributes to the Christian meaning, I hold, governs his philosophical project. In the course of this chapter, then, I shall outline Nietzsche’s presentation of these two alternative perspectives in order to demonstrate that while the Dionysian or tragic interpretation symbolises the affirmation of suffering existence, the Christian exegesis and its cognate practices, on the other hand, are nihilistic in Nietzsche’s view. Much of the subsequent discussion thus aims to explore the complexities gravitating around this key theme of ‘the problem [...] of the meaning of suffering’ in Nietzsche’s work.

Suffering has been marginalised in Nietzsche scholarship. As Kathleen Marie Higgins notes, ‘the intensity and scope of his concern for suffering is a feature of his work that has been unappreciated’.³⁹ Furthermore, I endorse Higgins’ view that ‘sensitivity to suffering is the presupposition of Nietzsche’s work throughout his career’: suffering goes to ‘the heart of his thought’.⁴⁰

In one way, my thesis can be seen to parallel the primary argument made in Bernard Reginster’s valuable study, *The Affirmation of Life*: Reginster identifies the import of the hermeneutic of suffering to Nietzsche’s governing project, namely the overcoming of nihilism. Before noting my departure from this reading, I briefly wish to note that I concur with Reginster’s study as far as he expounds Nietzsche’s thought with regard to the *active* interpretation applied to suffering.⁴¹ Here Reginster primarily appeals to an integral aspect of Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power, namely the value attributed to the overcoming of resistances. An entry from *The Anti-Christ* captures Nietzsche’s view:

³⁹ Kathleen Marie Higgins, ‘Suffering in Nietzsche’s Philosophy’, in *Reading Nietzsche at the Margins*, ed. by Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2008), pp. 59-72 (p. 72).

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 59-60.

⁴¹ See, for example, Reginster, pp. 176-85.

What is good? –All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad?– All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness?– The feeling that power *increases*- that a resistance is overcome. (*AC & TI*, p. 127)

Suffering is integral to feelings of pleasure, or rather, to the pathos of power. As Nietzsche puts it in *The Will to Power*:

Displeasure, as an obstacle to its will to power, is therefore a normal fact, the normal ingredient of every organic event; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event, presupposes a resistance overcome. (*WTP*, p. 373)

Nietzsche's construal of suffering seeks to surmount the dominant utilitarian or hedonistic interpretation of suffering bequeathed to modernity by Christianity. As Nietzsche notes elsewhere, the Christian outlook considers 'suffering and displeasure as evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence'; modernity is similarly characterised by a drive to 'constantly prevent all possible misfortune ahead of time' (*GS*, p. 191). Nietzsche argues, however, that 'all these modes of thought which assess the value of things according to *pleasure* and *pain*', focus upon mere 'secondary phenomena': these phenomena are derivative of a more fundamental principle, namely the striving for increased power (*BGE*, p. 154). As Reginster therefore puts it:

The ethics of power welcomes the inescapability of suffering in human life. It would consider wretched an existence in which there is no resistance to be overcome, no challenges to be met—that is to say, an existence devoid of suffering.⁴²

By relating pain and pleasure to power, as he does with the notion of overcoming resistances, Nietzsche suggests that pain and pleasure are inseparably intertwined. Capturing this paradox, Nietzsche proclaims: '[f]or happiness and misfortune are two siblings and twins who either grow up together or-as with you- *remain small* together' (*GS*, p. 191). In other words, 'all becoming and growing-all that guarantees a future-involves pain' (*AC & TI*, p. 120). Nietzsche's concern, therefore, is that the common aversion to pain that accompanies this modern predilection for self-preservation means

⁴² Ibid. p. 267.

that there is a dearth of individuals engaging in the arduous project of self-enhancement, or self-overcoming. He consequently laments:

Today we see nothing that wants to expand, we suspect that things will just continue to decline, getting thinner, better-natured, cleverer, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian- no doubt about it, man is getting 'better' all the time. (*OGM*, p. 27)

Nietzsche repeatedly seeks to convince his readership of the need to abandon the self-preservative desire to circumvent pain. He attempts to seduce the reader with exemplary figures of life-affirmation, variously associated with Dionysus, Zarathustra and the Overman. I shall return below to consider Nietzsche's figuration of self-cultivation, highlighting that this endless process is characterised by both great suffering and the possibility of self-affirmation.

However, despite acknowledging my affinities with Reginster's work, he follows many scholars focussing on Nietzsche's thought on nihilism in dismissing the *Genealogy*.⁴³ Consequently, Reginster only offers a partial account of Nietzsche's confrontation with meaningless or excessive suffering and its relation to nihilism: Reginster alludes to the notion of the overcoming of obstacles to signal Nietzsche's alternative construal of suffering, yet he neglects to stress the point that Nietzsche's work is deeply concerned with failure. Otherwise put, nihilism may also be discussed in terms of an incapacity to overcome the obstacles that one encounters. I shall thus complicate Reginster's view of Nietzsche's approach to suffering by placing greater weight upon Nietzsche's claim that:

Every animal abhors equally instinctively, with an acute sense of smell which is "higher than all reason," any kind of disturbance and hindrance which blocks or could block his path to the optimum [...] the path to power, action, the mightiest deeds. (*OGM*, p. 81)

Pointing to Nietzsche's analysis of slave morality, this important citation suggests that the confrontation with insurmountable obstacles engenders frustration and resentment. I shall consider the confrontation with suffering in its various manifestations to present such an obstacle.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 197. Reginster argues that 'the significance of the *Genealogy* is excessive'.

On similar grounds, I depart from the argument made in Higgins' insightful essay, alluded to above. While acknowledging the centrality of suffering in Nietzsche's work, Higgins does not uncover its excessive nature. For instance, Higgins notes that Nietzsche's approach to suffering 'is aesthetic because it involves interpreting suffering as an element in a larger whole, much as the artistic element is interpreted as an element essential to the larger organism of the artwork.'⁴⁴ From this perspective, one's suffering can be actively assimilated, integrated into one's overall interpretation of one's life and thus rendered valuable: the obstacle or resistance that the suffering experience presents to one's attempts to attain self-coherence is overcome. There are indeed many passages in Nietzsche's work that corroborate this suggested celebration of the self's capacity to perform an active appropriation of distress.⁴⁵ However, Nietzsche's work, I shall demonstrate, evinces an irresolvable tension: Nietzsche is concomitantly aware that suffering may resist attempts at appropriation, that it may provoke an ineluctable confrontation with meaninglessness and precipitate feelings of suicidal nihilism.

My work explores the sense of vulnerability, or fear of collapse, which underlies and attends Nietzsche's discourse on suffering. I hold this sense of frailty to account for the defensive-protective postures which undermine his expansive, affirmative idiom: attending to Nietzsche's writing on suffering evinces the discordant postures operating throughout his oeuvre.⁴⁶ Reading Nietzsche's discourse on suffering as inherently fragile, I would echo Martin Heidegger's comments on Nietzsche's enigmatic and fictional text, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: '[o]ne who has not previously and does not perceive the horror in all the discourses - seemingly arrogant and often ecstatically conducted as they are - will never know who Zarathustra is.'⁴⁷

Construing this as an articulation of Nietzschean philosophy, I would expand Heidegger's indictment to those commentators whom I hold to fail to discern the 'horror' that runs

⁴⁴ Higgins, pp. 60-61.

⁴⁵ I discuss this in more detail below. See pp. 37-8.

⁴⁶ I am particularly indebted to some of the key arguments, particularly regarding Nietzsche's contradictory stances, made in Henry Staten's wonderful book. I particularly draw upon Staten's views in the final segment of the chapter. Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ Martin Heidegger, 'Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?', in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. by David B. Allison (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 64-79 (p. 72).

throughout his work. By questioning the apparent exultation of Nietzsche's work, this thesis has wider implications for the reading of modernism. For instance, Charles Glicksberg outlines Nietzsche's thought in the following manner before going on to analyse modernist works including Kafka's *The Trial* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

Nietzsche struggled to find a way out of nihilism by resolving to accept life as it is for all eternity, despite the reality of suffering and the misfortunes that fell to his lot. By the concentrated and disciplined power of his will he would rise above the human condition. He would transmute suffering into sheer joy, pain into jubilation. Whatever befell him he would greet with a burst of Dionysian laughter and thus establish his control of life in a problematical and supremely indifferent universe.⁴⁸

This assessment of Nietzsche's thought is prevalent in studies focussing on the thinker's relation to the individual writers I shall be looking at: Mary M.F. Massoud sees Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* existing in 'defiance of Nietzsche's jubilant announcement that "God is dead!"';⁴⁹ meanwhile, Benno Wagner considers Kafka in relation to Nietzsche's celebration of the absolute squanderer who lives life dangerously, triumphantly;⁵⁰ in studies of Lawrence and Nietzsche, Eric Bentley places both figures within a tradition which he labels 'heroic vitalism',⁵¹ while Anne Fernihough observes Lawrence's departure from Nietzsche's imperious subjectivity.⁵²

While I shall be responding broadly to these views, I shall be extending and directing Heidegger's charge particularly towards Anglican philosopher Giles Fraser. Whilst Fraser's study, *Redeeming Nietzsche*, shares my focus upon Nietzsche's engagement with senseless suffering, Fraser, however, insists upon Nietzsche's triumphant rhetoric in his reading of Nietzsche's philosophical endeavour.⁵³ The need to interrogate Fraser's views is rendered all the more urgent given that he consistently implicates Nietzsche's thought on suffering with the horrors of the Holocaust. Therefore, tackling Fraser's thesis shall

⁴⁸Glicksberg, p. 26.

⁴⁹Mary M. F. Massoud, 'Beckett's Godot: Nietzsche Defied', *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 40 (2010), 43.

⁵⁰Benno Wagner, 'Insuring Nietzsche: Kafka's Files', *New German Critique* (2006).

⁵¹Eric Bentley, *The Cult of the Superman: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche with Notes on Other Hero-Worshippers of Modern Times* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1969).

⁵²Anne Fernihough, *D.H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁵³Fraser. For instance, see p. 138: 'Within the context of Nietzsche's fantasy world, the world of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra reigns supreme, and readers, in as much as they are able to suspend their disbelief in Zarathustra's world, are tempted to go along with Nietzsche and agree that Zarathustra is capable of redeeming all that is about him'.

also allow me to respond to similar views propounded by literary critics such as John Carey and Patrick Bridgwater, as aforementioned.

I shall now turn to *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to chart the co-existence of meaningless suffering and nihilistic resignation in Nietzsche's early thought. Furthermore, I shall now begin to examine the figure of Dionysus in more detail, observing that the deity both prefigures and exemplifies the masochistic subjectivity that Nietzsche associates with life-affirmation in his later works.

Disciple of Dionysus

The Birth of Tragedy involves an investigation into the pre-Socratic Greeks' capacity to confront and embrace suffering's senselessness through the medium of ancient tragedy. This text pivots on Nietzsche's proclamation that it is 'only as *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*': it is the aesthetic 'tragic pattern' that transfigures and palliates the nauseating insights disclosed by tragedy (*BT*, p. 32).

To follow Nietzsche's account of the success of tragedy - the tragic Greeks perform 'an affirmation without reservation even of suffering' through this transformative experience - entails an exploration of the two life-principles he invokes to expound his thesis, namely the Greek deities Dionysus and Apollo (*EH*, p. 50). Appealing to these two symbolic figures, Nietzsche argues that it is the combination and balance of Dionysus, the god of intoxication and excess, with the Apollonian principle of dream-like illusions and boundaries, that creates tragic art. While Apollo corresponds to the surface world of appearances or phenomena, Dionysus symbolizes a raw directionless energy which suffuses all being. The dynamic interplay of these two principles produces a rare, fragile tension in Pre-Socratic culture to produce tragedy's paradoxical affirmative energetic.

The combination of Nietzsche's exuberant rhetoric and recent postmodern criticism has led to a privileging of the Dionysian element of this dynamic. For instance, Robert Solomon points out that Nietzsche is held, particularly by poststructuralist critics, to embody Dionysus' excessive character: 'He is a burst of energy rather than a philosopher, an explosion instead of a visionary. Most of all he plays, and he reminds us of the importance of dancing and the unimportance of serious scholarship and

truth.⁵⁴ Nietzsche is thus celebrated as a 'deconstructionist before his time'.⁵⁵

Michael Allen Gillespie similarly notes that New French Thought holds Nietzsche to be a symbol of Dionysian playfulness, the philosopher who dances on the abyss and 'explodes all logic and subjectivity'.⁵⁶

By noting that *The Birth of Tragedy* simultaneously works to provide a powerful critique of modernity, Nietzsche's celebration of the Dionysian can be charted. One of the main arguments in the text surrounds the demise of tragic perception: the fetishisation of Apollonian reason, primarily instigated through Socratic optimism, continues to manifest itself in cultural forms such as Christianity and scientific modernity, forms which suggestively hold the world amenable to human knowledge. This ensuing over-dependence upon Apollonian rationality thus collapses the delicate balance of the two principles that give rise to tragic art. While this outlook signals a safe distance from the terrifying tragic knowledge of the world's purposelessness and absurdity, divorce from the passionate, instinctive energies associated with Dionysus transmits into cultural stultification and sterility. Not surprisingly, Nietzsche's diagnosis of modernity's crisis in these terms, and his concomitant espousal of the paradoxical revitalising energy of the Dionysian or tragic perspective, held great sway in early twentieth-century literary and intellectual culture.⁵⁷

To account for the Dionysian energetic of primordial tragedy it is important to mention something of ancient tragedy's religious context: 'tragedy originated- and continued to be performed- in the cult of Dionysus', as Richard Seaford notes.⁵⁸ Nietzsche understood the religious context to directly inform the content and form of primordial tragedy. The city Dionysia, the spring festival held to celebrate the Asiatic Dionysus' arrival in Athens, was characterised by the suspension of normal social codes and boundaries, by revelry, dancing, wine drinking, and orgiastic sexual licentiousness. This experienced rupture of

⁵⁴Robert C. Solomon, 'A More Severe Morality': Nietzsche's Affirmative Ethics', in *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, ed. by Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), pp. 69-89 (p. 70).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 176.

⁵⁷ See John Burt Foster, Jr., *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). In the next chapter, I shall show that Lawrence's remedy to modernity's predicament can similarly be aligned with this notion of the Dionysian.

⁵⁸Richard Seaford, 'Tragedy and Dionysus', in *A Companion to Tragedy* ed. by Rebecca Bushnell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 25-38 (p. 25).

autarkic selfhood continued to resonate not only in terms of communal spectator participation in ancient tragic performance, but also in the narrative of tragic drama: the tragic hero's destruction signals the inessential, transient nature of personhood and its return to the primordial reality.

Much of Nietzsche's idiom in the text is highly romantic. For instance, he rhapsodizes on the attainment of a 'mystical sense of unity' where the self is connected to larger communal and hence cosmic being (*BT*, p. 18). This is a result of the dissolution of egoistical, Apollonian boundaries of selfhood:

Not only is the bond between man and man sealed by the Dionysiac magic: alienated, hostile or subjugated nature, too, celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man. [...] Now the slave is a free man, now all the rigid and hostile boundaries that distress, despotism, or 'impudent fashion' have erected between man and man break down. [...] Singing and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and talk, and is about to fly dancing into the heavens. His gestures express enchantment. (*BT*, p. 17)

This romanticised notion of Dionysian experience as a harmonious reconnect with mankind and the natural world, signalling a freedom from alienated Apollonian being and hence from suffering, is picked up on by several critics. Gillespie, for example, draws upon Nietzsche's allusion to the Greek folk wisdom contained in the tale of Dionysus' companion Silenus to contend:

To be born is to be an individual, to be severed or alienated from the whole. This experience produces suffering, the only way to relieve this suffering is to cease to be an individual, that is to die and return to the original unity.⁵⁹

Gillespie's reading of Silenus' wisdom, that the 'best of all things is [...] not to be born, not to be, to be nothing', while 'the second-best thing [...] is to die soon', seems to valorise depersonalisation or death (*BT*, p. 22). In a similar vein, Fraser stresses the redemptive Dionysian vision by situating this rhetoric within the idealizing Romantic tradition. As such, his reading, too, points to the paradisiacal quality of this state, as he asserts:

⁵⁹ Gillespie, p. 206.

Dionysus' appearance in *The Birth of Tragedy* has considerable parallels in Romantic literature which corroborate its soteriological intentions. Novalis, for instance, celebrates the return of the wine-god as a saviour figure who comes to unify human beings with nature.⁶⁰

A more sophisticated account of Dionysian joy is offered, however, by Michel Haar as he emphasises the profound ambivalence of this affirmative experience. Complicating the readings proffered by Fraser and Gillespie, Haar recognises that Dionysian ecstasy entails the shattering of the rational ego. Thus, whether in the state of communal ecstasy or, relatedly, through profound identification with the hero's suffering, it is the fracturing of the individual's self-coherence that fosters a Dionysian permeability between the self and the whole. This dissolution of self-coherent identity, while gesturing to a radical openness to otherness, simultaneously suggests a powerful affect of vulnerability. Haar thus emphasises that a sense of frailty is key to tragic experience: the collapse of the self's centre induces a feeling of 'inadequacy' that 'translates into uncertainty, frailty, scattering and yet indeterminate hope'.⁶¹ Haar therefore argues that tragic experience amounts to a paradoxical affect of 'religious joy', an anguished 'joy inexplicable in Apollonian terms'.⁶²

Nietzsche's idealized endorsement of life with all its suffering and questionable or repugnant aspects thus derives from this affective, rather than conceptual, relation to the world's otherness. Declaring this joyous perspective as the ultimate expression of Dionysian faith and affirmation, Nietzsche posits this as the goal of his philosophy:

My new path to a "Yes".

...Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this- to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection- it wants the eternal circulation:- the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence - my formula for this is *amor fati*. (WTP, p. 536)

⁶⁰ Fraser, p. 57.

⁶¹ Michel Haar, 'Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine', in *Post-Secular Philosophy*, ed. by Philip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 157-76 (p. 172).

⁶² Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 164.

From this profoundly religious experience in which he declares '*amor fati*', or 'love of one's fate', Nietzsche presents Dionysus as the god of self-experimentation: his philosophy exhorts a parallel departure from the 'safe shores' of Apollonian meaning and identity. The classical myth of Dionysus' dismemberment and rebirth thus symbolises, for Nietzsche, his faith in overcoming the threat to self-possessed identity that such philosophical experimentation entails: 'Dionysus cut to pieces is a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction' (*WTP*, p. 543). This economy signifies a certain masochism at the core of Nietzsche's affirmative vision: the anguish involved in the rupture and expenditure of self-contained individuality is attended by a correspondent intensification of selfhood, of a pleasurable augmentation and renewal of centred being. Reading Nietzsche to celebrate the pathos of joy and power entailed in the regeneration of individuality and meaning, I thus claim that the Apollonian is implicitly present in this formulation of affirmation. To appreciate the reparative role played by Apollo in countering 'the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism', I shall register the complexity of the nature of tragic experience by highlighting that Nietzsche's account of the Dionysian also points to a fear of collapse into futilitarian resignation.

An Aesthetics of Suffering

At the core of *The Birth of Tragedy* is Nietzsche's contention that tragedy 'wishes us to acknowledge that everything that comes into being must be prepared to face a sorrowful end' (*BT*, p. 80). Dionysus' dismemberment pertains, then, to the inevitable dissolution of self-identity in death, to the violation of the self by time. Writing separately on tragedy, Iris Murdoch similarly notes that tragedy's 'dreadful vision of the reality and significance of death' works to 'break the ego, destroying the illusory whole of the unified self'.⁶³ For Nietzsche, awareness of the self's disintegration and of existence as ephemeral, entailing the inevitable pain of de-individuation, precipitates a loss of agency and feelings of nausea. For Nietzsche observes that, '[t]rue understanding, insight into the terrible truth, outweighs every motive for action' (*BT*, p. 39). This depiction of nihilism as a state of

⁶³ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 104.

paralysis, or the loss of willing induced by such disclosures, signals the necessity of 'untruth', or illusion, to transfigure the horror:

This is something that Dionysiac man shares with Hamlet: both have truly seen to the essence of things, they have *understood*, and action repels them; for their action can change nothing in the eternal essence of things, they consider it ludicrous or shameful that they should be expected to restore order to the chaotic world. Understanding kills action, action depends on the veil of illusion - this is what Hamlet teaches us. (*BT*, p. 39)

Nietzsche thus subverts the Platonic-Christian reverence for truth to contend that true knowledge of existence is unpalatable: insight into the groundless and transitory nature of existence merely serves to highlight one's fragile mortal existence. Noting the nature of this insight disclosed by tragedy thus complicates simplistic views of the Dionysian which solely suggest a harmonious return to primordial unity. Rather, Nietzsche's depiction of the pathos of collective identification is deeply ambivalent: Nietzsche celebrates the re-energising, irrational and transformative value of Dionysian ecstasy, on the one hand; on the other, the collapse of autarkic selfhood simultaneously discloses the terrifying knowledge of existence. He therefore registers the Greeks' need to impose illusory meaning: they must give form to the chaotic meaningless of the Dionysian or be subjected to suicidal nihilism. As Nietzsche claims that ancient tragedy rests on the interplay of the two symbolic deities, the Apollonian role in this schema cannot be understated: '[w]e can understand *the tragic myth* only as a visualization of Dionysiac wisdom by means of Apolline artifices' (*BT*, p. 105).

Recognising the import of the role of Apollonian illusion in ancient tragedy calls attention to what Henry Staten calls the 'double investments' operating in Nietzsche's work.⁶⁴ This series of tensions in Nietzsche's discourse gravitate around the central issue of meaningless suffering. For instance, Nietzsche articulates a philosophical project that seeks to perform a 'Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection'. Nevertheless, the Apollonian dynamic I have briefly sketched suggests that a full confrontation with senseless, unredeemable suffering is ineluctably averted. Furthermore, Nietzsche suggests that, while the nauseating, Dionysian insights may provoke a debilitating loss of agency, Apollo reconfigures these insights in palatable

⁶⁴ Staten, p. 169.

form: suffering's destructive force is mediated, and so the insights provided by the Dionysian contribute to the ultimate augmentation of selfhood.

Several commentators have perceived this declared goal of performing a Dionysian affirmation of existence as central to Nietzsche's philosophy. Fraser, for instance, notes that, 'Nietzsche's own version of 'love' is affirmation, and he believes total affirmation of human life is only possible and meaningful on the basis of a full apprehension of life's horror.'⁶⁵ Furthermore, Fraser asserts that 'Nietzsche clearly prides himself on his ability to out-face horror'.⁶⁶ Gillespie similarly detects a mood of triumphalism, contending that 'the Dionysian man [...] is able to affirm the chaos and contradiction of existence absolutely.'⁶⁷ Fraser, however, goes on to argue that Nietzsche's affirmation is self-deluded, that he in fact 'fails to appreciate the full horror of human suffering'.⁶⁸ He is not alone in making this allegation with regard to Nietzsche's depiction of suffering. Martha Nussbaum similarly charges Nietzsche with 'play-act[ing] at romantic risk-taking and solitude- but who never seems to endure a moment's human grief or thirst or hunger, wrapped up, as he is, in his own self-commanding thought'.⁶⁹ This posture, argues Nussbaum, characterises a fundamental contradiction in his work and aligns him with the restrictive, self-defensive position he is supposedly challenging. Both Nussbaum and Fraser are thus arguing that Nietzsche 'fails by his own standards': Nietzsche's affirmative project avoids a direct confrontation with the horror of existence that his philosophy's success depends upon.⁷⁰ Indeed, Fraser accuses Nietzsche of glamorising or aestheticizing suffering:

The very idea of the Apollonian [...] does suggest a desire to refract the experience of suffering so as to produce an aestheticized version of pain. [...] It is as if the Apollonian

⁶⁵ Fraser, p. 165.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 126.

⁶⁷ Gillespie, p. 221.

⁶⁸ Fraser, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism', in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, ed. by Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 139-67 (p. 161).

⁷⁰ Fraser, p. 122.

idea is there to filter out the very painfulness of pain, leaving us simply with the idea of pain.⁷¹

This apparent subterfuge on Nietzsche's part, distorting the real experiences of distress and pain, has profound implications for Fraser. Not only does Nietzsche's work reflect 'the imaginings of a more comfortable and innocent age',⁷² but it fails to acknowledge the 'full horror of true evil' which Fraser finds exhibited in the Holocaust:⁷³ 'Nietzsche's soteriology is incapable of facing [...] the evil as revealed in the Nazi- death camps.'⁷⁴ Invoking the Holocaust as a concrete example of the overwhelming horror presented by others' suffering, Fraser thus takes Nietzsche to exemplify the inadequacy of abstract philosophical discourse with regards to the issue of human suffering.⁷⁵

What is more, Fraser argues that insofar as Nietzsche holds distress merely 'to edify the noble spirit',⁷⁶ Nietzsche is 'a most dangerous thinker; one who writes of suffering in such a way that much of the reality of suffering is actually hidden.'⁷⁷ Indeed, the 'logic of exclusion' that Fraser discerns operating in Nietzsche's thought not only averts a head-on confrontation with concrete suffering, but is also 'in some way, bound up with preparing the ground for the Holocaust'.⁷⁸

Countering Fraser's sustained assault, it may be noted that Peter Dews, on the other hand, does not question Nietzsche's capacity to face life's horrors. After all, as Dews points out, 'Nietzsche learned to philosophize at the feet of Schopenhauer, whose evocations of the wickedness and misery of human existence it would be hard to surpass.'⁷⁹ In other words, pre-twentieth-century human history also unfortunately abounds in concrete examples of human suffering, brutality and stupidity, which, like the Holocaust, afford similar nauseating, debilitating insights; Nietzsche profoundly meditated upon such experiences having served as a medical orderly in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian war.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 136.

⁷² Ibid. p. 139.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 122.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 139.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 136.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 129. I will return to discuss this latter claim below as it entails further examination of Nietzsche's position on pity and the reality of others' suffering.

⁷⁹ Peter Dews, *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 149.

How then should one approach these conflicting positions with regard to Nietzsche's thought on suffering? I shall begin by alluding to the above-cited passage in which Nietzsche promulgates his Dionysian 'experimental philosophy'.⁸⁰ One point to observe that seems to be overlooked in the above critiques is that Nietzsche's vision of affirmation is posited as a goal, or an ideal: he does not describe this pathos of affirmation as a fixed or achieved state.⁸¹ Furthermore, noting that Nietzsche is cognisant of the threat of collapse that attends this occasion of affirmation suggests that he does not belittle the power of suffering. I also pointed out that this profoundly ambivalent experience is primarily affective and inexplicable in terms of abstract discourse: suffering and joy paradoxically co-exist in an ecstatic, momentary experience from which one may affirm one's life, and, by extension, according to Nietzsche, all of life.

Moreover, it is also necessary to complicate the positions proffered by critics who value Nietzsche's work in terms of its capacity, or incapacity, to engage in a full, brutal confrontation with life shorn of its redemptive illusions. As noted, Nietzsche's work repeatedly signals that an absolute affirmation of suffering is impossible; the capacity to affirm life qualitatively varies according to the psycho-physiological strength of the individual or culture. Indeed, highlighting the role played by the Apollonian within Nietzsche's theory of ancient tragedy serves to signal a point of continuity operating throughout Nietzsche's oeuvre: Nietzsche remains keenly sensitive to the horrific nature of existence and of the need to shield oneself from this awareness. For instance, later in *The Gay Science* he claims that 'life is not an argument; the conditions of life might include error' (*GS*, p. 117). That is, we are impelled to falsify what he calls the 'basic character of existence': failure to do so would entail suicidal paralysis. This ineluctable need for illusion is also registered in a related passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

[I]t might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the 'truth' one could still barely endure - or to put it more clearly, to what

⁸⁰ See the above citation: (*WTP*, p. 536), on pp. 28-9 of this thesis

⁸¹ The idealized position is suggested in the following claims, from above: it is 'The highest state a philosopher can attain'; 'it *wants* the eternal circulation'; 'It *wants* rather to cross over to the other side' (*WTP*, p. 536).

degree one would *require* it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified. (*BGE*, p. 68)

As mentioned in my Introduction, to function as willing subjects, the human animal needs to perform some form of an interpretative, artistic, or form-imposing activity. Karen L. Carr observes that, for Nietzsche, man is 'an organism that invariably and necessarily interprets'.⁸² Complicating simple, absolutist views of Nietzsche's engagement with suffering, the question that Nietzsche thus presents to his reader is: to what degree does your active interpretative artistry engage with existence, with its horrifying meaninglessness and nauseating suffering, and to what degree does it need to blunt, falsify or sweeten existence? In other words, he asks can you 'remain true to the earth', as Zarathustra proclaims, or do you impose or adopt an interpretation that renders disengagement from empirical existence (*TSZ*, p. 42)?

The Digestive Subject

To further apprehend Nietzsche's awareness of the nihilistic threat that suffering poses, of suffering's unbearable character, I shall first turn to his account of subjectivity with relation to the subject's interaction with its circumambient environment:

Perhaps what I have said here of a 'fundamental will of the spirit' may not be immediately comprehensible: allow me to explain. - That commanding something which the people calls 'spirit' wants to be master within itself and around itself and to feel itself master: out of multiplicity it has the will to simplicity, a will which binds together and tames, which is imperious and domineering. In this its needs and capacities are the same as those which physiologists posit for everything that lives, grows and multiplies. The power of the spirit to appropriate what is foreign to it is revealed in a strong inclination to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the complex, to overlook or repel what is wholly contradictory: just as it arbitrarily emphasizes, extracts and falsifies to suit itself certain traits and lines in what is foreign to it, in every piece of 'external world'. Its intention in all this is the incorporation of new 'experiences', the arrangement of new things within old divisions- growth, that is to say; more precisely the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power. (*BGE*, p. 160)

⁸² Carr, p. 28.

While holding that personhood consists of fluid, shifting internal energies and affects, Nietzsche maintains that the body is not bound and enclosed, but is porous and exists in a fluid dynamic relation to its surrounding circumstantial world. From the vantage point of this foothold, it can be observed that the subject displays a certain plasticity, a creative adaptability to shape and also be shaped; it is characterised by a capacity to assimilate and incorporate in order to adjust and reshape both self and environment. Applying a metaphor of digestion to dissolve the binary distinction of body and mind, and in its place suggest a relation of interdependency, Nietzsche postulates that ‘ “the spirit” is more like a stomach than anything else’ (*BGE*, p. 161). Nietzsche thus sees the healthy, functioning subject as seeking to integrate, or ‘digest’, heterogeneous sensations and experiences in its striving for coherence. This is primarily an appropriative manoeuvre by which the self attains the pathos of power: the self’s assimilative capacity, its ability to falsify and simplify, is tested, and suffers, as it overcomes the resistances presented by the complex, the contradictory, or the foreign.

While Carr analyses Nietzsche’s account of knowledge in similar terms and recognises this levelling, domesticating dimension, her exclusive focus on Nietzsche’s notebook entries means that she overlooks the crucial point that, according to Nietzsche, the expansive, ‘domineering’ mind is simultaneously served by a self-protective mechanism. In other words, an ‘apparently antithetical drive’ comes into play in acknowledgement of the self’s appropriative limits which serves to actively reject what it cannot assimilate. Accordingly a ‘kind of defensive posture against much that can be known [...] an acceptance and approval of ignorance’ also characterises the self’s relation to the external world (*BGE*, p. 161). This self-protective strategy operates, ‘according to the degree of its power to appropriate, or its ‘digestive power’; the spirit or mind may also assume a ‘defensive posture’, a self-protective strategy which may result in ‘an inner denial of this or that thing’ (*BGE*, p. 161).

I hold that this outline of Nietzsche’s apprehension of subjectivity is critical to comprehending the complexity of his thought. It is also essential to observe Nietzsche’s cognisance of the self’s limits, the boundaries of its ‘digestive power’, and hence its affirmative capacity. Not only does allusion to this schema suggestively corroborate my outline of the Apollonian-Dionysian dynamic in which I stressed Apollo’s role, but it also

suggests that Nietzsche's work is deeply sensitive to the individual's limits with regard to the overcoming of obstacles that one may encounter. This point is most evident in the case of meaningless suffering. I shall now invoke the work of two thinkers, Emmanuel Levinas and Elaine Scarry, whose respective work on the phenomenology of suffering depict its excessive character. Reference to the salient points of these two writers will allow a greater appreciation of Nietzsche's thoughts on senseless suffering.

Levinas' discussion of the phenomenology of pain in his essay, 'Useless Suffering', argues that suffering is a mode of experience which consumes the self and annihilates the pathos of self-integrity that the subject strives for. And while physical pain only constitutes one particular experience of suffering, by drawing attention to this, as Nietzsche and Levinas do, I shall analogise other forms of suffering to this understanding. Following Nietzsche by applying a broadly Kantian understanding of the self, Levinas observes that, unlike other sensations which can be ordered and assimilated by the unifying subject, extreme pain disrupts the pursuit of pleasurable self-relation, of subjective coherence. Levinas thus labels suffering to be 'unassumable', claiming that 'meaningless suffering is a tautology.'⁸³ That is, pain exacts a violence upon the self which escapes rational ordering; pain is that which can't be economized. Furthermore, pain, for Levinas, is a modality which not only signals an incapacity to render whole, but pain 'absorbs' consciousness and determines how all other experiences are perceived.⁸⁴ For Levinas, suffering thus signals the dissolution of coherence and identity and, registering a heightened awareness of the self's limitability, provokes a confrontation with the void. As Levinas puts it:

All evil relates back to suffering. It is the *impasse* of life and of being- their absurdity- in which pain does not just somehow innocently happen to 'colour' consciousness with affectivity. The evil of pain, the deleterious per se, is the outburst and deepest expression, so to speak, of absurdity.⁸⁵

This passage echoes Nietzsche's Dionysian vision: by considering pain to signal the self's loss of self-integrity or self-possession, as Levinas presents it, it is possible to say that pain is an anticipatory echo of death; pain is a foreshadowing of the self's utter disintegration.

⁸³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *On Thinking of the Other: Entre Nous* (London: Athlone, 1998), p. 79.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Elaine Scarry makes the link between physical pain, meaningless, and death more explicitly and extensively in *The Body in Pain*. Scarry observes that 'physical pain always mimes death' in that both 'are radical and absolute'.⁸⁶ Echoing Levinas' assertion that pain 'absorbs' consciousness, Scarry claims that both pain and death happen 'because of the body. In each, the contents of consciousness are destroyed.'⁸⁷ Pain and death are, she holds, 'the most intense forms of negation, the purest expressions of the anti-human, of annihilation, of total aversiveness'.⁸⁸ In other words, Scarry contends that, '[a]s in dying and death, so in serious pain the claims of the body utterly nullify the claims of the world.'⁸⁹ The manner in which pain absorbs consciousness is described in terms of the shrinking of the subject's circumambient world; this is a consequence of the necessary, inevitable inward directed attention that pain commands. Pain not only entails the annihilation of the subject's relation to the external world but also involves a correspondent shattering of meaning, identity, language. Pain violently gestures towards human finitude, and insofar as it obliterates language, is itself a clear indication of its capacity to violate our attempts to impose coherence. Thus, as Scarry observes, '[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.'⁹⁰ Pain denotes an excess: it is a force which shatters the self's boundaries and brings a heightened cognisance of our vulnerability to the world's otherness and its forces, forces which will inevitably invade and rend the individual apart. It can therefore be said that the phenomena of pain, in dispensing one's attempts at achieving psycho-physiological coherence and delivering the individual before the void, parallels the threat presented at the height of tragic experience.

Nietzsche frequently presents suffering, physical and psychic, as a 'powerful adversary' against which the self nevertheless triumphs (*D*, p. 70). For instance, Nietzsche contends in *Daybreak* that, in confronting physical pain, '[o]ur pride towers up as never before: it

⁸⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 31.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 4.

discovers an incomparable stimulus in opposing such a tyrant as pain' (*D*, p. 70). Consequently, suffering represents an opportunity for attaining self-mastery: surmounting this challenge presented by the experience of suffering 'represents a triumph over oneself' (*D*, p. 70). This experience thus ultimately involves an appropriative gain for the sufferer, and the possibility of self-insight: '[t]he tremendous tension imparted to the intellect by its desire to oppose and counter pain makes him see everything he now beholds in a new light' (*D*, p. 70). Nietzsche seems to suggest that he possesses a strong digestive capacity to assimilate that which by its very nature resists such mastery. Following this line of argumentation, that Nietzsche's work articulates alternative positive evaluations of suffering, one may well be persuaded by David Boothroyd's assertion that 'Nietzsche's discourse misses [the] discovery', put forward by Levinas, that 'suffering is "for nothing" '.⁹¹ Echoing Fraser's argument, Boothroyd asserts that Nietzsche seems to bypass the uselessness of suffering, the very fact that 'pain is that which "results from an excess", a "too much" '.⁹² This marks '[t]he significant difference between Nietzsche and Levinas' for Boothroyd.⁹³

Does Nietzsche really miss suffering's extreme nature, its power to overwhelm the sufferer and render him or her passive and powerless? In addition to outlining the inherent strains governing Nietzsche's discourse of suffering in *The Birth of Tragedy* and his rhetoric of Dionysian affirmation, I contend that one may discern Nietzsche's consideration of suffering's excessive character by observing the correlation between feelings of impotence and the reactionary recourse to vengefulness. That is, as aforementioned with regards to Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, obstacles that cannot be overcome engender a pathos of powerlessness and resentment. Such vindictive sentiments, I shall show, stem from the fact that suffering is refractory to one's attempts to impose meaning, for we have a need to bestow suffering with significance in order to function as effectual willing beings. Tracing the relationship between suffering and impotence suggests a deeper resonance informing Nietzsche's work: namely, insofar as we are both acting and interpreting creatures, the

⁹¹ David Boothroyd, 'Beyond Suffering I Have No Alibi', in *Nietzsche and Levinas: "After the Death of a Certain God"*, ed. by Jill Stauffer and Bettina Bergo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 150-64 (p. 158).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 157.

cognisance of impotence which suffering brings to our attention provokes a compensatory reactivity, an 'accusing', or vengefulness.

This notion can be briefly illustrated by referring to Zarathustra's teachings 'On Redemption' where Zarathustra pronounces that his 'art and aim' is 'to compose into one and bring together what is fragment and riddle and dreadful chance' (TSZ, p. 160). What specifically denotes 'fragment' and 'dreadful chance' in this passage is the past, or rather the past's imperfection: that which cannot be reversed by action or willing accordingly remains recalcitrant to assimilation. Zarathustra's teaching here pivots on the desire to reinterpret every ' "[i]t was" ' into an ' "I wanted it thus!" ' (TSZ, p. 163): ' "[i]t was": that is what the will's teeth-gnashing and most lonely affliction is called. Powerless against that which has been done, the will is an angry spectator of all things past' (TSZ, p. 161). The power to perform a synthesising or appropriative exegesis is hence key: failure to bestow significance upon past events which are irreversible through concrete action finds expression in the sufferer exacting 'revenge for its inability to go backwards' (TSZ, p. 160). This identification of impotence with vindictiveness is central to Zarathustra's message. That is, as one's active agency is rendered impotent by reflecting on the past, the powerless sufferer consequently 'takes revenge upon him who does not, like it, feel wrath and ill-temper' (TSZ, p. 162).

It is with reference to this passage that Heidegger notes that 'Nietzsche's thinking meditates on deliverance from the spirit of revenge';⁹⁴ this is 'the bridge to my highest hope' Zarathustra declares (TSZ, p. 123). Yet Zarathustra also reflects that man's thinking has been dominated by the spirit of vengefulness: '*[t]he spirit of revenge*; my friends, that, up to now, has been mankind's chief concern; and where there was suffering, there was always supposed to be punishment' (TSZ, p. 160). Zarathustra suggests that punishment is tied to the need to appropriate, or compensate for, the experience of useless suffering: the desire to inflict suffering through punishment, or understand one's suffering as punishment, results from an awareness of impotence which, in the passage just discussed, derives from an

⁹⁴ Heidegger, p. 69.

inability to contain a form of psychic suffering. I shall now explore the compensatory structure of punishment in the *Genealogy*, where Nietzsche further develops this association of punishment with vengeance and powerlessness.

Senseless Suffering in *On The Genealogy of Morality*

Usually prized for its systematic rigor, the *Genealogy* offers a speculative historical account of the emergence and success of the Christian ascetic ideal. Crudely put, Nietzsche argues that the ascetic ideal provided the slave populations in antiquity with an interpretation of the senseless suffering that dominated their lives. That is, with the provision of meaning offered by the ascetic priest, the slave was able to avert the threat of 'suicidal' paralysis, or nihilism, induced by the meaningless suffering deriving from their material experience of subjugation. Thus, in contrast to the tragic Greeks' construal of existence, Nietzsche diagnoses that the priestly 'artistry' or interpretation stems from a condition of 'powerlessness'. This priestly meaning is 'poisonous' and consequently constitutes 'an act of the most deliberate revenge' against the slaves' masters (*OGM*, p. 18).

In order to briefly outline this argument, I shall first allude to Solomon's assertion that '[i]f Nietzsche made us aware of anything in ethics, it is the importance of *perspectives*, the need to see all concepts and values *in context*.'⁹⁵ According to Nietzsche's hypothesis, the Christian exegesis of existence and its attendant values do not derive from an omnipotent and transcendent deity, but rather find their provenance in the psycho-physiological context of the ancient world. That is, thwarted from experiencing themselves as active, self-affirming agents realizing their own will to power, the Hebrew slave population consequently formulated values in order to make their suffering purposeful. However, the resultant values, articulated in a redemptive narrative that permits the slaves to both envisage themselves as willing agents as well as to conceptually appropriate their suffering, are permeated by a pathos of inadequacy, of impotence. Intertwined with salvific discourse, then, this is what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*: the spirit of impotent revenge. The Christian martyrs subsequently developed these values which, for Nietzsche, are suffused with rancour and premised on a negation of the 'other'. Solomon

⁹⁵ Solomon, p. 72.

sums up the slaves' subversion, or revolution, of the masters' values: '[s]lave morality is essentially a reaction against the humiliation and oppression of slavery and the superiority of the ruling classes.'⁹⁶

At this juncture it is worth noting that the *Genealogy* offers divergent readings with regard to Nietzsche's presentation of the slave revolt. That is, conflicting narratives and idioms operate throughout the *Genealogy*. On the one hand, I will show that there is a tendency to stress the dominant binary structure informing this work. Such views tend to emphasise Nietzsche's valorisation of the primitive nobles' self-affirmative values which stand in contradistinction to the deleterious values of Christian *ressentiment*. Indeed, the structure of the text, in which both the first and the concluding third essay highlight Nietzsche's oppositional logic, lends itself to this reading. Here I shall briefly consider this interpretation. Beginning with the idealized vision of spontaneous vitality, Nietzsche's rhetoric suggests the nostalgia of a primitive golden age. He contends:

The chivalric-aristocratic value-judgements are based on a powerful physicality, a blossoming, rich, even effervescent good health which includes the things needed to maintain it, war, adventure, hunting, dancing, jousting and everything else that contains strong, free, happy action. (*OGM*, p. 18)

Holding the primitive nobles to embody a primary spontaneous physicality, Nietzsche repeatedly signals his lament at the demise of this affirmative mode of being and at the slaves' triumphant overturning of this healthy self-relation. That modernity is seen to be dominated by the weak, the disgruntled, and the weary, who embody a restricted prudential economy, corroborates this point. The reader thus infers that the ascetic priest manages to inculcate the nobles with the slaves' values. Such values, for the masters, induce a deleterious self-doubt towards their spontaneous physical being, and they are thus convinced to orientate themselves towards the ideal of a non-natural, transcendent good. As Dews notes, the perverse values serve to force the nobles' 'spontaneously outward-directed drives to turn inwards'.⁹⁷ In relation to this development, Stephen

⁹⁶ Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 121.

⁹⁷ Dews, p. 141.

Mulhall contends that Nietzsche's narrative thus enacts his own equivalent of the Biblical myth of the Fall.⁹⁸

While these arguments are valid to a degree, they are partial and can lead to simplistic readings of the *Genealogy*. One consequent view, for example, is propounded by Fraser:

The way Nietzsche presents his genealogy one could be forgiven for presuming there are only two 'lifestyle choices'. One can become a Christian ascetic, morbid and life-denying, or one can be a hero - a Polish cavalry officer, a Homeric nobleman, a Julius Caesar-type, a Napoleon-type, take your pick.⁹⁹

Fraser stops short of exploring an alternative possibility to this binary organisation, consequently contending that 'Nietzsche clearly wants to return us to an ethic of action and glory'.¹⁰⁰ This argument can be countered by firstly noting that Nietzsche frequently cites artist figures such as Goethe, Shakespeare and Beethoven as his exemplars.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, more discerning readers will observe that the *Genealogy* is primarily offering a narrative of transformation that is consonant with his ideal of overcoming or sublimation.¹⁰² It is thus necessary to attend to the text's second essay, 'Guilt, bad conscience, and related matters', in order to observe Nietzsche's larger narrative framework. Here Nietzsche offers a speculative anthropological hypothesis of the provenance of the primitive social 'state' which pre-dates the origins of *ressentiment* and the reversal of the nobles' values. This narrative signals the sublimation of the primary predatory instincts that characterise the valorised nobles, while alerting the reader to the overarching vision of self and cultural transformation. This story therefore suggestively deconstructs such binary pairs as slave versus master, and sickness versus health, that prevail in the text's first and third essays. Moreover, attending to these conflicting narratives provides another point from which to observe Nietzsche's engagement with senseless, excessive suffering.

⁹⁸ Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁹⁹ Fraser, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 47.

¹⁰¹ For example, see *TI & AC*, p. 114.

¹⁰² I am indebted to Richard Beardsworth for this point. See Richard Beardsworth, 'Nietzsche, Nihilism and Spirit', in *Nihilism Now!: Monsters of Energy*, ed. by K. J. Ansell-Pearson and Diane Morgan (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 2000), pp. 37-69.

Primarily, the *Genealogy's* second treatise presents a hypothetical account of the origin and evolution of our internal, reflexive capacity, or conscience. This narrative begins by depicting the violent formation of the earliest 'state' whereby the more powerful pre-historic predatory tribes ruthlessly subjugated disparate, nomadic peoples. Nietzsche's a priori of man's instinctive cruelty directs this narrative. Nietzsche holds that the incipience of larger, collective living signals the repression of those primary instinctive drives. Adopting an urgent, cataclysmic tone, he claims that the sudden advent of societal existence is 'the most fundamental of all changes which [man] experienced': '[a]ll instincts of the wild, free, roving man were turned backwards, *against man himself*. Those instincts which are not discharged outwardly *turn inwards* - this is what I call the *internalization* of man' (*OGM*, p. 61). This repression of the basic, cruel drives is graphically depicted in images evoking an appalling self-terrorization commensurate with the savagery hitherto unleashed upon the other:

Lacking external enemies and obstacles, and forced into the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, man impatiently ripped himself apart, persecuted himself, gnawed at himself, gave himself no peace and abused himself, this animal who battered himself raw on the bars of his cage and who is supposed to be 'tamed'. (*OGM*, p. 61)

The majority of those incarcerated in early societal form are defined by an unharnessed cruelty that results in endless, undirected self-laceration. They are also characterised by the accumulation of frustrated impotent rage, or *ressentiment*, deriving from their incapacity to inflict suffering upon those harming them.

Furthermore, according to Nietzsche's hypothesis, the unprecedented suffering incurred by the inward-turning of our cruel instincts is compounded by the traumatic displacement of those primary instincts with an inchoate reflexive capacity. Nietzsche theorizes that '[t]he whole inner world [...] was expanded and extended itself and gained depth, breadth and height in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of man's instincts was *obstructed*' (*OGM*, p. 61). The supplanting of those hitherto governing instincts with the emergence of this new faculty, consciousness, 'that most impoverished and error-prone organ', entails an overwhelming sense of alienation in which the body is held to be the site of that which is both self and other (*OGM*, p. 61). One way to apprehend the

consequent distress can be attributed to the fact that, unlike the animals which unconsciously manage their affective economy, man has 'strayed' from an instinctive regulation of his affective expenditure, instead becoming dependent upon a 'fallible organ', namely his consciousness.¹⁰³

Moreover, Daniel Conway observes that, as a result of this shift in mode of being, '[o]ur reliance on consciousness requires us to pursue goals, in order to sustain a threshold level of affective investment.'¹⁰⁴ That is, in order to achieve a phenomenal experience of effectiveness, and hence power, we now require a 'goal capable of exciting a vital level of affective engagement.'¹⁰⁵ Whilst this goal may be self-generated, the majority are unable to harness the self's conflicting impulses in order to posit a unifying, commanding goal and are consequently subject to dispersal of their vital energies. In other words, they are subject to feelings of lethargy or depression, the pathos of suicidal nihilism. David Owen makes a corroborating point:

Insofar as one develops consciousness at the expense of instinct, so the feeling of power is increasingly mediated through meaning; the development of consciousness entails that the feeling of powerfulness requires that one experience one's self as meaningful.¹⁰⁶

Given, then, that the reflective capacities of the oppressed are greater due to the degree of internalisation experienced, it can be surmised that they possess a more urgent need to provide meaning to their lives. Indeed, the oppressed suffer from a particularly heightened awareness of their frustrated, violated condition, of their lack of agency and their incapacity to discharge their instinctive energies. Yet from what position do the oppressed generate meaning? One approach to this question, propounded by critics such as Boothroyd and Conway, is to stress the masters' role in bestowing meaning to the slaves. However, an exploration of Nietzsche's defence of the masters reveals further contradictory postures that undermine what Staten refers to as Nietzsche's consolation of the 'cruel hero'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See Conway.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁶ David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: Critique of Liberal Reason* (Sage, 1995), p. 57.

¹⁰⁷ Staten, p. 101.

Nietzsche's defence of the primordial masters and their externally-directed cruelty is suggestive of his continued preoccupation with useless suffering, of his need to confer the apparent senselessness of pre-history with significance. Claiming that in pre-history 'life then played the trick which it has always known how to play, of justifying itself, justifying its "evil" ', Nietzsche seeks to legitimize the 'the hardness, tyranny, stupidity and idiocy' of pre-history by pointing to the accomplishment of the masters' 'unconscious' state-building 'artistry' (OGM, p. 39). In other words, it is by justifying the brutal process of primitive domestication that Nietzsche argues that, primarily through the institution of punishment, the masters' form-giving cruelty, and hence the slaves' attendant suffering, is 'justified' and 'explained' (OGM, p. 39). Nietzsche is again engaged in the project of averting the horror of senseless suffering: the masters' harnessed cruelty exemplifies man's 'actual labour on himself', generating societal form and thus communal meaning for both master and slave.

Nietzsche justifies the infliction of suffering as punishment in two main ways in his narrative of primordial domestication. Firstly, basing his thesis on the premise that 'only something which continues *to hurt* stays in the memory', he holds that the body in this cultural context is primarily a site of discipline: he theorizes that the internalization of the 'images and procedures' of cruel punishment builds upon our inchoate reflective capacities to render man with an efficacious memory (OGM, p. 41). Accordingly, it is through a mnemonics of pain that man 'was eventually able to retain five or six "I-don't-want-to's" in his memory, in connection with which a *promise* had been made, in order to enjoy the advantages of society' (OGM, p. 42). It is this capacity to discern temporal and causal relations between events that permits adherence to the social code, the strengthening of communal identity, and the concomitant development of self-responsibility. For the ground is also being prepared for potential autonomous living: becoming increasingly '*reliable, regular, automatic*' with regards to our relationships with others, the self-responsible or 'sovereign individual' may emerge (OGM, pp. 39-40).

Secondly, as aforementioned, Nietzsche implicitly legitimises cruelty as he lauds the masters' generation of societal form: the primordial masters create 'a structure of domination that *lives*' (OGM, p. 63). Arguing that the populace had hitherto been 'unrestrained and shapeless', he asserts that this is now given 'a fixed form' within which

‘there is absolutely no room for anything which does not first acquire ‘meaning’ with regard to the whole’ (*OGM*, p. 63). Appealing to Romantic aesthetic notions that conceive beauty in terms of the unification of complex, disparate elements, Nietzsche valorises this state building artistry in which ‘parts and functions are differentiated and co-related’ within this social structure (*OGM*, p. 63). That is, it is through the aesthetic constitution of form or coherence that meaning is generated.

Echoing a Nietzschean defence of the predatory nobles’ ‘terrible tyranny’, Conway asserts ‘[i]n bringing order and purpose to a formerly formless populace, the beasts of prey impart meaning and identity to their captives’.¹⁰⁸ Yet, one can take issue with this argument by invoking Ridley’s observation that the slaves’ self-relation is dominated by their masters’ perspective: the slaves do not possess their own construal of existence to affirm themselves; the slaves are derivatively deemed as ‘low, low-minded, common and plebeian’ by the masters and are merely ‘object[s] of violation’.¹⁰⁹ Their suffering, from their own perspective, is meaningless.

The attempt to legitimize the primitive masters’ cruelty in terms of meaning constitution is also undermined by Nietzsche’s own climactic argument in the *Genealogy* :

*This is what the ascetic ideal meant: something was missing, there was an immense lacuna around man, - he himself could think of no justification or explanation or affirmation, he suffered from what he meant. Other things made him suffer too, in the main he was a sickly animal: but suffering itself was not his problem, but the fact that there was no answer to the question he screamed, ‘Suffering for what?’ Man, the bravest animal and the most prone to suffer, does not deny suffering as such: he wills it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose for suffering. The meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering, was the curse which so far has blanketed mankind, - and the ascetic ideal offered man a meaning! (*OGM*, p. 127)*

That is, the ascetic ideal’s success rests upon its response to the existential void presented by meaningless suffering: the slaves, whose lives are consumed by suffering, which is unaccountable from their own perspective, require a construal of suffering that

¹⁰⁸ Daniel W. Conway, ‘Beasts of Prey: How We Became What We Are: Tracking the ‘Beasts of Prey’’, in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, ed. by Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 156-79 (p. 166).

¹⁰⁹ Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche’s Conscience: Six Character Studies from the Genealogy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 37-38.

gives purpose to their suffering and allows them to avert suicidal paralysis. With no other suitable hermeneutic of suffering available, the ascetic ideal performs this function.

Suffering as Punishment

The ascetic ideal gives meaning to the oppressed by exploiting their existent apprehension of punishment as legitimised cruelty. To trace this claim I shall emphasise Nietzsche's view of man's instinctive disposition to inflict suffering while registering again that 'suffering is the basic condition of [the slaves'] existence', as Ridley notes.¹¹⁰ That is, it is worth recalling that the oppressed not only suffer as recipients of their masters' cruelty, but that they are also subject to a more intense experience of internalisation given that they have less possibility to discharge their aggressive instincts outwardly. Their lives are characterised by powerlessness and unbearable, unrelieved distress. Furthermore, the build-up of dangerous feelings of frustration and rancour threaten to explode early societal form: these aggressive drives and emotions spill over and are unleashed upon the other, 'friend, wife, child and anyone else near to them' (*OGM*, p. 99). It is accordingly the economy of punishment, premised on the notion of equivalence, which acts to curb instinctive, reactive, and immoderate feelings of vengefulness which accrue in the sufferers and threaten social cohesion.

To substantiate this point on the role of primeval punishment, I shall begin by noting that Nietzsche claims that the sufferers involuntarily seek to palliate their distress by inflicting pain upon the other:

For every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly, for a culprit, even more precisely for a *guilty* culprit who is receptive to distress- in short, for a living being upon whom he can release his emotions, actually or in effigy, on some pretext or other: because the release of emotions is the greatest attempt at relief, or should I say, at *anaesthetizing* on the part of the sufferer, his involuntary longed-for narcotic against pain of any kind. (*OGM*, p. 99)

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 38.

Extreme suffering is assuaged by locating a source for this distress. The sufferer now has a conceptual comprehension of the 'cause' of his or her suffering in identifying a '*guilty* culprit'. Moreover, the necessary 'release of emotions' is achieved by appealing to a 'logic' of 'compensation' whereby recompense 'is made up of a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty': the injured party can legitimately inflict suffering upon the guilty party and experience 'the elevated feeling of despising and maltreating someone as an "inferior" ' enjoyed by the masters (*OGM*, p. 45). Here Nietzsche contends that this primitive logic of compensation derives from 'the oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is, in the relationship between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor' (*OGM*, p. 49): the sufferer construes the other as a debtor while constituting itself as a creditor who has 'the pleasure of having the right to exercise power over the powerless without a thought' (*OGM*, p. 44). Importantly, as a result of this structure of compensation, communal existence is maintained: the sufferer's 'anger was held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* which can be paid in compensation, if only through the *pain* of the person who injures' (*OGM*, p. 43).

Echoing Zarathustra's teachings 'On Redemption', Nietzsche again presents externally-directed cruelty as a reactive, compensatory gesture. The perpetration of cruelty largely appears in Nietzsche's thought as a form of recuperation, an appropriative movement whereby the injured and aggrieved seek to recover their losses through the infliction of suffering upon the other. While I shall further discuss Nietzsche's thoughts on the particularly heightened pathos of power which cruelty affords when I turn to Kafka and Beckett and their respective depictions of suffering, impotent subjects, Heidegger's insightful comment on vengeance can help to explicate cruelty's appropriative dynamic:

[Revenge] opposes its object by degrading it so that, by contrasting the degrade object with its own superiority, it may restore its own validity, the only validity it considers decisive. For revenge is driven by the feeling of being vanquished and injured.¹¹¹

Heidegger's analysis is consonant with Nietzsche's understanding of punishment as 'compensation'. In both revenge and punishment there is a restorative, appropriative flow of energy towards the perpetrator as the other suffers and is diminished. Echoing

¹¹¹ Heidegger, p. 71.

Zarathustra's desire to supplant our dominant punitive logic and sentiments, Nietzsche elsewhere explicitly attests to the persistence of the pre-historic 'logic of compensation':

At present, to be sure, he who has been injured, irrespective of how this injury is to be made good, will still desire his *revenge* and will turn for it to the courts- and for the time being the courts continue to maintain our detestable criminal codes, with their shopkeeper's scales and *the desire to counterbalance guilt with punishment*: but can we not get beyond this? What a relief it would be for the general feeling of life if, together with the belief in guilt, one also got rid of the old instinct for revenge [...] Let us do away with the concept sin- and let us quickly send after it the concept *punishment*! (*D*, p. 121)

Attending to Nietzsche's articulations of his desire to transcend retributive, punitive modes of reasoning offers one way to chart Nietzsche's opposition to the ascetic ideal, or the 'priestly interpretation' of existence. For the priest perpetuates and amplifies the import of the notion of punishment: the ascetic hermeneutic of suffering operates essentially by identifying whom to blame, whom to punish. Moreover, the priest convinces the slave to find him or herself culpable, proclaiming: 'Somebody must be to blame [for your suffering]: but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself are to blame for it, *you yourself alone are to blame for yourself*' (*OGM*, p. 99). The notion of 'sin', formulated as a primal transgression in the narrative of the Fall, grounds this exegesis of legitimised self-punishment. While I shall discuss the sado-masochistic dimensions of guilt in the Kafka chapter, I wish here to highlight that this narrative allows the slave to avert feelings of suicidal nihilism which result from experiences of 'senseless suffering'. Firstly, blaming oneself allows 'every conceivable kind of suffering' to be appropriated by this interpretation of self-culpability: as Ridley notes, '[n]o external object can ever be held fully and convincingly accountable for *all* of your suffering'.¹¹² The sufferer may rigorously scrutinize their own actions and thoughts, intensifying their reflexive capacities, in order to locate the source of their suffering. Such a manoeuvre, in terms of the ascetic ideal, entails an ascetic regime of purification which seeks to extirpate corrupt libidinous impulses. Moreover, the slaves' adoption of prescribed ascetic practices, motivated by the goal of attaining transcendental bliss and the end of suffering through the denial of

¹¹² Ridley, p. 54.

corporeal being, permits them to experience themselves as willing agents. This is key to Nietzsche's apprehension of the tenacity of the ascetic interpretation of existence:

The interpretation - without a doubt - brought new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought all suffering within the perspective of *guilt*...But in spite of all that- man was *saved*; he had a *meaning*, from now on he was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of 'non-sense'; from now on he could *will* something,- no matter what, why and how he did it at first, the *will itself was saved*. (OGM, p. 127)

Nietzsche's account of the slaves' subscription to ascetic practices that diminish corporeal being in the pursuit of an idealized, de-eroticised, non-suffering existence, gives rise to one of the *Genealogy's* most striking aphorisms: 'a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; it needs an aim [goal] -, and it prefers to will *nothingness* rather than *not* will (OGM, p. 72). Despite creating a 'more poisonous' form of suffering, the slaves may constitute themselves as goal-bound agents by adhering to the ascetic ideal. The slaves' adoption of this interpretation of suffering thus underlines their need to avert unbearable, unappropriated suffering. Indeed, Christian soteriology economizes all of the slaves' distress, and does so according to 'the rational workings of divine providence'.¹¹³ It may be pointed out, then, that by fully accounting for suffering through its redemptive narrative, the ascetic ideal offers a 'narrow', simple, or reductive reading of existence: theodicy averts any form of confrontation with that which cannot be assimilated, namely suffering's excessive force.

Furthermore, the transcendental narrative provides the slaves with the conceptual wherewithal to palliate their suffering through the imagined cruelty exacted upon the masters. Thus, while only 'the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly' are to be saved, the transgressing masters are promised eternal punishment, to be 'eternally wretched, cursed and damned!' (OGM, p. 19). Christian salvific discourse thus reflects, for Nietzsche, the values of those 'who, being denied the proper response of action compensate for it only with imaginary revenge' (OGM, p. 21).

¹¹³Kenneth Surin, *The Turnings of Darkness and Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 53. Quoted in Tyler T. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 166.

The narrative of the *Genealogy* partakes in the drive to overcome the 'narrow', ascetic interpretation of existence. Furthermore, Nietzsche's ideal of squandering and the affirmation of suffering for self and cultural enhancement is integral to his vision of the sublimation of punishment. That is, pointing to the gradual supplanting of the deep-rooted punitive mentality, the notion of self-wounding underpins Nietzsche's ideal of mercy as it is performed by both the strong man and by the powerful community:

As the power and self-confidence of a community grows, its penal law becomes more lenient; if the former is weakened or endangered, harsher forms of the latter will re-emerge. The 'creditor' always becomes more humane as his wealth increases; finally, the *amount* of his wealth determines how much injury he can sustain without suffering from it. It is not impossible to imagine society *so conscious of its power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury available to it, - that of letting its malefactors go *unpunished*. 'What do I care about my parasites', it could say, 'let them live and flourish: I am strong enough for all that!'...Justice, which began by saying everything can be paid off, everything must be paid off', ends by turning a blind eye and letting off those unable to pay, - it ends, like every good thing on earth, by *sublimating itself*. The self-sublimation of justice: we know what a nice name it gives itself- *mercy*; it remains, of course, the prerogative of the most powerful man, better still, his way of being beyond the law. (*OGM*, p. 51)

In contrast to crude, primitive cultures that exercise severe punishment upon their criminals, Nietzsche elevates the individual and the community with the strength to endure its 'parasites', to exercise mercy. Strength is thus denoted by the ability to forego the compensatory, appropriative gesture of retaliation. This exemplary form thus entails suffering from absorbing the wounds inflicted by others. Such a capacity, Nietzsche argues, 'in the face of personal injury, of scorn and suspicion, well, that is a piece of perfection, the highest form of mastery to be had on earth' (*OGM*, p. 53). In opposition to claims that associate Nietzsche's thought with brutality, propounded by Fraser among others, Nietzsche's noble exemplar demonstrates a denied discharge of externally-directed cruelty and a consequent intensification of his or her own suffering.

Furthermore, by observing Nietzsche's contention that 'the law of life' is 'the law of *necessary* "self-overcoming" ', it is clear that he does not seek an atavistic return to the

values of the primitive nobles (*OGM*, p. 126). Indeed, as Ridley observes, Nietzsche is fully aware that '[m]an cannot be magically disinternalized'.¹¹⁴ Moreover, his depiction of 'those unusual cases of spiritual and physical powerfulness' that he describes in his narrative of primitive social formation not only radically departs from the vision of the spontaneous, physical nobles, but also gestures towards the overcoming of nihilism through the intensification and development of our reflexive capacities (*OGM*, p. 94):

Fundamentally, it is the same active force as the one that is at work on a grand scale in those artists of violence and organizers, and builds states, which here, internally, on a smaller, pettier scale, turned backwards [...] it is that very instinct for freedom (put into my language: will to power): only that the material on which the formative and violent nature of the force is let loose is man himself, his old animal self- and not, as in that greater and more eye-catching phenomenon, the other man, the *other* men. The secret self-violation, this artist's cruelty, this desire to give form to oneself as a piece of difficult, resisting, suffering matter, to brand it with a will, a critique, a contempt, a 'no', this uncanny, terrible but joyous labour of a soul voluntarily split within itself, which makes itself suffer out of the pleasure of making suffer, this whole *active* 'bad conscience' has finally [...] brought a wealth of novel, disconcerting beauty and affirmation to life, and perhaps for the first time, beauty itself. (*OGM*, p. 64)

Where the primitive nobles discharge their cruel drives externally in the 'grand scale' project of societal formation, Nietzsche similarly valorises this self-reflexive 'pleasure of making suffer' in which the self discharges its cruel instincts inwardly in the project of giving 'form' to itself.¹¹⁵ In both instances, meaninglessness is averted through the imposition of form. Also, in both cases the human animal gratifies its instinctive need to perpetrate cruelty. However, as Staten notes, in contrast to the affirmative vision of the primitive nobles, Nietzsche's picture of self-artistry seems to be characterised by the same perverse drive to inflict suffering upon oneself as that of the slave motivated by guilt: in both forms the 'sickness' of internalisation is amplified as both the guilty man and these self-artists similarly intensify the 'split within itself', expanding the self's inner pathos of distance.¹¹⁶ What distinguishes these celebrated artists' self-violation, however,

¹¹⁴ Ridley, p. 133.

¹¹⁵ This argument complicates the position of those who hold Nietzsche's account of the initial 'breach with man's animal past' to signal the equivalent of the Christian myth of the Fall in Nietzsche's thought.

¹¹⁶ Staten, p. 91.

is that they are pursuing the goal of self-enhancement, they are engaged in the formation of the self, rather than pursuing the goal of self-abnegation which motivates the self-directed cruelty of the ascetic ideal. This adduced passage thus concludes by suggesting that this 'artist's cruelty' contains the potential for 'the affirmation of life' (*OGM*, p. 64).

Self-artistry, as an 'active' self-relation of self-cultivation, is thus central to Nietzsche's project of overcoming nihilism and *ressentiment*. This is implicit in my discussion of Zarathustra's passage 'On Redemption' and in my outline of the slaves' experience of frustrated agency and their recourse to ascetic values. In the following citation, Nietzsche explicitly reinforces the value of engaging in the arduous task of self-fashioning as a means to overcome vindictive sentiments:

For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself- be it through this or that poetry or art; only then is a human being tolerable to behold! Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually prepared to avenge himself for this.
(*GS*, p. 164)

Experimental Living

Having argued that Nietzsche's parallel ideals involve masochistic notions of squandering and gesture towards inclusivity, I will now address Fraser's principal indictment of Nietzsche's work: Fraser alleges that Nietzsche's thought operates through a 'logic of exclusion' which is 'in some way, bound up with preparing the ground for the holocaust'.¹¹⁷ While Nietzsche's name has been closely linked with the Nazi atrocities – for instance, Jacques Derrida notes that '[t]here is nothing absolutely contingent about the fact that the only political regimen to have *effectively* brandished his name as a major and official banner was Nazi' - many have successfully defended Nietzsche's work against these charges.¹¹⁸ Clearing the way for a new scholarly appreciation of his work, this task was performed particularly by Nietzsche scholars such as Walter Kaufmann in the 1950s.

¹¹⁷ Fraser, p. 129. Otherwise put, Nietzsche's work evinces the values of *ressentiment* that he seeks to supplant.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 31., cited in Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990* (London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 317.

While I shall not engage with these debates here, I think it is important to address Fraser's charge given that he particularly targets Nietzsche's writings on nihilism and suffering, the areas of Nietzsche's thought that constitute the focal points of my thesis, to be implicated with the cataclysm of the Holocaust.

Fraser firstly discerns a logic of exclusion operating in Nietzsche's thought by arguing, as previously observed, that Nietzsche valorises the primitive masters: these primordial aristocrats embody a self-affirmation that stand antithetically to the weary, tired majority who embrace nihilistic slave values; instinctive egoistic behaviour, which includes the pleasure of inflicting suffering on others, is accordingly championed by Nietzsche. As noted in my Introduction, this view is espoused by a number of modernist literary critics.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Fraser also challenges Nietzsche's interpretation of Dionysus as the symbol of universal affirmation: Dionysus is 'the god who effects salvation by way of exclusion'.¹²⁰ Here Fraser alludes to primitive Dionysian ritual which is characterised by *sparagmos*, meaning 'a rending, tearing, mangling' in Greek. That is, the Dionysian cult entails the violent dismembering of the sacrificial victim which is then ritually eaten to symbolise 'the assimilation and internalisation of godhead'.¹²¹ With this view of Dionysus in mind, collective ecstatic joy is thus attained through the sacrifice or destruction of the other. On these grounds Fraser claims, vis à vis René Girard, that Dionysus can then be seen as 'the divinity of mob vengeance' whose ritual acts to consolidate and preserve social stability by allowing the venting of aggressive anti-social instincts.¹²² Nietzsche's repeated celebration of Dionysus thus constitutes, for Fraser, Nietzsche's insistent idiom of violent exclusion. This deeply implicates his thought with Nazi ideology and the Holocaust.

What I have tried to argue, however, is that the governing narrative of sublimation that drives the *Genealogy*, which contains both the promise of countering nihilism and superseding a reactionary subjectivity, can be applied to apprehend Nietzsche's work as a whole. By making the connection between the ideals he presents in this text with that of

¹¹⁹ See pp. 5-6.

¹²⁰ Fraser, p. 149.

¹²¹ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 95.

¹²² Fraser, p. 149.

the figure of Dionysus, it is possible to apprehend Nietzsche's exemplary model of self-overcoming: the ideal of the merciful individual and community, his delineation of those 'unusual cases' preforming a 'joyous labour' of self-artistry, and his evocations of Dionysian squandering in various forms, converge to suggest his paradigm of self-enhancement. The point of continuity, I have suggested, is the amplification of inward-directed cruelty. For Nietzsche, as far as he articulates his ideal forms, externally-directed cruelty and the exclusion of otherness are, on the contrary, expressions of a vengeful subjectivity which he desires that we supplant.

Furthermore, it is necessary to account for the strains operating throughout his work. That is, while acknowledging that elements in Nietzsche's thought lend themselves towards Fraser's reading, it is important to observe that Nietzsche's work is characterised by a tension between open, expansive and generous gestures on the one hand, and defensive, reactionary and protective postures, on the other. Focussing exclusively on either aspect of Nietzsche's economy, as Fraser does, results in a partial reading and one that does not address the following dilemmas, for instance: how does one account for the persistence of oppositional positions in Nietzsche's work? How does one make sense of his abandonment of the *Genealogy's* principal narrative theme of overcoming? Does Nietzsche merely lose sight of his overarching narrative in this text, as Richard Beardsworth claims?¹²³ While I have suggested that Nietzsche's work registers the force of meaningless suffering in his analysis of ancient tragedy, and in his account of the slaves' constitution of values, examining Nietzsche's discourse on others' suffering offers another entry point from which to chart his engagement with senseless suffering. It is by tackling this area of his thought in particular, which points to a heightened sensibility towards suffering's excessive force, which may disclose compelling insights regarding the contradictory postures that permeate his work.

Additionally, it is worth noting again that Nietzsche's elevated project of self-experimental self-enhancement, which entails a masochistic 'discipline of suffering', somewhat parallels the depiction of the Dionysian experience of ancient tragedy: the self-cultivator similarly fractures the self's existent pleasurable self-relation, and is

¹²³ Beardsworth, p. 67.

consequently more vulnerable and more porous to the world's otherness. The self-enhancer thus repeatedly engages in continued efforts to expand their digestive capacities, by both squandering and restoring meaning.

Among the strategies Nietzsche outlines in order to increase the self's affirmative capacity is the cultivation of an ancient ephectic or sceptical approach to existence. As mentioned above, Nietzsche paradoxically encourages the fostering of radical doubt and suspicion which is attained through an incessant questioning: 'the *will* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly, and quietly than one questioned heretofore' (GS, p. 13). Such a practice is characterised by the abandonment of all foundational beliefs and, like tragedy, entails the confrontation with nihilistic despair. However, it similarly announces a tragic faith in its capacity to 'cross to the other side' and generate new meaning, to perform a new art or interpretation. As an ideal, it valorises a fluid process of departure and arrival that advocates great suffering with the relinquishing of the self's secure ground.

Furthermore, this experimental living parallels tragedy in that, for Nietzsche, the most immediate strategy for generating this creative tension and developing the self's porosity entails the identification with others, and hence others' suffering. It is by developing this empathetic capacity that the self develops more comprehensive states, attaining a greater capacity to inhabit a multitude of perspectives from which one is thus able to affirm more of existence. An entry from *Human, All Too Human*, where Nietzsche observes that the profound identification with others' suffering signals a potential collapse, is pertinent here. Beginning this passage by claiming that the 'exceptional' man's empathetic capacity is distinct from the 'ordinary' man, whose 'sympathy for life in general, and for the suffering of mankind, is very weakly developed', he contends:

Most men tolerate life without grumbling too much and *believe* thus in the value of existence, but precisely because everyone wills himself alone and stands his ground alone, and does not step out of himself as do those exceptional men, everything extrapersonal escapes his notice entirely, or seems at most a faint shadow. Thus the value of life for the ordinary, everyday man is based only on his taking himself to be more important than the world. The great lack of fantasy from which he suffers keeps him from being able to empathize with other beings, and he therefore participates in their vicissitudes and suffering as little as possible. On the other hand, whoever would

be truly able to participate in it would have to despair about the value of life; if he were able to grasp and feel mankind's overall consciousness in himself, he would collapse with a curse against existence - for mankind, as a whole, has *no* goals and consequently, considering the whole affair, man cannot find his comfort and support in it, but rather his despair. (*HAH*, p. 36)

The exceptional man participates in the 'vicissitudes and suffering' of others: in contrast to 'most men', the exceptional man is capable of a profound Dionysian sensibility. And yet, while such 'sympathy for life' and others' suffering constitutes the means by which the self-enhancer masochistically expands their digestive capacities, Nietzsche insists upon the limits that any individual can bear. Echoing the earlier discussion on the 'necessity' for 'error' over truth, of Apollo's role in tragic art, and of the outline of the defensive-appropriative economy, Nietzsche claims that 'whoever would be truly able to participate in' the 'vicissitudes and suffering' of others 'would have to despair about the value of life; [...] he would collapse with a curse against existence' (*HAH*, p. 36). In other words, it is through a profound identification with others' meaningless suffering, the very means by which the exceptional man tests and expands his limits of affirmation, which precipitates nihilistic despair and the pathos of impotent rage.

I hold this passage key to apprehending the contrary positions, the oscillations and vacillations that characterise his thought. On the one hand, Nietzsche repeatedly insists upon the need to engage in an experimental, transformative philosophy that tests the self's affirmative boundaries. Often the rhetoric is exultant. However, such rhetoric belies a fear of being overwhelmed by others' suffering, a fear of the consequent dissolution of autarkic selfhood. Nietzsche's own heightened receptivity to others' suffering, as one such 'exceptional man' able to inhabit other perspectives and attain more comprehensive states, made him particularly susceptible to this threat. Nietzsche's work thus exhibits the fear of nihilistic collapse attended by a reactionary rage (*GS*, p. 192).

Suffering's Abyss

Nussbaum argues that Nietzsche embodies a hardness, a stoical self-defensiveness that demonstrates a lack of 'willingness to be porous'.¹²⁴ However, Nietzsche's experimental project points to the squandering of self-contained individuality through the identification with others' meaningless suffering. I maintain that it is his porosity that sees him expand and then contract, adopting a self-protective position as he reaches his digestive capacity. That is, Nietzsche desires to perform an open, expansive, totalising embrace of existence, yet when he reaches his assimilative limits, he reacts against the nauseating, paralysing truth which is presented most starkly in others' suffering. I hold that Nietzsche's philosophy can be understood to express a persistent sense of vulnerability in face of this threat as he reaches the limits of his affirmative capacity.

It is thus no coincidence that the nihilistic depths, or 'abysses', in Nietzsche's philosophy are repeatedly associated with others' suffering. For instance, as Zarathustra puts it: '[p]ity [...] is the deepest abyss: as deeply as man looks into life, so deeply does he look also into suffering.'¹²⁵ Similarly, 'the abysses of the Dionysiac' presented in ancient tragedy convey the audience's deep identification with Dionysus' and the hero's suffering, and thus bestow 'the wisdom of suffering' (*BT*, p. 24). And, as repeatedly implied, 'the deepest abyss and the highest summits' are considered to be inseparable for Nietzsche: his philosophy of self-cultivation advocates plummeting to the depths in order to overcome them, to attain a tragic-religious pathos of joy engendered by this confrontation (*BT*, p. 65).¹²⁶ The binary of height and depth dissolves as that which involves the greatest suffering engenders the greatest pleasure, or power.

Just as Zarathustra's narrative pivots on his ability to overcome this nauseating experience, there are repeated instances where Nietzsche's writings convey an incapacity to attain the ideal reached by his fictionalised prophet. In the *Genealogy*, for instance, Nietzsche assumes repeated reactionary, defensive positions when discussing others' suffering, or identifying with others' suffering:

¹²⁴ Nussbaum, p. 160.

¹²⁵ See also, for example, (*GS*, p. 192), where Nietzsche declares: 'I, too, know with certainty that I need only to expose myself to the sight of real distress and I, too, am lost.'

¹²⁶ See also *TSZ*, p. 69. In the parable, 'Of the Tree on the Mountainside', Zarathustra declares: 'Now it is with men as with this tree. "The more it wants to rise into the heights and the light, the more determinedly do its roots strive earthwards, into the darkness, into the depths- into evil."'

What is to be feared and can work more calamitously than any other calamity is not great fear of but great *nausea* at man; similarly great *sympathy* with man. Assuming that these might one day mate, then immediately and unavoidably something most uncanny would be produced, the 'last will' of man, his will to nothingness, nihilism. (OGM, p. 94)

As a result, Nietzsche insists that the 'pathos of distance' between the healthy and the sick 'ought to be the chief concern on earth' (OGM, p. 97). Elsewhere, in *Ecce Homo*, he is more extreme, claiming that 'everything weak, sick, ill-constructed, suffering from itself [...] *ought to perish*' (EH, p. 104). This statement is particularly startling given that it immediately precedes his declared identification with Dionysus, his symbol of universal affirmation. How, then, does one make sense of this discord permeating his thought? A related entry in *The Antichrist*, in which he propounds the same exterminatory argument, is revelatory: '[w]hat is more harmful than any vice?- Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak' (AC & TI, p. 127). As suggested above, it is 'active sympathy' and the engagement with the meaninglessness of others' suffering that attends Nietzsche's reactionary discourse: while the 'exceptional man' participates in others' distress in order to transfigure the self and affirm as much of existence as his digestive capacity can manage, it is precisely the fear of being overpowered by this meaninglessness that provokes Nietzsche's own 'curse against existence'.

In summary, then, Nietzsche's work evinces a great tension which can be apprehended by examining his preoccupation with meaningless suffering. It is particularly with regard to this discourse that one can observe the discordant impulses in his thought. On the one hand, his writing on meaningless suffering offers generous, inclusive gestures, pointing to the strong soul and community capable of enduring and absorbing its parasites. This affirmative vision is repeatedly characterised by the practice of a self-directed cruelty, and the overcoming of vindictive sentiments and action. On the other hand, the same discourse gives rise to reactionary, hostile positions.

By focussing on D.H. Lawrence's concern with senseless suffering and nihilism in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I shall now argue that Lawrence's affirmative vision is beset by similar strains. As I turn to examine the tensions arising in Lawrence's novel, noting that its vision of erotic transcendence similarly entails the need to transcend vengefulness, it may be instructive to suggest that Nietzsche's formulation of his ideal of '*amor fati*' anticipates

Lawrence's engagement with these powerful sentiments. For, as Nietzsche articulates this ideal, he remains cognisant of the persistence of this drive to 'accuse' the other and of the difficulty of surmounting such reactive feelings:

I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them- thus I will be one of those who makes things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse the accusers. Let looking away be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer! (GS, p. 276)

D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the Erotic Transcendence of Nihilism

Introduction: 'The English Nietzsche'

That Lawrence's work shares much with Nietzsche's thought is a firmly established view within Lawrence scholarship. Amongst those studies examining this kinship, Colin Milton's 1985 monograph, *Nietzsche and Lawrence*, offers the most extensive discussion. Milton's exploration of Lawrence's fiction is premised on the claim that 'Nietzschean ideas underlie and determine the large-scale patterns and structures of Lawrence's writing.'¹²⁷ Others tracing the relationship echo Milton and emphatically pronounce the similarities, with Harry Stenhauer going as far as to claim that Lawrence is the 'English Nietzsche'.¹²⁸ Many facets of Lawrence's thought have been analysed in this discussion. Eleanor H. Green, for example, has compared the political views of both men, while Greg Garrard has discussed their shared relevance to ecological concerns.¹²⁹ Others such as Anne Fernihough and John Burt Foster have commented on Lawrence's more ambivalent stance towards the philosopher, observing both Lawrence's assimilation of Nietzsche, and yet his desire to resist certain ideas.¹³⁰ Both commentators concede, however, that despite Lawrence's distancing attempts, fundamental convergences primarily characterise this relationship.

What I wish to do in this chapter is to consider another, hitherto neglected, dynamic in this relationship. Thus, having identified the entwined issues of meaningless suffering and nihilism to be central and consistent concerns in Nietzsche's work in my previous chapter, I will now argue that Lawrence's work can be similarly apprehended in terms of its

¹²⁷ Colin Milton, *Lawrence and Nietzsche: A Study in Influence* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 19.

¹²⁸ H. Stenhauer, 'Eros and Psyche: A Nietzschean Motif in Anglo-American Literature', *Modern Language Notes*, 64 (1949).

¹²⁹ Eleanor H. Green, 'Blueprints for Utopia: The Political Ideas of Nietzsche and D.H. Lawrence', *Renaissance & Modern Studies*, 18 (1974).; Greg Garrard, 'Nietzsche Contra Lawrence: How to Be True to the Earth', *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique*, 12 (2006).

¹³⁰ Fernihough; Foster.

depiction of the responses to suffering. I shall focus upon Lawrence's final novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in order to analyse these points of continuity.¹³¹

While the many reasons for examining *Lady Chatterley* within a discussion of Lawrence and Nietzsche shall become evident through the course of the chapter, it is worth noting here that critics normally read the novel as Lawrence's significant departure from the philosopher. For example, in his consideration of Lawrence's indebtedness to the thinker, eminent Lawrence scholar Kingsley Widmer dismisses the pertinence of Lawrence's last novel, claiming that it only 'relate[s] more distantly to the Nietzschean'.¹³² Widmer's approach is indicative of the critical tendency to focus on the texts that constitute what is commonly labelled Lawrence's 'leadership period' within this discussion, the novels of the mid-1920s which include *Aaron's rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923), and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). Otherwise put, *Lady Chatterley*, which was originally written with a working title of *Tenderness*, announces Lawrence's abandonment of his exploration of the political power motif; this shift in Lawrence supposedly marks his disengagement from Nietzsche's notions of the will to power and aristocratic leadership. I shall argue, however, that *Lady Chatterley* provides fertile ground on which to cultivate a considered approach towards understanding Lawrence's engagement with Nietzsche's principal preoccupations. My subsequent discussion will thus aim to reveal the extent to which Lawrence was focussed on dramatizing the modern nihilistic predicament as he discerned it, revealing its proximity to the response to suffering.

Critics such as Michael Bell and Daniel Schneider have noted the critical reception of *Lady Chatterley* by Lawrence scholars.¹³³ While Bell and Schneider defend the novel on its own terms, they also concur with the critical consensus to treat this text as inferior to Lawrence's great works, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. However, while Schneider cites damning views of a number of critics regarding, for example, the novel's overt didacticism and the nature of the novel's sexual content, his corrective to these

¹³¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, repr. 1961). All subsequent citations refer to this edition. I shall refer to the novel as *Lady Chatterley* from now on while abbreviating citations with *Lady*.

¹³² Kingsley Widmer, 'Lawrence and the Nietzschean Matrix', in *D. H. Lawrence and Tradition*, ed. by Jeffrey Meyers (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), pp. 115-31 (p. 131).

¹³³ Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 209. Daniel J. Schneider, *D.H. Lawrence: The Artist as Psychologist* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1984), p. 237.

interpretations is pertinent: these readings overlook the key, sustained tone of cataclysm that permeates the novel.¹³⁴ In other words, there is a need to stress that Lawrence's preoccupation with the post-war predicament of pervasive nihilism is most explicitly and extensively treated in this work. Thus, as Hilary Simpson notes, 'although Lawrence's last novel is frequently seen as a pastoral, a timeless exploration of sexual passion determined more by myth than by history, the historical context is crucial.'¹³⁵ The novel, I hold, paints a portrait of the English nation and its experience of overwhelming, senseless suffering. It insists upon a disjunction between experience and interpretation, of a corresponding evacuation of meanings and values, which is directly linked to the experience of the trauma from the war.

Post-War Nihilism

Perhaps the novel's most emphatic dramatization of suffering's excessive force and its tie to nihilism is evident with Lawrence's characterisation of Sir Clifford Chatterley. Returning from the war 'more or less in bits', Clifford is wounded and paralysed from the waist down (*Lady*, p. 5). This physical paralysis also symbolizes an internal, emotional paralysis which Lawrence considers to be prevalent in post-war culture. Leaving aside the point that narrative offers a central means to reconstitute a sense of selfhood for greater examination in my later chapter on Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, it is noteworthy that Clifford 'was back at Wragby, and writing his stories, and feeling sure of life, in spite of all, he seemed to forget, and to recover all his equanimity' (*Lady*, p. 53). However, his wife Constance notes his convalescence 'is only an appearance' (*Lady*, p. 53). Rather, the wound 'had been so deep as to be numb' and 'the bruise of the too-great shock' re-emerges, 'gradually spreading in his affective self' (*Lady*, p. 53). The wound thus renders him emotionally paralysed: 'he had been so much hurt that something inside of him perished, some of his feelings had gone. There was a blank of insentience' (*Lady*, p. 6). This devastation of Clifford's affective self is central to the novel's trajectory: his incapacity to sympathise with others intensifies the gulf between Clifford and his wife;

¹³⁴ Schneider, p. 237. Schneider notes that 'such criticism tends to ignore the carefully sustained tone of the novel, a tone arising [...] from the sense of the terrible psychic wound inflicted by the World War[.]'

¹³⁵ Hilary Simpson, *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 140.

this estrangement impels Constance, or Connie, to seek emotional fulfilment elsewhere, firstly in the disastrous affair with the playwright, Michaelis, and later with the gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors.

Clifford's trauma can be illuminated by drawing a parallel with Nietzsche's notions of Apollo and Dionysus, first outlined in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Recalling that Apollo represents the individuated self's coherent boundaries, the experience of extreme pain can be related to the Dionysian, an excessive force that overwhelms or ruptures these boundaries of selfhood. Accordingly, the experience of acute suffering signals an annihilation of self-definition that evokes the Dionysian awareness that everything that 'comes into being must be prepared to face a sorrowful end' (*BT*, p. 80). In terms of the novel, Lawrence stresses that Clifford 'was haunted by anxiety and a sense of dangerous impending void' (*Lady*, p. 145). His trauma has induced an encounter with life's senselessness, with what Nietzsche refers to as the '*horror vacui*', the fear of nothingness (*OGM*, p. 72). In Nietzsche's account of tragic art this Dionysian disclosure of life's inherent senselessness entails the attendant threat of a suicidal, depressive loss of will.¹³⁶ Lawrence marks his depiction of Clifford's anxiety, of his haunting fear of annihilation, by noting that there is an accompanying depressive, nihilistic fatigue: '[a] terrible hollow seemed to menace him somewhere, somehow, a void, and into this void his energy would collapse. Energyless, he felt at times he was dead, really dead' (*Lady*, p. 145).

Significantly, in Nietzsche's account of ancient tragic experience, the Greeks were able to invoke Apollonian illusion to counter the nauseating horror of the Dionysian insights. However, Clifford's loss of energy, or will, suggests an incapacity to perform a correspondent recuperative gesture to resist the disintegrative force of the Dionysian. The following passage gestures that the excessive force of the trauma to which Clifford is subject impacts his capacity to function as a coherent subject able to constitute an ordered, meaningful life through language that permits him to reflexively experience himself as an agent:

When Clifford was roused, he could still talk brilliantly and, as it were, command the future. [...] But the day after, all the brilliant words seemed like dead leaves, crumpling up and turning to powder, meaning really nothing, blown away on any gust of wind. The

¹³⁶ See p. 30 of this thesis and the discussion of *BT*, p. 39.

words were not the leafy words of an effective life, young with energy and belonging to the tree. They were the hosts of fallen leaves of a life that is ineffectual. (*Lady*, p. 53)

Lawrence's depiction of Clifford's nihilistic state in terms of a disjunction between language and action recalls Mark Warren's analysis of Nietzsche's notion of nihilism which, Warren holds, entails a discrepancy between interpretation and experience:

The fundamental structural contradiction in nihilism, then, is between humans as sensuous, worldly beings who suffer, feel, and act, and humans as conscious, cultural beings who constantly interpret and evaluate the world and themselves. Individuals lose their orientation and become nihilistic when they cannot fit experience and interpretation together to form a 'will' to act: that is, when they fail to organize their powers of agency.¹³⁷

In line with this analysis, Clifford evinces a disconnect 'between experiential and interpretive conditions of acting' due to his experience of extreme suffering.¹³⁸ There is a consequent evacuation of the significance of existent discourse as the self is unable to interpretatively appropriate its suffering, to give form, order and meaning to its experience. The existent interpretative framework constituted to secure, and reflect, the subject's sense of agency therefore appears at odds with empirical existence.

The novel repeatedly insists upon an emptying of meanings and values and ties this to the experience of overwhelming or senseless suffering. Connie's brief and ultimately devastating affair with Michaelis may be alluded to to illustrate this point. For example, what is telling from Connie's perspective with regards to Michaelis' cruel rejection of her following intercourse was that it was 'particularly unexpected' as 'she felt so innocent' (*Lady*, p. 58). It constitutes an act of 'incomprehensible brutality' and is described as 'one of the crucial blows of Connie's life' (*Lady*, p. 58). In other words, Connie is unable to rationally appropriate 'this unexpected piece of brutality' because it renders a dislocation between experience and significance (*Lady*, p. 58). Echoing Warren's analysis of nihilism as arising from 'disjunctions between experiential and interpretive conditions of acting', Connie consequently ruminates upon the inadequacy of existent meanings and ideals:

¹³⁷ Warren, p. 16.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 18.

All the great words, it seemed to Connie, were cancelled for her generation: love, joy, happiness, home, mother, father, husband, all these great, dynamic words were half dead now, and dying from day to day. [...] As for sex, the last of the great words, it was just a cocktail term for an excitement that bucked you up for a while, then left you more raggy than ever. (*Lady*, p. 65)

Connie's thoughts evoke Nietzsche's description of nihilism in terms of a disillusionment with existent ideals: '[n]ow everything is false through and through, mere "words", chaotic, weak, or extravagant' (*WTP*, p. 20). In a famous passage Nietzsche captures the disenchantment with those ideals that had hitherto governed and directed human willing: '[w]hat does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves*' (*WTP*, p. 9). As Connie implies here, and what is evident in her subsequent demise that is the focus of the first half of the novel, is that this disillusionment engenders a depressive loss of energy, or will.

A central theme of the novel is its depiction of the depths of passive nihilism to which the protagonists succumb as existent meanings lose their power. The emblematic Chatterley relationship is governed by recourse to obsolete, 'ineffectual' words, or empty signifiers: '[t]he only reality was nothingness, and over it a hypocrisy of words' (*Lady*, p. 53). For Clifford and Connie's 'integrated life', dominated by words, 'became utterly blank and nothing' (*Lady*, p. 53). Focalising through Connie, Lawrence registers the negative, exhaustive impact of adherence to a reified or ossified discourse: '[h]ow she hated words, always coming between her and life: they did the ravishing, if anything did: ready-made words and phrases, sucking all the life-sap out of living things' (*Lady*, p. 96). For Connie, the existent discourse is not only redundant, but it also impoverishes one's relation to the world: the privileging of the abstract, of words and interpretations divorced from fluid, lived experience signals a correspondent diminution of corporeal existence.

This experience of passive nihilism permeates the culture at large. In a letter to Connie, Mellors conveys that the men in the north of England are 'very apathetic. [...] There's no sort of conviction about anything, except that it's all a muddle and a hole. [...] The men are limp, they feel a doom somewhere, and they go about as if there was nothing to be done' (*Lady*, p. 311). In Nietzsche's apprehension of nihilism, the absence of a meaning or goal is attended by the depressive loss of a pathos of agency. As I noted in the

introductory chapter, Nietzsche considers humans to be future-orientated creatures. He thus repeatedly emphasizes the import of having a goal throughout his work: in the *Genealogy*, for instance, he claims: 'a basic fact of human will, its *horror vacui*; it needs an aim [goal]' (OGM, p. 72). As he similarly notes in *The Will to Power*, what is key to positing a goal is that it allows something 'to be *achieved* through the process': possessing a goal allows one to constitute oneself as an agent (WTP, p. 12).

What is more, Lawrence's depiction of the purposeless, general populace echoes Nietzsche's character type of the 'Ultimate' or 'Last Man', the figure that the philosopher repeatedly demonizes. Perhaps this type is most memorably described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where the thinker uses this symbol to capture the state of comfortable mediocrity he discerns to be characterising modernity (TSZ, p. 46). Lawrence similarly portrays the working classes, and, indeed, the social elite, to be motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and an aversion to suffering. For instance, informing Connie that nothing can 'make' the workers 'serious', that physical activities and sports such as football are considered 'too much like hard work' (*Lady*, p. 108), Mrs Bolton surmises that 'all the lads want is just money to enjoy themselves, and the girls the same' (*Lady*, p. 109). The connection of the pursuit of pleasure to a lack of meaning is shared in later passages. For example, as Connie travels to Venice and encounters travellers and holiday-makers she complains of 'too much enjoyment' and ponders: '[w]hat did people *mean*, with their simply determined enjoying of themselves?' (*Lady*, p. 266). Connie's observation, suggesting the pointlessness of the pleasure-seeking surrounding her, echoes Nietzsche's identification of hedonism with nihilism. That is, one dimension of Nietzsche's critique of modernity is that, in broad terms, he considers pessimism, the judgement of a '“preponderance of suffering over pleasure” or the opposite (hedonism)' as 'already signposts to nihilism': '[f]or in both of these cases no ultimate meaning is posited except the appearance of pleasure or displeasure' (WTP, p. 23). The pursuit of happiness merely signals an absence of a goal, or incapacity to constitute one.

Connie's lament also suggests a more poignant motivation underpinning the ubiquitous pursuit of pleasure. Discerning that pleasure 'was a complete narcotic', she observes, '[a]nd that was what they all wanted, a drug: the slow water, a drug; the sun, a drug; jazz, a drug; cigarettes, cocktails, ices, vermouth. To be drugged! Enjoyment! Enjoyment!

(*Lady*, p. 270). Connie's use of the term 'narcotic' implies that the pleasure-seeking primarily serves to palliate pain. This corroborates her earlier observation on the 'bruised' populace, the colliers who are consumed by an emotional-psychic wound deriving specifically from the war: 'the vast black clot of bruised blood, deep inside their souls and bodies', she thinks, will take generations to 'dissolve' (*Lady*, p. 53). She also perceives that the traumatized populace 'would need a new hope', or a new cognitive orientation, in order to redeem their suffering and restore a sense of agency: for the colliers' prospective strike was 'not a manifestation of energy' but only the indignation of senseless suffering 'slowly rising and creating the great ache of unrest' (*Lady*, p. 53).

Furthermore, Connie's perceptions of the colliers, signalling that the pursuit of pleasure serves to anaesthetize extreme pain, evokes Nietzsche's claim that Christianity contains 'so much to refresh, soothe and narcotize' deep suffering and depression (*OGM*, p. 101). In the *Genealogy* in particular, he elaborates upon this analgesic role by asserting that the ascetic ideal provides a number of palliative techniques that aim to distract the sufferer, or to effectively repress 'dull, crippling, long-drawn-out pain' (*OGM*, p. 107) in practices that seek to achieve a state 'akin' to 'hibernation' (*OGM*, pp. 102-3). In effect, by preventing the sufferer 'coming to consciousness', the ascetic ideal perpetrates a wholesale denial of embodied being. For, in acting as a 'narcotic against pain of any kind', these techniques seek to remove the sufferer from desire, from striving, from affective-erotic being (*OGM*, p. 99). As Nietzsche observes: '[i]f possible, absolutely no more wanting, no wishing; everything which arouses the emotions and "blood" must be avoided' (*OGM*, pp. 102-3). There is a corresponding evaluative position accompanying these practices:

the hypnotic feeling of nothingness, the tranquillity of deepest sleep, in short, *absence of suffering*- this may counted as the highest good, the value of values, by the suffering and by those who are deeply depressed, it *has* to be valued positively by them and found to be *the* positive itself. (*OGM*, p. 104)

According to Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal, then, entails a systematic repression of pain, and thus of embodiment. Insofar as it operates to prevent contact with the Dionysian excesses of earthly, bodily existence and suffering, it appears to be a particularly heightened form of Apollonian illusion. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* explores the consequences of repressing such 'tormenting, secret pain which is becoming unbearable',

and the effective denial of Dionysian embodiment that such an approach to suffering involves (*OGM*, p. 99). The novel offers a complex picture. For while it gestures towards the need to confront, rather than repress, such suffering, for this offers the potential for affirmation and flourishing, it also suggests that such encounters with overwhelming suffering may induce a nihilistic *ressentiment*. I shall pick up this point below, but firstly wish to examine the nihilistic consequences of this repression of pain and hence of the negation of embodiment.

The Self-Preservative Economy

Clifford, like the workers, seeks to deny full consciousness of his trauma. As mentioned above, on returning from the war he had resumed habitual life and 'seemed to forget' his paralysis. Yet this characteristic strategy of repression engenders a state of dissonance. This is evident, for instance, with regard to Clifford's conscious suppression of the knowledge of Connie's affair with the gamekeeper. On disclosure of the relationship the narrator conveys that, '[i]nwardly he had known for a long time she was leaving him. But he had absolutely refused any outward admission of it' (*Lady*, p. 300). Clifford's perspectival interpretation is marked by an extreme disconnect from empirical actuality: for 'he knew' about the affair, 'and all the time tried to kid himself it wasn't so' (*Lady*, p. 301). He thus 'felt the devil twisting his tail, and pretended it was the angels smiling on him' (*Lady*, p. 301). Such a highly illusory perspective, severed from, and shielding oneself from, life's unpalatable elements, evokes Nietzsche's portrait of the 'theoretical man' who denies cognizance of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

the theoretical man, alarmed and dissatisfied at his own consequences, no longer dares entrust himself to the terrible icy current of existence: he runs timidly up and down the bank. So thoroughly has he been pampered by his optimistic views that he no longer wants to have anything whole, with all of nature's cruelty attaching to it. (*BT*, p. 113)

Lawrence's narrator conveys that such a deceptive, restrictive perspective is inherently fragile and subject to radical disturbance: for the revelation of Connie's affair 'came as the most terrible blow and shock' to Clifford (*Lady*, p. 300). The narrator emphasises that Clifford's false optimism leaves the aristocrat more vulnerable when he is compelled to confront the discrepancy between his interpretative perspective and empirical

experience: '[t]his state of falsity had now brought on that crisis of falsity and dislocation, hysteria, which is a form of insanity' (*Lady*, p. 301). Such a sense of disconnect induces a state of nihilism.

Furthermore, Clifford's repression of this negative knowledge of Connie's affair evokes Nietzsche's entry on the self's appropriative or its 'digestive' capacity, alluded to in the previous chapter.¹³⁹ According to this entry from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche claims that the expansive, appropriating self incorporates knowledge of the other and the world by synthesising the contradictory and domesticating the unfamiliar. Prior to the devastating disclosure of the affair, Clifford has apparent mastery of Connie within his stable, coherent, and familiar perspective and world: '[h]e was used to her. She was as it were embedded in his will' (*Lady*, pp. 306-7). In order to retain this mastery and interpretative security, however, Clifford evinces the limits of his 'digestive' ability. For resembling Nietzsche's description of the self's antithetical, restrictive drive within the same passage, Clifford exemplifies the 'acceptance and approval of ignorance' with regards the foreign, the contradictory, or the disturbing: that is, the knowledge of the affair (*BGE*, p. 161). Indeed, Clifford's chief complaint towards his wife is that this news has shattered his familiar, routine world, destroying 'the fabric of his daily existence' (*Lady*, pp. 306-7). Clifford's active rejection of consciousness of the affair thus marks what Nietzsche would call Clifford's 'defensive posture', signalling the limits of his ability to emotionally and cognitively assimilate this refractory experience (*BGE*, p. 161).

Indeed, the term 'defensive posture' could be applied to sum up Clifford's character more generally. This defensiveness primarily takes the form of a pathological, narcissistic self-enclosure that is characterised by a withdrawal from painful relations with others. On the one hand, Clifford's self-enclosure can be seen as a protective, self-preservative recoil following the previous violation of his selfhood: having had the coherence and continuity of his being ruptured by his war injury, his withdrawal marks the closure of the self's boundaries in relation to the perfidious outside world. Clifford's self-prudential strategy is tropistically represented by his treatment of Wragby Wood: he wanted to 'protect' the wood, to have the 'place inviolate, shut off from the world', as it had been denuded to contribute to the war effort (*Lady*, p. 45). However, on the other hand, his desire for

¹³⁹ See *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 160; I discussed this entry in 'The Digestive Subject' section of chapter one. See pp. 34-5.

impervious self-containment predates the war and this can be tied primarily to his sense of emotional vulnerability, of what Morag Shiach calls Clifford's 'precarious sense of self'.¹⁴⁰ The novel repeatedly emphasises his fragility, noting that 'he was, in some paralyzing way, conscious of his own defencelessness' (*Lady*, p. 10). Consequently, Connie observes that he is 'tight' and 'scared of life' (*Lady*, p. 72), and the narrator notes that 'through the close bond of family defence [...] nothing really touched him' (*Lady*, p. 17).

Lawrence appeals to Nietzsche's idiom of preservation and squandering in his first critical work, his *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1914), an essay which was originally called *Le Gai Savoir*. Here Lawrence broadly follows Nietzsche's contestation of the Darwinian argument that the cardinal drive of organic life is that of self-preservation. That is, just as Nietzsche argues that '[t]he wish to preserve oneself is a sign of distress' (*GS*, p. 207), Lawrence challenges what he assumes to be the dominant interpretative orientation of modernity: '[w]e always hold that life is the great struggle for self-preservation; that this struggle for the means of life is the essence and whole of life. As if it would be anything so futile, so ingestive.'¹⁴¹ What is more, according to Lawrence, this prudential impulse will be intensified by the suffering experienced in the war:

And we must be prepared to fight, after the war, a renewed rage of activity for greater self-preservation, a renewed outcry for a stronger bushel to shelter our light. We must also undertake the incubus of crippled souls that will come home.¹⁴²

In my view, Clifford can be seen to embody the 'renewed rage' for 'greater self-preservation'.¹⁴³ And just as Nietzsche sees physiological, affective decay tied to the ascetic ideal and its self-preservative drive, Lawrence follows suit in his portrayal of Clifford. Indeed, Lawrence's characterisation of Clifford as exemplifying this heightened

¹⁴⁰ Morag Shiach, 'Work and Selfhood in Lady Chatterley's Lover', in *The Cambridge Companion to D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Anne Fernihough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 87-102 (p. 92).

¹⁴¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*, Edited by Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, repr. 1961), p. 404.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 407.

¹⁴³ For Lawrence's continued preoccupation with the theme of self-preservation see, for instance, the poem 'Self-Protection' in D. H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, Edited by Vivian De Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 532. Here Lawrence argues: 'To make self-preservation and self-protection the first law of | existence | is about as scientific as making suicide the first law of existence, | and amounts to very much the same thing.'

prudential posture echoes Nietzsche's claim that 'the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence' (*OGM*, p. 93). For, together with Nietzsche's 'theoretical man', Clifford resembles the two character types that Nietzsche identifies with the reactive values of the ascetic ideal in the *Genealogy*, namely the ascetic priest and the slave. This is firstly apparent in the aristocrat's assumption of a metaphysical or ascetic perspective. Such a perspective, Nietzsche complains, is rooted in a desire to transcend the body, and hence life: insofar as 'life counts as a bridge to that other existence', this perspective amounts to a devaluation of this worldly-existence (*OGM*, p. 90).¹⁴⁴ Clifford explicitly espouses such views: embodied being, he informs Connie, is 'an encumbrance' (*Lady*, p. 244); in further contradistinction to Nietzsche's privileging of bodily consciousness, Clifford argues that God is 'slowly eliminating the guts and alimentary system from the human being, to evolve a higher, more spiritual being' (*Lady*, p. 245). In other words, Clifford evinces what Nietzsche refers to as a 'hatred of the human, and even more of the animalistic, even more of the material' (*OGM*, p. 127).

The aristocrat Lady Bennerley corroborates Clifford's opinions. She is more explicit in attributing human suffering to embodied being and likewise considers scientific progress to signal a departure from afflicted corporeality:

'So long as you can forget your body you are happy,' said Lady Bennerley. 'And the moment you begin to be aware of your body, you are wretched. So, if civilization is any good, it has to help us to forget our bodies, and then time passes happily without our knowing it.' (*Lady*, p. 78)

This endorsement of hedonistic principles, in which pleasure or happiness is viewed as the highest good, holds scientific methodology as the instrument towards attaining the transcendental. Following Nietzsche in aligning science with the ascetic ideal,¹⁴⁵ Lawrence presents Clifford 'reading one of the latest scientific-religious books' as he 'was

¹⁴⁴ See also, for example, Nietzsche's condemnation of the Christian dual world view in *BT*, p. 8.: 'Hatred of the "world", the condemnation of the emotions, the fear of beauty and sensuality, a transcendental world invented the better to slander this one, basically a yearning for non-existence, for repose until the "sabbath of Sabbaths".'

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, *OGM*, p. 121 : 'science rests on the same base as the ascetic ideal: the precondition of both the one and the other is a certain *impoverishment* of life, - the emotions cooled, the tempo slackened, dialectics in place of instinct'; and *OGM*, p. 126.: science is 'one of the ideal's last phases of development, one of its final forms and inherent logical conclusions'.

egocentrically concerned with the future of his own ego' (*Lady*, p. 243). Suggesting the proximity of science to religious salvific discourse, Clifford turns to such literature to avert the terrifying encounters with the void at the core of being and hence contemplation of the self's absolute expenditure.

Lawrence depicts the aristocrat in terms strikingly close to Nietzsche's figure of the ascetic priest. Doing so, Lawrence emphasises the perversity of Clifford's denial of erotic-affective being. Nietzsche, for instance, claims that the 'ascetic life is a self-contradiction,' and excoriates the ascetic desire 'to be master' over 'life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions' (*OGM*, p. 91). That is, for Nietzsche, the ascetic drive for mastery over suffering itself entails a denial of erotic-passional being. Lawrence's narrator similarly asserts that Clifford is 'triumphing over life in spite of life' before employing an aphorism that reverberates with Nietzschean echoes: '[w]ho knoweth the mysteries of the will-for it can triumph even against the angels' (*Lady*, pp. 145-6). Through this connection with Nietzsche's priest, Lawrence makes it clear that Clifford also connives at his own emotional deadness in his ascetic pursuit of transcendence. Clifford's paralysis is not solely due to his war injuries.

Clifford's defensive self-enclosure evokes another dimension of Nietzsche's analysis of the ascetic ideal: namely, that slave morality 'says "no" on principle to everything that is "outside", "other", "non-self" ' (*OGM*, p. 21). For, as Connie discerns, Clifford's isolation, his need to be 'shut in' and 'cut off' from the industrial midlands, is related to his fear of, and attendant negation of, the other: '[h]e was in some way afraid' of the miners, 'his own men; but he saw them as objects rather than men, parts of the pit rather than parts of life, crude raw phenomena rather than human beings along with him' (*Lady*, p. 17).

Clifford's reification of the workers derives from his prudential, self-protective posture. According to Scott Sanders, Clifford is 'locked within the fortress of his ego', maintaining the 'illusion of the isolated ego, self-sufficient and all-powerful'.¹⁴⁶ Consequently, Clifford

¹⁴⁶ Scott R. Sanders, 'Lady Chatterley's Loving and the Annihilation Impulse', in *D. H. Lawrence's 'Lady': A New Look at Lady Chatterley's Lover*, ed. by Michael Squires and Dennis Jackson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 1-16 (p. 3).

‘regards the rest of the cosmos as the infringement of his bloated self’.¹⁴⁷ This ‘illusion of separation’, or contrived distance between self and the other, is thus directly related to his fear of ‘infringement’.¹⁴⁸ He correspondingly fosters distant and hierarchical, instrumental relationships. As Sanders puts it, ‘the attitude of domination presupposes a master and something *else* to be mastered’.¹⁴⁹

Jeff Wallace similarly notes in his discussion of Lawrence’s critique of instrumental reason that the domination of the other forecloses the possibility of fluid, porous relations between the self and the other. Suggesting a defensiveness at the heart of this economy, Wallace argues that ‘[t]he promise of domination’ must keep ‘a safe distance between subject and object’.¹⁵⁰ The self ‘must remain non-dialectical’, preventing an ‘intimate relationship with the other’.¹⁵¹ And it is in these terms of rigid, closed dichotomies of self and other that Lawrence examines the denial of emotional and physical intimacy in Clifford’s relationship with Connie: for ‘they were so utterly out of touch’; ‘he never touched her. He never even took her hand and held it kindly’ (*Lady*, p. 117).

Give and Take

Connie’s relationship with Clifford is characterised by ascetic self-denial. The couple are contained within fixed, Apollonian boundaries of separate identity that preclude intimacy. However, while Connie is largely a victim of Clifford’s paralysis and emotional deadness, the novel suggests that she is also complicit in her own self-abnegation. For instance, prior to meeting Clifford, the youthful Connie shares a similar ascetic demotion of the physical: her ‘whole dignity and meaning in life consisted in the achievement of an absolute, a perfect, a pure and noble freedom’ (*Lady*, p. 7). Desiring to extricate herself from embodied and socially embedded being, her early goal is to ‘shake off the old and sordid connexions and subjections’ (*Lady*, p. 7). The erotic is one such ‘sordid connexion’, for sex is considered merely ‘a sort of primitive reversion and a bit of an anti-climax’ (*Lady*, p. 7).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Jeff Wallace, *D.H. Lawrence, Science and the Posthuman* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 237.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The drive for a spiritually pure, transcendental, or cerebral existence is unsustainable, however: while Connie is originally attracted to Clifford's intellectual superiority, over time 'the mental excitement had worn itself out and collapsed' (*Lady*, p. 101). Therefore, '[a]s the years drew on it was the fear of nothingness in her life that affected her. Clifford's mental life and hers gradually began to feel like nothingness' (*Lady*, p. 53). Principally due to the absence of emotional-erotic intimacy, she becomes aware of a 'growing restlessness' and a vague feeling that 'she was going to pieces in some way' (*Lady*, p. 22).

One of the chief purposes of the novel is to present the practical nihilistic consequences of the ascetic denial of erotic, embodied being. With regards to Lawrence's portrayal of Connie in this respect, her physiological demise conveys the impact of the couple's characteristic neglect of the corporeal. For instance, Connie observes that, '[h]er body was going meaningless,' that it was '[o]ld through neglect and denial' (*Lady*, p. 73). Attending this awareness of her decline 'she began to be afraid' of her own finitude. And, echoing Clifford's fear of the '*horror vacui*', Connie's further contemplation of her own dissolution terrorizes her, inducing a paralysing loss of agency : perceiving the world to be permeated by 'hopeless inertia', she becomes 'immensely depressed and hopeless' (*Lady*, p. 73); she consequently feels that '[t]he days seemed to grind by, with curious painfulness, yet nothing happened' (*Lady*, p. 79).

The doctor's diagnosis of Connie's deterioration is significant: referring to her loss of 'vitality', he warns her that she is 'spending' her life 'without renewing it' (*Lady*, p. 81). In other words, the doctor's analysis of her degenerative condition, induced by her selfless care of Clifford, anticipates her own future perception of the modern condition: 'weary, worn-out for lack of a little tenderness, given and taken' (*Lady*, p. 266). What is more, for Connie this absence of a vital exchange of sympathy in the relationship brings about a bitter, 'cold indignation against Clifford, and his writing and his talk' (*Lady*, p. 73).

Briefly turning to Lawrence's near contemporaneous essay 'We Need One Another' (1929), in which Lawrence similarly articulates subjectivity as porous and fluid, can add to the apprehension of character interrelations in the novel. Here Lawrence argues that '[i]t is in the living *touch* between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena that we

move and have our being' (emphasis added).¹⁵² He describes this 'living contact' of 'give and take' as 'a quivering and flowing towards someone, something that will receive [an] outflow and send back an inflow, so that a circuit is completed'.¹⁵³ There are a couple of things worth noting here. Firstly, it is implicit that there is ultimately a reflexive nature of this dynamic encounter with the other: there is a further gain or return to the self, or an intensification of selfhood, even as there is some form of self-expenditure as the self 'gives' to the other. Furthermore, Lawrence stresses that should this 'circuit' be frustrated, then the individual becomes discordant and vindictive, seeking to hurt 'everyone within range'.¹⁵⁴

Lawrence's emphasis on revenge and its association with frustration or impotence recalls Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment* as it is explored in the *Genealogy*. Moreover, the erotic nature of Connie's frustration evokes Zarathustra's 'The Night Song', where the prophet discloses his own rancour at his lonely isolation. Here, finding that '[a] gulf stands between giving and receiving', Zarathustra conveys the bitterness arising from an unrequited love, of a gift-giving that is not reciprocated:

A craving for love is in me [...] But I live in my own light; I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me. I do not know the joy of the receiver [...] A hunger grows from out of my beauty: I should like to rob those to whom I give - thus do I hunger after wickedness [...] Such vengeance does my abundance concoct: such spite wells from my solitude. (*TSZ*, p. 129)

Connie's vindictive indignation mirrors what Henry Staten calls Zarathustra's 'economy of erotic *ressentiment*' represented in this song.¹⁵⁵ For a deep 'sense of injustice, of being defrauded, had begun to burn in Connie' against Clifford and the selfless outpouring of the substance of herself (*Lady*, p. 75). And there is an explicit moment of realization where Connie seeks to justify her otherwise irredeemable sense of loss:

A sense of rebellion smouldered in Connie. What was the good of it all? What was the good of her sacrifice, her devoting her life to Clifford? What was she serving, after all? A cold spirit of vanity, that had no warm contacts. (*Lady*, p. 75)

¹⁵² D. H. Lawrence, 'We Need One Another', in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), pp. 188-95 (p. 190).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 191.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Staten, p. 156.

Connie's sense of 'deep physical injustice', and the need to find an explanation for her suffering, thus recalls a key claim Nietzsche makes in the *Genealogy*: '[w]hat actually arouses indignation over suffering is not the suffering itself, but the senselessness of suffering' (*OGM*, p. 48). And, just as Nietzsche analyses these overpowering feelings of 'indignation' at unassimilated distress in his account of the slaves' *ressentiment*, Lawrence focalizes this experience of useless suffering through Connie to observe that, '[t]he physical sense of injustice is a dangerous feeling, once it is awakened. It must have outlet, or it eats away the one in whom it is aroused' (*Lady*, p. 75).¹⁵⁶ This 'outlet', as Nietzsche discerns, which allows 'a release of the emotions' to provide the 'greatest attempt at relief', is the identification of a guilty party:

For every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly, for a culprit, even more precisely for a guilty culprit who is receptive to distress,- in short, for a living being upon whom he can release his emotions, actually or in effigy, on some pretext or other. (*OGM*, p. 99)

Tellingly, Lawrence stresses the instinctive, emotional power of this 'physical sense of injustice' consuming Connie. This manifests in her reproach of Clifford. Connie's attempts to rationalize these sentiments, to exculpate Clifford by reflecting that '[h]is was the greater misfortune' in which he was 'part of the general catastrophe', are overridden by the persistent need to attribute culpability: '[a]nd yet was he not in a way to blame? This lack of warmth, this lack of simple, warm, physical contact, was he not to blame for that?' (*Lady*, p. 75). Lawrence's representation of the potency of these vindictive feelings suggests the largely imaginary form such sentiments take, and again echoes Nietzsche's analysis of *ressentiment* in the *Genealogy*:

And she realized for the first time what a queer subtle thing hate is. For the first time, she had consciously and definitely hated Clifford, with vivid hate: as if he ought to be obliterated from the face of the earth. And it was strange, how free and full of life it made her feel, to hate him and to admit it fully to herself. (*Lady*, pp. 199-200)

¹⁵⁶ See Nietzsche's descriptions of *ressentiment* in *OGM*, pp. 98-99.

By highlighting the sense of liberty and power that such thoughts induce, this elicitation of Connie's relish at the imagined extermination of Clifford surpasses the evocations of Mellors' annihilatory rage. Before examining the protagonists' respective struggles to surmount their grievances and these attendant reactive sentiments in more depth, I shall now focus upon the novel's depiction of the most apparent, even if the most painful and risky, means to avert this sense of indignation arising from one's experience of useless expenditure: namely, the establishment of a vital reciprocal contact with the other.

Commentators have noted Lawrence's antipathy towards notions of compassion and pity. For example, Jae-Kyung Koh claims that, '[t]he central criticism which Lawrence levelled at Western Civilization was that, due to its Christian foundations, it had given too high a value to ideas of altruism and sympathy.'¹⁵⁷ Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor echo this reading of Lawrence's negative appraisal of sympathy: '[a]ll compassion is self-pity, D.H. Lawrence remarked, and this usefully formulates the widespread modern suspicion of kindness.'¹⁵⁸ According to these critics, Lawrence's perspective exemplifies what they see to be a general proclivity to withhold sympathetic feelings towards others. However, having noted that the novel was originally conceived with the title of *Tenderness*, it is pertinent to invoke Mark Spilka's insightful reading of Lawrence's oeuvre given that Spilka detects a paradigmatic shift with regard to Lawrence's treatment of sympathy, of feeling with others, in his later work. Attributing this to biographical reasons - Lawrence overcame his own personal defensiveness deriving, for instance, from an intensely close relationship with his 'devouring' mother - Spilka claims that this transformation sees Lawrence come to embrace the qualities associated with expansive personal emotions, of tenderness, warmth and sympathy.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, close attention to the role of compassion in this text reveals a complex portrayal of sympathetic feelings. In order to explore the tensions at work here, I shall begin by pointing to the strong parallels with Nietzsche's largely negative analyses of the dynamics of pity. Doing so, I will show that, as with Nietzsche, Lawrence's highly complex portrayal of sympathetic sentiments resonates again with the theme of meaningless suffering.

¹⁵⁷ Jae-kyung Koh, *D.H. Lawrence and the Great War: The Quest for Cultural Regeneration* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 16.

¹⁵⁸ Adam Phillips and Babara Taylor, *On Kindness* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Mark Spilka, 'Lawrence's Quarrel with Tenderness', *Critical Quarterly*, 9 (1967).

Nietzsche's objection to the valorisation of sympathy or pity which he sees at the core of Christian morality can be crudely summed up by referring to passage 134 from *Daybreak*: pity 'increases the amount of suffering in the world' (*D*, p. 85). In manifold ways pity, Nietzsche argues, merely intensifies suffering for both the sufferer, the recipient of pity, and the pitier, the one who identifies with the sufferer. As such, pity, for Nietzsche, is 'harmful affect' that entails 'losing oneself' (*D*, p. 85).

Lawrence's novel amply demonstrates the validity of Nietzsche's analyses of, and negative view of, the role of pity. For instance, Connie's relationship to Clifford can be adduced with regard to the 'harmful affect' that others' suffering can have upon the pitier. Given, then, that her name Constance evokes a sense of loyalty, that her compassionate nature is evident in her youthful participation in social ameliorative projects as well as her role in the provision of aid to wounded soldiers, she can be seen to be particularly receptive to Clifford's suffering.¹⁶⁰ The narrator thus points out that Clifford 'was a hurt thing. And as such Connie stuck to him passionately' (*Lady*, p. 16). Furthermore, Clifford's injuries invoke a conventional sense of duty, as Bell puts it: '[t]here is a sense of compassion, imbued with ethical value, which requires her to respond to Clifford in a positive way.'¹⁶¹ However, having already discussed the life-denying consequences of the absence of warmth between the couple, Connie's depression is arguably compounded by sympathetically identifying with Clifford's distress. Echoing Nietzsche's contention that pity is 'contagious' and has 'a depressive effect', the pain that consumes Clifford's being, rendering him insentient, induces Connie's own depression: as the deep, overwhelming wound 'spread in him, Connie felt it spread in her. An inward dread, an emptiness, an indifference to everything gradually spread in her soul' (*Lady*, p. 75). This sense of 'emptiness' Connie is subject to corroborates Nietzsche's claim that 'pity is *practical* nihilism. [...] pity persuades to nothingness!'.

The potentially nihilistic consequence of identifying with others' pain is again registered with Lawrence's portrayal of Connie's relation to Michaelis. Here Lawrence conveys that

¹⁶⁰ I am indebted to Bell for this point regarding Constance's name and its significance. Bell, p. 215.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the pitier may be manipulated by the recipient of pity.¹⁶² Repeatedly Michaelis is described in terms which emphasise his sense of grievance, his nihilistic 'disillusion' and his vulnerability (*Lady*, p. 25). Moreover, he actively seeks to impress his suffering upon Connie, 'sending out an appeal that affected' Connie as 'an infant crying in the night' (*Lady*, p. 28). He consequently 'roused in the woman a wild sort of compassion and yearning' (*Lady*, p. 31) and 'she was utterly incapable of resisting' his 'awful appeal' (*Lady*, p. 28). With Connie's yielding to Michaelis' 'appeal' to her sympathetic sensibility, she ignores her better judgement, and her instinctive repulsion of the playwright. These instincts are proven correct when Michaelis blames her for their sexual incompatibility, bringing about her own nihilistic disillusion.

A further dynamic of pity presented in the novel, which accords with Nietzsche's analysis of the phenomena, regards its harmful impact upon the recipient of pity. Lawrence's presentation of Clifford's relation to his carer, Mrs Bolton, highlights the danger of being subject to the other's pity. This is particularly evident when Mrs Bolton consoles Clifford when he receives notice of Connie's affair with Mellors. Here, resolving that Clifford 'must weep' in order to overcome his hysterical reaction, Mrs Bolton determines to simulate identification with Clifford by recollecting her own loss. While this conjuring of past wounds itself is exhaustive for the carer, and also suggests an incapacity to really identify with the other's distress, it works to 'release his self-pity': 'in a contagion of grief', Clifford was soon 'weeping for himself' (*Lady*, p. 302). Moreover, Clifford's outflow of grief is described as 'sheer relaxation on his part, letting go all his manhood, and sinking back to a childish position that was really perverse' (*Lady*, p. 303). There is a corresponding shift in power relations between the couple: as he yields 'absolutely', Mrs Bolton becomes 'the Magna Mater, full of power and potency, having the great blond child-man under her will and her stroke entirely' (*Lady*, p. 303). Clifford's surrender, in shared suffering, marks an extreme loss of autarkic selfhood which the narrator disparages as '[t]he wallowing in private emotion, the utter abasement of his manly self' (*Lady*, p. 304). Furthermore, Mrs Bolton's domination recalls Nietzsche's view on pity as a mode of conquest, or the appropriation of others in distress:

¹⁶² Or as Nietzsche puts it in one passage, '[c]ompassion is essentially [...] a pleasant stirring of the drive to appropriate at the sight of the weaker' (GS, p. 116).

When we see someone suffering, we like to use this opportunity to take possession of him; that is for example what those who become his benefactors and those who have compassion for him do, and they call the lust for new possessions that is awakened in them 'love'; and their delight is like that aroused by the prospect of a new conquest. (GS, p. 40)

This continuity between love and pity in Nietzsche's thinking, and his somewhat defensive resistance to these twinned forms of emotional vulnerability, is noted by Staten: '[I]ike pity, love is a permeability of the boundary of individuation or a pouring-out of the substance of the self'.¹⁶³ From this perspective, pity and love thus both signal a heightened fragility with the potential loss of autonomous selfhood to the other. The Clifford-Mrs Bolton relationship is repeatedly depicted in these terms of appropriative 'love', suggesting this point of continuity with Nietzsche's negative appraisal of pity. For, particularly in the role of Clifford's carer, Mrs Bolton's love for her patient and subsequent domination of Clifford strongly resonates with Nietzsche's analysis of the 'egoism of love': 'submission, making oneself indispensable and useful to those in power; love, as a secret path to the heart of the more powerful - so as to dominate him' (*WTP*, pp. 164-5). Lawrence, then, follows Nietzsche in undermining notions of pure selflessness associated with love and pity according to romantic ideals and conventional morality: while Mrs Bolton '*thought* she was utterly subservient and living for others', in actuality according to the narrator, '[g]radually, with infinite softness, almost with love, she was getting him by the throat, and he was yielding to her' (*Lady*, p. 102). Mrs Bolton's apparent position of selfless subordination, marked by her early deference and compliance, is contrasted with an increasingly perfidious possession of the other.

In light of this threat to autarkic selfhood presented by love and pity as it is depicted in this pathological relationship, one can apprehend the posture assumed by the novel's social elites: like the Chatterleys, the Wragby intellectuals are 'all inwardly hard and separate' (*Lady*, p. 75), maintaining the Apollonian 'boundaries of the individual' (*BT*, p. 26). Furthermore, what Lawrence stresses in his depiction of the cerebral coterie is their excessive recourse to a calculative rationality that precludes any form of sympathetic

¹⁶³ Staten, p. 155.

identification with the other. Like Clifford, they, too, exemplify the posture of the Alexandrian or theoretical man who dare not glimpse the Dionysian. For example, the writer Hammond considers that the other's suffering is a 'concern only the person concerned, and, like going to the privy, [has] no interest for anyone else' (*Lady*, p. 34). He thus espouses disengagement from 'the matters of ordinary life', which are 'all utterly senseless and pointless' (*Lady*, p. 34). While my previous analysis of Connie's identification with Clifford's trauma would seem to corroborate such a view given that I pointed to the limits of such deep sympathy and the resultant pathos of nihilism that Connie experiences, it would be mistaken to see the novel gesture towards such an antithetical defensive posture. For, as I pointed out above, the novel makes it clear that such a prudential position, characterised by rational mastery and fearful detachment, ultimately leads to barren sterility. Indeed, Lawrence's portrayal of the intellectual elites brings to mind the philosopher Martha Nussbaum's analysis of Stoicism. According to Nussbaum, the Stoic argument for self-command appeals to 'images of softness and hardness to contrast vulnerability to external conditions with the dignified absence of such vulnerability'.¹⁶⁴ What is more, she claims that, '[t]he Stoic looks like a fearful person, a person who is determined to seal himself off from the risk' involved in 'attachments that can go wrong and cause deep pain.'¹⁶⁵ That is, at the core of the defensive position is a desire to avert any encounter of senseless suffering, of relationships that may entail self-loss. It is thus through the novel's exemplary relationship between Connie and Mellors that Lawrence presents a counter to the prevalent self-preservative impulse that dominates the world of the novel. Yet, even with Lawrence's desire to present an affirmation of one's vulnerability and the 'deep pain' that the intimate relationship entails, there remains the pull of an Apollonian mode of separate, individuated existence.

Love and Death

As the novel's protagonists embark on their affair, they, too, are presented to be in states of recoil and withdrawal from the painful contact with the other. Again, their shoring up of the self's boundaries is tied to their respective experiences of past suffering. Mellors,

¹⁶⁴ Nussbaum, p. 146.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 159-60.

for instance, '[e]specially [...] did not want to come into contact with a woman again. He feared it; for he had a big wound from old contacts' (*Lady*, p. 92). And, prefiguring the great disturbance to self-contained identity that the erotic encounter holds, the initial contact between the couple is primarily depicted in terms of a violent intrusion of the other upon the self.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, Lawrence stresses the involuntary, embodied nature of the sympathetic feelings that instigate the affair. The description of Mellors' response to Connie's depression evokes both his loss of rational self-possession and the proximity of, or entwinement of, these tender feelings with the erotic: Mellors perceives 'something so mute and forlorn in her, compassion flamed in his bowels for her'; he is rendered 'powerless' and, '[w]ithout knowing', his 'helplessly desirous hand' performs a '[b]lind instinctive caress'; the 'flame' at the 'back of his loins' intensifies as he reaches out to her in sympathy (*Lady*, p. 120). The erotic encounter is thus depicted as an extension of, or intensification of, compassionate feeling. This is clearly evident, for instance, in a later passage: '[a]nd he went into her softly, feeling the stream of tenderness flowing in release from his bowels to hers, the bowels of compassion kindled between them' (*Lady*, p. 290).

In portraying the loss of rational self-possession in the erotic-sympathetic relation, Lawrence echoes Nietzsche in identifying the ecstatic Dionysian experience with the erotic. For instance, in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche claims that 'the nature of the *Dionysiac*' refers to 'the blissful ecstasy which, prompted by the same fragmentation of the *principium individuationis*, rises up from man's innermost core' (*BT*, p. 40). The Dionysian, which is 'most immediately understandable to us in the analogy of *intoxication*' according to the thinker, thus also represents the internal libidinous urges that overwhelm and annihilate personal self-identity. This is suggested throughout the text: cue Nietzsche's reference to the orgiastic licentiousness at the Greek Dionysia; and the image of the Dionysian Greek in the form of the satyr, is, for instance, presented as a 'symbol of nature's sexual omnipotence' (*BT*, p. 40).

¹⁶⁶ For instance, see Connie's epiphanic moment when she encounters Mellors washing: 'Yet in some curious way it was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of the body' (*Lady*, p. 69).

Having registered Lawrence's negative portrayal of sympathy above with regard to the attendant threat of nihilism, how then does one apprehend this apparent valorisation of the Dionysian? One approach to reading the novel's complex rendering of compassionate relations is to heed the narrator's self-conscious interjection with regards to the role of the novel. This intrusive narrative voice articulates what Bell calls 'one of Lawrence's classic statements about the novel':¹⁶⁷

For even satire is a form of sympathy. It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here is the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead.
(*Lady*, p. 105)

According to this self-conscious authoritative narrative voice, the 'properly handled' novel operates to exemplify or inculcate 'a spirit of fine, discriminative sympathy' (*Lady*, p. 105). As Bell puts it, '[t]he detection of false feeling, the wrong kind of 'sympathy', is central to the book.'¹⁶⁸ Lawrence's implied reader is thus 'to recognise that sympathy can have a minus sign'.¹⁶⁹ While this is a useful reading, suggesting that the novel's presentation of sympathetic relations relies on a discriminatory capacity, that sympathy requires finesse, it doesn't cover all of the ground. For what is also stressed in the presentation of the Connie-Mellors relationship is the loss of such conscious control that would be necessary to determine one's flow of sympathy and to similarly detect false feeling. Rather, Lawrence's evocation of the couple's tender, compassionate feelings emphasises the involuntary, unconscious nature of sympathetic feeling. Perhaps, then, Kathleen Higgins' comments on Nietzsche's view on the role of pity in tragedy can be invoked to illuminate the discussion. Alluding to what Nietzsche refers to as the 'arrogant notion' of pity, or its appropriative mode, Higgins argues that what defines this 'arrogant perception' is that 'one's own position, when one pities [is] secure':¹⁷⁰ the pitier doesn't lose their sense of self as they seemingly identify with the sufferer. That there is no 'transformation of one's conception of self' in this form of pity suggests that there is no deep identification with

¹⁶⁷ Bell, p. 213.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 211.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 213.

¹⁷⁰ Higgins, pp. 68-69.

the other's suffering.¹⁷¹ Otherwise put, pity seems to be a more superficial Apollonian mode of perception, distinct from a deep Dionysian perception. As Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy*: '[h]owever powerfully this pity may affect us, in a sense it delivers us from the primal suffering of the world' (*BT*, p. 102). One way, then, to apprehend the the lovers' compassionate feelings, in contradistinction to the novel's other negative depictions of pity, which are particularly associated with an 'arrogant' possession of the other, is to regard these sympathetic feelings as an expression of a powerful Dionysian identification with the other.

What is more, Lawrence's vision of the erotic encounter registers the tensions entailed in the painful surrender of autarkic selfhood in the midst of this Dionysian experience. Lawrence's depiction of the Connie-Mellors affair thus resembles Nietzsche's presentation of the Dionysian as a transformative loss of self-possession that is marked by profound anguish: the loss of individuated form may be celebrated as it brings awareness of, and contact with, larger, vital cosmic forces that transcend the individual, on the one hand; however, it also signals cognizance of one's ephemerality, on the other. Nietzsche thus conveys tragic experience as inherently painful. In the novel, Lawrence captures this tension between the impulse to relinquish oneself to the other and the opposing desire to maintain autonomous control. Relatedly, Lawrence portrays the characters' impulse to reconstitute the Apollonian boundaries of individuation following any surrender of self-control. Examining the lovers' respective responses to their mutual erotic awakening thus reveals a profound ambivalence. For Lawrence presents the concomitant resistance to the sympathetic flow or interexchange as their respective egos battle this overwhelming force of erotic-sympathy: Mellors 'fought against' his tender and erotic feelings (*Lady*, p. 120); with regards to Connie's ambivalence towards erotic-sympathetic feeling, Schiach notes that such passion 'leads to a loss of self which she both celebrates and fears'.¹⁷² Particularly through Connie, Lawrence captures the self's sense of precarious exposure as it submits to the other in the sexual encounter. This fearful loss of autonomous selfhood that grips Connie is attended by a Dionysian awareness of one's finitude: as Connie 'went all open to him', '[s]he yielded with a quiver that was like death' (*Lady*, p. 180).

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Schiach, p. 93.

The association of love and death is familiar within the Western canon.¹⁷³ Nietzsche's contribution to this discourse, in the pronouncements of Zarathustra, anticipates Lawrence's depiction of Connie's 'death' in love. Articulating this relation between love and death within the context of a parable that evokes *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* central theme of self-overcoming, the prophet declares: '[I]oving and perishing: these have gone together, from eternity. Will to love: that means to be willing to die, too!' (TSZ, p. 145). Zarathustra's ideal of squandering, or 'perishing', through love seems to suggest that love offers one mode of attaining self-transcendence, signalling a way in which the present self may be slayed in the drive for continued perfection. Connie's death of her existent self and attendant rebirth as a new, revitalized being echoes this notion:

Another self was alive in her, burning molten and soft in her womb and bowels, and with this self she adored him. [...] In her womb and bowels she was flowing and alive now and vulnerable, and helpless in adoration of him as the most naïve woman. (*Lady*, pp. 140-41)

Her transfiguration is evoked through an idiom of liquescence that stresses the self's porous fragility in this intensified, dynamic interexchange with the other. Furthermore, Lawrence's presentation of this affirmative erotic encounter extends this vision of a fluid, protean self dialectically engaged with the immediate other to suggest a greater centrifugal, expansive sensibility. That is, 'flowing and alive now' (*Lady*, p. 140), Connie consequently attains an animistic receptivity towards the larger, circumambient environment: on her way home following intercourse, she perceives 'the trees in the park seemed bulging and surging at anchor on a tide, and the heave of the slope to the house was alive' (*Lady*, p. 185). This heightened sensibility recalls Nietzsche's description of Dionysian intoxication in terms of an enchanted re-connect with nature, with its promise of a temporary release from painful alienated, individual being.¹⁷⁴

However, Lawrence also emphasizes that Connie's accompanying anguish leads to a reactive closure of the self's breached boundaries, a resumption of conscious mastery. While also suggesting a necessary Apollonian reconstitution of individuated being, her

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Penguin, 1998).

¹⁷⁴ See *BT*, p. 17. I referred to this passage in the 'Disciple of Dionysus' section of chapter one. See p. 27.

oscillations register the strain that the self undergoes in this heightened state: 'tormented by her own double consciousness and reaction', this divided state constitutes her 'real grief' (*Lady*, p. 179). What is more, focalized through Connie, Lawrence portrays this need to self-augment as entailing a compensatory appropriation of, or violation of, the other. Signalling this particularly ambivalent condition, Dionysian imagery of *sparagmos*, or the sacrificial destruction of the victim, is heavily suggested here as Connie reacts to her terrifying loss of self-control: 'if she adored him too much, then she would lose herself, become effaced, [...] a slave' to the other; consequently, a reactive 'hard passion flamed in her for a time, and the man dwindled to a contemptible object'; she feels 'the force of the Bacchae in her limbs and her body,' and the man is 'the mere phallus-bearer, to be torn to pieces when his service was performed' (*Lady*, p. 141). Inverting the image of the expansive Dionysian vision, the defensive-appropriative dynamic of these thoughts is stressed: for while the man is reified as 'a pure god-servant to the woman', she fears the non-objectified, non-subjugated other disturbing this vision of self-aggrandizement: '[t]he man, the individual, let him not dare intrude' (*Lady*, p. 141).

Lawrence's presentation of Connie's torment strongly suggests that her desire to possess the man expresses a compensatory augmentation of selfhood. As such, this novel adds another dynamic to Nietzsche's notion that 'sexual love' reveals itself 'as a craving for new *property*' (*GS*, p. 40): for while the philosopher claims that sexual love 'may in fact be the most candid expression of egoism' in that it is characterised by a desire to absolutely possess the beloved other, Lawrence's exposition of Connie's anguish further suggests that this possessiveness also arises as a reactive fear to the self's dissolution in moments of heightened intimacy, particularly 'in the flux of new awakening' (*Lady*, p. 141). Additionally, Connie's articulation of this temptation to manipulate the exposed other as an instrument for one's own self-intensification recalls the description of her youthful affairs:

A woman could take a man without really giving herself away. Certainly she could take him without giving herself into his power. Rather she could use this sex thing to have power over him. For she only had to hold herself back in sexual intercourse, and let him finish and expend himself without herself coming to the crisis: and then she could

prolong the connexion and achieve her orgasm and her crisis while he was merely her tool. (*Lady*, p. 141)

Again sex is considered in these appropriative-instrumental terms. However, what marks Connie's transformation is her resistance to these strong and familiar defensive-appropriative urges. Realizing that '[i]t was early yet to begin to fear the man', she admits that she is 'weary' of these 'barren, birthless' instrumental relations (*Lady*, p. 141). That is, as this mode of being maintains a self-conscious mastery, it forecloses the deep sympathetic circuit of give and take with the other; there is no ego dissolution and correspondent Dionysian rebirth. Furthermore, her resolution to give up 'her hard bright female power' gestures to the novel's gender ideology (*Lady*, p. 141).

The Politics of Eros

A number of critics writing on Lawrence's presentation of erotic-sympathetic relations suggest that both the man and the woman undergo an equal, somewhat democratic, experience of self-relinquishment in the novel's valorised erotic encounter. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that, '[w]oman must, like man, abdicate all pride and all will'.¹⁷⁵ More recently, Martina Ludwigs argues that the novel subverts the 'inherently hierarchical sexual relationship' with both partners 'giving up control and willing self-abasement'.¹⁷⁶ Kirsty Martin also observes that sympathy in Lawrence's work 'involves submission'¹⁷⁷ and the loss of 'one's personal control'.¹⁷⁸ However, as with the aforementioned critics, Martin fails to discern that Lawrence depicts a subtly distinct position with regards to the male: while Mellors realizes that he, too, must yield to one's deeper sympathetic impulses, that coming 'into tender touch' with Connie was 'the thing he had to do', it is noteworthy that he resolves to do so 'without losing his pride or his dignity as a man' (*Lady*, p. 290). There appears to be a tension in Lawrence's presentation of the squandering ideal: while he seems to celebrate an intensive, involuntary sympathetic-erotic experience, which entails the Dionysian dissolution of one's rational

¹⁷⁵ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), p. 252.

¹⁷⁶ Marina Ludwigs, ' "A Democracy of Touch": Masochism and Tenderness in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', *Anthropoetics: The Journal of Generative Anthropology*, 16 (2011), 4-5.

¹⁷⁷ Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 132.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 138.

self-possession, on the one hand, he simultaneously gestures towards Mellors' need to maintain some sort of integral core of selfhood, on the other.

One way to account for Mellors' contradictory posture is to read it as signalling a defensive need: like Connie, he similarly struggles to courageously yield and 'perish'. Indeed, Mellors' defensive desire to retain his 'integrity' is understandable when one observes that his recurrent feelings of embittered indignation largely derive from past erotic hurt. For instance, somewhat echoing the idiom of Dionysian *sparagmos* alluded to above, he complains to Connie that his estranged wife 'always ripped [him] up' (*Lady*, p. 290). From Mellors' point of view, he has been the sacrificial victim of the devouring, appropriating female, experiencing a pointless dispersal of his selfhood. His resolve to retain a degree of conscious mastery may thus imply a need to safeguard against the abandon that dangerously exposes the self to the other.

This apparent defensive strategy evokes Nietzsche's comment in his unorthodox autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, in which the thinker notes his resistance to the devouring female: '[t]hey all love me [...] Happily I am not prepared to be torn to pieces: the complete woman tears to pieces when she loves' (*EH*, p. 45). However, where Nietzsche's entry may ambiguously hold positive connotations of the 'perfect woman', Mellors' account of his wife aligns her with the cold, compensatory cruelty that Connie ultimately manages to suppress and overcome. For Mellors relays that his wife oscillated in the sexual relation, that she 'loved [him] in moments. But she always took it back, and started bullying' (*Lady*, p. 290). Bertha seems to be recovering her sense of self through the devastation of the other.

Nevertheless, despite gesturing towards a reading of Mellors' restrictive economy as a reactive limitation of his self-expenditure, I believe that invoking Nietzsche's analysis of sexual love encourages a more positive interpretation of Mellors' posture: Mellors' realization of his need to withhold his core self speaks directly to a key theme that I am exploring in this chapter, namely of overcoming nihilism. This point can be illustrated by firstly citing Nietzsche's thoughts on sexual love in which the thinker contends that there is an inevitable unequal exchange between the sexes:

Woman wants to be taken, adopted as a possession, wants to be absorbed in the concept 'possession', 'possessed'; consequently, she wants someone who *takes*, who does not himself give or give himself away; who on the contrary is supposed precisely to be made richer in 'himself' - through the increase in strength, happiness, and faith given him by the woman who gives herself. Woman gives herself away; man takes more. (GS, p. 228)

Lawrence's novel undoubtedly complicates this vision of the woman's desire to be 'possessed'. Nevertheless, it does so in order to valorise female submission, thus corroborating Nietzsche's conventional gender hierarchy: Connie's transfiguration is dependent on the overcoming of 'her hard bright female' will; the novel strongly associates the ubiquity of hurtful, instrumental sexual relations with the egoistic, appropriating female. What is more, according to Nietzsche's view of this 'eternally immoral' exchange dynamic, the woman's yielding confers the male with an 'increase in in strength, happiness, and faith'. In terms of the novel, the significance of the male's appropriative flow, as I read this passage to apprehend Mellors' posture, cannot be overstated: Mellors is invigorated with the capacity to engender new meaning, new value. Otherwise put, this hierarchical erotic dynamic, as Nietzsche outlines it, is central to understanding the characters' capacity to overcome nihilism and constitute new meaning.

While critics generally focus on Connie's more obvious transformation, attending to Mellors' parallel development is crucial. His transfiguration is particularly significant in marking the transition from a condition akin to Nietzsche's description of passive nihilism to that of one exhibiting the capacity to constitute a newfound sense of agency through the creation of a new cognitive orientation or purpose. This critical oversight regarding the import of Mellor's transformation is suggested, for example, in Wayne Burns' assessment of the gamekeeper:

Mellors is [...] Lawrence's idealized self-image. [...] Mellors is so perfect, from the beginning, that he cannot possibly develop or even change. He has all the right feelings, all the right ideas, and knows all the right answers.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Wayne Burns, 'Lady Chatterley's Lover: A Pilgrim's Progress for Our Time', in *D. H. Lawrence: Critical Assessments Vol.3, the Fiction (2)*, ed. by David Ellis and Ornella De Zordo (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1993), pp. 84-102 (p. 86).

I disagree with this reading, and instead find it significant that prior to meeting Connie Mellors 'did not know what to do with himself' and existed 'day to day, without connexion and without hope' (*Lady*, p. 147). He is conscious of his aimlessness and perceives his own solitary existence, which consists of raising game for the wealthy on the Wragby estate, to be characterised by a sense of 'futility, futility to the *n*th power' (*Lady*, p. 148). He can thus be aligned with the general, indifferent and purposeless populace. It is only 'when this woman had come into his life' and the affair begins, however, that Mellors consciously reconsiders his need to find his purpose: having 'had not cared nor bothered till now' about his lack of direction (*Lady*, p. 148), he now ruminates that he has 'no business to take a woman into [his] life, unless [his] life does something and gets somewhere, inwardly at least' (*Lady*, p. 287). Moreover, Mellors' drive to articulate a new meaning and purpose intensifies following intercourse with Connie. His renewed striving for purposive activity seems to suggest that he has benefited from the positive flow, or the 'increase in strength, happiness, and faith' conferred to him by the woman's yielding, as Nietzsche conveys it in his outline of sexual love. The novel's narrative voice also hints at the greater role played by erotic love when it announces, 'the creative act that is far more than procreative' (*Lady*, p. 290).

In an earlier theoretical work, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), Lawrence makes a series of claims that anticipate his depiction of the erotic and its relation to meaning constitution in *Lady Chatterley*. For instance, here Lawrence contends that, '[m]en, being themselves made new after the action of coition, wish to make the world new.'¹⁸⁰

Echoing Mellors' renewed yearning to join with others to 'fight that sparkling electric Thing outside there' (*Lady*, p. 126), Lawrence also claims here that, as a result of 'successful sex union', the man 'craves' for 'the hope of purposive, constructive activity [...] or the hope of passionate, purposive *destructive* activity: the two amount religiously to the same thing, within the individual'.¹⁸¹

At the centre of this discursive work is a dialectic of passional and cerebral modes of being. For instance, the 'ideal purpose' that emerges, Lawrence contends, must have

¹⁸⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: Penguin, repr. 1971), p. 108. From now on I refer to this text as *Fantasia*.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 187.

‘roots in the deep sea of passionate sex’.¹⁸² This dialectic gestures towards the productive Dionysian-Apollonian dynamic Nietzsche describes in *The Birth of Tragedy* insofar as Lawrence stresses the need to arrive at a fine balance between passional and intellectual forces. Therefore, just as Nietzsche laments the degenerative shift towards the excessively Apollonian or cerebral, on the one hand, Lawrence claims that when ‘purposiveness’ is held ‘as the one supreme and pure activity in life’, and the erotic is consequently neglected, there is a ‘drift into barren sterility’.¹⁸³ In the novel, Connie’s deterioration within her marriage, exemplifying the modern condition, would illustrate this point. On the other hand, however, just as Nietzsche evokes the pathos of nihilism that attends the Dionysian, Lawrence similarly holds that passional forces must be held in check: ‘[a]ssert sex as the predominant fulfilment, and you get the collapse of living purpose in man.’¹⁸⁴

Nietzsche’s analysis of sexual love also serves to warn against the potentially nihilistic consequences of the erotic experience. Recalling that Nietzsche cautions against the male completely expending himself in erotic love, the philosopher claims rather that the man is to ‘be made richer in himself’ in order to avert an irreversible loss of selfhood:

The passion of a woman, in its unconditional renunciation of her own rights, presupposes precisely that on the other side there is *not* an equal pathos, not an equal will to renunciation; for if both should renounce themselves from love, the result would be - well, I don’t know, maybe an empty space? (GS, p. 228)

To understand Nietzsche’s privileging of male augmentation and thus meaning-constitution, it is important to note that he claims that if there is no male enrichment through erotic love, there is only a mutual projection into nothingness. As Staten puts it, in the case of an equal, reciprocal love, according to Nietzsche, ‘there would be nothing left, no one to preserve being as each spilled toward the other, both would cease to exist: *horror vacui*, the nausea of spilling into a void’.¹⁸⁵ Lawrence’s novel stresses the need, particularly of the male, to replenish or preserve himself in the erotic exchange. While this contact with the female other entails a Dionysian experience of self-loss, Mellors’

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p. 110.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Staten, p. 166.

resolve gestures towards the male need to distinguish and strengthen oneself in order to generate a new vision of purpose: being absolutely overwhelmed by sympathetic-erotic feelings would lead to the shared annihilation of individual identity; neither party would contribute to the generation of new meaning. The male must retain a degree of Apollonian self-presence.

The novel, commonly read as a celebration of sexual love, therefore crucially stresses the need for new meaning and purpose which, while rooted in erotic fulfilment, is also something that surpasses the erotic.¹⁸⁶ As Lawrence puts it in *Fantasia*: '[s]ex as an end in itself is a disaster'; sex, Lawrence claims may 'disintegrate society', and so it must be 'subordinated to the great dominating male passion of collective *purpose*'.¹⁸⁷ Thus, just as I argued in my previous chapter that Nietzsche insists upon the Apollonian in his analysis of ancient tragic experience, Lawrence's depiction of Mellors seems to suggest wariness with regards to the erotic, Dionysian forces and their power to annihilate purposive meaning. For not only does Mellors celebrate the newfound peace of chastity at the novel's coda, but also, in one exchange with Connie, where she asks him if his existence ' "will have less point" ' living with her, he warns that ' "it might" ', and that he is ' "not just his lady's fucker, after all" ' (*Lady*, p. 288). Relatedly, he informs her: ' "A man must offer a woman *some* meaning in his life, if it's going to be an isolated life, and if she's a genuine woman. I can't be just your concubine" ' (*Lady*, p. 288).

Feminist critics have commented upon the novel's privileging of male leadership.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, De Beauvoir and Simpson connect this vision to Lawrence's elevation of male purposive activity. However, what is absent in their respective critiques is sufficient consideration of Lawrence's preoccupation with nihilism and senseless suffering. That is,

¹⁸⁶ Milan Kundera, for instance, exemplifies the general view of the novel: 'I think of D.H. Lawrence, that bard of Eros, that evangelist of coition, who, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, tried to rehabilitate sex by making it lyrical.' Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed* (Chatham: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 45.

¹⁸⁷ Lawrence, p. 110. (repr.1971)

¹⁸⁸ For instance, De Beauvoir claims: 'Lawrence believes passionately in the supremacy of the male'. De Beauvoir, pp. 228-29.; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 238. Millett argues: 'In *Lady Chatterley*, as throughout his final period, Lawrence uses the words "sexual" and "phallic" interchangeably, so that the celebration of sexual passion for which the book is so renowned is largely a celebration of the penis of Oliver Mellors'.

one must keep in mind that Lawrence's insistence on male's bestowal of meaning is, like Nietzsche's, deeply tied to an understanding of the human fear of 'the void'. Lawrence's portrayal of the Clifford -Connie relationship evinces the novel's sexual ideology in these terms.

Connie's position repeatedly corroborates the novel's sexual ideology. For instance, as she laments the fact that the outside, hostile world may come between her and Mellors, she exclaims, '[i]f only *he* would make her a world' (*Lady*, p. 221). Moreover, Clifford is castigated for abnegating this responsibility. This arises at the point where he consents to Connie's proposal of finding a surrogate partner to provide an heir to Wragby. Not only does Clifford's response reinforce his own absence of agency as he asserts that the arrival of a child would provide him with 'something to strive for' insofar as he could feel that 'one was building up a future for it', but he also assumes a selfless, subordinate stance: 'I mean, but for you I am absolutely nothing. I live for your sake and your future. I am nothing to myself' (*Lady*, p. 117). As this declaration of 'private worship put her in a panic', Lawrence conveys Connie's 'deepening dismay and repulsion' in gender terms:

It was one of the ghastly half-truths that poison human existence. What man in his senses would say such things to a woman! But men aren't in their senses. What man with a spark of honour would put this ghastly burden of life – responsibility upon a woman and leave her there, in the void? (*Lady*, p. 117)

Mellors' courage in his desire to find a new meaning thus contrasts with Clifford's weakness. Furthermore, Mellors' determination to preserve his integral selfhood during coition stands in opposition to the majority of men who 'insisted on the sex thing like dogs' (*Lady*, p. 7), while presenting an antithetical position to Clifford's absolute self-abandonment to Mrs Bolton. Clifford's perversity can now be fully apprehended: devoured by the appropriating female, this illustration of male self-surrender signals the complete 'collapse' of the possibility of meaning-generation and the overcoming of nihilism. Nevertheless, Lawrence also subtly undercuts the male's exalted position, thus eroding the gendered binary distinction that the novel's ideology depends upon. For example, when Connie questions Mellors as to the 'point' of his existence, he not only fails to articulate this, conceding that he is ' "all mixed up with a lot of rage" ' (*Lady*, p. 288), but he also acquiesces to Connie's offer to formulate his purpose: ' "It's the courage

of your own tenderness” ’, she tells him, ‘ “that will make the future” ’ (*Lady*, p. 288). Mellors endorses Connie’s explicit articulation of his meaning.

An Affirmation of Suffering?

As Ludwigs points out, the word “tenderness” itself is closely tied to notions of pain.¹⁸⁹ As I have implied throughout, suffering is integral to the novel’s vision of self-transcendence. For instance, the novel’s action confirms the painful need to squander one’s egoistic security in order to grow and flourish. Mellors and Connie thus develop from respective conditions of defensive recoil, defined by their past grievances, to become porous and dynamically engaged with the other in the erotic relation.¹⁹⁰ This manoeuvre cannot be thought of without an intensification of suffering. Mellors’ articulation of his apprehension of the need to relinquish his self-contained identity thus exemplifies the novel’s ideology: ‘ “It’s life. [...] There’s no keeping clear. And if you do keep clear you might almost as die. So if I’ve got to be broken open again, I have” ’ (*Lady*, p. 123). The protagonists are clearly defined in opposition to the populace at large, and also to the intellectual elites who evince a similar self-preservative aversion to difficulty and pain. Simply put, the novel’s paradigmatic relationship illustrates Nietzsche’s point that ‘all becoming and growing-all that guarantees a future- involves pain’ (*TI & AC*, p. 120).

Critical responses to the text nevertheless suggest that the novel’s affirmative vision involves an overcoming of, or an amelioration of, pain. For example, T.H. Adamowski claims that, in the depictions of Connie’s orgasmic fulfilment, Lawrence is ‘imagining a miracle’¹⁹¹ whereby the sexual encounter ultimately brings ‘stability, recurrence, and coherence- an existence that is providing itself with a foundation’.¹⁹² Other critics echo

¹⁸⁹ Ludwigs, p. 5. ‘Some of the connotations of *tenderness* are softness, sensitivity, pliability, giving way, lack of resistance.[...] another connotation of *tender* is “sore” or “painful” ’.

¹⁹⁰ For instance, regarding Mellors previous self-protective stance, see *Lady*, p. 147: ‘He had thought he would be safe, at least for a time, in this wood. He would be alone, and apart from life, which was all he wanted’.

¹⁹¹ T. H. Adamowski, ‘The Natural Flowering of Life: The Ego, Sex, and Existentialism’, in *D. H. Lawrence’s ‘Lady’: A New Look at Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, ed. by Michael Squires and Dennis Jackson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 36-57 (p. 49).

¹⁹² *Ibid.* p. 47.

Adamowski's view of Lawrence's utopian erotic in which the self attains 'a calm totality in full possession of itself'.¹⁹³ For example, Koh contends that:

Connie's choice is to yield up herself to 'new life' to heal her psychic trauma and to seek the tenderness of life. Her giving up of conscious control over herself leads her to a fuller and more fulfilling life.¹⁹⁴

Note Koh's use of 'heal' here, subtly suggesting that the telos of the novel lies in the overcoming of suffering and the attainment of happiness. Michael Squires offers a similar reading by arguing that 'Connie eases the pain of life in the great outer world by escaping to the wood'.¹⁹⁵ Thus, according to Squires, 'Connie and Mellors discover peace of mind' in the pastoral sanctuary.¹⁹⁶ Ludwigs goes further and suggests that Connie's resolve to yield to Mellors enacts a utopian, democratic relation: '[t]he zero-distance model of love that the novel promotes, that of a tender touch that reaches the core of the other, overcomes the problem of separateness, alienation, mutual misunderstandings, and competing interests.'¹⁹⁷

To assert, however, that Lawrence depicts a vision in which suffering is overcome, or aims at the palliation of pain, would situate the novel with the optimistic vision Nietzsche associates with both Alexandrian culture and with the ascetic ideal. Suffering from these cognate perspectives 'counts as an objection to life' (*WTP*, p. 543). Given that I have argued that Lawrence presents the protagonists' transformation in opposition to the self-preservative pursuit of happiness associated with these related cultural forms, I shall turn now to challenge and complicate these interpretations of the novel.

As the preceding discussion has suggested, Lawrence paints a far more complex picture of the sexual experience than the self arriving at a point of absolute 'calm' self-possession or 'peace of mind'. Furthermore, with regards to Ludwigs' suggestion that the couple attain a 'zero-distance' resolution, I would argue that, on the contrary, the novel repeatedly insists upon the ontological isolation of the individual. Indeed, this sense of separateness is perhaps most evident particularly at the height of sexual intimacy, thus

¹⁹³ Ibid. pp. 49-50.

¹⁹⁴ Koh, p. 177.

¹⁹⁵ Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), p. 200.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 201.

¹⁹⁷ Ludwigs, p. 15.

accounting for the self's greater sense of vulnerability at this moment. For instance, in the first depiction of the sexual encounter in the Connie-Mellors' relation, Connie is grieved by her cognizance of detachment while Mellors comes to climax. He, however, is unaware of her tears and 'thought she was there with him'; for Connie, this unconnected other is a '[s]tranger' and thus '[s]he even resented him a little' (*Lady*, p. 132).

While this passage relates to the start of the couple's relation, this gulf is also evident between them towards the end of the novel. For example, when Connie returns from Venice she is startlingly insensitive to Mellors' distress: beleaguered not only by the gossip engulfing their affair, but also by the vindictive intervention of his ex-wife, Mellors' humiliation is compounded by Connie as she relays Clifford's derogatory judgment; Mellors suppresses his indignation towards Connie's cruelty, and so '[s]he never knew the fierce bitterness with which he resented the insult' (*Lady*, p. 286). The other is again presented as detached or opaque, and Lawrence seems to be conveying a fundamental incapacity to really know the other. Indeed, Lawrence's use of free indirect discourse itself contributes towards this sense of the self's opacity, for the reader cannot absolutely determine whether one is entering the consciousness of the narrator or of the focalized character throughout the novel.

The lack of sympathy between the couple in these instances can also be explained by the important point that Mellors attests that his tender feelings come and go.¹⁹⁸ That is, once a deep sympathetic connection is established it is not fixed and permanent. Rather, as Bell observes with regards to Lawrence's work in general, any emotional resolution is episodic, rather than absolute.¹⁹⁹ Thus, not only does the sympathetic bond fluctuate between the couple, but other tensions remain unresolved. This includes the strain that I observed above in relation to the individual's desire for autonomy, on the one hand, and the conflicting drive for sympathetic communion with the other, on the other. The suffering experienced from a state of heightened self-division is thus integral to the erotic-sympathetic and regenerative relationship.

¹⁹⁸ *Lady*, p. 289. Mellors informs Connie: ' "Ay! It comes an' goes, like in me." '

¹⁹⁹ Michael Bell, 'Reflections on Violence: Writing and/as Violence in Lawrence', *Etudes Lawrenciennes*, 31 (2004), 55. Bell claims: 'many of Lawrence's stories [...] typically achieve wholeness as emotional episodes while refraining from offering permanent solutions to long-term conditions or fraught relationships.'

Finally, to further contest those readings that identify the novel's depiction of a harmonious erotic relation, I shall expand upon a point which I alluded to above: namely that the protagonists are fully conscious of the fact that entering the relationship itself will entail an intensification of suffering. For example, aware of the inevitable entanglement with Clifford, and of the gossip that will proliferate and engulf them, the couple nevertheless determine to embrace the relationship even as Mellors concedes that he was no longer 'buoyant' and that '[e]very bitterness and every ugliness would hurt him: and the woman!' (*Lady*, p. 148). More importantly, the couple also realize that greater suffering shall arise from internal, emotional sources. They therefore acknowledge that they are '“a couple of battered warriors”' who are '“returning to the fray”' (*Lady*, p. 213). This confrontation with one's previous emotional wounds presents the greatest challenge to their capacity to affirm the pain of '“being broken open”' again.

In the previous chapter I noted the fragility of Nietzsche's affirmative project; *Lady Chatterley's* affirmative vision appears similarly brittle. This is evident when one examines the potency of those reactive, vindictive sentiments which the protagonists struggle to overcome. This signals their respective incapacities to assimilate or redeem previous grievances. It is worth noting that Connie incites her lover to recall his relationship with his wife, and thus '“his big wound”', particularly at the height of affirmation. By doing so, I wish to equate Mellors' confrontation with his past with Nietzsche's ideal of '*amor fati*', love of one's fate: '[m]y formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity' (*EH*, p. 39). David Owen points to the 'experiential character' of this thought, noting that Nietzsche conceived it in a moment of 'overflowing joy'. Consequently, it can be seen to serve as a test of one's capacity to reinterpret and thus affirm one's past grievances from one's present vantage point.²⁰⁰ As Owen puts it, from such a position 'one would suffer all the frustration, despair, etc., again as a condition of possibility of this rapturous moment.'²⁰¹ In the notebook entry I alluded to in chapter one, Nietzsche refers to this in terms of a 'Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection' (*WTP*, p. 536). To further clarify the weight placed on one's present moment towards one's interpretative activity, Higgins observes that, '[o]ne's activity in the present

²⁰⁰ Owen, p. 107.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 108

has impact on the entirety of time anyway, even disagreeable moments in the past. One's activity in each moment reweighs the entire causal nexus in which one exists.'²⁰² From Mellors' position of relative potency and affirmation, the recollection of his bitter experiences can therefore be viewed as a psychological test in which he can examine his ability to redeem or appropriate his previous suffering. Insofar as Mellors stands in contradistinction to those who populate the world of the novel, the workers and the elites who share a similar desire to repress previous pain, this episode points to a tentative progressive vision defined by the courage of bringing oneself to confront and bear one's own pain, the distress that remains unassimilated or senseless and which thus engenders a consuming bitterness. However, it is clear that Mellors fails to perform what Zarathustra would call a translation of ' "[i]t was" ' into an ' "I wanted it thus!" ' (TSZ, p. 163), the reinterpretation necessary to surmount a retaliatory rage against one's lack of agency towards the irreversible past: Mellors, who has insisted throughout that he has a '[b]ellyful of remembering' (*Lady*, p. 212) and that he doesn't 'quite digest [his] bile' (*Lady*, p. 175), declares in the course of the dialogue that he 'could wish the Clifford and Berthas all dead' (*Lady*, p. 292). As Connie exclaims, this exterminatory desire immediately undermines his newly articulated vision of tenderness.

Mellors use of digestive metaphors evokes, and yet stands in opposition to, Nietzsche's image of the 'strong and well-formed man' who 'digests his experiences (including deeds and misdeeds) as he digests his meals, even when he has hard lumps to swallow' (*OGM*, p. 101). Mellors' annihilatory proclamation, which signifies his repudiation of those unpalatable aspects of his life, rather recalls Clifford's restrictive economy: Mellors displays an incapacity to attain self-mastery through the assimilation of his past grievances. Mellors, it would seem, fails to synthesise these refractory experiences and, coming across a blockage to his interpretative will to power or mastery, he is beset by resentful impotence.²⁰³ Thus, paralleling my earlier analysis of Connie's bitter indignation towards Clifford, Mellors' annihilatory proclamation can be viewed as a continued expression of a vindictive sensibility: his suffering remains senseless and his indignation is

²⁰² Higgins, p. 70.

²⁰³ This point recalls Nietzsche's claim which I alluded to above: 'every animal abhors equally instinctively, with an acute sense of smell which is "higher than all reason", any kind of disturbance and hindrance which blocks or could block his path to the optimum' (*OGM*, p. 81).

only placated by the imaginary thought of a vengeance perpetrated against the identified culprits.

Lawrence aligns Connie and Mellors with Clifford to register the potency of these reactive desires, and the depth of their respective grievances. Pointing to the modernists' engagement with 'unassumable' suffering, these reactive feelings also feature heavily, for instance, in Kafka's *The Trial* and Beckett's *Endgame*, texts that similarly focus upon powerless subjectivities. Clifford, as I have implied throughout, is repeatedly portrayed in terms of impotence. For example, Clifford's reactionary response to Connie's disclosure of the affair evinces an exterminatory desire that can be apprehended in terms of his feelings of powerlessness: the narrator comments upon Clifford's 'sheer, unspeakable, impotent hate' when he exclaims that Connie ' "ought to be wiped off the face of the earth!" ' (*Lady*, p. 308). Likewise, Clifford 'couldn't even accept the fact' of Mellors' existence (*Lady*, p. 308).

Furthermore, Lawrence follows Nietzsche in depicting morality as the instrument of the weak and the powerless to perpetrate revenge against the healthy or strong. Thus Clifford's immediate recourse to conventional moral binaries to demonize the other suggests the absence of a capacity to exact an actual revenge: '[s]uddenly he had become almost wistfully moral, seeing himself the incarnation of good, and people like Mellors and Connie the incarnation of mud, of evil' (*Lady*, p. 309). Mirroring Nietzsche's account of the slaves' appeal to morality to exercise retribution, Clifford's reactionary, exterminatory desire becomes more refined, less explicit, as he moves to denounce Connie's immoral affair with the bestial Mellors.

Indeed, Mellors' attempt to vindicate his exterminatory logic, as I read it, is grounded in his identification of Clifford's and Bertha's shared retributive drives. That is, Mellors' view of the novel's villains resonates with Nietzsche's identification of impotence and vengefulness: for Lawrence's protagonist claims that Bertha and Clifford 'can't live and their souls are awful inside them'; they consequently 'only frustrate life' (*Lady*, p. 292). This view can be read alongside Nietzsche's contention that 'one thing is needful: a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself [...] Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually prepared to avenge himself for this' (*GS*, p. 164).

Mellors' rationalization of his wish to annihilate Bertha and Clifford thus has distinctively Nietzschean echoes, even if these reverberations only serve to highlight the philosopher's own defensiveness. That is, Mellors' murderous fantasy recollects my argument from the previous chapter that Nietzsche assumed similar reactive sentiments towards 'the sick'. Among several such comments which I alluded to, Nietzsche declares, for instance, that 'everything weak, sick, ill-constructed, suffering from itself [...] *ought to perish*' (*EH*, p. 104). What must be kept in mind, however, with both Nietzsche's generous, expansive visions and in those restrictive, defensive announcements, is that the overcoming of suicidal nihilism remains his central preoccupation. Here, then, in one such exclusionary declaration, the philosopher claims 'that pathos of distance between healthy and sick "ought to be the chief concern on earth", for the healthy are "alone the *guarantors* of the future"' (*OGM*, p. 97). In terms of Lawrence's novel, which I view to be similarly preoccupied with overcoming the threat of suicidal nihilism, it is the protagonists who can be perceived solely in the role of '*guarantors* of the future': Connie and Mellors exemplify a tentative but courageous self-overcoming and, as such, they constitute new meaning. Nevertheless, having made the point that Mellors' vindication of his exterminatory logic may imply the need to protect the novel's '*guarantors* of the future' against the vindictiveness of the wretched and the sick, I maintain that this reactive posture radically undermines the novel's expansive vision.

Perhaps, then, as Lawrence's protagonists seek to fulfil their vision of tenderness and so surmount these consuming vindictive sentiments, Connie's resolve to detach herself from Clifford suggests the limits of Lawrence's centrifugal vision. A full affirmation of the other, particularly of the sick and vindictive who threaten the self's flourishing, remains beyond the protagonists' reach. Here, echoing Nietzsche's suggested acknowledgement of his own limits as he resolves to 'let looking away be [his] only negation' (*GS*, p. 276), Connie similarly determines that, with regards to Clifford, '[s]he didn't want to hate him. She didn't want to be mixed up very intimately with him in any sort of feeling' (*Lady*, p. 202).

Lawrence's depiction of the self struggling to regulate its vindictive sentiments arising from unredeemed suffering and feelings of impotence corroborates my view of Lawrence's continued engagement with Nietzschean themes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. And while I have also highlighted the novel's treatment of the primary need to confer

meaning, or a goal, in order to avert the pathos of suicidal nihilism, it is clear that the constitution of meaning is entwined with the need to appropriate or digest one's experience of useless suffering. Here, then, lies the overlooked importance of Nietzsche to Lawrence's final novel. I shall now turn to examine Kafka's *The Trial*, a text that places similar emphasis upon the potency of vindictive sentiments arising from one's failure to interpretatively appropriate and affirm one's suffering.

Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and the Interpretation of Suffering

Praise and blame. If a war proves unsuccessful one asks who was to 'blame' for the war; if it ends in victory one praises its instigator. Guilt is always sought wherever there is failure; for failure brings with it a depression of spirits against which the sole remedy is instinctively applied: a new excitation of the *feeling of power* - and this is to be discovered in the *condemnation* of the 'guilty'. This guilty person is not to be thought of as a scapegoat for the guilt of others: he is a sacrifice to the weak, humiliated and depressed, who want to demonstrate on something that they still have some strength left. To condemn oneself can also be a means of restoring the feeling of strength after a defeat.

Nietzsche, *Daybreak*

Introduction: Kafka and Interpretation

The fragmentation of the protagonist's orderly universe is signalled in the first sentence of *The Trial*, with the announcement of Josef K.'s arrest: '[s]omebody must have made a false accusation against Josef K., for he was arrested one morning without having done anything wrong' (*The Trial*, p. 1).²⁰⁴ Assuming that someone has reported him to the authorities, K. consequently seeks to establish the grounds for the criminal proceedings brought against him. The plot of the novel revolves around this preoccupation. The critic Thomas M. Kavanagh thus notes: '[i]t is as the *inexplicable* breaks in upon his world that we, as readers, begin to follow the unfolding of his odyssey.'²⁰⁵ As is well known, the reason for K.'s arrest remains beyond his and the reader's ken for the novel's entirety: the court's processes appear capricious, arbitrary and pernicious. K. confronts a world of impenetrable and empty signifiers. Invoking the motif that I have been applying throughout, I will argue that K.'s continuous incapacity to assimilate his experience amounts to an encounter with

²⁰⁴ Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (London: Penguin, repr. 2000). All citations refer to this edition of the novel.

²⁰⁵ Thomas M. Kavanagh, 'Kafka's *the Trial*: The Semiotics of the Absurd', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Trial*, ed. by James Rolleston (Indiana University: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 86-93 (p. 92).

excessive or 'senseless' suffering: K.'s quest is one that is impelled by the need to render his persecution meaningful, to interpretatively master his suffering. The crucial role of interpretation in *The Trial* cannot be overstated: K.'s very existence hinges upon exegetic activity.

As the narrative focalizes through K.'s experience, the reader's engagement with the novel to a large extent mirrors Josef K.'s hermeneutic impasse. Added to this exegetical challenge, however, the reader must negotiate K.'s unreliability, apparent from his confused and partial view, his misinterpretations of events and characters, and his repeated patterns of assertions and negations. Furthermore, not only is the voice of the third person narrator similarly limited and undependable, but the narrative device of free indirect discourse compounds the reader's confusion. Interpretative activity and interpretative difficulty is thus central to the novel, for both the reader and the characters inhabiting this radically indeterminate world.

While interpretation is central to all literary and cultural discourse, the very constitution of Kafka's *The Trial* underscores the primacy of exegesis. A number of scholars have drawn attention to the novel's incompleteness and thus to the necessarily provisional nature of all interpretative claims regarding *The Trial*. Following Ritchie Robertson, Annie Ring points out that '*Der Proceß* has itself never hung together as a totality. Rather, it is made up of scattered chapters that were put together after his death in an order that Kafka scholars consider questionable.'²⁰⁶ Theodore Ziolkowski similarly notes that '*The Trial* has a definite beginning and end' with everything else 'left in a state of confusion', engendering various interpretations.²⁰⁷ Added to this conundrum, the scale of the Kafka critical industry itself, or what the novelist Milan Kundera refers to as 'Kafkaology', suggests the impossibility of arriving at any comprehensive, totalizing position.

Nevertheless, it is useful to point to two dominant trends in Kafka scholarship with regards to readings of *The Trial*. First, as Robertson notes, '[m]uch contemporary Kafka criticism [...] argues that Kafka intended only to urge upon the reader the ultimate

²⁰⁶ Annie Ring, 'In the Law's Hands: S/M Pleasure in *Der Proceß*, a Queer Reading', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 48 (2012), 319.

²⁰⁷ Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Mirror of Justice: Literary Reflections of Legal Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 227.

absence of meaning both in his own writings and in the surrounding world.²⁰⁸ This proclivity, to claim that Kafka 'designed to provoke and then frustrate the reader's desire for an intelligible meaning', can be seen as a corollary of the text's resistance to any univocal meaning, of the profusion of textual interpretations.²⁰⁹ Robertson contests this 'mystificatory' or nihilistic interpretation of the novel, one that urges a cognizance of meaninglessness. Indeed, the reading he proffers, pointing to the protagonist's inherent guilt, characterises the alternative dominant construal of the novel. That is, as Kundera has observed, there is a traditional reading of the novel, beginning with Kafka's friend Max Brod and continuing to contemporary commentaries, which, in one way or another, locate the source of guilt in the accused himself.²¹⁰

Ring follows Kundera in pointing out that this interpretation of K.'s culpability is usually corroborated by adducing biographical evidence. Noting that 'it is the biographical reading that has carried the most weight in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries', Ring sums up this tendency:

Biographical accounts of *Der Proceß* stress the similarities between Kafka and his beleaguered protagonist: they refer to the author's engagement of Felice Bauer, which ended just weeks before Kafka began writing the novel in a dramatic scene that he perceived as a tribunal. Alongside the drama with Bauer, Kafka's relationship to his father surfaces regularly in the interpretations of the text.²¹¹

Such accounts point to Kafka's sense of failure, and hence guilt, in light of the termination of his unorthodox relationship with Bauer; these readings also emphasise his persistent sense of inadequacy with regards to his domineering father. For instance, contending that most readings 'do not sufficiently point to the personal anguish' from which Kafka's 'sense of shame and guilt' stemmed,²¹² Saul Friedlander has recently offered an interpretation of Kafka's oeuvre on the premise that 'Kafka's fiction was but a more or less heavily disguised autobiography'.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 89-90.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p. ix.

²¹⁰ Kundera, pp. 204-06.

²¹¹ Ring, p. 308.

²¹² Saul Friedländer, *Franz Kafka: The Poet of Shame and Guilt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 5.

²¹³ Ibid. p. 10.

In opposition to this biographical approach, however, Kundera exhorts that one read *The Trial* first and foremost 'as a novel'.²¹⁴ Doing so entails the relegation of the import of the biographical evidence adduced by so many. Instead Kundera stresses the need to identify with K.'s situation, one that recognizes his persecution. Not only do I heed Kundera's admonition in my reading of the novel, but I shall also take Kundera's broader praise for the novel genre in the same text to offer an insight into this critical proclivity to find K. guilty: Kundera's claim that the novel allows for the temporary suspension of 'the ineradicable human habit of judging instantly, ceaselessly, and everyone' suggests the persistence of a particularly moral construal of events and behaviour.²¹⁵ What I wish to suggest through my reading of *The Trial* is that I see the tendency to find K. himself culpable as exemplifying this 'ineradicable habit' of judging. As I have suggested in Chapter One, this has its roots in the exegetical tradition Nietzsche identifies with the Christian ascetic ideal.

What is more, I shall illustrate in the course of this chapter that this 'ineradicable habit', or need, is most pressing when confronted with that which apparently defies our interpretative capacity. I am thus arguing that K's encounter with 'senseless' suffering mirrors our reading, a reading experience that encounters a text that resists univocal interpretation and which thus gives rise to that other dominant reading, that of the insistence upon the text's indecipherable meaninglessness. I shall thus invoke Nietzsche's notion of the will to power to point out that we have a primary, 'ineradicable' need to confer meaning, and that when this urge is thwarted the most common exegetical port of call we turn to is to exercise judgement. Otherwise put, I shall seek to demonstrate that these seemingly divergent schools of thought regarding the novel's 'meaning', that of K.'s guilt and that of the text's apparent meaninglessness, are entwined and reverberate with Nietzsche's thoughts on nihilism and the interpretation of suffering.

In holding Kafka's text as particularly amenable to a Nietzschean reading I stand opposed to Brod, whom Kundera refers to as the founding father of 'Kafkaology'. Brod rejects any connection between Kafka and Nietzsche:

²¹⁴ Kundera, p. 206.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

Nietzsche is Kafka's antipode with almost mathematical exactitude. Some Kafka interpreters only demonstrate their lack of instinct when trying to bring together Kafka and Nietzsche on one level of analysis - as if there existed even the vaguest ties or comparisons and not just pure opposition.²¹⁶

Several studies have since refuted Brod's absolute dismissal of Nietzsche's relevance to Kafka. However, despite noting points of continuity, critics such as Benno Wagner and Peter Heller, for example, somewhat echo Brod's view by stressing Kafka's departure from the philosopher: Wagner focuses upon Zarathustra's ideal of squandering in order to chart Kafka's antithetical concern with insurance;²¹⁷ Heller ultimately aligns Kafka with the life-negating asceticism of Nietzsche's educator and antipode, Arthur Schopenhauer.²¹⁸ Others tracing the affinities between the pair tend to offer broad discussions of Nietzschean motifs present in Kafka's work,²¹⁹ while Lewis W. Tusken focuses upon 'In The Penal Colony' to note the relevance of Nietzsche's thought on suffering to Kafka's short story.²²⁰ Patrick Bridgwater offers the most extensive discussion of the relationship of the two figures in his *Kafka and Nietzsche*.²²¹ However, as Reinhold Grimm notes, Bridgwater's analysis of Nietzsche's relevance to Kafka remains rather loose and general.²²² Indeed, with regards to *The Trial*, Bridgwater argues that Kafka's 'main source for this second novel was surely Kant's description of the workings of the Conscience'.²²³ Furthermore, I shall seek to overturn Bridgwater's reading which is based on the premise that 'Nietzsche and Kafka were agreed in rejecting materiality in favour of

²¹⁶ Quoted in Wagner, p. 84.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Peter Heller, 'Kafka and Nietzsche', in *Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium. Vol. iv: Franz Kafka: His Place in World Literature.*, ed. by Wolodymyr T. Zyla, Wendell M. Aycock, and Pat Ingle Gillis (Lubbock: Texas Technology University, 1971), pp. 71-95.

²¹⁹ Walter H. Sokel, 'Nietzsche and Kafka: The Dionysian Connection', in *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 64-74; Stanley Corngold, 'Kafka's 'Zarathustra'', *Journal of the Kafka Society of America*, 19 (1995); Stanley Corngold, 'Nietzsche, Kafka and Literary Paternity', in *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, ed. by Jacob Golomb (London, England: Routledge, 1997), pp. 137-57; Linda C. Hsu, 'Klamotten: Reading Nietzsche Reading Kafka', *German Quarterly*, 67 (1994).

²²⁰ Lewis W. Tusken, 'Once More with Chutzpah: A Brave Comparison of New Worlds in Nietzsche's the Genealogy of Morals and Kafka's in the Penal Colony', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 10 (1989).

²²¹ Patrick Bridgwater, *Kafka and Nietzsche* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974).

²²² Reinhold Grimm, 'Comparing Kafka and Nietzsche', *German Quarterly*, 52 (1979), 41. '[Bridgwater's] investigations and insights are constantly hampered by his lust for sweeping, all- too sweeping generalization, philosophical flights of fancy.'

²²³ Bridgwater, p. 67.

inner, spiritual reality.²²⁴ Again drawing on biographical sources, this assumption has implications for the reading of *The Trial*: K.'s guilt is a priori, and his trajectory acts as 'proof and product' of Kafka's 'asceticism'.²²⁵ K. accordingly comes to the realization that man is guilty of living in the world.

Rejecting Bridgwater's biographical approach and his reading of K.'s inherent guilt, I shall remain attentive to K.'s actual experience of senseless persecution. With regard to the novel's action and this dominant strand of my thesis, that of the relationship between suffering and nihilism, I shall illustrate that K.'s incapacity to assimilate his experience, or to render his suffering as meaningful, provoke what I have been referring to as the physio-psychological experience of nihilism; attending this impotence to interpretatively master one's experience is a correlative loss of efficacious agency, which, at its peak, leads to suicide. I shall thus interpret what I see as K.'s complicity in his execution as stemming from his impotence to attribute his suffering with a meaning; his capitulation is thus marked by his recourse to guilt. In linking impotence to an interpretation of suffering as guilt, I will therefore invoke Nietzsche's analysis of the ascetic ideal. Doing so I shall illustrate the relevance and power of Nietzsche's insight of the human condition to apprehend K.'s trajectory: '[m]an, the bravest animal and the most prone to suffer, does *not* deny suffering as such: he *wills* it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a *meaning* for it, a *purpose* for suffering' (OGM, p. 127).

A Senseless Invasion

As mentioned above, from the first sentence until the last action, the nature of the charges brought against Joseph K. remain undisclosed. Yet while this secretive aspect of the legal process may confound Anglophone readers, Ziolkowski points out that this is 'perfectly routine according to the Austrian Code of Criminal Procedure'.²²⁶ Ziolkowski therefore claims:

[Kafka] is describing the normal procedures of civil-law courts, where the investigation remains private and confidential as long as it is in the hands of the examining

²²⁴ Ibid. p. 29.

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 44.

²²⁶ Ziolkowski, p. 233.

magistrate, and becomes public only when that official turns it over to the prosecutor with the recommendation of a trial. Not until this point does the defense become formally involved.²²⁷

Ziolkowski similarly notes that the translation of the title *Der Proceß* into English misleadingly suggests that K.'s case culminates in an actual trial. However, K.'s case does not in actual fact go beyond the preliminary hearing stage. What is more to the point is that Kafka's narrative technique, together with the characters' responses to these institutional processes, serve to render such practices as alien and absurd from the perspective of the accused: the court's unfathomability and capriciousness is achieved by Kafka's techniques of estrangement, permitting the reader to identify with K.'s experience of bewilderment. Indeed, the sovereignty of the court rests upon its capacity to confuse the accused, to frustrate the defendant's capacity to know. Thus, Michel Foucault's comment on the classical model of criminal procedure is pertinent: '[t]he secret and written form of the procedure reflects the principle that in criminal matters the establishment of truth was the absolute right and the exclusive power of the sovereign and his judges'.²²⁸ Enduring elements of this classical model remained in practice in Kafka's day. Moreover, as an insurance lawyer, and previously as a student of law, Kafka was familiar both with these previous codes and with contemporaneous developments and debates that surrounded the transition to the modern, enlightened code of criminal law. For instance, as a student Kafka attended lectures given by Hans Gross. Neil Allen therefore notes that, 'Gross's psychological hypothesis (loosely derived from Brentanian theory) suggested that, in their ignorance of the charge, defendants would be more likely to divulge (involuntarily) evidence of their culpability'.²²⁹

Allen continues to observe that:

The court's procedure is reminiscent, simultaneously, both of lack of any defendants' rights in the earlier system of justice, and of Gross's notion that the accused's ignorance

²²⁷ Ibid. pp. 230-31.

²²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, repr. 1991), p. 25.

²²⁹ Neil Allen, *Franz Kafka and the Genealogy of Modern European Philosophy: From Phenomenology to Post-Structuralism* (Indiana University: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), p. 158.

of the charge would aid the progress of the investigation by obfuscating psychological defence mechanisms.²³⁰

Insofar as the court's mysterious operations serve to inflict the accused with an experience of radical indeterminacy, this constitutes K.'s primary experience of persecution. For instance, as the supervisor informs K. that 'I am absolutely unable to tell you that you stand accused, or rather I don't know if you are' (*The Trial*, p. 9), K.'s repeated refrain is to declare the 'senselessness' of his arrest.²³¹ Again, this time at his first tribunal, having initially been mistakenly identified as an interior decorator, he argues that 'the purpose' of the institution was to start proceedings 'which are pointless and mostly, as in my case, inconclusive' (*The Trial*, p. 36). The court's intrusion thus operates to destroy K.'s logical interpretation of existence. K. registers the violence of the disturbance as he denounces the arbitrariness of his persecution: 'even Frau Grubach was intelligent enough to see that such an arrest has no greater meaning than an attack in the street by undisciplined young thugs' (*The Trial*, pp. 34-5).

Given this inexplicable disturbance of K.'s world, Cyrena N. Pondrom observes that 'K. sets clarity as his first goal. Only then is useful action possible'.²³² This is key. K.'s overriding need to interpretatively master his situation is highlighted:

[T]he right which he still possessed to dispose of his things did not rank high in his estimation; to him it was much more important to understand his position clearly, but in the presence of these people he could not even think. (*The Trial*, p. 3)

At this juncture it is worth recalling a central argument from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, namely that the will to power can be apprehended primarily as an urge to interpret: the experience of efficacious agency and one's interpretation are intertwined. For instance, in one key passage Nietzsche claims that 'the essence of life, its *will to power*' is constituted by 'spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing and formative powers' (*OGM*, p. 55). Indeed:

²³⁰ Ibid. pp. 159-60.

²³¹ In addition to subsequent examples in this chapter, see, for instance, *The Trial*, p. 10; p. 63.

²³² Cyrena N. Pondrom, 'Kafka and Phenomenology: Josef K.'s Search for Information', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Trial*, ed. by James Rolleston (Indiana University: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 70-85 (p. 73).

[A]nything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, [...] everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering, dominating*, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former 'meaning' and 'purpose' must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated. (*OGM*, p. 55)

As Alan D. Schrift notes: ' "will to power" operates through the interpretive imposition of meaning and is in Nietzsche's view nothing other than a name for the active process of interpretation itself.'²³³ What is suggested here is that life is a process of active interpretation, and this entails the supplanting of existent interpretations, ad infinitum. Simon May also succinctly captures the import of interpretation to the subject's capacity to 'secure' its place in the world, that is, to establish its 'conditions for the preservation and enhancement of life': 'In sum, "will to power" denotes the securing of power over the world, and to that extent, it is expressed through the valuing and interpretation which capture all (human) life.'²³⁴ Thus, from a Nietzschean perspective, the pathos of power is inseparably bound to the self's capacity to interpretatively master its place in the world: '[f]or a human being to experience his or her *self* as powerful requires that s/he experience being in the world as meaningful', as David Owen notes.²³⁵ One's interpretation is thus expressive of one's power, and the loss or failure of one's interpretative capacity is attended by paralysis, a feeling of depressing lethargy.

The need for interpretative mastery is emphasised throughout the novel. This is particularly the case given that the court not only deliberately withholds the nature of the charge brought against the accused, but the court's multi-stratified hierarchy operates at every level to obfuscate its own proceedings: the narrative voice declares that '[t]he hierarchical structure of the court was endless and beyond the comprehension even of the initiated' (*The Trial*, p. 94). Its procedures induce uncertainty, frustration and resignation even for its own servants and functionaries: without an awareness of the

²³³ Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 184.

²³⁴ Simon May, *Nietzsche's Ethics and His War on 'Morality'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 12.

²³⁵ Owen, p. 43.

origins or the ends of the cases they 'were allowed to concern themselves with', the minor officials 'fell into the depths of despair when they encountered obstacles they could not overcome because of their temperament' (*The Trial*, p. 94). Beset by the interpretative difficulties that permeate the court's processes, the court's functionaries do not attain the pathos of power engendered by the overcoming or resistances, as Nietzsche holds. Rather, in their frustrated attempt to interpretatively master the legal business that 'simply appeared in their orbit', these officials experience a contrary feeling of impotence (*The Trial*, p. 93).

Defendants similarly perceive the court's processes as an interminable movement of constant deferral without a conclusion. Consequently, their sense of agency is denied and they fall into passive despair. The merchant Block's story resembles K.'s trajectory: Block firstly appears to K. as assertive and defiant, and unlike the other submissive and herd-like defendants, he is actively engaged in the pursuit of the truth about his case, to discover the nature of the charges brought against him. Having hired several advocates to advance the proceedings, he informs K. that he 'wanted to see tangible progress, the whole thing ought to be working towards a conclusion or at least advancing in regular stages' (*The Trial*, p. 138). Foreshadowing K.'s decline, Block's subjugation is a corollary of his incapacity to interpret any signs of progress in his case.

Similarly, the incapacity to articulate one's charges, to apprehend the origins of the proceedings, threatens paralysis. For instance, when K. quizzes 'a man of the world who in any other circumstances would be completely in command of himself' as to why he is waiting in the corridor, not only is this man incapable of completing his sentence, but he 'looked at the others as if it was their duty to help him' give his reason (*The Trial*, p. 50). Turning to others, or to external interpretative frameworks to apprehend one's situation, suggests that the defendants are powerless to bestow personal significance to their experience. Block corroborates this view as he divulges to K.:

You must remember that in this business many things are constantly coming up for discussion which are beyond the range of the intellect; people are just too tired and distracted to cope with a lot of things and so take refuge in superstition. (*The Trial*, p. 136)

Collectively imprisoned in the indefinite and indeterminate proceedings, the debilitated defendants do not have the strength to confer a rational or individual explanation of their suffering: they 'take refuge in' an irrational, collective interpretation that seems to 'propagate' itself (*The Trial*, p. 136). This turn to external meaning evokes Nietzsche's view that nihilism 'is rooted in the old habit of supposing that the goal [or meaning] must be put up, given, demanded *from outside*' (*WTP*, p. 16).

Several commentators have noted K.'s persistent reliance on logic.²³⁶ However, most overlook the fact that this is driven by the obvious need to discover the legal rationale behind his charge. In line with this rational pursuit of the cause of the proceedings, Nina Pelikan Strauss thus notes that '[t]o discover the Authority who has authorized his arrest is K.'s goal, a goal any reader with a modern concept of justice can identify as sane.'²³⁷

Invoking Nietzsche to perform a more abstract level of analysis sheds further light upon K.'s exegetical activity: the appeal to causality allows one to appropriate and domesticize the unfamiliar and the distressing. Nietzsche outlines this self-preservative hermeneutical activity:

To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown-the first instinct is to *eliminate* these distressing states. First principle: any explanation is better than none. [...] The cause-creating drive is thus conditioned and excited by a feeling of fear. The question 'why?' should furnish, if at all possible, not so much the cause for its own sake as a *certain kind of cause* – a soothing, liberating, alleviating cause. [...] Thus there is sought not only some kind of explanation as cause, but a *selected* and *preferred* kind of explanation, the kind by means of which the feeling of the strange, new, unexperienced is most speedily and most frequently abolished. (*TI & AC*, p. 62)

²³⁶ See, for example, Pondrom, p. 50. Pondrom contends that K. is 'a reasonable man who assumes that cause and effect are inviolable and that everything has an explanation'. See also Rolf J. Goebel, 'The Exploration of the Modern City in *the Trial*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. by Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 42-60 (p. 50). Goebel reads Josef K. as 'the detective who, persistently if in vain, seeks to impose rationality, logic, and legal analysis'.

²³⁷ Nina Pelikan Strauss, 'Grand Theory on Trial: Kafka, Derrida, and the Will to Power' (2007), pp. 378-93 (p. 384).

Accordingly, K. aims to avert his experience of senseless suffering by attributing it with a cause. He seeks to comprehend the court's distressing invasion by firstly appealing to the most readily familiar sources: he reckons that his landlady, Frau Grubach, must be able to offer an explanation; he then considers the intrusion as an elaborate prank, 'for some unknown reason', carried out by his colleagues at the bank to mark his thirtieth birthday (*The Trial*, p. 3).

Furthermore, Nietzsche's point on the 'cause-creating drive' echoes his notion of the self's digestive-appropriative capacity, alluded to in my previous chapters: Nietzsche argues that the mind operates to 'make the new like the old, to simplify the many-fold, to overlook or push away the completely contradictory' (*BGE*, p. 160).²³⁸ Laurence Lampert thus claims that, for Nietzsche, '[t]he basic will of the human mind inclines it powerfully to cosmetics, to lying surfaces'.²³⁹ Lampert's comment also gestures towards Nietzsche's notion of Apollonian appearances as he presents it in *The Birth of Tragedy*. With regard to Kafka's novel, K. resembles Nietzsche's figure of the Alexandrian man who, by fetishizing reason and appearance, 'opposes Dionysiac wisdom and art' (*BT*, p. 85): for K. the world is inherently rational, everything is explicable and amenable to the application of logic. K. thus possesses what Nietzsche refers to in *The Gay Science* as 'faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and measure in human thought, in human valuations - a "world of truth" that can be grasped entirely with the help of our four-cornered little human reason' (*GS*, p. 238). Correspondingly, it is possible to read the court's seemingly meaningless invasion as an eruption of the Dionysian chaos that shatters K.'s logical colonization of existence: the court represents 'the essential, indifferent [...] comings and goings of the contingent world', as Pondrom puts it.²⁴⁰ K.'s primary drive, then, is to assimilate this experience, for the senselessness to be interpretatively integrated. He thus seeks to restore order, or to recuperate the Apollonian veil of illusion: once 'order was restored, then every trace [of the arrest] would be eliminated and everything would resume its old course' (*The Trial*, p. 14).

²³⁸ See pp. 34-5, for example.

²³⁹ Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of Beyond Good and Evil* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 228.

²⁴⁰ Pondrom, p. 80.

Furthermore, just as Lawrence depicts the general populace in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in terms of the pursuit of pleasure and aversion to pain, K. similarly resembles Nietzsche's Last Man:²⁴¹

After all, K. lived in a country which enjoyed law and order; there was universal peace; all the laws were upheld; so who dared to pounce on him in his own home? He had always been inclined to take everything as easily as possible, to believe the worst only when the worst happened, not to worry about the future even when everything seemed threatening. (*The Trial*, p. 3)

This passage captures the 'narrower, abbreviated, simplified world' that K. inhabits (*WTP*, p. 15). Another Nietzschean passage, alluded to above, comes to mind in line with K.'s optimistic perspective:

Most men tolerate life without grumbling too much and *believe* thus in the value of existence, but precisely because everyone wills himself alone and stands his ground alone, and does not step out of himself as do those exceptional men, everything extrapersonal escapes his notice entirely, or seems at most a faint shadow. (*HAH*, p. 36)

K. seeks to maintain this simple, 'narrow' perspective of life: he had never visited the squalid suburbs until his first tribunal; he consoles himself in adversity that he would not have suffered '[i]f he stayed at home and led his normal life' (*The Trial*, p. 46). His thought and behaviour are repeatedly characterised by a desire to minimise his suffering: applying Nietzsche's observation, K. 'wills himself alone and stands his ground alone' in order not to be exposed to others' pain (*HAH*, p. 36). However, one consequence of K.'s habitual denial of struggle and difficulty is an 'excessive sensitivity' towards distress: K. evokes Nietzsche's argument that, as a consequence of 'the poverty of real experience of pain' in the comfortable, modern world compared to past ages, 'pain is hated much more than formerly' (*GS*, p. 61). That is, Nietzsche contends that modernity is an age of 'refinement and ease' in which 'one can hardly-endure the presence of pain' (*GS*, p. 61). The weight to this argument is achieved as Nietzsche claims that 'excessive sensitivity [...] seem[s] to me to be the real "distress of the present"' (*GS*, p. 61). As a result of the court's persecutory intrusion, K. is propelled into a world of pain and senseless distress, as Karl J.

²⁴¹ See p. 67.

Kuepper observes: '[h]umiliation and pain are such integral components of all procedures of the trial, that the stooping posture seems like the distinguishing mark of everyone connected or involved with the trial authorities.'²⁴² In this world K. repeatedly exemplifies Nietzsche's point on this modern sensitivity to distress. For instance, as K. becomes aware that Block's appearance is reflective of the hardship that the merchant has endured, he commands Leni to take Block away, as he 'could not stand the sight of the merchant any longer' (*The Trial*, p. 142). Furthermore, while a host of readings of the lumber room scene have been proffered, one may also conjecture that K. offered to be whipped in place of the guards due to an incapacity to stomach the sight of others' distress.²⁴³

By illustrating K.'s hyper-sensitivity I wish to augment the point that prior to the court's intervention K. has minimal encounters with others. Indeed, for James Hawes it is precisely this absence of contact with others that constitutes K.'s guilt:

Guilt (if it merits the title) that comes from inaction is incurable. This may be the hidden logic in the opening line of the novel. Josef K. has done nothing bad to anyone. He has actually 'done' nothing at all to anyone, he has not functioned interpersonally.²⁴⁴

K. is primarily characterised by a desire to avoid contact with the court. I would add to Hawes' reading that K.'s experience of others, since the initiation of the process at least, would seem to justify such recoil: others appear to be hostile forces, working against him from the moment that the court intervenes in his life. Indeed, as Kundera notes, everyone readily assumes K's guilt.²⁴⁵ His enduring desire for detachment may be reflective of an unconscious awareness that becomes increasingly conscious with the novel's movement, namely that '[e]verything belongs to the court' (*The Trial*, p. 118).

²⁴² Karl J. Kuepper, 'Gesture and Posture as Elemental Symbolism in Kafka's *the Trial*', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Trial*, ed. by James Rolleston (Indiana University: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 60-69 (p. 66).

²⁴³ For other views see, for example: Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 185; Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Kafka and the Hermeneutics of Sadomasochism', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 46 (2010), 335; David Tenenbaum, *Issues of Shame and Guilt in the Modern Novel* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), p. 135.

²⁴⁴ James Hawes, 'Faust and Nietzsche in Kafka's *Der Prozess*', *New German Studies*, 15 (1988), 145-46.

²⁴⁵ Kundera, p. 209.

Furthermore, it is key to note that K. reads his relations with others on a contractual basis, one that consists of the identification of obligations, debts and compensation.²⁴⁶ By tracing K.'s comportment through this heuristic lens, it may be argued K.'s desire not 'to be obliged to anyone' reflects his fear of further suffering given the particularly retributive nature of social relations that he witnesses and experiences (*The Trial*, p. 27). Block's account of the court, for example, suggests that 'the great organism' can be seen as a creditor seeking recompense for an injury suffered. On this understanding, the primary affect instilled by the court on the populace and the defendants is one of fear and paralysis. Block's analysis of the court reinforces K.'s apprehension and anxiety, for instance, as he warns K. against 'doing oneself immeasurable harm through attracting the particular attention of a bureaucracy which was always vengeful' (*The Trial*, p. 95):

One had to keep quiet, even when this went against the grain! And try to see that [...] the great organism itself compensated for the slight disturbance by easily producing a replacement at another point - everything was after all connected - and remained unchanged, assuming it did not become (and this was probable) even more secretive, even more observant, even more severe, even more malevolent. (*The Trial*, p. 95)

This apprehension of the court evokes Nietzsche's hypothesis of primeval punishment in the *Genealogy*:

Throughout most of human history, punishment has *not* been meted out *because* the miscreant was held responsible for his act, therefore it was *not* assumed that the guilty party alone should be punished:- but rather, as parents still punish their children, it was out of anger over some wrong which had been suffered, directed at the perpetrator, but this anger was held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* which can be paid in compensation, if only through the *pain* of the person who injures. (*OGM*, p. 43)

As Nietzsche scholar Aaron Ridley succinctly puts it, '[i]n injuring someone the culprit becomes a debtor - one who owes recompense to his creditor.'²⁴⁷ The primitive logic of punishment thus appeals to the 'psychological trappings' of 'buying and selling', 'the

²⁴⁶ I will illustrate this in more detail below. For further examples of K.'s thinking in these terms, see *The Trial* p. 72: K. feels 'indebted' to his uncle; *The Trial* p. 75: he feels that he 'owes' the family an explanation.

²⁴⁷ Ridley, p. 31.

oldest and most primitive personal relationship there is' (*OGM*, p. 49). Moreover, Nietzsche stresses that:

Through punishment of the debtor, the creditor takes part in the *rights of the masters*: at last he, too, shares the elevated feeling of despising and maltreating someone as an 'inferior' - or at least, when the actual power of punishment, of exacting punishment, is already transferred to the 'authorities', of *seeing* the debtor despised and maltreated. So, then, compensation is made up of a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty. (*OGM*, p. 45)

Punishment, then, as Christopher Janaway expresses it, is 'a legitimization of cruelty'.²⁴⁸ Echoing Zarathustra's pronouncement that 'man is the cruellest animal' (*TSZ*, p. 235), here in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche contends that man has an instinctive disposition to inflict suffering upon others: '[t]o see somebody suffer is nice, to make somebody suffer even nicer - that is a hard proposition, but an ancient, powerful, human-all-too-human proposition' (*OGM*, p. 46). Nietzsche claims that these cruel aggressive drives are permanent human traits, although they may have altered in form, having become spiritualized or sublimated.²⁴⁹ Kafka's novel, I would suggest, parallels Nietzsche's insights on the human condition, upon the persistency of the pleasure of making others suffer. What is more, as Allen notes, Kafka seems to be suggesting that 'the "modern", "enlightened" mode of justice is always capable of relapsing into the arbitrariness and "inhumanity" of apparently outdated procedures'.²⁵⁰

In addition to expounding a general overview of the court's functioning, Block also describes particular individuals within the court as 'vengeful'. For instance, Block warns K. of Huld's vindictiveness, and the advocate's cruel subjugation of the merchant can be interpreted as punitive and compensatory: Block is made to pay for apparently betraying the advocate by hiring extra legal assistance. What is more, Huld punishes Block by systematically denuding him of his interpretative integrity: Huld firstly confuses Block as to whether he is to wait or to enter his room; the advocate subsequently compels the merchant to study abstruse legal documents beyond his comprehension, which Huld

²⁴⁸Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 134.

²⁴⁹ See, for example, *OGM*, p. 45.

²⁵⁰ Allen, p. 159.

claims are 'only to give him an idea of how difficult the battle I'm waging on his behalf really is' (*The Trial*, p. 152). Moreover, Huld informs the merchant of news of his case which, however, is indecipherable: the advocate speaks unclearly throughout and informs Block that, '[y]ou will know that various opinions pile up round every case like an impenetrable thicket' (*The Trial*, p. 153). Adumbrating K.'s encounter with the priest in 'The Cathedral' chapter, Huld thus subdues Block by referring to an infinite proliferation of interpretations of his case: Block, like K., is subject to an indefinite deferral of the definition of the charge brought against him. The court and its officials thus exact cruel compensation for a perceived disturbance by subjecting the identified debtor to an irresolvable indeterminacy and thus terrifying senselessness.

A Vindictive Process

Interpreting his case from his familiar banking perspective, that is, domesticizing it in terms of debit and credit, allows K. momentary hermeneutic mastery: '[t]he case was nothing but a large business deal' (*The Trial*, p. 99). Furthermore, as he recalls previous successes in his banking role, K. is temporarily buoyed and reassured of his capacity to triumph against the court: for K. it is primarily a matter of success or failure against an adversary, rather than one of moral guilt or innocence. For many critics this approach typifies K.'s failing, a failing that is marked by an inadequacy to look inward and recognize his own inherent culpability. For instance, Robertson among others points to K.'s moral transgression: hinting at the court's potentially benevolent role, Robertson claims that '[t]he Court has begun arousing him from previous moral indifference into the beginnings of self-awareness'.²⁵¹ In this line of argument, K. is not guilty of any particular act of transgression, but rather of an ignorance of 'the moral law'. Indeed Robertson claims that '[r]igorous self-examination is the only means to overcome his "repressed moral awareness"'.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Robertson, p. 104.; See Bridgwater, p. 61. Bridgwater echoes this view: 'However much K.'s rational self of Conscience may try to assert itself, he continually lacks moral concentration, and in every case eventually follows the Will, that is, his desires. In Biblical terms K. is, like Karl Rossman, the victim of original sin, for his very will is guilty.'

²⁵² Robertson, p. 118. Robertson follows Ingeborg Henel here. See Ingeborg Henel, 'The Legend of the Doorkeeper and Its Significance for Kafka's *Trial*', in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Trial* ed. by James Rolleston (Indiana University: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 40-55 (p. 42). Henel argues: 'At his arrest he

It is evident in the novel, however, that the court's processes actually prevent any form of 'rigorous self-examination'. K. realizes, for instance, as he contemplates transcribing and then scrutinizing his personal history, that the continual inability to comprehend the actual charge brought against him outweighs any ameliorative manoeuvre, even that of self-examination:

Without having a particularly apprehensive nature one could easily come to believe that it was impossible ever to get the plea ready. Not because of laziness or cunning (only the advocate could be hampered by these) but because in ignorance of the actual accusation and even of any further charges arising from it one had to recall the most trivial actions and events of one's life, present them and review them from every angle. (*The Trial*, pp. 100-101)

K. is aware that the lack of specific charge itself prevents any attempt at self-exculpation. The thought of embarking upon an endless and ultimately fruitless process of self-scrutiny, one that will inevitably fall short of attaining a totalizing perspective, precipitates a depressing lethargy: having resolved to write his plea given that 'it would not be enough [...] to sit in the corridor like the others with his hat under the bench' (*The Trial*, p. 100), K. is now beset by weariness and despondency, for '[a]gain his thoughts were ending in lamentation' (*The Trial*, p. 101). The court precipitates resignation and paralysis rather than moral self-scrutiny. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's point on the court's perniciousness is pertinent: '[c]ulpability is never anything but the superficial movement whereby judges and even lawyers confine you in order to prevent you from engaging in a real movement, that is, from taking care of your own affairs.'²⁵³

Critics also hold K. culpable by adducing evidence of his immoral, instrumental behaviour in his relations with others. Robertson contends that '[i]n his dealings with other people, K. is aggressive and calculating'.²⁵⁴ Hawes echoes this, and, 'doubting the moral soundness of Josef K.', adduces Roy Pascal's evaluation: '[s]exuality has a place in *Der Process* and *Das Schloss* chiefly as a means to acquire power over

ignored the inspector's admonition that he occupy himself less with his innocence and the authorities and reflect more about himself'.

²⁵³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 45.

²⁵⁴ Robertson, p. 99.

another person.²⁵⁵ I do not dispute K.'s moral ambiguity. However, I follow Ring's observation that, '[i]t appears as though the entry of the court into K.'s life unlocks a sadistic instinct in him: to preserve the law, and to extract enjoyment from enforcing it upon others.'²⁵⁶ Ring's claim that 'K. begins to yield to the court's strange processes',²⁵⁷ having at first protested against his arrest, echoes my reading of K.'s development: having previously lived a sheltered, ascetic life, the court's intervention not only opens K. to various erotic encounters, it also induces him to perpetrate similar cruelties upon others as he experiences himself at the hands of the court. In the first instance, the court's malign influence can be illustrated by pointing out that K.'s infliction of suffering upon others is unintentional, resulting from being both exhausted and distracted by the legal proceedings. Such instances arise in his business capacity. Indeed, increasingly afflicted by a sense of self-division as his case overwhelms him, K. perceives this diversion from his business affairs itself as 'a torture sanctioned by the court as part and parcel of the proceedings' (*The Trial*, p. 105). The effect of his growing neglect of bank business is to inflict his dependents with a similar sense of futility: K. refuses to see the clients 'who now appeared to have waited entirely in vain' (*The Trial*, p. 109); and, in no 'fit state to listen' to the manufacturer's financial request, he wonders 'when the manufacturer would eventually realize that all his words were useless'. (*The Trial*, p. 102). K. increasingly resembles and perpetuates the nature of the court processes that he himself is subjected to.

Moreover, I read further instances of K.'s collusion with the court's punitive structure to derive from his need to palliate his own pain through exercising a compensatory cruelty. That is, K.'s complicity with the court, or what Ring calls his 'paradoxical attraction to the regulation and retribution of the law', stems from his need to assuage his suffering.²⁵⁸ Again, Nietzsche's penetrating analysis of the psychology of the sufferer informs my reading: 'every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly, for a

²⁵⁵ Hawes, p. 140; Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society 1880-1918* (London: Basic Books, 1973), p. 240.

²⁵⁶ Ring, p. 312.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 306.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 312.

culprit, even more precisely for a *guilty* culprit who is receptive to distress' (*OGM*, p. 99). The novel insists upon the characters' need to identify the nearest culprit, or debtor, to hold accountable for any perceived loss. Tellingly, *The Trial* emphasises the incongruity of such identifications. For instance, K. mistakenly holds his landlady accountable for his arrest and had 'even thought for a moment of punishing Frau Grubach by persuading Fräulein Burstner to join him in giving notice' (*The Trial*, p. 18). K.'s relationship with Fräulein Burstner is similarly characterised by K.'s aberrant apportioning of blame. Debtor-creditor positions are highly unstable in this relationship, and the characters' discourse confuses conventional notions of transgression and accountability: immediately following K.'s misplaced reproach of the Fräulein for 'introducing disturbance and disorder', he seeks her forgiveness for the court officials' invasion into her room, which, he tells her, was 'done by strangers, against my will'; insofar as Fräulein Burstner 'can't find any trace of disorder', she grants 'with pleasure the forgiveness' that K. requests (*The Trial*, p. 19). However, gesturing towards her own hypersensitivity, she instantly reproaches K. when she then notices the slightest of disturbances to her room. Given that he is not ultimately accountable for this almost imperceptible disruption, Kafka again portrays the characters' primary need to assuage any perceived injury.

Additionally, Paul Alberts' argument, suggesting that the court's incompetency compounds K.'s confusion in social relations, is relevant:

The figure of K. struggles within himself, but also with social relations, and the rules of interaction, legal and extra-legal, that demand obedience. Human social relations for Kafka are not neatly enframed, regulated or enhanced by the legal system, but appear as too-often insincere, unreliable - threatening or driven by base needs that erupt irregularly.²⁵⁹

Among the 'base needs that erupt irregularly' includes the fundamental need to bring relief to one's suffering. From this point of view, Alberts' comment suggests that there is an absence of a controlling, authoritative judiciary which would stabilize these outbursts of vindictive sentiments. Indeed, it may be surmised that the irregular court thus seems

²⁵⁹ Paul Alberts, 'Knowing Life before the Law: Kafka, Kelsen, Derrida', in *Philosophy and Kafka*, ed. by Brendan Moran and Carlo Salzani (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), (p. 189).

to operate immanently and insidiously: in effect, the disorderly nature of the court itself proliferates its own retributive structures on a micro, interpersonal level.

What is also evident as K. repeatedly misreads the roles of debtor and creditor, is that it is his position of powerlessness that propels his drive to reproach the other. For instance, K. identifies the washerwoman as the culprit for interrupting his moment of grandiloquence at the tribunal despite the fact that it was 'not clear' whether she was to 'blame' for the shrieking (*The Trial*, pp. 35-6). Indeed, despite realizing that it is the student, rather than the washerwoman, who is responsible for the offensive, distracting shrieking, K. continues to hold her culpable, suggesting that what is key is simply identifying a guilty culprit: there must be some form of restoration following a perceived loss. Furthermore, when he returns to the courtroom the following week, K.'s ineradicable need to find a guilty culprit, and his incapacity to surmount his grievances, are again illustrated when he belies his apparent magnanimity towards the washerwoman: despite claiming that the speech's interruption was 'all in the past, almost forgotten', even though it had 'really infuriated' him at the time, he immediately subverts this poise of equanimity to explicitly censure her (*The Trial*, p. 40).

Moreover, as the washerwoman subsequently exculpates herself by clarifying her situation and claiming that ' "I am excused in the eyes of all who know me" ', she points to K.'s limited perspectival knowledge and to the inappropriateness of his reproach (*The Trial*, p. 37). This episode, highlighting K.'s incomplete knowledge, gestures to another key theme of the novel, namely, the inevitably finite and embodied nature of truth claims. This point evokes Nietzsche's doctrine of perspectivism: countering traditional epistemological notions of objectivity and disinterestedness, Nietzsche contends that '[t]here is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"' (*OGM*, p. 92). In the novel, truth or knowledge claims are ineradicably orientated by needs, drives or affects: they reflect the social or psycho-physiological will to power of the individual. Nevertheless, several characters presume to hold a neutral, objective position, usually claiming to offer K. a supposedly detached and reliable overview of the court's

operations.²⁶⁰ The reader learns to be suspicious of such claims. And the reader's ironic detachment extends to K. when he promulgates similar views. At his first hearing, for instance, K. claims to possess a detached, objective view of the court's proceedings. He purports to 'distance' himself 'from the whole business' of his arrest and so 'judge it calmly' (*The Trial*, pp. 35-6). From this privileged standpoint, he promises to bequeath insights that are to the court's 'advantage' and that will provoke improvements. Furthermore, his alleged perspectival distance is accompanied by an alleged stance of affective disengagement, as he informs the court:

'What has happened to me represents of course only one individual case, and as such it's not very important since I don't take it too seriously, but it's typical of the proceedings instituted against many people. I speak here for those, not for myself.' (*The Trial*, p. 33)

However, his very 'interested' position becomes immediately apparent, primarily signalling his need to assuage his grievances. For this assertion, claiming to transcend his own suffering and to selflessly represent others in order to ameliorate the injustices perpetrated against them, is considerably undermined by his later concession to the washerwoman:

'I would never have got mixed up voluntarily in these things, and my sleep would never have been troubled by the need to make improvements in this judicial system. But because I was allegedly arrested - I am under arrest, in fact - I've been forced to intervene here, indeed in my own interest.' (*The Trial*, p. 40)

Moreover, his detailed articulation of his injuries, coupled with his delight at the apparent humiliation of the examining magistrate, belie his posture of equanimity to signal, rather, a deep drive for a compensatory retribution. This drive for revenge, however, cannot be actually fulfilled. Even his humiliation of the examining magistrate is ambiguous, and, like all events in the text, provisional and subject to one's interpretative perspective. K.'s only recourse is to have his suffering palliated by the thought of an imaginary or deferred vengeance against his more powerful adversary: he indulges in a fantasy of the magistrate's loss when he envisions abducting the woman. Here K. brings to mind

²⁶⁰ See especially K.'s discussion with Titorelli. *The Trial*, p. 118; p. 121. I shall discuss the priest's authoritative omniscience below. See pp. 126-7.

Nietzsche's characterisation of the powerless slaves who 'being denied the proper response of action compensate for it only with imaginary revenge' (*OGM*, p. 21).

Evoking Nietzsche's analysis of *ressentiment*, the characters' frequent vengeful imaginings are not only attended by a cognizance of impotence, but they involve the cruel spectacle of the other's violent punishment. For instance, the court usher acknowledges both his actual powerlessness and fantasises retaliating against the student who goes off with his wife, the washerwoman:

If I were not so dependent on them I would have squashed that student against this wall long ago. Here, next to this notice. I dream about that all the time. Here, a little above the floor, he is pinned to the wall, arms stretched out, bandy legs in a circle, and streaks of blood all round. But so far that's only a dream. (*The Trial*, p. 48)

In also being deprived of possession of the washerwoman, K. registers his 'first indubitable defeat' and resorts to a similar compensatory vision: K. 'pictured to himself the most ridiculous scene possible' whereby this 'pathetic student, this puffed-up child' would kneel by his mistress Elsa's bed 'and beg for mercy with hands clasped in prayer' (*The Trial*, p. 46). This image of the student's humiliation anticipates Block's subjugation and, by extension, K.'s own demise. Moreover, the fact that Elsa is apotheosized prefigures K.'s own execution scene: in both scenarios suffering is presented for the pleasure of the spectator; here, and at K.'s death, this spectator suggestively assumes divine status.

To recapitulate, *The Trial* alerts the reader to the fallibility of any objective, omniscient claims to knowledge. It continually highlights the provisional and interested, or motivated, nature of such claims, which, in K.'s case, are largely determined by his pathos of powerlessness and injury. Attending to these points to highlight Kafka's insistence upon the embodied nature of knowledge would seem to counter Bridgwater's claim that '[b]ecause he rejected material reality, Kafka sought to create wholly "spiritual" works that would have no reference back to the empirical world'.²⁶¹ In my following examination of the priest's parable of the man from the country, the perspectival, limited

²⁶¹ Bridgwater, p. 44.

basis of truth claims is again highlighted. I shall depart from the critical tendency to privilege the parable solely as a philosophical or interpretative conundrum by remaining attentive to K.'s actual plight: interpretation is a site of agonistic conflict, and K.'s subsequent paralysis must be read in light of the frustration of K.'s concrete need to interpret the nature of the charge brought against him.

The Will to Interpretation

There are parallels between the advocate Huld's subjugation of the merchant Block and K.'s hermeneutical dispute with the prison chaplain in 'The Cathedral' chapter: in both cases there is a contestation of interpretations; characteristically, the official's voice dominates the discourse, purporting to hold something of an authoritative, omniscient and unassailable standpoint; moreover, a hermeneutic impasse besets the defendant due to the endless proliferation of interpretations that operate to signal the perpetual deference of a clear statement of the charge brought against them. It is this impasse, I hold, that signals the defeat of the respective defendants. The failure of K.'s power to actively interpret his situation propels his suicide, or execution.

Nietzschean echoes abound in 'The Cathedral' chapter. Robertson and Hawes point to the religious setting to suggest reverberations with Nietzsche's 'death of God': K. is drawn to a man in the cathedral looking on at a picture of the burial of Christ.²⁶² Echoing the demise of the court, and signalling a parallel with Nietzsche's thought on God's death, Hawes notes that the cathedral 'is literally a structure which has lost its rationale but still exists'.²⁶³ This cathedral setting acts as the background in which the priest narrates the parable of the man from the country, or the story of 'Before the Law'. Critics have tended to privilege the import of the parable with regards to the novel as a whole: Robertson claims that '[i]t is perhaps the supreme moment in Kafka's writing',²⁶⁴ and Ingeborg Henel argues that it is 'the key to the novel itself'.²⁶⁵ Robertson and Henel both focus upon the parable's final sentence to unlock the 'puzzle' of the novel. Robertson, for instance, argues that '[t]his peripeteia – the doorkeeper's information to the dying man that the door was all along intended for him and for him only – is an essential part of the story's

²⁶² Robertson, p. 122; Hawes, p. 135.

²⁶³ Hawes, p. 135.

²⁶⁴ Robertson, pp. 122-23.

²⁶⁵ Henel, p. 48.

meaning.²⁶⁶ As Henel puts it, '[t]he law in question here is the law of each individual',²⁶⁷ and consequently the individual must perform 'the act of self-judgment'. Henel thus claims that K.'s 'desire to lead a quiet life outside the trial have prevented him from hearing what the priest meant to tell him by means of the legend: that he should give up his evasions and confront his judge'.²⁶⁸ For Henel, then, K. fails through weakness: as a perfect example of a Nietzschean Last Man, K. evades his own individual responsibility. While this reading may be seductive, I take issue with it, however: firstly, I shall challenge the assumed authority of the priest's discourse; secondly, by remaining attentive towards K.'s actual quest, that of discovering the nature of the court's charge, I want to ensure that my reading stays proximate to the interpretative impasse that besets the protagonist with regards to the reason of his arrest. That is, K.'s experience is first and foremost one of 'senseless suffering'.

In contesting the priest's privileged position assumed by Robertson, Henel and others, I follow Allen who observes:

The priest is as much a functionary of the law as Titorelli, the Advocate, or the arresting officers, and thus his tale does not inevitably explain any more or less of the law than does that of any other character; it could be as much symptomatic as revelatory.²⁶⁹

To corroborate this argument, it is worth examining K.'s actual exchange with the priest, something which is neglected in the aforementioned discussions. Here K. oscillates from a combative independence to a desire for conciliation which amounts, I shall argue, to his capitulation.²⁷⁰ K.'s surrender is prefigured when he denies, or overrides, his own empirical experience in order to place trust in the priest: his faith in the priest involves the repudiation of obvious signs of the priest's hostility. This amounts to a denial of his

²⁶⁶ Robertson, p. 123.

²⁶⁷ Henel, p. 48.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 50. Henel also invokes Zarathustra's maxim to pronounce judgement on K.: 'Can you be judge of yourself and avenger of your own law? It is terrible to be alone with the judge and avenger of one's own law' (*TSZ*, p. 89).

²⁶⁹ Allen, p. 145.

²⁷⁰ I am reading this section of the novel with Nietzsche's views on 'the value of having enemies' in mind. See *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 53. In this startling passage Nietzsche claims, '[o]ne has renounced *grand* life when one renounces war'. The following citation is particularly suggestive with regard to K.'s subsequent demise: '[o]ne is *fruitful* only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains *young* only on condition that the soul does not relax, does not long for peace.'

own embodied perspective, a relinquishing of his own interpretative integrity: fatigued, and determined to achieve conciliation, he surrenders any remnant of autonomy he possesses. Here K.'s movement parallels Block's trajectory: the merchant's transformation from proud defiance to a debased surrender, signified most apparently by his growing and humiliating dependence on Leni, the advocate's maid, is mirrored in K.'s newfound desire for an absolute and 'decisive' dependence upon the other:

K. had no doubts about the priest's good intentions; it was not impossible that if he were to come down he would make common case with him, it was not impossible that he might receive from him some decisive and acceptable advice. (*The Trial*, p. 165)

Contrary to K.'s certitude, the figure of the priest remains ambiguous and radically indeterminate. The priest is thus similar to the other 'helpers' K. seeks and encounters. This becomes apparent when examining the discourse that ensues the priest's narration of the parable, which itself highlights the role of exegesis: both K.'s and the priest's respective interpretations of the parable examine the interpretative capacities of both the man from the country and the door-keeper. Central to the debate is the notion of truth and perspective: the reliability of each figure in the narrative and whether they have been deceived or not, either by the other or by their own respective, necessarily limited perspectives, comes to the fore.

For some, such as Jacques Derrida, what is crucial about this chapter is its demonstration of the endless proliferation of discourse: '[t]his entire chapter is a prodigious scene of Talmudic exegesis, concerning *Before the Law*, between the priest and K.'²⁷¹ For Derrida the discussion is thus paradigmatic of deconstructive practice, revealing the perpetual play or deferral of meaning. As he puts it elsewhere, '[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely'.²⁷² On the one hand, the priest himself suggests this potential radical play of significance: he seemingly endorses an active heuristic engagement with the parable and repeatedly alludes to alternative interpretations. For instance, he appears to encourage K.'s interpretative agency when he rebukes him not to 'take

²⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Before the Law', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), (p. 217).

²⁷² Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. by David Lodge (New York: Longman, repr. 1993), pp. 108-23 (p. 110).

somebody else's opinion without testing it' (*The Trial*, p. 167). On these lines, the priest seems to echo Nietzsche's attack on the narrow, dogmatic assertion of an absolute notion of truth: Nietzsche assails 'that unconditional will to truth', as '*faith in the ascetic ideal* itself [...] it is the faith in a *metaphysical* value' (*OGM*, p. 119). And, paralleling the discourse surrounding the parable, one method by which Nietzsche undermines this metaphysical value is by arguing for a multiplicity of perspectives: '[t]here are many kinds of eyes. Even the sphinx has eyes - and consequently there are many kinds of "truths", and consequently there is no truth' (*WTP*, p. 291). As Schrift puts it, 'the assertion of a multiplicity of truths effectively deconstructs the epistemological standard of truth as single and univocal'.²⁷³

On the other hand, however, the priest dominates the discourse and ultimately denies K.'s reading of the text. For instance, the priest simultaneously forecloses such interpretative profusion when he chastises K. for having ' "insufficient respect for the written record and [...] [for] altering the narrative" ' (*The Trial*, p. 168). Not only is the priest's authoritative voice asserted, but this claim presupposes privileged access to a transcendental signified free from the threat of interpretative corruption. The priest's appeal to a transcendental signified, to an unconditional truth, is repeated with his invocation of the law's absolute infallibility. Again this manoeuvre seeks to undermine K.'s interpretation: as K. determines the door-keeper's culpability for having deceived the man, the priest confers the functionary with transcendental status, warning K. that ' "to doubt his worthiness is to doubt the law" ' (*The Trial*, p. 168). Presenting the door-keeper as infallible and beyond reproach, the priest's shifting position now controverts Nietzsche's declaration that '[t]he will to truth needs a critique - [...] the value of truth is tentatively to be *called into question*' (*OGM*, p. 120).

What I want to emphasise is that the priest's authoritative appeal to an esoteric knowledge of a transcendental text is accompanied by a persistent combative posture, manifesting in the repeated negation of K.'s perspective. This episode thus highlights that exegesis is a site of agonistic conflict: interpretation is reflective of respective power positions and claims; the text is not a site for the neutral, free play

²⁷³ Schrift, p. 154.

of discourse. For, having guided K. through a number of interpretative orientations, the priest argues: ‘ “[a]t any rate, the figure of the door-keeper is thus interpreted in a way that differs from your opinion” ’ (*The Trial*, p. 169). The priest’s rhetorical strategies thus suggest a resemblance with Nietzsche’s portrayal of the ascetic ideal: according to the thinker, this ‘rejects, denies, affirms, confirms only with reference to its interpretation’ (*OGM*, p. 116). The priest’s strategies thus ultimately seek to deter K. from interpretative engagement: ‘ “I am only telling you the opinions which exist. You must not pay too much attention to opinions. The written word is unalterable, and opinions are often only an expression of despair” ’ (*The Trial*, p. 169). Straus summarises K.’s encounter with the priest:

Joseph’s K. experiences of conversation and language with the priest who recites the story of “Before the Law”, can be read as instances of how the authorizing of certain premises can lock up meanings and destroy understanding, *even* as the author of these premises invites free-play - or in the case of the priest, free will.²⁷⁴

The priest’s defamation of interpretative plurality recalls the advocate Huld’s concluding comments to Block, which similarly seem to deprive the accused of any value of active interpretative engagement. As Block desperately awaits information on his case with regard to the advocate’s discussion with another judge, Huld informs him: ‘ “[t]hat declaration by the judge has no significance at all for you [...]. You wouldn’t understand them anyway, so it’s enough for you to know there are lots of arguments against it” ’ (*The Trial*, p. 153). This comment accompanies and underscores Block’s utter subjugation.

To illustrate the radical instability of authoritative positions, and the interpretative conundrum that K. is subject to, it is worth noting that the priest again invites a Nietzschean reading at the conclusion of the discourse: to undermine K.’s exegesis of the parable, the priest simultaneously subverts the presupposition of an external, validating truth or authority by retorting, ‘ “one does not have to believe everything is true, one only has to believe it is necessary” ’ (*The Trial*, p. 172). Reinforcing the Nietzschean flavour of this discourse, K. responds: ‘ “[d]epressing thought. It makes the lie fundamental to world order” ’ (*The Trial*, p. 172). To apprehend the

²⁷⁴ Straus, p. 386.

devastating impact that the priest's concluding remark has upon K., it is worth following Hawes' point that the priest's statement is 'almost verbatim a Nietzschean formulation'.²⁷⁵ That is, K.'s quest into the nature of the court terminates with the priest's warning which compels K., in Nietzsche's words, '[t]o recognize untruth as a condition of life' (*BGE*, p. 36). For Nietzsche claims that 'without a constant falsification of the world [...] man could not live - that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life and a denial of life' (*BGE*, pp. 35-6). Accordingly, it is through human interpretative activity that we have imposed order upon a world which is 'for all eternity chaos' (*GS*, p. 109): 'for all life is based on appearance, art, deception, point of view, the necessity of perspective and error' (*BT*, p. 8). Logic is one such lie, or anthropomorphism, by means of which humanity has preserved itself.

In Nietzsche's thought this insight may signal a celebration of our creative, interpretative capacity. For instance, in terms of the liberating potential contained in this disclosure, which can be seen as an examination of our inventive strength, Nietzsche claims:

That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely *apparent* character, the necessity of lies.

To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, might be *a divine way of thinking*. (*WTP*, p. 15)

Yet, as James Miller points out, the revelation that the truth is illusory, or a 'kind of fiction', exposes us to the notion that 'everything we hold as solid and certain about the world is, on closer examination, demonstrably accidental, contingent, or false - laws, ideas, philosophies, religions, moralities, everything'.²⁷⁶ In terms of Kafka's novel, it is K.'s 'essential conviction' that the law is 'solid and certain' that is shattered.²⁷⁷ As Kavanagh puts it, K. learns that the 'only functioning code is arbitrary': K. is devastated as the notion of justice, and disclosure of the concrete

²⁷⁵ Hawes, p. 132.

²⁷⁶ James Miller, 'Carnivals of Atrocity: Foucault, Nietzsche, Cruelty', *Political Theory*, 18 (1990), p. 477.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

nature of his charge, seemingly evaporates.²⁷⁸ The thoughts and imagery that dominate the close of the chapter signal K.'s consequent defeat and anticipate his pending execution. He now resembles those passive, impotent defendants whom he had encountered in the corridors whose interpretative capacities were exhausted. Now K. similarly appears overwhelmed by things 'beyond the range of the intellect' (*The Trial*, p. 136):

He was too tired to follow all the deductions that could be drawn from the story; they led him into unaccustomed trains of thought, removed from reality and more suitable for academic discussion among court officials. The simple story had become perplexing, he wanted to be rid of it; and the priest, showing great delicacy of feeling, let him do this. (*The Trial*, p. 172)

K.'s psychological disorientation and dependence is symbolically represented: he is now reliant on the priest to guide him out of the cathedral as he was unable 'to get his bearings in the dark. The lamp in his hand had gone out long ago' (*The Trial*, p. 172). Furthermore, K., who had previously eschewed others' compassion as degrading and debilitating, now invokes the priest's pity and remonstrates when the priest dismisses him as if he 'meant nothing' (*The Trial*, p. 172).

For Straus, Kafka supersedes Nietzsche by exploring the social and psychological repercussions of the 'liberation from stabilized, hegemonic, essentialist, or metaphysical forms of discourse or belief': 'K. learns a gross parody of Nietzsche's lesson: that "Morality [is] a useful error" which K. should abandon along with his longing for "rights" and "justice".'²⁷⁹ Yet, while I echo Straus's endorsement of Kafka's exploration of the nihilistic predicament facing modernity, in my view Nietzsche's thought similarly engages with 'the trauma of nihilism'.²⁸⁰ Indeed, Nietzsche's work offers a means to apprehend K.'s condition in ways which have hitherto remained unexplored: in line with Nietzsche's preoccupation with nihilism and meaningless suffering, K.'s predicament is one characterised by an encounter with excessive, unbearable suffering given that it remains 'senseless'. That is, contrary to Straus's claim, I have argued throughout that Nietzsche remains attentive to the negative and real social and psychological impact of nihilism,

²⁷⁸ Kavanagh, p. 90.

²⁷⁹ Straus, p.382.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 387.

that he simultaneously signals a potentially dangerous condition of disorientation confronting modernity. One relevant passage captures Nietzsche's view of the modern conundrum:

But the tragic thing is that we can no longer *believe* those dogmas of religion and metaphysics, once we have the rigorous method of truth in our hearts and heads, and yet on the other hand, the development of mankind has made us so delicate, sensitive, and ailing that we need the most potent kind of cures and comforts:- hence arises the danger that man might bleed to death from the truth he has recognized. (*HAH*, p. 78)

Nietzsche again stresses that we moderns have developed a particularly heightened sensibility towards suffering. Moreover, he contends that we are now aware that 'for far too long we have interpreted [the world] falsely and mendaciously, [...] that is, according to a need' (*GS*, p. 204). That is, the honesty of the intellectual conscience fostered by Christianity itself has eroded credulity in the ascetic ideal, its metaphysical notions, and its interpretation of suffering. This 'need', Nietzsche points to, is first and foremost in my view, that of conferring suffering with significance. This 'need' remains even though we 'now we realize that the way of the world is not at all divine - even by human standards it is not rational, merciful, or just'; indeed, this 'need' is rendered all the more pressing given that we have become 'so delicate, sensitive, and ailing' (*GS*, p. 204). 'The danger' from which 'man might bleed to death', then, regards unbearable, meaningless suffering. Ridley therefore succinctly observes that with the decline in the ascetic ideal, which 'had succeeded for 2000 and more years in making existence and suffering bearable (by making them, at bottom, illusions)', 'we suddenly find ourselves without those resources which, hitherto, we had used to deal with' suffering.²⁸¹ Nietzsche contends in one notebook entry that '[n]ihilism appears at that point, not that displeasure in existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any "meaning" in suffering, indeed in existence' (*WTP*, p. 35). Nietzsche's work has participated in the deconstruction of the Christian metaphysical picture. However, as noted above, Nietzsche remains cognisant of the ascetic ideal's historical worth in

²⁸¹ Ridley, pp. 9-10.

terms of the preservation of the human species: '[w]ithin it, suffering was given an interpretation; the enormous emptiness seemed filled; the door was shut on all suicidal nihilism' (*OGM*, p. 127). Kafka's depiction of K. in the novel's final chapter is suggestive of the modern predicament given the absence or 'mistrust' in 'any meaning in suffering': K. confronts the senselessness of his trial; the door opens to suicidal nihilism.

A Spectacle of Suffering

Colluding in his execution, the novel's final chapter nevertheless stresses K.'s insistent need to validate himself, to confer meaning upon his existence. His final thoughts emphasise his need to interpretatively redeem his suffering:

'the only thing I can do now is preserve my logical understanding to the end. I always wanted to grab at life, and not with the best of intentions either. That was not right; and am I to show now that not even these proceedings lasting a whole year could teach me anything? Am I to depart as an utterly stupid man? Are they going to say when I have gone that I wanted to end the case at the beginning and that now, at the end, I want it to begin again? I don't want people to say that. I'm thankful they've given me these stupid inarticulate companions for this journey and that they've left it to me to say what has to be said to myself'. (*The Trial*, p. 176)

While K.'s determination to remain logical appears constant, there are aspects of this rumination that reveal a marked shift in K.'s thought, signalling his resignation: he turns his attention outwards to how others will perceive him where previously he had been dismissive of those who had largely appeared hostile or indifferent; his self-reproach has become more general, more all-encompassing, as he censures himself for wanting 'to grab at life'. For Heller and others stressing Kafka's depiction of the ascetic realization of the 'futility of striving', such an admission may be interpreted as evidence of K.'s voluntary renunciation of willing, or desiring: K. is no longer deceived by life but is engaged in 'an effort to dissolve world and self [...] to achieve a state of non-volition'.²⁸² My concern with this view is that it seems to be at odds with K.'s empirical experience of persecution: K.'s sense of agency is not willingly relinquished but rather gradually eroded

²⁸² Heller, p. 76.

by the court's insidious and senseless operations; through a Nietzschean lens, K.'s persistent need to experience himself as an active agent is apparent even at his moment of surrender. That is, the interpretation of his suffering remains his chief concern, as he seeks to bestow it with redemptive significance: to fulfil his interpretative will to power he desires to impose a teleological trajectory upon his experience and so discern that he has grown, that he has learned something.

Nevertheless, K.'s understandable rejection of the thought of the endless repetition of the court's proceedings, apparent in his need to impose an origin and an end to this experience, suggests his current position of weakness or life-negation in Nietzschean terms: K's ruminations evoke, and subsequently repudiate, Nietzsche's thought experiment of the 'eternal recurrence'. That is, as Nietzsche calls this experiment 'the heaviest weight', the notion of eternal recurrence equates to the greatest test of one's capacity to appropriate one's suffering: Nietzsche asks the bearer of this thought to examine their life with the view that 'everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - [...] innumerable times again' (GS, p. 194). With its seemingly extreme responses of despair or affirmation, Nietzsche claims that '[i]f this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you' (GS, p. 194). K's repudiation of the thought of the continuation of the unfathomable, interminable cycle of the court's processes is reflective of his fatigued condition and anticipates his defeat and execution.

Exhausted and denuded of his own interpretative capacity, K.'s guilt, as Mark M. Anderson notes, is 'produced by accusation and the attendant persecution'.²⁸³ As I read it, K. constitutes his own guilt in order to actively interpret his senseless suffering. Yielding to the court's unstable punitive logic allows him to comprehend his distress: he suffers as he has transgressed the law. Like Nietzsche's slaves' heeding the teachings of the ascetic priest, he can 'understand his suffering itself as a *condition of punishment*' (OGM, p. 111). His recourse to finding himself culpable, as a guilty debtor who deserves his punishment, is evident at the novel's denouement.

²⁸³Mark M. Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin De Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 155.

Bernard Williams observes that 'feeling guilty involves the internalization of a figure who is an ideal "victim" or "enforcer" '.²⁸⁴ Noticeably, K. relinquishes his feeble resistance against his guards, and indeed begins to direct the procession towards his death, when a figure resembling Fräulein Burstner 'appeared in front of them' (*The Trial*, p. 175). Furthermore, 'K. was not at all concerned about whether it was Fräulein Burstner or not': 'he wanted to keep her in sight as long as possible, but only because he wanted to keep in mind the reproach she signified for him' (*The Trial*, p. 175). That he projects the figure of Fräulein Burstner, then, signals the presence of a 'victim' or 'enforcer'. With K.'s 'reproach' established, or internalised, K. and the guards cease their pursuit: for K. 'could do without her now' (*The Trial*, p. 176).

Projecting the figure of Fräulein Burstner signals K.'s awareness of having committed a transgression: '[g]uilt is occasioned only by *failing* to honour what we take to be an obligation', as May notes.²⁸⁵ The nature of the 'reproach' that 'she signified for him' is important: earlier in the novel, K. had committed a sexual, predatory attack on Fräulein Burstner in which 'he seized her, and kissed her on the mouth and then all over the face like a thirsty animal' (*The Trial*, p. 23). Fräulein Burstner departs from K.'s embrace as an exhausted, forlorn, defeated figure. There is a shift in K.'s interpretation of this assault: he moves from an initial innocent triumphalism, oblivious to any sense of transgression committed, to one of considered self-reproach. This transformation attends his defeat at the hands of the court. Essential elements of the guilty sensibility are now evident: a victim has been harmed, and acknowledging his status as a debtor, K. is beset by feelings of failure. Furthermore, by invoking the figure of Fräulein Burstner, K. finds his guilt irredeemable. K.'s previous failed attempts to contact the Fräulein reveal that his debt towards her has not been, and cannot be, discharged:

He tried to contact her in several different ways, but she always managed to avoid him. [...]Then he wrote her a letter addressed to her both at her office and at her apartment in which he tried once again to justify his behaviour, offered any satisfaction she might require, promised never to overstep any bounds she might set, and asked only to be given an opportunity to speak to her sometime. (*The Trial*, p. 59)

²⁸⁴ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 89-90.

²⁸⁵ May, p. 59.

As May again notes, the sense of failure that characterises guilt may arise as 'the creditor's terms are not known or even knowable, or because repayment has no conceivable terminus'.²⁸⁶ Thus, even though K. 'had promised to defer to her wishes in everything', there is no response, not even 'to tell him why she could not grant his request' (*The Trial*, p. 59). K., who 'did not want to be obliged to anyone' (*The Trial*, p. 27), has not repaid his dues and has not even attained clarity with regards to the gravity of his misdemeanour: Fräulein Burstner does not 'appear' again in the novel until this point.

Indeed, recalling K.'s earlier vision of the apotheosized Elsa within his retributive fantasy, Fräulein Burstner's ghostly appearance is suggestive of the elevated, deified status that she now assumes for K. . With this point in mind, the carnal, sexualised nature of the violation K. perpetrates takes on added significance in pointing to his irredeemable culpability. For there is a parallel with K.'s crime and Nietzsche's analysis of guilt in his discussion of the ascetic ideal: for the Christian it is the corrupt essence of carnal embodiment that forecloses the possibility of fully discharging one's debts before God, the pure, transcendent deity. Nietzsche contends:

You will already have guessed *what* has really gone on with all this and *behind* all this: he seizes upon the ultimate antithesis he can find to his real and irredeemable animal instincts, he re-interprets these self-same animal instincts as guilt before God. (*OGM*, p. 68)

Accordingly, man is comparatively corrupt and inferior, forever subject to being betrayed by his recalcitrant drives as he seeks to imitate or become one with the transcendent deity: bound to inevitable failure, man is thus forever guilty. As Nietzsche argues, '[g]uilt towards *God*' allows man 'to feel the palpable certainty of his own absolute unworthiness' (*OGM*, p. 68). Corroborating K.'s resolve to find himself worthless in contradistinction to his own deified creditor, the novel repeatedly associates the sexual

²⁸⁶ May, p. 59. This parallels the nature of K.'s guilt towards the court: not knowing the specificity of his crime, 'the creditor's terms are not known or even knowable, or because repayment has no conceivable terminus.'

with depravity and decay as it depicts erotic encounters through predatory, animalistic imagery.²⁸⁷

Furthermore, Nietzsche holds that guilt exemplifies the 'will to torment oneself, that suppressed cruelty of animal man' that has 'seized on religious precepts in order to provide his self-torture with its most horrible hardness and sharpness' (*OGM*, p. 68). Critics such as Anna Katharina Schaffner, Margot Norris, and Annie Ring have investigated sadomasochistic themes in Kafka's oeuvre by appealing to thinkers such as Freud, Kraft-Ebing, and Giles Deleuze.²⁸⁸ By contending that civilized man is constituted by a sado-masochistic subjectivity, Nietzsche anticipates much of this field of thought. Bringing Nietzsche's insights upon self-directed cruelty into this discussion offers further analytic tools to bring to Kafka's novel: for the beleaguered protagonist, not only does the perpetration of sado-masochistic acts enable him to experience some form of a pathos of agency, but it also, according to Nietzsche, fulfils the primary urge to inflict suffering. I shall briefly contextualize these claims.

As noted above, Nietzsche hypothesises in the *Genealogy* that the incipience of primordial, collective living entails the necessary repression of our primary aggressive and anti-social instinctive drives.²⁸⁹ Brian Leiter therefore notes, in Nietzsche's account 'instinctual energy does not simply vanish: it must be continuously discharged somehow'.²⁹⁰ Thus, unable to freely discharge these aggressive urges in the social sphere, Nietzsche contends that the 'internalization' of these instincts is unavoidably traumatic. For an exceptional minority the inward-turning of these drives provides a 'pregnant' potential for future development: Nietzsche valorises the self-reflexive 'pleasure of making suffer' in which the self discharge its cruel instincts in the project of giving 'form' to itself (*OGM*, p. 64).²⁹¹ Yet while Nietzsche embraces self-violation as a practice of self-cultivation, he is ambivalent, however, about the development of guilt among the majority of sick, self-lacerating creatures: the priest may encourage the intensification of

²⁸⁷ See, for example, *The Trial*, p. 44; p. 112.

²⁸⁸ Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion: Sexual Deviance in Sexology and Literature, 1850-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Margot Norris, 'Sadism and Masochism in Two Kafka Stories: 'In Der Strafkolonie' and 'Ein Hungerkünstler' ', *MLN*, (1978); Ring.

²⁸⁹ See p. 43 of this thesis.

²⁹⁰ Brian Leiter, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 234.

²⁹¹ See p. 52 of this thesis.

self-cruelty for ‘the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance and self-overcoming’ (*OGM*, p. 100), however, the absolute nature of guilt towards a deity is, for Nietzsche, where self-terrorization ‘reached its most terrible and sublime peak’ (*OGM*, p. 64). Furthermore, guilt aims at life-denying as opposed to life-enhancing ends: rather than seeking to integrate and harness our drives and affects, the ascetic ideal encourages the extirpation of our ‘irredeemable animal instincts’ (*OGM*, p. 68).

Given that Nietzsche posits that man has indelible cruel instincts, and that civilization is borne from the inward-turning of these drives, it is no surprise that Nietzsche argues that ‘one should open one’s eyes and take a new look at cruelty’: there is ‘an abundant, over-abundant enjoyment of one’s own suffering, of making oneself suffer’ (*BGE*, p. 159). In both life-denying and life-enhancing forms of self-inflicted cruelty, the masochist is ‘split within himself’ and is gratified by identifying with the perpetrator of suffering. In a passage from *Daybreak* Nietzsche apprehends the ascetic’s self-directed cruelty as more sophisticated than the crude, externally-directed cruelty perpetrated by the barbarian:

The triumph of the ascetic over himself, his glance turned inwards which beholds man split asunder into sufferer and a spectator, and henceforth gazes out into the outer world only in order to gather as it were wood for his own pyre, this final tragedy of the drive for distinction in which there is only one character burning and consuming himself - this is a worthy conclusion and one appropriate to the commencement: in both cases an unspeakable happiness at the *sight of torment!* (*D*, p. 113)

‘Split off from him- or herself as the suffering object’, there is possible pleasure in identifying with the inflictor of suffering, as Janaway notes.²⁹² The fundamental drive to inflict suffering is thus gratified.

In the novel, K.’s masochistic proclivity is evinced at moments of great distress: K. inflicts, or considers perpetrating, suffering upon himself as a means to claim some form of agency when particularly threatened by a paralysing impotence.²⁹³ K.’s self-incrimination thus permits him to fulfil the instinctive drive to perpetrate cruelty,

²⁹² Janaway, p. 126.

²⁹³ For example, K. considers offering himself to the whipper for punishment in place of the guards because he feels powerless to prevent their whipping. See *The Trial*, pp. 69-70.

albeit on himself, when his sense of agency is most threatened. Schaffner's comment is insightful: 'Kafka's characters resort to masochistic survival strategies, investing the menace with pleasure so as to regain a modicum of control over their lives.'²⁹⁴

However, ultimately this sensation of power seems to be denied K. at the moment of his greatest need, namely at his execution scene: K.'s absolute defeat is signalled as he fails to assume the position of perpetrator, or witness, of his own suffering. The fatal blow is beyond K. and is performed by the guards:

K. was perfectly aware it was supposed to be his duty to seize the knife as it hovered from hand to hand above him and drive it into himself. But he did not do this [...] He was not able to prove his own worth completely. (*The Trial*, p. 177)

K.'s ignominy is confirmed by the final denudation of his claim to agency. His interpretative power is similarly extinguished at the end, as it is the 'stupid inarticulate' guards whose voice he last hears, denying him the final chance to impact his reception (*The Trial*, p. 177). Like Block before Huld, K.'s ignominious execution is similarly expressed: he dies 'like a dog'.

For Robertson, the novel's tragedy lies 'in the fact that Josef K.'s sense of shared humanity awakens only in the last minute of his life'.²⁹⁵ Hawes shares this notion, claiming that K. similarly sees 'a vision of the human community he has failed so conspicuously to attain'.²⁹⁶ Hawes in particular implies that at the final moment K. can understand his guilt. I agree with Ziolkowski's assessment, however: 'K. is summarily executed "like a dog" with no understanding or clarification of his guilt'.²⁹⁷ K.'s invocation of Fräulein Burstner registers his own desperate attempt to clarify his guilt, to avert senseless suffering: K. constitutes his own guilt given the absence of an actual charge. And his concluding, desperate plea suggests that he remains uncertain, unconvinced of his complicity in this constitution of his guilt: '[w]ere there still objections which had been forgotten? Certainly there were. [...] Where was the judge he had never seen? Where was the high court he had never reached?' (*The Trial*, p.

²⁹⁴ Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller, *Modernist Eroticisms: European Literature after Sexology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 85.

²⁹⁵ Robertson, p. 129.

²⁹⁶ Hawes, p. 146.

²⁹⁷ Ziolkowski, p. 240.

178). K.'s death is dismal, remaining uncoded by the court authority that now operates secretly, transporting him to an empty industrial wasteland. In my opinion, Robertson and Hawes are engaged in the 'human-all-too-human' project of conferring significance upon K.'s brutal and abject end: providing a redemptive inflection of K.'s execution seems at odds with the novel's insistence of the senselessness of the process, from K.'s point of view. That is, as suggested at his first tribunal, the process that induces K.'s suicidal execution may in fact be based on nothing more than that of mistaken identity. Thus, borrowing Deleuze and Guattari's words, the respective readings proffered by Hawes and Robertson appear 'unsustainable on the basis of the novel's overall architecture and movement'.²⁹⁸

I would argue that K.'s preoccupation with, or his projection of, others at the scene of his execution is reflective of the very fact that he cannot escape cognisance of its senselessness: overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of his suffering, and incapable of performing the fatal blow himself to reclaim some sense of agency, his final recourse is to consider his suffering as a cruel spectacle for others' pleasure. My argument derives from Nietzsche's claim that 'the primitive logic' that ' "[a]ll evil is justified if a god takes pleasure in it" [...] still penetrates into our European civilization!' (*OGM*, p. 48). According to Nietzsche, the ancients shielded themselves from the nauseating truth of the pointless horror of existence by considering their suffering as a cruel spectacle for the Gods' enjoyment:

In order to rid the world of concealed, undiscovered, unseen suffering and deny it in all honesty, people were then practically obliged to invent Gods and intermediate beings at every level, in short, something which roamed round in obscurity, which could see in the dark and which would not miss out on an interesting spectacle of pain so easily. With the aid of such inventions, life then played the trick which it has always known how to play, of justifying itself, justifying its 'evil'. (*OGM*, p. 48)

Obscure, indeterminate figures appear in the murky twilight at K.'s actual moment of execution. Tellingly, K. had previously shunned any public exhibition of self-loss as shameful. Yet, in contradistinction to his constant hostility towards the profusion of

²⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 44.

spectators who recurrently appear to witness his distress throughout the text, K. now protests at their absence: as he surveys the theatrically costumed executioners, he reflects that '[t]hey want to get rid of me cheaply'; he remonstrates, '[w]hy did they send just you!' (*The Trial*, p. 174). And yet, underlining K.'s utter abjection and impotence, I would argue that he does not provide an exhibition for his ghostly spectators to enjoy: his ignominious lack of resistance parallels Block's earlier humiliating subjugation, which K. himself, as a spectator, found repugnant.²⁹⁹

By bringing Nietzsche's insights to my reading of Kafka's *The Trial*, I have emphasised K.'s persistent need to bestow his suffering with some form of significance. Doing so, I offer a new reading of the novel and also reconsider the relevance of Nietzsche's thought to this text. I have thus pointed to the role of interpretative activity in the novel and argued that the court primarily thwarts the defendants' exegetical capacity: the accused are reduced to a state of paralysis and dependence as they fail to comprehend the charges brought against them. Given that K. is besieged by the court's insidious and overpowering forces, I have read K.'s self-culpabilisation as signalling both his active attempt to reclaim some form of meaning and hence agency, as well as his surrender. Finally, as the novel's action remains radically indeterminate until the very last moment, I have suggested that even the self-incrimination that precipitates his complicity in his own execution remains inadequate: his preoccupation with his need to justify his senseless, unredeemable suffering therefore constitutes the novel's theatrical denouement. This consideration of the role of the spectator that is central to the final chapter's hyperbolic theatricality is prevalent in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. Furthermore, the inflated attention drawn to the artifice of the execution scene, pointing to the co-existence of art and the brutal ugliness of life, evoke Nietzsche's thought on the role of tragic art. As I now turn to examine Beckett's play in relation to suffering and nihilism, I shall illustrate that not only is the senseless and the unpalatable theatrically represented, but the play also echoes Nietzsche's views on ancient tragedy by calling attention to the role of art to justify life's horror.

²⁹⁹ See *The Trial*, pp. 149-150. This point recalls Nietzsche's view in *Daybreak* that 'one does not want to see a contemptible creature suffer, there is no enjoyment in that' (*D*, p. 86).

Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and the Economy of *Ressentiment*

And it is like the end of a tragedy in the theatre. The stage is strewn with dead bodies, worse still, meaningless bodies, and the curtain comes down.....

[...]. Utmost inertia falls on the remaining protagonists. Yet we have to carry on.

D.H. Lawrence, 'A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*'

Introduction: Theatre of Suffering

Hamm's opening soliloquy gestures towards the play's principal themes and points to one of the central predicaments that govern the drama:

HAMM: Enough, it's time it ended, in the refuge too. *[Pause.]* And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to ... to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to - *[he yawns]* - to end. God, I'm tired, I'd be better off in bed. (*Endgame*, p. 93)³⁰⁰

Exemplified by a suicidal desire that will remain unfulfilled, Hamm's fatigue recalls the state of paralysis that characterises K.'s ignominious death in Kafka's *The Trial*. This desire to end coupled with the incapacity to actualise this wish recurs throughout Beckett's *Endgame*, performing a central tension in a play characterised by constant strains and ambiguities. This predicament suggests one of the possible significances of the play's title.

Hamm's meta-theatrical opening words, '[m]e - *[he yawns]* - to play', resonates with K.'s theatrical execution: both Hamm and K. corroborate Nietzsche's apprehension of the 'human-all-too-human' need for a witness to human suffering (*Endgame*, p. 93). That is, as I shall explore in greater depth below, this self-conscious performativity is directly related to the characters' experience as chronic sufferers: Beckett, like Kafka, dramatizes

³⁰⁰ Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber, 1990), p. 93. All subsequent references relate to this edition.

the characters' various strategies to appropriate their useless suffering, including that of invoking and implicating the audience in the characters' exegetical impasse.

The philosopher Stanley Cavell notes the link between suffering and performativity: '[i]t is a play performed not by actors, but by sufferers'.³⁰¹ Hamm's opening, self-reflexive soliloquy may possess a hyperbolic quality, yet it also serves to point to the centrality of suffering in the drama:

HAMM: Can there be misery - [*he yawns*] - loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now? [*Pause.*] My father? [*Pause.*] My mother? [*Pause.*] My ... dog? [*Pause.*] Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine? No doubt. [*Pause.*] No, all is a – [*he yawns*] - bsolute, [*proudly*] the bigger a man is the fuller he is. [*Pause. Gloomily.*] And the emptier.
(*Endgame*, p. 93)

As the play continually complicates the question of sympathetic identification between characters and between characters and the audience, this speech adumbrates the import of the theme of the sufferer's radical ontological isolation in *Endgame*. This has significant ethical implications which I shall examine by appealing to Nietzsche's thought on suffering, sympathy, and cruelty.

Endgame is preoccupied with pain and cruelty, entropy and impotence. Beckett's characters are ageing, fragmented subjects who, as Clov puts it, are 'dying from their wounds' (*Endgame*, p. 131). For instance, the drama both begins and ends with Hamm apostrophizing his handkerchief, 'old Stancher'. In his examination of the etymology of the verb stanch, Beckett scholar Russell Smith reveals both its relation to mourning as well as to its contemporary meaning, 'to stop the flow of blood'.³⁰² I shall show that, as in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley*, these wounded characters deploy defensive and recuperative strategies in a struggle for mastery, to attain some form of self-coherence, to prevent further spillage of selfhood.

The refuge itself, as a space, epitomizes such defensive withdrawal and self-enclosure. Furthermore, the claustrophobic setting of the shelter, combined with the characters'

³⁰¹ Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 158.

³⁰² Russell Smith, 'Endgame's Reminders', in *Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, ed. by Mark S. Byron and Michael J. Meyer (New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 99-120 (p. 100).

physical confinement, evoke Elaine Scarry's observation on the phenomenology of pain as the shrinking of the self's universe: Clov is the play's only mobile character; Hamm is blind, paralysed and wheel-chair bound; Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, are legless and living in dust-bins.³⁰³ Human existence in this play, then, as throughout the Beckettian world, is constituted through suffering and loss. As I attend to the sense of suffering and loss that permeates *Endgame*, I shall signal the relevance of Nietzsche given that his philosophy was particularly preoccupied with analysing the psychology of the crushed, the impotent and the sick.

In the first part of my discussion I shall focus on sketching the characters' experience of passive, chronic suffering. Here I shall observe the characters' recourse to defensive, restricted economies which I shall discuss with reference to Nietzsche's analysis of *ressentiment*. I shall then turn to consider the characters' recuperative strategies, particularly focusing on the role of narrative in the play. However, as I note the characters' failed attempts to constitute an efficacious, willing selfhood through narrative, I shall then turn to approach the pervasive appearance of cruelty in the play.

Cruelty and narrative intertwine in *Endgame*. Katherine White's analysis of the content of Hamm's narrative is pertinent:

Hamm is a storyteller, reiterating tales of pain and misery. These stories may be an attempt to pass the time, but they may also provide relief by dwelling on a fictitious person's despair, the suffering of oneself may be momentarily alleviated.³⁰⁴

Hamm 'appears to take satisfaction in the knowledge that others also endure suffering', according to White.³⁰⁵ Yet while White asserts that Hamm is able to palliate his own pain through his fictions, she does not explore how his narratives of suffering operate to do so and thus allow him to avert the prospect of suicidal nihilism. I shall thus invoke Nietzsche's thought on cruelty to explain this phenomenon, suggesting ways in which the play's seemingly gratuitous cruelty works to sustain the fatigued characters.

³⁰³ Scarry, p. 32.

³⁰⁴ Kathryn White, *Beckett and Decay* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 14.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Dying from their Wounds

The world outside of the shelter is, according to Hamm, 'corpsed'. This vision of the world depicted in *Endgame* may be taken to be representative of a post-apocalyptic scenario. Theodor Adorno, for instance, relates the play's barrenness to the devastation wrought by World War Two.³⁰⁶ Pursuing this reading would allow one to situate *Endgame* along with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in terms of their respective depictions of post-war nihilism. However, by recalling that Nietzsche holds that our particular interpretative perspectives are embodied, that they are symptomatic of the particular physiological constitution of the beholder, it is possible to argue that the characters' bleak outlook can be related to their overriding physical deterioration and exhaustion. After all, as the critic Mary Catanzaro puts it, Hamm is 'the consummate picture of tired ennui'.³⁰⁷ Perhaps the best place to begin to explore this notion of perspectival outlook in the play is by turning to Hamm's reminiscing of his visit to the madman who, in perceiving the world as 'ashen', seems to echo or presage the characters' habitation of a 'corpsed' world.

Thomas Dilworth and Christopher Langlois note that Hamm's remembered visit to the madman occurs at the centre of *Endgame*.³⁰⁸ They thus contend that as 'middleness is thematically emphasized' throughout the play, Beckett is gesturing towards its significance to the play as a whole. Furthermore, Dilworth and Langlois identify the appearance of the madman in *Endgame* to signal the relevance of Nietzsche to this particular work. These critics stress Beckett's antagonism towards Nietzsche, noting 'Beckett establishes his play as thoroughgoing contradiction of the Nietzschean optimism about the putative nonexistence of God'.³⁰⁹ Accordingly, Hamm's depressing, apocalyptic mediation of the madman's vision is to be primarily read as a rebuttal of Nietzsche's supposed celebration of God's death as it is pronounced by the fictional madman in the market-place. However, I hold that this view not only fails to attend to the profound ambivalence conveyed towards God's death by Nietzsche, here in *The Gay Science* and throughout his oeuvre, but it also sells short the relevance of his thought to *Endgame*.

³⁰⁶ Scarry, p. 32.

³⁰⁷ Mary F. Catanzaro, 'Masking and the Social Construct of the Body in Beckett's *Endgame*', in *Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, ed. by Mark S. Byron and Michael J. Meyer (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2007), p. 165 (p. 185).

³⁰⁸ Thomas Dilworth, 'The Nietzschean Madman in Beckett's *Endgame*', *Explicator*, 65 (2007), 168.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

It is important to observe that Nietzsche's madman also warns of a devastating disorientation attending God's death. For example, the madman quizzes his indifferent market-place audience: '[w]here are we moving to? [...] Aren't we straying through an infinite nothing?' (GS, p. 120). Nietzsche's passage suggests a deep ambivalence towards this 'event'. Nietzsche's writing consistently registers this tension. For example, as I have claimed in chapter one, Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy* that the ascetic ideal has persisted as it both presents a direction or goal to motivate human willing, and it also offers the cognitive means to appropriate human suffering. Thus, while Nietzsche may celebrate the potential exhilarating liberation that God's death may signify for those 'free spirits', he is also cognisant that the loss of transcendental orientation points may signal a collapse into what he calls 'passive nihilism'. What is more, it is clear from this passage that the madman questions humanity's capacity to supplant God, to confer new direction or a new meaning to life: '[i]s the magnitude of this event not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?' (GS, pp. 119-120). I will return to consider the ways in which the play captures the characters' response to God's 'decomposition' and their struggle to replace Him and 'become like gods'. Before examining the play's dramatization of this loss of transcendental narrative and the psycho-psychological nihilism that attends the experience of meaningless suffering, I will briefly register an alternative apprehension of nihilism with regard to Nietzsche's famous passage, expounded by the critic J. Hillis Miller.

Miller's interpretation of the madman's passage in *The Gay Science*, which argues that nihilism is related to a particularly modern perspective, provides an entry point for a consideration of the connection between Nietzsche's and Hamm's respective madmen. According to Miller's reading of Nietzsche's pronouncement of God's death, modernity sees man becoming the centre of meaning, supplanting God.³¹⁰ However, rather than celebrate this development, Miller bemoans the unrestrained growth of man's imperialistic ego, relativizing all. For Miller argues that as '[t]he will wants to assimilate everything to itself, to make everything a reflection within its mirror',³¹¹ there is a resultant loss of the objective world. Miller consequently claims: '[w]hen everything exists

³¹⁰ Miller, p. 3.

³¹¹ Ibid. p. 4.

only as reflected in the ego, then man has drunk up the sea.’³¹² In other words, ‘[n]ihilism is the nothingness of consciousness when consciousness becomes the foundation of everything.’³¹³ Having noted Miller’s observations, I will now attend to this nihilistic, narcissistic-relativism that Miller identifies as it manifests in Beckett’s drama, and associate this perspective with that of the chronic sufferer.

In *Endgame*, the contrasting perspectives held by Hamm and the madman whom he visited suggests that one’s relationship to the outside world is constituted by one’s own particular consciousness:

HAMM: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter - and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! [*Pause.*] He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. [*Pause.*] He alone had been spared. [*Pause.*] Forgotten. [*Pause.*] It appears the case is ... was not so ... so unusual. (*Endgame*, p. 113)

Hamm’s perceptions of abundant life, of ‘that rising corn’ and the ‘sails of the herring fleet’, diverge dramatically from the madman’s barren vision. These antithetical views, held respectively by Hamm and the madman, evoke Nietzsche’s claim that ‘[t]here is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing” ’ (OGM, p. 92). For Nietzsche, ‘knowing’ is an active interpreting and evaluating; it is a means to secure one’s place in the world and attain mastery over the basic conditions of life. For, as he succinctly puts it, ‘all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation’ (OGM, p. 55). One’s perspective is symptomatic, then, of one’s will to power, of one’s strength to interpret, to confer meaning. Furthermore, as I shall argue in the central part of my discussion, for Nietzsche this exegetical or perspectival orientation is apprehended as an aesthetic activity. It is thus telling that the madman who considers the world as ‘ashen’ is no longer a painter or engraver: he has lost his creative or heuristic capacity. As Nietzsche puts it, ‘[t]his same species of man, grown one stage poorer, no longer possessing the strength to interpret, create fictions, produces nihilists’ (WTP, p. 317). Attending this loss of interpretative or

³¹² Ibid. p. 3.

³¹³ Ibid.

creative capacity, the correlative loss of effectual selfhood is apparent in the withdrawn, reclusive state of Hamm's madman.

Tellingly, as Francis Doherty points out, insofar as Hamm observes that the madman's 'case is...was not so unusual', he 'disallows the possibility of treating him as mad, but allows the possibility for this unusual view to be shared by many'.³¹⁴ That the characters come to share the madman's perspective of an 'ashen' world is reinforced by their similar adoption of defensive, withdrawn postures. I shall now turn to explore the characters' self-protective strategies and postures and relate these to their experience of chronic suffering.

While the shelter has been variously interpreted by commentators, it may also simply figure as an extension of the self. As Scarry argues when discussing rooms generally:

In normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter [...] keeps warm and safe the individual it houses in the same way the body encloses and protects the individual within; like the body, its walls put boundaries around the self preventing undifferentiated contact with the world.³¹⁵

Hamm's desperate insistence upon a return to the centre when taken on his spin round the room points to an excessive vulnerability to the other and the outside world:

HAMM: Do you hear? [*He strikes the wall with his knuckles.*] Do you hear? Hollow bricks! [*He strikes again.*] All that's hollow! [*Pause. He straightens up. Violently.*] That's enough. Back! (*Endgame*, p104)

With Scarry's view of the room in mind, Hamm's distress at finding the walls 'hollow' suggests a fear of permeability. Here resembling Lawrence's portrayal of the paralysed Clifford Chatterley, Hamm's urgent injunction to return to the centre similarly suggests a fragility that requires a defensive foreclosure of contact with otherness. What is more, despite being apparently sealed from the 'corpsed' world outside, the characters are aware that they remain part of natural processes. The refuge, and hence the self, remains porous, subject to natural ageing and decay, as this exchange illustrates:

³¹⁴ Francis Michael Doherty, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 100.

³¹⁵ Scarry, p. 38.

HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate.

CLOV: In the vicinity

HAMM: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!

(*Endgame*, p. 97)

This notion of the fragile boundaries of selfhood subject to natural dissolution evokes Nietzsche's binary of Apollo and Dionysus as he describes them in *The Birth of Tragedy*: Apollo, on the one hand, symbolizes the illusory boundaries of individual identity that allow us to conceive of a self and to function in an ordered world; Dionysus, on the other, represents nature's abundant, excessive forces that overwhelm and ultimately collapse this *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation). While I discussed the Dionysian and the rupture of individual boundaries in the Lawrence chapter in terms of the erotic encounter, here I shift my emphasis to apprehend the Dionysian in terms of pain and decay, similarly operating to fragment the ego and dissolve the self's pursuit of self-contained identity. In other words, the god that Nietzsche holds to symbolize life's abundance and regenerative potency also brings cognisance of time's inexorable movement and a painful awareness of our own finitude: Dionysian tragic wisdom, as Nietzsche puts it, 'wishes us to acknowledge that everything comes into being must be prepared to face a sorrowful end' (*BT*, p. 80). Michael Worton comments, in line with Nietzsche's view of the Dionysian, that '[i]f our one certain reality is that "we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" , this truth is very difficult to accept emotionally.'³¹⁶

A number of critics have focussed on the characters' struggle to digest what I have referred to in terms of Dionysian knowledge. For instance, in what Judith Roof calls a 'tragedy of perpetual loss', she claims that '[t]he characters perceive their fragmentation in relation to a past wholeness.'³¹⁷ That is, the characters' evince a particularly heightened sensitivity to loss, suggesting an inability to absorb and recover from their decrepitude and pain. This observation echoes Freud's notion of melancholia which, as Jonathan Boulter discerns, signals incapacity to appropriate one's losses in coherent

³¹⁶ Michael Worton, 'Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Theatre as Text', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. by John Pilling (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 67-87 (p. 72).

³¹⁷ Judith A. Roof, 'A Blink in the Mirror: Oedipus and Narcissus in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*', in *Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Steven Connor (London: MacMillan, 1992), pp. 141-49 (p. 145).

narrative form.³¹⁸ I shall return to the crucial point of narrative below, but here wish to emphasise Roof's claim by noting Boulter's assertion that the melancholic is 'continually haunted by loss, by history'.³¹⁹ The director Hector Blau similarly observes that an awareness of inexorable loss and decay is apparent 'even at the start': Clov's opening speech upon the 'impossible heap' of grain signals 'nothing but loss, ineluctable and pitiless loss' according to Blau.³²⁰ For Hamm, change is perceived solely as deterioration. Sylvie Henning similarly observes that 'Hamm acquires a more simply negative, and even destructive, view of nature'.³²¹ Hamm's perspective is thus partial, echoing his madman's limited, nihilistic vision: Hamm lacks a more inclusive vision of life's total economy, one that would encompass loss and gain, death and birth, and growth or enhancement as well as decay. In other words, he has lost sight of the vision of the 'herring fleet' that had earlier differentiated his perspective from the madman. In Nietzsche's idiom, Hamm evinces a 'low valuation of all that becomes': he derides life as becoming, as change, as this, Nietzsche notes, is a source of suffering (*WTP*, p. 317). Significantly, Nietzsche argues such an evaluative position, one that conceives of life solely in these terms, derives from physiological suffering and impotence: '[w]hat kind of man reflects in this way? An unproductive, suffering kind, a kind weary of life' (*WTP*, p. 317).

Hamm's hostility to the natural world can be illustrated in a related exchange which also implies an excessive vulnerability to the other:

HAMM: You stink already. The whole place stinks of corpses.

CLOV: The whole universe.

HAMM: [*Angrily.*] To hell with the universe! (*Endgame*, p. 114)

This outburst recalls Hamm's opening soliloquy and the first, harsh words addressed to Clov: '[y]ou pollute the air!' (*Endgame*, pp. 92-3). Hamm cannot voluntarily deny his sense of smell; the other and the world at large are considered perfidious contaminants. Indeed, his frustrated, impotent condemnation of the world and his

³¹⁸Jonathan Boulter, *Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 45.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰Herbert Blau, *Sails of the Herring Fleet: Essays on Beckett* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2004), p. 97.

³²¹ Sylvie Debevic Henning, 'Endgame: On the Play of Nature', in *Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Steven Connor (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 100-18 (p. 107).

servant evokes Nietzsche's analysis of reactive *ressentiment* in the *Genealogy*. Focussing upon the physiological-psychological perspective of the powerless slaves in antiquity, Nietzsche characterises this perspective to express a hostility to 'everything that is "outside", "other", "non-self" ' (OGM, p. 21). Moreover, it cannot be overstated that Nietzsche treats this principle of negation to derive from a particularly heightened sensitivity to suffering: '[t]he instinctive hatred of reality: a consequence of an extreme capacity for suffering and excitement which no longer wants any contact at all because it feels every contact too deeply' (TI & AC, p. 30). In a cognate passage from *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche elaborates upon this point and claims that such sensitivity is one of the effects of prolonged illness:

If anything whatever has to be admitted against being sick, being weak, it is that in these conditions the actual curative instinct, that is to say the *defensive and offensive instinct* in man becomes soft. One does not know how to get free of anything, one does not know how to have done with anything, one does not know how to thrust back - everything hurts. Men and things come importunately close, events strike too deep, the memory is a festering wound. Being sick *is* itself a kind of *ressentiment*. (EH, p. 15)

Endgame dramatizes Nietzsche's observations on the psychology of those afflicted by the 'festering wound' of their memories in relation to blame and forgiveness. Nietzsche's connection of an 'instinctive hatred of reality' to a heightened sensitivity to others is relevant here. This sensibility entails a consequent defensive withdrawal from such contact. With regards to Hamm this series of points can be readily evinced by focussing upon his relationship to his parents. Representing his past, his lineage, his embodiedness, it is significant that his parents, too, are perceived as corporeal invaders disturbing Hamm's desire for cerebral self-enclosure, or what Henning calls 'Hamm's solipsistic dreaming'.³²² His parents are a painful intrusion, rupturing his attempt to attain a sealed, self-identical self-relation; they 'come importunately close' and largely signal further loss of selfhood. Hamm's subsequent order to Clov to violently eject Nagg and Nell is commented upon by Cavell: '[t]he old father and mother with no useful functions any more are among the waste of society, dependent upon the generation they have bred, which in turn resents them for their

³²² Ibid. p. 111.

uselessness and dependency.³²³ Suggesting that Hamm is governed by a calculative rationality which seeks a useful return for any expenditure or loss, Cavell's point echoes Henning's observations on Hamm's hostility towards natural decay and thus to life per se. Henning acutely discerns Hamm's view of the natural world: '[i]f there is neither absolute gain, nor anything free of change (and therefore of loss), better that the natural process should not exist at all'.³²⁴ Both Cavell's and Henning's observations echo Nietzsche's analysis of the calculative reasoning that characterizes the ascetic ideal, thus suggesting Hamm's position of weakness or hunger in Nietzsche's parlance, rather than one of affirmative strength or abundance: the philosopher posits that the notion of a transcendental world and the cognate notion of a permanent soul are dictated by the need to avert the unpalatable consideration of the self's complete expenditure.³²⁵ This prudential, calculative reasoning permeates *Endgame*. It can also be said that this perspective exemplifies an excessively Apollonian rationalization of life which seeks to deny Dionysian, tragic knowledge. Clov, like his master, can be defined by his desire for self-enclosure. His drive for withdrawal is similarly motivated by the need to assuage pain. As such, the theatre director Blau, in a retrospective of a production, explains the effort 'to seal him [Clov] off as much as possible from the air, the world, the presence of others, who are the source of pain'.³²⁶

Not only do the characters suffer from physiological deterioration and various related ailments, but, as Blau hints at, their interrelationships themselves are abusive, retaliatory and are clearly sources of pain for all concerned. Speaking of Hamm and Clov, Laura Salisbury describes them to be '[b]ound in what seems like a master-slave dialectic of violent hatred and mutual dependence'.³²⁷ The implicit masochistic dimension contained in his continued loyalty to Hamm confounds Clov. He petitions Hamm:

³²³ Cavell, p. 117.

³²⁴ Henning, p. 107.

³²⁵ See my discussion of the ascetic ideal on page 50.

³²⁶ Blau, p. 75.

³²⁷ Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 113.

CLOV: There's one thing I'll never understand. [*He gets down.*] Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me? (*Endgame*, p. 129)

This pivotal point in the play, in which Clov quizzes Hamm as to why he stays, signals not only Clov's continued dependence, but also the characters' need to account for their suffering.

One possible reason as to why the characters sustain their combative and cruel relationships is suggested in the final exchange between Hamm and Clov. This exchange features a logic of indebtedness or obligation that is also suggestive of the origin of Clov's subordinate position:

HAMM: I'm obliged to you, Clov. For your services:

CLOV: [Turning, sharply.] Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you.

HAMM: It's we are obliged to each other. (*Endgame*, p. 132)

That this logic may underpin the characters' co-dependence seems consistent with their mutual desire to achieve a causal or logical closure such as that provided by a contractual structure. Clov, after all, 'love[s] order' (*Endgame*, p. 120). That is, echoing my discussion of the characters' preoccupation with the fear of loss with regard to the natural processes of decay, this contractual logic of indebtedness is emblematic of a calculative rationality that promises the recuperation or augmentation of selfhood: all losses return within a closed, bound system. Furthermore, in linking Hamm's chronicle to his possible adoption of Clov, Paul Lawley observes that Hamm seeks to dominate and manipulate Clov by drawing attention to the latter's sense of indebtedness. As Lawley puts it, '[t]he adopted child is expected to feel that he owes a debt because he was *chosen*'.³²⁸ Hamm thus invokes notions of indebtedness in which he configures himself as a parental creditor who should be recompensed: '[u]pon an adopted son he can bring to bear a pressure of obligation', as Lawley notes.³²⁹ Clov, then, may rationally apprehend his suffering, or his continued dependence upon Hamm, in terms of his indebtedness.

Through a Nietzschean lens, Hamm and Clov's relationship can thus be seen to illustrate the pertinacity of primeval contractual relations, 'the oldest and most primitive personal

³²⁸ Paul Lawley, 'Adoption in *Endgame*', in *Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Steven Connor (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 119-27 (p. 120).

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

relationship there is' (*OGM*, p. 49). And yet, in a play that operates through a series of tensions and ambiguities, this logic repeatedly dissolves. Not only do the characters appear to inexplicably reverse roles, but notions of obligation are themselves shown to be inherently unreliable. For instance, when Nagg complains of being denied a promised Turkish Delight 'in return for a kindness', most likely for attending to his son Hamm's stories, he laments that '[o]ne must live with the times', that he must resign oneself to the fact that the 'times' are characterised by dishonour, or of the failure to honour obligations or promises (*Endgame*, p. 120). Rather, as Nagg implicitly discerns, the contractarian logic is manipulated by the dominant. This example, I would suggest, renders these notions of indebtedness as insufficient in themselves to bind the characters, or to be appealed to in order to appropriately account for their suffering.

Narrative Gestures

The breakdown of performative speech-acts such as promising is indicative of the general denudation of the significance of language in the refuge. For instance, again exhibiting his dependence, Clov asks Hamm to 'teach' him 'new words' since the old ones no longer have any meaning. And, in contrast to Connie Chatterley's disillusion with those 'great words' - ideals such as hope, charity, sacrifice - Clov despairs that even the most everyday words 'sleeping, waking, morning, evening [...] have nothing to say' (*Endgame*, p. 133).³³⁰ As a consequence of inhabiting a world of empty signifiers, Boulter observes that there is an 'absence of true dialogical exchange' in the shelter.³³¹ Furthermore, Boulter contends that narrative operates to 'supplement' this absence: 'the narrative function is appropriated to mitigate the dialogical void at the heart of the drama'.³³² Narrative, I shall show, not only 'mitigate[s]' the 'dialogical void', but it may be considered itself as the most necessary and sustaining palliative that the characters can call upon, given particularly that other forms, such as dialogue, Nagg's Turkish Delight, or Hamm's painkiller, consistently fail to materialize or to satisfy.

³³⁰ See D.H. Lawrence, *Lady*, p. 65.

³³¹ Jonathan Boulter, 'Speak No More': The Hermeneutical Function of Narrative in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, in *Samuel beckett: A Casebook*, ed. by Jennifer M. Jeffers (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 39-62 (p. 42).

³³² *Ibid.*

Narrative gestures abound in *Endgame*. And the content of these stories or fragments reveal a preoccupation with the need to narrate pain and painful experiences. For example, Nagg and Nell share their reminiscences of their bicycle accident in which they lost their limbs. Subject to inexorable loss, paralysis and impotence, the characters in Beckett's drama deploy narrative in order to attempt to augment, and reconstitute their sense of selfhood. For, consonant with Nell's later remark that 'nothing is funnier than unhappiness', narrative here is offered as a palliative for her depression. Or, as Nagg puts it, the story is meant to 'cheer' Nell 'up' (*Endgame*, pp. 101-2).

It is telling that Hamm's violent outburst against his parents occurs as they narrate this painful experience. While I have hinted above that this excessive reaction may arise from a particularly vulnerable sensibility stemming from prolonged illness, and as I shall further consider the related issue of sympathy in the play below, here I will focus on Hamm's need to dominate the story-telling, to arrogate this privilege for himself. Hamm's imperialistic domination within the refuge is noted by John Sheedy who claims that Hamm is 'at once the writer, director and star actor-sufferer in the only show on earth'.³³³ Sheedy's keen observation, suggesting Hamm's narcissistic denial of the other, recalls Miller's contention that nihilism characterises narcissism in the sense that the other and the world are lost. Such a posture of narcissistic self-enclosure can be viewed as a defensive expression, an attempt to close oneself off from further loss and pain. Indeed, by calling Hamm an 'actor-sufferer', Sheedy is registering that it is suffering that gives the place of narrative such force in *Endgame*, that it is suffering that impels Hamm, for instance, to 'write', 'direct' and 'star' in his 'show'. Alluding again, for example, to Hamm's opening, self-reflexive soliloquy may corroborate this point: as Hamm asks '[c]an there be misery loftier than' his, he is also announcing his own urgent need to give his pain expression. His pain is 'bigger'. For it may well be the case that he here evinces a narcissistic incapacity to identify with others' distress, but, given that the other appears opaque or impenetrable, it follows that the self's experience of its own pain is most real, most palpable. And, as thinkers such as Scarry and Arthur Frank have argued in their respective work, sufferers are impelled to express their experience of pain, particularly through narrative form.

³³³ John J. Sheedy, 'The Comic Apocalypse of King Hamm', *Modern Drama*, (1966), 317.

Both Scarry and Frank have written persuasively on the correlation between pain and narrative. Registering pain's capacity to annihilate consciousness, Scarry contends that '[p]hysical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story'.³³⁴ Frank echoes Scarry's view that pain, or illness, 'is a call for stories'.³³⁵ According to Frank, pain disrupts and possibly destroys the sufferer's sense of coherence and orientation as they become what he calls a 'narrative wreck'.³³⁶ Using the metaphor of wreckage to convey the devastating disorientation that besets the sufferer, Frank claims that for the chronic sufferer in 'conditions of fatigue, uncertainty, sometimes pain' it is stories that bring new orientation points to help render self-coherence. Frank argues: '[t]he way out of narrative wreckage is telling stories, specifically [...] "self-stories". [...] The self is being *formed* in what is told.'³³⁷ Significantly, Hamm insists that his story is a chronicle, suggesting a factual, biographical element. While the audience may perceive his story to be fictional, largely through Hamm's repeated intrusive and contradictory self-reflexive gestures, the performative aspect of the story is reinforced by Clov who retorts, on being compelled to listen to his story, that it is the one that Hamm has 'been telling' himself 'all' of his 'days' (*Endgame*, p. 121). The story itself is bound to Hamm's self-constitution.

One of the most influential aspects of Nietzsche's work is that of the relation between aesthetic activity and the attainment of self-mastery or self-coherence. As I discussed in Chapter One, Nietzsche broadly conceives of the aesthetic to mean form-giving. With regards to self-artistry, Nietzsche points to the need for a dominant drive to hierarchically order and give form to the self's multiple, conflicting impulses. As he puts it in *The Will to Power*, the co-ordination of these warring drives 'under a single predominant impulse results in a "strong will" ' (*WTP*, p. 46). The pathos of power is thus attained when the plurality of instincts are organized and directed by the tyranny of one dominant drive. This ruling drive then determines the nature and direction of the self's willing. The emphatically aesthetic conception of this project is apparent in this famous passage from *The Gay Science*:

³³⁴ Scarry, p. 3.

³³⁵ Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 53.

³³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 54.

³³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 55.

To 'give style' to one's character - a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye....In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small. (*GS*, pp. 163-4)

This valorisation of the attainment of aesthetic coherence is also evident in Nietzsche's description of his exemplars. For instance, Goethe 'created himself, he disciplined himself into wholeness' (*AC & TI*, p. 114). The central relevance of the literary for Nietzsche is also apparent in Alexander Nehamas' seminal interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy.³³⁸ For Nehamas, not only are Nietzsche's key doctrines informed by aesthetic notions, but Nietzsche's espousal of self-fashioning takes literary narrative as its paradigm. For literary narrative exemplifies the need to order, edit, and select one's materials in order to attain an overall coherence.

In Hamm's case, his chronic illness significantly disturbs his capacity to constitute the self as narrative achievement.³³⁹ For Hamm's dominating fatigue is both symptomatic of, and further contributes towards, his inability to generate narrative self-coherence. Thus his suicidal desire attends his complaint of the 'effort' to construct and sustain his narrative:

HAMM: I don't know. [*Pause.*] I feel rather drained. [*Pause.*]
The prolonged creative effort. [*Pause.*] If I could drag
myself down to the sea! I'd make a pillow of sand for my
head and the tide would come. (*Endgame*, p. 120)

This passage, I hold, suggests that Hamm's loss of creative strength manifests in, or leads to, a state of suicidal nihilism. His incapacity to creatively sustain a sense of self-coherence, in Nietzsche's idiom, is reflective of an inability to direct the self's plural impulses through the 'force of a single taste' and engender a pathos of willing towards a goal. The consequent unravelling of selfhood, or the diffusion of the self's

³³⁸ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

³³⁹ In noting Hamm's inadequacy as a story-teller, I disagree with Doherty's comment that Hamm delights in 'his own skill at telling' given that his 'invention and memory are in satisfactory working order for sufficient doling out of words'. Countering this suggestion that Hamm is able to achieve a proficient sense of self-coherence, I concur, rather, with Stan Gontarski's observation that '[t]he dominant trope of these narratives is their sense of unending, which manifests itself formally in fragmentation and incompletion.' See Doherty, p. 90; Stan E. Gontarski, 'A Sense of Unending: Samuel Beckett's Eschatological Turn', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, (2009), 141.

drives, results in a 'weak will', a loss of power or a state of paralysis. As mentioned earlier, Hamm may have come to resemble the reclusive madman whom he had visited precisely because his creative capacity is weak.

Throughout Nietzsche's work the aesthetic is celebrated as a means to avert suicidal nihilism. For instance, in *The Gay Science* he argues: '[h]onesty would lead to nausea and suicide. But now our honesty has a counterforce that helps us avoid such consequences: art, as the *good* will to appearance. [...] As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us' (GS, p. 104). In *The Will to Power* he similarly claims, '[w]e possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*' (WTP, p. 435). The philosopher Bernard Williams neatly grasps the significance of this assertion: 'Nietzsche does not mean that we possess art in place of the truth; he means that we possess art so that we can possess the truth and not perish of it'.³⁴⁰ To expand upon the role of art in Nietzsche's thought with this point in mind, and to signal its relevance to interpreting *Endgame*, it is useful to briefly return to in his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Here Nietzsche hypothesises that the ancient Greeks, whom he claims were particularly sensitive to suffering, created the art form of ancient tragedy in order to overcome a view of existence captured in the ancient Greek folkloric wisdom of Silenus: '[t]he best of all things is something entirely outside your grasp: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second-best thing for you - is to die soon' (BT, p. 22). Prone to this pessimistic outlook, the Greeks, according to Nietzsche, created tragic art through a unique combination of the antithetical aesthetic impulses he attributes to the Greek deities Apollo and Dionysus. Having sketched these symbols with a different language above, it is worth clarifying that Apollo symbolises surface appearance and dream-like illusion, while Dionysus, the god who is dis-membered in ancient myth, signals a pre-perceptual reality of senseless images and nature's unrestrained, excessive force. The fact that Dionysus is dis-membered points to the radical dissolution of individuality associated with ancient tragedy with regards to the hero's death and to the audience's collective intoxicated state. Apollo, on the other hand, represents individual boundaries and so accounts for both the recognizable form of the heroic individual and the existence of an intelligible plot that propels the drama. And, as

³⁴⁰ Bernard Williams, *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 322.

Nietzsche claims that it is the balance of these two impulses that enables the Greeks to flourish and repel the prevalent pessimism, it can be asserted that an imbalance, or over-reliance upon one of these impulses would fail to render tragedy's paradoxical energizing impact: Apollonian rationality on its own, while remaining painfully aware of life's senselessness as Aaron Ridley clarifies, leads to sterility without an energizing glimpse of the Dionysian raw energy. 'Apollo could not live without Dionysus' as Nietzsche puts it (*BT*, p. 26).³⁴¹ Unmediated exposure to the Dionysian vision of existence, on the other hand, is nauseating and induces suicidal nihilism by bringing cognisance of the ephemeral nature of individual being. Nietzsche thus claims that, 'Apolline consciousness alone, like a veil, hid that Dionysiac world from his view' (*BT*, p. 21). For Nietzsche, the death of tragedy in Greek culture is signalled by a subsequent excessive reliance upon Socratic rationality. The view heralded by this outlook, that the world is amenable to rational reflection, inherently precludes the possibility of registering the world's Dionysian senselessness. And this rejection of the deeper Dionysian truth of the meaninglessness of existence also shapes Christian theodicy, given that the belief in a benign deity domesticizes senseless suffering within a transcendental rational economy.

In a 1936 entry from his 'Clare Street Notebook', Beckett seems to be deploying a similar psychological-metaphysical structure of appearance and reality to that found in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*:

There are moments where the veil of hope is finally ripped away and the eyes, suddenly liberated, see their world as it is, as it must be. Alas, it does not last long, the perception quickly passes: the eyes can only bear such a merciless light for a short while, the thin skin of hope re-forms and one returns to the world of phenomena. [...] And even if the cataract can be pierced for a moment it almost always re-forms immediately; and thus it is with hope.³⁴²

Resembling Nietzsche's binary of truth and illusion, this passage suggests that Beckett's aesthetics can be read as being motivated by the wish to depict the world through 'liberated' eyes, to present it in a 'merciless light', denuded of 'hope'. Or, using

³⁴¹ Aaron Ridley, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Art* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 14-15.

³⁴² Quoted in Erik Tonning, *Modernism and Christianity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 116-17.

Nietzsche's idiom, Beckett wishes to render the Dionysian truth, to offer a glimpse of the chaotic senselessness that is foreclosed by the veil generated by our perceptual and conceptual faculties.

Cavell's admiration for what he observes to be Hamm's attempts to 'defeat meaning, of word and deed', can be aligned with Beckett's view as it is expounded in this notebook entry. That is, Cavell perceives Hamm to be something of a Nietzschean overman engaged in 'the task of purposely undoing, re-evaluating all the purposes we have known'.³⁴³ Accordingly, Hamm is performing an active destruction of the Christian interpretation of existence in order to present the world innocent of this 'curse'. In its stead, according to Cavell, Hamm seeks '[o]nly a life without hope, meaning, justification, waiting, solution'.³⁴⁴

Beckett's hostility to Christian soteriology and what Cavell calls 'its total, even totalitarian, success', is also registered by Beckett biographer James Knowlson who invokes the poem 'Ooftish' to support his reading. In this poem Beckett expresses his contempt towards the totalizing nature of eschatology:

offer it up plank it down | Golgotha was only the potegg | cancer angina it is all one to
us | cough up your T.B. don't be stingy | [...] the whole misery diagnosed undiagnosed
diagnosed | get your friends to do the same we'll make use of it | we'll make sense of it
we'll put it in the pot with the rest | it all boils down to blood of lamb.³⁴⁵

In 'Ooftish' the rational optimism that structures theodicy, or the 'we'll make sense of it' notion in the poem, degrades others' particular, and perhaps useless, suffering; by appropriating others' suffering within a universal narrative, theodicy thus performs a violence against the reality of the individual's experience of pain. Beckett's antipathy towards Christian theodicy thus may be aligned with Nietzsche's repudiation of the Christian interpretation of suffering.

Yet while Nietzsche's thought actively participates in the overcoming of the ascetic ideal, on the one hand, he also points ambivalently to the nihilistic consequences of

³⁴³ Cavell, p. 150.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 149.

³⁴⁵ Knowlson, p. 67.

the dissolution of the Christian exegesis of existence, on the other. Thus, echoing the ambivalence contained in the market-place madman's pronouncement which I alluded to above, he argues: '[a]s we thus reject Christian interpretation and condemn its "meaning" as counterfeit, *Schopenhauer's* question immediately comes at us in a terrifying way: *Does existence have any meaning at all?*' (GS, pp. 219-20). What is more, for Nietzsche the pursuit of the naked truth such as that implied in Beckett's notebook entry entails the onset of an awful predicament: on the one hand, scientific modernity, which Nietzsche holds to embody the modern form of the ascetic ideal's relentless pursuit of the truth, comes to the 'realization that the way of the world is not at all divine - even by human standards it is not rational, merciful, or just' (GS, pp. 203-4); on the other hand, while 'we moderns' may accept that we have interpreted life 'falsely and mendaciously', doing so involves cognisance that we did so 'according to a *need*': interpreting the world as 'rational, merciful, or just' 'may have made it possible for us to *endure* life' (GS, p. 204). And this argument of a psychological 'need' for such an interpretation is reinforced in the climactic moments of the *Genealogy*: here Nietzsche accounts for the origins and persistence of the ascetic ideal by claiming that it primarily functioned to combat 'epidemics' of suicidal nihilism by offering an interpretation of 'senseless suffering' (OGM, p. 127). Nietzsche thus claims that the dilemma to 'confront coming generations' is 'the terrible Either/Or: 'Either abolish your venerations or – *yourselves!*' (GS, p. 204). Taking our 'venerations' to refer to the interpretation of the world as 'rational, merciful, or just', Nietzsche concludes: '[t]he latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be - nihilism? That is *our* question mark' (GS, pp. 203-4).

This tension grips *Endgame*. This can be best illustrated when Hamm invokes the presence of a 'rational being' to confer significance to their existence at the very moment when he appears to corroborate Cavell's identification of an active evacuation of meaning. Hence Hamm firstly exclaims, '[w]e're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?' (*Endgame*, p. 108) before surmising:

HAMM: I wonder. [*Pause.*] Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. [*Voice of rational being.*] Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at! [CLOW starts, drops the telescope and begins to scratch his belly with both hands. [*Normal*

voice.] And without going so far as that, we ourselves ... [*with emotion*] ... we ourselves ... at certain moments ... [*Vehemently.*] To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing! (*Endgame*, p. 108)

This strain, with regard to whether the characters can exist devoid of meaning or not, is registered in the shifts in emotion gestured to in Beckett's stage directions. And while Hamm may express a desire to not 'mean something' that may give currency to Cavell's view, it is clear that Hamm's radical oscillation from such a posture of closure, or rejection of meaning, to one that invokes the possibility of new meaning in the form of the appearance of a 'rational being,' resonates with Nietzsche's analysis of the modern predicament. Otherwise put, 'senseless suffering', or the fear that it will 'all have been for nothing', impels one to seek a means to appropriate useless suffering: the self is impelled to reconstitute itself, to attempt to generate coherence by conferring significance to the senselessness it encounters. That this attempt, I suggest, takes the form of an appeal to an imagined 'rational being' also implies the continued valence of God, or of the Christian narrative's interpretation of suffering, which I shall return to consider below. Additionally, while there are echoes here of the dialectical dynamic that Nietzsche describes in the Apollo-Dionysus relation as I discussed it particularly in Chapter One, Hamm's vacillation, moreover, evokes Beckett's similar notebook entry: ineluctably the 'thin skin of hope reforms' only moments after 'the veil of hope is finally ripped away'.

With regards to the importance of meaning constitution in *Endgame*, I think it is worthwhile to stress my divergence from critics such as Cavell and the Beckett scholar Eric Topping. Topping identifies Christianity as 'Beckett's fundamental antagonist'³⁴⁶ and supports Cavell's view of the characters' performance in terms of their resistance to those bequeathed, Christian meanings. Contending that 'Hamm's *fear*' is to remain 'residually significant', Topping also argues that in his opposition to 'the heroic-redemptive attitude', 'Beckett parodies the whole attempt to wrest meaning from the Void'.³⁴⁷ This deflationary reading of the import of meaning constitution in Beckett echoes Cavell's apprehension of a repudiation of significance in *Endgame*: as aforementioned, Cavell

³⁴⁶ Topping, p. 104.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 118-19.

explicitly argues that, with regards to what he considers to be Hamm's heroic undoing of meaning, 'where existence is interpreted, sheltered, it is lost'.³⁴⁸ Yet while these respective readings of *Endgame* may be aligned with a Nietzschean active nihilism insofar as the characters seem to partake in a deconstruction of existent meanings, I maintain that Beckett also dramatizes the characters' incapacity to remain bereft of significance. Just as Nietzsche insists upon a necessary Apollonian reconstitution of meaning following an encounter with Dionysian senselessness in *The Birth of Tragedy*, so do the characters in *Endgame* evince an ineluctable desire to constitute and recuperate selfhood, to seek self-coherence, to give their suffering some significance.³⁴⁹ As I have suggested above, this manifests particularly in the characters' narrative strategies. As Worton puts it, 'the very abundance of specifically narrative gestures in *Endgame* points to the desire for a degree of meaning formation.'³⁵⁰

Clov's case most readily illustrates the characters' need to bestow their suffering existence with significance. His greater reliance upon traditional, external narrative means to apprehend his pain and avert the encounter with the what Nietzsche calls the 'horror vacui', or the thought that it has all 'been for nothing', somewhat distinguishes his approach from Hamm's: for the persistence of the ascetic ideal in *Endgame* is most apparent in Clov's interpretation of his suffering as punishment. Tellingly, Clov repeatedly gestures towards an inability to inhabit any alternative perspective, signalling a long-standing condition of physiological-psychological paralysis. For example, suggesting his appeal to traditional responses, Clov comments: '[a]ll life long the same questions, the same answers' (*Endgame*, p. 94); similarly, he confirms his psychological stasis as he states at the end of the play that, 'I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits' (*Endgame*, p. 133). Recalling that Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy* that the ascetic ideal provides a narrative which encourages the sufferer to 'understand his suffering itself as a *condition of punishment*', it is significant that both Clov's opening words and his final speech echo each other, suggesting both this state of stasis and that he apprehends his existence in these terms (*OGM*, p. 111). Here in the latter speech he articulates his desire for his pain to end:

³⁴⁸ Cavell, p. 151.

³⁴⁹ Stan Gontarski echoes my view, arguing that 'although Hamm fears the actual end, he fears insignificance more'. Gontarski, p. 141.

³⁵⁰ Worton, p. 63.

CLOV: [*As before.*] I say to myself - sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you - one day. (*Endgame*, p. 133)

It is evident that Clov's thinking is dominated by the conception of the end of unbearable suffering. Robert Kugelman's discussion on the phenomenology of pain is pertinent to an appreciation of Clov's interpretative strategy: '[n]o greater deformation of the human condition can be imagined than endless pain which is called Hell - because pain promises an end. All writers on pain find themselves addressing eschatology, because that is the dynamism of pain.'³⁵¹

A further dimension to this eschatological hermeneutic is that it permits Clov to rationally appropriate his suffering by appealing to the contractual logic that grounds and legitimises notions of punishment. Thus, echoing Josef K. in *The Trial*, whom I argued in the previous chapter rationalized his experience of senseless suffering in terms of guilt, Clov, too, can attain cognitive mastery of his distress insofar as he conceives of himself as a debtor who is legitimately repaying for debts incurred. As aforementioned, this logic permits him to understand his continued service to Hamm. That this repayment entails one's suffering shall be further illuminated by my discussion on the role of cruelty below. Furthermore, through a Nietzschean lens, this punitive logic entails a concomitant sense of agency insofar as Clov can hold himself accountable for his suffering: rather than looking to some external source of his pain, he can discern his fault within himself and amend his behaviour accordingly, namely by suffering 'better'. This is underpinned by the conception of his pain ending.

Clov's notion of punishment also implies the presence of a perpetrator or spectator of his punishment: Clov's desire to suffer 'better' assumes an unnamed 'they' inflicting or spectating upon his pain. As Stan Gontarski observes, punishment 'implies fixation, order, somebody or something inflicting this'.³⁵²

Anthropomorphizing senseless suffering by invoking a personal 'they' as perpetrators of his distress, Clov thus domesticates his encounter with the *horror vacui*. Doherty's

³⁵¹ Robert Kugelman, 'Pain, Pathos, Place', in *Challenges to Theoretical Psychology*, ed. by Wolfgang Maiers (North York, Ont.: Captus University Pub., 1999), pp. 182-99 (p. 189).

³⁵² Gontarski, p. 142.

perceptive comment corroborates this reading: '[m]an needs the fiction of punishment for a crime uncommitted in order that he bear up under the burden of an emptiness and isolation which are unbearable but must be borne.'³⁵³ What is evident in this analysis of the role of punishment as Clov conceives it is that the hermeneutic of suffering provided by the ascetic ideal provides a means of shielding man from what Nietzsche calls the 'basic character of existence', namely its Dionysian senselessness.

Returning to an entry from Nietzsche's mature work, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which he speaks of differing abilities to confront, and hence affirm, as much of life as possible, may draw out the distinction between Hamm's and Clov's respective exegetical approaches:

It might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the 'truth' one could still barely endure - or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would *require* it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified. (*BGE*, p. 68)

Calibrating strength in a language that echoes his metaphor of one's digestive capacity, Nietzsche valorizes those who can assimilate existence in a form that is minimally 'thinned down, [...] sweetened, [...] falsified'. In other words, for Nietzsche, the strong individual can perceive and affirm existence without appeal to 'hope' or to transcendental structures. Nietzsche thus inverts the traditional value ascribed to the pursuit of truth, which holds truth to signify the beautiful or the permanent, by conceiving of such knowledge as ugly, nauseating and potentially fatal. We all, to some extent or other, according to Nietzsche, require illusion or untruth. Thus while altering the nature of truth, Nietzsche continues to value those who can confront life as honestly as possible, or rather, with regard to how much of life's ugly, bitter, and useless suffering one can swallow. For Nietzsche, it is the ascetic ideal, on the contrary, that performs the maximum amount of thinning down, sweetening, and falsifying of the nauseating reality of existence.

³⁵³ Doherty, p. 43.

Hamm's narrative, I believe, is suggestive of his larger digestive capacity to confront and absorb more of life's horror without recourse to those transcendental sweeteners that Clov draws upon. Not only is the content of Hamm's narrative largely disturbing and unredeemed, but his self-reflexive remonstrance to his fictive characters points to an acknowledgement of an absence of any redemptive palliative: '[u]se your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!' (*Endgame*, p. 118). Here he seems to echo Nietzsche's valorisation of a Dionysian or tragic interpretation of existence which exhibits a strength to assimilate life's unpalatable aspects. This notion of strength would also appear to corroborate Cavell's reading of Hamm's heroism.

Yet as I have argued above, Hamm's position dramatically vacillates. This suggests his incapacity to attain narrative self-coherence, and his own digestive limits to absorb these experiences. To illustrate Hamm's shifting position with regards to the Christian interpretation of existence, it can be noted that, for instance, when Clov asks Hamm to explain his sense of dependence, Hamm assumes an idiom that evokes notions of a deified status. That is, Hamm pompously asserts a position of hermeneutical superiority that suggests that he has supplanted God as an omniscient authority, as he declares: '[a]h the creatures, the creatures, everything has to be explained to them' (*Endgame*, p. 113). Yet Hamm's incapacity to displace God as a creator is once again highlighted by his anguish at his impasse to generate new characters, and thus a new self-narrative. This is apparent in his subsequent recourse to prayer that attends the suggested dissolution or incompleteness of his narrative:

HAMM: I'll soon have finished with this story. [*Pause.*] Unless I bring in other characters. [*Pause.*] But where would I find them? [*Pause.*] Where would I look for them? [*Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.*] Let us pray to God. (*Endgame*, p. 118)

Here Hamm echoes the beleaguered, superstitious defendants in *The Trial* whose creative or exegetical paralysis is marked by their recourse to an external authority to confer value. On top of this, the stage directions register his subsequent 'anguished protest' as he then exclaims '[t]he bastard! He doesn't exist!' (*Endgame*, p. 119). Hamm, then, whose perspective of the corpsed universe echoes the apocalyptic vision of the madman he had previously visited, now resembles the Nietzschean madman who pronounces God's

death. Hamm's indignation justifies the market-place madman's caution regarding our worthiness or ability to supplant God, to be creators.

What is also suggested by Hamm's call to prayer is the characters' need for an audience to witness the human theatre of suffering. This need is implied, for example, at a number of key moments: as mentioned above, a witness is imagined in Clov's apprehension of a 'they' who inflict his 'punishment'; it is also apparent in the characters' insistence upon an audience to attend to one's stories; and Hamm's invocation of a 'rational being' evokes Nietzsche's claim in the *Genealogy* that, with reference to the ancient Greeks, '[i]n order to rid the world of concealed, undiscovered, unseen suffering and deny it in all honesty, people were then practically obliged to invent Gods and intermediate beings at every level' (*OGM*, p. 48).

In the *Genealogy* and in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche repeatedly elevates the aesthetic of the spectacle. His famous claim in *The Birth of Tragedy* - 'for it is only as *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*' - argues that it is only when one attains the perspectival distance held by the spectator that one can transcend the chaotic senselessness of life (*BT*, p. 32). For Nietzsche contends in this passage 'that our awareness of our meaning differs hardly at all from the awareness that warriors painted on canvas have of the battle portrayed' (*BT*, p. 32). Rather, the necessary perspectival distance is achieved at its most vital in the act of creation. For Nietzsche then goes on to say, deploying a similar metaphysical image of art to that of a child in the 'playful construction and destruction of the individual world' which he uses later in the text, that (*BT*, p. 32):

All of our knowledge of art is utterly illusory, because we, as knowing subjects, are not identical with that being which, as sole creator and spectator of that comedy of art, prepares an eternal enjoyment for itself. Only insofar as the genius is fused with the primal artist of the world in the act of artistic creation does he know anything of the eternal essence of art; for in that state he is wonderfully similar to the weird fairy-tale image of the creature that can turn its eyes around and look at itself; now he is at once subject and object, at once poet, actor and audience. (*BT*, p. 32)

In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche returns to consider the pleasure afforded to those who experience this pathos of distance. Here he contends that there is an undeniable pleasure attained in the witnessing of others' pain. For as Nietzsche puts it:

All evil is justified if a god takes pleasure in it: so ran the primitive logic of feeling - and was this logic really restricted to primitive times? The gods viewed as the friends of *cruel* spectacles - how deeply this primeval concept still penetrates into our European civilization! (*OGM*, p. 48)

Hamm and Clov's War

Cruelty is central to Nietzsche's philosophy. It lies at the heart of his apprehension of human nature and it is intimately tied to his notion of the will to power, to ideas of self-cultivation and to cultural enhancement. Appealing to this area of his thinking shall expand the critical understanding of the role of cruelty in *Endgame*, which has hitherto focused upon its seeming gratuitousness.³⁵⁴ I shall demonstrate that there is a distinctive 'logic of cruelty' operating in the characters' struggle for dominance.³⁵⁵

Cruelty pervades *Endgame* and dominates the play's central relationship. As Beckett stressed to Michael Haertdter, 'there must be maximum aggression between [Hamm and Clov] from the first exchange of words onward. Their war is the nucleus of the play'.³⁵⁶ Significantly, Hamm's cruelty predominantly manifests as a desire to afflict Clov with a sense of meaninglessness. For instance, with '*prophetic relish*' Hamm conveys his prescient vision of a fatigued Clov losing his will, 'sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever' (*Endgame*, p. 109). According to Hamm, Clov's profound, future isolation will be characterised by dramatic deterioration. For again conceiving the shelter as a figuration of the self's boundaries, Hamm informs his servant that the walls will disappear, '[i]nfinite emptiness will be all around', and he'll be 'like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe' (*Endgame*, pp. 109-10). To emphasise the abjectness of Clov's confrontation with what Nietzsche calls the '*horror vacui*', Hamm gestures towards the

³⁵⁴ For example, Paul Sheehan claims that cruelty operates 'outside the framework of cause and effect' in Beckett; Francis Doherty sums up his analysis of *Endgame*: '[a]ll we can say is that, in the end, man's role is absurd and meaningless in a world designed for cruelty'; and Paul Lawley asserts: 'Hamm's *need*, both then and now (despite Nagg's claim), is the need to exert power wilfully, even arbitrarily'. See *ibid.* pp. 99-100; Paul Sheehan, 'A World without Monsters: Beckett and the Ethics of Cruelty', in *Beckett and Ethics*, ed. by Russell Smith (London, England: Continuum, 2008), pp. 86-101 (p. 86); Lawley, p. 121.

³⁵⁵ Sheehan, p. 86.

³⁵⁶ Quoted in Elsa Baroghel, 'From Narcissistic Isolation to Sadistic Pseudocouples: Tracing the Genesis of *Endgame*', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui: An Annual Bilingual Review/Revue Annuelle Bilingue*, 22 (2010), 124.

uselessness of religious consolation as he proclaims, 'all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill' this darkness (*Endgame*, p. 109). Hamm's vision emphasizes Clov's concomitant loss of efficacious agency. In doing so it recalls Nietzsche's claim from *The Birth of Tragedy* that 'insight into the terrible truth,' or awareness of the ephemerality or Dionysian meaninglessness of existence, 'outweighs every motive for action' (*BT*, p. 63). Having sketched the characters' defensive-recuperative strategies above, it is evident then that Hamm's 'aggression' seeks to explode Clov's protective measures and to subject him to a depressive loss of willing.

Nietzsche repeatedly distinguishes the inward-directing of our aggressive instincts from the outward expression of these impulses. Eliding the tensions that exist in Nietzsche's writings on cruelty for reasons of space, and before registering Nietzsche's valorisation of its inward-directed form, I wish to explore a series of passages in which he seeks to wrest externally-directed cruelty from a traditional moral perspective. For instance, in an entry in *The Gay Science* under the heading 'On the doctrine of the feeling of power', Nietzsche juxtaposes acts of kindness with the perpetration of cruelty by considering them as equally motivated by the primary desire for power:

Benefiting and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power over them - that is all one wants in such cases! We *hurt* those to whom we need to make our power perceptible, for pain is a much more sensitive means to that end than pleasure: pain always asks for the cause, while pleasure is inclined to stop with itself and not look back.
(*GS*, p. 38)

Cruelty, for Nietzsche, is primarily understood as a means to impact the other. While both 'benefiting and hurting others' involve a flow of energy back to the self, it is cruelty that provides a greater return: the person in pain, Nietzsche claims, is more inclined to acknowledge its source. From this model, then, the infliction of suffering is, like generosity and altruistic actions, fundamentally a strategy to augment the sense of self.

In his earlier work *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche is more explicit about the 'innocence' or amoral status of cruelty. He claims, '[m]alice does not aim at the suffering of the other in and of itself, but rather at our own enjoyment' (*HAH*, p. 71). This enjoyment is analogous to the pleasure 'we take pleasure in breaking up twigs, loosening stones, fighting with wild animals, in order to gain awareness of our own strength' (*HAH*, p. 72): we inflict cruelty in order to 'release our power on the other person and experience an

enjoyable feeling of superiority' (*HAH*, pp. 71-72). Indeed, reinforcing this notion of the intense sensation of power that the perpetrator enjoys, Nietzsche claims in *Daybreak* that 'to practice cruelty is to enjoy the highest gratification of the feeling of power' (*D*, p. 16). As such, he also contends in the *Genealogy* that cruelty acts as 'a veritable seductive lure to life' (*OGM*, p. 47).

Further insight into the dynamics of cruelty, and why it may particularly appeal to Beckett's fatigued characters, can be gained by further examining Nietzsche's idea of the will to power. In one succinct passage Nietzsche puts it: '[w]hat is happiness? - The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome' (*AC & TI*, p. 127). It is possible to read the perpetration of cruelty as the overcoming of the other's resistance, as Ivan Soll does when he observes that, 'in making others suffer we are made aware that we are making them experience things *against their will*'.³⁵⁷ Soll goes on:

What differentiates cruelty from other behaviour that involves overcoming difficulty is that cruelty involves overcoming the opposed and resisting will of another person. [...]
The joys of cruelty become the joys of the triumph of the will over other wills, of interpersonal domination.³⁵⁸

Given the ubiquity of the characters' strategies to dominate the other in *Endgame*, together with defensive resistance to such attempts, it is possible to see the characters as charged by the desire to attain this particular pathos of power, of overcoming the external other's will. What is more, it is possible to align Nietzsche's thought on the need for a state of creative tension, in which no party or force completely dominates or annihilates the other, with Beckett's comments on *Endgame*. Turning firstly to Beckett: Beckett writes to Alan Schneider that 'death is merely incidental to the end of "this...this...thing." ...I do not say "death game"'.³⁵⁹ Salisbury cites this letter in order to persuasively argue that 'this play is emphatically not an extermination struggle'.³⁶⁰ In

³⁵⁷ Ivan Soll, 'Nietzsche on Cruelty, Asceticism, and the Failure of Hedonism', in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals*, ed. by Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 168-92 (p. 180).

³⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 180-81.

³⁵⁹ Maurice Harmon (ed.), *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 22.

³⁶⁰ Salisbury, p. 129.

other words, Hamm's domination cannot be total, for that would spell the death, or end, of the game. Yet, as I shall argue below, the play's denouement suggests that the characters dangerously flirt with this possibility.

Nietzsche's work repeatedly stresses the need for the generation of a creative tension, for the continual play of dominance and resistance. This tension prevents the collapse into sterile tyranny. One such passage from *Twilight of the Idols* captures this view with regards to the relation both to the external other and within oneself:

A further triumph is our spiritualization of *enmity*. It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies: in brief, in acting and thinking in the reverse of the way in which one formerly acted and thought. The Church has at all times desired the destruction of its enemies: we, we immoralists and anti-Christians, see that it is to our advantage that the Church exist.... In politics, too, enmity has become much more spiritual - much more prudent, much more thoughtful, much more *forbearing*. Almost every party grasps that it is in the interest of its own self-preservation that the opposing party should not decay in strength; the same is true of grand politics. A new creation in particular, the *Reich* for instance, has more need of enemies than friends: only in opposition does it *become* necessary.... We adopt the same attitude towards the 'enemy within': there too we have spiritualized enmity, there too we have grasped its *value*. One is *fruitful* only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains *young* only on condition that the soul does not relax, does not long for peace.... Nothing has grown more alien to us than that desideratum of former times 'peace of soul', the *Christian* desideratum; nothing arouses less envy in us than the moral cow and the fat contentment of the good conscience.... One has renounced *grand* life when one renounces war. (*TI & AC*, p. 53)

The continued dynamic of dominance and resistance is key to the play. As Salisbury remarks with regards to Hamm and Clov's conflict, 'each requires the other to remain in the game'.³⁶¹ Clov, then, continually defies Hamm's attempts to subjugate him. Dina Sherzer observes the subtle and manifold strategies deployed by Clov to undermine and resist Hamm's dominance. Among these include the use of paradox, tautology and mimicry.³⁶² Thus, as far as Hamm's cruel prophecy sought to unravel Clov's sense of

³⁶¹ Ibid. p. 128.

³⁶² Dina Sherzer, 'Beckett's Endgame, or What Talk Can Do', *Modern Drama*, 22 (1979), 295-96.

selfhood, Clov's tactics similarly aim to impede Hamm's attempts at configuring cognitive coherence. Indeed it is worth noting that with regards to Hamm's prophetic vision Clov undermines the potency of his master's prescience by challenging its opening premise: Clov poignantly reminds Hamm that he cannot 'sit down' thereby suggesting that he consequently will not succumb to the depressive collapse that follows the assumption of this initial sitting position.

Furthermore, in defying Hamm's imperialistic denial of his individuality, and by asserting his identity in terms of his suffering or disability, Clov's retort is also suggestive of the self's radical isolation, of the other's incapacity to identify with one's suffering. This theme is also evident in what Beckett called '[o]ne of the cruellest sections of the play', where Clov denies Hamm his painkiller.³⁶³ Here Clov is the perpetrator. This is no moment of resistance against his bullying master. Furthermore, to corroborate this characterisation of Clov's maliciousness, Smith points out that Clov undertakes his master's orders to 'bottle' Nagg and Nell with brutal efficacy: 'he is a more-than-willing Executioner [...] whose zeal to exterminate all remaining forms of life exceeds even his master's'.³⁶⁴ Such incidents demonstrate the frequent interchangeability of the characters' roles, contributing to the play's resistance to standard ethical readings. Moreover, the ethical interpretation of the play is further complicated by noting that with Clov's denial of Hamm's painkiller, the perpetrator is unable to imaginatively identify with the other's pain, even if this is only to register the degree to which one can claim to impact the other. Thus Clov's enquiry as to whether Hamm's throat hurts - so as to maliciously deny him a lozenge - evokes an earlier point where Hamm sought to ascertain the degree to which he had made Clov suffer:

HAMM: I've made you suffer too much. *[Pause.]* Haven't I?

CLOV: It's not that.

HAMM: *[Shocked]* I haven't made you suffer too much?

CLOV: Yes!

HAMM: *[Relieved.]* Ah you gave me a fright! (*Endgame*, p. 95)

³⁶³ Samuel Beckett, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett. Volume II: Endgame*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 65.

³⁶⁴ Smith, p. 109.

I wish to read a series of passages from Nietzsche's *Human All Too Human* in conjunction with this dialogical exchange. Here Nietzsche ruminates upon the theme of the perpetration of cruelty and makes the claim that 'when we injure out of so-called malice, the *degree* of pain produced is in any case unknown to us' (HAH, p. 73). Underpinning the argument is a recurrent view found in Nietzsche, namely that we display a lack of imagination to identify with the other: 'the idea of one's "neighbour" [...] is very weak in us; [...] [t]hat the other suffers *must be learned*; and it can never be learned completely' (HAH, p. 71). Nietzsche here seems to anticipate Beckett's understanding of the self's essential solitude.

What is of primary significance with regard to these contentions is Nietzsche's intention to interpret human nature, and hence human cruelty, 'beyond good and evil'. He asks: '[c]an there be an injury out of pure *malice*, in cruelty, for example? If one does not know how painful an action is it cannot be malicious' (HAH, p. 73). Applying this point to *Endgame* would complicate the standard ethical reading of the characters' behaviour. Paul Sheehan makes a similar observation when he notes, 'ethics presupposes the relation to the other, the notion of cruelty in itself is extricated by traditional ethics by this absence of the other.'³⁶⁵ The characters' narcissistic self-enclosure, which I argue is particularly heightened due to their chronic suffering, signals an increasingly attenuated awareness of the other. These points corroborate Weller's reading of Beckett's admiration for both Racine's and the Marquis de Sade's 'dispassionate statement of human desire': Weller's interpretation of Beckett's 'dispassionate', or non-moral, statement' of human motivation similarly situates humanity 'beyond good and evil'.³⁶⁶

A second point to note in relation to Nietzsche's series of claims is that there is a characteristic self-preservative dimension to this incapacity to relate to the other. As Nietzsche contends: '[b]ut do we ever completely *know* how painful an action is to the other person? As far as our nervous system extends, we protect ourselves from pain' (HAH, p. 73). As discussed in Chapter One, Nietzsche holds that one's responsiveness towards others' pain has a depressive, nihilistic effect that threatens to overwhelm the

³⁶⁵ Sheehan.

³⁶⁶ Shane Weller, 'The Anethics of Desire: Beckett, Racine, Sade', in *Beckett and Ethics*, ed. by Russell Smith (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 102-17 (p. 114).

self.³⁶⁷ He argues, for example, that the individual capable of a deep, Dionysian identification with others' distress 'would collapse with a curse against existence' (HAH, p. 36). Consequently, the majority remain sealed within themselves as 'everyone wills himself alone and stands his ground alone' (HAH, p.36). He thus argues that the 'great lack of fantasy' that most suffer from prevent them 'from being able to empathize with other beings' (HAH, p. 36). As a result they 'participate[s] in their vicissitudes and suffering as little as possible' (HAH, p. 36).

The characterisation of a narcissistic self-enclosure in terms of a rejection of others' distress is repeatedly evident in *Endgame*. As aforementioned, Nagg and Nell's narration of loss may have provoked Hamm's excessive outrage at his parents' disturbance. Furthermore, Nagg vindictively recollects his own harsh rejection of the infant Hamm who, as a 'a tiny boy' 'frightened, in the dark', woke his parents only to be moved 'out of earshot' so that they 'might sleep in peace' (*Endgame*, pp. 119-20). Baroghel observes that Nagg thus seeks 'a pain free psychosis, not disturbed or intruded upon by the other'.³⁶⁸ Additionally, Nagg's point that he 'was asleep, happy as a king' (*Endgame*, p. 119), echoes Hamm's refrain of a wish to go to sleep and evokes Nietzsche's contention in the *Genealogy* that the fatigued sufferers seek a state of hibernation as a release from pain (*OGM*, p. 102-3). The characters' experience as chronic sufferers prompts this narcissistic withdrawal from the other.

A further illustration of this fear of an exposure to others' vulnerability is evinced in Hamm's narrative. Perceiving the arrival of a desperate beggar as an 'invasion', the narrator avoids the beggar's face, 'black with mingled dirt and tears', and exclaims, '[n]o, no, don't look at me, don't look at me' (*Endgame*, p. 117). It is telling that this event occurs as Hamm's fictional narrator prepares for the Christmas festivities: the narrator, however, oscillates from paternal, generous postures to hostile, defensive gestures, wishing to restrict the gift of refuge to the other, and thus limit the loss to the self that this would entail. For Boulter, Hamm's repeated return to his story suggests 'a nostalgic return to potency' given that 'he had the means and power to render real aid to

³⁶⁷ See p. 57 of this thesis.

³⁶⁸ Baroghel, p. 126.

someone'.³⁶⁹ In other words, 'the story takes place in a time where some ethical action could have taken place'.³⁷⁰

Boulter's situating of potency with ethical action, or generosity, echoes my correspondent alignment of impotence with cruelty, vis à vis Nietzsche. This ideal of squandering is suggestive of a position of strength, of abundance, and this may apply to the individual or to the state. This strength or richness can be understood as an accomplished state of coherence, of self-mastery, that can partake in the expenditure of one's riches and the absorption of one's losses. This may take the form of voluntarily relinquishing one's state of self-coherence, which is exemplified for Nietzsche by the ancient ephectics. It is with regard to such notions that Nietzsche's valorised self-directed cruelty can be illustrated, as discussed in Chapter One.³⁷¹ And, echoing the passage cited above in which Nietzsche stresses the need for the preservation of one's enemies, one manifestation of such strength is that of the capacity to bear one's parasites (*OGM*, p. 51). The sovereign individual or powerful state has the strength to grant their malefactors forgiveness.

The damaged, fragmented characters in Beckett's play stand in contradistinction to Nietzsche's ideal of abundance and squandering. As discussed above, the 'wounded' subjects in *Endgame* consider the other primarily as a threat. They thus adopt self-preservative strategies in order to limit and control their contact with the other. And rather than grant forgiveness for any perceived injury, Beckett's characters seek to assuage their pain by identifying someone to blame for their respective losses. For as Nietzsche puts it, 'every sufferer instinctively looks for [...] a culprit' (*OGM*, p. 99): identifying a legitimate offender, according to Nietzsche in an analysis that is pertinent to *Endgame*, acts as a palliative insofar as it produces 'some kind of *excess of feeling*, - which is used as the most effective anaesthetic of dull, crippling, long-drawn-out pain' (*OGM*, p. 107). That is, blame cognitively prefigures the perpetration of cruelty upon the other who, as the identified culprit, shall be punished. Moreover, as I shall show below, this perpetuation of revenge comes dangerously close to removing the other from the game. Such a strategy may be driven by the desire to augment one's own sense of selfhood or to attain peace, yet, it stands in opposition to Nietzsche's recognition that '[a]lmost every

³⁶⁹ Boulter, p. 46.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 47.

³⁷¹ See p. 56.

party grasps that it is in the interest of its own self-preservation that the opposing party should not decay in strength’.

Blame is a chief feature of the suffering characters’ responses to the world and to the other. Hamm, as I noted above, reproaches life per se. He also condemns his father, whom he calls an ‘accursed progenitor’ (*Endgame*, p. 96). White contends that ‘Hamm resents Nagg and Nell for bringing him into this world, and essentially blames them for his suffering’.³⁷² Catanzaro also notes that ‘Nagg and Nell clearly have not been forgiven’ for the more specific grievance of their neglect during his childhood.³⁷³ Blame, then, in *Endgame* illustrates Nietzsche’s point that it is reactive, motivated by the desire to compensate for the self’s losses: it primarily signals the bearer’s impoverished condition. Again this aggrieved mentality is governed by the appeal of the closed economy of the contractual logic, where the sufferer, according to Nietzsche, identifies him or herself as a creditor who may gain recompense through the perpetration of cruelty upon the guilty culprit. Yet not only does blame underline the reactive, compensatory nature of cruelty, it potentially perpetuates this pathos of loss or impotence according to the philosopher. For Nietzsche continues in the passage ‘On the doctrine of feeling power’, which I alluded to above:

The state in which we hurt others is certainly seldom as agreeable, in an unadulterated way, as that in which we benefit others; it is a sign that we are still lacking power, or it betrays a frustration in the face of this poverty; it brings new dangers and uncertainties to the power we do possess and clouds our horizon with the prospect of revenge, scorn, punishment, failure. (GS, p. 39)

In contrast to Nietzsche’s healthy squanderer who is able to bear one’s parasites, the play’s characters remain inextricably bound in the game of blame and perpetual revenge. The perpetration of cruelty, which may, as Nietzsche puts it, act as a ‘seductive lure to life’ for the wearied characters, and which may produce ‘the most effective anaesthetic’ for chronic pain, is nevertheless fundamentally associated with impotence. That is, as is evident here, Nietzsche repeatedly associates revenge with failure. In *Ecce Homo*, for

³⁷² White, p. 14.

³⁷³ Catanzaro, p. 173.

instance, he claims that 'the feeling of vengefulness and vindictiveness' belong 'to weakness' (*EH*, p17). Furthermore, as suggested in this passage under consideration, revenge self-perpetuates and only brings a further 'prospect of revenge'. This is both symptomatic of weakness and also signals the greater 'failure' for all involved. I shall now illustrate how the 'the prospect of revenge, scorn, punishment, failure' transpires in *Endgame* as a consequence of this need to blame the other.

The End Game

The final act of vengeance, Clov's indeterminate departure, leaves Hamm bereft of an audience for his narrative. The play's denouement thus highlights Hamm's impotence and meaningless isolation. Reinforcing the pervasive sense of inexorable loss, Hamm seems to presage this moment of utter abandonment earlier in the play:

HAMM: There I'll be, in the old refuge, alone against the silence and... [*he hesitates*]... the stillness. If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with. [*Pause.*] I'll have called my father and I'll have called my... [*he hesitates*]... my son. [...] I'll say to myself, He'll come back. [*Pause.*] And then? [*Pause.*] And then? [*Pause.*] He couldn't, he has gone too far. [*Pause.*] And then? [*Pause. Very agitated.*] All kinds of fantasies! That I'm being watched! A rat! Steps! Breath held and then... [*he breathes out.*] Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark. (*Endgame*, p. 126)

According to Mary Bryden, Hamm triumphs in the battle for power as he 'conclude[s] the show on his own terms'.³⁷⁴ The final move, Bryden asserts, sees Clov as 'the sacrificial lamb, or, alternatively, the scapegoat sent into the "Desert" recommended to him by Nell in her final breath'.³⁷⁵ However, the idea of Hamm's ultimate victory, coupled with this notion of finality which I shall soon turn to, is questionable: for Bryden also notes, by pointing to the fact that the herb Clove is used 'as a calming agent and a palliative for internal bleeding', that Clov's absence means that 'there will be no more painkiller of any

³⁷⁴Mary Bryden, 'The Sacrificial Victim of Beckett's *Endgame*', *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Theory, Criticism and Culture*, 4 (1990), 219.

³⁷⁵*Ibid.* p. 224.

sort' for Hamm.³⁷⁶ And it is the loss of the most potent palliative going, namely the presence of an audience attending to one's stories, which terrifies Hamm. Frank's comment on the relation between illness and narrative is insightful on the ill self's particularly heightened dependency upon an audience:

The self-story is told both to others and to one's self; each telling is enfolded within the other. The act of telling is a dual reaffirmation. Relationships with others are reaffirmed, and the self is reaffirmed. [...] The ill person needs to reaffirm that his story is worth listening to by others. He must also reaffirm that *he is still there*, an audience for himself. [...] Illness is a crisis of self in the specific sense of an uncertainty that one's self is still there as an audience.³⁷⁷

Hence Hamm's bullying insistence that Clov fake his enthusiastic demand that Hamm continue his narrative and his alternative tactic of bribing Nagg to attend to his stories. What is more, Nagg's repudiation of this role anticipates Clov's similar vindictive manoeuvre. Nagg is aware that Hamm, as Ruby Cohn notes, 'is centre stage, always in need of an audience', as he brutally concludes his speech.³⁷⁸

NAGG: I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice. [*Pause.*] Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope. (*Endgame*, pp. 120-121)

Nagg's disclosure of his neglect of Hamm, in which he both reveals Hamm's dependency while imagining a future reversal of the actual power structure, evokes Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment*, or the imaginary revenge of the impotent. Moreover, Nagg's vindictive wish plays on Hamm's fear of solitude and envisages his son's fundamental isolation much as Hamm's prophecy envisioned Clov's solitude and future destitution. In both cases the victim is to imagine himself alone in the 'dark'; it is telling that Clov had earlier reported to Hamm that Nell died of 'darkness'. As pointed out above, the darkness amounts to an encounter with the meaningless void that precipitates suicidal collapse.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Frank, p. 56.

³⁷⁸ Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theater* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 77.

The devastation wrought by Nagg's move is suggested by Hamm's summative comment, 'our revels are now ended' (*Endgame*, p. 120). With Nagg rejecting to play the role of audience, Hamm's pronouncement is indicative of the terminal state of this relationship.

With Clov's absence at the end of the play, Hamm's final strategy is suggested by the 'fantasies' that he is 'being watched' in his premonitory vision. His final appeal to an audience is noted by Salisbury: '[f]or in his final "gag" Hamm throws his whistle towards the auditorium, offering it up to these others "[w]ith my compliments". It is precisely the audience, then, alongside Clov, who are invoked in the final line "[y]ou ... remain" '.³⁷⁹ Hamm's appeal to an unseen and uncertain spectator constitutes his final recourse to avert suicidal nihilism. For, as I have argued throughout, it is senseless, useless suffering that cannot be assimilated in the self's quest for coherence and which thus threatens to overwhelm the self. Hamm's strategy thus echoes Josef K.'s desperate search for a witness to observe his ignominious ending in *The Trial*. Hamm's self-reflexivity also parallels the ancient Greeks whom Nietzsche argues were 'full of tender consideration for the spectator' (*OGM*, p. 49). That is, Hamm, like Nietzsche's exemplars, exhibits the fundamental need to recoup something from the experience of pointless suffering. By inventing an audience, as the Greeks created the intermediary, spectating gods, Hamm's suffering is offered as a gift for the pleasure of the spectator. 'My compliments' therefore means: my suffering, a gift to you, for your pleasure. Tellingly, Clov had earlier directed his telescope to the auditorium to inform Hamm, 'I see...a multitude...in transports...of joy' witnessing the theatre of suffering (*Endgame*, p. 106). The modicum of comfort is attained in considering one's suffering to be of value to a spectating audience: it is no longer 'unseen', or senseless.

Invoking an audience also allows the possibility of identifying with the spectator's detached position. This move permits one to imaginatively achieve spectatorial distance from one's suffering. I believe something of this is going on when Hamm speaks of multiplying himself like the 'solitary child who turns himself into children' (*Endgame*, p. 126). Hamm here evokes Nietzsche's depiction of the ascetic who split himself 'asunder into sufferer and a spectator' in order to attain 'an unspeakable happiness at the *sight of*

³⁷⁹ Salisbury, p. 131.

torment' (D, p. 68). Indeed, given that Beckett's play continually implies the individual's essential solitude, such an approach seems inevitable, just as Nietzsche saw such self-terrorization as integral to the human condition. Thus, as Hamm envisions his final destitution and the absence of his two main sources of pain relief, namely an audience for his stories and an outlet for his aggression, his self-division now brings to the fore Nietzsche's claim that we must take 'a new look' at cruelty: 'there is also an abundant, over-abundant enjoyment of one's own suffering, of making oneself suffer' (BGE, p. 59). What is key here in Nietzsche's thought is that one's aggressive, cruel drives continue to be discharged. Given that these drives have no external outlet, they are turned inwardly thus amplifying one's own inner pathos of distance; one forges one's own capacity to experience oneself as both a perpetrator and a spectator of one's own suffering. What I suggest to be Hamm's strategy of dividing himself can thus be seen to parallel Clov's imaginary 'they' inflicting his punishment. For Nietzsche, such examples of self-cruelty continue to constitute an undeniable pleasure, for the self continues to inflict suffering and attain the most intense pathos of power. In Beckett's play, these images corroborate Nietzsche's picture of human nature, while also suggesting man's indelible fear of encountering the '*horror vacui*', or the acknowledgement of the fact that one's long-standing pain will have 'been for nothing'.

Yet, despite gesturing towards Hamm's recuperative strategies, the final image of the isolated Hamm appealing to the audience strikes one of profound loss and failure. For Clov's ambiguous departure, this radical uncertainty as to whether he has actually departed or not, comprises the final act of vengeance on Clov's part: by highlighting both Hamm's dependence and impotence, he presents the blind Hamm with a final exegetical predicament, preventing him from interpretatively mastering the game. For, exemplifying the play's continual frustration of closure, Gontarski notes: 'Clov's silent, unresponsive presence' signals 'a persistence that suggests that there may be at least one more turn to the wheel'.³⁸⁰ Thus, rather than situate Nietzsche's analysis of cruelty with Weller's reading of Beckett's 'dispassionate statement' of human nature, despite the suggested parallels, I hold that Nietzsche's thought points more towards a reading of the characters'

³⁸⁰ Gontarski, pp. 139-40.

impotence and ultimate failure. This revenge play between the characters which dominates the drama thus clearly undermines any notion, such as that held by Cavell, of Hamm's heroism or triumph.

Indeed, these cruel and masochistic dimensions of *Endgame* may account for the audience's mixed response to the play. On the one hand, *Endgame* may repel its audience as it presents its characters as ineluctably at war with each other and with themselves, struggling to constitute some form of self-coherence and inescapably bound to destructive, compensatory strategies. However, by noting *Endgame*'s relation to Nietzsche's analysis of ancient tragedy, it is possible to identify a source of the audience's pleasure, albeit a painful-pleasure source. According to Nietzsche, tragedy entails a masochistic dimension: '[t]hat which constitutes the painful voluptuousness of tragedy is cruelty' (*BGE*, p. 159). For Nietzsche, tragedy involves the dissolution and reconstitution of meaning and identity: in the awareness of, and identification with, the hero's demise, and in the audience's intoxicated state, ancient tragedy entails the decomposition of stable meaning and the fragmentation of egoistic boundaries and Apollonian closure. However, mirroring nature's exuberant fertility, the self does not collapse in this quasi-religious experience, but has the power to reconstitute itself: Dionysus is the god who is painfully dis-membered, but he is also perpetually re-born. I shall now outline the relevance of this painful-pleasurable dialectical dynamic with regard to the audience's experience of *Endgame* by firstly registering the audience's resistance towards Beckett's favourite play.

As I have suggested above, Beckett's distancing techniques may prevent deep identification with the characters. However, as Julie Campbell acknowledges as she alludes to the Beckett critic Vivian Mercier's aversion to *Endgame*, reactions to the play also depend upon the audience's personal disposition and contextual situation: Mercier's repulsion to the play stemmed from personal crisis, from his wife's illness and death; his reaction points to the fact that Beckett's drama, in its unconventional presentation of human suffering and decay, may negatively impact its audience.³⁸¹ This negative affect may be talked about in terms of nihilism. For Nietzsche, as I mentioned above, considers one potential affect of tragedy, given that it is premised on the recognition that everyone

³⁸¹ Julie Campbell, 'Endgame and Performance', in *Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, ed. by Mark S. Byron (New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 253-74 (p. 269).

'must be prepared to face a sorrowful end', is that of inducing feelings of suicidal despair (*BT*, p. 80).

In a similar manner, Beckett's dramatization of his characters' decline may provoke revulsion. For *Endgame*'s audience is arguably exposed to what Nietzsche calls 'the disgusting spectacle of the failed, the stunted, the wasted away' (*OGM*, p. 26). As Nietzsche argues that '[t]he *sickly* are the greatest danger to man', for they 'introduce the deadliest poison and scepticism into our trust in life, in man, in ourselves', it may be said that audience's engagement with 'the unfortunate, the downtrodden, the broken' may subject them to feelings of nihilistic despair (*OGM*, p. 95). For, as Nietzsche succinctly puts it, '[t]he sight of man now makes us tired - what is nihilism today if it is not *that*?... We are tired of *man*' (*OGM*, p. 27).

That Beckett may have been aware of this possible impact upon his audience is suggested in his earlier novel, *Molloy*. Here the eponymous narrator, similarly beset by debilitating physical ailments, confesses of his own wearied condition:

It is indeed a deplorable sight, a deplorable example, for the people, who so need to be encouraged, in their bitter toil, and to have before their eyes manifestations of strength only, of courage and of joy, without which they might collapse, at the end of the day, and roll on the ground.³⁸²

Coupled with this affective dimension of the play, *Endgame* presents the audience with a cognitive impasse. Otherwise put, the play repeatedly resists attempts at interpretative closure and mastery. Significantly, Beckett told Schneider that he wanted to provide a 'full evening's agony' with the performance of *Endgame*.³⁸³ That this 'agony' may take the form of a hermeneutical obstacle which both characters and audience share can be elucidated, for example, by pointing to Clov's ambiguous departure. Hamm shares this impasse with the audience he repeatedly invokes.

The audience's drive for hermeneutical closure or coherence thus mimics the characters' various attempts to attain a self-preservative self-enclosure. The

³⁸²Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 20.

³⁸³ Baroghel, p. 131.

characters' thwarted attempts to assemble the 'grains' of their identity, to construct a coherent 'heap' or whole, or an Apollonian individuated self, are transmitted to the witnessing audience (*Endgame*, p. 93). For the characters' attempts to render power or interpretative mastery are largely shifting, paradoxical, and unintelligible.

Nietzsche's analysis of the self's appropriative economy is germane here with reference to the hermeneutical difficulties that the audience are presented with. For Nietzsche observes that the most common means of attaining 'the *feeling* of growth, the feeling of increased power' is through the tendency 'to assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the complex, to overlook or repel what is wholly contradictory' (*BGE*, pp. 160-2). This drive for the superficial or for an Apollonian assimilation of the complex and paradoxical to categories of stable identity is, however, thwarted for the audience of *Endgame*. As Gabriele Schwab observes, the audience cannot rely upon notions of psychic continuity, 'of circumscribed wholes', given the characters' fragmentary and interchangeable natures.³⁸⁴ She also makes the general observation that: '[t]he pervasive structure of negation and contradiction frustrates all partial investments of meaning and thereby fundamentally impedes every gesture of interpretation which strives for closure.'³⁸⁵ By disturbing the stable categories of meaning and identity that we rely upon, the audience is subject to an 'endgame' which plays with the limits of our subjectivity. Drawing again on Schwab's thesis, Campbell notes it is possible to see a dialectic of opening and closure characterize the audience's experience of the play: '*Endgame* encourages the spectator to make sense of what is happening on stage, but then challenges this very procedure.'³⁸⁶ The audience's attempt to attain a state of interpretative coherence amounts to a gesture of closure towards the play's refractory otherness. Yet the play repeatedly resists this imperialistic endeavour; it disturbs these ineluctable attempts at closure, at assimilation. The experience of this play thus involves an expenditure of the rationally closed, coherent, or Apollonian self. We are propelled, as Schwab discerns, to engage with new openings which then impel us to posit new interpretations; of course, these new positions, gesturing towards closure, are themselves being

³⁸⁴ Gabriele Schwab, 'On the Dialectic of Closing and Opening in *Endgame*', in *Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Steven Connor (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 87-99 (p. 89).

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 91.

³⁸⁶ Campbell, p. 268.

continually ruptured by the constant strains, ambiguities and contradictions that characterise this play. Presented with this exegetical recalcitrance, the self must invest more of itself in this drive to assimilate or digest that which resists such attempts at assimilation. This dynamic, which mirrors the Apollonian-Dionysian dialectic of meaning evacuation and reconstitution as Nietzsche presents it, may account for both the joy and hostility that *Endgame* generates.

For some, the absence of gestures or signals that point towards an interpretative consensus or closure may provoke hostility and depression. Recalling Nietzsche's minimal psychological principle that the self experiences the pathos of power as it overcomes resistances, it may be surmised that Beckett's play, rather, with its refractory nature, stimulates an antithetical pathos of impotence. For as Nietzsche puts it, 'every animal abhors [...] any kind of disturbance and hindrance which blocks or could block his path to the optimum' (*OGM*, p. 81). This resistance or blockage, it must be stressed, that provokes such repugnance is not solely cognitive. For the cognitive and the affective are intertwined: the characters' embodied pain manifests in their cognitive failings which are purveyed to the audience. It is thus this presentation of the psycho-physiological break down, and not just psychic dissolution, which the self seeks to appropriate and which it may stumble at. And yet the experience of dissolution that *Endgame* subjects us to is pleasurable. As Campbell wonderfully puts it: '[t]here is no message in *Endgame*, there is no consoling panacea, but there is something indefinable and also magical going on.'³⁸⁷

In confronting the audience with the characters' senseless suffering, *Endgame* presents a truly Dionysian vision, one of a world devoid of hope. It resists attempts to reconstitute palliatives or restoratives that would engender some form of meaning. And yet we, as creatures with consciousness, are impelled to constitute meaning. We are thus provoked to engage with the resistances the play presents us with. And this entails 'agony'. For, as Nietzsche maintains, suffering is integral to feelings of pleasure, or rather, to the pathos of power:

³⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 270.

Displeasure, as an obstacle to its will to power, is therefore a normal fact, the normal ingredient of every organic event; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event, presupposes a resistance overcome. (*WTP*, p. 373)

The dialectic of opening and closure I have just sketched suggests that *Endgame* presents resistances which we are 'in continual need of'. For the play continually invites and resists interpretative closure. And if we are to grow, according to the thinker, we require to engage with such resistances. Thus, just as Nietzsche saw the tragic Greeks embrace Silenus's wisdom, with the dissolution of ego-security this entailed, so *Endgame's* masochistic dimension may spell a paradoxical feeling of life-enhancement in the midst of such nihilistic despair. For in this encounter with the text's unassimilable otherness, the self may just find itself temporarily assuming the position of Nietzsche's 'genius of the heart': 'broken open, [...] more uncertain perhaps, more delicate, more fragile, more broken, but full of hopes that as yet have no names' (*EH*, p. 47).

Conclusion: Affective Modernism

In her well known essay, 'On Being Ill', Virginia Woolf complains that 'illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature' (*On Being Ill*, p. 3).³⁸⁸ Woolf's essay addresses literature's neglect of this most bodily of experiences by celebrating suffering's transformative potential and valorising the insights disclosed in illness. Broadly speaking, her argument echoes Nietzsche's exaltation of suffering as 'the occasion for self-mastery and self-insight'.³⁸⁹ As Nietzsche puts it in one cognate passage: '[t]he tremendous tension imparted to the intellect by its desire to oppose and counter pain makes him see everything he now beholds in a new light' (*D*, p. 70).

As observed in chapter one, Nietzsche's discourse of suffering is beset by a series of tensions, however: his affirmative rhetoric is particularly complicated by focussing upon his views on others' distress. Similar strains operate in Woolf's essay: Woolf champions the receptivity to otherness fostered by illness, on the one hand; her rejection of sympathy suggests an acute vulnerability to the fear of nihilistic collapse, on the other. The issue of the self's affective being comes to the fore: both figures endorse notions of an expansive, porous self; yet this vision seems to be at odds with their respective stress on protecting autarkic selfhood. By charting the strains in Woolf's essay, and by drawing attention to the notions of opening and closure, I aim to highlight some of the salient points of my thesis as a means of concluding my study.

The Need for Illusion

According to Woolf, 'the whole landscape of life lies remote and fair' for the sick (*On Being Ill*, p. 8). In contrast to the narrow and familiar outlook held by the healthy, industrious majority, this sense of perspectival detachment defamiliarizes the

³⁸⁸ Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill: With Notes from Sick Rooms by Julia Stephens* (Ashfield, Mass.: Paris Press, 2012). All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

³⁸⁹ Boothroyd, p. 156.

everyday world. Woolf thus attends to the normally overlooked celestial aesthetic spectacle. However, her initial joy gives way to ambivalence as she ponders nature's indifference: '[d]ivinely beautiful is also divinely heartless. Immeasurable resources are used for some purpose which has nothing to do with human pleasure or human profit' (*On Being Ill*, pp. 13-14). Despite finding her own illness and 'irresponsible' freedom valuable, Woolf seeks to economize this endless and unfathomable squandering: 'the waste of Heaven' must be made 'use of'; there is a need to extract some 'human profit' from this 'divinely heartless' performance (*On Being Ill*, pp. 13-14). Otherwise put, Woolf acknowledges Nietzsche's claim that 'the way of the world is [...] not rational, merciful, or just' (GS, p. 204). Woolf's essay is thus grappling with the conundrum confronting modernity as articulated by Nietzsche: namely, of the human need to confer value to the world shorn of transcendental significance.

What is more, Woolf claims that the ill are particularly sensitive to these Dionysian disclosures: 'only the recumbent' are aware of one's place within the natural order, of one's ephemerality; the majority defend themselves from awareness of the self's insignificance, of which 'Nature is at no pains to conceal' (*On Being Ill*, p. 16). As considered throughout in the main body of my thesis, the ill, impotent and beleaguered characters who populate the worlds of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Trial*, and *Endgame* are especially exposed to the unbearable awareness of the *horror vacui*, the fear of nothingness, the thought of one's finitude. Following Nietzsche's contention that we are also impelled to resist such Dionysian insights, I thus noted the characters' need to recuperate significance against this unpalatable knowledge.

Woolf's essay similarly echoes Nietzsche's claim that it is only as 'an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us' (GS, p. 204). That is, Woolf points to the inevitability of the Apollonian gesture, of the human need to shield oneself from full knowledge of the Dionysian: she claims that man's creative activity has been directed towards generating the illusion that 'there will be some green isle for the mind to rest on even if the foot cannot plant itself there' (*On Being Ill*, p. 17). More specifically, humanity has 'wished into existence' notions of Heaven and immortality in order to resist the threat of suicidal paralysis (*On Being Ill*, p. 17). Christian belief is thus treated as one more fictional illusion, expressing human 'hopes and desires' which stand to counter nature's indifference. However, discerning the 'tired' and 'worn' appearance of believers (*On*

Being III, p. 18), Woolf points to the frailty of the Christian illusion in order to contend that '[t]he duty of Heaven-making should be attached to the office of the Poet Laureate' (*On Being III*, p. 19). Moreover, as Woolf turns instead to literature to provide solace and the generation of new meaning, she argues that literature in turn finds its inspiration in nature, exemplified by the 'self-sufficient' flowers she turns her attention towards: '[w]onderful to relate, poets have found religion in nature; people live in the country to learn virtue from plants. It is in their indifference that they are comforting' (*On Being III*, p. 15). Yet it is curious that Woolf, whose meditation is prompted as a response to the unpalatable realization of nature's grand indifference to human endeavour, here valorises the flowers in these very terms. Woolf thus argues, 'the great artists, the Miltons and the Popes, [...] console not by their thought of us but by their forgetfulness' (*On Being III*, p. 16). Further scrutiny of Woolf's ideology of self-sufficiency suggests that it is others' suffering in particular that art must distance us from.

Sympathy and the Pathos of Nihilism

A recurrent theme in the modernist texts that I have explored is man's fundamental isolation. Woolf holds a similar view of human existence, claiming that illness reveals that '[w]e do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others' (*On Being III*, p. 11). In illness, Woolf argues, the 'make-believe' pertaining to the capacity of sympathetically identifying with others' distress 'ceases' (*On Being III*, p. 12). The singular nature of one's suffering is thus to be celebrated: '[h]ere we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable' (*On Being III*, pp. 11-12).

Woolf valorises one's suffering as a means for self-growth, an opportunity to explore one's 'inner virgin forest' or untouched 'snowfield' (*On Being III*, pp. 11-12). Her position strongly resembles Nietzsche's view that one's suffering is 'what is truly personal': '[w]hat we most deeply and most personally suffer from is incomprehensible and inaccessible to nearly everyone else' (*GS*, p. 191). Pity, for Nietzsche, thus denies the personal value of one's suffering: pity acts as an instrument to appropriate or colonize the other, foreclosing the sufferer's unique encounter with 'terrors, deprivations, impoverishments,

midnights, adventures, risks, and blunders' which are 'necessary' for self-transformation (GS, p. 191).

Woolf's denunciation of sympathy bifurcates as she departs from the rhetoric of dignified self-discovery: echoing Nietzsche's reactive repudiation of sympathy, Woolf contends that '[s]ympathy nowadays is dispensed chiefly by the laggards and the failures' (*On Being Ill*, p. 10). The problem with sympathy, she claims, is that it is 'fantastic and unprofitable', exercised by those who have 'dropped out of the race' (*On Being Ill*, p. 10): sympathising with others is a form of useless expenditure, there is no return to self. As with nature's grand squandering, suffering is an excessive force, indifferent to the economy of the individual.

Indeed, suffering's overwhelming nature is hinted at in Woolf's initial complaint that illness rarely features as a literary theme: 'there is the poverty of the language' to describe pain (*On Being Ill*, p. 6); 'the experience cannot be imparted' (*On Being Ill*, p. 8). Moreover, suffering's power to shatter one's sense of self-sufficiency is evident as Woolf discusses encounters with others' suffering. For others' suffering provokes the self to reflexively consider its own unredeemed grievances:

As is always the way with these dumb things, his own suffering serves but to wake memories in his friends' minds of *their* influenzas, *their* aches and pains which went unwept last February, and now cry aloud, desperately, clamorously, for the Divine relief of sympathy. (*On Being Ill*, pp. 18-19)

Woolf suggests here that one's own past wounds remain alive, unappropriated. The senseless, irredeemable nature of these injuries induce the sufferer to seek others' sympathy, and to assimilate one's grievances within a common meaning. Furthermore, Woolf warns against compassionate feelings as they precipitate the onset of suicidal nihilism:

But sympathy we cannot have. Wisest fate says no. If her children, weighted as they already are by sorrow, were to take on them that burden too, adding in imagination other pains to their own, buildings would cease to rise; roads would peter out into grassy tracks; there would be an end of painting and of music; one great sigh alone would rise to Heaven, and the only attitudes of men and women would be those of horror and despair. (*On Being Ill*, p. 9)

Human agency is denuded as one's own suffering is amplified in pity, becoming unbearable. Artistic endeavour would similarly collapse in the contagion of grief. And yet Woolf again points to the necessity of art: art provides one means to 'prevent one from turning the old beggar's hieroglyphic of misery into volumes of sordid suffering' (*On Being Ill*, p. 9).

Attention to modernism's complex discourse on suffering, particularly in relation to nihilism, reveals a repeated fear of collapse: Woolf may valorise suffering in this essay, yet she simultaneously betrays a fear of losing her sense of autonomy as she is exposed to both others' and hence one's own senseless suffering. As Nietzsche observes, it is the experience of unbearable, meaningless suffering that precipitates individual and collective feelings of suicidal nihilism.³⁹⁰ And given that one implication of God's death is that we moderns no longer have the traditional means to appropriate our suffering, modernist literature, I contend, conveys our particularly heightened susceptibility to this pathos. Furthermore, Woolf's essay echoes the modernist works of Lawrence, Kafka, and Beckett, by simultaneously illustrating that this pathos of impotence engendered by suffering is attended by a reactionary-defensive, perhaps compensatory, rejection of the other.

Attention to the nature of this reactive discourse appearing in modernist literature may contribute to critical discussions of modernist figures and their relationship to fascist ideologies and politics. That is, my thesis may further illuminate, and complicate, studies by John Carey, Charles Ferrall and Leon Surette among others, by calling attention to the writers' respective engagement with the issues of senseless suffering and nihilism: this dimension of the writers' thought and fiction has been largely overlooked in existent discussions that align modernist writers with right-wing politics.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ See, for example, pp. 56-7 of this thesis.

³⁹¹ Carey; Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Leon Surette, *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

Modernism and the Dionysian Affect

Woolf's lament regarding the paucity of literature engaging with the body in illness can be extended to contemporary critical discourse. As Terry Eagleton notes, the fragile body in pain, subject to illness or emotional disturbance, features rarely within 'body-orientated academia'.³⁹² The reason for this, according to Eagleton, is that 'the suffering body is largely a passive one': 'hardly able to compete with the sexual, disciplined or carnivalesque body', the suffering, passive body stands at odds with postmodernism's 'ideology of self-fashioning'.³⁹³

Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* departs from this critical tendency and focuses upon bodily emotions in a range of literary and cultural works. Seeking 'to expand and transform the category of "aesthetic emotions"',³⁹⁴ Ngai contends that negative feelings such as envy, anxiety and paranoia issue from 'the general situation of obstructed agency'.³⁹⁵ By focussing upon two further affects bound to 'the situation of passivity itself',³⁹⁶ namely nihilism and *ressentiment*, my thesis may complement Ngai's study. Within the field of modernist studies, my approach to wounded subjectivities marks a shift from Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mapping*:³⁹⁷ while Flatley seeks to uncover the redemptive qualities of negative affects such as melancholy in modernist literature, I have stressed the depiction of reactionary and impotent feelings attending the pathos of frustrated agency.

Woolf's essay also exhorts for a new language for the body, and a new hierarchy of the affects (*On Being Ill*, p. 7). While the term 'affect' is commonly held to be synonymous with the emotions, it may also connote the self's relation to its surrounding world. Lisa Blackman's definition is useful: '[r]ather than considering bodies as closed physiological and biological systems, bodies are open, participating in the flow or passage of affect, characterized more by reciprocity and co-participation than boundary and constraint.'³⁹⁸ As Flatley puts it, 'affect indicates something relational and transformative'.³⁹⁹ I have

³⁹² Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. xiv.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 6.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 13-14.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁹⁷ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

³⁹⁸ Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (London: Sage, 2012), p. 2.

³⁹⁹ Flatley, pp. 12-13.

drawn on Nietzsche's notion of the self's digestive economy in order to explore the self's interrelations with the other and the otherness of the world as it is portrayed in the respective literary works I have chosen to look at. I have focussed particularly upon the relation between suffering and the self's boundaries: in all three modernist texts, the characters evince a reactive, defensive recoil as a result of heightened feelings of vulnerability stemming from emotional, psychological, and physical experiences of injury. Yet heightened suffering, as Nietzsche and Lawrence discern, is integral to self-enhancement: even as both register the ultimately reflexive, or narcissistic, nature of human experience, they stress that becoming more permeable to the other is central to one's self-affirmation.

Woolf insists that illness fractures the self's boundaries, usurping the mind's rigid hegemony which serves to restrict the body's immediate, sensual awareness of otherness (*On Being Ill*, pp. 21-22). Woolf celebrates this affective receptivity as 'the barriers go down' (*On Being Ill*, p. 23) : the self's 'arrogance', its illusory, Apollonian posture of rational self-sufficiency, is breached in illness. Here lies a further tension at play in this essay: while fearing the threat to autarkic selfhood presented by others' suffering, Woolf simultaneously celebrates illness' capacity to shatter our illusion of self-control. She similarly praises great literature as it frustrates one's pathos of agency, claiming that 'the masters themselves often keep us waiting intolerably while they prepare our minds for whatever it may be - the surprise, or the lack of surprise' (*On Being Ill*, p. 24). The 'masters' thus prevent exegetical closure, thwarting the 'arrogant' boundary of self-contained identity imposing itself.

In my thesis, I have examined works that produce this 'tragic' affect, this dissolution of the self's comfortable self-coherence. In different ways the writings of Lawrence, Beckett and Kafka cruelly frustrate our drive for hermeneutic mastery and self-possession: these works expose the reader, or the audience, to human vulnerability, to experiences of useless suffering, to senseless or compensatory cruelty, to the problem of nihilism. In short, they present the Dionysian, unpalatable and excessive character of existence. And herein lies their value, opening us up to our own and to the world's otherness. As Kafka puts it:

We need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors* (New York: Schocken, 1977), p. 16.

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