The Death of God and the
Negation of Eternal Return
in the Theology of Thomas J.J. Altizer
and the Fiction of A.S. Byatt

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to explicate the concept of the death of God as it arises within Thomas Altizer's theological writings and the fiction of A.S. Byatt, paying special attention to the idea of the negation of eternal return. The negation of eternal return not only informs Altizer's theology, but also provides a metaphor with which to critique not only the traditional theological idea of God, but also the self-sufficiency of the theological tradition. As Altizer's theology is informed by a literary tradition outside the circle of traditional theological reflection, so this thesis suggests that theology comes about necessarily through self-emptying fictions, and not through the closedness of scholasticism; therefore the fiction of Byatt becomes a point of entry into theological reflection. The negation of eternal return also provides a useful metaphor for the metaphysics of the Proper, and economies of the Same.

An intertextual consideration of Altizer's influences and theological development alongside the works of Byatt (specifically Possession, The Virgin in the Garden and Still Life) , the thesis is informed also by thinkers such as Mark C. Taylor, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva, disciplines such as modern physics and nineteenth century biology, and literary works such as "The Dream of the Rood," and Iris Murdoch's The Time of the Angels. In the negation of eternal return, the kenosis of the God of Christendom, it is suggested, there

arises a writing and reading which is, in Altizer's words, "a historically evolving faith," a decentering of the economy of the Proper, and an unending interpretation which is the apocalypse of the God who is other-than-God, and a theology which is other-than-theology.

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For Thursday's Child

PREFACE:

Calling it a Draw

Perhaps it was a book that only a genius could write, and he was not a genius. It might be that all he wanted to say about love and about humanity was true but simply could not be expressed as a theory. Well, he would think about all that later on. What he needed now was relaxation, perhaps a holiday. (Murdoch, _Time of the Angels_ 221)

Herewith my thesis, which both presents and marks the end of my research (according to my submission forms, this theis should *embody* my research). Having submitted this writing to the institutional authority (an event which now, for me, lies in the future, a future forever captured in these marks; but for you, my reader, that future may very well be eternally past) the research from which it has originated is negated by its presence. Its presence, however, not only marks the absence of that research, but its total presence in that negation. Nowhere else is that research to be found but here, and here only in its absence.

In many ways the writing of a thesis is the drawing of a representation, an image, for lack of a better word, of one's research. "This is what my research looks like," I might say. Here then, is my picture, childish though it may be (for I remain a child in the eyes of the

institution, having not yet undergone the rite of passage to which this writing points).

Flannery O'Connor once said that a child tries to draw "exactly what he (sic) sees" (Fadiman 607), but in a world following Piaget and Levi-Strauss, we have come to accept that a child draws not what he or she sees, but symbols representing what he or she sees, whether in reality or in the mind's eye. Any parent who has almost praised what looked like a very nice helicopter only to find that it is in the eyes of its artist a portrait of Mommy will understand this concept. To draw what one sees is a skill which must be taught, if it can ever be accomplished at all; it is certainly not accomplished by the unskilled child, and certainly not by *this* unskilled child. The unskilled child must provide an explanation in order to enlighten the uninitiated viewer of the identity of his or her inscribed symbol. Herewith my scribbled symbols, and my explanation--well, that's yet to come.

This thesis was conceived of and written over the course of two years at the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology, at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. It is the product of original research and no part of it been used in any other thesis. A previous version of chapter three has been published in <u>Literature and Theology</u> 8:2 (1994).

I have followed the MLA style in the presentation of this thesis, using parenthetical citation and, in cases of frequent citation or the use of multiple works by a single author, abbreviations for the titles of the works

have been used. A list of frequently used abbreviations precedes the text. I have, for the sake of clarity, deviated from MLA norms and single-spaced my end-notes.

Now, there are numerous people without whom I would not have been able to complete this project, and here I have a chance to formally acknowledge their contributions.

I must begin by thanking Susan Cumings, who left several parts of her thesis, including her acknowledgement page, on a computer disc of which I am in possession. For the form of this page, I thank you, Susan.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Robert Detweiler, who first of all sparked my interest with a paper on Possession at the last conference in Glasgow, and also because of whose initial advice I wound up in Glasgow in the first place, and also to David Jasper, because of whose continued advice, support, and motivation, I have endured, SADS notwithstanding. Dr. Jasper has provided opportunities for personal development far beyond the requirements of a graduate supervisor. I am also grateful for the hospitality shown to Robin and myself by Alison Jasper, who has, along with David, made us feel much more at home before and after the recent birth of our daughter, Caroline. Robin's mother, Gerri Castle, also made it possible for me to spend a lot less time washing dishes and changing diapers, and a little more time typing, for which I thank her. I also greatly appreciate the friendship of the people in the Centre, particularly

that of Catherine Raine, my fellow sufferer at Edgehill Road.

I am also very thankful to A.S. Byatt, who has taken far more time and effort to read and respond to my work than I would have ever expected, and whose congeniality has given me confidence I would not otherwise have known. To Dr. Altizer, as well, for responding to my inquiries, and for providing additional sources, I am grateful.

Finally, I am eternally grateful for the love and support of my parents and family: *sine qua non*. I also thank Caroline for waiting as long as she did. There are many others, both here and in the States, whom I wish to thank as well, and I will do so--but not here. Most crucially, my deepest love and gratitude, which I cannot express, remains always for you, Robin.

<div style="text-align: right">
J. Stephen Fountain
Glasgow, September 1994
</div>

FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

IN THE TEXT

"AOA"   Altizer, Thomas J.J. "Altizer on Altizer."

Unpublished essay, Sept. 1991.

"AFT"   ---."America and the Future of Theology."

Radical Theology and the Death of God. Ed.

Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton.

Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966.

"RC" ---. "The Contemporary Challenge of Radical

Catholicism." The Journal of Religion

74:2 (April, 1994): 182-198.

"DTCN"   ---. "Dionysian Theology as A Catholic

Nihilism." Lecture. Special Session on God

Without Being, Jean-Luc Marion. AAR Annual

Meeting. November, 1993.

GA   ---. Genesis and Apocalypse. Louisville, KY:

Westminster/John Knox, 1990.

GOG   ---. The Genesis of God. Louisville, KY:

Westminster/John Knox, 1993.

HAA   ---. History as Apocalypse. Albany, NY: SUNY

Press, 1985.

"INCWR?"   ---. "Is the Negation of Christianity the Way

to Its Renewal?" Religous Humanism 24 (W

1990): 10-16.

"STOC"   ---. "The Satanic Transgression of

Crucifixion." Unpublished essay, Fall,

1992.

SEOG   ---. The Self-Embodiment of God. New York:

Harper and Row, 1977.

TP   ---. <u>Total Presence</u>. New York: Seabury, 1980.

P   Byatt, A.S. <u>Possession: A Romance</u>. London:

        Vintage, 1990.

SL   ---. <u>Still Life</u>. London: Penguin, 1985.

VIG   ---. <u>The Virgin in the Garden</u>. London: Penguin,

        1978.

MP   Derrida, Jacques. <u>Margins of Philosophy</u>. Trans.

        Alan Bass. London: Harvester, 1982.

OG   ---. <u>Of Grammatology</u>. Trans. G. Spivak.

        Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976.

"WM"   ---. "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of

        Philosophy." <u>Margins of Philosophy</u>. Trans.

        Alan Bass. London: Harvester, 1982. 207-

        272.

"ACW"   Kristeva, Julia. "About Chinese Women."

        <u>The Kristeva Reader</u>. Ed. Toril Moi.

        Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. 138- 159.

"SM"   ---. "Stabat Mater." <u>The Kristeva Reader</u>. Ed.

        Toril Moi. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. 160-

        186.

A   Taylor, Mark C. <u>Altarity</u>. Chicago: Univ. of

        Chicago Press, 1987.

DC   ---., ed. <u>Deconstruction in Context</u>. Chicago:

        Chicago UP, 1986.

E   ---. <u>Erring</u>. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press,

        1984.

"PT"   ---. "The Politics of Theo-ry." <u>Journal of the</u>

        <u>American Academy of Religion</u> 59 (1991):

        11-37.

PROLOGUE:

Facing the Death of God

"We can speak about God only if we can fully and actually speak, even if such speech should be indirect, paradoxical or veiled. (Thomas Altizer The Self-Embodiment of God 1)

"Our sense of interdisciplinary activity now needs to be replaced with a much more generous and braver sense of multidisciplinary theoretical reflection which avoids the theological dilettantism saturating so much work in the field of 'literature and religion,' fostered all too often by a largely unreflective sense of literary criticism.

. . .may there indeed be a way back--to literature, and through literature even now to theology?" (Jasper, "Introduction: Religious Thought and Contemporary Critical Theory" 2,5).

This thesis has a double grounding: on the one hand, its methodological ground consists of an explication of the development of the idea of the death of God within Thomas Altizer's theological writings and within the fiction of A.S. Byatt, paying special attention to the concept of the negation of eternal return (as developed, for instance, by Mircea Eliade, and not to be confused with Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence"). The negation of eternal return not only informs Altizer's entire theological network, as well as providing the fundamental

viewpoint from which to critique traditional scholastic theology, but is also a key motif arising from Byatt's fictional realms. Not only does Altizer propose that the negation of a cycle of eternal return in the death of God provides an image of God which is contrary to that of traditional theology, but methodologically the self-sufficiency of theological scholasticism is negated by Altizer in favor of a more literarily-informed approach to theology. As Altizer's "theology" demonstrates a fundamental relationship between theology and literature, so this thesis attempts a theological discussion in a literary mode, not a scholarly one (a dangerous proposition for a "thesis"), suggesting that theology comes about necessarily through fictions, which are self-emptying, not through a scholasticism which seeks its own closure. Finally, the negation of eternal return provides a useful metaphor for the "phallogocentric economy of the Same" (as Irigaray demonstrates in her considerations of Nietzsche [Oppel 93]); it is the critique of that system, the metaphysics of the "proper," to which this work is dedicated. For Altizer, theology arises outside the family circle of traditional Christianity, and fiction provides an entry into the theological realm, an entry which is gained through his attention to theology's "abject," fiction. Thus Altizer's is a decentering presence within the circle of traditional theology. Such an entry may also be gained through the fiction of A.S. Byatt.

Efforts by twentieth century theologians such as Thomas Altizer to grant any sort of sacred status or religiousness to texts outside the Christian theological tradition, or indeed, outside the canon (or to read canonical texts as textual products), have often been met with a firm Barthian "Nein!" or with the sentiments of those who, like Theodore Runyon, reflecting upon Altizer's understanding of Pauline *kenosis*, sees theological reflection ocurring outwith the tradition as the "secularization" of the gospel, "the basic sin of Man (sic)" (Cobb 45-57). "To become itself," however, Altizer has said, "theology must negate itself," even to the point of "abandoning its own tradition" ("Word and History" 122).

The question whether or not there can actually remain anything like theology (talking about God, God-talk, the exercises of theo-logic) following the death of God is a question which has been answered by a select few highly productive new theologians in the past thirty years[1], although it is still a subject of debate whether or not their disparate efforts have actually been "theology," or, in fact, whether or not they should be (as are the questions, "What *is* the death of God?" and "When exactly did that death occur?"). What remains for theology in/at the wake of the death of God? Those of us who consider ourselves within, if at the margins of, disciplines affected by recent critiques of (the) Author/ity, find ourselves in a critical situation not

unlike that of A.S. Byatt's character, Ellen Ash, wife of renowned Victorian poet, R.H. Ash.

> I sit among his possessions--now mine or no one's--and think that his life, his presence, departs more slowly from these inanimate than from him, who was once animate and is now, I cannot write it, I should not have started writing. My dear, I sit here and write, to whom but thee? I feel better here amongst thy things--the pen is reluctant to form "thee," "thy," there is no one there, and yet here is still a presence. (P 442)

In this scene from Possession, Ellen Ash writes in her journal, just after her husband Randolph's death. The relationship between Ellen and Randolph has been celibate since Ellen's inability to consummate the marriage. This "inability" has been accepted by Randolph, and Ellen has lived her life in slavish attempts to compensate for the lack of bodily evidence of the relationship between them. Randolph, however tender and accepting of Ellen's love, and however reciprocal that pure and innocent love may have been, found passion in the arms of Christabel LaMotte, his fellow poet who, it turns out, mothers his child. Through a procession of confessions and textual evidence, Ellen learns of her husband's involvements, though the fact and the implications of the affair are repressed. She writes here, following Randolph's death, in remembrance of Him, anamnestically (until He comes?), though she knows "He'll come no more" (P 381). The truth

of the matter is, of course, that he never has at all; not with her, at least. What would it mean for theology to admit the same--that its efforts to maintain an exclusive relationship have precluded the very idea of relationship, and perhaps also that its efforts to contain that non-existent relationship within a sterile site (the marriage, the canon, the institution) have blinded it to improper, illegitimate and scandalous re(ve)lations occuring elsewhere? Perhaps the very idea of re(ve)lation consistently displaces our efforts to theologize and canonize.

In his "analogical-theological" reading of the relationship between Ellen Ash and her husband, Robert Detweiler observes that "Randolph is his wife's god," accepting her unconditionally ("FF" 8). While Randolph has accepted Ellen's worshipping him in Spirit and in Truth, and in that way exclusively, Randolph has not returned her love with the same exclusivity, although he has provided her with "letters of care that are her sacred texts" (Detweiler, "FF" 8). Ellen sets herself up to experience a double-death, with her discovery of her husband's infidelity and child on the one hand, and his actual physical death on the other. As Detweiler observes, the discovery of his infidelity reveals him as "an ordinary, suffering human being" (8). Confronted by the death of her god, not merely a cessation of his existence, but a revelation of his carnality and the fact that her "innocent" and exclusive relationship never existed either, Ellen responds appropriately. She begins

to write. Does she write in order to preserve his presence, in order to re-present a presence which, as she understood it, was never there in the first place? An im/possibility: "There is no one there, and yet here is still a presence," the presence of the death of God. An im/possible presence, perhaps. The presence of absence. Ellen finds herself, as so many writers do, writing in the between-time of presence and absence. Suspended between the texts of her own pacifying love letters from Randolph and the revelation of his humanity, Ellen faces an ultimate crisis when, acting in the stead of all humanity, her "sense of belonging to a comforting tradition" is superceded by her "drive to know" (Detweiler, "FF" 9) and she cries her own "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani," wailing "What shall I be without you?" (P 459). It is a profound loss of identity which accompanies the death of God, and certainly the structures of theology need to be reminded that God is not what we thought (He) was--(He) is other, and is no longer accessible to the execution of theology as it has been effected previously. Expressed through writing such as Byatt's, the death of God deconstructs theology, transforming its literalism into literarity, its analysis into poiesis. Only in writing, rather than in the written, can theology survive in this "no-time" of the between.

Writing in his erudite Erring, Mark C. Taylor observes that the responses to the demise of the "divine Author and the corresponding demise of religious

authority" vary, from outright indifference concerning
matters of reflection, to obstinate fundamentalism, to a
celebratory attitude of transformative liberation, or to
the situation of those "marginal people" running the
borders of belief and unbelief (4-5). Such marginal
people recognize not only the manifestation of the death
of God in the present age, but also its profound
implications for the whole of western thought. As the
transcendent God goes, so goes the transcendental ego,
the Self, Reason, History, Purpose. . . . Should we say,
in short, Christendom? As early as 1963, Thomas Altizer
was posing the iconoclastic question

> Shall we come to understand that everything we
> "know" as Christian is finally Christendom? Or,
> negatively stated, what can be the residuum of
> a faith which accepts the death of God? Will
> faith contain any definable or cognitive
> meanings? Indeed, will it contain any symbolic
> meaning? When no "up" or "down" is left, when
> "beginning" and "end" and all historic symbols
> have disappeared, what will be the meaning of
> such primary dogmas as the Incarnation and the
> Creation? ("AFT" 13)

Of course, the humanistic atheist attitude of this early
Altizer sought the dissolution of the transcendent for
the sake of the autonomous individual, so that the
Christendom which was negated could not have included
that transcendental ego which Taylor deconstructs along
with the transcendent God. Still, the strength of

Altizer's questioning lies in the fact that whatever one's position, the death of God as it has been so irreversibly embodied in the history of the twentieth century is an unavoidable theme for the contemporary reader.

Implicitly and explicitly, in style and content, Altizer has followed the trace of the death of God throughout the texts of the entire corpus of western history, epic apocalyptic texts marked by great evocations of absolute endings. Within Altizer's grand narrative, however, absolute ending is inseparable from absolute beginning, and while ours is a time well acquainted with apocalypse as catastrophic conclusion, it is also, as Altizer points out, a time reluctant to know apocalypse as revelation. Nowhere is that reluctance more obvious, according to Altizer, than in the near-original wanderings of postmodernist thought. Though it is a term being constantly redefined, postmodernism, as Altizer sees it, runs the inevitable risk of final reversion into a cycle of eternal return. Postmodernists, among whom I have counted myself and perhaps still do, may find themselves now some decades into the "postmodern" world, as Sam Keen observes, "without an organizing center. . . wandering in a wilderness of confusing plurality" (111). Postmodernism finds itself always in between, always not yet, occupying a non-site which is at once (and neither) ending and (nor) beginning. Perhaps the time is at hand, however, for that which has dwelt near its origin, albeit reluctantly, to depart, for while ours is a time of great

erring, it is also a time of great thinking[2]. That thinking, as Thomas Altizer observes in The Genesis of God, has been most reluctant to think about God, although it has also been deeply, though negatively, theological. Such theology has been most hesitant to speak of both God and beginning, and certainly of the beginning of God, while the death of God, at least in name, is recurrently evoked within postmodernist discourse (GG 1-10). The death of God as event, however, is inseparable from the genesis of God in the Fall and incarnation. Theology which embraces the drama of the death of God fully is necessarilly a fallen theology, but a theology which may now in the time of its ending know an actual beginning as a literary exercise, a liturgy, a poiesis. Such a theology can know the incarnation as the embodiment of the death of God, and therefore as the genesis of the self-emptying God, and as its thinking will be an active embodiment of the death of God, it will therefore be a fallen theology which "sins boldly" in proclaiming the death of God and the immanence of the apocalyptic Kingdom of God. That very proclamation is itself an embodiment of the revelation of the incarnate God. No term has yet appeared with which to refer to such an exercise, although it may very well be, as Carl Raschke has pointed out, that at the end of theology, "theological thinking" now stands at the door, a thinking (Denken) which, in Heideggerian terms, is also thanking (Danken) (Raschke viii). However, the transformed theological thinking following the death of God may also be known as kenotic

theology, a/theology, theo-poiesis, and perhaps even as "reading religiously," and "thanatopoiesis."

A self-sacrificial understanding of theology, and an understanding of theological thinking/thanking as a literary, liturgical and doxological activity, provides a forum for christological reflection freed from the domination of dogmatic tradition, while encouraging reflection upon that very tradition as fallen, and therefore errant, even sinful, yet liturgical and, as worship, precluding validation from authority-structures. Validation, or criticism, arises in the question of the doxological self-understanding of a discourse, that is, in its own participation in the self-embodiment of the kenotic God, sacrificially emptying itself for the sake of the other. Further, a kenotic understanding of God which knows history as the body of the self-emptying God no longer finds itself bound to patriarchal and phallocentric images of Christ, for it is in their very fallenness that those images proclaim the gospel of the death of God. In such a manner, theological thinking may just as fully reflect upon Christology in relation to the man Jesus of Nazareth, but may also know, as Rosemary Ruether suggests, a christology liberated from patriarchy, in which Christ is encountered in the other and experienced in the midst of our community. The activity of a kenotic theological community would, it seems to me, bear a marked similarity to what Robert Detweiler refers to as "reading religiously." Rather than

offer a method with which one might "read religiously,"
Detweiler engages in such an activity, and suggests that

> groups committed to an intensive play with
> literature, engaging each other in search--and
> sometimes in the creation--of texts that,
> wherever they originate, take them against the
> grain of conventional reading, may discover
> themselves as *communitas*, powerless against the
> literary establishment and indeed uninterested
> in challenging it. (BF 61)

Such groups will be marked, says Detweiler, not by their
endeavors toward the evangelization of an original
"doctrine of religious reading" but by communal "reading
for the mystery, marking the traces of liminality even in
secular and fugitive texts--and celebrating those
discoveries" thereby "constantly learning anew what
religious reading is" (61). Continuing, or at least re-
enacting, the activity of the ancient "storytelling
culture," such communities will, according to Detweiler,
inevitably attempt to establish such events and their
celebration "in language and gesture adapted from
liturgy" (61). Returning to the activities of story-
telling cultures means for theological thinking a turn
from the literal to the literary, from the use of the
story as a tool of exclusion to the use of the story as
an activity of community.

Further, in his essay, "Thanatopoiesis: Imagining
Death," Detweiler speaks specifically of a "theology of
kenosis, a self-emptying for the sake of others," which

is also defined as a faith the substance of which lies in "the call to live transforming lives in this present existence" (8). Considering the place of the pervasive myth of an afterlife in a contemporary Christian context, Detweiler suggests that "a religious faith that does not depend on a belief in life beyond death" might be more consistent with the faith of the early church than the institutionalized faith which has evolved over the past two thousand years, and might also provide a healthier and more ethical view of the place of the believer in history, living toward community, and living toward death. Such a faith may originate not only from the critique of the traditional afterlife myth, but also from the critique of the larger context of the superposition of the transcendent. Outside theological circles, such as within the narratives of modern physics and cosmology, the finitude of the universe and the constantly shifting theories of space-time represent a paradigm shift tantamount to a death of God, as do the critiques of meaning, presence, authority and the self within critical theory. The fall of the transcendent meaning-provider, be it an afterlife, God, Reason, the infinity of the universe, the stability of the self, or the authority of the text, and so on, represents a loss within the history of ideas which must be mourned as surely as the death of a member of one's community. Theological thinking is just now undergoing its Einsteinian revolution, a revolution which was endured by science with recourse to relativity, and within literature because of its poetics. What has

been needed in order for theology to face the death of God is its own relativity theory, its own quantum poetics.

The reactions to the notion of the finitude of existence (in fact, to finitude in general), and the notion of the meaning of that existence have tended toward one of two options, obsession and denial or acceptance and remembrance. These two options find expression both within academic disciplines and within the popular culture which evolves under the influence of those disciplines, drawing from an understanding of history which is either, on the obsessive side, a purely cyclical understanding of an eternal return, or on the side of acceptance, a kenotic understanding of the linear irreversibility of time. The dialectical tension between these two opposing ideas has arisen within a wide range of disciplines, and informs a developing soteriological cultural mythology within the present age, a mythology which provides the very understanding of "meaning" with new meaning. I have tried to follow the traces of that tension throughout various texts and disciplines; not with a sense of destination, however, but with a desire to contribute to the ever-expanding story that is the active embodiment of the death of God.

A kenotic critical understanding stands in distinction from the Western metaphysical tradition's understanding of the unitary ego, the transcendent God, the priority of presence and the tendency towards domination and staticity. On the other hand, a kenotic

understanding stands also in contradiction to the
excessive emphasis on ineffable Otherness often found
within postmodern theory (especially postmodern
theology). Both understandings, which are here grossly
generalized, risk the sterile transcendency of the
eternal return. A truly kenotic model for theological and
critical thinking acknowledges the total presence of the
transcendent in the immanent, not as the re-presentation
of an originary presence, but as the embodiment of the
self-kenotic God, an embodiment which is only present in
its passing away. In contrast to a "postmodern"
theological understanding, a kenotic theological thinking
allows for an anamnestic understanding of a once-and-for-
all-event which is always new, a eucharistic conception
of total presence as a continual displacement. Such a
thinking necessarily finds itself directed toward the
future, not toward an eschatological glory or telos, but
toward the future for the sake of which the present is
itself emptied.

What is presented in the quest for the sake of the
future is neither the re-presentation of an originary
presence, nor the impossible presentation of an ineffable
absence, but a self-emptying apocalyptic presence,
present in its passing. The quest that is undertaken here
then, traverses necessarily intertextual crossroads, not
simply nostalgically nor teleologically, but doxolog-
ically and eucharistically, marking a celebratory
anamnesis, an embodiment of the Death of God. What the
reader will find in the following work is both an attempt

to discuss the event of the death of God within and alongside several related texts, and also an attempt to participate in the embodiment of that event, in a religious writing/reading which gives itself over to the community of readers so that the text is itself embodied in the reading, and only there in its passing away, in a textual apocalyptic "total presence" ("total presence," it will be shown directly, is not the metaphysical preservation and re-presentation of presence it might seem).

Beginning with a discussion of the death of God itself, and exploring textual sites embodying that event, the quest to be undertaken here will have been an interdisciplinary and intertextual dialogue, the recent novels of A.S. Byatt providing both a reference point and the means of transport. Aside from her status as a major force in contemporary British literature, and her growing popularity outside the UK, A.S. Byatt is one of those few authors whose work places its reader between enjoyment and religious experience, between absorption into the narrative and awe at the precision which which the text has been woven. Most forcefully in her award-winning Possession, but also in her other novels, Byatt blends poetry, historical fiction, mystery, criticism, scientific text and romance into an intertextual entity which defies generic definition. Within the *bricolage* of narrative and textual fragments, author/ity is sacrificed for the overflow of interpretive activity effected by the interplay of relationships within the textual nexus,

inside and outside the work itself, in fact, displacing any notion of staticity, whether of the text, the author, or of the reader. Byatt's work offers both a site and the elements with which the enactment of the death of God may take place; in the reading, in the writing, there, always, the call to worship.

This thesis is arranged in five chapters. In chapter one the philosophical and theological significance of Altizer's understanding of the "death of God" is elucidated, with special attention to the influence of Mircea Eliade, Hegel and Nietzsche. The centrality of the concept of the negation of eternal return for these three thinkers and for Altizer is demonstrated as a radical negation of transcendence, which informs Altizer's understanding of the death of the eternal God as the genesis of the total presence of the apocalypse of the self-emptying God in the incarnate movement of Creation and Fall.

Chapter two examines the development of Altizer's death of God theology from its literary influences. Specifically, the writings of Milton, Blake and Joyce contribute to an epic tradition in which Altizer chronicles the textual negation of transcendence into its total presence in the universal eucharistic language of Joyce. Altizer's theological method is here shown to rely fundamentally upon an act of interpretation which is embodied in a eucharistic re-writing and which sacrifices Authority in a radical dynamic. That interpretation relies essentially upon the negation of an eternal

transcendence, known by Altizer in a deepening historical consciousness of the eternal God as a Satanic presence, a transcendence known in the movement of Fall and Incarnation. Such a movement may be known as a radical critique of Authority, enacted by a reading which is a universal eucharist which negates the metaphysics of the proper.

In chapter three, an intertextual critique of the work of Kristeva, Byatt, and Altizer, alongside a treatment of the Anglo-Saxon poem, "The Dream of the Rood," continues the development of the implications of the themes of the death of God, relating Kristeva's *jouissance* and the subject in process to Altizer's notion of "total presence." The objections of Mark C. Taylor to Altizer's idea of total presence are addressed, and themes of the negation of realms of exclusivity through the irruption of difference (the fragmentary, the abject, the improper) are shown to link Kristeva's notion of the tension between the semiotic and the symbolic, Altizer's understanding of the kenotic God, the destruction of "circles of sameness" within Byatt's Possession, and the textual and historical situation of "The Dream of the Rood" and the monument upon which it appears.

Chapter four adresses notions of temporal linearity and cyclicity, themes which have provided an undercurrent to the preceding three chapters. The apparent opposition between the linearity of evolutionary history and cyclic eternal return is here investigated through associated notions such as newness, absolute beginning, recurrence,

and dichotomy. The irreversibility of history, a prominent theme in Altizer's understanding of history, is examined, and the dialectic of the dichotomy of linearity and cyclicity, and the function of dichotomy in general, is explored through Derrida's writing in Of Grammatology, the a/theology of Mark C. Taylor, recent developments in physics and cosmology, including the "new physics," and the literary-scientific work of Stephen J. Gould. Gould's assessment of the development of the nineteenth century geological theories of Charles Lyell, whose work marks the tension between linearity and cyclicity, as he responds to the ever-more-popular ideas of evolution while holding to his "steady-state" theory of the earth leads into the use of geological theory in Possession. Using the work of Charles Lyell, A.S. Byatt draws on the tension between a "steady-state" view of the earth and the dynamic of evolution, and the shifting paradigms of nineteenth century science provide a vehicle through which the false economy of the exclusive ahistorical realm is revealed and decentered.

Chapter five, a conclusion which isn't, draws together the themes which have been developed in chapters one through four, looking specifically at Altizer's ideas regarding the negation and transformation of Christianity, which must acknowledge its status as, he says, a "historically evolving faith." A historically evolving faith cannot uphold an idea of an eternal, static, transcendent divinity, nor the stasis of its own institutionalism, but must embody the total presence of

the Kingdom of God, the apocalypse of the self-negating God. The theme of "masking" provides an entry into Altizer's critique of traditional Christianity, and is followed through the a/theological work of Mark C. Taylor and the fiction of Iris Murdoch, whose _The Time of the Angels_ might provide an anticipatory glimpse into the content of Byatt's forthcoming sequel to _Still Life_ and _The Virgin in the Garden_, both of which are discussed here. Through these works are developed the connections between "circles of sameness," the metaphysics of the proper (as developed by Kristeva and Derrida), and the functions of metaphor and incarnation in unmasking the eternal return therein. In the negation of the God of Christendom, in the reversal of eternal return, in the decentering of the economy of the proper, there arises a writing and reading which is a "historically evolving faith," an unending interpretation which is the apocalypse of the God who is other-than-God, and a theology which is other-than theology.

> Thus God is the name of exile, the name of the ground of exile, the name of the source of that exile which realizes itself by becoming exiled from itself. Simply by naming God we make that exile manifest. . . .(Altizer, _The Self-Embodiment of God_ 29)

> But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down
>   Redeem the time, redeem the dream

The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from

the yew

And after this our exile   (Eliot, "Ash

Wednesday" IV:25-29)

NOTES

[1] The "Death of God Movement" in theology began in the 1960's and focused primarilly upon the writings of Thomas Altizer, William Hamilton, and Paul Van Buren. Since that time, however, postmodern theologians, or a/theologians, have published works as diverse as the deconstructive writings of Mark C. Taylor, the pragmatic works of Don Cupitt and the systematic efforts of Robert Scharlemann. Other important writers include Charles Winquist, Carl Raschke, and Ray L. Hart.

[2] I have in mind Heidegger, of course, and also his use of Hölderlin. See Poetry, Language, Thought. trans. Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). 9, 78.

Chapter One

The Point of No Return:
A Brief History of the Death of God

O grosse Not!

Gott selbst liegt tot,

Am Kreuz er gestorben,

Hat dadurch das Himmelreich

Uns aus Lieb erworben.

Johann Rist, "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid," second stanza (Von der Luft 263; Scharlemann, "Introduction" 5)

A form of faith or belief that adheres to an unmoving and immobile Godhead must deny the possibility of a forward movement "from Eternity to Eternity," just as it must submit to the absolute sovereignty of the primordial God. When faith is understood in this sense, there can be no question of a transformation of faith in response to the movement of the Godhead. But an apocalyptic and radical form of the Christian faith celebrates a cosmic and historical movement of the Godhead that culminates in the death of God himself (sic). (Altizer, "William Blake and the Role of Myth" 189)

If no other contemporary thinker so invites yet evades classification, surely no other theologian has been met with such disparate opinion as Thomas Altizer, and nothing so clearly demonstrates both the breadth and

diversity of Altizer's work nor testifies to the uniqueness of Altizer's style and direction. In light of his pervasive faith in the uniqueness of Christianity, his fidelity to the message of Jesus, and his devotion to Biblical revelation, Altizer is a traditional, even evangelical, theologian. In light of his assaults upon orthodoxy and fundamental doctrine and his attributing of canonical significance to non-canonical works of poetry, fiction and philosophy, Altizer is fervently radical, even heretical, and plays the role of theological literary critic. His continuity with Hegel places him within the modernist tradition, yet his critical stance toward the history of metaphysics finds him alongside postmodernist theorists (a title which he eschews and finds anachronistic with regard to theology[1]). Altizer's work interacts with Christian theological history, and yet this is a history whose basic conceptions of God and Christology Altizer firmly rejects[2], a rejection which finds affinity between Altizer's marginality and the efforts of feminist thought and liberation theology. Such a dialectic characterization threatens to continue indefinitely, yet the impressions Altizer has made upon others exhibit this same diversity.

"When the history of twentieth-century American theology is written," says postmodern a/theologian Mark C. Taylor, "one of its major chapters will be devoted to the work of Thomas J.J. Altizer" (JAAR 569). R.C. Sproul, in a retrospective look at the Death of God Movement (with which Altizer is so intimately connected) which

was subtitled "Looking Back at a Controversy that Was
Destined to Die," refers to the movement as a "media
event" and speaks of the development of "a newfound
adherence in and insistence on the traditional tenets of
faith" within the two decades following the appearance of
the "TIME" article in 1966 (18). Sproul credits Altizer,
however, with "staccato bursts of insight," arising from
thoughts "expressed in almost poetic fashion" (19). This
faint praise is contrasted by the comments of John Cobb,
who refers to Altizer as "the leading radical
(theologian)," "the most influential theologian" of the
late Sixties, "the first major theologian since World War
I to think theologically from the perspective of the
study of the history of religions conceived on a world
scale," and most impressively, "the boldest evangelical
theologian of our time" (13-16). Unlike the "media event"
description given by Sproul, Cobb states that "the furor
over the Death of God movement has altered the
theological climate in America irreversibly" (13). To the
contrary, Robert McAfee Brown says of the most recogniz-
able of all the Death of God texts, Altizer's The Gospel
of Christian Atheism, that "It is not a gospel. . . ; it
is not Christian. . . ; and it is not Atheism. . . .
In an attempt to celebrate 'the death of God,' this book
succeeds only in demonstrating the death of the 'death-
of-God-theology'" (a comment which appears on the cover
of the work). Regarding death of God theology with
typical disdain, Mary Daly has referred to Altizer as one
of "the more colorful manifestations of the phenomenon,"

and simplistically, and mistakenly, observes that for Altizer "God is dead but Jesus is alive," an assertion which, in her Beyond God the Father, exemplifies the Christian idolatry which, even in its most radical forms, requires that incarnation involve the "superior" sex (70). Finally, and perhaps most amusingly, Scott Cowdell, while appreciating the efforts of "postmodern theologians" such as Altizer and Mark C. Taylor, suggests that "the Christian vision of Altizer and Taylor" might be informed by "a touch of nostalgia for 1960's hippiedom. . .or else an anticipation of days spent in the ease of retirement" (Cowdell 66).

In his own words, Altizer has referred to himself as "an ersatz theologian, a self-taught theologian," but one who "intends to be a Biblical theologian" seeking "a theological meaning of the Bible apart from Church and Christendom;" Altizer's "real hope and intention," he says, has been "to do pure theology, a theology thinking about God alone, and thinking in such a manner and mode as to make possible a theological realization of revelation" ("AOA" 1, 6)[3]. That intention has given rise to a textual corpus the contents of which elicit criticisms from its own author ranging from "badly written, pretentious and irresponsible in its claims, and wholly lacking in historical sophistication and mastery of its sources," said of Oriental Mysticism and Biblical Eschatology ("AOA" 1), to "two non-books which are only loosely and inadequately conjoined," said of Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred ("AOA 2).

That same body of work earns praise from others as containing "the first Buddhist Christian theology," said by Herbert Richardson of The Descent Into Hell ("AOA" 5) and one work, The Self-Embodiment of God, which is accepted by Jacob Neusner as "belonging to the sacred circle of the Torah" ("AOA" 6). Although Altizer's work is seen by its author as an "expression of a theological voyage. . . conducted in solitude and darkness" ("AOA" 9), the same may be said of the entire body of that work that is said by Altizer of his The Self-Embodiment of God, that as a demonstration of "the dissolution of a theological author," the work "only becomes real when the reader is the author of the text" ("AOA" 7). The emptying of author into reader directly reflects the one pervasive theme which, despite discrepancies and shifts in critical estimations, continually manifests itself throughout the vast majority of Altizer's work: the embodiment of the uniquely Christian death of God.

It is as a "Death of God" theologian that Thomas Altizer continues to be most commonly recognized, due in large part to the media attention surrounding "death of God" theology in the 1960's, of which the following is a memorable sample:

> ATLANTA, Ga., Nov. 9,1965--God, Creator of the Universe, principal deity of the world's Jews, Ultimate reality of Christians, and most eminent of all divinities, died late yesterday during major surgery undertaken to correct a massive diminishing influence.
> Reaction from the world's great and from the man in the street was uniformly incredulous. . . From

> Independence, Mo., former President
> Harry S. Truman, who received the
> news in his Kansas City barbershop,
> said "I'm always sorry to hear
> somebody is dead. It's a damn shame."
> (TIME 82)

When the above satirical excerpt from the Methodist student magazine "Motive" appeared in the April 8, 1966 issue of "TIME," the world was just beginning to hear about the claims being made at Emory University, claims which were generally attributed to Altizer, then Associate Professor of Bible and Religion. Altizer, however, was not a lone figure in the much-publicized development; he was usually mentioned alongside William Hamilton and Paul Van Buren. However, insomuch as Altizer was by far the most vocal, and arguably the most articulate, it is his name which has become inseparably identified with the Death of God movement. Although the "movement" may have lost attention, Altizer has continued to develop the theological and philosophical implications of the death of God for now more than three decades.

The death of God, according to Altizer, was not due to surgical complications but was self-inflicted. Altizer points out not a "massive diminishing influence," but an intentional, radical, massively increasing influence, that is, a radical inflowing of God into history, into actuality, into presence, into flesh. It is this same death of God which Altizer knows in his most recent work as the genesis of God. The death of God may be understood as both a one time event and a continual process, as John Cobb points out, (210) but just as recent cosmological theory can speak of the history of space-time as a single

event, the idea of event and process need not refer to two things or even two characteristics, but two interpretations, two descriptions. The *event* of the death of God constitutes the *process* of the events of history. This is not to imply that the death of God is simply a "cultural phenomenon," although this is so, and it is not to be understood that the cultural aspect of the death of God reflects an event or process simultaneously occurring in some metaphysical realm, for the cultural phenomena and the metaphysical reality are one and the same; this Hegelian "identity of history and metaphysics" is foundational to the philosophical development of Altizer's thought (Cobb 19).

His dialogue with Hegel is indeed the most crucial catalyst in Altizer's theoretical evolution[4], but significant directional force must also be assigned to Nietzsche and Mircea Eliade. Altizer's developing appropriations and transformations of Eliade, Hegel and Nietzsche have marked the origins and milestones of his philosophical/theological "voyages," voyages which began prior to "the death of God" and have continued beyond "the genesis of God."

The eminent historian of religions, Mircea Eliade, makes a considerable appearance early in the history of Altizer's writing, as the subject of his second book, <u>Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred</u>, in which Altizer puts forward the thesis that "Eliade has given us our only Christian and truly dialectical understanding of Christianity" ("AOA" 2). A truly Christian understanding

for Altizer draws from Eliade a notion of the uniqueness of the Christian understanding of both the fall and the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, and a distinction between pagan (religious) humanity and modern (nonreligious) humanity, a distinction which depends primarily upon the negation of a nostalgic cycle of eternal return.

Eliade asserts, in The Myth of the Eternal Return, that "Christianity is the 'religion' of modern humanity and historical humanity, of the one who simultaneously discovered personal freedom and continuous time (in place of cyclical time)" (161). Further, Eliade notes that the idea of God has become all the more pressing for modern humanity, whose existence is "historical" rather than cyclic or repetitive, and for whom the idea of God provides the last refuge in the face of "the terror of history" (162). Only the presupposition of God, says Eliade, provides modern humanity "freedom (which grants one autonomy in a universe governed by laws or, in other words, the 'inauguration' of a mode of being that is new and unique in the universe)" and a theodical certitude that "historical tragedies" possess "transhistorical meaning" (162). Any alternative position, Eliade maintains, ends in despair occasioned by the fact of one's existence in a hostile universe. As that religion which asserts the fallenness of humanity, Christianity directly addresses the position of modern humanity, "irremediably identified with history and progress", for whom "history and progress are a fall, both implying the

final abandonment of the paradise of archetypes and repetition" (162). In The Sacred and the Profane, Eliade carries his observation further, noting that modern nonreligious humanity has "lost the capacity to live religion consciously, and hence to understand and assume it," while retaining, in the depths of the unconscious, a memory of the religious sense (SAP 213). In contrast to religious humanity, who lived in the realm of the cyclic eternal return and kept themselves "close to the gods" through imitation of divine conduct and by "reactualizing sacred history," nonreligious humanity "refuses transcendence" and creates itself through a desacralization of self and world; modern nonreligious humanity, according to Eliade, believes it "will not be free until it has killed the last god" (202-03). This is, according to Eliade, a futile task, as nonreligious humanity is always the inheritor of religiosity, and so retains "degenerated rituals" such as New Year's festivities, celebrations of new homes, childbirth, and marriage, and "camouflaged myths" in plays, cinema, and perhaps most significantly, in reading. According to Eliade,

> reading includes a mythological function, not
> only because it replaces the recitation of
> myths in archaic societies and in the oral
> literature that still lives in the rural
> communities of Europe, but particularly
> because, through reading, the modern human
> succeeds in obtaining an "escape from time"

> comparable to the "emergence from time"
> effected by myths. . . .(R)eading projects one
> out of one's personal duration, makes one live
> in another "history." (SAP 205)

The function of such religiousness, says Eliade, is to 'awaken one to the universe,' but as long as nonreligious humanity remains unaware of the religiousness locked away in its unconsciousness, this awakening cannot occur. This forgetting of religiousness is called by Eliade a "second fall" into a desacralized and profane world (213).

Now, Altizer points out what he calls Eliade's "non-dialectical contradiction," a result of "an only partially dialectical understanding of Christianity. . . firmly rooted in the non-dialectical ground of the dominant historical expressions of Christianity," and it is this contradiction which he attempts to resolve in his Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred ("AOA" 2). Here Altizer declares, contrary to Eliade, that "it is precisely the most radical expressions of the 'profane' (in Eliade's sense) in the modern consciousness that can dialectically be identified with the purest expressions of the 'sacred' (again in Eliade's sense)" ("AOA" 2). Three years later, in his article "The Sacred and the Profane: A Dialectic Understanding of Christianity," Altizer considers the religious quest for the sacred through a negation of the profane a backwards movement, a search for a primordial totality which "reverses the evolution of history" (Altizer and Hamilton 143). This backward movement is not confined to traditional

Christianity, but occurs in Eastern religions as well,
even those in which the "opposition between sacred and
profane" is apparently "transcended;" there, too, "a
total epiphany of the sacred occurs only by means of the
abolition of the profane" (143). In his attempt to embody
a truly apocalyptic faith and a true understanding of the
Incarnation, Altizer, like Eliade, proclaims the
uniqueness of Christianity, but that uniqueness here lies
in a non-Eliadean understanding of the Christian emphasis
on the Fall. "Only an acceptance of the fallen reality of
the profane," says Altizer, "can make possible a faith
that encounters the concrete actuality of the world, and
moves **forward** through alienation and estrangement to an
Eschatological End that transcends a primordial
Beginning" (Altizer and Hamilton 148). Thus, as Cobb
points out, Altizer replaces a pagan, traditional
Christian, or Buddhist No-Saying with a Dionysian Yes-
saying; "now, the dialectical affirmation of being in
the immediate moment is an epiphany of the sacred" (Cobb
30). This affirmation of "being in the immediate moment,"
of the sacrality of the profane, must be a dialectical
affirmation, insomuch as "only an acceptance of the
reality of a negative or fallen reality can make possible
a coincidentia oppositorum that is a coming together of
the dual reality of the sacred and the profane" (Altizer
and Hamilton 149). Altizer agrees with Eliade that "a
nondialectical affirmation of the profane ends in despair
and Godlessness, for the profane has no sacral or
redemptive power," but points out that on the other hand,

a faith which simply "knows an eternal and unmoving sacred. . . can never know the reality of the Incarnation" (Cobb 31; Altizer and Hamilton 149). What is called for, then, is an understanding of Fall as genuine Fall, that is, as a negation of an eternal transcendent, and of Incarnation as a fully kenotic event, as the death of God. For Altizer, the uniqueness of Christianity entails a recognition of "a kenotic Christ" which "cannot be known as an exalted Lord or cosmic Logos (Altizer and Hamilton 152). "When the Incarnation is understood as a descent into the concrete, or as a movement from a primordial and unfallen sacred to an actually fallen profane," Altizer specifies, "then it cannot be conceived as not affecting a supposedly eternal Godhead, or as being a static or unchanging extension of the God who is the transcendence of Being" (Altizer and Hamilton 152). For Altizer, traditional New Testament Christology remains bound to a backwards-moving process; a genuine Incarnation must be truly kenotic, "a continual process of Spirit becoming flesh, of Eternity becoming time, or of the sacred becoming profane" (152). In Altizer's kenotic Christology, not only does Spirit become flesh, the sacred become profane, but in so doing the fallen identity of flesh, profane existence, is transformed. This forward movement of Spirit results in the "abolition of its original ground;" the unchanging eternal God, "the primordial God of the Beginning" negates itself in order to effect a union of Spirit with flesh" (Altizer and Hamilton 154).

It is the death of the primordial which marks the genesis of the kenotic God, and which, as original fall, negates an original totality or ground and reverses the cycle of return. This theme, which has its origin in Altizer's early treatment of Eliade, runs throughout his work. The ending of the cycle of return and the genesis of God have remained crucial themes through to recent works. By the time of <u>Genesis And Apocalypse</u> (1990), for example, Altizer has begun to fully elucidate the cosmological ramifications of the fall, the death of God. There the fall, known now as the beginning of history, the self-naming of the I AM, and the act of creation and revelation, breaks the primordial silence and negates the cycle of eternal return, releasing the actual events of history which are actual (read "profane" in Eliade's sense) in their perishing (finitude). Thus the events of history embody the self-naming of the I AM and yet embody the "actual absence and unspeakability of I AM," therefore embodying the self-emptying of God which is an "actual and final fall" from an originary transcendence or plenitude, and an "irreversible beginning of a full and final actualization" (32-33).

Still drawing from an original Eliadean influence, Altizer asserts that nothing could be more opposite to this fall than "an eternal cycle of return," and that this is the primary difference between the pagan, or as Altizer would put it, archaic or primordial, understanding of history and the understanding of the Judaeo-Christian "historical world" (33). Although

creation is understood as "fall" in primordial mythologies, says Altizer, it is there a fall that is destined for regeneration in a cycle of eternal return, and so is a fall which does not end the primordially transcendent, and therefore is neither a new act nor can it be actually present (37).

The Christian understanding of fall as *felix culpa*, says Altizer, understands creation as the totally new act which ends and reverses a primordial eternity, and as the "embodiment of the glory of God" such as could never be known in a cycle of eternal return (37). Thus the uniqueness of the Christian death of God remains, having developed in Altizer's latest works from its early proclamation in The Gospel of Christian Atheism. There Altizer combines an Eliadean influence with a Hegelian philosophical structure:

> "God is dead" are words which may only truly be spoken by the Christian, and not by the religious Christian who is bound to an eternal and unmoving Word, but by the radical Christian who speaks in response to an Incarnate Word that empties itself as Spirit so as to appear and exist as flesh. A kenotic Word acts or moves by reversing the forms of flesh and Spirit. Moreover, a dialectical reversal in this sense cannot lead to an identification of the sacred with the profane or of the Spirit with flesh; Spirit must negate itself as Spirit before it can become manifest as flesh . . . .

Spirit empties itself of Spirit so as to become
flesh, and flesh negates itself as flesh so as
to become Spirit.   (Altizer and Hamilton 154-
55)

Clearly, as exhibited by the above passage, the death of
God as Altizer understands it draws effectively from
Hegel's philosophical system, especially the development
of Spirit as it is presented in the Phenomenology of
Spirit[5]. In The Genesis of God, Altizer credits Hegel
with the historical realization of the incarnation of
God, a realization which could only occur in the modern
world, in "a self-consciousness that realizes itself by
interiorly and individually realizing that *God Himself is
dead* (Phenomenology of Spirit 785)" (31)[6]. This credit
however, had been given to Hegel as early as the above-
quoted Gospel of Christian Atheism, in which Hegel is
named as "the thinker who created a conceptual portrait
of the incarnate or kenotic movement of God" (Gospel 63).

"It is only in Hegel," says Altizer, "that we may
discover an idea of God or Being or Spirit which embodies
an understanding of the theological meaning of the
Incarnation" (Gospel 63). For Hegel, Spirit exists in a
dialectical movement in which it "must become
historical;" that is, "Spirit exists 'for-itself' when it
exists as its own opposite or other," and "only when
Spirit knows itself in its own otherness will it fulfill
its destiny as Spirit" (Gospel 65). The kenotic movement
of Spirit, the self-annihilation of God, the "self-
sacrifice" of Spirit "first enters consciousness when

Spirit first appears in its kenotic form as the man, Jesus of Nazareth," says Altizer (Gospel 66)[7]. In the death of Jesus we find the fullest expression of the self-negation of Spirit, of the death of God, and so "the radical Christian refuses to speak of God's existence," Altizer says, "because he knows that God has negated and transcended himself in the Incarnation, and thereby he has fully and finally ceased to exist in his original or primordial form" (Gospel 67)[8]. Further, this dialectical process, with its Hegelian orientation, "aims at an end: God as all in all" (Cobb 35), the "total presence" of the divine in history.

Because of the depth of Altizer's understanding of the incarnation (and crucifixion) as the movement of the kenotic God into "all-in-all," or "total presence," Robert Scharlemann sees it as "perhaps the most daring of the Hegelian readings of the present" (91). Further, the idea of total presence offers a theological passage through both the barriers of modernist nihilism and postmodern cynicism. That is, as Scharlemann points out, the contemporary identification of God with finitude, which echoes a theological reading of incarnation and crucifixion as the "'place' where God is," transposes not only the modern nihilistic "impossibility of finding any existing thing that is godly" but "even the absence of a sense of absence (even the loss of a feeling that God is dead)" into a "testimony of the total presence of God" (90). The loss of "tension between God and the real" testifies to the revelation that "God is totally in

things as they are, present also in the absence of a sense of his absence at all" (Scharlemann 90).

In the wake of the postmodern and post-structuralist critiques of western metaphysics, any appeal to Hegel is suspect, especially one which so clearly draws from what has been critiqued as an eschatological circle in which Spirit merely returns to itself, and one in which Spirit's negation does not seem an authentic negation. Mark C. Taylor argues that "within Hegel's panoptical system, difference *always* returns to identity," and "profitless expenditure, senseless prodigality, and excessive loss cannot be tolerated and must therefore be excluded or repressed" (A 23, 32). Therefore "Hegelian philosophy," says Taylor, "can be understood as a systematic attempt to secure the *identity* of identity and nonidentity and the *union* of union and nonunion" (A xxiii)[9]. In other words, the postmodern problem with the Hegelian dialectic lies in its interpretation, first of all, as a System of totalization in which all reality is rationally subsumed under one grand narrative of the life of Spirit, and secondly, as a system in which the negativity of the movement of Spirit is not kenosis but simple contradiction. Mark C. Taylor claims, then, that "within Altizer's Hegelian dialectic, there is no place for the postmodern" (TEARS 242)[10]. Altizer, however, recognizes in postmodernism the same nostalgia and exclusivity which postmodernism critiques within the metaphysical tradition and its culmination in modernism. While it is a basic tenet of most postmodernist critiques

that they are not separate from but parasitic (in both
senses) upon (and to) modernism, Altizer recognizes
postmodernism as a reaction to modernism, but modernism
for Altizer entails a negation of the movement of eternal
return and therefore postmodernism is seen as a
reappearance of a nostalgic eternal return, an eternal
return which is basically equivalent to the "Hegelian
circle" critiqued by postmodernism. Altizer would argue,
alongside Rowan Williams for example, that while "Hegel
believes there to be only one story to tell of the life
of the mind," that story is "emphatically not a story of
return to the same" (75). Referring to Deborah Chaffin's
work on Derrida's interpretation of Hegel, Williams
asserts that "the structure of Hegel's dialectic is meant
to *challenge* the all-sufficiency of the polarity of
simple identity and simple difference" (78 emphasis
mine). In Altizer's terms, the question is whether or not
Hegel should be considered a pagan (in his Eliadean
sense) or a truly modern thinker (that is, one whose
system is ultimately a negation of an eternal return).

It is in his "Hegel and the Christian God," (which
appears in a fuller form in The Genesis of God) that
Altizer addresses the problem of the understanding of the
Hegelian movement as an eternal return. The question to
be answered, says Altizer, is whether or not "the
Hegelian absolute can actually die" (81). "Is a purely
Hegelian negation a negation which is equally
affirmation," Altizer asks, "so that finally there is no
real distinction between negation and affirmation?"

("HCG" 81). If this is so, then the Hegelian movement of Spirit, the informing paradigm of Hegel's entire philosophy (Walker 214), is simply an eternal return, but such an understanding overlooks the centrality of *Trieb* or *kenosis* in the Hegelian system (GOG 37). "*Trieb* or *kenosis*," says Altizer, is the "most distinctively Christian ground of Hegel's system," and is also "the ultimate source and ground of a purely Hegelian negation" (GOG 37). Although there is an identity of opposites in the Hegelian system, this identity is due to a real opposition, as opposites are themselves "realizations of their own inherent otherness" (GOG 37). Such opposition is manifest in the absolute, Spirit, in Hegel's system, and without this opposition, Altizer points out, "Spirit would be lifeless and alone" (GOG 37). If such an absolute is to be understood in the Hegelian system as the ground of actuality, Altizer explains, that ground cannot itself be inactual or lifeless. While Hegel shares with Spinoza the view that actuality is that one indivisible substance, Altizer points out that Hegel knew that substance as a self-negating subject, and only with the centrality of *Trieb* or *kenosis* can the absolute be known as "subject," a subject which is self-negating or self-alienating (GOG 38). Altizer further points out that while Spinoza's God could not be related with evil, Hegel's God experiences a "purely negative movement," a withdrawing into itself and becoming "self-centered," realizing "that God who is 'being in itself'" and actualizing the death of God and the actuality of

absolute Spirit; this is the death of "the purely abstract God" (GOG 38). Without this death, which Hegel identified with the crucifixion, Hegel's system, says Altizer, would be a "truly empty system," a system of the affirmation of that "purely abstract" absolute which was known by Hegel as evil; with it, however, Hegel can know absolute spirit as the embodiment of kenosis, as the crucified God, and can know the God of Christendom as "the bad infinite," that eternal and absolute isolation which is "alienated from the Godhead," an alienation which is requisite to the self-negation of the kenotic God, and an "alienation which finally negates itself" (GOG 40). It was this absolute evil which Nietzsche, in The Antichrist would know as the God who is the "deification of nothingness" (GOG 40). The death of God is necessary for the negation of such an absolute evil, for "only the death of God," Altizer maintains, "is the full realization or actualization of absolute spirit," an actualization required by a self-negating absolute spirit which "realizes itself as its own 'other'" (GOG 38). This otherness, Altizer reiterates, is absolutely unique to the Christian understanding of the crucified God (GOG 38). It is in knowing this death of God that Hegel most obviously knows the uniquely Christian God, and in his knowledge of that otherness which is an embodiment of that death[11], the uniquely Christian God is, according to Altizer, "more decisively present in Hegel than in any other thinker except Nietzsche" (GOG 38). Hegel and Nietzsche, says Altizer, are "those thinkers who most

purely know the death of God," and as such also "most decisively know the Christian God" (GOG 38).

Nietzsche, whom Hans Küng has identified in Does God Exist? as "*the* atheist, whose challenge Christians must face" (Mark 273), has long been a force in Altizer's thinking, but his influence was early noted as a negative one. In his 1958 essay, "Religion and Reality" Altizer viewed Nietzsche's characterization of Christianity as world-denying as the negative truth of an antithetical pagan. In complete opposition to his later development, Altizer's early radical stance saw world-denial as a necessity:

> Contemporary Christians of all sorts also resist the eschatological teachings of Jesus. But, in so doing, they transform the historical Jesus and make impossible the radical demands of the Sermon on the Mount. Only a world-denying faith can make possible an absolute obedience to God. For the other-worldly eschatology of Jesus is the ethical equivalent of the philosophical nihilism of Buddhism. A faith which clings to being, which clings to the world, can never pass into the faith which Jesus demanded. As Nietzsche saw, both Christianity and Buddhism are nihilistic religions. Both embody a hatred of reality. But it is just this hatred which makes love possible. (260)

Here Altizer credits Nietzsche with the accurate
definition of the God of Christianity as the "deification
of nothingness, the will to nothingness pronounced holy;"
this observation, which Altizer then saw as arising from
"the depths of (Nietzsche's) pagan defiance of Christ,"
would soon become fundamental in Altizer's theology,
which then only took note of the similarity that both
Buddhism and Christianity "teach that religious
fulfillment lies only in a loss of the self. . . (a)nd
both look forward to a dissolution of being that will
make possible the authentic realization of faith and
love" ("Religion and Reality" 261). However, at this
stage in his development, Altizer uses Nietzsche to call
for the "rejection of reality" in order that the reality
of God be manifest. In his treatment of the
eschatological traditions of the Old Testament, "The
Religious Foundations of Biblical Eschatology," Altizer
utilizes Nietzsche's inquiry "into man's employment of
God as an instrument of his own self-torture,"
concluding, strangely enough, in light of Altizer's
subsequent development, that "the rejection of the
'reality' of the world makes possible the realization of
the 'reality' of God," and further, that "(w)hen the
world becomes a nothing, Yahweh 'becomes' the wholly
Other, the one final Reality" (270). The God of this
early stage of Altizer's thought is not the God who has
died, but the God who "has begun to act;" if there is to
be any death, it is to be that of the world, of reality,
of history, of being:

The good news of prophetic-eschatological faith
is that even now God has begun to act. And the
initiation of his action can result only in the
advent of the End; for the higher expressions
of biblical religion can submit to no "reality"
that is not the "reality" of God. Hence the
coming of the Kingdom of God must mark the
advent of a New Creation--which must
necessarily effect a total reversal of the
"reality" of the world and which alone can make
possible the triumph of God. ("Religion and
Reality" 272)

Also in his 1963 essay, "Nirvana and the Kingdom of God,"
Altizer continued to affirm the necessity of transcending
and annihilating "all desire to be a being in the world"
(Cobb 29). However, Altizer engaged in some negation of
his own thought by suggesting a realized eschatology in
which "the Kingdom of God 'will never dawn in us if we
refuse our existence in the here and now'" (Cobb 29). In
this understanding, "being" is not annihilated as Altizer
had previously advocated, but it is "transfigured:"

It is this very reality in its sheer actuality
and immediateness which is being transfigured
by the dawning of the Kingdom; God appears here
and not in a beyond. Therefore, the Christian
must live this life, sharing all its fullness
and emptiness, its joy and its horror, knowing
that his destiny is to live here and now,
allowing his life to be the metal which God's

fire will transform into his Kingdom. And if we
are to live now, we cannot escape the anguish
of the human condition; if we are to live here,
we cannot flee this condition by a leap of
faith. (Cobb 29)

It is at this point that the faith which for Altizer had
been "world-denying" becomes "world-affirming." It is at
this point, too, that a Nietzsche who had previously
served as an opposite becomes a positive influence, as
Altizer's understanding of dialectic develops and the
"profane" existence of this world becomes the kenotic
body of the self-negating God. Once a distinction is made
between the God of Christendom (the God of Eternal
Return, Hegel's Bad Infinite, and Nietzsche's "Will to
Nothingness Pronounced Holy") and the kenotic, crucified
God of authentic Christianity, the cry of Nietzsche's
madman, that God is dead, becomes the truest Christian
testimony. As Altizer proclaims in "The Sacred and the
Profane," the radical Christian remains "bound to an
eternal and unmoving word," but the "radical Christian,"
who proclaims the death of God, responds to the truly
incarnate Word, the negated Spirit which appears in flesh
(Altizer and Hamilton 154-55). This same emptying of
Spirit into flesh is the totality of which Altizer speaks
in his recent Genesis of God, when he writes, "to be open
to totality itself as the apocalyptic Body of the Godhead
is to be open to an absolutely new totality," and it is
still only the Christian vision which may understand that
totality as the "dissolution of a purely transcendent

God" in the "transformation of a pure and total
transcendence into a pure and total immanence" (114). It
is this immanence, says Altizer, which is not only
manifest in Hegel's Science of Logic, but which is also
"enacted in Nietzsche's vision of Eternal Recurrence"
(GOG 114). Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence," however,
must be distinguished from and considered in relation to
the concept of "eternal return" and understood in its
association to the Will to Power.[12]

Nietzsche's vision of eternal recurrence, says
Altizer, "is not to be confused with the archaic vision
of eternal return;" in fact, Altizer adds, "it is its
very reversal" (GA 128). The "vision of eternal return"
of which Altizer speaks is, of course, drawn from the
influence of Mircea Eliade's thought, in which an
original transcendence passes into immanence and back
again into transcendence, or in which there is no real
distinction between immanence and transcendence, or in
which the function of immanence is as a mode of
transcendence; in short, eternal return represents any
metaphysical/temporal structure in which no real
beginning is possible. In consideration of the finality
of Nietzsche's view of history, Altizer notes that the
primary difference between the pagan, or as Eliade might
put it, archaic or primordial, understanding of history
and the understanding of the Judaeo-Christian "historical
world" is the refutation and reversal by the latter of
any vestige of eternal return (GA 33). Further, Altizer
would agree with Bernard Zelechow that while Nietzsche

utilizes the language of "pagan philosophy," his idea of
eternal recurrence is "distinctly albeit implicitly
biblical" (138). It is a grave error, says Zelechow, to
view eternal recurrence as a flight from "the bond of
Western culture" or subservience to history's biblical
temporality into the safety of "the pagan cyclical view
of time" (138). According to Zelechow, the view of
history shared by the biblical texts and Nietzsche is an
account of the redemptive call to personal responsibility
and paradoxical freedom (129-130). "The biblical view,"
says Zelechow, is grounded by an "eternal now that binds
the infinite past to the infinite future," and in which
"time and eternity are linked by a given unity of world
and Presence," so that history is the experience of the
"God whose essence is doing in the world rather than
merely the God of the cosmos who is" (129). The emphasis
of biblical texts upon the personal encounter with God
and the responsibility of the person's doing "God's work
in the world" rather than upon the imparting of
theoretical knowledge asks the question "to what extent
can God's commands be embodied?"; a question which,
according to Zelechow, is also asked by Nietzsche's
"secularised version of the biblical view of eternal
presence (history)" (130). In Nietzsche's conception, the
responsibility leveled upon the individual confronted
with the responsibility of eternal recurrence becomes the
vehicle through which the past is redeemed by the "Thus I
willed it" of the Will to Power, so that the pagan idea
of the unalterability and inaccessibility (and cyclical

repetition) of the past is transcended, while the historicity and actuality of the present are affirmed: the "eternal now" of eternal recurrence requires "the active recognition of human freedom" and responsibility, rather than the "fatalism and despair" of the pagan cycle (Zelechow 138-39). This point bears special weight in light of Altizer's consideration of creation and the revelation (and death/genesis) of God as "novum," that is, in a view of the events of history as "historical," or unique. It is just this vision of which Altizer speaks in his consideration of the uniquely Christian proclamation of the death of God and the redemption of history.[13]

The death of God, which for Altizer marks a beginning which is the irreversible ending of a primordial silence and therefore a total novum, can never "simply pass into ending," as is the case in "a cycle or circle of eternal return," in which there is finally no distinction between beginning and end, alpha and omega (GA 33). In order that events be understood as "final and unique," Altizer asserts that the beginning which releases those events must be understood as beginning alone, "a unique beginning which is the origin and ground of irreversible and unique events" (GA 33). However, insofar as these events are unique only in their finality, in their perishing, an understanding of beginning which is absolute, that is, which can only be understood apart from a cycle of eternal return, must also be an understanding in which "ending becomes

manifest and real as an irrevocable perishing, a death
that is fully and only itself, and therefore a death that
can never pass into life" (GA 34).

Now such an understanding, for Altizer and for
Nietzsche as well, grants "a new finality" to life, a
finality in which life, and history itself, as the
passing away of events which are unique in their
perishing and are released by the absolute beginning, is
inconceivable apart from the ultimacy of death (34). It
is this very understanding of the ultimacy of death which
becomes the harbinger of new life, a life in which
"nothing is more forbidden than a longing for death," and
a life in which a chaos can be understood which is
absolutely other, and which can never be reconciled in a
cycle of eternal return:

> Once such life has become manifest and real,
> nothing is more forbidden than a longing for
> death, a death that now and for the first time
> appears and is real through the new portal of
> the full and actual darkness of chaos. Now only
> does chaos appear as a chaos that is only
> itself, an ultimate abyss which can never be
> sanctified or reversed in a cycle of eternal
> return, and a final abyss which is eternally
> closed to the presence of light. Yet the
> manifestation and realization of that chaos is
> a decisive sign of the presence of a
> truly new life, a life liberated from the
> encompassing power of a primordial abyss that

can be the giver of life, as the realization of the final and total darkness of chaos shatters the enticing and beckoning power of every primordial or original source and ground. Now death is otherness itself, a death that is wholly other than life; and with the realization of that life the life-giving power of the call of eternal return is ended. (34)

It is only with the "self-naming of I AM," then, that the "call of eternal return" is ended. Altizer maintains that this ending is a "radical iconoclasm," which destroys every vestige of "an original or primordial ground or light" (34). This iconoclasm grants to speech a new identity, dissociating speech from myth and rite, and freeing it from the cycle of eternal return. The speech of I AM, says Altizer, can not be associated with a cycle of eternal return, because the words which end the cycle of return can be heard "only as themselves," thereby bringing about the reversal of the pagan view of cyclical history and the "beginning of the impact of irreversible events upon consciousness, an impact which ever more gradually and more fully called forth the release of individual and unique identities" (35).[14]

Whether "the self-naming of I AM" refers to an ultimate cosmological beginning or an individual salvific event in an individual lifetime[15], the contrast between the cycle of eternal return which is reversed and the eternal recurrence which is embraced in the "thus I willed it" is of great import. The "thus I willed it" of

the "will to power" and eternal recurrence are finally
intrinsically connected, as Altizer proclaims:

> (Eternal recurrence) is (eternal return's) very
> reversal, and is its reversal by apprehending
> eternal recurrence as the absolute ending of
> eternal return, or the absolute ending of the
> very possibility of transcendence, of the
> ending of every moment which is not an
> immediate and total now. If "Being begins in
> every Now (Zarathustra III, "The
> Convalescent"), that beginning is the ending of
> transcendence or the death of God, a death
> which occurs in every full and actual moment,
> and therefore a death releasing a total
> immanence, a pure immanence which is an
> absolute reversal of every moment which is open
> to transcendence, and therefore a reversal of
> an eternal return which is a return of a
> primordial and eternal moment of time. But
> Nietzsche's vision of Eternal Recurrence is
> finally identical with his vision of the Will
> to Power, for here eternal recurrence is actual
> and real only in a moment of absolute will
> . . . ." (GA 128)

Thus Altizer parallels the actuality of the individual
moment with the ultimate cosmological beginning of the
death/genesis of God and with the absolute will of the
Will to Power. As the absolute willing of all that
occurs, the willing of eternal recurrence and the

Christian doctrine of predestination are inseparable for Altizer. It is this understanding which allows Altizer to refer to Nietzsche as an Augustinian thinker. "Even as Augustine can only know full freedom by willing the will of God," says Altizer, "Nietzsche can only know full freedom by willing the Will to Power, a willing which is the willing of everything which occurs, just as a willing of the will of God is a willing of everything which occurs" (GOG 122). Both predestination and the Will to Power are a simultaneous willing of good and evil, and as such, grant total freedom for Augustine and can be known for Nietzsche as a will which is "beyond good and evil." A willing of absolute evil such as Nietzsche's Will to Power is a negative will which according to Altizer imparts to God an ever more negative identity. This negative identity of God is the understanding which separates Hegel's concept of God from Spinoza's in its knowledge of the absolute evil inherent in the absolute. Such a knowledge of God remains largely esoteric in the thought of Hegel, but, Altizer claims, it "bursts forth with an irresistible power" in the thought of Nietzsche. It is his understanding of the negativity and evil in the idea of God which warrants Nietzsche's place as that thinker who, in Altizer's words, "has more deeply understood the uniquely Christian God than any other thinker since Hegel" (GOG 127). That understanding relies upon an affirmation of the self-negating God and of the will as a "self-embodied" will which accepts responsibility for the whole of history in the willing of

eternal recurrence, and therefore wills predestination even as the Christian God wills the fall and predestination in the kenotic movement of death and genesis, thereby ending and negating the eternal return.

Altizer's treatment of Nietzsche emphasizes the distinctions and similarities between the cosmological and existential implications of the death of God. That is, on a simple level, the death of God serves as a paradigm for both universal creation and self creation, which, in Altizer, become one and the same act, simultaneous with apocalypse, an ending which is an "apocalyptic genesis." It is that ending which is proclaimed by the "'good news' of Jesus," the good news of the "final ending of evil," an ending which Altizer proclaims as occurring even now, with the Kingdom of God. (GOG 8). The movement of total fall, of the genesis which is the death of God, is a movement which has never been understood theologically as an apocalyptic genesis, says Altizer, and in true apocalyptic mode, he proclaims in his most recent work that "the time is at hand" for such an understanding (GOG 9).

In a transfigured Eliadean mode, Altizer declares that such an understanding, an understanding of "a new eternity," a Nietzschean/Hegelian eternity "that is not only new, but whose novum is all in all" will remain beyond our consciousness so long as we in the modern world continue to cling to any sort of concept of a totality which remains "a pure or unending eternity," in

the sense of a closed system or of a transcendence which is ultimately a pure transcendence or presence[16] (GA 28).

Eliade, Hegel and Nietzsche provide only the most rudimentary theological and philosophical elements in an exposition of Altizer's understanding of the death/genesis of God. That is an understanding which is equally provided by writers such as Milton, Blake and Joyce, among others. However, the philosophical structure provided by Altizer's appropriation of Eliade, Hegel and Nietzsche provides a suitable framework within which to approach those writers, as well as a starting point from which to begin to move toward an exploration of the multifaceted realms within which considerations of the death of God, the dialectics of eternal recurrence and eternal return, the relationship between linear and cyclical time, and the interplay of fiction and theology interact and take on new shades of meaning.

> Theology was born out of faith's will to enter
> history; now theology must die at the hands of
> a faith that is strong enough to shatter
> history. If theology is to transcend itself it
> must negate itself, for theology can be reborn
> only through the death of Christendom, which
> finally means the death of the Christian God,
> the God who is the transcendence of Being.. . .
> Perhaps we are at last prepared to understand
> the uniqueness of the Christian gospel.
> (Altizer, "Theology and the Death of God" 110)

NOTES

[1]Altizer remarks in the preface to his The Genesis of God, that "the simple truth is that a fully modern theology has not yet been written or conceived, so that there cannot yet be a postmodern theology, but only a renewed medieval, or patristic, or pagan theology. . ." (2).

[2] As Charles Sabatino points out, Altizer is not simply a critic of religion who asserts that "theology must become anthropology or that concern with God must give way to concern strictly with humanity," but is altogether more radical, claiming that "the religious tradition itself calls for this shift away from concern with the transcendent God" (289)

[3]This conviction is but one of many instances of the profound influence of Hegel upon Altizer's thought. Altizer's obsession with the idea of God bears similarity to Hegel, as Robert Scharlemann notes,

>One of Hegel's basic motifs puts him at odds
>with all thoughtless theology; it is the motif
>that in the meaning of 'God' there is a content
>that we can think, or conceptually grasp, and,
>by grasping it, take part in its own reality.
>(Inscriptions and Reflections 81)

but whereas Hegel's model here is "thinking" and the "concept," Altizer, though not explicitly, implicitly places centrality upon writing as the fundamental paradigm of theology.

[4] It is Hegel's voice which is most recognizable in Altizer's writings, despite an acknowledged debt to Kierkegaard. In Altizer's estimation, Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's system does not overturn it, but deepens it in a dialectical inversion. "Modern theology," says Altizer, "was founded by Soren Kierkegaard" ("Theology and the Death of God" 95), and while both Kierkegaard and theology following his lead have named Hegel's system and its God "the pure antithesis of the Christian God," Altizer asserts in his The Genesis of God, speaking specifically of Hegel's Science of Logic, that because of the ambiguous and dichotomous character of Hegel's God, Kierkegaard's "judgement is precarious" because that God which is antithetical to the Christian God is the Godhead which is in Hegel negated in the negation of eternal return (11-12). The Hegelian God is "absolute Idea," Altizer explains, but is as such "a 'personality' which is not exclusive identity but rather universality itself" (GOG 12). Further, Altizer maintains that "Kierkegaard's dialectical understanding of Christianity is a reverse Hegelian thinking" which is "deeply Hegelian in apprehending the profound historical transformation of Christianity," in which contemporary Christianity has become the very opposite of New Testament faith, and that Kierkegaard's understanding of

the "offense" of faith arises from a Hegelian understanding of the paradox of the incarnation (GOG 44-45).

5 Jean Hyppolite has examined the idea that the Phenomenology is fashioned as a pedagogical Bildungsroman, an epic tale of the heroic consciousness. "Hegel's Phenomenology," says Hyppolite, ". . .is the novel of philosophic formation; it follows the development of consciousness," from the renunciation of first beliefs to absolute knowledge (12). Hegel, however, according to Hyppolite, understood his work not as novel but as science, presenting within it that absolute knowledge. Altizer, however, has certainly read the Phenomenology as novel, not as presentation of scientific fact but as narrative open to interpretation, but as a novel the writing of which, like history itself, is the writing of the word of God, a writing which embodies the self-negation of God in history (and a writing which Altizer himself continues). Hegel's Phenomenology marks the conscious historical realization of the incarnation of God, but is only one point in a continuing embodiment. For Altizer, Hegel's absolute knowledge is completely incomplete. Certainly Altizer would agree with Derrida's assessment in Positions that:

> We will never be finished with the reading of Hegel, and, in a certain way, I do nothing other than explain myself on this point. In effect I believe that Hegel's text is necessarily fissured; that it is something more and other than the circular closure of its representation. (Taylor, DC 1)

Perhaps it should be added that we will never be finished with the writing of Hegel as well.

6 Eric von Der Luft observes that the phrase "God is dead," so often associated with Nietzsche, occurs three times in Hegel, and is often incorrectly attributed to Luther (by Baillie, Miller, and Findlay, for instance) (263). The phrase is in fact derived from the Lutheran pastor, Johann Rist, whose Good Friday hymn, "O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid," concretizes the Lutheran theme of divine kenosis in what Scharlemann denotes as a religious expression of the disciples' momentous "loss of a world and a God" in the crucifixion (Theology at the End of the Century 5). Hegel, says Scharlemann, transformed the religious intensity of that sentiment into "a moment of world history as the point at which spirit is most estranged from itself" (5).

7 For Hegel, the Christ-event is the historical actuality of Spirit's self-negation and actualization. In the concrete figure of Jesus of Nazareth, Spirit "yields to passion and to death and rises majestically from its ashes" (Hyppolite 352). This "to die and become" of the divine is re-enacted in the life of the consciousness of the subject, which "having posed itself in its absolute

self-certainty, discovers its own finitude and is lost in the finite" (Hyppolite 352).

[8] As Fackenheim points out, Hegel's understanding of incarnation grows out of an understanding of the necessity of redemption, 'preserving and reconciling the extremes of divinity and humanity' (139). Therefore the redemptive act entails a divine entrance into the human world, without destroying the humanity which it would redeem, but also without simply forfeiting its own divinity; as Fackenheim stresses, "a god who *simply* died in the human world would be but an additional member in the Roman pantheon of dead gods" (140). Rather, the Christian redemptive action, centered in the crucifixion, entails a radical dialectical coincidence of the opposites of God and humanity, divinity and death, which inevitably "explodes into paradox" (Fackenheim 140).

[9] It could be argued, from a point of view such as is offered by David Manser in his article "On Becoming," that this is a misunderstanding of the radicality of "becoming" within Hegel, as well as a de-emphasizing of the notion that within Hegel's dialectic "even everyday concepts are, when properly understood, similar, in that they do not denote static and timeless entities" (68). Hegel's use of "becoming" as the reconciliation of being and nothing does not reduce nothing (or nonidentity) to being (or identity), but serves to express the fact that neither being nor becoming (nor identity and nonidentity, union and nonunion) are static and changeless in the face of the insufficiency of language to express such a notion.

[10] Taylor's argument is based of course on Derrida's reading of Hegel, which criticizes the notion of "closure" in the Hegelian system. However, Howard Kainz asserts that while Derrida "has in mind the 'syntheses' of bivalent logic prevalent in nondialectical systems," the Hegelian system includes, a "collapse of the ordinary distinctions between thought and being," which leads to a "collapse of the binary distinction between closure and unassimilable otherness (by focusing on that very limited sphere where there is a distinction which is no distinction, or a unity-in-distiction)" (88). Hegel's dialectic engenders, according to Kainz, a "closure of closure and alterity," which is not mere synthesis, nor staticity, but paradox, entailing not simple dissolution of distinction, but also distinction's perpetuation and intensification of itself (89).

[11] The embodiment of the otherness of the transcendent God is, as Hyppolite explains, the actualization of the death of God in community:

> The death of Christ is not only the death of the God-man, but also the death of the abstract God whose transcendence radically separated human existence from his (sic) divine essence. . . .As spirit God has become the

>universal self-consciousness of the community
>which, through the mediation of its history,
>raises its particularity to universality and
>makes this universality, within which the
>particular dies, concrete and moving. (568)

The death of the particular here is to be understood as a kenotic openness to community, a kenosis which, like the death of God, is the apocalyptic genesis and the "total presence" of the particular; the particular is not simply eradicated in a static entity, but is understood as participating in a process of "othering," of consistent decentering.

[12]According to Joan Stambaugh, Nietzsche himself drew no real distinction between "return" (*Wiederkunft*), and "recurrence" (*Wiederkehr*), using *Wiederkunft* " in most of the 'crucial' passages," that is, in those passages in which Nietzsche most explicitly refers to the concept (NTER 29). Further, Stambaugh points out that Nietzsche opted against the "more familiar and less ambiguous" term *Wiederholung* (repetition), which would have, according to Stambaugh, connoted "the exact repetition of all things . . . in a determined series" (NTER 30). A clearer distinction exists between the English "recurrence" and "return" than the German *"Wiederkehr"* and *"Wiederkunft,"* so that, according to Stambaugh:

>. . .what *recurs* is an event, something which
>has previously occurred. What *returns* might be
>anything, including a person, which goes back
>to where it was. A recurrence is something
>which has *run through* its course and occurs
>again. A return implies a turning about and
>going back to an original place or state. (NTER
>30)

Stambaugh, as she interprets Nietzsche to have done, draws no real distinction between the two terms except with respect to the subject of "recurrence" or "return," whether event or object, respectively, although that subject is always *Das Gleiche* (NTER 45-59). Stressing the import of the individual's powerful willing of the sameness of every moment, Stambaugh understands the Will to Power as "the world considered as '--and nothing else!'" and eternal return as the consideration of the world as "*my* world, the ring of rings to which I pledge my *own* return" (NTER 101). For Stambaugh, eternal recurrence or return represents that totality, that predestined totality, which determines the existential situation of the individual, existing in either of "two possibilities of *being*," reminiscent of Heidegger's authentic or inauthentic existence: "the dissonance of self-contradiction, or the consonance of speaking to oneself again" (TPOTIN 198).

Further, Zelechow notes that while Stambaugh "assert(s) that Nietzsche works within the context of Greek presuppositions" she does "recognize that Nietzsche's sense of time isn't pagan;" while asserting Nietzsche's Platonism, Stambaugh's "reading of recurrence

requires a biblical conception of time," according to Zelechow (142). Magnus, Stewart and Mileur also point out the necessity of a linear concept of time in the notion of eternal recurrence, a notion which, they argue, is a "self-consuming concept," which "requires as a condition of its intelligibity the very contrast it wishes to set aside," thereby allowing us to "see the same thing, only differently" (25).

[13]Winston L. King convincingly argues in "Zen and the Death of God" (Cobb 207-224) that Zen "in its rejection of 'Oriental Mysticism' and Altizer in his
    rejection of Christian and Buddhist
    transcendentalism" arrive at much the same position. While Altizer does indeed affirm the negation of an absolute ground (Sunyata) as common to both Christianity and Buddhism, and also often sanctions the dialectical negation of Madhyamika Buddhism, he adheres to his belief in the uniqueness of Christianity as he states in his response that "just as Zen knows nothing of what we have known as transcendence, so likewise it has no awareness of what we are coming to know as total immanence."

[14] Dr. Robert Carroll argues convincingly for a translation of I AM (in Exodus 3:14) as "I will be what (ever) I will be," so as not to transform the ambiguity of the divine name, an absent presence which carries within it the "charge of the future," into a static presence ("Strange Fire" 55-57). That static presence might be said to be equivalent to the eternal return which is negated by the speech of I AM in Altizer, identifying the kenotic God not with the staticity of eternal return but with the process of becoming in creation and incarnation. Carroll's emphasis upon futurity is not contradicted by Altizer's use of I AM, though perhaps Altizer's position might be strengthened by the use of Carroll's translation. Altizer's use of I AM, however, tends to link him not only with the biblical tradition, but also with the romantic tradition exhibited by Coleridge's understanding of the "primary imagination," which, as Carroll points out entails the "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Carroll 52). That is an association of which neither Carroll nor Altizer would entirely approve: Carroll finds Coleridge's grounding of the self in God, "I am because in God I am," far removed from its biblical origin and "bordering on the absurd", and, as stated above (Sabatino), Altizer's "self" finds its identification with God not in its grounding in eternity, but in history, futurity, emptiness and interrelationality.

[15] Sabatino links the cosmological and existential aspects of the self-negation of God by observing the import of Buddhist negation for Altizer, in that it provides a positive perspective upon the negation of God and self. Within Mahayana Buddhism, Sabatino notes, it is not "personal centeredness" which provides the "primary

meaning within being," as in the Western view of the self, but the "essential belonging in interrelationality of all existent beings" (293). The symbol of the death of God for Altizer presents a kenotic understanding of both God and humanity:

> . . .as God is to be understood as having retained and claimed nothing, but to have abandoned all prerogatives of Godhead, so does authentic human dwelling consist in the similar shift of one's own individual being toward that more common possibility of meaning which each shares with all. The death of God is a symbol for the death experience which any person must undergo as we come to participate with others in what is found to be an essentially shared world possibility and future. . . .Not only does (Altizer) negate the distinct existence of God, but he further negates the ultimate significance of that centered and individual being whom each might claim to be. (294-95)

For a full elucidation of Altizer's understanding of the relatedness of Buddhist and Christian notions of negation and emptiness, see his Genesis and Apocalypse, chapter 6, "Emptiness and Self-Emptiness," 93-106.

[16] Refuting the claim put forth by Eric Meyers that Altizer's understanding of creation as the totality of the eternal God is a "dialectical process-pantheism" ("Thomas J.J. Altizer's Construction of Ultimate Reality and Meaning," Ultimate Reality and Meaning 1:4 [1978] 272-73), Sabatino specifies that this totality is a negated totality which passes through two stages of coming-to-be. First, there is the "emergence of world and God as Other," but also a second movement of incarnation "(represented by the Jesus event) in which creation is finally complete with the total self-negation of God" (291-92). This completion, however, is a passing of the eternal God into the "eternal becoming which is the world;" thus Altizer's total negation of transcendence differs from the transcendence which, understood as "embodied" but not "negated," is retained by God in the pantheism of process theology (292).

Chapter Two

Writing the Word of God
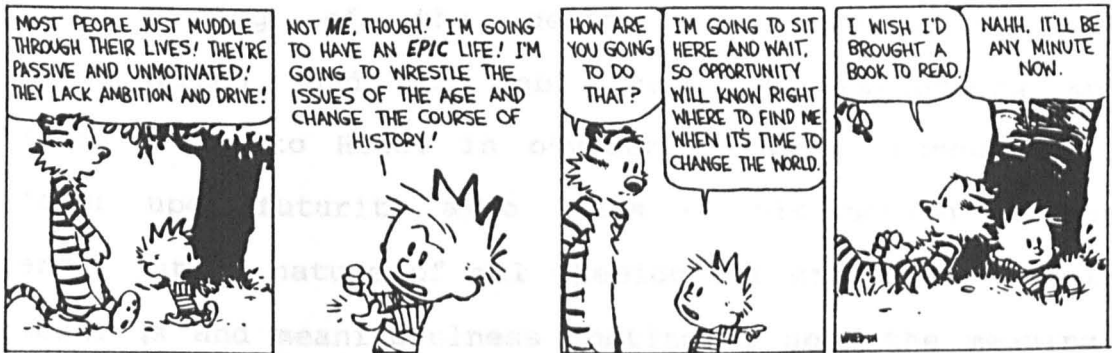
(Watterson 77)

> When no "up" or "down" is left, when
> "beginning" and "end" and all historic symbols
> have disappeared, what will be the meaning of
> such primary dogmas as the Incarnation and the
> Creation? (Altizer "AFT" 13)

> There is no up and down; there are no
> hierarchies; nothing is more fundamental than
> anything else. (Capra et al. 133)[1]

Alan Olson, in his review of Altizer's Genesis and
Apocalypse, notes that the notion of historical
apocalypse within Altizer's theology resembles the
"ontological priority of the future" of which Heidegger
and Bloch have written (124). This ontological priority
of the future is a theme which is adopted by Wolfhart
Pannenberg, for whose systematic theology the notion of
futurity is crucial, as he understands God as the "power
of the future," and can claim that since the future is

the realm of God's existence, it is legitimate to assert that God does not yet exist, but is coming to be. Certainly this might be said to be Altizer's understanding of the death and genesis of God systematized, and the debt that both Pannenberg and Altizer owe to Hegel is obvious. However, Pannenberg's focus upon futurity also leads to his notion of the anticipatory nature of all theological statements, their meanings and meaningfulness contingent upon the meaning-giving ultimate future (an event which is itself contingent, and only hope provides the foundation of "meaning" in light of that event which may or may not happen). In Pannenberg's theology, this apocalyptic event lies always in the future, while for Altizer apocalypse is a present reality (but an apocalyptic present reality, a "presence" which is always not yet). Although Pannenberg's understanding of history adds little to a traditional eschatological notion, Pannenberg's theology does lend itself to a "hermeneutical priority of the future," a notion of interpretation which finds affinity with Derrida's meditations upon *"différance"* and the "trace." Similarly, Altizer's theological "priority of the future" finds him (his objections to the anachronism of postmodern theological concerns notwithstanding) paralleled with Derrida as well[2].

Charles Winquist points out the similarities between the theological movement from transcendence to radical immanence in Thomas Altizer's thought and the play of *différance* in Derrida's philosophical deconstructions,

noting that in both, "the origin of identity is the substitution of a signifier, a name, for the transcendental signifier and a displacement into a network of signifiers" (338). For Altizer, whose theology and interpretation of history are written under the "grand trope of the death of God" (Winquist 339), God is understood as the signified "God" whose name entails the death and radical kenosis of the transcendental signifier, "God." The history of theology becomes then for Altizer a history of historically evolving re-interpretation of that signifier, a re-interpretation which is for Altizer, the presence of the absence of the transcendental. Altizer's theological program, then, relies fundamentally upon his activity as reader, as re-interpreter and re-writer of the Word of God which negates the transcendental, objective, inactual reality of the immobile God of Christendom. Altizer's re-reading of God himself draws not only upon a critique of the interpretive activities of the institutional Christian tradition, but also upon a re-interpretation of those marginal "theologians" who were, rather than reinforcing the propriety of the eternal return of the God of Christendom, writing scripture themselves and effecting the historical evolution of the faith, an evolution that scholasticism has sought to avoid, and indeed, to reverse. Such re-interpretation is for Altizer a re-enactment of an original Christianity, but the emphasis here is not on a return to an original authoritative text, but upon the apocalyptic manner in which that text

is presented, grounded in a historically evolving faith. For Altizer, as Winquist observes, "theology cannot take possession of an original text because in the beginning there is silence" (339); the "original text," for Altizer is a text which is always already effaced and written under erasure. The God of Altizer's theology is a God who has written Godself as other than God, and a God the theology of whom is written as other-than-theology, by such "theologians" as Milton, Blake and Joyce, who have acknowledged, as Altizer, the "textuality of the divine" (Raschke 138; Jasper, "From Theology to Theological Thinking" 15). Acknowledgement of the "textuality of the divine," implies a shift from the objective notion of the logocentric (or at least a shift within that system if logocentrism is a tradition from which we cannot escape), the hermeneutic and theo-logical, toward the poetic, a fall "from the book to writing and theological thinking" (Jasper 20). This is a fall which, like the fall which Altizer equates with the death and genesis of God, is a felix culpa, enacting the very embodiment of that movement which is simultaneously death and resurrection, an embodiment which grants actuality to history and enacts within that history a total grace. That movement is for Altizer the epic movement of Spirit which is the redemptive and sacrificial negation of God, a historical movement reflected in literary epic movements and in the epic of the individual and universal consciousness. This movement is most essentially a movement of the negation of eternal return.

In his essay, "The Beginning and Ending of Revelation," Altizer chronicles once again the ending of the cycle of eternal return by the self-naming of I AM, an ending which "is the beginning of the impact of irreversible events upon consciousness," a beginning in which "world itself become(s) the arena and the horizon of ultimate praxis, a praxis releasing the ultimacy of primordial and sacred acts into the actuality of life and world itself" (79). Now while the effect of the self-revelation of I AM is for Altizer historically developing, the revelation of I AM irreversibly establishes its own beginning and the "beginning of the ending of eternal return" (79). History itself, says Altizer, is a "realization of that revelation," a realization which has evolved an ever more deeply negative consciousness of transcendence, developing through multiple movements and identities over the course of centuries (80). That consciousness has, however, in the twentieth century, reached a "global embodiment" (80), in a total presence of the absence of the transcendent, a total presence which is a universal grace, a result of the apocalyptic movement of a historically evolving faith, an apocalypticism which was marginalized by the Christian Church itself (88-9). That grace is known in the absolute silence of the self-negating God, a silence which is the fulfillment of the speech of the self-revelation of I AM, the consummation in which "'God said' has wholly and finally passed into silence;" "if grace is everywhere, and is everywhere here

and now, it is everywhere as death and nothingness, and finally as the death and nothingness of I AM" (108). The finally present totality of death and ending is for Altizer, the apocalyptic ending which is the apocalypse (ending and revelation) of God, an apocalypse in which "the death of the Crucified God is now universally realized as a final and total event," an "actuality" which is the "total realization of the Crucified God" (108). Thus for Altizer God is God in God's self-embodiment and negation in the world itself, so that the reality of God lies not in the transcendent to which the realization of God refers, but in the realization itself, an embodiment of the negation of the transcendental signified. This act of negation is most fully realized in the crucifixion, "the sacrifice of that God who is fully God in kenosis and self-emptying," and the negation of that God who is only the God of Glory, a negation which the final realization and actualization of that God of ultimate sacrifice (GA 78). The full realization and enactment of that negation is symbolized by Altizer by a universal liturgy and eucharistic anamnesis, a totalizing, now at the end of history of the sacrifice of God and negation of the God of glory which is "re-presented or renewed in the liturgical action of the eucharist or mass," and the sacrifice which is "proclaimed in authentic Christian preaching" (GA 76-77).

The negation of the God of Glory in the God of Sacrifice, especially as embodied in the liturgical movement of the eucharist, is a theological understanding

shared with Altizer by Robert Scharlemann, whose explications of the kenotic God tend toward the more systematic than do Altizer's. In Scharlemann's meditations upon the being of God in the Eucharist, to say that "God is in the Eucharist" is to say that "the sacrament of the eucharist symbolizes or makes perceptible the one activity of being within the many activities of the final agent, God" (Klemm 308). The event of the sacrament discloses the self-revelatory activity of God which is always happening everywhere (Klemm 308), and the eucharist functions as a "revelatory language event," in which language, "the process of speaking and hearing, is the self-embodying of God" (308). In language, God "embodies deity as other than himself;" "God is manifest as other than God in the event of language," and eucharist, as a re-enactment of the primary symbol of God's self-negation, reveals the depth of that manifestation (Klemm 308). The "presence" of God in Scharlemann's theology, as in Altizer's, requires a critique of traditional ontology in which the being of God is the presence of God's absence, or, in which the way that God "is" coincides with the way that God "is not," or is as God is "other than God," as Scharlemann explains in his intricately paradoxical essays, "The Being of God When God is Not Being God," and "Being 'As Not'" (IR 30-65). The same theme of ontological theological critique is undertaken by Jean-Luc Marion, in his God Without Being (1991), which also turns toward the eucharist for its focus.

Marion's consideration of the possibilities of theology in the wake of the death of God draws quite directly from Heidegger and Barth, while critiquing both, and presents the case for an understanding of God without Being, that is, for a theology which is from the beginning conscious of its own tendency toward idolatry, even in assigning to God its highest designation, that of Being. A theology in which God is understood solely as bound to, or participating in, the realm of Being remains, according to Marion, anthropocentric and idolatrous in its attempt at mastery of God through reason. Reason is not completely eradicated by Marion, however, but it cannot be maintained as the basis for a knowledge or worship of God; rather, the basis for theology is faith in the revelation as "agape" given by God alone. Rather than making an idol of Reason, Marion discloses the possibility that, as David Tracy notes in his foreword to the work, "revelation, centered in forms of visibility, can become an icon for thought" (xi). Marion's preliminary distinction between the idol and the icon (briefly, in which the idol is understood as that which freezes one's gaze and the icon as that which "gives rise to an infinite gaze" [18]), reminiscent of Heidegger's treatments of art, provide the tenor for Marion's main discussion, that of the question of Being in the theological context. In the end, even Heidegger's critique of ontotheology is open to a Derrida-esque questioning, though Heidegger's admission that the idea

of Being has no place in a theology provides a pervasive theme for Marion's work.

In admitting no less of God (whose name is consistently crossed out in the work) than absolute otherness, Marion understands theology's task as one of worship and thanksgiving, metaphorically presented through the activity of the Eucharist. True theology, for Marion, founded upon the kerygmatic revelation of the historical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, carries out the task of a "Eucharistic hermeneutic," contrasted by Marion with both "scientific exegesis" which attempts to master the text and "prohibit in it all utterance of the said," and the "prophetic" treatment of the text which renders it "so radically nonfactual that no salvation can occur in it" (145). In a eucharistic mode, theology understands the revelation of God in the present in an otherwise-than-metaphysical understanding of time in which

> "the present of the Eucharistic gift is not at all temporalized starting from the *here and now* but as memorial (temporalization starting from the past), then as eschatological announcement (temporalization starting from the future), and finally, and only finally, as dailyness and viaticum (temporalization starting from the present). (172)

In this case, says Marion, the present does not "order the analysis of temporality as a whole," but rather "results from it" (172).

Further, not only does the Eucharist signify the gift of "union with Christ" in the corporal ecclesial body, but as presence is understood as gift in a Eucharistic context, time itself may be understood as gift for the sake of partaking within it in the gift of the eucharistic present:

> The eucharistic presence comes to us, at each instant, as the gift of that very instant, and, in it, of the body of the Christ in whom one must be incorporated. The temporal present during the which the eucharistic present endures resembles it: as a glory haloes an iconic apparition, time is made a present gift to let us receive in it the eucharistically given present. (175)

Thus in the mystery of the "properly Christian" understanding of temporality, the "ultimate paradigm of every present" according to Marion, is given the gift of the eucharistic present.

While Marion's understanding of the "eucharistically given present" closely resembles Altizer's "total presence" (which is understood as a universal eucharist), Altizer's understanding of history and temporality is founded upon the idea of the embodiment of the death of God. For Marion the death of God does not serve as such a temporal metaphor; Marion views the philosophical concept of the death of God as the death of an idolatrous confining of God to human terms, specifically to the distinction between being and nothing, presence and

absence. Like Altizer, Marion places God beyond being and
nothing (Scharlemann, "A Response" 116), but the death of
God for Marion is the death of an idolatrous concept
which stopped short, as all concepts do, of an
understanding of the God who reveals Himself, but who
remains absolutely other. The transcendence of God the
Father is maintained, contra-Altizer, in the kenotic act
of the incarnation. With Altizer, Marion maintains that
the Lordship of Christ is gained through the absolute
surrender of the cross, but this does not imply that the
agapaic expenditure of Christ provided no promise of
receiving that lordship again:

> This kenotic loss, going so far as death and,
> above all, the descent into hell, appears as
> the highest lordship--that, precisely, of love
> without reserve, universal and hence all
> powerful. But it does not suffice to say of
> this lordship that in losing it the humanity of
> Jesus had no assurance of finding it again, in
> a game of loser wins. It does not suffice,
> since his very divinity cried out in Psalm 22,
> attesting by that very fact, in one stroke, the
> kenosis and divinity as kenosis. When Jesus
> rises, he does not rise at all by himself but
> by the power and will of the Father. (193)

Not only in his understanding of the transcendence of God
does Marion differ from Altizer, but also in his
eucharistic understanding of temporality. While Altizer
proposes an immanental "total presence" made possible by

the kenotic death of God, Marion suggests that every present be understood as "gift" not only of past but also of future, in which "the present, always already anterior to and in anticipation of itself, is received to the extent that the past and the future, in the name of the Alpha and the Omega, give it" (176). The import of this, says Marion, lies in the fact that it reveals that which has been called "real presence" as "foundering in the metaphysical idolatry of *here* and *now* or else must be received in according to the properly Christian temporality" (176). Whereas Altizer's account portrays God as present *in* the immanence of the present, an immanence which is the negation of transcendence and implies the dynamic apocalypse of presence itself, Marion preserves the otherness of God in distinction from the present which is offered as gift and also in distinction from the past and future in which the present is offered up and taken back again (176-77).

Marion's understanding of the crossing of God, in Altizer's opinion, contains a contradiction in its granting of a Pseudo-Dionysian mystical transcendental absolute unity to God, an eternal return which negates the very self-negation of the Christian God, alongside a Hegelian notion of the kenotic "gift" of the Crucified God. Following mystical theology's "way of absolute return," "Marion calls for a liberation from Being," Altizer points out in his review of God Without Being; or rather, Altizer adds, Marion calls for a liberation to be given to Being, that Being's own "play" might liberate

itself, "above all to liberate itself from that ontological difference between Being and beings which is the deepest ground of our dominant Western ontologies" ("DTCN" 4). Such a freedom implies, Altizer criticizes, a reversal of "all radical thinking," "by way of a Christian neoplatonism," but this implication that might have been avoided in Marion's thought through the dialectical quality of the crossing itself of Being. "Surely Marion is radical in calling for the 'Crossing' of Being," says Altizer, who is quick to inquire whether the crossing might perhaps "abolish (Being) without deconstructing it, exceed it without overcoming it, and annul it without annihilating it," but while Marion employs the language of Hegelian *Aufhebung* to explicate the "giving" of the Crucified God, (employing *"releve,"* Derrida's translation of the Hegelian term), he "immediately calls upon the Pseudo-Dionysius, that thinker who is most infinitely distant from Hegel. . . rejoicing in a deeply mystical call that we become messengers announcing the divine silence," messengers who have abandoned "everything whatsoever both in this 'world of nothingness' and in the 'world of being," because of the deep discontinuity between "the false light of our world and the absolute darkness of the Godhead" (6). Yet, Altizer notes, Marion's emphasis upon the Crucified God is in complete opposition to the language of Pseudo-Dionysius, language from which images of kenosis are lacking. Perhaps then, Marion's Dionysianism is a modern Catholic Dionysianism, Altizer suggests, a Dionysianism

which knows Godhead as absolute darkness, but which can know an openness to "non-being" which "is itself an arena of the gift of the crucified God" (11). Such a Catholicism can know the world itself as the gift of the Crucified God, "a God which appears only in its disappearance, and which "is" only in the sense that it has wholly and totally given itself;" God without being (12). Such an understanding would present a fully and uniquely Catholic notion of world which "is nature and grace at once," a history, a world, an existence which is "a sacramental world," not in the Pseudo-Dionysian sense of a reflection of "Heavenly and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies," but as the gift and the giving of the kenotic God, a "universal eucharistic presence of the Lamb of God" (12).

A universal eucharistic presence in which existence is itself understood as the body of the kenotic God is a restatement of Altizer's understanding of "total presence," a coincidence of the opposites of the divine and the corporeal which Altizer finds developing both within modern Catholic scholarship and having developed within the Christian epic tradition, a tradition epitomized in the historical evolution of the Protestant and Catholic theological discourses of Milton, Blake and Joyce.

It is within Catholicism that Altizer lately finds the most promise for the continued evolution of Christian theology. Catholicism has progressed radically in the past century, notes Altizer, "losing its feudalistic and

monarchical political ground" as well as "erasing its own
condemnations of modern astronomy, evolutionary
biological science, and modern biblical scholarship," so
that now, in Altizer's opinion at least, critical
scholarship is more progressive in Catholic groups than
in Protestant, and "radical political theology" is far
more associated with Catholicism than Protestantism
("TCCRC" 188). Further, the gap between religious
institution and academia present in both Catholicism and
Protestantism is a gap which is in Catholicism "both
present and absent at once," for the Catholic Church is
itself more open to contemporary thought, an openness not
equalled, says Altizer, since the sixteenth century, and
an openness which has evoked a historically forward
dynamic unparalleled in the Protestant world (188-89).
Simply, and drastically, put, Altizer suggests that if
the Protestant era has now ended, "it is Catholicism
alone in the Christian world which is open to a genuine
future" (189). The unique promise which Altizer finds
within Catholicism is of course prompted by, among other
things, the impact of liberative theologies, the literary
works of poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, the
creative theological works of writers such as Jean-Luc
Marion and Alphonso Lingis and others, but Altizer's
primary interest in the development of Catholic thought
resides in the work of D.H. Leahy.

Altizer finds Leahy's development of the "real
presence of the eucharist" into a "total and apocalyptic
presence" to be a Catholic reversal of the teleological

destination of Hegelianism, while, in a Hegelian movement of negation, Leahy can know, as Altizer does, the existence of all matter as the body of God ("RC" 190). In Leahy's apocalyptic coincidence of opposites, elucidated in his Novitas Mundi and Foundation: Matter the Body Itself,

> it becomes the destiny of the eucharist to be the substantial experience of the world at large. Now an essentially new consciousness is born, whereby and wherein the very matter of the universe becomes the apocalyptic and sacrificial body of God. ("RC" 190)

The movement represented by the eucharist is understood as an anamnestic re-enactment of the movement of creation, crucifixion, and resurrection, the "nullification of God" which is the "being-there" of God in the eucharist and in history (190).

The nullification of God, the kenotic movement of crucifixion and the total presence of the body of God are concepts the development of which Altizer chronicles through the theological focus of the epic tradition which runs through Milton, Blake and Joyce, a tradition which includes the birth of the "modern imagination" in Milton and its fruition in a total apocalyptic presence in Joyce. The epic tradition in which Altizer finds the development of the kenotic movement of the death of God is a tradition in which the movement of Fall is crucial, as through Fall the kenosis of the transcendent God is effected; for this reason, the dialectic of God and

Satan, a dialectic embodying a radical understanding of negativity, is a vital theme within that development.

Milton's <u>Paradise Lost</u>, according to Altizer, enacts the epic birth of modernity through the revelation of a totally glorious Satan, in its premier historical presentation as the dialectically opposite element to Christ (<u>GA</u> 162; <u>HAA</u> 162). Within <u>Paradise Lost</u> Satan mirrors the activity and personality of the Messiah: Satan's Hellish majesty being "an inverted form of the monarchic majesty of the Son in Heaven," and the self-emptying voyage of the Son being paralleled by an equivalent Satanic voyage through the nothingness between Hell and earth (<u>HAA</u> 158):

> even as the Son undergoes a kenotic voyage from Heaven to earth to offer himself in sacrifice for a totally guilty humanity, Satan undergoes a kenotic voyage from Hell to Earth where he kenotically empties himself into a serpent so as to tempt and ensnare a totally innocent humanity, and if that destruction of humanity is realized by the enticement of a totally exalted and ecstatic consciousness which is a totally negative consciousness, the salvation of humanity is realized by a passion and a death that is an equally negative act and enactment. (<u>GA</u> 162).

<u>Paradise Lost</u> enacts a conjunction of Christ and Satan, says Altizer, a conjunction resulting from an understanding of the passion and death of Christ, a

passion and death which occur within the core of the Satanic realm (GA 162). Altizer interprets Milton's conjoining of Christ and Satan not only as the "dramatic center of Paradise Lost," but more importantly as the "grounding epic" and "symbolic center" of the modern world (GA 162; HAA 143). That new naming of Satan and Christ is exercised through a resistance on Milton's part to utilize the traditional name of Christ in his epic poetry, opting for the terms "Son of God, the Son, or Messiah," a result, according to Altizer, of Milton's knowledge of a truly new Christ who has actually died in the crucifixion, falling to the majestic power of Satan, and therefore a Christ inseparable from the reality of Satanic power (163, 167). The free acceptance by Christ of the death and humiliation of the crucifixion is contingent upon the triumph of Satan in the Fall, a fall wherein the Creator has surrendered creation to sin and death, a surrender which is consummated in the kenotic movement of the crucifixion (164).

The kenotic movement of fall, according to Altizer, realizes the "merit" of both Son and Satan, and conjoins the kenotic act of God and the redemptive movement of Christ with the absolutely negative "power and actuality of Satan" (GA 165).

> The Son cannot act as the sacrificial and atoning Son apart from the sovereignty of Satan over a wholly fallen world of death, just as the Son's abandonment of the glory of Heaven is

a response to that very exaltation of Satan.

(165)

The "merit" of Christ is therefore possible only in light of the Fall and "kenotic voyage of Satan," a movement which dialectically conjoins the identities of Christ and Satan.

Remarkably, Altizer reads Milton's portrayal of "the purely negative energy of Satan" as "the imaginative embodiment" of the revolutionary political power released in the English revolution, a power which was paralleled by Goethe's Faustian will, Nietzsche's will to power, and which was further the ground for the "all too modern discovery of the infinity of the universe," all of which know a negation of the traditional distinction between the transcendent and the immanent, whether a will estranged from soul, a finite earth estranged from the infinity of the universe, or a transcendent God estranged from the finitude of existence (165). That power, and that transformed distinction, represented, according to Altizer, an apocalyptic vision of the triumph and sovereignty of Satan and darkness, a sovereignty which for the first time in history allowed a full knowledge of the apocalyptic victory and redemption of the kenotic Christ. Altizer reads <u>Paradise Lost</u> as a defense and chronicle of the fall of Satan and its renewal and reversal in the acceptance and willing of crucifixion, a dialectic which, Altizer contends, has no precedent in the Christian tradition, a tradition which had never known a fully kenotic Christ, a Christ which can only be

known through the exaltation of Satan (<u>GA</u> 166-67; <u>HAA</u> 161).

> Nothing like this is present in the Christian tradition, but that tradition as such had never known a Son of God who truly and fully dies, and if Milton was the first dogmatic theologian to know that death, Milton was inevitably the poet who exalted Satan, an exaltation that is a necessary response to a deep and comprehensive realization of the ultimacy of death. For only a fully sovereign Satan could be the ground of that death; that sovereignty is a sovereignty over a wholly fallen world, a world whose very center is eternal death. Moreover, that death alone makes possible the kenotic or self-emptying movement of the Son. Consequently, to know the full actualization of the self-emptying of the Son is to know the sovereignty of Satan, a sovereignty which is first dramatically enacted and envisioned in <u>Paradise Lost</u>, and a sovereignty apart from which there could be no apocalyptic victory of Christ. (<u>GA</u> 167).

Whereas the Christian theological tradition, which Altizer sums up in the words of Aquinas, could simply assert that "Christ's passion did not concern or affect his Godhead," Milton's <u>De Doctrina Christiana</u>, which Altizer claims embodied "the purest Scriptural theology" that had yet been historically realized (<u>HAA</u> 145), at

once affirmed the traditional "eternally impassive God,"
but also separated that God from the Son, asserting that
the two are essentially distinct, because of Christ's
totally kenotic death, a kenosis which is precluded by
the concept of an infinite and eternal God (GA 168). The
understanding of kenosis is carried even further in
Paradise Lost than in the Doctrina, in which the Father
"retires in the act of creation," so that, rather than
the Doctrina's version in which Creation is produced out
of God alone, and the Son first of all, so that creation
is not "by or with the Son" (HAA 146), the creation in
Paradise Lost is "by the Word or the temporally generated
Son," so that the Son is "generated in time rather than
in eternity" (GA 168; HAA 154). That is an understanding
which, Altizer asserts, was impossible for Milton the
dogmatic theologian, but not for Milton the poet, who
could know more fully than any prior theologian the
actuality of death and the fall (GA 168)[3]. That knowledge
of the totality of death made possible the presentation,
Altizer points out, of a universe in which a harmonious
unified order is known only as a prefallen reality, a
"lost universe," vanished as a result of the fall. Thus
Altizer knows Paradise Lost as a "'wake' for a cosmic
corpse," a remembrance and re-enactment of the loss and
fall of a vanished universe (HAA 171; GOG 80). It is this
loss and fall which provides the theme of Paradise Lost,
a fall which effects a knowledge of a radically novel
Christ, a "fully kenotic or self-emptying Christ" (GA
168). While that Christ, so opposite to an eternal and

transcendent God was, Altizer says, previously known
theologically to Luther, Luther's adherence to the
authority of the ancient Church prevented its dogmatic
explication, an explication which would only take place
with the "radical Reformation" which found its voice in
Milton, "the first systematic theologian to accept the
full death of Christ" (GA 168; HAA 152). That voice, says
Altizer, was completely actualized in the poetry of
Blake, whose comprehension of the totality of fall
extends to the transcendent realm of Godhead itself (GA
168-69).

Blake, whom Altizer names as "the epic poet of the
French and American revolutions," revolutions which
Altizer understands as historical embodiments of the
imaginative death of God[4], proclaims the kenosis of the
transcendent which was thereby politically enacted in his
distinction between the kenotic movement of Christ and
the eternal Creator, a Creator who exemplifies a purely
Satanic negativity (GOG 44-45; GA 169). Blake conjoins
the self-emptying of Jesus with the death of the "purely
alien and negative Creator," so that the Satan which is
negated in the crucifixion is the Godhead whose pure
negativity is emptied in the crucifixion[5]; this is an
understanding of evil as the divine Being's self-othering
and "withdrawal into self-centeredness" which Hegel was
developing simultaneously in his Phenomenology of Spirit
(GA 169; GOG 81). Both Hegel and Blake thereby knew a
revolutionary death of God, in which the total negativity
of the eternal Godhead, which Hegel knew as "being-in-

itself," which Blake knew as Satan and Creator, negates itself (GA 170; GOG 51). According to Altizer, "Christ is the Christian name of that self-alienation or self-emptying," and so Christ and Satan are inseparable in name, and this is "dual-naming" is continued in Blake and Hegel as it had been begun in Milton's Paradise Lost, which had embodied "the totality of the fall. . .that can finally be known as the fall or death of God" (GA 170).

In realizing an identity of God as Satan, and envisioning the self-kenotic death of that God in a historically-evolving apocalyptic history, Altizer finds Blake in full continuity with "the original apocalyptic ground of Christianity" and also with Milton's vision of the totality of the fall, but Blake's vision of fall "radicalizes and totalizes its Miltonic source" through its apprehension of fall as "all in all" (HAA 189)[6]. Blake's naming of God as Satan reveals him, as Milton before him, to be in Altizer's opinion "a God-obsessed man and seer;" this obsession, paired with his understanding of the Satanic power of his revolutionary historical situation, results in the centrality within his writings of the image of the end of the world, an apocalyptic ending which historically marked an apprehension of the death of God (HAA 189).

The death of God, or the self-negation of the eternal Absolute Spirit in Hegelian terms, which is realized as an "abstract universality" and a totally negative reality, is understood by both Blake and Hegel as an apocalyptic event within the context of the

eschatological fulfillment of their contemporary worlds, a notion shared by Nietzsche as well[7] (<u>HAA</u> 192; <u>GOG</u> 80-81; 168). Altizer shares this conviction that the era of the French revolution "is the historical point at which a universal consciousness first fully and finally becomes actual and real," a result not only of the birth of a new self-consciousness, born in the dialectic of "universal freedom and the individuality and freedom of actual self-consciousness," but also of Blake's realization of the "total universality of Satan" within his apocalyptic mythology, within *Jerusalem* in particular, and Hegel's development of his apocalyptic philosophical system (<u>HAA</u> 192). The apocalyptic reality which Blake knew as "Urizen, as Selfhood, as Spectre, and as Satan" was paralleled according to Altizer in Hegel by the conception of "abstract Spirit or the 'Bad Infinite' or the God who alone is God" (<u>HAA</u> 192). Blake's <u>Milton</u> and <u>Jerusalem</u> present a Christ who reverses and negates the negative reality of the purely transcendent Creator, whom Blake knows as "Urizen" or Satan (Hegel's "Bad Infinite"), in a movement which is the "self-annihilation of Satan," a movement which is also an "apocalyptic redemption" in the reversal of the fall which was creation, but a reversal which is also that fall's "apocalyptic consummation" (<u>GOG</u> 81).

Similarly, Altizer reads Blake's "Luvah" as another character within his mythology which symbolizes such a Hegelian negative totality (<u>HAA</u> 199). The figure of Luvah, who appears in <u>The Book of Thel</u> but plays a major

dramatic and symbolic role in "The Four Zoas,"[8] is understood by Altizer as "the center and ground of a universal and eternal process of fall," and a "*coincidentia oppositorum*" embodying a historically enacted fall which is simultaneously transgressive and redemptive (HAA 197). With the figure of Luvah, Altizer observes, Blake conjoins Milton's Son and Milton's Satan in a dialectical characterization embodying Christ's self-emptying and also Satan's negativity; within Jerusalem, for instance,

> (Luvah) symbolically embodies the sacrificial
> movement of energy or passion from its original
> fall to its ultimate self-sacrifice in Christ,
> and thence to the repetition of that sacrifice
> in the suffering of humanity; and. . . he also
> embodies the dark or evil forces of passion and
> must himself become Satan if he is actually to
> accomplish his work. (HAA 198)

Luvah, moving through the opposites of Christ and Satan, is the movement of history toward apocalypse, at once historical horror and violence and the redemptive Lamb of God which realize the universal reality of "The Eternal Great Humanity Divine," a movement which, according to Altizer, reenacts Paradise Lost by presenting "a purely apocalyptic epic" aimed at the establishment and realization of "the final apocalyptic triumph of the New Jerusalem," a triumph made possible by the conjunction of Milton's Son and Satan (HAA 199). The conjunction of Son and Satan in the kenotic movement of the death of God is

a union of Jesus and the New Jerusalem, a complete conjunction of God and Man in the abolition of the eternal and transcendent God, an abolition in which the Satanic reality of the transcendent negativity of God is itself negated and thus realized historically as the actuality of history (HAA 204; GOG 97). Thus Blake knows the Creator as the Crucified God, the self-annihilating Satan who is "the actual source of the totality of experience" (GOG 105).

It is in their knowledge of Satan, says Altizer, that the works of Milton and Blake find their continuity, the Satans that they present being Satans which are historical and actual embodiments of their respective worlds, the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (GA 170). The twentieth century has witnessed a comprehensive nihilistic epiphany of Satan, says Altizer, factually in its unique historical horrors and also literarily in its "twin epics," Joyce's Ulysses and Finnegans Wake (GOG 141). The historicization of the radical dichotomous character of the self-negating God is consummated in these twin epics, and that consummation realizes and embodies a historical negation of the "primordial movement of eternal return" in a universal apocalypse (GOG 116).

Joyce's Ulysses, in Altizer's reading, presents a continuation of the Miltonic and Blakean understanding of the self-kenotic negation of God, making manifest a "Christ who is Satan, a Christ who is 'God becomes man becomes fish,' and who is now a nameless or anonymous

Christ" identical with Lucifer, whose fall is a *felix culpa* (GA 170-71). Joyce, along with Nietzsche, supercedes Blake in the radicality of his negation of God, enacting a resurrection of "that original abyss or nothingness which was negated by the original act of the Creator," and therefore reversing that original act, and reversing the Creator as well (GOG 117). Celebrating a "God-Satan who is Christ," Joyce's Ulysses presents, Altizer points out, a renewed heretical Sabellian Son of God, "the Father who was Himself His Own Son," a Father whose fatherhood disappears in a liturgically embodied mystery of incarnation and crucifixion, a Father known as a "Hangman God" and revealed as only a "noise or voice in the street" (HAA 219; GOG 106). This "noise or voice in the street," however, is the "all in all" of the self-sacrificing Creator, a kenotically revealed totality which makes possible the apocalyptic prayer to "Our Father who art not in heaven," a prayer heralding the arrival not of Elijah, but of the Joycean New Jerusalem, the "New Bloomusalem," and its Christlike figure, the extraordinarily ordinary Leopold Bloom ("STOC" 19; HAA 219; GOG 106).[9]

Altizer offers the reading of Leopold Bloom as a reversal of the docetism that becomes apparent in all previous Christology, ushering into historical consciousness a Christ-figure who is an actual human being[10] (HAA 225). That is an understanding which Altizer claims has developed through the epic tradition, from Dante's inability to portray Christ as in any way human,

to Milton's refusal to "enact or envision him as eternal
and divine Word," and Blake's inability to cast Christ's
fullness into a "singular or individual form" (HAA 225).
Altizer parallels this new Christological understanding
with a new understanding of the Eucharist, insomuch as
the fully human Christ who is now revealed is priest and
victim, present in a Eucharistic presence "in our time
and flesh" (HAA 225). Herein a new epic language is
present, for within Ulysses Altizer finds Bloom's epic
heroism expressed in antiheroic "everyday words and
acts," which are, and this is Bloom's priestly function,
"indistinguishable from those of their audience or
reader" (HAA 226). Therefore Bloom is Christlike by
virtue of his "reversal of every mythical identity of
Christ," in a totally historical identity and world[11]; it
is impossible to "imagine Bloom *as* Christ," says Altizer,
but this is because Bloom's identity so reverses the
traditional glorified image of Christ, but does so in
such a way that Bloom's textual presence "affects us even
as does a ritual enactment," making present the actuality
of "life itself" in the reversal of the negativity of a
purely majestic Christ (HAA 227).

In Finnegans Wake, Altizer submits, Bloom is
transformed into H.C. Earwicker, H.C.E. ("*Hoc*" *est corpus
meum*: take read, this is body, broken for you," as Mark
C. Taylor reads it [Tears 64].), Here Comes Everybody, a
Blakean "The Eternal Great Humanity Divine," who is
consumed in the cosmic *missa jubilea*, enacted in Joyce's
transformation of liturgical language into the language

of the everyday, "a wholly fallen language" (HAA 233, 244). The language of Joyce, and most of all the language of Finnegans Wake, says Altizer, is a language embodying the fall, the "divine death" which is re-enacted throughout its (non)narrative, and a language which calls upon its reader to "enact that which is read," in a Eucharistic re-enactment in which the body of Christ becomes the realization of death and chaos in history, a conjunction of Christ and Satan[12] in which the transcendent Creator is known as Satan and the "Satanic" reality of history, and realized in Joyce in a transformed liturgical language which is divine and human at once (GA 172; HAA 234-237).

> . . .the language of the Wake is not only human
> and divine at once, it is totally guilty and
> totally gracious at once, for our final epic
> language is a cosmic and historical Eucharist,
> a Eucharist centered in an apocalyptic and
> cosmic sacrifice of God. Now a primordial chaos
> and abyss is indistinguishable from Godhead,
> just as an original chaos has passed into the
> center of speech. But now this ultimate chaos
> is fully and finally present, and present in
> and as this apocalyptic and liturgical text.
> (HAA 234)

Even as the language of the Wake embodies reconceptions of the figures of the Father, the Son, and Satan, the refiguration of these typically male images is accompanied by a new representation of the feminine.[13]

Altizer points out that Milton's Paradise Lost, while presenting a poetic presence of the Christian God, portrays the "silence of the Mother of God, a Mother who can only be absent in the presence of the Father," but fully present in the absence of the Father, the death of God, which is not yet epically understood until Blake (HAA 236). Joyce, however, continues the "renewal and resurrection" of "the archaic and primordial Goddess," which Blake had begun; Blake's goddesses, however, according to Altizer, generally embody "a destructive and demonic presence," unlike Joyce's Molly Bloom, who, in her transformation into Anna Livia Plurabelle, renews Dante's "vision of Beatrice as the source of all grace" (HAA 237). Anna Livia Plurabelle, however, is no mere repetition of a cyclical primordial system of return, but "an actual and living center of joy and grace," an actual human and ordinary presence, like Leopold Bloom, "neither mythical nor divine"[14](HAA 237). Further, Altizer points out that the central action of the Wake is a re-enactment of "primordial sacrifice," or fall; that is a sacrifice which is re-enacted through the "night language" which "embodies the brute and formless matter of the primordial 'water,'" but unlike the sacrifice and silencing of that feminine presence in the primordial act of the Father's "I AM," it is the water itself which speaks in the language of the Wake, speaking, "with an immediacy. . . never sounded since the original act of creation," a language which enacts the death of God ("STOC" 20; GOG 107). "Accordingly," notes Altizer, "a resurrected Anna

can proclaim: 'Rise up now and aruse! Norvena's over' (619.28)," the end of "norvena" or nirvana ushering in the apocalyptic nightfall, the language of which is the "night language" which is the language of the death of God, the language of the "fall, condemnation and crucifixion of H.C.E," who is not only the Father, but is also, Altizer observes, Yggdrasil[15], the "cosmic Tree, which in the Eddas symbolizes the universe, a universe which goes on trial as the 'Festy King'" in the Wake ("STOC" 20; HAA 239; GOG 107). Within the Eddas Yggdrasil is also derived from "Yggr," meaning "deep thinker," or God, and "drasil," meaning "horse or carrier;" therein Yggdrasil "becomes at times 'bearer of God'" connoting at once the cross and the Virgin, as well as the tree which was the source of original sin (Himler 55). Altizer links "original sin" and "original sun" within the center of the Joycean negative Godhead which negates itself in the very language of the Wake, a negation "consummated in the resurrection of Anna Livia Plurabelle, a resurrection which absorbs the power of Godhead;" that resurrection culminates in a universal Eucharist which is cosmic crucifixion and resurrection, a final "Yes," which also evokes the imagery of the tree, in the "cosmic dispersal of (A.L.P)'s body or leaves" (GA 171; GOG 107, 131-32):

> So. Avelaval. My leaves have drifted from me.
> All. But one clings still. I'll bear it on me.
> To remind me of. Lff! So soft this morning,
> ours. Yes. (628.6-9) (GA 171)

In this apocalyptic morning A.L.P. is known by Altizer at once as Dante's Beatrice, who "is the resurrected Christ" in the "resurrection of all and everything, and thus the resurrection of Here Comes Everybody" ("STOC" 24). This is the Beatrice who in Dante is "the sole actual image and the only intimate presence of the incarnate Christ," the Christ "in whom and by whom time and eternity are one," as the "very embodiment of grace," and the figure whom Dante sees as he is gazing upon Christ as the "one Sun" in the Paradiso ("STOC" 23). In the Wake Beatrice is present in the form of A.L.P. as the resurrection and image of H.C.E., in the self-sacrifice of the eternal God, a self-sacrifice grounded in an act of original sin by which the Father knows, and is conjoined with, his creation, a self-sacrifice enacted by the Eucharistic language of the Wake, re-enacting the apocalyptic moments evoked by the images of the tree of knowledge, the God-bearing trees of incarnation and crucifixion, and the apocalyptic tree located at the center of the universe, Yggdrasil ("STOC" 23-4). It should be remembered that the apocalyptic falling of Yggdrasil, which Altizer here identifies with the death of the eternal Father represented by H.C.E, entails the freedom of the two humans therein, the "founders of a new humanity" who will live "under a new sun, more brilliant that the former one," even perhaps symbolizing a Joycean re-enactment of the granting of full humanity by the Edenic tree, and also by the tree of incarnation and crucifixion (Eliade 169). All of these would be understood by Altizer to be

re-enacted in the Eucharistic language of the <u>Wake</u>, a language which historically enacts a universal Eucharistic presence, not leastly in its epic quality, by which its reader enacts the language therein.

The night language of the <u>Wake</u>, a language written in the absence of the Sun, "writing or scripture finally ends," making way, Altizer proclaims, for that "primal and immediate speech. . .which is on the infinitely other side of that writing which is Scripture or sacred text" (<u>HAA</u> 237). However, Altizer's understanding of Joyce and of scripture is all too dialectical to end there. "Scripture is more universally present in <u>Finnegans Wake</u> than it is in any other text," its sacrality passing into "ribaldry, banality and blasphemy," releasing the grace of a transcendent Heaven into "what Scripture can only name as Satan and Hell" (<u>HAA</u> 238). Thus the text of the wake is not commentary upon Scripture, but is, in a transformed embodiment, Scripture itself[16] (a notion directly related to Altizer's Christology). The New Testament, says Altizer, appears in the <u>Wake</u> in an inverted form, in which the four evangelists are "false witnesses," participating in a chaos which is the "apocalyptic epiphany of total grace" (<u>HAA</u> 238). Within the universally Eucharistic language of the <u>Wake</u>, Scripture is both present and absent in a writing which is the ending of the Written, a presence which is the absence of the transcendental and the originary; the presence/absence of Scripture is a Eucharistic and

apocalyptic presence, a total presence which is present only in its passing away:

> Now writing itself becomes indistinguishable from the original act of creation, and therein it becomes far more violent and chaotic than it has ever been before, and so much so that even if Finnegans Wake is for the most part written in English, it is written in an English that can be read only by learning to read anew. Every new epic calls for and demands a new art and act of reading. . . .Thereby ritual fully passes into writing, and so writing ends as a writing which is only writing, and a writing is born which is inseparable and indistinguishable from that chaos and abyss which appeared to come to an end with the advent of writing and art. (HAA 238-39)[17]

Altizer's reading of Joyce is a radical critique of the traditional notion of Scripture, yet it is an interpretation which takes its departure from the connection between Scripture and Eucharist, writing and ritual, which Carl Raschke presents succinctly in relation to deconstruction's critique of the metaphysics of presence. The "classical meaning of *scriptura*," says Raschke, "refers to the densification of word and text into a public de-*scription*, the metamorphosis of mere writing into the document" (Theological Thinking 134). The written "document" is understood as the site of the re-presentation of presence, standing separate from "the

act of writing which gave it body" (134). The written, as opposed to "writing," is therefore "charged with the sense of the *aliter*," which accounts for the gilding and illumination of Scripture (134). Illuminating the understanding of the "book," the end of which post-structuralist thought has heralded, Raschke points out that "Scripture is the 'book,' and is not simply the material ensemble of inscriptions; it is a veritable theophany" (134). The theophany of the book takes place of course in the reading, a reading which therefore becomes a presence-evoking ritual; such an understanding is woven into the very fabric of the term:

> "Book" is etymologically connected to "beech," an "edible tree" (cf. the Greek root *phago-*). Thus the book is the tree, the symbol of life, that is ingested as a sacrament. Reading in the classical context is akin to the celebration of the "mass," the assimilation of meanings, the consumption of the god, the transfer of presence. (Raschke 134)

Certainly Altizer's understanding of the Eucharistic function of language is derived from such a tradition, but rather than effecting a mere "transfer of presence" which is a representation of an originary presence (of an eternal God, the Father, a Platonic nous or "sun" which instills in profane matter its Spirit) Altizer's understanding of the Eucharistic activity is founded upon his understanding of a "total presence," which is an apocalyptic presence, present in its passing away, a

presence of the absence of God. Altizer's dialectical enactment of the presence/absence of scripture, while certainly bearing similarities to the deconstructionist notion of "the end of the book," which Raschke notes as being "founded upon the Hebraic passion for iconoclasm, for de-situating holiness and making it a temporal disclosure" (134), moves beyond Derrida's notion of "*ecriture*," in an action Raschke foresees, toward a notion of scripture as "oeuvre" or "poiesis" (134). "Poiesis" entails, Raschke points out, a Heideggerian/Ricoeurian "coming to presence through language" rather than "the installation of presence in the book," a manifestation of "the 'fullness' within the flux of the historical" (134). Raschke's notion of "poiesis" opens up the possibility of a notion of text which "parlays into a set of paradoxical references" which "establish the language of text as scripture," a notion compatible with Altizer's understanding of the dialectical historical development of the negative presence of the transcendental (135). In Altizer's terms that historical development entails the enacting of the Word or Kingdom of God in the negating of the eternal Author, the Father, and focuses on the "total presence" of the apocalyptic revelation, in which the death of God is equally understood as the genesis of God; Raschke, too, critiquing the tendencies of the a/theological deconstructive trend in theology, calls for an overcoming of the "sentimentality of absence" present in an overemphasis upon the "vanished author of the text,"

toward a "theological thinking" in which the "Kingdom of God. . .is present among the grief of absence" (138).

Such a presence of the Kingdom of God, like Altizer's transformed Scripture and ritual, entails, as Raschke points out, an understanding of religion as a "pre-metaphysical return of the repressed" (137); not to be understood as an eternal return, the Kingdom of God in Altizer's way of thinking is a "calling forth of the *apocalyptic* identity of genesis" (GOG 183 emphasis mine):

> . . .just an original genesis is a dissolution or reversal of an undifferentiated pleroma, a final apocalypse is a dissolution or reversal of that very origin, but a reversal in which apocalypse *is* all that genesis *was*. Only a realization of that identity could make possible a consummation of genesis itself, but that very realization calls forth the apocalyptic identity of genesis, a calling forth which is the epiphany of the absolute triumph of the Kingdom of God. (GOG 183)

The "triumph of the Kingdom of God," and the original negation which is the death/genesis of God, finds expression in images of birth as well as death, for as Altizer has observed, it is the Mother of God whose presence is known in the absence of God; that presence coincides, of course, with the birth of a new writing[18], as Altizer points out in the language of Joyce:

> Thereby ritual fully passes into writing, and so writing ends as a writing which is only

writing, and a writing is born which is inseparable and indistinguishable from that chaos and abyss which appeared to come to an end with the advent of writing and art. (HAA 238-39)[19]

In the absence of the Father, the Author(ity), the reading of such writing enacts the presence of the (M)other; the improper relations embodied in the liturgical and profane "night language," a "dream language," which follows in the Wake of the death of God may well have resulted in the birth of a new writing, and a new reading--between speech and writing, between the transcendent and the immanent, between heaven and earth, between the Sun and the Virgin soil. In that decentered center grows the tree which bears the revelation of "the return of the repressed."

"Our epic destiny," says Altizer, "was first interiorly enacted in Eve's temptation and fall," a fall effected by the irresistible temptation of "that ecstatic delight induced by a purely negative and thus purely forbidden consciousness, a delight consummated in that ecstasy which she knew in tasting the forbidden fruit"[20] (GOG 97); that is a fall which is re-enacted in the Eucharistic "presence" manifest in writing the death of God. The reader before the book (the "edible tree," as Raschke observes) re-enacts the situation of Eve before the tree of Life, a situation re-enacted by the Virgin before the cross; partaking of the fruit of that tree might signal the beginning of an apocalyptic dawn, a dawn

in which the world is filled with "the smell of death and destruction," and yet "smells fresh and lively and hopeful" (Byatt P 507). The Prayfulness, the playful prayful-ness of the language of the Wake (601) marks the sacrifice of Authority for the sake of the reader, whose eucharistic enactment negates and preserves the opposition between the two, participating in the ceaseless interpretation, the eternal dissemination of the text, the body of the Author(ity). In Joyce, authorial authority is sacrificed in a language which consciously requires the interplay of the act of reading[21].

Thus the authority of the reader is established, but that is an authority that is incessantly de-centered by the text itself, in a wrestling toward an apocalypse which is always not-yet. That same wrestling for authority is present in Blake's reading and re-writing of Milton, as David Reide observes:

> In order to establish his own poetic authority, Blake needed to subvert Milton's, to establish a difference between himself and Milton. He attempted to overcome Milton's dualism, to repudiate what Milton saw as the essential structure of differences that constituted his cosmos and his text, the differences between God and man, (etc). . . .But Blake is the inheritor of Milton's language, the language of a western tradition built on dualisms. . . . Inevitably, Blake's poem does not end with a

seamless vision, but with a woven garment of
language that prevents, or defers, revelation.
Ultimately *all* Blake can do is establish his
difference from Milton, and so generate another
duality: Blake/Milton. (275)

Blake's reading of Milton relies upon the decentered
"writerliness" of the text, its submission to the
subversion of its authority (Reide 275). But at the same
time, Blake's establishment of authority in his new text
demonstrates that subversion, presenting to its reader
(that reader who would read against the "proper"
interpretation, subverting the repressive, sterile
eternal return of authority to itself) the elements with
which to "combat the author's authority" (Reide 275-6);
thus the transcendent authority of the text negates
itself in a kenotic movement into the communal activity
of the reader, interpretation, the writing of the body
which is the absence of the author.

In Milton's rewriting of Scripture as well, as
Sanford Budick suggests, "the intercession of the logos,
His effort to 'interpret,' is part of a living faith in
and of interpretation" (211). The understanding of faith
as a dynamic process of interpretation is exhibited
within Paradise Lost in Milton's "belief in the ability
of the human imagination to emulate divine rationality
and Christian redemption in its own acts of
reconciliation through separation," according to which
"the sanctuary of mankind's (sic) engraved heart must
wander and err--must interpret," in order to "achieve

unity or oneness with the divine interpreter" (211). That is a dynamic unity which would become fully immanent in Blake, and fully embodied within the very language of Joyce. The dynamic unity of reader and writer is an incessantly oscillating relationship, exemplified by the fact that Altizer's granting authority to the texts of writers such as Milton, Blake and Joyce depends upon the subversion of that authority in the re-writing, in the interpretation of those texts. Our epic destiny, as Altizer calls it, is a destiny of interpretive activity, a destiny which is terminated by an interpretive paradigm such as has informed scholastic theology, which reasserts textual and transcendent authority. In Altizer's rewriting of theology, he not only distinguishes between scholarly writing and "fully theological writing," but also "seeks a postmodern style" of writing while asserting that "there cannot yet be a postmodern theology" (GOG 3; HAA 4; GOG 2). The implication is simple, a postmodern theology must follow in the wake of modern theology, a theology which has yet to be fully written, and will remain unfinished until the underlying paradigm of theology can accommodate the sacrifice of (the) Author(ity). Meanwhile, theological reflection remains at the margins, as perhaps it is destined to do, arising from the negation of the eternal return of the realms of the proper both within and outwith its own discipline and tradition (as demonstrated, for instance, by Altizer's considerations of the epic tradition).

The sacrifice of authority which negates the metaphysics of the proper, the sterile system of eternal return, is enacted by a reading/writing which is, in Altizer's terms, a universal eucharist, the total presence of apocalypse. To be sure, that is a reading which is the result of a conscious effort on the part of the reader, an openness to the voice of the repressed (which, as we have seen from Altizer's reading of Joyce, is recognized theologically as a feminine or maternal voice), but there are texts which engender such readings more fully than others (Kristeva, for instance, credits "poetic and religious discourse" as preferred sites[Gross 98]). There is writing which is itself interpretive activity, sacrificing its own authority for the sake of the reader, and for the sake of the interpretive activity. In such writing, author may become reader, writing may become liturgy in which priest (author) and congregation (reader[s]) are united, not in re-presentation, but in the deferral of meaning which is itself the "goal" of the interpretive activity, the "total presence" of meaning. Certainly Altizer's work is such a writing, and in the world of contemporary fiction the work of A.S. Byatt stands out. Unlike Joyce, the unreadability of whose language marks a transferral of authority, Byatt's work blends poetry, science, fiction, literary criticism, and so on, in a narrative which is ultimately readable, in fact, incessantly so. As both professional writer and reader, Byatt is a writer whose work negates its own singularity; any single work of

Byatt's is a network, and a departure point, of intextextuality, pointing toward texts which are its origin and its negation. It is toward Byatt's work, and toward some of those other texts, that we now turn.

NOTES

[1] This is the philosophical situation from which science and theology operate within the present contemporary paradigm, according to physicist Fritjof Capra and theologians David Steindl-Rast and Thomas Matus (Belonging to the Universe, 1992).

[2] For an informative study of the relation of Derrida's thought to theology, see Kevin Hart's The Trespass of the Sign, especially 64-70, and Hart's discussion regarding Derrida and negative theology, in which he concludes "not that deconstruction is a form of negative theology but that negative theology is a form of deconstruction" (186). See also Derrida's "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials."

[3] In Ruin the Sacred Truths, Harold Bloom draws a similar, if more understated distinction between Satan and Christ, and theology and poetry in Milton.

> If Satan in Paradise Lost is aesthetically superior to God and Messiah, as I think we must acknowledge, it is because passion is grander in him than in them, and Milton overtly accepted the paradox that poetry was more simple, sensuous and passionate than theology and philosophy. But this hardly means that reason is lacking in Satan. . . . (102)

[4] Altizer notes that "Blake was the first seer to grasp the unity of the American and French revolutions, a unity marking the advent of a truly new world, indeed an apocalyptic world," an advent which ushered in the "end of all previous history" (HAA 185). Blake's epic poetry conjoins that "historical and eschatological ending" with "a poetic and imaginative ending," says Altizer, in a "new genre of apocalyptic poetry" which ends "the integral and organic coherence of the Western epic

tradition," even reversing that tradition in chaotic language of Fall (HAA 185). The historical political revolutions themselves, says Altizer, also mark a "profound transformation of language," giving rise to a "postaristocratic" speech of the masses (HAA 183-84).

[5] Pollard too, observes that Blake thought Milton "of the devil's party without knowing it," presenting Satan as the true hero of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained; that Satan, Pollard asserts, was for Blake "the true Jesus" (64-68). Further, "for Blake," writes Pollard, "Milton's Satan was Messiah, the Saviour, and Milton's Jehovah was the Devil; Heaven was seen in Hell and Hell in Heaven" (68). Within this dialectical schema arose Blake's marriage of contraries, exemplified by the notion that "God becomes as we are that we may be as He is" ("There is No Natural Religion"), which Pollard equates with Nietzsche's emancipatory birth of Dionysian creativity, evoked in the dithyrambs of both Blake and Nietzsche (75), marking the ecstatic mourning and celebration of the death of God.

[6] Milton's "attempt in his epic to give poetic form to a view of life enlivened by faith" finds favor with Blake, writes Bette Werner, but Blake finds Milton still "the slave of his own oppressive notion of a cruel deity of reason and law," and describes him in *Milton* as "Samson shorn by the churches" struggling to support a collapsing ancient God (Urizen) (52-3). This is exemplified by one of Blake's illustration from his *Milton* which depicts that very scene:

> Blake's illustration. . .shows Milton holding up the slumping figure of an ancient God, who rests upon the tottering, broken tablets of the law. The inscription identifies the image of the Urizenic God with Milton's Satanic 'Self-Hood of Deceit and False Forgiveness," whose annihilation will mean the poets eventual salvation. (Werner 52)

[7] A brief but useful account of the similarities between Blake and Nietzsche is provided by David Pollard's "Self-annihilation and Self-overcoming: Blake and Nietzsche" (in Krell and Wood's Exceedingly Nietzsche, 1988). Nietzsche and Blake are paralleled in their use of dithyrambic verse, their "belief in the superabundance of creative energy," their iconoclastic reactions to their "destitute ages" and their conservative backgrounds, and their orientation toward creativity as the "annihilation or overcoming of Selfhood" (63).

[8] For an extremely informative, concise discussion of Blake's mythology and Christology, see Welch's article, the title of which rather gives the game away, "William Blake's 'Jesus': The Divine and Human Reality,

Incarnate in the Imaginative Acts of Self-annihilation,
Forgiveness, and Brotherhood." Welch notes that Blake's
"four zoas" represent humanity's fallen (and therefore in
need of re-integration) "mental powers:" 'imagination,
reason, instinct and passions,' known to Blake as
"Urthona (or Los), Urizen, Tharmas, and Luvah (or Orc)"
(103). Further, Welch observes within Blake's developing
mythology the consistent "root metaphors" in which
"Jesus=Imagination=Poetic Genius," which entail the
identification of Christ with reality which is "both
human and divine, encompassing space and time, infinity
and eternity," so that a complete dismissal of the figure
of the transcendent Father is unnecessary; the Father and
Spirit are "subsumed in the Son" (103, 118).

[9] It is this ordinariness which Jung, in his 1932
review of <u>Ulysses</u>, read as the vehicle for Joyce's
cynically-disguised compassion: "we suffer because the
world revolves around eternally identical days that
repeat themselves over and over, pushing the human
consciousness in its foolish dance through the hours,
months, years" (Eco 35)

[10] Edward Cronin offers the fascinating reading of
Leopold Bloom as "Eliade's primitive man who, lacking
religious faith, relies upon myths and archetypes to
overcome the 'terror of history,'" a man "out of his time
by several millenia (435, 437). While "Leopold Bloom has
religious faith to renounce," says Cronin, this "complete
'philosophical' materialist" whose "Jewishness rests as
lightly upon him as his Catholicism into which he was
formally baptized so he could marry his Catholic wife"
defends himself nonetheless with "an arsenal of
protective myths," the most important of which is his
wife, Molly, followed closely by his home, which becomes
the center of the world, Eliade's "archetypal Center,"
not by virtue of its location or structure, but because
it contains Molly, "Bloom's very being" (435-39). Bloom's
home represents his nostalgia for pure presence, and his
preoccupation with it, in Cronin's opinion, represents
his desire to reverse the irreversibility of time, to
live in harmony with the rhythms of the universe; it is
this "desperate" "artificial" and "sterile" mythologizing
which sustains Bloom through June 16, 1904, and Cronin
adds, which will "get him through June 17, 1904"
(438,439, 446).

[11] Umberto Eco, while avoiding Altizer's
Christological language, observes that the "refusal and
destruction of the traditional world" within <u>Ulysses</u> is
effected by a "radical conversion from 'meaning' as
content of an expression to the form of the expression as
meaning," so that experience "shows itself directly in
the word," speaking "by itself," as does the form itself
(37). When Joyce critiques the "paralysis of Irish life,"
for example, he does so not in the content of the text,
but rather in the form of the text: for instance, by
"record(ing) the vacuous and presumptuous newsmen without

pronouncing judgment" (Eco 36). Thereby the language of the assertion gives way to the language of enactment.

[12] Commenting on the influence of linear and cyclic conceptions of temporality in Joyce (and opting for the metaphor of the spiral in which historical time may be understood as both linear and cyclical, and the religious movements of redemption or damnation may also be read as such, moving upward or downward contingent upon the observer) Paul Kuntz observes the necessity of Joyce's conjunction of Christ and Satan. Drawing from Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson (A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake. NY: HBJ, 1944), Kuntz proposes that "if the final meaning of Finnegans Wake is a 'mighty allegory of the fall and resurrection of mankind (sic),'" then it is fitting that "Joyce's anti-hero should be both a devil and a saint," noting that the universality and range of interpretation "from a dead soul, or a Lucifer, one who has condemned himself to Hell by choosing evil, to a Christ-figure who has sacrificed himself for the salvation of mankind (sic)" coincides with the representation of the evolution (or not) of history as a downward or upward spiral, so that "St. Augustine would read it one way, defenders of the modern world the other way" (530-31).

[13] While A.L.P. is understood by Altizer as "neither mythical nor divine," the coincidence of actual humanity and "joy and grace" in an image which re-enacts the rupture of the propriety and sterility of an originary presence bears significant similarities with Julia Kristeva's "maternal and erotic" notion of "la mère qui jouit" (Graybeal 19). This image, discussed by Kriteva in "About Chinese Women" and elsewhere, conjoins the two alternatives allowed women by the repressive traditional Christian system, symbolized by the corporality and sensuousness of Eve or the virginity of Mary (Graybeal 19). Kristeva, rather than advocating an escape from the "Symbolic system" or an marginal masculine identity which is "allowed" by the system, discerns the possibility of decentering the system through identification with its repressed identity:

> When, striving for access to the word and time, she identifies with the father, she becomes a support for transcendence. But when she is inspired by that which the symbolic order represses, isn't a woman also the most radical atheist, the most committed anarchist? In the eyes of this society, such a posture casts her as a victim. But elsewhere? ("ACW" 159)

[14] Julia Kristeva sees this as a prime motivation behind the language of the Wake. That is, insofar as she reads the Wake as "an example of the unconsciously motivated 'chora' which manages to evade that phallogocentric discourse of the Lacanian 'Symbolic

Order' which dominates our waking lives" (Butler 277), its "dream language" is an instance of the return of the repressed semiotic (dis)order.

[15] According to Eliade, Yggdrasil, in Northern European mythology, is the tree of life situated at the center of the universe, and which connects the cosmos to its origins yet announces its end, for before Ragnarok, the destruction of the cosmos and the return of Balder, Yggdrasil shall tremble, suffer and fall; then the apocalypse has come. Yggdrasil, according to Eliade, is the paradigm for the cyclical time of the mythical religion, for it "incarnates the exemplary and universal destiny of existence itself: every mode of existence--the world, the gods, life, men--is perishable and yet capable of rising again at the beginning of a new cosmic cycle."

[16] Similarly, Christopher Butler notes Samuel Beckett's observation that Joyce's writing "is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (275).

[17] Because of the birth of Joyce's "new writing," Altizer notes that "there is no narrative structure as such in the Wake," that is, there is no narrative structure which is distinguishable from an "epic movement" which is also a "cultic and sacrificial violence, a violence wherein an whereby the breaking and dismemberment of the Host and Victim passes into the very words of the text" (HAA 239). This linguistic and graphic *sparagmos* liturgically extends the narrative to include the reader in the Eucharistic moment of epic enactment. A less vivid but more praxis-oriented image of the interaction between reader and text in Joyce is drawn by Brian Russell, who compares Joyce's fragmented momentary epiphanies with the manners of presentation in the contemporary visual arts and also in Mark's gospel:

> Joyce does not tell a story as a continuous narrative; he provides necessary preparation to appreciate a moment of significance which can lead to prospects for change in the individual and in society. His episodic way of building up fragments or illustrations or incidents is more like the way reality is conveyed in the modern visual arts, in film and in television. It may also be that the episodic structure of (say) Mark's Gospel, leading to the cross and resurrection as climax, can be understood as a chain of epiphanies which prepare us to receive the significance of the climax so that we can hold something of its meaning for our Christian discipleship. (40)

[18] As Eco points out as well, "Finnegans Wake signals the birth of a new type of human discourse," a discourse which does not make assertions regarding the world, but "becomes a mirror-like representation of the

world" (86). Words no longer support the "things" of which they speak, "'things'. . .are used to convey words, to support and evidence them" (87). Further, the novel semantic structure of the <u>Wake</u> makes its own limitations known: "the form of the relationships between *signifiers* expresses new possibilities of defining something," but "the form assumed by the *signifieds* remains as a mirror of an obsolete universe" (87). Thus the "evolutionary network of connections between signifiers" serves to inform us of that which we are already aware--"namely, that everything is everything" (87).

[19] As Umberto Eco notes regarding the "aesthetics and metaphysics of chaosmos," the <u>Wake</u> "encloses chaos within the framework of an apparent Order and thereby places us in the same situation as the apostate Stephen who uses the words of Thomas Aquinas to refuse family, country, and church" (87). The <u>Wake</u>, through its iconoclastic and chaotic fallen language, ushers in a revolutionary faith, the only faith left in our apocalyptic situation: "the only faith that the aesthetics and metaphysics of the Chaosmos leaves us is the faith in Contradiction" (87).

[20] McCarthy points out that spelling and writing is connected to fall and creation throughout the <u>Wake</u>; as Adaline Glasheen observes, Joyce presents writing as "an act equivalent to the eating of the tree of knowledge" (143).

[21]Murphy and McClendon (211) submit that Altizer signals a shift beyond the paradigm of the modern age in his reading of Joyce. Altizer certainly maintains that that shift is enacted literarily, though perhaps not yet theologically. Altizer does note a development in consciousness following the <u>Wake</u>, which distinguishes the contemporary age: "our wake is no longer <u>Finnegans Wake</u>," writes Altizer in <u>Genesis and Apocalypse</u>,

> for no resurrection lies readily at hand, and yet our death does lie in the wake of resurrection, and in the wake of an eternal life which is eternal life and eternal death at once; and if that wake is no longer an awakening of the dead, it may well be an apocalyptic transfiguration nonetheless, and an apocalyptic transfiguration which is a transfiguration of our abyss. (186)

Chapter Three

Ashes to Ashes: Possession, *Jouissance*,
Apocalypse, and "The Dream of the Rood"

It was just one step, I say, to displace Man

From the just centre of the sum of things--

But quite another step to strike at God. . .

(Byatt, Possession 209)[1]

Joy Comes in the Mo(u)rning:

Kristeva's Jouissance

In her discussion of Holbein's "Dead Christ" Julia
Kristeva interprets the confrontation of "separation,
emptiness and death" in the painting's presentation of
the passion and death of Christ, understandably enough,
as the "depressive moment," characterized by the
sentiments, "everything is dying, God is dying, I am
dying" (BS 130). It is this moment, transformed by
Christian tradition through its interpretation of
crucifixion and resurrection, sacrifice and redemption,
which becomes the vehicle with which the individual
subject identifies with the "absolute Subject (Christ)"
(132-34). However, the presentation of the crucified
Christ in the manner utilized by Holbein, that is, as one
"without the promise of Resurrection" (110), marks a
site, for both artist and viewer, of an absolute loss of
meaning, an instance of the "deepest abyss" of Hegelian
severance, a site of the death of God (136). This same
moment of severance, emphasized in the Christian

concentration upon the rupture in the relationship between God the Father and the Son, constitutes a Hegelian "work of the negative" in the coming to consciousness of the individual which is chronicled in the crucifixion narrative's "mythical representation of the Subject" (132).

It is as a result of her appropriation of the Hegelian work of the negative that Kristeva has developed the understanding of *"le sujet en procès*," the "subject in process/on trial," a subject suspended between the two extremes of, on the one hand, the symbolic "ego in control," and on the other, the semiotic "jubilatory fall into nature, into the full and pagan mother" (Graybeal 14). This subject is of course a speaking subject, or at least a signifying subject; signification is not for Kristeva a question of the assertion of a transcendental ego, however (Gross 98). Signification is a question of the thetic rupture and repression of the semiotic *chora* in order that the subject participate in the symbolic realm of language. While the repression of the semiotic is prerequisite for symbolic signification, neither the semiotic nor the symbolic "exist" as such except in distinction from each other. An understanding of the subject in which the semiotic *chora* functions as the endless displacement of the symbolic offers, in opposition to the alternatives of the perpetual frustration of the symbolic drive toward mastery through the eradication of the semiotic or the desperation of an absolute loss of meaning, another mode of existence.

Fully related to the semiotic and the symbolic, between errancy and propriety, between drive and reason, between the irrecoverable freedom of the maternal origin and the unfulfillable law of the paternal rule, the subject in process is open to what Kristeva calls *jouissance*.

Jouissance, as utilized by Kristeva and others, carries the simultaneous implications of sexuality, spirituality, physicality and conceptuality, signifying "total joy or ecstasy" (Graybeal 15). *Jouissance*, in all its dimensions, relates to the drive of desire, an impulse, as Jean Graybeal notes, "incapable of final satisfaction, since desire is always displaced and displacing" (17). Openness to *jouissance* and its excesses is exemplified in the postmodern critique of Platonic metaphysics' rejection of the improper and irrational which endeavors to construct or to return to "a timeless state of stasis," an endeavor which draws its efficacy from an exclusive model of the subject "as unified, self-identical, capable of perfect self-understanding and mastery, and constituted solely in relation to 'law and reason'" (Graybeal 17). Contrary to this understanding, the subject of *jouissance* is continually dissolved, displaced, and re-established in its displacement. *Jouissance* is driven by the play of negativity, by the loss of the unified, self-mastering subject in its encounter with its semiotic dimensions which have been marginalized and repressed in a system of patriarchal rationality; such a drive is clearly unending, based not on a progressive linear chronology, but on the suspension

and oscillation of the *jouissant* subject between the symbolic and the semiotic, between law and freedom, edification and loss.

"A possible source of *jouissance*," according to Graybeal, "is the sense of abjection" (26). "Abjection" is characterized by Kristeva as " a vortex of summons and repulsions;" the "abject" is defined as "what is radically excluded. . .that which is violently and negatively chosen," and is further, "that which I most clearly want not to be" (Graybeal 26). "The expulsion of the abject" is a dimension of the symbolic splitting and repression of the semiotic *chora* (Gross 87). As the semiotic recurs and displaces the symbolic, so the abject is never completely exterminated, but lingers on the margins, "threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution" (Gross 87). In the case of the proper, Platonic metaphysical system, the abject includes the semiotic recognition of the foundational function of abjection, that is, the recognition of the existence and recurrence of the Other which the symbolic extreme seeks to eradicate or deny. The repression of the abject results in its fragmentary recurrence within the symbolic discourse which seeks its eradication.

While Graybeal cites abjection as "a possible source" of jouissance, Mark C. Taylor, in his remarkable work, <u>Altarity</u>, goes much further. Quoting Kristeva's <u>Powers of Horror</u>, Taylor indicates that "*Jouissance* alone makes the abject as such exist," specifying that "it is

simply a boundary, a repulsive gift that the Other. . .
(sic) allows to fall so that the 'I' does not disappear
but finds in it, in this sublime alienation, a fallen
existence" (182). The boundary of abjection which is the
site of *jouissance* gives rise to an apocalyptic notion of
the subject, and also to a notion of literature that, "in
the absence of God," replaces the sacred and is itself "a
version of the apocalypse" (182). From Kristeva's point
of view, Taylor observes, "all literature is probably a
version of the apocalypse," rooted "in the fragile
boundary ('borderline') where identities (subject/object,
etc.) are not, or are hardly at all--double, blurred,
heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject"
(182).

Kristeva's apocalyptic understanding of the subject
which is recurrently displaced and of meaning which is
never established is obviously not, writes Taylor, "the
realization of a Hegelian *telos* in which absolute
knowledge becomes totally present;" rather, "this
apocalypse is black with burnt up meaning," and is "not
the *parousia* but its impossibility" (181). Perhaps,
however, an apocalypse which will have always not yet
arrived is also one which is always already at hand.

History en procès: Altizer's Apocalypse

Despite his perceptive reading of Kristeva, Mark C.
Taylor, in another recent non-book, criticizes the work
of Thomas Altizer by saying that, as we have noted, in
Altizer's writing "there is no place for the postmodern,"

and that Altizer does not understand the difference between Hegel and postmodern thinkers (Tears 242). Taylor suggests that Altizer, like Hegel, may not know to what extent he is right (as Derrida echoes Bataille in Writing and Difference), but it should be added that Taylor does not allow Altizer to be right enough, or, more precisely, that he does not allow Altizer to err greatly enough. The difficulty is, I suspect, one of style, for while Taylor philosophizes with shears and needles, Altizer, like his predecessor, uses a hammer, and this inevitably results in rough edges and fragments.

Taylor's problem with Altizer, it seems, is one of presentation. Altizer has not kept up with the trend and continues to make use of terms like "presence," a practice which places his writings pitifully out of fashion. Specifically, Taylor says that Altizer does not "think the death of God radically enough," and is unwilling to "confront the impossibility of presence and the inescapable absence of apocalypse" (69). What offends Taylor in the extreme is Altizer's use of the phrase "total presence," which Taylor interprets as the re-presentation of an originary presence, so that Altizer's kenotic death of God is merely a Hegelian dialectic in which presence returns to itself (67). Such an understanding of total presence interprets it as a desire for the present possession of presence, a return of the immediacy of speech (67-69). The "self-embodiment of God" of which Altizer writes is indeed present in an eternal now which is a total presence, but contrary to

Taylor's reading of Altizer's "presence," Altizer
specifically points out that the present is only present
in its perishing. The self-embodiment of God in the
present is its perishing, and the presence is not a re-
presentation of an originary presence, but a reenactment
of the absolute perishing of an original totality or
eternity--the present, for Altizer, is present not in
terms of its re-presentational presence, but in terms of
its perishing, its recurrent absence. The originary
presence for which Taylor says Altizer exhibits a
nostalgia is a presence which for Altizer can only be
thought as absence, as perishing (Altizer, GA 43).
Presence, for both Altizer and Taylor, is identified with
speech, but Taylor's hesitancy to think long enough with
Altizer results in his reduction of Altizer's thought to
the triadic schema of speech-writing-speech, presence-
absence-presence, which represents "the fall that sets
history in motion" (Taylor, Tears 60). In Taylor's
version of Altizer, speech, or presence, falls into
writing, or absence, and is recovered in the end.
Something is lost in Taylor's translation, however, for
presence for Altizer is always and only present in its
perishing; there is not, as Taylor claims, a "profit from
every expenditure" in Altizer's thought (Tears 64); there
is only expenditure, only sacrifice--prophetic perhaps,
but not profitic. The fall, as the beginning of history
("the fall that sets history in motion"), known to
Altizer as the self-naming of the I AM, the act of
creation and revelation, in breaking the primordial

silence, releases actual events which in their actuality in perishing embody the self-naming of the I AM and yet embody the "actual absence and unspeakability of I AM," therefore embodying the self-emptying which is an "actual and final fall" from an originary transcendence or plenitude, and an "irreversible *beginning* of a full and final actualization" (GA 32-33).

As noted in the preceding chapters, Altizer says nothing could be more opposite to this than an eternal cycle of return, and this is the primary difference between the pagan, or as Altizer would put it, archaic or primordial, understanding of history and the understanding of the Judaeo-Christian "historical world" (33). A beginning which is the irreversible ending of a primordial silence and therefore a total novum can never "simply pass into ending," as is the case in "a cycle or circle of eternal return," in which there is finally no distinction between beginning and end, alpha and omega (33). In order that events be understood as "final and unique," the beginning which releases those events must be understood as beginning alone, "a unique beginning which is the origin and ground of irreversible and unique events" (33). However, insofar as these events are unique only in their finality, in their perishing, an understanding of beginning which is absolute, that is, which can only be understood apart from a cycle of eternal return, must also be an understanding in which "ending becomes manifest and real as an irrevocable perishing, a death that is fully and only itself, and

therefore a death that can never pass into life" (34). The "self-naming of I AM," ends the "call of eternal return," and Altizer maintains that this ending is a "radical iconoclasm," which destroys every vestige of "an original or primordial ground or light" (34).

Eternal return is, as we have seen, strictly distinguished from "eternal recurrence" by Altizer. It is the willing of eternal recurrence which ends the cycle of eternal return, and it is his appropriation of Nietzsche's vision, rather than Hegel's, which most clearly demonstrates Altizer's critique of Hegelian teleological return:

> . . .Hegel understood the death of God as the resurrection of God, a resurrection which is the return of the Godhead of God, and the return of the Godhead of God as the center and ground of self-consciousness in history. That is precisely the return which is ended in Nietzsche's vision of eternal recurrence, and it is ended by a new proclamation of the death of God, a death that is now, and for the first time in our history, a full and final death, and thus it can only return as death and never as a resurrection of the Godhead. So it is that Nietzsche's vision of the eternal recurrence of the same is a vision of the recurrence of full and actual events, events which are finally actual events only as the consequence of the

death of God, for only that death releases

events from a transcendent ground. . . . (140)

Indeed, Altizer's anti-cyclical (in the sense of an eternal return) yet not teleologically linear Christian vision sees genesis as apocalypse, beginning as ending, presence as expenditure or loss while maintaining the absolute distinction of the two terms. Both Altizer and Kristeva, while drawing from a Hegelian process of oscillation of binary opposites, critique the tendency of such a system to result in a re-presentation of an originary presence or to tend toward stasis. Altizer's "speech of the Father," the self-naming of the I AM, becomes a first moment only by ending a pure transcendence, that is, as the death of God. The order of speech and the symbolic becomes a kind of negative ground for the play of total presence, just as the symbolic order grants the possibility of the semiotic, providing a temporal structure by which the semiotic (the feminine) is repressed (abject-ed) and through which the process of upheaval, displacement, and errancy holds sway. For Kristeva, the symbolic order is a "temporal order," associated both with "the Father" and with speech:

There is no time without speech. Therefore, there is no time without the father. That, incidentally, is what the Father is: sign and time. It is understandable, then, that what the father doesn't say about the unconscious, what sign and time repress in the drives, appears as their *truth* (if there is no "absolute," what is

> truth, if not the unspoken of the spoken?) and
> that this truth can be imagined only as a
> *woman*. (Kristeva, "ACW" 153)

Pointing toward a kind of non-teleological, utopian,
apocalyptic challenge of much the same sort as Altizer's,
Kristeva envisions

> A constant alternation between time and its
> "truth," identity and its loss, history and
> that which produces it: that which remains
> extra-phenomenal, outside the sign, beyond
> time. An impossible dialectic of two terms, a
> permanent alternation: never the one without
> the other. ("ACW" 156)

"Never the one without the other;" and yet, in his
critique of Altizer, Taylor, in a move which seems more
simple metaphysical inversion than deconstructive
critique, calls for the writing of "a writing that is not
secondary to, or has not 'fallen' from speech" (Tears
69). For Altizer, this is unthinkable, for that very fall
is historical; it has *happened*. The denial of that fact
is the basis of Altizer's objection to postmodern
theology. Altizer's understanding of the present
situation, however, is compatible with a postmodern
standpoint; in fact it is postmodern. Taylor seems to
have given Kristeva the benefit of the doubt which he
does not allow Altizer. Perhaps Altizer should be read,
using Taylor's phrasing, not as a "truthful philosopher,"
but as a "stylish writer" (Altarity 182). Perhaps one
must confront not only Altizer's voice in the wilderness,

but also his writing in the sand; if "in the absence of God, literature remains (reste); (the) literary remains (to) 'take the place of the sacred'"(182), then perhaps Altizer's gospel should be read in terms of its literary destabilization as well as its theological structure. Perhaps it is inevitable that the reader, the subject, even history itself (insofar as it becomes a "subject" for Altizer) is recurrently suspended between the two, driven by desire and loss.

The Suspended Subject: "The Dream of the Rood"

As a religion with a cross at its center, loss should not be a difficult concept for Christianity to swallow; yet Christianity has always been preoccupied by the recovery of the original, the primal, the authentic (even Altizer's Genesis and Apocalypse is subtitled "A Theological Voyage Toward Authentic Christianity"--maybe there is *something* to Taylor's critique). It is commonly accepted that the rise of Christianity as an official religion was accompanied by a zealous search for relics, and of course one of the most sought after relics was, along with the grail, the true cross. Claims of the discovery of even a small fragment of what was alleged to have been the true cross gave rise to several literary works, most notably that work which, having no title, is known as "The Dream of the Rood."

In its most primal available form, the "Dream of the Rood" exists, in part, in runic form upon the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire. The monument, which has been

dismembered, defaced, buried, exhumed and re-assembled (as part of an act against idolatrous monuments), contains various Christian scenes as well, with the fragments of the poem consigned to the margins of the sculpture. The poem may also be found in its fullest form within the "Vercelli book," dated from the "second half of the tenth century," and separated from its earlier form by an enigmatic three centuries (Swanton 1). Also belonging to the tenth century is a silver reliquary, built to contain the largest known fragment of the "true cross," upon which a passage from the poem is inscribed (Alexander 103). The survival of the poem in these three forms is testimony to a remarkably widespread dissemination and popularity throughout its history.

The poem is, at least in its fullest form (of which Michael Alexander grants only the first half "authenticity"), written in the style of the Anglo-Saxon riddle, making use of its two most common forms, the "I saw" and the "I am" types (Alexander 104). Riddles, it is supposed by Alexander, were "traditionally reserved for party games," though in this case, the riddle is accompanied by the use of the "six-stress line," a form reserved for moments of solemn ceremony (Alexander 105). Riddles conceal or hold back their "answers," which are, when one plays the game, supplied by the reader. The question, of course, concerns the answer to the riddle in this case, when there seems to be no answer required. The tale here does not sound like a riddle; what is the mystery, what is the question to be answered, where is

the missing name to be supplied? Here, too, the reader is without recourse to the answer, as the reader's questions are met by the silence of the text. Of course this is also a dream, and humanity has been interpreting dreams for as long as we've been sleeping. When we interpret dreams we assume that things are not as they seem, that there is a need for what we as readers, or hearers, do.

Riddles served as entertainment at parties, and were also a method of passing a wealth of acquired wisdom from one generation to the next. Wisdom is more easily recalled in the form of a riddle, or a proverb or parable. The impermanence of authors and the resistance of wisdom to straightforward presentation make necessary the technique. However, it may not be quite correct to say that wisdom is "recalled," nor that what is passed on has been "acquired." As an intentionally misleading genre, whatever truth may be therein "contained" is veiled by falsehood; the riddle, as Aristotle writes, presents the possible in an impossible way (McCarthy 17). "Riddle and parable may be much the same," says Frank Kermode in his consideration of the obscurity of parabolic narrative (*mashal* or *hidah*) (GS 24). Both riddle and parable "require some interpretive action from the auditor; they call for completion; the parable-event isn't over until a satisfactory answer or explanation is given; the interpretation completes it" (24). The response completes, of course, only the parable event, and not the parable itself. Parables are not only like riddles; Kermode suggests "that the interpretation of

parable is like the interpretation of dreams" (24). "The dream-text," says Kermode, "when understood, disappears, is consumed by the interpretation, and ceases to have affective force (or would do so, if one were able to conceive of a completed dream analysis)" (24). Fortunately, or unfortunately, the riddle of the rood remains unanswered, and it is quite impossible to conceive of a completed dream analysis, at least where this dream is concerned. Of course, as Heidegger points out in his epilogue to "The Origin of the Work of Art," "the task is to see the riddle," not to solve it)[2]. Riddle, vision, and parable recall the challenging words of another prophet:

> You who are glad of riddles! Guess me this riddle that I saw then, interpret me the vision of the loneliest. For it was a vision and a foreseeing. *What* did I see then in a parable? And *who* is it who must yet come one day? (Nietzsche 271-72)

The dreamer of the "Dream of the Rood" hears, deep in the night, the voice of a glorified tree, which, at the very moment the dreamer proclaims it a "signum of victory," is revealed to be "stained and marred," and one reads that "through the gold," the dreamer "might perceive what terrible sufferings were once sustained thereon." After a while, the bleeding tree (a loaded metaphor) breaks the silence. The tree's tale is, of course, of being arbitrarily chosen from the forest (but now blessed among trees for having borne the Son), taken

away to be mounted by the Almighty God, the warrior king,
and then thrown into the earth to be forgotten for a
time. Some time thereafter, "followers of the Lord,
friends," resurrect the cross and adorn it, and find
healing there. The function of the tree as feminine
symbol, "mounted" by the Almighty God (this is no Christ
with whom identification is allowed, this is a God who
only sleeps, but does not die), discarded, rescued and
adorned lends itself all too easily to identification
with the semiotic drive utilized as the prop for the
paternal system's abuse, yet remaining within the
narrative to offer healing to those who would hear her
voice. In contrast to the purely glorious crucified God,
the Christological element here is the cross, suspended
between heaven and earth, sustaining the act of its own
abjection and suffering its own horrors. It is not only
the cross, however, which is held in suspension between
its own extremes.

The dreamer of the dream of the Rood, while
apparently providing for the reader a means of access to
a first-hand account of the passion narrative, even to
the point of the immediacy of a spoken voice--the voice
of the Rood--provides here no immediacy for the reader or
for the one who stands before the cross. The cross
itself, whether the written poem, the inscribed monument
before which one might stand, or even the cross described
in the poem itself, bearing the physical marks of the
passion, bears the inscription of the passion narrative,
but that is a narrative which is only readable in light

of the later development of the narrative in which the cross itself plays a part. The cross is remembered, and its text completed, its inscription made readable, by a later completion outside its own narrative. In the original cross, therefore, lies an incomplete and unreadable narrative which is appropriated by later reading and interpretation. Within the narrative of the poem, there takes place a retrospective movement toward the elusive and illusory origin, an origin the presentation of which is futile, except in its recurrent displacement. Even the voice that is given to the tree is, in the end, the voice of the dream of the dreamer. Between the voice of the tree and the inscription upon it, between speech and writing, there lies the cross. Any search for the true, originary cross is doomed to failure, insomuch as Kermode points out, "interpretation, which corrupts or transforms, begins so early in the development of narrative texts that the recovery of the real right original thing is an illusory quest" (125).

The reading of the cross, then, can only be a reading of the reader, an attempted appropriation of a text on the boundary of the narrative of the passion. The cross, as a character, performs its function in the passion narrative and is then put aside, its own narrative diverging from the narrative of which it plays a part. The cross, as a text, bears the marks which provide the narrative and yet stand between the cross and the reader, preventing the reader's possession of the tale. On the contrary, as an element outwith both the

"original" and traditional institutional narrative, the cross "unreads" the narrative, as "an unstill brightness" incessantly changing its garb from gold to blood and sweat (Lines 19-23). Even within the metaphysically glorious ending of the Vercelli book, in which the cross is seen as an escape from the sufferings of the world, healing is given to those who bear the mark of the cross, denoting *possession* not *of* the cross but *by* the cross.

It is of no small import that the monumental cross which should bear the poetic, religious inscription should have been dismantled and, as it were, ostracized from its system, a system which has been again and again defined as exclusively patriarchal. It seems obvious why such a monument should be seen as dangerous, for it seems to carry with it a call to those of whom Kristeva occasionally speaks, as Elizabeth Gross points out:

> Kristeva consistently maintains that only certain men--that is, those who are prepared to put their symbolic positions at risk by summoning up the archaic traces of their repressed semiotic and maternal (prehistory)-- are able to evoke, to name, to re-inscribe this maternal space-time and pleasure in the production and transgression of textuality. The feminine and the maternal are expressed and articulated most directly in two kinds of discourse: the poetic and religious discourses. (98-99)

"The poetic text," says Gross, "materializes the pleasures, rhythms and drives of the semiotic," while "religious discourse is the site of a privileged symbolic representation of the semiotic, in which the symbolic is able to tolerate the expression of normally unspoken pre-oedipal pleasures" (99). Of course, the symbolic is not always so tolerant, and the restraint and shame deemed "proper" to the body are ascribed to what could otherwise be interpreted as an instance of "jouissance," the identifying of the subject with the sign of the cross. The marking of the body with the sign of the cross takes place most notably on Ash Wednesday, when the leaves of the triumphal expectations of Palm Sunday give way to the ashes of Lenten mourning. The crossing of the self takes place with the bearing of the ash. Ash, however, "black with burnt up meaning" (Taylor, Altarity 181), can make for very fertile soil.

Will the Circle be Unbroken?:

Possession and Apocalypse

Our Lady--bearing--Pain

She bore what the Cross bears

She bears and bears again--

As the Stone--bears--its scars

The Hammer broke her out

Of rough Rock's ancient--Sleep--

And chiselled her about

With stars that weep--that weep--

The Pain inscribed in Rock--

The Pain he bears--she Bore

She hears the Poor Frame Crack--

And knows--He'll--come--no More-- (Byatt P 381)

The poem, or fragment, reminiscent of "Stabat Mater," is one contained upon "a page of scraps of poems," written by Sabine de Kercoz, the cousin of Christabel LaMotte, Victorian poet, lesbian demigoddess to feminist academic groups and lover of Randolph Henry Ash, by whom she has borne a child. In order to keep her pregnancy concealed, Christabel spends the time before the birth in Brittany with cousin Sabine and her family. Brittany, we are told by Sabine, recalling the words of her father, is a place of both (and neither) linear and (nor) cyclical times (364)[3].

All of this, and much, much more, takes place within A.S. Byatt's Possession, in which, to oversimplify in the extreme, a fortuitous discovery of a fragment of a draft of a letter to an unknown correspondent (who turns out to be Christabel LaMotte) of the illustrious nineteenth century poet, Randolph Henry Ash, sends Roland Michell, a twentieth century student of Ash and assistant to James Blackadder, noted Ash scholar, on a quest which is to transfigure not only modern Ash and LaMotte scholarship, but also the lives of those who, whether honestly or through more covert means, join in the search.

Prior to this event Roland is, to say the least, disillusioned, seeing himself as having arrived a decade

or so too late on the academic scene, and despite his fulfillment of the obligatory educational status, consigned to research for Blackadder and carve a living out of tutoring and dishwashing. The discovery of the letter, however, which was not only unfinished and effaced, but also did not fit into the preconceived mythic character of Randolph Henry Ash (who, it was understood, enjoyed a quite traditional relationship with his wife, Ellen, despite the absence of children), provides Roland the opportunity to possess that which is absolutely unavailable to his peers and superiors, that which, in fact, calls into question all that they so ambitiously pursue. Roland soon realizes that he cannot accomplish his quest alone, and shares his secret with Maud Bailey, noted scholar of Christabel LaMotte and a descendant of Sophia Bailey, who had reared Maia Bailey, Maud's great-great-great-grandmother, and, unbeknownst to Maud, the daughter of Ash and LaMotte. Maud Bailey, too, has grown somewhat cynical of her pursuits, especially as she is herself pursued by both Fergus Wolff, a trendy young deconstructionist to whose wolfish wiles Maud has already succumbed, and Leonora Stern, a lusty American sister in the LaMotte school.

Roland and Maud come to share a common quest in their pursuit of the history of the Ash-LaMotte affair and the destiny of the child, but on the way they discover a common desire, a desire which is exhibited throughout the novel and shared by most of its characters:

"Sometimes I feel," said Roland carefully, "that the best state is to be without desire. When I really look at myself--"

"If you have a self--"

"At my life, at the way it is--what I really want is to--to have nothing. An empty clean bed. I have this image of a clean empty bed in a clean empty room, where nothing is asked or to be asked. Some of that is to do with--my personal circumstances. But some of it's general. I think."

"I know what you mean. No, that's a feeble thing to say. It's a more powerful coincidence than that. That's what I think about, when I'm alone. How good it would be to have nothing. How good it would be to desire nothing. And the same image. An empty bed in an empty room. White." (267)

The white and/or empty room is a recurring image in Byatt's work. The nostalgia thereby invoked, which Robert Detweiler calls a desire for an absence of desire ("Faithful Fictions. . ." 4), is in Possession symptomatic, in several characters and their respective societies, academic, social, or religious, of the tendency toward one or the other of the exclusive extremes of dissolution and mastery exhibited by the individual subject or the institution as subject. Exclusive institutional systems tend toward an ambiguous but zealously affirmed symbolic origin, while the

disillusioned subject longs for nonexistence or complete "satisfaction;" either way, the result is a static nostalgia. This nostalgia for a pure presence, for an absence of actuality, for a negation of any Other, is exemplified in both realms of "real" temporality presented in the text of <u>Possession</u>. Each of the two primarily linear narratives (nineteenth and twentieth century) is informed by a mythical, and therefore primarily cyclical, narrative, implicitly animating the roles of the "real life" characters and their respective societies, and explicitly illuminating the text as a whole.

On the one hand there is the actual past of the 19th century characters: the Ash-LaMotte narrative. Two exclusive systems come immediately to the fore: the households of Randolph and Ellen Ash and of Christabel LaMotte and Blanche Glover. Both households are, to borrow a phrase from Irigaray, economies of "the order of the same." The Ash marriage, due to Ellen Ash's self-protection, which is at the same time her self-assertion, is never consummated. The order of the same maintains such a grip over Ellen that she cannot allow herself what little difference is "allowed" for the propagation of the system. Ellen prefers to worship her husband only in spirit and in truth. The illusory order of the Ash marriage, separated from carnality, is broken most critically by Ellen's discovery of her husband's affair and child. Writing, and loving, have always shattered spheres of indifference, and so it is, too,

that the correspondence between Ash and Christabel, revealed to Ellen, splits the illusory realm of spirituality upon which she bases her "marriage." This revelation is provided by Ellen's counterpart, Blanche Glover, Christabel's cohabitant who is driven to suicide by the failure of her own exclusive realm. Her ill-fated system was an attempt to live with Christabel "frugally, charitably, philosophically, artistically, and IN HARMONY with each other and Nature," isolatedly and "without recourse to help from the outside world, or men" (307). It comes as no terrible surprise to learn of the method of her demise:

> I intend to emulate the author of the Vindication of the Rights of Women, but, profiting by her example, I have sewn into the pockets of my mantle those large volcanic stones which MISS LAMOTTE had ranged upon her writing desk. . . .(308)

Thereby another system of exclusion bites the dust at the hands of Ashes and Writing.

On the other hand there is the contemporary narrative, the actions of the characters in the "now" of the twentieth century, in which Roland and Maud share their "white-room" visions and in which the same two preeminent systems, which have failed in the past, recur, taking on mythic proportions. The Ash and LaMotte "households" have developed into two academic centers, represented by Roland and Maud. Shaping the actions of these academic camps are the mythic figures of Ash and

LaMotte, around whose fictive personae scholastic and theoretical systems of exclusion have developed. Moreso than Ellen Ash ever dreamed, modern Ash scholars have exalted Randolph Ash to a godlike position as the paragon of nineteenth century virtue. Blanche Glover's dream, too, has become reality in the minds of LaMotte scholars who see the two (Christabel and Blanche) as victims, not of themselves, but of an outside world still hostile toward true, higher, beauty.

Now, providing the underlying script for both the destruction of the nineteenth and twentieth century "circles of sameness" is the myth which informs the writings of Randolph and Christabel. The recurrent mythical narrative which pervades the poetry and correspondence of Ash and LaMotte and therefore the actions, thoughts and dialogue of their contemporary counterparts is the northern European story of the myth of Ragnarok and its accompanying events, including the apocalyptic suffering and collapse of the world tree note, an event which is powerfully enacted with the disturbance of Ash's grave by the appropriately named American scholar, Mortimer Cropper (who harvests the past even to the point of pillaging cemeteries). It is this same myth --the tale of suffering of the tree at the end of the world, announcing the return of the slain Balder-- which has been noted by many scholars in connection with "The Dream of the Rood".[4]

Roland's own discovery of the fragment, the subsequent quest and further discoveries effect a

critique of the traditional Ash and LaMotte narratives
and through the re-telling and connection of the mythic
and "real" narratives reaffirm, though enacting anew,
both origin and future. For example, Maud is not only
given an origin--an ancestry--but she is also freed, from
the constraints of possessive relationships with Fergus
and Leonora, and from her own relationship to her subject
matter as well. Further, Roland returns home to find that
his previous work has, due to his discoveries, gained
recognition, and realizes that "nothing in what he had
written had changed and everything had changed" (468).
Roland and Maud, as the primary subjects of Possession,
are suspended between extremes of exclusion (mastery)
and dissolution, and driven by desire toward a creative
conclusion which displaces their own subjective,
genderal, academic and temporal boundaries in a
coincidence of genesis and apocalypse. The cry of
jouissance marks the site of recurrent displacement and
re-establishment:

> And very slowly and with infinite gentle delays
> and delicate diversions and variations of
> indirect assault Roland finally, to use and
> outdated phrase, entered and took possession of
> all her white coolness that grew warm against
> him, so that there seemed to be no boundaries,
> and he heard, toward dawn, from a long way off,
> her clear voice crying out, uninhibited,
> unashamed, in pleasure and triumph.

In the morning, the whole world had a strange new smell. It was the smell of the aftermath, a green smell, a smell of shredded leaves and oozing resin, of crushed wood and splashed sap, a tart smell, which bore some relation to the smell of bitten apples. It was the smell of death and destruction and it smelled fresh and lively and hopeful. (507)

Far from concluding the narrative, the "resolution" of the mystery of the Ash-LaMotte affair opens up new futures, in the light of which history is re-written. Further, in the post-script, the reader is supplied with a fragment of the tale, not unlike the letter "given" to Roland, a kind of "pharmakon"[5] regarding the meeting of the father and Maia (Maia, incidentally, is the mother of Hermes), which throws the narrative, now apparently wrapped-up, into a new light, exhibiting and generating the endless possibility of potential worlds not only of the past, but of the future as well. The reader begins again, or one finds oneself at the beginning.

Thomas Altizer, seemingly echoing the sentiments of Maud and Roland, notes that in our historical situation we have lost all sense of a true and actual beginning, except as an absolute mystery. The veiled mystery of that seemingly unknowable origin calls to us, according to Altizer, "calling us to a quest that otherwise would be absent" (27). This same calling, says Altizer, makes possible "a new naming of beginning;" an answering of that call, a "new naming" even of the mystery, is,

according to Altizer, "an evocation, if not an embodiment, of the novum" (27). This "embodiment" of the absolutely new must come at the closure of a history, an ultimate ending. "The death of God in the modern world," says Altizer, "is just such an ending," and though it has not yet been understood theologically, it has authentically "realized a new naming of beginning," providing our history not only with the opportunity to know genesis "not only as an absolute origin or source," but as "that event which is absolutely new. . .in its very embodiment of totality" as well (28).

The total presence of history in the present is not the re-presentation of a past presence, but a negation of past and future as merely past and future (191); the end or completion of history of which Altizer writes is inseparable from the genesis of a present (and therefore a past and future) which is present and actual only in its perishing. So too the narratives of both "The Dream of the Rood" and Possession are never fully present, but continually rewrite themselves, or are rewritten, as textual history, neither (and both) linear nor (and) cyclical, carrying, like Maia, a message which is never delivered. "Now and then there are readings," says Byatt (is she critic, reader, or author here?), ". . . readings when the knowledge that *we shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily, runs ahead of any capacity to say what we know, or how" (471). Such readings fall away as soon as they are known. Or is it

that they are known, like dreams recalled upon waking, in their falling away, by their absence?

> In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, is followed, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have now for the first time recognised, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge. (472)

Our historical situation finds us surveying the fragments of unfinished histories, interpreting a history the unity of which is shattered by individual elements, sifting through the ashes of a disaster brought on by, among other things, leaving our canons closed too long. The completion of the unfinished text of the cross, the resolution of the Ash-LaMotte affair, the reading of history—these call us on, for as Randolph Henry Ash observes, "we are driven by endings as by hunger. We must know how it comes out. . ." (476). It is in answering that call, in the reading, in the enactment, the re-writing of the text, that we provide and are provided with an ending, an ending which is truly ending, actual only in its perishing. Reading from such a precarious position is necessarily writing, turning from the nostalgic impossibility of the blank page of the eternal same toward the ashes of apocalypse. Reading in the wake of the death of God, following deconstruction, calls for a kind of poetics[6] of *jouissance*, a kenotic reading and

writing which accepts the end of endings and takes apocalypse seriously, as genesis. Perhaps then we may begin, following the fragmentary trace of the death of God, to read, and write, "It is finished".[7]

> Nothing leaves a trace. . . .a trace that is
> almost nothing. . . a trace that is as light (and
> as dark) as *ash*. (Taylor, <u>Tears</u> 163)

NOTES

[1] The excerpt is from "Swammerdam," the magnum opus of Byatt's fictional Browning-esque poet within <u>Possession</u>, R.H. Ash.

[2] See Martin Heidegger's <u>Poetry, Language, Thought</u>. trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. 79.

[3]
> "He said that the Druid religion as he
> understood it had a mysticism of *the centre*--
> there was no linear time, no before and after--
> but a still centre--and the Happy Land of Sid--
> which their stone corridors imitated, pointed
> to.
>   Whereas for Christianity this life was
> all, as the life, was our testing-ground, and
> then there were Heaven or Hell, absolute.
>   But in Brittany a man could fall down a
> well and find himself in a summer land of
> apples. Or catch a fish-hook on the bell tower
> of a drowned church in another country."
> (Byatt, <u>P</u> 364)

Also, for an intriguing consideration of the function of linear and cyclical understandings of temporality within earth science, see Stephen J. Gould, <u>Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time</u> (London: Penguin, 1987), discussed in chapter four.

[4] See, for example, the works of Gabriel Turville-Petre, _Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia_. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964. (119-20), Gale R. Owen, _Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons_. Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1981. (27) and J.A.W. Bennett, _Poetry of the Passion_. Oxford: Clarendon, 1982. (14).

[5] See Derrida's _Dissemination_, "Plato's Pharmacy."

[6] In his consideration of Ricoeur's "mimesis," Detweiler suggests that "an imagining of what our own creative configurations might be, our own plots. . . might. . .lead us to poetry (Detweiler, "Faithful Fictions" 20)

[7] These words also end Altizer's _The Self-Embodiment of God_, and are contrasted by Taylor with his own ending of _Erring_: "It is (un)finished. . . Amen. . . Sobeit. . . (p.s.)".

Chapter Four

Crossed Lines and Broken Circles:
Paradigms, Dichotomies and Novelty

We might mistake this

tranced moving for joy

but there is no joy in it (Atwood, "The Circle

Game" 20-22)

To assume that the evidence of the beginning or
end of so vast a scheme lies within the reach
of our philosophical inquiries, or even of our
speculations, appears to be inconsistent with a
just estimate of the relations which subsist
between the finite powers of man and the
attributes of an Infinite and Eternal Being.
(Lyell, Principles of Geology 799)

It doesn't have to be like this. All we need to
do is make sure we keep talking. (Stephen
Hawking's computer-assisted "voice" in Pink
Floyd's recent single "Keep Talking")

Blackadder said, "How strange for you, Maud, to
turn out to be descended from both--how
strangely appropriate to have been exploring
all along the myth--no the truth--of your own
origins." (Byatt P 503)

Randolph Henry Ash's observation that "we are driven
by endings as by hunger" (Byatt 476) is only half-true,
for we are equally driven by origins. Thomas Altizer goes

so far as to say that the "primacy and centrality" placed upon "the ultimate question of origin" by a uniquely "Christian and Western thinking" provides its distinction from "all other thinking" (GOG 52). It follows then that Altizer views Hegel and Nietzsche, two thinkers exemplifying the culmination of Christian thinking, as "totally given to the question of origin," and sees the thought of the twentieth century, so influenced by their thinking, still generally obsessed by that question, from "our most openly revolutionary traditions" to "our most empirical science" (53). In Altizer's understanding, as we have seen, beginning is to be understood as a negation of eternal return, and therefore as beginning which is truly beginning, without the possibility of reversal in a cycle of eternal return. It is this understanding which separates the ancient consciousness from the modern consciousness, which as such knows an exclusively and irreversibly forward movement of time (53). The evidence of such a consciousness, grounded in an irreversibly forward temporal movement, is noted in contemporary scientific thinking by Altizer, who observes that even though the *laws* of contemporary physics may be "time symmetric," the actuality (for instance, the applications of physics and the evolutionary structure of biology) to which those laws apply is understood as irreversible, given to an exclusively forward movement of time (GOG 53)[1]. That irreversibility is linked of course to the notion of historicality, is the basis not only of Altizer's understanding of the self-negation of God, but

also his understanding of Christianity as a forward-moving, historically evolving faith. Such an idea of the historical evolution of theology has often been negatively compared with the objectivity of science, and as Carl Raschke observes, theology is spoken of as "'imaginative,''fictive,' metaphorical,'" and so on, and given less "truth value" than "objective science" (19).

However, in the wake of quantum theory, a revolution in the way objective science sees itself is now offering common ground upon which to examine the structures and development of both science and theology. As Stephen Toulmin has observed in <u>Foresight and Understanding</u> (1961), science has been coming to see the relativity of its own assertions, its inhabitance of a continually evolving intellectual world:

> We need. . .to see scientific thought and practice as a developing body of ideas and techniques. These ideas and methods, and even the controlling aims of science itself, are continually evolving, in a changing intellectual and social environment. (Raschke 19)

The "laws" of incompleteness and uncertainty which have been ushered into science by quantum theory have been met with disdain by mechanists and rationalists who, as Raschke observes, predict that quantum theory will lead to the destruction of the foundations of science (Raschke 50). The relativism which is the cause of such fears has not remained constrained to the theoretical and abstract,

or even to the scientific, as more recently, George Lindbeck has written of the "textualizing of reality," apparent in thinkers such as Derrida and Thomas Kuhn:

> We find it natural, as previous generations did not, to speak of encoding data, following scripts in scientific investigations, and inscribing reality in texts. Trope and metaphor everywhere reign. (Lindbeck 363)

Within the objective sciences, "discovering the truth" has been replaced with "modelling reality," and the theories of literary criticism "rival those of the hard sciences in technical complexity," so that "the epistemological grounding of a physicist's quarks and of Homer's gods is exactly the same" (Lindbeck 363)[2].

This theoretical relativization would not seem at first to be present in Altizer's distinction between the irreversibility inherent in the human conception of time and the apparent reversibility or atemporality of universal principles. This distinction, however, as with all distinctions in Altizer's writings, is part of a dynamic dialectic relationship. The dialectics of reversibility and irreversibility, and of the theoretical and the material, are associated by Altizer with the development of the uniquely Western autonomous consciousness. First, Altizer is careful to distinguish between the material and the theoretical in modern science, stating that the irreversibly forward movement of time and the category of absolute beginning are "inescapable," in "actual" (material) scientific

expressions, while not an absolute necessity in "formal or abstract" (theoretical) scientific expressions (GOG 54). As the 'dominant and most comprehensive thinking of the twentieth century,' scientific thinking, at least in its "actual" manifestations, according to Altizer, testifies to the impossibility of knowing "a pure and actual backward movement of time, or a movement of time which is ultimately forward and backward at once" (54). Altizer's distinction between "actual" science which apprehends the irreversibility of time and "formal/abstract" science which may not, amounts, it seems, to a distinction between scientific "history" and "myth," a distinction between immanent, historical praxis and transcendent, ahistorical theory. This distinction arises out of Altizer's historical understanding, which, as noted previously, is not an either/or between transcendence and immanence, but an apocalyptic dialectic in which the transcendent is recurrently emptied/presented into immanence, without the possibility of a backward movement to the re-presentation of an originary presence, but opening the possibility of the total presence of an embodied transcendence, known in its absence, its passing away. The pure theoretical does not exist in actuality. In this same manner, says Altizer, is the origin-obsessed modern consciousness also "centered upon death," the death of an ancient transcendence which, in the science of the seventeenth century, simultaneously produced a radically new historical subject and an

understanding of "universal mathematical and physical laws":

> Even the discovery of the infinity of the universe which gave rise to modern science in the seventeenth century is the full realization of the death of a celestial sphere which is other than our terrestrial sphere, only that death made possible the comprehension of universal mathematical and physical laws. . . . The very mind that comprehends those radically new mathematical and physical laws is a mind that is a truly new subject or center, a center of consciousness now liberated from the encompassing presence of all primordial images, and only that liberation made possible a purely autonomous thinking. (GOG 61)

Yet this purely autonomous subject was to be radically decentered by the time of the twentieth century, as Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence and Will to Power ushered in what Altizer refers to as the "final disappearance of that unique 'I' which was born with the advent of the will"; Eternal Recurrence is a re-enactment of Augustinian predestination in Altizer's understanding, which reveals the "bondage of the will which cannot will backwards" and enacts the transformation of all "it was" into "thus I willed it," shattering that "I" which finds itself "powerless against everything that has occurred and has been done" (55). The historical disappearance of that "I", however, has not been fully effected, according

to Altizer, "so long as the deep question of its ultimate origin is inescapable, an inescapability which is inevitably present in the actual presence of the symbol or category of absolute beginning" (54-55). The symbol or category of absolute beginning is, in Altizer's view, required for an understanding of an irreversibly forward movement of time (54-55). Although we have effected the death of God ourselves, says Altizer, the full embodiment of the death of God will remain beyond us, "more distant from us than the most distant stars," as it was for the hearers of Nietzsche's Madman, "so long as we can know, and only fully and truly know, a forward movement of time," for until then "we will not yet have escaped or transcended our origin in a forward movement of revelation, a forward movement that is the necessary and inevitable beginning of an absolute beginning or genesis" (53-54). As for the reality of the occurrence of the full embodiment of the death of God, that is a matter of interpretation, for the total presence of the apocalyptic absolute future which is the consummation of an absolute genesis occurs in every now and yet, present only in its perishing, is always not yet.[3]

It was in very much this same manner that Nietzsche, in <u>Twilight of the Idols</u>, contrasted the historian's backward belief in the search for origins with his own "formula for happiness": the straight line, the *goal*[4] (Kaufmann 470, 473). Nietzsche's "goal" was hardly the traditional teleological end of the story, but a negation of the cyclic return of the same. Within the cycle of the

same, origin and *telos* are two sides of the same coin (a
coin which may very well be fixed--perhaps a coin without
inscription[5]), witness Heidegger's notion of beginning
which "contains the end latent within itself," in "The
Origin of the Work of Art" (though I suspect that given
the dichotomous quality of the *Ur-Sprung*, Heidegger could
well be read otherwise) (76). Questions of the absence or
presence of beginnings and endings bring to the fore the
circularity or linearity of the perspective from which
one reads the universe. For the Western world, that
perspective has changed drastically since the time of
Nietzsche, indeed, since Augustine, as we have tried to
make sense of the coincidence of the "Greco-Roman
apprehension of the cycles of life and of seasons" and
the "Hebraic conception of history from the creation to
the last judgement" (Kuntz 517). Biblical absolute linear
history gives rise to the necessity of absolute beginning
and absolute ending, eternity turns to time and back
again to eternity, a curiously circular arrangement, as
the historical musings of Altizer exhibit. Linearity,
however, is allegedly the paradigm which, according to
Eliade, separates modern humanity from the primitive.
Postmodernism critiques linearity over and against
cyclicity, even spatiality over against temporality, and
lines and circles remain nuclei around which views of
history orbit, even after history itself has been
supposed to have ended.

In Of Grammatology, Derrida, while drawing a
definite delineation of what he understands as a "linear"

paradigm, cautions that any thinking which supposes to "think the history of (a) system, its meaning and value must, in an *exorbitant* way, be somewhere exceeded" (OG 85). Certainly this is true of Altizer's thinking; although he utilizes the distinction of linear "historical" thinking from "ahistorical" thinking, his affirmation of such a modernist view serves to supercede and subvert its teleology, and proclaims the possibility of a "transformed" theology. Altizer, though he does indeed eschew the title, is at least in this way a "postmodern" thinker. His use of "historical," "linear," and "epic" models enacts a simultaneous affirmation and critique of such systems, in a writing which recurrently subverts itself. Altizer's notion of history is not a simple linear teleology, but a thoroughgoing critique of the staticity of eternal return, a critique which requires an understanding which is beyond simple teleological linearity. Derrida's critique of linearity does not defend a static "simultaneity," but serves, as Altizer's notion of "total presence," to subvert an oppressive notion of history. Perhaps, as Derrida suggests in his assertion that the "pluri-dimensionality" of "non-linear writing" does *not* "paralyze history within simultaneity," but "corresponds to another level of historical experience," the term "history" is not so useful anymore (OG 85). Derrida finds that "history's" association with "a linear scheme of the unfolding of presence, where the line relates the final presence of the originary presence according to the straight line *or*

circle," and reckons that "simultaneity," a concept closely akin to Altizer's criticized eternal return, "coordinates two points or instants of presence, and it remains a linearist concept" (OG 85). The relaxation of the oppressive domination of linearity might negate the sterility of the "technical and scientific economy," and "transform its nature profoundly," says Derrida, who notes that "beginning to write without the line," which is to allow "access to pluridimensionality and to a delinearized temporality," reveals the "rationality subjected to the linear model appear as another form and another age of mythography" (OG 87). Such a transformation has been occurring within "philosophy, science and literature" within the last century, because thinking finds itself 'suspended between two ages of writing,' a suspension which has resulted in a situation in which "the problem of reading occupies the forefront of science" (87). The revolutions within 'philosophy, science, and literature,' says Derrida, "can be interpreted as shocks" which are enacting the gradual destruction of the linear, epic model (OG 87). The duplicity of such a standpoint is obvious; the very concept of "revolution" and the possibility of a "new writing," depend upon both a cyclic (which is the nature of "revolution," a term which bears great weight in Altizer's thinking) and a linear understanding (otherwise "newness" itself is precluded). Derrida is well aware of this tension, and states that the present inadequacy of writing according to a linear model "is not *modern*, but

it is exposed today better than ever before" (OG 87). The "meta-rationality and meta-scientificity" of such thinking, abandon the traditional concepts of "*man, science,* and the *line*" (OG 87), enacting the familiar Derridean occurrence, the end of the notions of "history" and of "the book."

Heavily influenced by Derrida, Mark C. Taylor's discussion of the "End of History," in his Erring, invokes the following passage from Altizer's "History as Apocalypse":

> . . . the end of history and the death of God are not only simultaneous but identical movements. The end of history is the self-negation of self-consciousness, an ending which is fully and openly embodied in the twentieth century, and an ending which is eschatological in the sense that it is an absolute end of everything which is here manifest and real as history itself. So it is that the end of history has, indeed, occurred, and not simply the history of metaphysics, but the history of the West as a whole, for the "metaphysical" identification of being as presence is simply the philosophical voice of the Western consciousness itself. (E 52)

The advent of the postmodern consciousness (an almost meaningless catch-phrase now, but in Taylor's Erring it is enough to identify it with the "radical implications of the death of God" [7]) which marks the "end of

history" simultaneously alters the whole of the network of concepts with which Taylor illustrates the classical Western onto-theo-logical *Weltanschauung*. This network, which Taylor exemplifies with the use of the related concepts of God, self, history and book, rests, according to Taylor, upon a hierarchically oppressive and repressive system of unequal bipolar opposition, from which emancipation may be gained not simply by a reversal of the hierarchy, but through the effecting of a "dialectical inversion that does not leave contrasting opposites unmarked, but dissolves their original identities" (E 7-10). Of course, the question is, especially for Altizer, whether the "dissolution of their original identities" is an actual possibility, or whether such an aim is fundamentally a reactionary escapism. That is, dialectical inversion, when applied to bipolar opposites such as origin and *telos*, should result in a dynamic of affirmation and critique; however, "dissolution of original identities" would necessarily bring that dynamic to a halt, in an attempt to step outside the very system the subversion of may be effected only from within. Taylor does indeed stress the "parasitic" character of such an inversion, exhibited by the preclusion of the deconstructive critique's separation from the system it subverts, so perhaps "dissolution of original identities" is just an unfortunate choice of words. At any rate, it must be affirmed that Taylor's critiques mark an irreversible alteration in the climate of the theological environment.

Taylor's a/theology represents a definite theological paradigm shift in which, under the influence of post-structuralist thought, God becomes "writing," self becomes "trace," history becomes "erring," and book becomes "text" (13). The alteration of these terms marks a change in theological focus and method from an obsession with presence and domination toward a notion informed by subversion and *kenosis*, a change which epitomizes, for Taylor, the difference between modernism and postmodernism (13).

While Taylor's portrayal of the underlying dichotomies of Western metaphysics allows for the equation of theology with modernism, Altizer, in the preface to his <u>Genesis and Apocalypse</u>, suggests that the possibility of recovering theology in a "postmodern" world is offered by the very fact that it was the theological enterprise as a "science" which was the first discipline to fall victim to modernity, or at least to have been forced into a kind of unnoticed dormancy, in which a kind of transformation may have been taking place (13). In order to effect a metamorphosis from within the all-engulfing postmodern silence, Altizer states that theology must be reborn into a "profoundly atheistic if not nihilistic world," a world which owes its very existence to the "uniquely modern realization of the death of God" (13). Regarding "postmodernism" as a nostalgic reaction against modernism, Altizer heralds the birth of a fully "modern" theology, a theology which remains to be written, but a theology which, like

Taylor's a/theology, is driven by a kenotic understanding of the dialectic of polar dichotomies (GOG 1-4). For Altizer, however, the notion of *kenosis* and the possibility of subversion are unavailable to a postmodernism which, seeking a *dissolution* of identities, cannot know beginning itself. The possibility of *kenosis* requires, in Altizer's estimation, a genesis which is an ending of an originary transcendence; in fact, that is its very definition. To seek a dissolution of dichotomous identities is to seek an ahistorical pure presence, a presence of which history itself, in Altizer's reckoning, requires the negation.

It is for this reason that the question of genesis is so fundamental for Altizer, who recognizes that "at a time of ending, nothing is more overwhelming than the mystery of beginning" (27). Nowhere is this more evident than in the present century's fascination with the power of the natural sciences to present the terrifyingly ancient past (even as this is written, new pictures taken by the Hubble telescope have made the evening news, and Stephen Hawking's voice provides the recurring theme for the latest Pink Floyd single). However, though our cosmological concerns revolve around the question of "cosmic beginning," Altizer claims, as noted in the previous chapter, that "we have lost or are losing every sense of a true and actual human beginning, or of a human beginning that now could be actually new" (27). Even as the "first moment" of the cosmic expansion remains elusive to our scientific theories, so Altizer notes that

"ultimate beginning or novum" remains veiled before us (27). The veiled mystery of that seemingly unknowable origin calls to us, according to Altizer, "calling us to a quest that otherwise would be absent," a calling which makes possible "a new naming of beginning;" it is this call which has been answered in the writing of the present century, writing which is itself "an evocation, if not an embodiment, of the novum" (27). As stated previously, Altizer maintains that the embodiment of the absolutely new must come at the closure of a history, an ultimate ending; as he explains:

> If a new naming of beginning is truly a novum,
> it is realized only in that vacuum or emptiness
> which is effected by the erosion and erasure of
> an earlier naming of beginning; and that
> erasure is the inevitable consequence of the
> ending of an old world. (27)

So long as we in the (post)modern world continue to cling to any sort of a concept of a totality which remains "a pure or unending eternity," in the sense of a closed system or a transcendence which is ultimately only a pure transcendence or presence, "we will remain closed," says Altizer, to an understanding of "a new eternity, . . . an eternity that is not only new, but whose novum is all in all" (28). The understanding of novum advocated by Altizer precludes the possibility of an understanding of God as "simply and only eternal, or whose primordial identity is simply identical with an apocalyptic identity, or whose identity and reality as God wholly

transcends the novum of an absolute or total beginning;"
in other words, if one is to speak of a God pre-existent
to an absolute origin who remains unchanged or who simply
returns at the end of history to the pre-creative state
in an all-encompassing process of reconciliation, then
one does not speak of the absolutely new, or actual, for
"absolute beginning cannot be a total event if it is not
an all-comprehending event. . .(or) if it exists in and
as the shadow of a preceding eternity, for then its very
existence as such would not be absolutely new" (29).

It is newness with which Altizer is concerned in so
much of his work, a radical novelty which distinguishes
Christianity's kenotic understanding of God from a cycle
of eternal return. As discussed briefly in chapter one,
this is Altizer's concern regarding "postmodernism" and
the apparent contradiction between its reliance upon
bipolar opposition for its critique's impetus and the
alleged (by Altizer at least) aim of its critique to
dissolve the bipolar identities; just as no actuality at
all is possible in a cycle of the same, or in a system
which posits an eternal transcendence, no critique is
possible in a quest for the dissolution of distinctions.
A dialectic which hopes to dissolve distinctions is most
fundamentally a cycle of the same, and if a postmodernist
theological agenda draws from such a philosophical
paradigm, then it is, according to Altizer, nothing new
at all, but a reactionary "renewed medieval, or
patristic, or pagan theology" (GOG 2). The generalization
of individual theological or critical efforts under a

rubric such as "postmodern," however, runs a serious risk of misunderstanding those efforts. Further, the debate over whether or not "postmodernity" is, or can be, anything more than late modernity continues among thinkers such as Rorty, Dupré, Habermas and Lyotard (Dupré 277-95), and such paradigmatic historical dichotomization must remain dynamic and subversive, as both Altizer and "postmoderns" would agree, if it is to serve as a useful method of elucidation.

The underlying questions here pertain, unsurprisingly, to the possibility of novelty and the function of dichotomy. It is "the new" which, in Altizer's view, ultimately separates an ahistorical "pagan" cyclic understanding from a "modern" linear view, two understandings which become, it must be recognized, yet another paradigmatic dichotomy, like "modern" and "postmodern." Recent discussion regarding the existence and relation of historical paradigms have both clarified and obscured the issue. Paradigm shifts, of course, rely upon a distinction between dichotomies, and a conviction that "something new" can indeed happen. Things tend to get rather confusing, however, when the opposing paradigms concern the existence or non-existence of paradigms and paradigm shifts themselves, or, in the case of the opposition of a "cyclic" or "linear" historical understanding, when opposing historical understandings pertain to historicality itself. There is no doubt that fundamental philosophical infrastructures have changed drastically within the past few centuries, but it is not

automatically given that anything "absolutely new," or, on the other hand, anything which might be regarded as a definite philosophical paradigm shift, has happened.

Since Thomas Kuhn introduced the phrase in the 60's, "paradigm shifts" have been a topic of much discussion within virtually every academic field. A paradigm shift occurs, according to Kuhn, when a scientific revolution gives rise to a new way of thinking which is "incommensurable" with the previous way of thinking[6]. However, as Bohm and Peat point out, incommensurability may very well exist only in the eye of the beholder; that is, the incompatibility of two paradigms may be most real to those who exist in the time of revolution, and the "event" of a paradigm shift may be far too subtle and interconnected to result in a dichotomy of "old" and "new" (27). Bohm and Peat suggest that there is "a potential for a continuously creative approach" in which such a dichotomy does not surface; this however, like Taylor's deconstructive theological method, is at least similar to a paradigm shift with regard to the way we understand paradigms (which become polar dichotomies when a distinction between old and new is made) themselves (Bohm and Peat 27).

Let us suppose that the phrase "paradigm shift" is at least suitable for discussion for the moment, and that one has indeed occurred, or is occurring. This is the position taken by Fritjof Capra, Thomas Matus and David Steindl-Rast in their conversations regarding science and theology. Fritjof Capra is perhaps the most recognizable

(along with Paul Davies) spokesperson for the "New Physics;" Capra's works, of which The Tao of Physics is probably the most well-known, present, as Carl Raschke puts it, "a marriage of physics with religious thought in the subject area of quantum mechanics" (20). Raschke also points out that the authors of the new physics have "almost en bloc" convinced their readers that "quantum mechanics corroborates some form of Eastern theosophy" (21), and this is no less true of Capra's conversation with two Christian thinkers such as Steindl-Rast and Matus. However well-intended, the simplistic discussions of the three thinkers serve to demonstrate the dangers of overemphasizing paradigm shifts and approaching cross-disciplinary discussion informed by a magnanimous but subconsciously imperialistic pluralism.

In Belonging to the Universe, Matus and Steindl-Rast parallel in theology the paradigm shift which Capra observes within science. Capra contrasts the "old scientific paradigm" of Descartes, Newton and Bacon, with the "new paradigm," which is referred to (insufficiently, Capra points out) as "holistic, ecological, or systemic" (xi). On the theological side, Matus and Steindl-Rast differentiate between the old "rationalistic, manualistic, or Positive-Scholastic" paradigm and the new (again insufficiently so-called) "holistic, ecumenical, or transcendental-Thomistic" paradigm (xi). The two new paradigms are characterized by five criteria which distinguish the perspectives of new paradigm science and theology with regard to its subject matter, and to the

methodology by which it utilizes the contents of that subject matter.

First, Capra recognizes in the new scientific paradigm a "shift from the part to the whole," characterized by a reversal of the old-paradigm belief that 'the dynamics of the whole of a complex system could be understood from the properties of the parts' (xi). This reversal results in the conviction that "the properties of the parts can be understood only from the dynamics of the whole," and that "ultimately there are no parts at all," because what is known as a part is "merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships" (xii). This shift is paralleled by the theological shift "from God as revealer of truth to reality as God's self-revelation" (xii). Similar to the scientific point of view, Matus and Steindl-Rast note that the old paradigm held that "the sum total of all dogmas. . .added up to revealed truth," while the new paradigm "reverses the relationship between part and whole," so that "the meaning of dogmas can be understood only from the dynamics of revelations as a whole" (xii). In this view, "revelation as a process is ultimately of one piece," with particular dogmas reflecting the singular moment of "God's self-manifestation in nature, history, and human experience" (xii).

Secondly, Capra observes a scientific "shift from structure to process," in the turn from the old paradigm's view "that there were fundamental structures, and then there were forces and mechanisms through which

these interacted, thus giving rise to processes," to the new paradigm's understanding of structure as "the manifestation of an underlying process," stressing the dynamic quality of the "web of relationships" that appear as a structure (xii). Theologically, the correlating shift is from "revelation as timeless truth to revelation as historical manifestation" (xii). The old paradigm view here, according to Matus and Steindl-Rast, is that "there was a static set of supernatural truths which God intended to reveal to us;" however, "the historical process by which God revealed them was seen as contingent and therefore of little importance" (xii). The new theological paradigm, on the other hand, views "the dynamic process of salvation history" as the truth itself, "of God's self-manifestation;" revelation is therefore "intrinsically dynamic" (xii).

Thirdly, Capra acknowledges a "shift from objective science to 'epistemic science'" (xiii). This entails a movement from the belief in the objectivity of scientific observations and their independence from the observer and the "processes of knowledge" to a belief that "epistemology. . .is to be included explicitly in the description of natural phenomena" (xiii). Theologically, the shift is from "theology as an objective science to theology as a process of knowing" (xiii). Like scientific descriptions, "theological statements" in the old paradigm were thought to be objective and independent of both the believer and the epistemological process (xiii). This belief, which might have been more clearly referred

to as the theological/philosophical shift from ontology to epistemology, has, according to Matus and Steindl-Rast, given way to the notion that "reflection on non-conceptual ways of knowing--intuitive, affective, mystical--has to be included explicitly in theological discourse" (xiii).

Fourthly, both a scientific and theological "shift from building to network as metaphor of knowledge" are mentioned by Capra, Matus and Steindl-Rast, stressing the turn from a conception of knowledge as an edifice made of "fundamental laws, fundamental principles, and basic building blocks" (a structure the foundations of which were said to be crumbling during paradigm shifts) toward the formation of a network of relationships formed by descriptions of "observed phenomena" or theological statements (xiii). Such networks will include, according to Capra, "neither hierarchies nor foundations," and according to Matus and Steindl-Rast, singular perspectives within that network "may yield unique and valid insights into truth" (xiii). The shift from building to network also entails the supersession of the idea of, on the one hand, physics, or on the other "a monolithic system of theology" as an ideal for other sciences or as "the sole source for authentic doctrine" (xiii).

Finally, the authors suggest that scientifically, a shift has occurred "from truth to approximate descriptions," and theologically, from a focus upon "theological statements" to a focus upon "divine

mysteries" (xiv). Scientifically, this shift displaces the Cartesian belief that science "could achieve absolute and final certainty," and acknowledges the contingency, incompleteness, and approximation of scientific assertions (xiv). Thus, the scientist is not concerned with correspondent truth, in the sense of agreement between assertion and reality (signifier and signified), but with the utilization of "limited and approximate descriptions of reality" (xv). Likewise the theologian, turning from the "manualistic paradigm" with its emphasis upon its own formation as a comprehensive "'summa' or compendium," toward "a greater emphasis on mystery" which "acknowledges the limited and approximate nature of every theological statement," finds truth in the reality given "a certain true, but limited expression" by the statement (xv).

Now, while the discussion by Capra, Matus and Steindl-Rast is valuable in its critique of the scientific and theological tendencies toward totalization, providing a forum for a more open discussion regarding pluralism, ecological and liberative concerns, Capra's tendency to regard reality as absolutely transcendent, along with the authors' simplistic blending of Buddhist and Christian mysticism (in which "on the deepest level there is no difference" between the teachings of Jesus and the Buddha [60]) gives rise to a metaphysical dichotomy in which reality is as unavailable to the scientist as the absolutely transcendent God is to humanity. The ineffable

transcendence which thus arises, rather than providing a site for dialogue between science and religion, or Buddhism and Christianity, eliminates the discrepancies between disciplines and philosophies (paradigms) by discounting the very qualities which make them unique. Again, the issue is dichotomy and its dissolution. Interdisciplinary and interfaith discussion should indeed serve to dispense with unnecessary quarrels, but it should also intensify distinctions, and above all, avoid the thought that the goal of discussion is an end of the dialogue ("It doesn't have to be like this," as Hawking and Floyd say). Is it not a dangerous proposition to allow an alleged plurality of belief under the conviction that all religions ultimately (at the deepest level) say the same thing (since what all religions say is usually a version of *my* religion)? It is for this reason, it seems to me, that Thomas Altizer is so definite in his belief in "the uniqueness of Christianity," for only by affirming the uniqueness of Christianity can one affirm the uniqueness of Buddhism, or any other system of belief, any other paradigm--and uniqueness does not presuppose superiority. Such uniqueness might have been preserved had the authors' considered the possibility of a kenotic theology, rather than one in which God remains an ultimately ineffable and static identity, that is, had the idea that "the dynamic process of salvation history is itself the great truth of God's self-manifestation" been thought more radically, understanding history itself as God's self-manifestation and not the "truth" of it

(xii). Even though the authors do refer to "reality as God's self-revelation," that is a reality which can be known only as an absolute mystery behind the observation of it. This is not to say that the efforts of the three authors are fundamentally flawed; it is to say however, that there are serious contradictions and areas of critical neglect. In the end, the efforts of Capra, Steindl-Rast and Matus serve as a warning against the danger of aiming at the dissolution of opposition, effecting a critique which might otherwise be quite valuable, but because of the illusion of the sufficient totality of the new paradigm, reconstructing a hierarchal bipolar metaphysical system which remains all too · heavenly. It would be, perhaps, timely to re-examine some sources of the new paradigm of which the authors speak.

"New Paradigm" thinking has its roots in the post-Nietzschean hermeneutics of suspicion, an iconoclastic critical stance toward the very nature of truth and absolute criteria. That very iconoclasm arose at least as early as the time that, driven by the Scientific Method, the post-Enlightenment movement from God to Reason as an absolute criteria intensified a process of philosophical relativization which would soon, in Nietzsche and in later scientific exploration, question the need for absolute criteria altogether. That process of relativization was nonetheless marked by shifting replacements of transcendental systems. As Carl Raschke suggests, this was the case in evolutionary theory, which found a way to "sanctify time" with the notion of

progress (80). Without recourse to traditional teleology, Raschke asserts, evolutionary theory reversed the providential notions of Christianity, though eventually fostering its own teleological underpinning in the process (80). Evolutionary theory, or more specifically, the discoveries generated by the geological discovery of "deep-time," (simply, that the earth is a lot older than Christendom wanted to think), provided thinkers of the time opportunity to reconstruct their basic ideas of history, just as cosmology in the post-Einstinian world has had opportunity to do the same. Reconstructing history provides its editors the freedom to proclaim that things are not as they seem, or at least not as they *had* seemed. As readers, the audiences of the prophets of science, we have always been and remain hungry for cosmological theory and paleontological discourse which might provide us with the answers to the ultimate metaphysical "why" (as Heidegger put it, "Why are there things rather than nothing?") and there remain scientists who are confident that if they can read back far enough, whether reading the earth or the stars, we can reach the beginning. Reaching the beginning, we seem to think, will supply us with the shape of the end, and some meaning for the time in between. For some scientifically brilliant but theologically elementary thinkers, Stephen Hawking for instance, that means "knowing the mind of God," which is, of course, knowing the mind of the Author of the universe (175). Although the folly of the search for the *mens auctoris* has been recognized by some hermeneutical

enquiry for some time now, the reading of immanent space and spaces continues in the service of the quest for the meaning of transcendent time. Space and time, if modern physics is to be believed, are inseparable; in fact, they are the same thing, and perhaps no other pair of fundamental scientific concepts has undergone such radical change in the passing century.

It was very early, around 1915 in fact, that the Newtonian conception of absolute space and time was challenged, and the idea which held "space and time" to be a "fixed arena in which events took place, but which was not affected by what happened in it" gave way to the view that space and time were "dynamic qualities," so that "when a body moves, or a force acts, it affects the curvature of space and time--and in turn the structure of space-time affects the way in which bodies move and forces act" (Hawking 33)[7]. What has happened in a world in which space and time are no longer reliable as unchanging, static concepts is a new understanding of a universe which must have had a beginning a "finite time ago, and that might end at a finite time in the future" (Hawking 34). It was Einstein's general theory of relativity which implied all of this, as well as rethinking the idea of "absolute time," a rethinking which among other things leads to the assertion that time and space are not separate, but together form what is known as "space-time" (Hawking 23). Simply, if there is no space, there is no time. Therefore, before the beginning of the universe, if there was no space, there

was no time, either. Since the universe now takes up space-time, it is commonly understood to have begun with what is called a process of expansion. "According to present estimates," says David Layzer, "the cosmic expansion began between 10,000 and 15,000 million years ago," at which time the history of the universe began; there was no earlier moment in space-time (Layzer 135). Stephen Hawking is not quite so emphatic, as he reminds one of the argument that scientific laws are no longer valid in the vicinity of the big bang, where "the curvature of space time is infinite;" therefore, there may have been events before the big bang, but since such events "can have no consequences. . . they should not form a part of a scientific model of the universe," and we should assume "that time had a beginning at the big bang" (Hawking 46). Hawking further points out that "many people do not like the idea that time has a beginning, probably because it smacks of divine intervention," which is why, in 1951, the Catholic Church declared that the big bang agreed with the Biblical account (46-47). It is commonly accepted, however, that the idea that "the universe must have had a beginning in time" was proven in 1970 by Hawking and Penrose, who, while utilizing Einstein's general theory of relativity, also proved that theory to be "incomplete" and unable to account for "how the universe started off, because it predicts that all physical theories, including itself, break down at the beginning of the universe" (Hawking 50-51). Indeed, Hawking offers the explanation that "it is possible for

space-time to be finite in extent and yet have no
singularities that formed a boundary or edge" (135).

Of course, the implications of "space-time" theory
have required that the discourses of physics operate
under a different understanding of time than most other
discourses. Stephen Happel points out that in scientific
theory the idea of linear time has been replaced with
that of "'arrows' of time," required due to the fact that
"all time is specific to the location of the observer,"
and because in the vast expanse of the universe "there
can be no absolute simultaneity" (96). Of the several
"arrows of time," one is of particular interest, and that
is the arrow which relates to the human understanding of
time, which most often revolves around the reference
point of "now." As Happel explains:

> "Now" is a shifter in language; its ostensive
> content is determined by shadings into the past
> and anticipations of the future. But what is
> future "now" will become present. Scientists
> often prefer to think of this as a purely
> "subjective" phenomenon, a reflection upon a
> relatively stable, spatially limited frame of
> reference in which signals will be heard or
> seen simultaneously, but are apprehended
> through subjective distension. There would be
> no now if there were no conscious beings to
> perceive it. Simultaneity appears as a
> concensus of those within a certain spatial
> continuum. (97)

Further, Happel states that Penrose has observed the human ordering of events to be "'something that we impose upon our perceptions in order to make sense of them in relation to the relation of the uniform forward time-progression of an external physical reality'" (98). Drawing from Hawking's treatment of the alleged continuity of linear time, Happel notes that it may be helpful to distinguish between "real" time and "imaginary" time, imaginary time being "indistinguishable from directions in space," and real time being "simply a figment of our imaginations," helpful insofar as it allows us to make sense of the world around us (98). This does not necessarily imply that one idea of time is to be favored over the other; the idea of real time is useful because we exist in and are affected by the processes of universal expansion, though it may be that the concept of imaginary time "is more basic than real time with its thermodynamic arrow," but within such imaginary time "past, present and future are functional equivalents" (98).

The overarching importance of the traditional "real" understanding of time continues to be questioned, as time appears to be yet another metaphysical construct alongside God, the self, logos, presence, and a long list of other rational grounds the priority of which it has become so fashionable to investigate. Paul Davies has noted in his examination of the present understanding of laws of nature that the seemingly purposive sequence of events offered by some orthodox evolutionary theories may

not hold up among "particle physicists, cosmologists and unifiers, whose thinking is strongly influenced by the theory of relativity" (63). The "real" understanding of time is fundamental to such theories which give a rational narrative account of the history of the laws of nature as well as to the universe itself. As Davies explains,

> Central to the evolutionary theme is the dimension of time. The laws of nature, like the cosmos itself, are given a history. *An arrow of time is built into the operation of physical laws.* Time is thus singled out from spacetime and ascribed a metaphysical significance that it lacks in relativist theory, where space and time are on an equal footing and spacetime itself is part of the dynamical system. (63)

Relativist theory then, entails a negation of the metaphysical transcendence of time itself, and a temporal understanding which is not so obviously linear as that which informs evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theory, however, is not exclusively concerned with the linearity of time. The acknowledgement of the metaphorical character of temporal notions presented in Stephen Jay Gould's geological considerations adds much to the historical meditations of physicists and cosmologists by considering "time's cycle" as well as the linearity of time, and by acknowledging the textuality of such considerations.

Even as Altizer writes theology outwith the scholarly theological paradigm in order to preserve its dynamic, so Gould operates on the margins of academic science as he addresses the questions of historical novelty and dichotomy (which are ultimately questions of uniqueness) in his fascinating work, <u>Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Deep Time</u>. Gould's work, which is more philosophical literary-critical text than scientific treatise, explicates the thematic tensions within the works of Thomas Burnet, James Hutton, and Charles Lyell, as well as critiquing the orthodox readings of the authors and their spheres of influence. Discussing the interplay of the metaphors of "time's arrow" and "time's cycle" in the development of modern geological understandings, Gould begins with an assessment of the value of subsuming historical understandings under such a dichotomy (8). Gould initiates this assessment with a brief discussion of dichotomy itself, in which, turning from his past practice of criticizing the drive toward dichotomy as a practice of gross oversimplification, he affirms the value of the utilization of multiple dichotomies in the discussion of a given subject (8-9). Rather than arguing for the truth or falsehood of any given dichotomy, Gould suggests that dichotomies should be understood as "useful or misleading" (8-9). It is this step away from the literalism of scientific theory which makes Gould's work here so intriguing.

Aside from the fact that geological/archaeological discussions were greatly influential in the changing of the intellectual climate of the past two centuries, Gould's choice of the apparently opposing ancient metaphors of linear and cyclic time relates his discussion to the whole of Western thought. It is often thought, especially based upon a simple reading of works in which metaphors of time are contrasted (Eliade, Hegel, Nietzsche and Altizer come to mind), that the two metaphors are diametrically opposed. The contrast here, however, is primarily between two metaphors of *historical* time, and not a contrast between an *anti-historical* or *ahistorical* understanding and a *historical* understanding, as in the case of the aforementioned authors. However, the superimposition of the historical/ahistorical dichotomy upon the linear/cyclic dichotomy reveals degrees of variation within each polar element.

It is no new task to attempt to embrace the linearity along with the cyclicity of history; it is as old as the play of night and day and the struggle between transcendence and immanence. For Gould, this embrace entails a simultaneous espousal of the "uniqueness and lawfulness" of events, the arrow and the cycle of time (10). Gould's interpretation of the arrow/cycle dichotomy runs as follows: on the one hand, time's arrow denotes the irreversibility of historical events, in which "each moment occupies its own distinct position in a temporal series, and all moments, considered in proper sequence, tell a story of linked events moving in a direction;" on

the other, in time's cycle "time has no direction," and "fundamental states are imminent in time, always present and never changing," so that "apparent motions are parts of repeating cycles, and differences of the past will be realities of the future" (10-11). Gould's delineation of this dichotomy, as he acknowledges, is influenced by Eliade, but his reason for its use is to effect an intertextual critique and comparison of the works of three pivotal figures in the history of geology.

The first, Anglican clergyman Thomas Burnet, combined the historical metaphors of arrow and cycle in his Sacred Theory of the Earth, published between 1680 and 1690, and most often read as a narrative "blending" of "earth's history" with a "literal reading" of the Biblical account of creation and providence (a circularly arranged linear narrative beginning and ending in divine immanence: a cycle of unique, historical events) (21-59). Gould, rather than dismissing Burnet's work as faulty science, suggests that Burnet's combination of science and religion was the result of a world-view which recognized no delineation between the two (27). As both a scientist and King William III's private chaplain, Burnet's arguments draw from the truths of both Nature and the Scriptures; Burnet's theories grew out of a basic assumption that the Bible was "literally" true, and from that fact Burnet constructed a physics which would not conflict with the one foundational truth (27-28). To criticize Burnet's methodology, Gould asserts, is pointless, and is further an exercise in the elitist

conviction that the arrow of progress assures present day scientists that the methodologies of our predecessors are "ever more inadequate the further back we go," an assertion which serves to hide the fact that it is our manner of reading which is itself inadequate (27). Approaching Burnet at such a level guarantees misunderstanding, and it is because of this misunderstanding that Burnet's work has not been read for its valuable dialectical understanding of the uniqueness (linearity) and repetition (cyclicity) of history (58). Despite its Biblical literalism, which prompted Burnet to assign a definite number to the unique repetitive cycles of history, Burnet's treatment of both the arrow and cycle of history "embodies a great intellectual insight," argues Gould, namely that "(h)istory grants absolute uniqueness *in toto*, although timeless principles may regulate parts and abstractions" (59).

Gould's second subject, James Hutton, whose "unreadable treatise," Theory of the Earth (1795), "marks the conventional discovery of deep time in British geological thought" (61), exhibits a thorough ahistorical perspective, in which the earth is "a dynamic balance of opposing forces" with "no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end" (82;63). Hutton's geology was informed, says Gould, by a pure vision of the cyclicity of time, and carrying this vision to its logical conclusion, Hutton advocates a consistent denial of history (80). Hutton's writing on the "history" of the earth, states Gould, explicitly disallows the uniqueness

of historical events and avoids "all metaphors involving sequence and direction" (81). Hutton's earth, according to Gould, is " a machine without a history" (61). It is Hutton, however, who is credited by geology with the discovery of "deep time," but Hutton's ancient earth is an earth the "history" of which is comprised of "a continuous backing and forthing, never a permanent alteration in any direction" (81). In Hutton's most recognizable phrase, the earth is a machine with "no vestige of a beginning,--no prospect of an end" (Gould 65). An ancient earth is a simple logical deduction given such a system (66). However, Hutton's "discovery" of the vastness of geological time, in Gould's assessment, would have never reached the public were it not for the de-emphasizing of his antihistoricism in John Playfair's Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth; a revision made possible, Gould asserts, by the fact that no-one read Hutton closely enough to notice the change (61,95). History, says Gould, has therefore come to remember Hutton as a devoted empiricist, a scientist who based his work on geological observation (67), while in fact the opposite is true; Hutton's dedication to an ahistorical vision required deep time because cycles and processes are not visible in the present (79).

Finally, and most crucially, the momentous work of Charles Lyell, whom Michael Ruse notes as the most important intellectual influence upon Darwin (18), is presented by Gould as reflecting the processes by which Lyell's original cyclic view of history and of the steady

state of the earth was forced to deal with the linear progressive views of biological evolution (99-179). Whereas Hutton's consistent adherence to the abstract theory of the unchanging machinistic cycles of the earth's "history," earns him Gould's recognition as the "Theorist of Time's Cycle," Lyell's struggle to explicate both the timelessness of historical principles and the uniqueness of historical events, as well as the equilibrium of the earth's development against the progress of biological evolution, merits his designation by Gould as the "Historian of Time's Cycle" (99). Although "textbook history," as Gould calls it, has paired Hutton and Lyell as champions of "uniformitarianism" (the view that past geological events were the result of causes acting with the same intensity as those in the present [Ruse 70]), the work of the two differs in theory, method, and indeed, in result. Like Hutton, Lyell was committed to a cyclic understanding of the events which shaped the earth, but while Lyell defended a "steady" notion of constant shift throughout the globe, "giving the earth a timeless steadiness throughout all its dynamic churning," Hutton had preferred a more catastrophic sequence of periods of global upheaval (151). Further, Lyell was writing in a time which had seen a departure from the "tradition of general system-building" based upon "fatuous, overarching theories" which had held sway fifty years prior, in Hutton's day (152). Lyell had to deal as well with the emergence of biological evolutionary theory, the

progressive nature of which did not easily agree with a "steady state" history. The development of the various editions of Lyell's Principles of Geology, according to Gould, is therefore marked by a decreasing dedication to a uniform cyclical vision, a vision which had been coherently presented in the first three editions but which was gradually muted in the following six editions; the tenth edition, published following a thirteen-year period of reconsideration on Lyell's part, had become, Gould laments, "almost. . .a textbook" (150). But Lyell's Principles, taken in the corporate form including all its editions, is no ordinary textbook, says Gould, but a treatise "dedicated to defending (the cyclical) vision in the face of a geological record that requires close interpretation, not literal reading, to yield its support" (143). The fundamental problem, Gould points out, was that Lyell had not only attempted to apply time's cycle, acceptable in the description of "physical history," to biological history, but had also excluded humankind from that biological history (167).

Originally, Lyell argued that paleontological evidence for evolutionary progression was mere negative evidence: the absence of mammalian fossils in Paleozoic strata was simply not evidence enough to preclude their existence--perhaps they had not been discovered yet (Gould 138). Further, Lyell explained apparent evolutionary progress as the result of climatic changes; there was no more an arrow of progress in biological species than there was in their surrounding environments,

and since the environment of the earth as a whole remained in a steady state, so living things have maintained "an unchanging complexity and diversity," absent of any sort of "improvement" (Gould 149). This did not apply, according to Lyell, to humans, however. Humanity's divine gift of reason set them apart from the normal course of things; the creation of humanity was indeed a "miraculous" event in an otherwise steady history, but this creation, according to Lyell, had to do not with *physical*, but *moral* nature (Gould 142). Lyell's Principles held to biological uniformitarianism and the separate nature of humans from its first publication in 1831 until 1866, when Lyell's tenth edition conceded, as he had in a separate publication in 1862, that "progress in life's history was 'an indispensable hypothesis. . . (which) will never be overthrown'" (Gould 168). This concession came as a result of the fact that within those twenty years, no Paleozoic evidence of mammals or birds had been found despite increasing exploration, and based on other fossil evidence Lyell conceded also that "human origin had been an event in the ordinary course of nature" (Gould 168).

Rather than criticize Lyell for compromising his steady state vision, Gould praises his intellectual ability, which enabled him to allow for progress in biology, while maintaining his dedication to "time's cycle" in terms of physical geology (169). This mutual acceptance of time's arrow and time's cycle continues to inform current scientific inquiry (196). In short, says

Gould, "uniqueness is the essence of history, but we also crave some underlying generality, some principles of order transcending the distinction of moments" (196). The dichotomy of time's arrow and time's cycle, even though the two terms are mere "categories of our invention," tolerates individual aspects of both the biological and the physical components of the subject of scientific observation (196). In the narrative of earth's history, the two metaphors grant the ability to show that "organisms follow time's arrow of contingent history; minerals, time's cycle of immanent logic" (Gould 196). Hutton and Lyell were able to comprehend the immensity of time through the geological metaphor of time's cycle, but the individuality of biological history required "time's arrow" to "establish a criterion of uniqueness for each moment" (Gould 197). Applying these two criteria to the elements of fossil records, Gould states that "two world views, eternal metaphors, jockey for recognition within every organism--receiving special attention according to the aims and interests of students: homology and analogy; history and optimality; transformation and immanence" (199). With regard to each individual, the two metaphors, according to Gould, "do not blend, but dwell together in fruitful tension" (200). This interaction requires an interpretive approach which neither "seek(s) one in order to exclude the other" (as in Hutton's ahistorical vision and Lyell's early espousal of uniformitarianism at the expense of progress), nor "espouse(s) a form of wishy-

washy pluralism that. . .loses the essence of each vision" (199).

The strength of Lyell's vision, then, lies in the fact that his later work allowed for the uniqueness of life while preserving the immanent principles which guide the formation of physical elements. Rocks and minerals are not living organisms, and living organisms are not merely physical elements, though composed of them, and therefore a more complete scientific vision requires metaphors which apply to both; an ahistorical vision of time's cycle, pursued at the exclusion of the arrow of progress, becomes a static system, and will not withstand the dynamic tension which life, and history, requires. The work of Hutton and Lyell, as portrayed by Gould, exemplifies this thesis, though only Lyell saw the need for the revision of his ahistorical system (his schema of eternal return). It is fitting then, that it should be Lyell to whom Ellen Ash, in Byatt's Possession, turns.

Following her husband Randolph's death, Ellen finds and reads an unfinished letter from Randolph to Christabel LaMotte, in which he begs to know of the fate of their child, thinking Christabel and himself to be murderers. Ellen burns the letter and thinks to herself, "My life. . . has been built round a lie, a house to hold a lie" (457). Ellen, who has known of the affair, both through her own discovery and by confession from Randolph, has ignored the whole matter, not allowing it to affect the celibate and oppressive relationship she and Randolph share. Ellen, we are told, has thought

herself justified in her "charade" by the fact that she was "truthful with herself" --but about which charade she has been truthful, whether her own resistance to Randolph's physical advances, or her knowledge of his affair, or whether she regarded the two simply as elements in a larger charade, we are not told. Of course, Randolph is not told of Ellen's feelings regarding either situation, nor is Ellen informed of Randolph's opinion of their relationship, and Ellen finds herself wondering "how the story of their lives looked to him" (457). Here, too, her silence has reigned, for "it was not a matter they discussed" (458). Dwelling upon "her sense of the unspoken truths of things," Ellen turns her thoughts to a passage which she had previously written down, a passage from Lyell's Principles of Geology:

> It is the total distinctness, therefore, of crystalline formations such as granite, hornblendeschist, and the rest, from every substance of which the origin is familiar to us, that constitutes their claim to be regarded as the effects of causes now in action in the subterranean regions. They belong not to an order which has passed away; they are not the monuments of a primeval period, bearing upon them in obsolete characters the words and phrases of a dead language; but they teach us that part of the living language of nature, which we cannot learn by our daily intercourse

with what passes on the habitable surface.
(458)

The passage, likely from the ninth edition, published in 1853 (Ellen's contemplations take place in 1889; she had read _Principles_ in 1859, while Randolph was away "studying," unbeknownst to Ellen, with Christabel; Lyell's acceptance of biological progression had marked effect upon his tenth edition of _Principles_, published in 1866), reflects Lyell's adherence to uniformitarianism within geological structure, while implying that the uniformitarian view, that past events are the "effects of causes now in action," may not hold up in consideration of other cases. That is, Lyell's claim that the _"distinctness_ of crystalline formations. . .from every substance of which the origin is familiar to us. . . constitutes their claim to be regarded as the effects of causes now in action," leaves open the idea of progress with regard to fossil records and biological considerations. Ellen, however, identifies with these inhabitants of the cyclical realm. She "liked the idea of these hard, crystalline things," which "were not primeval monuments but 'part of the living language of nature,'" and saw herself as "keep(ing) faith with the fire and the crystals" (Byatt _P_ 458). Ellen wants nothing of carved granite monuments to passed times, but identifies with the ahistoricality of the crystalline "language of nature," in which time does not pass. Ellen believes in the "unspoken truths," identifying with a realm not of

this world and denying that "the habitable surface is
all" (458).

Sharing her sentiments, Ellen's reclusive
counterpart, Blanche Glover, has claimed that it was her
intent that she and Christabel should live "fully human
lives. . .in harmony with each other and Nature. . .
without recourse to the outside world," and failing at
this, joins together with "large volcanic stones" and
departs to "a fairer world" (307). It was of course
Blanche who delivered the word that Ellen's solitary
system had failed, that indeed her life, like Blanche's,
had been "a house to hold a lie." Upon returning
Randolph's "Swammerdam" (which he had given to
Christabel) to Ellen, Blanche mournfully recalls that she
and Christabel had been "innocent" and "all in all to
each other" (454). This sterile economy had been ruined
by Christabel's involvement with Ash and the birth of the
child: the progress of life subverting the ahistorical
realm. Her own closed system fragmented, Blanche informs
Ellen that her "happiness," too, "is ruined, is a lie,"
but Ellen preserves the propriety of her domestic realm,
instructing Blanche, twice, "Please leave my house"
(454)[8].

Although Blanche had later reacted to her "failure
of ideals" (307) by escaping life itself, life for Ellen,
albeit a life of repression, had gone on, and the reality
of Randolph's relationship is not spoken into existence
until Randolph himself speaks it. Upon his confession,
however, the concrete roles of the Ash household begin to

crumble. Randolph's confession comes as Ellen plays the dutiful scribe, copying his words verbatim as he dictates a new "Swammerdam." In order to hear his confession, however, at Randolph's request Ellen stops writing and plays the role of confessor--a confessor who hears of the sins of her god. Taking her new role a step farther, Ellen restores Randolph's original writing (Swammerdam) to him, and banishes his unfaithfulness to that non-existent realm outside their closed domestic system. It does not exist, if not between the two of them:

> "I cannot explain Ellen, but I can tell you--"
>
> "No more. No more. We will not speak of it again."
>
> "You must be angry--distressed--"
>
> "I don't know. Not angry. I don't want to know any more. Let us not talk of it again. Randolph--it is not *between us.*" (455)

Ellen had done, Byatt writes, "what was in her nature" (455), but her Nature is now being shaken to its foundations. Ellen's realm, as we have said before, is the realm of the language of Nature, of silence, of the unspoken, of the ahistoricality of the exclusive cycle, the proper household[9]. This "Nature," like Blanche's, is the steady-state, cyclical realm of exclusive transcendence informed by a nostalgia for pure presence. The progress of life, of history, reveals its failure. For this reason the same drive to life represented by Christabel's child shatters both the exclusive dreams of Blanche and Ellen. Life, however, is not all that is

denied by such systems; death, too, in its historicity and finality, negates this vision of eternal return. Informed by a vision of eternal return, Ellen has kept silence, preserving the non-relationship, maintaining the propriety of the household, and is reluctant to admit that her idol (Randolph) has passed on. The death of "her god," however, and the inadequacy and transgression of her system must be endured. Ellen does not choose to escape as Blanche does, but faces her crisis, living on in the face of the historicity of existence, surviving in the realization that her "all in all" exclusivity was less than complete.

Left to wander the household, now absent of its divinity, Ellen had found Randolph's unfinished letter to Christabel while looking through his desk (455). "She had never read his letters," Byatt writes, and looking through his desk "filled her with a superstitious bodily fear" (455). Allowing herself now these transgressive, iconoclastic acts, Ellen, as it were entering her household's Holy of Holies, finds the unfinished letter "as if she had been guided to it" (455). In addition to this unfinished letter, Ellen was also in possession of two other letters which she had carried with her: a letter from Christabel to Ellen, in which Christabel wonders if Ellen knows of her, imagines that she does, and requests a response from Ellen--"of forgiveness, of pity, of anger"--and encloses a sealed letter to be given to Randolph. Ellen, faced with the decision whether or not to reply to Christabel, had written letters "in her

head," but unsurprisingly, "she wrote down nothing" (452). She had wanted to write and tell that she had *always known*," that she had been told of the affair by Randolph long ago, but she did not, knowing that "it would not convey the truth of the way it had been, of the silence in the telling, the silences that extended before and after it, always the silences" (453). Now, concerning the other two letters, Ellen naturally reduces her husband's *unfinished* letter to Christabel, which testifies to the illegitimacy of her own relationship ("That other woman was. . .his true wife" [460]), to ash (a geological element), "keeping faith with the fire and the crystals." Thus the letter's incompletion is taken to a final form and given closure which can be tolerated by the propriety of the household. In the light of the purifying flames of the pyre upon which she has sacrificed the unfinished letter, however, Ellen holds the *sealed* letter, which she will neither deliver nor read, but which she later consigns to the earth--if it is discovered, it will be discovered "when I am not here to see it," she decides. Ellen buries this letter, along with some other items, in a sealed specimen case in the grave along with Randolph's coffin, granting them "a *sort of duration*. . . a demi-eternity" (462). Following Randolph's demise and the deconstruction of her domestic system, Ellen finds herself oscillating between ahistoricality and historicity, between the ashes of the unfinished letter, her own mortality, her husband's infidelity, and her ability to grant "duration" to these

lifeless artifacts, these inanimate papers, these dead letters, which are now placed in a container designed for life-forms. Does she grant life to these inanimate, or once again, merely the appearance? As she lingers there by the fire, she also sits down to "manufacture the carefully edited. . .truth of her journal," which she considered "a defense against, and a bait for, the gathering of ghouls and vultures" (462). As her husband's body is prepared, so Ellen prepares the corpus which will be read, a body which she attempts to render proper through her preparation.

It is the preservation of the body proper with which Ellen has been concerned throughout the duration of her marriage. The primal image of that preservation visits Ellen following her recollection of the passage from Lyell, when, in her time of loss and remembrance, Ellen invokes the image of her honeymoon, the founding of her marital institution. This moment is recalled in Ellen's ahistorical, nonlinguistic manner: "She did not remember it in words," writes Byatt, "(t)here were no words attached to it, that was part of the horror. She had never spoken of it to anyone, not even to Randolph, precisely not to Randolph" (458). Following her recollection of the event, or rather non-event, she "turned over Christabel's letter" (459). The coincidence of her honeymoon and Christabel's letter ruptures her unspoken sphere, and threatens to reveal her deception to the new members (relatives who had come at Randolph's death) of her household, the propriety and exclusivity of

which has now been irreversibly transgressed. Here, when the origin of her exclusive realm and its transgression coincide, when the wordless sterile image and the transgressive writing collide, Ellen finds herself, alone, and breaks her silence:

> She howled. "What shall I be without you?" She put her hand over her mouth. If they came, her time to reflect was gone or lost. She had lied to them too, to her sisters, implied a lie in her bashful assertions that they were supremely happy, that they simply had no good fortune with children. . ." (460).

She is undiscovered, and continuing her reminiscence, Ellen recalls a time before her marriage, reading from one of Randolph's letters to her, a bundle of which she has placed in the specimen box. She reads of Randolph's prolific writing during the years of their imposed courtship; on the day described by Randolph in the letter, he has "composed over 70 lines," the subject of which has been the pyre of Balder (461). He finds the story "most violently interesting" and describes it as "an account of the human mind imagining and inventing a human story to account for the great and beautiful and terrible *limiting facts of*--existence" (461). "But," says Randolph, romantically and nostalgically, "I would rather be sitting in a certain garden," with Ellen, of course (461). Ellen reads no further, but concluding with this innocent, nostalgic image of a prenuptial garden (a time before the carnal "fall" of the honeymoon, a fall Ellen

has denied) prepares to perform three restorative acts, acts which should purify her husband's history, the story of which has now allegedly come to an end. Ellen seals the box, contemplates the edited writing she will prepare for posterity, and considers writing a letter to Christabel, but hesitates, as the power of her many years of dwelling in the realm of the unspoken takes hold. Ellen knows, however, that her efforts at maintaining propriety are doomed to failure, and she is faced with the reality that both she and Christabel, who remain without Randolph, exist in a world of history, of progress:

> She thought, one day, not now, not yet, I will put pen to paper and write to *her*, and tell her, tell her, what?
>
> Tell her he died peacefully.
>
> Tell her?
>
> And the crystalline forms, the granite, the hornblendeschist, shone darkly with the idea that she would not write. . . .The other woman might die, she herself might die, they were both old and *progressing* toward it. (462 emphasis mine)

Here the cyclicity of the geological and the progression of the biological collide, and while Ellen settles upon her decision to remain silent, Byatt turns toward the future, toward the actions Ellen will take in the morning, when "she would pick up the black box. . .and set out on his last blind journey" (462). It is hardly

certain, however, that Ellen means to abolish the truth of the contents of the box; as Leonora Stern notes a century later, "Why did she leave it to be found, if she didn't entertain the thought of it? Why wasn't it clasped to her bosom--or his?" (498). Ellen's actions are duplicitous; she abolishes and preserves. By "burying the evidence," Ellen, as she wishes, grants the contents of the specimen box "a sort of duration," for Christabel's sealed letter will not remain sealed, not even when sealed by the tomb[10].

When the tomb is broken and the word is delivered, all because, in Maud Bailey's own words, "we need the end of the story" (498), Christabel's writing lives again in the voice of her descendent, in the midst of "that strange gathering of seekers and hunters" (499). There, among those gathered for the sake of the truth, perhaps to preserve the past, perhaps to obtain some relic, the words of Christabel to her beloved are heard, and she speaks of the transgressed unity, of the manner in which the circle is broken for the sake of the future:

> Do you remember how I wrote to you of the riddle of the egg? As an *eidolon* of my solitude and *self-possession* which you threatened whether you would or no? And destroyed, my dear, meaning me nothing but good, I do believe and know. I wonder--if I had kept to my closed castle, behind my motte-and-bailey defenses-- should I have been a great poet--as you are? . . .These things are all mixed and mingled--

and we loved each other--*for* each other--only

it was in the end for Maia. . . .(502)

There is no simple self-reflexive love here--"*for* each

other" but "for Maia," for the not yet. The cycle of

reflection and simple return overflows for the sake of

the future; no simple union of opposites, no "wishy-washy

plurality," but the ever-emptying negation of self-

presence. As the love of Christabel and Randolph "*for*

each other," is remembered as having existed for the sake

of another, and does not remain there between the two, so

also, the actions of Ellen are recalled:

> Maud said, "You know Ellen. Why do you
>
> think she just put it in the box--with her own
>
> love letters--". . .
>
> Beatrice said,
>
> "She didn't know what to do, perhaps. She
>
> couldn't just give it to him, and she didn't
>
> read it--I can imagine that--she just put it
>
> away--"
>
> "For Maud," said Blackadder. "As it turns
>
> out. She preserved it, for Maud."

Ellen's abolition/preservation for Maud allows Maud, who

like Ellen, it must be remembered, wants nothing more

than the self-sameness of "an empty room, white" to read

her own existence in a new light, calling her self-

subsistence into question. Maud identifies with

Christabel's "unbroken egg," a pure presence which, like

the closed identities of Blanche and Ellen, is

transgressed. "I know how she felt about her unbroken

egg," says Maud, "her self-possession, her autonomy;"
Maud is reminded of these by the reading of Christabel's
letter, and yet her self-autonomy is challenged by her
relationship with Roland, which has by now firmly rooted
itself.

Her situation, caught between autonomy, pure self-
presence, and the loss of that self-sufficiency is for
Maud, as it was for Ellen, and also for Christabel, an
uncanny and uncomfortable one. The quest which has
granted her "the truth of her own origins" and "the end
of the story" has also produced the loss of her autonomy,
as she is inextricably bound in a web of relationships
beyond her control. Maud despairs at the irreversibility
of her ancestry and also the retrospective
predetermination of her quest and her simultaneously
developing relationship with Roland. Reflecting upon her
newfound origin and future, Maud protests, "I don't quite
like it. There's something unnaturally *determined* about
it all" (505). Maud finds herself faced with an
individuality and uniqueness, granted by a negation of
her nostalgia for pure presence, her desire for
ahistoricality, which appears to her, at her point of
epiphany, tied to a "predestined" history.

The predestination of her past, however, is the very
predestination which grants her salvation, an identity
and a future. This same "predestination" was experienced
by Ellen, who finds Randolph's unfinished letter "as if
she had been guided to it" (Byatt 455). Maud's embrace of
that predestination, like Ellen's, transforms the

"fragment," the "riddle" of all her "it was" with a liberative "thus I willed it" (Altizer GA 142; see chapter 3). Ending the ahistorical eternal return of pure presence by embracing a predestined historicity is Nietzsche's vision of eternal recurrence, which, as discussed in chapter one, is the "absolute willing of all that occurs" (GOG 122). Historicity does not absolutely negate cyclicity itself, but the exclusivity of either element in the dichotomy results in a false economy. As Lyell, Gould, and so many others discussed here understood, two dichotomous metaphors interact in a dynamic dialectic, and the repression of one cannot be maintained, but results in its irruption into the realm of its prohibition, or in the uncanny presence of its absence within the discourse which marks its effacement. The line requires the circle, but neither exclusively; it is for this reason that Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, though resembling eternal return, is, as we have noted, actually its very negation.

"Despite the fact that their purely circular forms so fully coincide, says Altizer, Nietzsche's vision of eternal recurrence is the negation of eternal return, insomuch as eternal return is "a flight from history" (GA 138), and "predestination and eternal recurrence are a transfiguration of the horror of existence" (142). Both predestination and eternal recurrence are, according to Altizer, circular,

> . . .a circle in which the center is
> everywhere, but as opposed to a circle of

eternal return, this is a circle of becoming,
and only of becoming, a totally immanent
becoming which is the consequence of the death
of God. (GA 144)

Thus a willing of eternal recurrence is a willing of the
death of God, a death which, in Altizer's interpretation
of Nietzsche, is thereby a universalized immanence and a
universal, transfiguring grace, a "freedom from history,"
enacted by the very willing of history itself. Eternal
recurrence, the embrace of history, by which the
individual is "freed from history," is a dichotomy of the
circularity of eternal recurrence and the linearity of
unique, historical events.

This same recurrence is evident in Byatt's
"conclusion." The end of the story of Possession,
actually a post-script, occurring after the conclusion,
rewrites the entire narrative, and the reader finds
herself faced with a script which eternally recurs,
endlessly subverting its own conclusions. The narrative
of Possession, like the narrative of history, turns out
to be both a circular and linear narrative, each
conclusion transforming its own sterility, providing a
freedom from the letter in a transfiguring grace.

The "end of the story" and the "truth of the
origin"? Yes and no. "There is no guarantee," as
Blackadder cautions Maud, "that that is what we shall
find" (498). "But," as Maud retorts, "we must look"
(498). Breaching the realm of pure presence,
transgressing the transcendent, enacting the coincidence

of opposites, these can only be effected by those who,
like Ellen Ash and Maud Bailey, even as Nietzsche and
Lyell and others here discussed, are not afraid to look,
and live. Such looking, and living, is a reading, and
writing, which is an enactment of the death of God, and
which brings us face to face with the truth that
Christabel saw, granting Randolph the story of his child,
a story which, though it was never delivered to Randolph,
opened up a future for its readers, a future which
springs forth from the tension between the origin and the
ending, a future informed by the conviction that "all
History is hard facts--and something else. . ." (499).

> While the paradigm of evolution wholly
> dominates our cosmological and biological
> thinking, and does so even when evolution is
> conceived of as being wholly contingent and
> fortuitous, the very possibility of a human as
> opposed to a material evolution is now banished
> from our historical and cultural thinking
> . . . .Yet with the loss of. . .a nonnatural or
> noncyclical evolution, has come the inevitable
> loss of a specifically or uniquely human
> identity, and most particularly so insofar as
> that identity is seen and known to be
> everywhere the same. . . .Uniqueness, as
> opposed to natural particularity, then vanishes
> in all its forms, and human meanings and
> identities can never then transcend the
> boundaries of the natural cycle. Consciousness

can then be itself only by being everywhere the same. . . .thus there becomes no possibility whatsoever of transcending nihilism, unless nihilism is thought through to its very reversal. (Altizer, HAA 8-9)

NOTES

[1] This is a view also held by Wolfhart Pannenberg, who, in his Systematic Theology, affirms that reality "is first and foremost a historical reality;" Ted Peters explains Pannenberg's insistence that "even if the laws of classical dynamics are reversible, the actual course of natural events from which those laws have been extracted are not" (Pannenberg, Toward a Theology of Nature 10). Like Altizer, Pannenberg insists upon the temporal uniqueness of events, and while Pannenberg's conception of the trinitarian God is of a radically different sort than Altizer's, the historical understandings of the two, in which, in Pannenberg's words "the act of creation did not take place only in the beginning. . .it occurs at every moment," and in which that recurrent creation is understood as the very mode existence of a God who is "not yet," have much in common (Toward a Theology of Nature 34).

[2] Perhaps it might then be more correct to amend Altizer's point and say that the human experience of that "actuality" is understood as irreversible, and fabricated as well. The possibility that the irreversibility of the human *experience* of time might open up new dialogues between science and the human sciences is a notion that has been entertained from time to time, by Ilya Prigogine, for instance, whose challenging 1984 essay concludes with the hopeful suggestion that "we are approaching a point where the rediscovery of time will lead not only to a better understanding of the mechanisms of change, which we encounter at all levels of the universe we observe," but more importantly, "to a better embedding of human beings in the universe from which we

have emerged" (446). Prigogine suggests a temporal vision founded upon a conception of time as "a construction in which we all participate," arising out of an attempt to 'relate human history to the natural processes described by natural science as reversible and deterministic' (433, 446). A more useful contemporary scientific vision of time, rather than envisioning humanity at the hands of a deterministic world, must, according to Prigogine, incorporate the characteristics of "irreversibility, evolution and creativity" (445).

[3]In fact, an enquiry into the historical occurrence, or not, of the "full embodiment of the death of God" as the fullness of presence in history is doomed to failure, as is the search for the historicity of the primordial originary moment. Such an enquiry resembles a misappropriation of the bipolar functions of a societal mythic *imaginaire* of which Paul Ricoeur has written (Kearney 64). In the case of Altizer's considerations, the "society" in question includes the whole history of Western thought, but Ricoeur's ideas are still significant, perhaps even more so because of the vast expanse of Altizer's historical considerations. Altizer considers not just the history of a culture, or even the history of known philosophical discourse, but history itself. Of course, such a perspective is necessarily culture-bound, but Altizer rightly sees no other alternative; cultural, or historical, dichotomies such as origin and *telos* cannot be dissolved, but they may be decentered. According to Paul Ricoeur, there is an inherent decentering dynamic in the interaction of foundational and teleological discourse, dissolution of which results in stasis, as Altizer is so adamant to demonstrate in his critique of eternal return.

In Lectures in Ideology and Utopia, Ricoeur reckons that an "ensemble of symbolic discourses," a "socio-political *imaginaire*," is possessed by all societies (Kearney 64). Positively or negatively, this *imaginaire* serves to preserve the community's "sense of identity," and to criticize when necessary the current state of affairs "out of fidelity to an elsewhere" (Kearney 65). This dialectic of preservation and criticism is known as "reaffirmation" and "rupture," and carries with it the potential, when misinterpreted, for oppressive stasis (Kearney 64-65). As Ricoeur explains, on the preservatory side,

> . . . the *imaginaire* operates as an "ideology" which can positively repeat the founding discourse of a society--what I call its "foundational symbols--thus preserving its sense of identity. . . . The danger is, of course, that this reaffirmation can be perverted. . .into a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate the established political powers. (Kearney 65)

On the other hand, describing the critical function of the *imaginaire*, Ricoeur observes that

> Over against this, there exists the *imaginaire* of rupture, a discourse of "utopia" which remains critical of the powers that be out of fidelity to an "elsewhere," to a society that is not-yet. But this utopian discourse is not always positive either. For besides the authentic utopia of critical rupture there can also exist a dangerously schizophrenic utopian discourse which projects a static future without ever producing the conditions of its realisation. . . .(Kearney 65)

"In short," says Ricoeur, "ideology as a symbolic confirmation of the past, and utopia as a symbolic opening towards the future, are complementary; if cut off from each other, they can lead to forms of political pathology" (Kearney 65). Ricoeur sees the nucleic myth of a society functioning both as a "symbolic confirmation of the past," and as a "symbolic opening towards the future" (Kearney 65). When one element is forgotten, and survived only by its ambiguous but zealously affirmed opposite, or on the other hand, when the mythic function of origin or goal is replaced by a fixed historicity (a past "golden age" or a "messianic future"), the result may well be a static nostalgia which ignores the realities of the present (Kearney 65). Interestingly enough, driven by a nostalgia for pure presence, whether the pure presence of origin or the re-presentation of that presence in *telos* (the fundamental of eternal return), the negative "historicizing" of the mythic symbols of past and future ignores the very possibility of historicality itself.

[4] Nietzsche's idea of the historian's backward belief in the search for origins might be translated into Ricoeur's terms as "negative reaffirmation," and Nietzsche's own "formula for happiness": the straight line, the *goal* might be thought of as, again in Ricoeur's terms, "positive rupture."

[5] I have in mind here Derrida's delightful essay, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," and his allusion to Nietzsche's "On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense" (Derrida 217).

[6] Carl Raschke clarifies Kuhn's position, noting that in Kuhn's writings, "paradigm" designated only "the gist of scientific deliberations;" as the term "paradigm shift" has come to be understood in reference to "the greater intellectual reversals" which affect both practical methodology and formal reflection, it has more in common with Gerald Holton's "themata," or Michel Foucault's "episteme" (Raschke 70).

[7] Milic Capek is not so certain as Hawking; Capek suggests that the absolutist notion of time as "completely independent of concrete physical events" was in the first instance "so elusive and so completely foreign to sensory experience that it took centuries to

be fully grasped" (608). Newton, however, so fully ingrained the notion into tradition that it took a full-fledged "revolution" (relativism) to revise it, and even now the question of whether a unity of time underlying locally discordant temporal events may be preserved even in relativity remains open (608).

8 "The ideal of happiness has always taken material form in the house," writes Simone de Beauvoir in her classic The Second Sex, "whether cottage or castle, it stands for permanence and separation from the world" (467). Further

> Within its walls the family is established as a discrete cell or unit group and maintains its identity as generations come and go; the past, preserved in the form of furniture and ancestral portraits, gives promise of a secure future; in the garden the seasons register their reassuring cycle in the growth of edible vegetables. . .neither time nor space fly off at a tangent, they recur in appointed cycles. In every civilization based on landed property an ample literature sings the poetry of hearth and home. . . .
> The home becomes centre of the world and even its only reality; "a kind of counter-universe or universe in opposition" (Bauchelard); refuge retreat, grotto, womb, it gives shelter from outside dangers; it is this confused outer world that becomes unreal. . . . Reality is concentrated inside the house, while outer space seems to collapse. (467-69)

9 This theme, of the cycle of exclusivity within the household, is further developed, with a strong influence from biology, in Byatt's Morpho Eugenia, within Angels and Insects.

10 In his consideration of Derrida, Taylor connects "tomb," as Derrida does in Margins of Philosophy, with the silence of the "a" of différance, "silent and discreet as a tomb: oikesis" (Altarity 263). Continuing the citation from Derrida:

> And thereby let us anticipate the delineation of a site, the familial residence of the tomb proper in which is produced, by différance, the economy of death. This stone--provided that one knows how to decipher its inscription--is not far from announcing the death of the tyrant. (263)

Taylor further supplies the translation note from Margins, which reads: "Tomb in Greek is oikesis, which is akin to the Greek oikos--house--from which the word economy derives. . . .Thus Derrida speaks of the 'economy of death' as the 'familial residence and tomb of the proper'" (263). Elsewhere, "tomb," is related to "tomb(er)" to fall (292-96).

Chapter Five

(Un)masking Theology: The End of Conclusion

> Beginning is anonymous, hence by necessity it
> is the province of myth and rite, the domain of
> the mask in all its numerable forms, and the
> primal if elusive motif of epic traditions
> throughout the world. (Altizer, HAA 17)

Over his desk the little print of the
photograph of Randolph Ash's death mask was
ambiguous. You could read it either way; as
though you were looking into a hollow mould, as
though the planes of the cheeks and forehead,
the blank eyes and the broad brow were sculpted
and looking out. You were inside--behind those
closed eyes like an actor, masked: you were
outside, looking at closure, if not finality
. . . . (Roland) touched the letters, which Ash
had touched, over which Ash's hand had moved,
urgent and tentative, reforming and rejecting
his own words. He looked at the still fiery
traces of the poem. . . .

He had been taught that language was
essentially inadequate, that it could never
speak what was there, that it only spoke
itself.

He thought about the death mask. He could
and could not say that the mask and the man
were dead. What had happened to him was that

the ways in which it *could* be said had become more interesting than the idea that it could not. (Byatt, <u>Possession</u> 473)

Altizer's critique of institutional Christianity's idea of the transcendent God relies on an underlying confidence that the image of God thereby portrayed is a false one, and not only the image of God, but also the image of history, and theology. That is, Altizer's critique involves the replacement of an eternal, self-sufficient God of Christendom with the self-negating apocalyptic God, the replacement of an ahistorical cycle of eternal return with the notion of historicity and actuality, and the understanding of theology, and Christianity as a dynamic, historically-evolving, even self-negating exercise. Altizer's critique might certainly be thought of as the unmasking of God, history and theology, of which the true image has been obscured by the mask of eternal return. This might be enough, if the point were not that there is no transcendent reality[1] behind the mask, for the mask is all.

If theology may be understood as a "mask of God," it would not be inappropriate to describe theology following the death of God as God's death mask. The death of God, however, has made such an impression upon contemporary theology as to be understood, at least by some, not as the closure and end of the idea of God, but also as its genesis, as a dramatic event the enactment of which theology, and history itself, effects. This duality is illustrated in the above passage from A.S. Byatt's novel,

Possession, in which the unlikely iconoclast Roland Michell ponders a photograph of the death mask of Randolph Henry Ash. Roland's dedication to the study of Ash's life and writings has, as noted before, led to his discovery of a fragment of correspondence between Ash and Christabel LaMotte which not only transforms that dedication into possession, but also destroys the fixed images of both Ash and LaMotte held by Roland and the academic world. Roland, it will be recalled, has stumbled upon a textual fragment while following a twofold path toward a simultaneous beginning and end. On the one hand, Roland was looking for undiscovered sources, for beginnings. That is, he was examining Randolph Ash's personal copy of Vico's Principj di Scienza Nuova[2], scanning the marginalia for the origins of Ash's "Garden of Proserpina." This primary original quest becomes the very act which brings about the "unmasking" of Ash's hidden relations, the ending of the mythic academic image of Ash. In the above scene, gazing upon the death mask from without, Roland faces the absolute finality, the absolute completion, of Ash. The death mask is an absolutely true image, Ash's movements being absolutely fixed and his life absolutely completed, but in that same way the death mask is the absolute negation of what Ash was, indeed, what Ash is. The trueness of the representation depends absolutely upon the death of the subject, and this oxymoronic "still life" portrays the presence of the absence of the author. Gazing from within the death mask, Roland becomes Ash, as indeed his reading

and rewriting of Ash's work has kept Ash alive. Ash's presence is transferred to Roland, but this is a presence wholly dependent upon the absolute absence, the absolute negation of the (A)(a)uthor. Like the body of God in the eucharist, the presence of the representation of Ash entails both death and life, negating itself to become itself. Eucharistically, the idea of the coincidence of the death and life of the body of God is nothing new, and the ambiguity and oscillation of theological language regarding the death and genesis of God enacted therein is necessary for its efficacy as a liturgical event. As we have seen, the ambiguity of the language of "the death of God" within the past century has given the philosophical and theological enactment of the death of God a eucharistic flavor. This is an ambiguity not easily tolerated by the system of scholastic and institutional "theology," and therefore its preservation finds those who do such theology often operating outwith such a system, or operating within while drawing from without.

"He could and could not say that the mask and the man were dead;" as it faced Roland in the presence/absence of the death mask, a choice faces those upon the odyssey that is contemporary Christian theology, between the Scylla of "Christian fundamentalism," and the Charybdis of what would seem to amount to "no Christian faith or praxis whatsoever" (Altizer, "Is the Negation of Christiantiy the Way to Its Renewal?" 10). That is the situation as Altizer sees it, asserting that Christianity, faced with survival in "a purely atheistic

world," may either deny that reality and retrench into exlusivity or affirm itself as a "historically evolving" religion (12). Although much "postmodern theology" has been written from this standpoint, as witness the whole of Mark C. Taylor's a/theological writing, the appropriation of Biblical modes of "prophetic critique" by liberative theologies[3] demonstrate that this is no new situation for Christianity. So says Altizer as well, who views "historical evolution" as Christianity's "deepest ground" (12). Christianity originated within a purely atheistic world, says Altizer, a world in which Christianity was confronted with the choice of refusing the reality of the anti-Christian world (12). Ironically, that same atheistic reality was to be the future of Christianity itself, as Christianity was the future of that world; in the same manner, then, suggests Altizer, the atheism of the contemporary world may very well be the future of Christianity (14). There is no more important theological concept than an understanding of the "full and genuine continuity" between the ancient ending enacted upon the ancient world by the apocalyptic movement of original Christianity, and the modern ending of the modern world (11).

The choice facing Christianity in the present world, according to Altizer, is a choice between eternal return and its reversal, an historical evolution repeating the situation of "the new world of Christianity," a new world which, in its ending of an old world, precludes the possibility of a way of return ("INCWR?" 15). Death of

God theology, says Altizer, is one of several schools of thought which sees orthodox Christianity as a reversal of original Christianity if only in its denial of historical evolution. The insistence upon the character of historical evolution within biblical scholarship in the twentieth century, an insistence shared by Death of God theology, evoked modern fundamentalism, which, according to Altizer, is "just as modern," as modern atheism, and "just as distant from the Bible as are its most modernistic counterparts" (16). The attempt of Death of God theology, and its theological contemporaries, to "recover the lost world of the Bible" served to demonstrate, says Altizer, "how lost that world has become," insomuch as the Biblical recovery which was sought could only take place through "a real and full disintegration of everything that is manifest as a Christian world" (16). The inevitability of that disintegration, the foundations of which lay in the writings of Kierkegaard and the early writings of Barth, opened the way toward a delineation of the opposition between the self-sufficient God of Christendom and the Word of God:

> . . .now revelation or the Word is the full and actual negation and reversal of its manifestations in the Christian world, and only the real and actual negation of that Christian world can make possible an openness to the Word of God. Paradoxically, it is the death of God that alone makes possible the full revelation

of God, for the Word of God is the very
opposite of the Christian God, and most
manifestly so the very opposite of that God who
is the center and ground of the modern
Christian world. ("Is the Negation of
Christianity the Way to Its Renewal?" 16)

The possibility of Christianity today, says Altizer,
arises from the possibility "that the very negation and
reversal of a dominant and manifest Christian identity is
the way to a recovery and renewal of Christianity," a
possibility which has been advocated and enacted by Death
of God theology (16). If only in its proclamation of this
possibility, Death of God theology remains theologically
and culturally relevant today, and reveals its
fundamental importance for new theological thinking.

The question, "Can Christianity actually negate
itself so as to truly transcend itself?" is a question
Altizer continues to ask, even now following the passing
of the popularity of death of God theology (GOG 43). If
Christianity is grounded in a full and genuine
understanding of the death of God, as Altizer maintains,
"it can pass into or even realize a universal historical
movement," but if it is not, it remains "inevitably
destined to be a sectarian or historically isolated
faith" (GOG 46-47). The delineation which Altizer draws
between a forward-moving Christianity and orthodox
Christendom relies upon a delineation between the
"apocalyptic God" and the God of Christendom, a god "far
more purely transcendent" than the God of Israel, and

more "transcendent and majestic" than the God of the New Testament (GOG 171). The primary difference, however, between the apocalyptic, self-emptying God of which Altizer writes and the God of Christendom is the latter's lack of "that very movement of actualization which is so primary in prophetic Israel, a movement which is totally realized in an original Christian apocalypticism" (GOG 171). That realization is a realization of the "absolute triumph of the Kingdom of God," the Kingdom of God which is the immanent Word of God, enacting a radical and universal grace; the reversal of this understanding, progressively enacted by the Christian Church, resulted in an understanding of the "absolute transcendence of God," a God of glory alone, manifest as "an absolutely unmoving and inactual or passive transcendence" (171). A contemporary reversal and negation of the God of Christendom entails an understanding of the "triumph of the Kingdom of God" and the Word of God as God's self-enactment, even as the enactment of an original Christianity was also an apocalyptic movement.

Such an apocalyptic movement is also demonstrated in Mark C. Taylor's previously mentioned Erring, a groundbreaking work which Altizer calls "apocalyptic theology with a vengeance," and in which, again according to Altizer, "Taylor seeks a genuinely Christian theology, centered in Incarnation and Crucifixion" ("The Triumph of the Theology of the Word," in Wyschogrod et al, "On Deconstructing Theology," 528, 525; hereafter "TTOW"). However, Altizer goes further (admitting more of the work

than Taylor himself would), and claims that _Erring_ is also "in quest of a purely Biblical or Scriptural writing," seeking "a pure revelation of Word which can only be a total erasure of word" (525). Further, while condoning Taylor's subversive method, Altizer criticizes Taylor's tendency to ignore the actuality of texts in favor of a "pure or disembodied thinking," the "trace" which dissolves all actual presence ("TTOW" 525).

However, Altizer does point out that, following Scharlemann, Taylor understands "the crucified God" as "eternally and kenotically embodied in _word_," so that "God is what word means, and word is what God means" ("TTOW" 527). Thus Taylor understands "the divine itself as writing" and writing as enacting the death of God, "inscribing the disappearance of the transcendental signified" (527). Surely this is not so far away from Altizer's distinction between the unmoving, self-sufficient God of Christendom and the God who is incarnate in the Word and the Kingdom. The important distinction here, however, as noted previously, and as Taylor points out in his response to Altizer, is that for Altizer the death of God implies the "total presence" of the parousia, the Kingdom, or the word, while for Taylor the death of God entails its deferral and total absence (Taylor, "Masking:Domino Effect," in Wyshogrod et al, 551; hereafter "MDE"). However, if the apocalyptic moment is the deferral of apocalypse, or if, in Altizer's terms, total presence is known apocalyptically, in its passing, in its absence, there is finally no disagreement between

Altizer's "total presence" and Taylor's deferral of
presence, or at least there is a dynamic oscillation
found in both. Denying the dissolution of dichotomy,
Taylor's theology, like Altizer's, "errs" in that space
between presence and absence. "The time and space of
erring," says Taylor, are opened by a fourfold "domino
effect" comprised of "Hegel's acknowledgement of the
death of God," "Kierkegaard's claim that Christendom is
at its end," "Nietzsche's announcement of Dionysus (whose
other name is the Anti-Christ or Bacchus)," and
"Derrida's recognition of the closure of the book" ("MDE"
555). "In erring," Taylor asserts, "I am doing nothing
other than struggling to think the domino effect of
masking by thinking the unthinkable oscillation of
alterity and the impossible alterity of oscillation"
("MDE" 555). Such oscillation is not dissolution;
oscillation, marks Taylor, "derives from the Latin word
oscillum, which means a swing and originally referred to
a mask of Bacchus that hung from a tree in a vineyard to
sway in the wind" (555). Taylor's <u>Erring</u> is indeed a
series of unmaskings: unmasking the self to find God,
unmasking God to find presence, and on and on, even as
Altizer's iconoclastic writings unmask the God of
Christendom; but the process of unmasking is unending, as
mask upon mask is revealed. Masks form the recurring
theme of Taylor's response to the criticisms of his
<u>Erring</u>, a response which begins with a quotation,
uncited, from Bataille:

"You know quite well," I said slowly, "that as far as I'm concerned, there's no longer any difference between a mask and a cassock. There isn't anything you've said to me for a long time that hasn't seemed a sham. . . " ("MDE" 547)

The coincidence of mask and cassock, both veiling the *imago dei*, is a coincidence explored not only by Bataille, but also by Iris Murdoch, in her 1966 The Time of the Angels, published at the same time deconstruction was being born in America, and death of God theology was making the news[4].

According to Byatt, whose writing bears a marked influence by Murdoch, The Time of the Angels, the title of which evokes an image of a transcendent atemporality, a heavenly eternity, is an early fictional attempt to address the death of God, a subject, among many others, dealt with in Byatt's forthcoming sequel to Still Life, the third in what will have been a fourfold set[5]. Perhaps a retrospective look at Murdoch's novel might anticipate Byatt's forthcoming work.

Religion, I suggest, is that institution created by the Father's discourse to conceal the origins of society in the murder of the mother: religion's walls of order are built over her body. Religious discourse offers a sanitized version of the linguistic history of how we came to be, detailing the necessary

refusal of the mother and the triumphal accession to the Father's Law. (Reineke 262)

The Time of the Angels is the story of the mysterious house of Carel Fisher, an eccentric Anglican priest who has recently moved into an all-but-defunct London parish. Carel's eccentricities include, among others, hallucinations of pests within his home, speaking to no one who visits (at his instructions no one gets past his maid Pattie, who is also his mistress), carrying on an incestuous relationship with his niece, who, we find out in the course of the novel, is actually his daughter, and perhaps the least of these, adhering to unorthodox atheistic beliefs. Carel's brother, Marcus, also lives in London, and has some concern over his brother's reputation, as well as his mental state, and his prohibition from seeing his alleged neice, Elizabeth, who is supposedly the daughter of the third Fisher brother, Julian, now deceased. Following a hard-won battle to gain entry into the almost impermeable fog-shrouded rectory, Marcus is allowed to confront his brother, and it is within the dynamics of this dialogue that Carel's "beliefs" are revealed.

Asked if he is aware that some think him insane, Carel responds by evading the question (or perhaps by answering it after the manner of "Whom do you say that I am?"), and asks Marcus, "Do you?" (162). Marcus denies that he does, although it has crossed his mind before, and does again during the course of their conversation, and states simply that Carel does "behave strangely"

(162). He then inquires, "Is it really true that you've lost your faith?". Carel's answer is again evasive, requiring clarification in a bit of elitist posturing. "You use such an odd old-fashioned vocabulary," he says, "Do you mean do I think there is no God?" (162). "Yes," Marcus answers. "Well then, yes, I think it. There is no God," responds Carel. Marcus is taken aback by his brother's remark, even though Marcus himself claims to be an atheist, and is at work on a book provisionally entitled Morality in a World Without God, a work which undertakes the "demythologizing of morals" (68). Marcus obviously thinks it improper that a man of the cloth should maintain such heresy and cautions, "if you really don't believe, you shouldn't go on being a priest. Your vocation--" (162). "My vocation is to be a priest," Carel retorts, "And if there is no God it is my vocation to be the priest of no God" (162). With that, Carel attempts to dismiss Marcus from his presence, but Marcus wants a full explanation, which runs in this way:

> "Nobody wants to hear, Marcus. It is the
> most secret thing in the world. And though I
> may tell you, you will not retain it in your
> mind because it cannot be borne." Carel was
> still pacing the room, not with a steady stride
> but as if wafted rather irregularly to and fro.
> The cassock rustled and swung, was checked and
> swung again. (162)

Here the ultimately veiled unbearable truth and the oscillation of the messenger coincide, the "truth" cannot

be remembered, but remains covered, concealed, like the fabric which envelopes the figure of the messenger. The discourse continues,

> Carel went on. "You cannot imagine how often I have been tempted to announce from the pulpit that there is no God. It would be the most religious statement that could be conceived of. If there was anybody worthy to make it or receive it." (163)

Marcus is not entirely impressed, and points out the lack of novelty in Carel's words. "It's not exactly *new*--" he says, and Carel answers,

> "Oh yes, people have often uttered the words, but no one has believed them. Perhaps Nietzsche did for a little. Only his egoism of an artist soon obscured the truth. He could no hold it. Perhaps that was what drove him mad. Not the truth itself but his failure to hold it in contemplation." (163)

Again Marcus finds fault, this time with Carel's gravity, and remarks, "I don't see anything so dreadful about it . . .atheism can be a perfectly humane doctrine--" (163). Carel reacts by revealing the foundation of his doctrine, the unmasking of theology:

> "It is not as the German theologians imagine, and the rationalists with their milk-and-water theism, and those who call themselves atheists and have changed nothing but a few words. Theology has been so long a queen, she thinks

> she can still rule as a queen in disguise. But
> all is different now, *toto caelo*. Men will soon
> begin to feel the consequences, though they
> will not understand them. (163)

"A queen in disguise:" masked or unmasked theology? Marcus' interest has begun to fade now, as he mutters a faintly ridiculing "Do you understand?" (162). Still Carel perseveres,

> "It is not that all is permitted. To say that
> was the reaction of a babbling child. No one
> who had enough spirit to say it ever really
> believed it anyway. What they wanted was simply
> a new morality. But the truth itself they did
> not conceive of, the concept of it alone would
> have killed them."

Again Marcus criticizes, and says, "But all the same morality remains--" (163). Carel waxes parabolic in his response,

> "Suppose the truth were awful, suppose it was
> just a black pit, or like birds huddled in the
> dust in a dark cupboard? Suppose only evil were
> real, only it was not evil since it had lost
> even its name? Who could face this? The
> philosophers have never even tried. All
> philosophy has taught a facile optimism, even
> Plato did so. Philosophers are simply the
> advance guard of theology. They are certain
> that Goodness is there in the centre of things
> radiating its pattern. They are certain that

Good is one, single and unitary. . .Only a few

of them really feared Chaos and Old Night, and

fewer still ever caught a glimpse--And if they

did perhaps, through some crack, some fissure

in the surface, catch sight of *that*, they ran

straight back to their desks, they worked

harder than ever late into the night to explain

that it was not so, to prove that it could not

be so. They suffered, they even died for this

argument, and called it the truth." (163-64)

Marcus now calls Carel's motive into question, asking,

"But do you yourself really believe--?" (164). Carel

responds by announcing that "any interpretation of the

world is childish," and that "all philosophy is the

prattling of a child," and by then referring to Judaism's

grimness as its redeeming characteristic. The Book of

Job, for example, agrees with Carel's philosophy, he

says, since therein there is neither sense nor justice,

"there is only power and the marvel of power, there is

only chance and the terror of chance," and therefore

there is no God, nor any unitary Good (164). It is the

nonexistence of the unitary which for Carel implies the

darkness of his entire system, as he points out, "If

there is goodness it must be one,. . .multiplicity is not

paganism, it is the triumph of evil" (164). Following

much more one-sided debate, Marcus retaliates against

Carel's assertion that the most important fact for humans

is their contingency, the fact that they are controlled

by chance and that "spirit" is unavailable to such low

creatures, with a compromising "All right, there have
been illusions-- but now at least we know the truth and
we can start from there--" (165). "We do not know the
truth," Carel counters, ". . .it is something that cannot
be endured" (165). Carel holds firm to the impossibility
of human good and maintains that the whole of theology
and philosophy has been a masking of that fact:

> "People will endlessly conceal from themselves
> that good is only good if one is good for
> nothing. The whole history of philosophy, the
> whole theology, is this act of concealment. The
> old delusion ends, but there will be others of
> a different kind. . . .It would be a
> consolation, it would be a beatitude, to think
> that with the death of God the era of true
> spirit begins, while all that went before was a
> fake. But this too would be a lie, indeed it is
> the lie of modern theology. With or without the
> illusion of God, goodness is impossible to us."
> (165)

Marcus, exhausted and bewitched by this and the
continuation of the exchange, can only summon the
strength to confront his brother with "I've changed my
mind. . .I think you are insane" (166). It is then that
the reader is allowed to witness the extent of Carel's
heresy, as he proclaims, "Where wast thou, Marcus, when I
laid the foundations of the earth, whe the morning stars
sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"
Marcus ignores his brother's self-deification, and

inquires pragmatically, "So you are going to go on being a priest. . .with all those things inside you?" Carel does go on, if for no other reason than because "when (he) celebrates mass (he) is God" (166) (this is a reversal of the priestly function of which Altizer writes, in which the priest identifies with the assembly, not with the divine; see the discussion of Altizer and catholicism and eucharist in chapter two). The discourse disintegrates until Marcus launches one last attempt to reverse the passing conversation; Marcus grabs Carel's garment, is rebuked, and a feined embrace lands a shameful blow across Marcus' face. "You exist, Marcus," Carel murmurs, "just for a moment you exist. Now get out" (168).

Now Marcus has already been dissatisfied with his complaining to the Bishop, who seemed a great deal more sympathetic toward Carel than he should have been. In his meeting with Marcus and his house-mate, Norah Shadox-Brown, the Bishop numbers Carel among the Anglican church's noted "eccentrics," and recommended patience regarding Carel, since "belief is such a personal matter" (89). Regarding Marcus' atheism, the Bishop is pleased to hear of Marcus' book, despite Marcus' clarification that he is not a beleiver (89). Marcus' belief is not such an issue, claims the Bishop, since "the dividing lines are not by any means as clear as they used to be" (89). "Passion," says the Bishop, "Passion, Kierkegaard said, . . .that's the necessary thing" (89). This displeases both Marcus and Norah, who declares, "But there's a

difference between believing in God and not beleiving in God" (89). The Bishop confirms this, but clarifies that "perhaps this difference is not what we once thought it was. We must think of this time as an interregnum" (89). The following conversation strangely parallels Marcus' conversation with Carel, which has yet to take place. Here the Bishop recommends theological demythologizing, a "change of symbolizing," which "is nothing new," but as "God lives and works in history, (t)he outer mythology changes, the inward truth remains the same," (90). Marcus counters with a recommendation that society "say he doesn't exist and be done with it," but the Bishop maintains that "the Church will have to endure a very painful transformation" (90), a point which upsets Marcus, who realizes that despite his disbelief, the structure of the beliefs of others is a reassuring presence. "That they should be deciding that God was not a person, that they should be quietly demoting Jesus Christ, this made him feel almost frightened" (91). Foreshadowing his brother's words, Marcus challenges the Bishop with, "suppose the truth about human life were just something terrible, something appalling which one would be destroyed by contemplating," and complains, "You've taken away all the guarantees" (91). The Bishop, with expected aplomb, replies, "That's where faith comes in" (91). Norah ends the scene by observing that the Bishop's reponse is "meaningless" (91).

Norah's response to Carel's violently-ended exchange with Marcus is equally disapproving, finding it grim

"romantic nonsense" (185). Marcus, however, says that he finds a sort of hope, a "difficult hope," in what Carel has said; even though "the situation is terrible,. . .the human spirit can respond" (185). Marcus agrees with the futility of past theology and philosophy, and affirms that what is necessary is that one "learn to live without the idea of the Good being somehow One" (186). Again Norah is unimpressed, and takes a pragmatic, common-sense approach, arguing, "I don't see any point in either affirming or denying that the Good is One. I still ought to pay my bills" (186). Marcus does not share Norah's confident common-sense, common-sense which enables her to see to the root of Carel's affect upon Marcus. Carel's tirade has ruined Marcus' great construction:

> "Has this conversation with Carel wrecked your book?" said Norah.
>
> "Yes."
>
> Since the talk with Carel, indeed since fully apprehending the existence of Carel, Marcus had known that his book just wouldn't do. (186)

His systematic explication of the moral good thus torn asunder, Marcus declares to Norah that he will do unto Carel as Carel has, might one say, done unto him? Marcus intends to save Carel; "save him. . .by love," says Marcus, who settles upon his actions toward Carel and upon the course of the revision of his writing:

> "By love," said Marcus. It was now clear to him that this was the answer. His great book would

not be about good, it would be about love. In
the case of love the ontological proof would
work. Because love was a real human activity.
He would save his brother by loving him. Carel
could be made to recognize the reality of love.
"Is love One, I wonder?". . . (187).

In the end, of course, reality, perhaps the reality of
love, does not save Carel, but destroys him. Just as his
revelation unto Marcus has destroyed and transformed his
writing, so another piece of writing, a letter from
Pattie declaring her liberation, seals Carel's fate,
prompting his suicide.

The Time of the Angels is comprised of a web of
interconnected revelations and deceptions, veilings and
unveilings, all of which may be related to the central
concept of unity and multiplicity explicated in Marcus'
discussions. At the same time that deconstruction and
death of God theology were doing so, Murdoch's narrative
was exemplifying the manner in which one deconstructive
unmasking leads to another, tracing the breakdown of the
entire System. This notion is supported by the
consideration that Carel's efforts throughout the novel
are aimed toward molding the fog-enshrouded rectory into
an entirely exclusive universe, complete with
transcendent Elizabeth and corporeal Pattie. Elizabeth,
however, lies within the gaze of the all-too-human Leo
and his dominie Muriel, whose eyes are opened in their
"prayer-closet" revelation (granted by the rift through
which she beholds her father's body in its profane

embrace). Pattie, too, finds herself involved in a relationship with a fallen prince of sorts, now consigned to maintain Carel's household, resided in small quarters with only his icon with which to maintain his connection to his origins. This connection is, of course, severed, by Leo's selfish transgression, but painfully re-enacted by the indirect and camouflaged restoration of the icon by the marginal figures, Marcus, Muriel, and Pattie. Pattie, whose role as the fallen creature chosen and blessed by Carel is threatened by the revelation of Carel's relationship with Elizabeth, proves to be the most potent decentering force, as it is her writing, prompted by her knowledge of the transgression of her God (as Murdoch directly refers to their relationship) which accompanies Carel's dead body. Of course, Pattie's writing is witnessed at Carel's death by Muriel, flesh of Carel's flesh, whose acquiescence allows Carel's suicide to succeed. It is there, given "the power of life and death," that Muriel experiences "the utter and complete absence of God" (209). With Carel's demise and the collapse of his domestic world, Muriel, re-enacting the disclosure of the holy of holies, witnesses a "bright streak of light between the curtains," which prompts her to "pull the curtains back," and discovers that "the fog had gone away" (212). This is no mere "happy ending," as Pattie's sins have cost her relationship with Eugene, Eugene is given the gift of the memory of his first tragedy, Muriel and Elizabeth had been "riveted together" by Carel, "each to be the damnation of the other until

the end of the world" (212). In addition, Marcus
discovers that his book is all but impossible to write,
and is reacquainted by the recurrent once-Christian-now-
sort-of-Buddhist Anthea, whose name is obviously a subtle
pun on the absence of God. "Fancy old Anthea turning up
again like that" (221). The recurrence of the death of
God seems to inevitably accompany the efforts of those
outside, and those on the margins, to gain entry, to look
behind the mask, to witness the transgression and to
write liberation, efforts which lead to the incessant
decontsruction of the edifice. Perhaps Marcus would write
his book, but it would never be completed, and Marcus had
come to understand that now he must write differently,
beyond the realm of theo-ry:

> Marcus found that he had left Carel's room
> and was walking down the stairs. Would he go on
> working on his book? Perhaps it was a book that
> only a genius could write, and he was not a
> genius. It might be that all he wanted to say
> about love and about humanity was true but
> simply could not be expressed as a theory.
> (221)

Perhaps Murdoch, through Marcus, takes her reader toward
an insight noted by Thomas Altizer more than twenty-five
years later:

> . . .truly theological writing cannot be
> scholarly writing, just as truly theological
> reading cannot be scholarly reading, and this
> is true not only of theological reading and

writing, but of philosophical and poetic reading and writing as well. (GA 14)

Marcus' thoughts also echo Pattie's sentiments following her reading of an excerpt from Being and Time which she had noticed upon Carel's desk while cleaning his room. The passage, which in Pattie's reading reverberates with obscure references to Dasein, Being-at-an-end, Being-towards-the-end, the ready-to-hand and the not-yet, sounds to Pattie "senseless and awful," even apocalyptic, "like the distant boom of some big catastrophe" (144)[6]. Perhaps Pattie's displeasure, even as Marcus' later enlightenment, comes as a result of the impossibilities inherent in theorizing. Those impossibilities are certainly understood by Mark C. Taylor, whose "The Politics of Theo-ry," states succinctly, "(t)o rush from theology to theory is not to escape God; it is merely to exchange overt faith for covert belief in the One who excludes difference(s)" (30).

In his discussion of Heidegger, whose writings increasingly demonstrate Altizer's theological/ philosophical/poetic non-scholarly orientation, Taylor focuses upon the "Abgrund" noted by Heidegger in the twentieth century's experience of the absence of God (In "What Are Poets For?" in Poetry, Language, Thought). Heidegger uses Abgrund to denote "the complete absence of the ground," the origin the absence of which creates a nostalgia, a longing for return (Taylor, "The Politics of Theo-ry" 30). "Throughout the history of western ontotheology," notes Taylor, "God and Being have been

interpreted as one or the One," a unity, a circular Presence which in Heidegger's terms "is everywhere as the Same in its own center" ("PT" 30). This presence, says Taylor, is tenaciously pursued by theory, by ontotheology, which craves its "overarching or underlying unity that will unite multiple data" (30). Its absence is the absence of the singular origin of pure identity. In Taylor's scheme, "the inaccessibility of the origin implies the impossibility of the end;" there is no "return to, or of," the primal origin, and the end, the apocalypse, is always delayed (34). Curiously enough, it is this same singular unity, eternal return, which in Altizer's writing is negated by the actuality of history, the absolute beginning. In both cases, the impossibility of return defers "Presence" and precludes the possibility of the "sacrifice of difference" (Taylor, "PT" 34). In the case of Marcus' book, the inability of theory to contain, and neutralize, multiplicity, ends in the author's departure to a place of recreation, taking a leave of absence, a holiday, away from the realm of his efforts to theorize. Carel, on the other hand, turns out to have in fact suffered from the very nostalgia which he so decried. His exclusive domestic efforts were directed toward the re-establishment of his connection with his own origin, in Freudian terms, the absent Mother, the womb, the uncanny "home (Heim) from which we come and to which we long/dread to return" (Taylor, "PT" 18). "Within the Freudian economy," Taylor points out, "the mother is the savage origin that is our end," and which "stands

before us "naked except for a monstrous primitive mask," a mask that is "the face of our desire" (18). The fog-shrouded house and the captive and secluded Elizabeth are created by Carel in the image of this uncanny home. Carel is quite direct, however, in his discussion with Marcus, about his nostalgia for the ultimate return:

> "We are clay, Marcus, and nothing is real for us except the uncanny womb of Being into which we shall return. . . .Meanwhile I endure in the place in which I am. I endure, my Marcus. I wait for it all to finish." (Murdoch 165-66)[7]

Carel's existence turns out to have depended upon the continuation of the representation of the atemporal, undifferentiated cycle of the same, to which he resigns himself following the collapse of his system, caused by the permeability of its outer membrane--that is, its inability to keep Pattie properly inside and others properly outside. Both marginal characters on the inside of Carel's institution transgress the limits of its masking and, in Murdoch's words, "commit the crime of looking;" they are "guilty of seeing, of knowing," (171) and reveal the endless interplay of veilings and unveilings which topples the proprietary system of original presence[8].

Perhaps there are no two symbols more intrinsically related to the cycle of eternal return and unitary original presence than "the virgin" and "the garden." The two are joined by A.S. Byatt in the first novel in an as-yet-unfinished tetralogy, The Virgin in the Garden. From

its reminiscent beginnings in its prologue, which already, like the postscript of _Possession_, decenters the temporality of the narrative insomuch as this is a prologue which takes place some sixteen years later than the story itself, <u>The Virgin in the Garden</u> introduces a recurrent tension between the historic and the ahistorical[9], a tension heightened by the im/possibilities of beginnings and the irreversibility of exile:

> Alexander had a strongly linear sense of time. Chances did not come round again, they went, and stayed, past. He had sometimes thought of more modern, more artificial ways of rendering that matter, the virgin and the garden, now and England, without undue sentiment or heavy irony. But he would not try.
>
> "It was good the first time, though," Frederica was saying. "In the first place. All the singing and dancing. Funny, the fifties. Everybody thinks of it as a kind of no-time, an unreal time, just now. But we were there, it was rather beautiful, the Play, and the Coronation and all that."
>
> "A false beginning," said Alexander.
>
> "All the beginning there was," she said. "My beginning, anyway. That was what did happen."
>
> "I must go," said Daniel. "I must go."(15)

In the subtly foretelling absence of Stephanie Potter, Byatt's other three primary characters synoptically trace and enact the events of the historically past but graphically future "no-time" of the 1950's. Alexander Wedderburn, the writer of the myth of the age, desiring to tell a circular story but bound to inscribe lines looks back with regret. Frederica analyses and praises the aesthetic and the existential, noting what "everybody thinks," the beauty of the time, the fact that "we were there" and that it was, after all, "her beginning." Daniel, apocalyptic dweller in silence, witness to the revelation of glory and tragedy, simply enacts his own exodus.

Together with Still Life, The Virgin in the Garden reveals the duplicitous, oppressive exclusivity of institutions and institutional systems, and places opposing metaphors within a dynamic dialectic, the progress of which remains open-ended. Alexander's inability to "capture" the times, Daniel's antagonistic relationship with the church, Stephanie's forsaking of her father's attitudes toward the Church in her relationship with Daniel, Frederica's developing identity and the strange relationship between Marcus and Lucas Simmonds contrapose the central issues of the stability and exclusivity of narratives (self-sufficient institutional systems), and the interpretation (which may mean reinforcement, continued "veiling" or abolition, "unveiling," or both, as in "revelation") of them. When the search for transcendent Unity (the One) fails in the

face of immanent multiplicity, theo-ry gives way and the end of interpretation, the apocalypse is deferred, or perhaps its deferral is its occurrence.

The Virgin in the Garden's recurring theme of the chronicle, the writing of the story of the times, masque-ing history brings the issue of the reconciliation of the immanent and the transcendent to the fore. The immanent writing is obviously intended to be a representation, an image or an occurrence of the presence of the transcendent reality of which it speaks. On the other hand, such writing, such interpretation arises as an effort to find within transcendent nature and history the story of one's own life. But within such rewriting, the retranslation of actual history in terms of a mythic narrative, there occur the opposing efforts of connecting with the past and breaking with it, as Eliade's distinction between the religious and the non-religious elucidate. As Taylor points out, the "relig-ious" points to this double bind (religare) ("PT" 34). Byatt's use of an excerpt from the Easter "Times" implies this dual nature. Paradoxical images of old and new fill the excerpt's examination of the repositioning of Easter day "back to its natural and primeval place in the year. . . Old New Year's Day" (151 emphasis mine). Easter is opposed to Christmas as that holiday which "makes a clean-cut break with what has gone before," and entails a "sudden discovery that the annual miracle of the spring has come" (151 emphasis mine). Further, the human effort to "see in the passing of the seasons an image of

himself," is noted as an eternal occurrence; and not only with the seasons, but with the transformation of the government, the rising of a new Queen, the commoner is called upon to identify:

> But the spring comes with its annual message that all disasters and losses can be transcended by the unconquerable power of new life. As a nation, as a Commonwealth, we take as our suprememly representative person our young QUEEN, and in her inauguration dedicating the future by the ancient forms, we declare our faith that life itself rises out of the shadow of death, that victory is wrested out of the appearance of failure, that the transfiguration of which our nature is capable is not a denial of our temporal evanescence but the revelation of its deepest meaning. (152)

Such a full identification is not always possible, however, as the real tragedy which takes place in _Still Life_, a tragedy foreshadowed by the situation of Mrs Thone, who is "little moved" by the spectacle of the Coronation, since "her interest in the future, and her real interest in the outside world" had passed following the death of her son. Her faith in the transcendence of the ahistorical has passed irreversibly into the historical, and the natural/governmental unity had been shattered by the excessive multiplicity of her senseless loss. Mrs. Thone's hopelessness testifies to the failure of her informing narrative:

> Once she had understood that between a good
> breakfast and an end of a break bell a boy
> could run, fall, smash, twitch, stop· moving
> forever and begin to decay, she understood also
> that nothing could be undone, no air raid, no
> death camp, *no monstrous genesis*, and that the
> important thing about herself was that she had
> not much time and it did not matter greatly
> what she did with it. (243 emphasis mine)

Unlike the complete hopelessness in this description of
Mrs. Thone's survival, the tragedy of Stephanie's death
is survived by Daniel through the revision of his own
narrative. The simultaneous beginnings and endings of
relationships and marriages in The Virgin in the Garden,
too, are rewritten in consideration of the radical ending
of Still Life:

> Death is more of an end than marriage.
> Tragedies end with death. . . .
> Surviving. . .is not exactly resolution. Over
> the next few weeks he retold himself his own
> story, backwards from that moment, forwards
> into a future of which that moment was the
> origin. The rest of his life was life after
> this death. (344)

Stephanie, who bears of course the feminine form of the
name of the original Christian martyr, has, from the
moment she and Daniel met, thrown his beliefs into
question. Her father's reccommendation that Daniel read
"King Lear," a far superior life-narrative than the

Bible, in his opinion, Daniel's obsession with her and
their premarital sexual activities, as well as her death,
revealed to Daniel the shortcomings of his own informing
narratives. Following her death, Daniel is forced to
admit that he does not believe that the dead rise again,
a sentiment which brings the recurrence of the passage
"if after the manner of men I have fought with the beasts
at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not?"
(341, 350). Other words, too, heighten the fact that
Daniel can make no sense of this occurrence, that he
cannot stretch his unifying narrative far enough to
contain it:

> There was more: ordinary words, like stones,
> turning live Stephanie into remembered
> Stephanie, good-natured and distancing. Daniel
> took the words as another lesson of truth. She
> *was*, she *was*. (SL 338)

The metaphor recalls Byatt's description of Daniel's
religion in The Virgin in the Garden, given following
Daniel's advances toward Stephanie and the development of
the tensions between their views of each other and the
Church. Daniel "never addressed God. . .in words of his
own," finding the words of the church like the "Church's
stones, there" (108). Repeating the words of the church
reassured Daniel, letting him "sense the tug and rush of
forces behind his perception or comprehension" (108).
Daniel's "common sense Christ" was also such a
reassurance, having known of the "machinery of the soul,"
and "divine justice," but also being, Daniel believed,

long since dead (108). Beliefs had not mattered so much to Daniel, we are told, "compared to the certainties of strength and solidity he had felt, alone with God;" Stephanie, however, had come "between him and God," and his desire for her had dislodged a few of the stones from his religious foundations. Her death would shake that foundation to its core. Daniel's God of the powers of divine justice must undergo radical revision. The coincidence of the lessons of Lear and the Bible exhibit Daniel's attempts at that revision, following the well-intended suggestion by a sympathetic deaconness that "maybe Stephanie had been taken. . .because our Lord wanted Daniel to know the way of a life without such love" (346). Daniel considers that Christian critics maintain that Cordelia "was killed to effect the reconciliation of Lear with the heavens," but "who could believe in a God who killed that life to teach Daniel Orton a lesson about suffering?" (346). Soon impatient with the self-referentiality of considerations of Shakespeare, and now quite unsure of the purpose of the powers that be, Daniel sinks into a nihilistic apprehension of his own future:

> There were times when he was amazed that *anything* was alive, a greenfly or an early daffodil someone brought him, when he feared for its silky green weightless life as much as he feared for his children. . . .He had, perhaps, hoped that they would be a consolation. Instead, they were a source of

fear. He feared for them, and he feared them.
(347)

* Daniel is unable to reconcile himself to such a God, even
though it is to this God that he "tries" to pray; "not to
Christ," Byatt specifies, but the "undifferentiated God
who held together the stones of that place" (350). That
is, of course, the God of ultimate unity, the God of no
difference, providing the staticity of the institution.
Daniel feels a kind of sympathy for Christ and for his
own situation there in the realm of the undifferentiated
God, believing that that God had no compassion for him,
but only laws. Laws which Christ had understood, to a
limit, and laws which might bring some comfort in the
rationalization of his wife's death:

> Christ had said that the Father cared for the
> fall of a sparrow, but though it was clear that
> Christ had cared, it was not at all clear that
> the powers did. The power struck, according to
> law. Men had fragile skulls, their hearts
> pumped efficiently, delicately, robustly, and
> an air bubble could stop them. (350)

Rationalization, however, brings no end to the suffering;
but Daniel considered the image of the crucifixion to be
a call for the system to be otherwise, "for human
suffering to be at the centre, for man to be responsible
for his own destiny and for the destroyed to come again
. . .like St. Paul's wheat sown in corruption" (350).
Daniel's episode within the structure of the Church only
brings him back to his recurring theodical question,

"what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" (350).
That question remains unanswered, and Daniel has not
really come to terms with his wife's death by the "end"
of Still Life, though he has vented his rage at Gideon,
and "for a moment. . .felt peace". Daniel ends his story
"walking," tracing the steps of his own exile, and
returning to write and rewrite the story of his life
after death (358). We may return to the beginning, to the
prologue, for a glimpse of the future however, a future
in which Frederica notes that "Daniel does not change,"
and in which one finds Daniel, still in priestly costume,
"in the habit of thinking of himself as a survivor, a
battered and grizzled survivor" (4).

The narratives of Stephanie, Frederica, Alexander
and Marcus evolve similarly. Stephanie's relationship
with Daniel and to the Church, her ensuing family life,
Frederica's self-image and her self-discovery, the
mystical relationship between Marcus and Lucas Simmonds,
Marcus' development and Bodhi-tree experience in Still
Life, and Alexander's writing all entail the negation of
the insufficiencies of the undifferentiated unity and its
endless revision.

Stephanie, following Daniel's calling her out of her
father's house on a mission of mercy, and following his
own admissions of desire for her, attends Daniel's Easter
service, in which "her dislike of Christianity hardened
like ice," as she witnessed the opposition of her desire
to be part of the tradition and her repulsion at the
"realities" of English Easter. Like the "Times" excerpt,

Stephanie counters Easter with Christmas, preferring Christmas' true miracle of birth. Unsurprisingly, it is, in her opinion, a failed revision which was responsible for her repulsion. "It had not been possible," Stephanie ponders, "to graft Eastern blood rites and dismembered God on to English Spring as it had been possible to bring together Northern celebrations of the winter solstice," since "there was a hot, barbaric quality about the lessons for Easter Day," which did not fit with the light prettiness of English Spring, except perhaps in its reminiscence of "forgotten Druidic atrocities". Even the Apocalyptic city seems offensive to Stephanie, intriguingly enough because of its ahistoricality:

> The English mind was secretly horrified by glassy sea, crystal walls, white wool, brass feet and throne of the New Jerusalem where Spring would never come again because there was neither grass nor winter. (VIG 154-55)

It is not simply because of the incompatibility of England and Easter that Stephanie's mind wanders so during the service, but also because of her presence in that place, and its place in her life, and Daniel's place in her life as well, a life which had before been informed by strict rationality. She is also put off by what she sees as Daniel's hypocrisy, thinking that he "doesn't believe a word" (159). Following this episode of the inability of Stephanie's rationality to contain Daniel's presence, she is driven toward the nostalgic image Byatt uses recurringly, and she dreams of "a bare

room" (160). Stephanie does not allow this nostalgia to linger, however, nor does she exclude Daniel and her own shifting religious attitudes from her mind. Instead, in an embrace of transgression and historicality, she is soon recalling that "I went to bed with him. . . .It was a revelation" (188). The nostalgia soon returns, however, when, at Alexander's side, Stephanie desires "not to be" (200). Stephanie's oscillation continues into Still Life, in which she is torn between domestic duties and her own desire to continue her education, the tension between the two being played out within her ironic considerations of Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode." Stephanie further epitomizes the paradoxical relationship between will and human nature, generally in the juxtaposition of her drive toward both self-improvement and continuation of the species, and specifically in her final words, in which she tells her son Will that the cat which has captured the sparrow, like the power which will soon seize her, and like herself, has only acted according to its nature, and is therefore not "bad." Stephanie, however, attempts to keep this necessary "evil" properly outside her domestic system, and her final act comes as a result of her conviction that "cats eat birds. . .(b)ut not in our house" (332).

The construction and maintenance of the realm of the proper is, of course, driven by a nostalgia for an original paradise. That nostalgia is inevitably thrwarted within The Virgin in the Garden and Still Life, and certainly within the development of the character of

Frederica, the self-reflective autonomous subject who, lacking the compassion of her sister, approaches her many relationships, and the very future itself, as opportunites for "self"-development. Byatt portrays Frederica's development as an evolution marked by oscillation between self-assertion and nostalgia, from the "mirrored Frederica" of The Virgin in the Garden, who "had desired and admired only Frederica," and considers her virginity a burden, into the prophesied image, beyond the temporal realm of the text itself, of

> an ageing woman walking along a London street
> she could almost with certainty tell herself: I
> have come to the end of desire. I should like
> to live alone. (325)

Within the "present" of the narrative of The Virgin in the Garden, Frederica's developing post-adolescent psyche is paralelled by Byatt with the spirit of the age of the Coronation, marked by an overoptimistic attitude toward the recovery of lost innocence, an innocence for which the older Frederica would despair, despite the younger Frederica's attempts to lose it. "There had been," Frederica considers, "some sort of innocence about the rejoicing" at the time of the Coronation, an innocence described as "a truly aimless and thwarted nostalgia" (241). Although Frederica had at the time no appreciation for that nostalgic age, upon her later reflection, in which she has gained the knowledge that "everything is a new beginning," she mourns its loss:

> True Paradise, Proust said, is always Paradise
> Lost. Only when Frederica was old enough to
> equate the tenuous pastel hopes of 1953 with
> her own almost-adult knowledge that everything
> was a new beginning, that reality for her was
> the future, did she come to feel nostalgia for
> what at the time she diagnosed boldly as blear
> illusion. (242)

Still Life finds Frederica, safe in the knowledge that "everything is a new beginning," writing herself into a "model universe" (Cambridge) and loving a stranger (one "without a native tongue"), both of which result in her recognition that "the world was larger than it had been" (216). The expansion of Frederica's world, however, is a cause of crisis, eradicating the unity of her autonomy. Seeking to preserve the One in the face of the Many, Frederica's problem, Byatt writes, "was the existence of too many, and conflicting purposes" (283). However, Frederica's development as a "present subject" in Still Life depends upon the existence of "two hypothetical future Fredericas," both writers, one reclusive and one "worldly," and both of whom, Frederica insightfully notices, "might be indissolubly one" (283).

Marcus, the solitary, mystical younger brother of Frederica and Stephanie, who is visited by visions of light and falls victim to the duplicitous efforts of Lucas Simmonds to interpret those visions, supplies yet another of Byatt's examples of oppressive, exclusive, and in this case ultimately destructive, relationships. While

Lucas' enchanting of Marcus depends upon his theosophical revisioning of ecclectic bits of science and religion, he is driven by his desire for and his puritanical resistance to the sexual fiasco enacted between them. Lucas' grand vision seeks the pure transcendent beyond the corrupt corporeal, a purely original realm the revelation and reinstatement of which his intentions and actions evoke. Foreshadowing her use of paleontology, psychology and mythology in Possession, Byatt blends the scenes before the sexual encounter between Lucas and Marcus with images mythical, scientific and sexual:

> . . .the ammonites are early records of the *true* history of creation, and the secret meaning of the petrified snake, its *real* relation to holiness, is to be found in Jung's account, in Psychology and Alchemy, of Mercurius—as a dragon. He read out a whole page to Marcus, with mounting excitement. . . . *together* bird and snake made the finished circle, tail-in-its-mouth dragon, a meeting of earth and air which was just what he and Marcus wanted. . . . (299-300)

While the homeostatic relationship between Marcus and Lucas provides companionship for two otherwise socially marginal characters, each possesses the potential to fulfill the other's sense of completion, of closedness. Lucas, in Marcus' eyes, bears the power to control the strangely immanent infinity within Marcus' mind, granting boundaries to the powers therein. When Lucas doubts his

efficacy, Marcus assures him that he has changed his life, since Marcus "did not want his closed world to go," given that "Lucas Simmonds was his protection from the importunity of the infinite" (307). Lucas, on the other hand, sees Marcus as his virginal mediator, a bodily connection with whom might ironically bring purity from the corporeal realm:

> "I am not pure. That's what it is. Partly. Of the earth, earthy, though it smells and I hate the smell, I hate the whole messy business. I hate my body, I hate bodies, I hate hot and heavy. . . .You are pure. One recognises it when one sees it. You are a clean being, you see cleanly. . . ." (307)

Rather than connecting Lucas with the "where we began," the asexual sphere, Marcus' touch, described by Byatt in botanical terms (311), marks an apocalyptic moment, a rupture of Lucas' attempts to recapture the ahistoricality and propriety of "the garden," his *prima materia*, by means of "the virgin," Marcus. Recognizing this demise, Lucas notes, "It's a disaster. It's the beginning of the end" (311). From there it is a short step to the institutionalization of Lucas following his self-destructive episode, Marcus' rebellious visitation of Lucas, Lucas' final admission to Marcus that "God, or something, or me, wants you" (405), his warning to Marcus not to let "them" 'get his brain,' and Marcus' reluctant removal and return to his home. Now Marcus remains alone to reconcile his own body and mind, finitude and

infinity, without his errant teacher, who was now to be, at least Lucas thought, mutilated, and in precisely the wrong manner; "They'll--take bits of me away," Lucas had said, "not the right bits" but "bits of brain" (404).

The Marcus of <u>Still Life</u> finds himself striving to reconcile, or at least to hold in tension, the body and the mind, the finite and the infinite, without sacrificing one for the other. This means forgetting things parapsychological and concentrating on things "ordinary" (238). Marcus has in the past viewed the world outside his own mind as a "threatening, shapeless mess" given order by the terrifying power of his mental geometricizing, but by means of the biological, botanical and social experiences given Marcus by new friends and new interests, through the activities organized by Gideon Farrar, at the Centre for Field Studies, for instance, Marcus finds "peace," and particularly so through one transformative experience. Upon contemplation of an elm tree, upon both the tree as a site of "the intersection of light and earth," and his own imperfect ability to contemplate the tree itself, Marcus feels that "he himself was not there for nothing," that " he had his place, he was part of something" (241). However, while his contemplation of the tree and its relation to earth and light brings Marcus a new understanding of the word "earthed," insofar as it provides him a place to be, the coincidence of power and site recalls the "God of power" contemplated by Daniel, and foreshadows the fact that it will be Marcus who will witness the destructive force of

that power in Stephanie's death. That death will force
Marcus to acknowledge the historical actuality which even
as he moves toward enlightenment in meditation upon the
tree is subsumed under his ordering and unifying
structure. The English elm which Marcus contemplates,
Byatt points out, "might be thought a particularly happy
tree, a self-sufficient tree, a kind of single eternity"
which asexually "propogates itself underground;"
unsurprisingly, the tree's "lack of variation" makes it
particularly susceptible to disease. The elm represents,
Byatt tells us, a "sempiternal, essential part of our
English landscape" in 1955 (242). Dis-ease, and
instability, and historicality haunt the myth of self-
sufficiency, despite the efforts to eradicate the causes
of such instability. The Virgin in the Garden and Still
Life are marked, more than by any other single element,
by an attempt to write out instability from the
chronicles of the age.

It is of course Alexander Wedderburn who provides
that writing, as The Virgin in the Garden and Still Life,
like Possession as well, are distinguished by an
underlying "mythic narrative" which informs the primary
narrative. In The Virgin in the Garden, that myth is, as
we have seen, presented in Alexander's play, a play which
Bill Potter summed up as "a nostalgia for something that
never was, a *charming*, airy dream of a time which was in
fact nasty, brutish, and bloody" (368). It is easily
understood that the overarching tone of The Virgin in the
Garden is one of such nostalgia, felt by Alexander

preceding the play itself, when he is described with Byatt's recurrent white room image, "he wanted a clean white empty room and silence" (314). Despite Alexander's "strongly linear sense of time," the nostalgia of the system of eternal return at work in The Virgin in the Garden requires that the narrative remain entirely open, or at least that it seem so, its final lines offering no closure whatsoever, but a sustaining of its self-sufficiency, a self-sufficiency that is preserved and yet broken by its lack of an ending:

> That was not an end, but since it went on for a considerable time, is as good a place to stop as any. (428)

That is, self-sufficient though it may be, without beginning or end, a closed system like the virgin or the garden, the text requires another to follow it; that other text is of course Still Life.

The narrative of Still Life is informed by Alexander's development of another play, this time involving the life and work of Van Gogh. It is in the context of Alexander's discussion of Van Gogh with the eminent scholar, Professor Wijnnobel, whose words serendipitously grant Alexander "a priveleged insight into the order of things, in which all things are experienced as parts of a whole" (175). Alexander wants to grant to Van Gogh's painting (specifically "Breakfast Table" in this case), as Van Gogh had desired, a kind of liveliness, in fact, a "spermaticity" which Van Gogh sought through abstinence. Wijnnobel disagrees, and

counters with the concept of still life, "nature morte," as disguising a homeostatic nostalgia, the Freudian death-drive:

> Maybe we could see our fascination for still life--or *nature morte*--in these terms? Maybe the kind of lifeless life of things bathed in light is another version of the golden age--an impossible stasis, a world without desire and division?. . . .*Nature morte*, Mr. Wedderburn. Thanatos. (179)

The drive toward the unifying silence and stillness of death typifies Alexander's problem with his play, which, as he admits to Wijnnobel, is that its unity is restrictive. Asked if he has dramatized the fact that the historical Vincent was "a man you would move quickly away from, if he sat next to you in a cafe," Alexander responds tellingly, "I have tried. I can't get it all in" (179). The problem of the insatiability of the death-drive is also the problem of analogy, the inability of artifice to "make present" that of which it is a symbol, presented by Byatt through the comparison and contrasting of linguistic metaphor and artistic representation. Both are masks of "reality," and Alexander's struggle to relate Van Gogh's reality with words in at least a manner equal to the way Van Gogh had related reality with paint provides Byatt opportunity to critique her own process of writing. Alexander learns, "working with words on a painter who was an articulate painter," that visualization of things can precede their linguistic

articulation, in fact, visualization can occur without articulation. Alexander, however, is confined to work within his prison-house of language, as is Byatt, who notes that language behaves differently than paint, being an existential medium:

> Language runs up and down, through and round things known and things imitated in a way paint doesn't: no one ever *painted* "Put those apples in the basket and help yourself. . . .
>
> We know paint is not plum flesh. We do not know with the same certainty that our language does not simply, mimetically coincide with our world. There was a cultural shock when painters shifted their attention from imitating apples to describing the nature of vision, paint, canvas. But the nausea Jean-Paul Sartre felt on discovering he could not, with language, adequately describe a chestnut tree root is a shock of another kind. (It should be noted that though he failed to describe the thing mathematically, or with nouns and colour adjectives he did at least evoke it with metaphors, seal-skin, serpentine, a tree root connected to the world by a man describing a vision of unconnectedness.) (166)

Sartre's "vision of unconnectedness" of course parallels Marcus' elm tree experence, but Byatt also identifies her own abandoned intention to reach, or at least to exercise, a pure language, much like the early

Wittgenstein. Byatt, however, in Nietzschean/Derridean mode, observes that the original purity of such assertive, correlative "truth" quickly dissolves, and exists only in the realm of the mythic edenic origin:

> I had the idea when I began this novel, that it would be a novel of naming and accuracy. I wanted to write a novel as Williams said a poem should be: no ideas but in things. I even thought of writing without figures of speech, but had to give up that idea quite early. . . . Adam in the Garden named the flora and fauna (and the rocks and stones, presumably, and perhaps also the gases and liquids, atoms and molecules, protons and electrons). But even in the act of naming, we make metaphors. Consider the grasses, so carefully distinguished one from the other. They are little figures of speech. (301)

Byatt's dismissal of the privileged non-metaphorical realm recalls Nietzsche's iconoclastic considerations of the nature of language. In his <u>The Will To Power</u>, Nietzsche asserts that "(W)hat matters with words is never the truth, never an adequate expression," truth remaining beyond "the creators of language" (218). The metaphorical process merely begins with the word: "A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image--first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound -- second metaphor . . . " (218). When the word becomes a concept, it is still bound up in the endless shifting and

renaming process of knowing "numerous individualized, and thus unequal actions," or situations or things to which we might apply the name of a given concept, "which we equate by omitting the unequal" and then naming with the concept (219). The picture of truth that Nietzsche draws from all this is an unsettling one:

> What then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms--in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and which now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. (219)

Byatt's focus upon the concept of metaphor, which is shared by her character, Frederica, whose Phd thesis will be written on metaphor, calls into play the "theological delineation between sign and symbol" (Taylor, _Erring_ 57), a distinction noted by Frederica's mentor, Raphael Faber, who informs Frederica that 'what she needs is a theologian' with whom to discuss metaphor (286). Frederica's thesis, which Raphael Faber describes as "a work of incredible theoretical complexity, a life-work," promises to approach conflicting views of the quality of metaphor, specifically in Milton, based upon a

dissociation from "sensibility" which may or may not have occured with Milton, and in so doing, to address the concept of Incarnation (in Milton and Marvell and so on) as perhaps a relocation of that dislocated sensuousness. The ironically named Faber, however, reveals himself an "artificer" against artifice in his antipathy toward the concept of incarnation, and with it, the whole of Christianity:

> ". . .as I see it--the Christian religion
> itself is the final presumptuous image-making.
> I find the Incarnation absurd. I don't say you
> haven't got something, about the metaphoric
> difficulty of making a *character* out of
> incarnate Christ. But you can't expect me not
> to feel a little repelled. It's simply the
> final graven image, from my point of view."
> (287)

The fundamental quality of metaphoric incarnation to the whole of western thought from Aristotle to post-Nietzschean thought has been shown by Derrida, not leastly in his essays in "White Mythology," in which metaphysics is described, in one of many ways as "derivative from metaphor" (*relève de la metaphore*); derivative in this sense however, "*relève*," is a translation of Hegelian *Aufheben*, and carries its paradoxical implications (258). The task of metaphysics has been to control the loss which metaphor carries with it, the slippage from the realm of the proper name, the de-centering of presence, the inability of the symbol to

re-present the original--in short, to mask the death of
God. "Metaphor," says Derrida, "always carries death
within itself" ("WM" 271), as that which is "carried off
to a horizon or proper ground, and which must finish by
rediscovering the origin of its truth"--a failing eternal
return which marks "Platonic, Aristotelian and Cartesian
discourse," and which is represented in those discourses
by the images of the Sun and light ("WM" 268-69). Hegel,
in his Lectures on the Philosophy of History, utilized
the images to describe "the history of the world," as
traveling East to West, beginning in Asia, ending in
Europe, as well as the accompanying process of Spirit's
becoming conscious of itself, symbolized by the
coincidence of the subject's creative "inner sun,"
considered higher than the external sun ("WM" 269). In
the light of reason, the metaphor, the symbol, is
"grounded" and "has roots," which "bestow upon the symbol
its revelatory power" (Taylor Erring 57). Consider here
Marcus' contemplation of the tree, bathed in light, and
in meditation upon the power of his own inner light;
here, "between two suns," the end of metaphor becomes,
as Derrida observes, "an interiorizing anamnesis" ("WM"
269). This episode takes place within a chapter
entitled by the printer, despite the author's intentions,
"A Tree, of Mary, One," a mistranslation of
Wordsworth[10] into an image reminiscent of the Stabat
Mater, upon which Kristeva meditates--both portraying an
image of the revelation of the Virgin before the tree,
that image which in chapter two recalled Eve's fall and

the eucharistic act of the reader before the book (the edible tree). Kristeva's reflections from "Stabat Mater," are held here in tension: "Between two suns," the end of metaphor becomes "an interiorizing anamnesis." Consider the inability of the graven image to "present" the transcendent, presenting only its absence, an unending metaphor-making, rather than a sufficient reflective "naming."

Might the tree of Mary, the re-presentation of the One, have hidden the tree of many? A typographical, topographical, tropographical error. . .A scandalous suggestion, masked and eradicated to preserve the proper, the unity, and the authority, of the One.

The "end of metaphor" denotes the end of the sufficiency of the original Sun, the Good, the One, the transcendent, in a recollection, a remembrance, a

*Mamma : anamnesis (Kristeva "Stabat Mater" 166).

Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible (Kristeva, "SM" 162).

It would seem that the "virgin" attribute for Mary is a translation error. . . . The fact remains that Western Christianity has organized that "translation error," projected its own fantasies into it and produced one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 163).

The calm of another life, the life of that other who wends his way while I remain henceforth like a framework. Still Life. There is him, however, his own flesh, which was mine yesterday. Death, then, how could I die to it? ("SM" 169). Every God, even including the God of the

recurrent anamnesis of the death of the transcendent and its kenotic negation.

The eternal return of re-presentation is the recurrence of the primordial womb, and the desire toward unity finds that unity marked by separation to its core.

Beginning as negation of transcendence; beginning as the realm of the mask.

The endless play of metaphor unmasks the self-sufficiency of the transcendent powers, the One, the Good, which, interestingly enough, is just what Carel Fisher spoke out against, just what Marcus Fisher kept alive, and just what keeps reappearing in Iris Murdoch's metaphysical journeys into morality ("the good is—in the Platonic image of the Sun which has dominated Murdoch's ethics—the *light* in which human existence is lived" [Antonaccio 279]). It is the

Word, relies on a mother Goddess. Christianity is perhaps also the last of the religions to have displayed in broad daylight the bipolar structure of belief: on the one hand, the difficult experience of the Word—a passion; on the other, the reassuring wrapping in the proverbial image of the mother—a love. For that reason, it seems to me that there is only one way to go through the religion of the Word, or its counterpart, the more or less discreet cult of the Mother; it is the "artists'" way, those who make up for the vertigo of language weakness with the over-saturation of sign-systems ("SM" 176-77).

A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language—and it has always been so . . .("SM" 178).

What an inconceivable mania it is to aspire to singularity, it is not natural, hence it is inhuman; the mania smitten with Oneness ("there is only One woman") can only impugn it

tendency of the Platonic Sun to burn away difference, it is the tendency of the Eternal to negate itself, to reduce difference to the ash of apocalypse, but that ash retains the fire of that burning, or so Derrida writes: language, words, ash, cinders, bearing the trace of the original flame, and that ash is seen as fertile soil, the ground from which the seed of the same grows to preserve the originary presence, in absence --dissemination, germination: "Pure difference, different from (it)self, ceases to be what it is in order to remain what it is. That is the origin of history, the going down (*déclin*), the setting of the sun. . .then in place of burning all, one begins to love flowers. The religion of flowers follows the religion of the sun" (Derrida, <u>Cinders</u> 45-46). Of course all this should be taken with a grain

by condemning it as masculine. . . Within this strange feminine see-saw that makes "me" swing from the unnameable community of women over to the war of individual singularities, it is unsettling to say "I". . . .Did not Christianity attempt, among other things, to freeze that see-saw? To stop it, tear women away from its rhythm, settle them permanently in the spirit? Too permanently. . . ("SW" 182-83).

The love of God and for God resides in a gap: the broken space made explicit by sin on the one side, the beyond on the other. Discontinuity, lack and arbitrariness: topography of the sign, of the symbolic relation that posits my otherness as impossible. Love here, is only for the impossible.

For a mother, on the other hand, strangely so, the other as arbitrary (the child) is taken for granted. As far as she is concerned-- impossible, that is just the way it is: it is reduced to the implacable. The other is inevitable, she seems to

of salt (lightly), for as Nietzsche, quoted by Derrida in "The Flowers of Rhetoric: The Heliotrope" reminds us, "One day all that," that is, all philosophizing and moralizing, "will be of just as much value, and no more, as the amount of belief existing today in the masculinity or feminity of the sun" ("WM" 245).

say, turn it into a God if you wish, it is nevertheless natural, for such an other has come out of myself, which is yet not myself but a flow of unending germinations, an eternal cosmos ("SM" 184-85).

> We two remake our world by naming it
> Together, knowing what words mean for us
> And for the others for whom current coin
> Is cold speech-- but *we* say, the tree, the
>   pool,
> And see the fire in air, the sun, our sun,
> Anybody's sun, the world's sun, but here, now
> Particularly our sun. . .(Byatt, P 114: a
> passage from the poetry of Randolph Henry Ash;
> a passage which is particularly meaningful to
> Beatrice Nest, whom Byatt describes as
> "transfigured" at the opening of Ash's grave.)

Murdoch's heliotropism is shared by Byatt, by her own admission, but with a difference; a difference which acknowledges, as Nietzsche did, a connection with the masculinity or femininity of the sun. "What I write is heliotropic," says Byatt, whose uncompleted PhD thesis

dealt with neoplatonic creation myths, in which "the Sun
is the male Logos, or Nous, or Mind, that penetrated
Hyle, or matter, or female earth, and brought it to life
and form" (The Shadow of the Sun xiii). Byatt finds
this analogy both "exciting and depressing," because of
its coincident physical truth, given that "life does
depend absolutely on light," and analogical falsehood,
since "there is nothing intrinsically male about the sun,
or female about the earth" (xiii). In light of this
male/female geological dichotomy, Byatt states that her
novels "all think about the problem of female vision,
female art and thought, using these images (amongst
others, and not without interest in the male, too)"
(xiii). "In The Virgin in the Garden," says Byatt, the
complicated imagery finds "the helpless visionary who saw
too much light" both male and a mathematician, while the
"power figure was female, Queen Elizabeth I, who presides
over the pale world of her successor, all ruddy and
shining" (xiii). Still Life presents Vincent Van Gogh as
the central figure, "a whole-hearted sun-driven, light-
driven maker (but who also had problems about sexuality
and work)" who, while "he was mad with too much light,"
still "got something done, he made something" (xiv). "In
Possession," says Byatt, "where there are two poets, both
of whom can and do write, and can and do feel sexual
passion, even if tragically, the sun becomes quietly
female for both of them," drawing upon Norse and German
sources in which the sun is female (xiv). "My poets," Ash
and Lamotte, says Byatt, "quietly accepted the

personification, destroying the old Nous-Hyle myths
without even shouting about it" (xiv). Altizer, as we
have seen, in his reflections upon "radical catholicism,"
equates the death of God in the modern world with the
rise of the feminine deity, a figure found in Dante's
Beatrice, Blake's Mother of God, and Joyce's Anna Liva
Plurabelle:

> (I)n the modern world. . . .the Christian God and
> the Goddess are at this point one and the same,
> or the redemptive God and the redemptive
> Goddess are inseparable, and so inseparable
> that the redemptive God can now only be
> manifest and actual as the Goddess. Thereby we
> can see the deep necessity of the death of God
> in the modern world, a death or nullification
> which can alone now release an apocalyptic
> epiphany of the Goddess. . . .("The
> Contemporary Challenge of Radical Catholicism"
> 193)

The presence of the (M)other (and this is no virginal
feminine repesentation of pure presence, no mere female
counterpart to the Eternal male), as discussed in chapter
two, is known in the absence of the Father, of the
(A)(a)uthor(ity), a death which is a genesis, and a death
the historical knowledge of which announces the birth of
a new writing, the reading of which enacts the presence
in absence of the body of the Author, of the Father, and
of the Sun[11]. In his "The Ellipsis of the Sun," within
"White Mythology," Derrida points out that "there is only

one sun in (the Aristotelian) system. The proper name, here, is the nonmetaphorical prime mover of metaphor, the father of all figures. Everything turns around it, everything turns toward it"; but he also points out that "if metaphor, the chance and risk of mimesis, can always miss the true, it is that metaphor must count with a determined absence. . .("WM" 241-243). It is a "reasonable" (that is, for the subject illuminated by the light of reason) tendency to denote, to pronounce the proper name, but "even in naming, we make metaphors," says Byatt, and her post-Nietzschean interpretation of language brings into relation her own work as writer as well as the work of her characters in correlating, contrasting and revisioning narratives, both their own and those to which they find themselves related (or not). The Virgin in the Garden, Still Life, and Time of the Angels, present the inevitability of the breaching of unitary homeostasis, the metaphorical process which is that breaching, and the continual masking which, acknowledged or not, constitutes its continual and simultaneous confirmation and negation. That breaching is known in the negation of eternal return found within Altizer's reading of Eliade, Hegel and Nietzsche, and the concentration of that reading upon the self-emptying God known in the incarnational movements of Creation, Fall and Crucifixion. It is exercised in Altizer's re-writing of the re-writing of Scripture exhibited through Milton, Blake and Joyce, and in the developing knowledge of the negative movement of the transcendent, a movement known

in the eucharistic language of immanence, a language which marks the sacrifice of the (A)(a)uthor-ity and the rise of the voice of the repressed. As the negation of the eternal One, that is a voice of plurality. That voice is heard in the contemplation of the death of God, a contemplation which finds the subject suspended, between the symbolic and the semiotic, before the Book, before the tree, before the cross as the dreamer of the dream of the Rood, faced with the fragment, in that place which is the site of *jouissance*, the site of the breakdown of systems of exclusion. It is the one who reads from such a position to whom Irigaray writes, "To interpret Him (the Crucified) therefore means 'go beyond' if possible without return. Not be satisfied with such a love. Leave it to the men of *ressentiment*, and try to create another world" (Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche, in Oppel 106). That world is, like Byatt's textual locus, a place and time of neither pure cyclicity nor pure linearity, but a place which marks the *jouissant* labor of evolution and relativity, a labor which brings forth the birth of one outside "proper lineage" and the closed "family circle." That is a birth the story of which is consistently masked, hidden, discovered and re-written, and the story of that origin, like the story of Maia's origin, is a story without end.

Shall we know the death of God as the genesis of a "return to an original Christianity" which is also a negation of theology? Altizer's return to "original Christianity" is a return to a "historically evolving

faith," which acknowledges the inevitability of metaphoric continuation. The movement away from the eternally returning unity, represented by the One, the Good, the patriarchal Sun, the eternal, unmoving God of Christendom, requires an understanding in which God is no longer an objective subject of theology, but the abject Word which is written from within the poetic discourse, not the origin of metaphor, but the trace of absence which marks the course of metaphorical anamnesis. The negation of eternal return is the birth of historically evolving faith, a universal faith freed from the limits of the phallogocentric, unitary oppression for the sake of the economy of the proper. For those who would read religiously, the self-kenotic God, the God who is other-than-God, requires theology which is other-than-theology, a writing which is the total presence of apocalypse, the embodiment of the God who is Word.

NOTES

[1] It should be stressed that Altizer's refusal to name God as eternally transcendent does not preclude the possibility of God's "otherness;" as Altizer specifies in The Self-Embodiment of God:

> The only God who can be named is the God who is finally other, for God is other in being named, and God is finally other in being named as God.
> To speak of God is to speak of the God who is finally other, finally and wholly other, and finally other than Himself (sic). Only by being other than Himself can God be finally other, for only by being other than Himself can God lose, and finally lose, an identity which is eternally the same. (33)

[2] Vico, Byatt tells us, "had looked for historical fact in the poetic metaphors of myth and legend; this piecing together was his 'new science'" (P 3). Kuntz describes Vico's efforts as a marriage of linearity and cyclicity in which the consistency of cycles points to the reassurance of Divine design in a dynamic of harmaony and equilibrium (520-530). It is from this grand system (specifically Ash's copy, his personal property, the contents of which had not been catalogued by the library), the margins of which Roland studies, that the fragment falls, and the decentering begins.

[3] For example, Rosemary Reuther cites the Biblical prophetic tradition as providing a basis for biblical critique. The "prophetic principle" allows for the critical establishment of historically evolving norms by which texts may be regarded as authoritative, even as the early church "set aside as no longer normative" much of Hebrew ritual law (Sexism and God-Talk 23). Biblical faith, says Reuther, informed by a prophetic tradition, "constantly criticizes and renews itself and its own vision" (24).

[4] In 1966 Derrida had presented "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at a conference at Johns Hopkins, which, according to Christopher Norris, "marked the first impact of deconstruction among North American literary critics (242). It was also in 1966 that Time magazine ran a cover story on death of God theology, supported by a cover on which big red letters upon a solid black background read "Is God Dead?" ("Toward a Hidden God," April 8, 1966)

[5] It was as a result of its recommendation by A.S. Byatt that I came to read The Time of the Angels. In a recent phone conversation, Byatt suggested that The Time of the Angels had been an attempt to deal literarily with the theme of the death of God, and according to Murdoch herself, had left more to be done. Byatt's forthcoming Babel Tower would attempt to accomplish at least some of

what Murdoch had left undone. Further, Byatt is, in the process of researching for the writing of Babel Tower, reading Altizer—specifically The Genesis of God.

[6] The sound of apocalypse is of course the death knell, Derrida's *Glas, Klang, le son* of the the death of God (Taylor, A 267-303). The excess of Heidegger's theoretical words speak only silence to Pattie, a deafening silence which foreshadows the approaching death of her God.

[7] Despite his use of death of God language, Carel reveals his fundamental motivation to be what Altizer refers to as an "ultimate nihilism," a "sacrifice of God for 'the nothing'" (GOG 150). That "nothing" which is a Freudian image of the primordial womb, a nothing which "disguises an eternal death," is the pathological desire of the Oedipal drive toward oneness with the "ultimate womb which is the womb of all and everything" (GOG 151). Such a desire overlooks the inherent separation within the maternal relationship, a separation highlighted by Kristeva and Irigaray (Irigaray, Je, Tu, Nous 39; Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 178).

[8] Derrida notes the connection between this act of forbidden vision and the Apocalypse, and also the deferral of apocalypse in "Of An Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy."

> *Apokalupto,* I disclose I uncover, I unveil, I reveal the thing that can be a part of the body, the head or the eyes, a secret part, the genitals or whatever might be hidden, a secret, the thing to be dissembled, a thing that does not show itself or say itself, that perhaps signifies itself but cannot or must not be handed over to its self-evidence. (64)

[9] In a recent letter Byatt explained,

> The whole of The Virgin in the Garden turns on cyclical history (renaissance" and Christian linear history (resurrection) and therefore on grass on the one hand and Marvell's innocent garden with its grass and innocent red and white, and the red of blood and the stone of death. I also think that the figure I "found" while writing that novel, Spenser's Dame Nature, hermaphrodite (Hermes, Aphrodite and as you say Hermes is trismegistus and the psychopomp. . .) is in fact the Nature who haunts and opposes God (Christ) in In Memoriam and is red in tooth and claw (and also hermaphrodite "behind the veil" see Ricks' note on the figure of the Sais-temple). And these figures are there in Angels and Insects (30 July, 1994).

[10] Byatt has pointed out that the phrase is a printer's error for what should be "A Tree, of Many, One," from Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode." Despite her objections, the mistake continues to be repeated (letter to the author, 5 May 1994).

[11] Eliade elucidates the connection between the origin of Christianity as an "official" religion and the solar Sol Invictus cult, with which Constantine was associated, noting the heavenly vision of Constantine and the discrepancies regarding the interpretation and origin of the cipher, IHS, the abbreviated form of the name of Christ, the Son. Constantine considered the sun, and possibly then, the Son, as "the most perfect *symbol* of God" (Eliade, A History of Religious Ideas 2:411).

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