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## Fort! Da!: Thinking Death in Freud and Faust

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*Fort! Da!: Thinking Death in Freud and Faust*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
Mercer Greenwald

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2021

*dedicated to  
my little black poodle  
Schnapsidee,  
who gives me the best ideas.*

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## INTRODUCTION

## A Blood Oath: Literature and Psychoanalysis

What would it mean to think death? We can think about death, around death. We can fear death, avoid death, and mourn the deaths of others. But death itself seems unthinkable to us. Maybe we can catch a glimpse of it for a moment – if we are tired and squint really hard, when we find ourselves despairing, or when we drive past a gory roadkill – but then in an instant it is gone from our view and from our thought. Death, in its terrifying unthinkability, establishes a limit in our life and our knowledge of what life is. The natural law that death stops life forever is non-negotiable. There has never been a commandment, “Thou shalt die,” because there is no transgression of this that can be thought or effectively carried through. The after-life has no shape and no profile; as a phenomenon, its only “elusive shapes” [*schwankende Gestalten*] are the shapes formed through metaphors, stories, and myths.<sup>1</sup> When we speak of the dead, we say they are “pushing up daisies” or that they “bit the dust.” One day she “croaked.” He “kicked the bucket.” But none of these representations of death ever speaks of death itself. Because death, understood as the end of life, cannot be experienced, we think that death cannot be thought.

How are we to think about something that poses a limit to thinking as such? We might take a speculative approach, as if we were looking through a spyglass to catch sight of an unidentified object that is flying away from, or perhaps toward us. Eventually, though, we must look up and continue on our limping path. Our feet hurt.<sup>2</sup> We imagine that we are speculating about what is above us and in front of us on our path. Similarly, when we speculate about death, we imagine that

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first line of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*.

<sup>2</sup> Freud’s last lines of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*] quote “Die beiden Gulden,” a version by Friedrich Rückert of a maqamat by Al-Hariri, an eleventh century Arab grammarian: What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping. . . . The Book tells us it is no sin to limp” [*Was man nicht erfliegen kann muss man erhincken. / Die Schifft sagt, es ist keine Sünde zu hincken*]. Freud, *BPP*, 78. JL 69. We should also remember that Oedipus also is a prince with a limp. Freud also quoted these lines in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess of Oct. 20, 1895. Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 285.

we are speculating about a death that will occur in the future. But what if the death we must speculate about is also behind us or all around us? Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's famous line "*stirb und werde*" or "die and become," shows us how death can provide a new mode of becoming. By careful misreading, we might speculate or theorize (or phantasize) that Goethe's process of becoming might be initiated by the death—the period of inanimacy— that comes before birth.<sup>3 4</sup> When we think of death as something that came before life, death-after-life can be thought of as a return, and thus can become more thinkable. In this way, death is understood not only as a singular event but also as a repetition: what occurred before life will occur again after life and recur again and again continually throughout life. The many repetitions of life hold the most basic structure of death, as both origin and end. Speculating on death in this way, we are reminded of Sigmund Freud's words from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: "It is surely possible to throw oneself into a line of thought and to follow it wherever it leads out of simple scientific curiosity, or, if the reader prefers, as an *advocatus diaboli*, who is not on that account himself sold to the devil" [*Man kann sich doch einem Gedankengang hingeben, ihn verfolgen, soweit er führt, nur aus wissenschaftlicher Neugierde oder, wenn man will, als advocatus diaboli, der sich darum doch nicht dem Teufel selbst verschreibt*].<sup>5</sup>

Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) in 1920 – in the midst of the Spanish influenza pandemic and two years after the end of the First World War – during a period of mass death on a previously unimaginable scale. I began writing this project exactly a century later, in a moment of uncanny historical repetition: the death toll from the COVID-19

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<sup>3</sup> For the quote "die and become" [*stirb und werde*], see Goethe's poem "Blissful Yearning" [*Selige Sehnsucht*].

<sup>4</sup> In "Analysis Terminable Interminable," Freud makes this connection between theorizing and phantasizing: "we must call the witch to our help after all' – the Witch metapsychology. Without meta-psychological speculation and theorizing—I had almost said 'phantasizing'—we shall not get a *step forward*." Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 1964), Vol 23: 225. This quote references the Witch in Goethe's *Faust*, who gives Faust a rejuvenating potion per Mephistopheles's request. This quote echoes the moment in *Faust*, when (referring to Mephistopheles), Faust says: "Unless he can discuss a *pas* at length, / it might as well not have been danced. Steps forward are what most annoy him" [*Kann er nicht jeden Schritt beschwätzen, So ist der Schritt so gut als nicht geschehn. Am meisten ärgert ihn, sobald wir vorwärts gehn*]. Goethe, *Faust*, 4153.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, *BPP* 71; *JL* 64.

pandemic increases every day, and each time I read the news, I am confronted with the story of a new mass shooting or another black man or woman who has been murdered by the police. There is perhaps no better time than now, in a moment when death surrounds us, to return to the Freudian death drive – a concept that was introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and has haunted us for a century.

In Chapter V of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes the unimpaired movement of the drives by turning to “the poet’s words” [*des Dichters Worten*];<sup>6</sup> Freud says that the life drive “presses ever forward unsubdued” [*ungebändigt immer vorwärts drängt*].<sup>7</sup> The poet Freud refers to here is Goethe, and these lines perfectly describe Goethe’s eponymous character Faust. But when we look more closely at the passage from which Freud derived his quote, we learn that this line is actually spoken by Mephistopheles, the character we may understand as Faust’s opposite, “the spirit that constantly negates! / And rightly so! What has arisen / deserves to be annihilated” [*der Geist, der stets verneint! / Und das mit Recht; denn alles, was entsteht, / Ist wert, daß es zugrunde geh*].<sup>8</sup> This description recalls Freud’s death drive [*Todestrieb*], which urges the subject on a circuitous path toward destruction and disintegration; this drive presses the subject “to return to the inanimate state” [*zum Leblosen zurückzukehren*].<sup>9</sup> Just as it would seem that Mephistopheles and Faust are opposing characters in Goethe’s *Faust*, the life drive and the death drive might be construed as antithetical forces in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. But in both cases, it is more complicated than this, and the dialogue

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<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 5; *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (London: Imago Publishing, 1940), 45. In the following citations, I will refer to these texts as BPP and JL. I will not provide the German for non-primary texts that appear in the footnotes. If a non-primary text appears in the body of my argument, I will provide the German as either a block quote within the body of my text or in a footnote.

<sup>7</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe *Faust* (Berlin: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2017), 1851-1857. The translations I provide are by Stuart Atkins, *Goethe: The Collected Works: Faust I & II, Volume 2* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> Goethe *Faust*, 1338-1340. My translation.

<sup>9</sup> Freud, BPP 46; JL 40.



between these two texts helps to make this clear. As I noted in the Goethe passage that Freud quotes, Faust is not describing himself; he is being described by Mephistopheles, and to make matters even more perplexing, Mephistopheles is dressed “in Faust’s gown” [*in Fausts langem Kleide*].<sup>10</sup> Because of this, we may wonder to what extent the description “pressing ever forward unsubdued” [*ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt*] describes Faust or Mephistopheles.<sup>11</sup> Faust and Mephistopheles become intertwined in this passage; similarly, Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the life and death drives always exist in tandem. Freud and Goethe also become tangled in this key moment when Freud turns to the “poet’s words” as if to put on Goethe’s clothes, as Faust does Mephistopheles’s.

Freud’s relationship with Goethe invites a closer look. Avital Ronell writes in *Fighting Theory* that “Freud saw in Goethe the starting point of psychoanalysis.”<sup>12</sup> Goethe seems to cast a wide shadow for many philosophers and poets living and writing in the German language after him. Ronell writes specifically about the relationship between Goethe and his successors: “Freud said that he couldn’t write anything while he was reading or close to Goethe. He frequently associated Goethe’s name with a sort of paralysis... Goethe acts as a destructive force and, at the same time, as someone who inspires a feeling of endless indebtedness.”<sup>13</sup> Freud’s relationship with Goethe is paralyzed in a state of ambivalence; indeed, Freud is just as wary of the world of poetry as he is in awe of it. The poetry of Goethe seems to have inseminated Freud’s work; Goethe’s words live, breathe, and grow inside of it. Ronell introduces another metaphor of the interiority and exteriority between Goethe and Freud: “But writers do not simply admire their predecessors. They chow down on them, introject them, and sometimes don’t manage to spit them out in time. Then the drama of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1851-1857. My translation.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, *BPP* 5; *JL*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Avital Ronell, *Fighting Theory* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

incorporation takes hold and the undead exact their revenge.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, we might playfully say that Freud is impregnated, nourished, haunted, or perhaps even virally infected, by Goethe’s words; in any case, he is unable to escape Goethe’s poetic-genetic material.

What is clear is that the relationship between Freud and literature is anything but clear. It is undoubtedly ambivalent. On the one hand, Freud denounces the poets as vulgar con men, thus falling in the lineage of Plato, who in the last book of *The Republic* informs us that the divorce between philosophy and poetry was already considered an “old quarrel.” In order to describe this ancient animosity between philosophy and poetry, Plato quotes several expressions from poets about philosophy; these expressions deemed philosophy “the yelping hound barking at her master,” and they identify “the band of philosophers who have made Zeus a slave” and they say that philosophy is “mighty in the idle babble of fools.”<sup>15</sup> But on the other hand, Freud also plays the role of poetry’s greatest admirer and advocate. In Freud’s work there are countless moments of intertextual references to the poets, and one of the most common referents is Goethe’s *Faust*. Freud is suspiciously jealous of the poets, despite the fact that he goes to them seeking knowledge.

Freud knocks on Dr. Faust’s door like a humble student, but his knock is answered by Mephistopheles instead. Mephistopheles, though, does not immediately provide Freud with the knowledge he longs for. Instead, he withholds his knowledge according to the teaching: “The best of what you know, you may not tell the pupils” [*Das Beste, was du wissen kannst, / Darfst du den Buben nicht sagen*].<sup>16</sup> The poets are Freud’s inscrutable teachers—they are for him what Jacques Lacan calls “the subject supposed to know”—but their knowledge is concealed.<sup>17</sup> Freud also follows the lead of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 290.

<sup>16</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 166. Here Freud is quoting Goethe’s Mephistopheles in *Faust*, 1840-1. This is one of Freud’s favorite quotes; he quotes them again later in the text on page 461, in multiple letters to Fliess on December 3, 1897 and on February 9, 1898, and he quotes these lines when he receives the Goethe prize in 1930, at the end of his life.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, Seminar XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 267.

Mephistopheles insofar as he obscures his knowledge from the public, positioning himself in the role of the scientist who conceals the very material he reveals. In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud admits to concealing various points of knowledge from his readers when he writes, “when I interpret my dreams for readers I am obliged to adopt [similar] distortions” [*wenn ich meine Träume für den Leser deute, bin ich zu solchen Entstellungen genötigt*].<sup>18</sup> Just like the Delphic Oracle, Freud promises his readers secret knowledge that resists revelation. This knowledge can only be revealed in a distorted form akin to the dreamwork. In fact, one of the primary forms of the dreamwork, condensation [*Verdichtung*], is related to the German word for poetry, “*Dichtung*.” Freud writes in the *Interpretation of Dreams* that “there lies in dreams a marvelous poetry” [*Der Traum hat eine wunderbare Poesie*], and it seems that the dream work and the poet use the same language of concealing and revealing.<sup>19</sup> For Freud, the work of the mind is akin to the work of poetry and, thus, the work of the analysis is akin to the practice of reading. Fully understanding Freud’s project, therefore, necessitates the work of reading and interpreting poetry.

Freud’s citations and references to *Faust* often appear at key moments in the process of his argumentation; we might say that they are theoretical navels in Freud’s work. In an opaque moment in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud turns his attention to what he calls the “navel” of the dream—the piece of the dream which resists analysis:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.

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<sup>18</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 166; Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1914), 48.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 91; *Ibid.*, *Die Traumdeutung*, 17.

*In den bestgedeuteten Träumen muß man oft eine Stelle im Dunkeln lassen, weil man bei der Deutung merkt, daß dort ein Knäuel von Traumgedanken anhebt, der sich nicht entwirren will, aber auch zum Trauminhalt keine weiteren Beiträge geliefert hat. Dies ist dann der Nabel des Traumes, die Stelle, an der er dem Unerkannten aufsitzt. Die Traumgedanken, auf die man bei der Deutung gerät, müssen ja ganz allgemein ohne Abschluß bleiben und nach allen Seiten hin in die netzartige Verstrickung unserer Gedankenwelt auslaufen. Aus einer dichteren Stelle dieses Geflechtes erhebt sich dann der Traumwunsch wie der Pilz aus seinem Myzelium.<sup>20</sup>*

In every dream there is a point of obscurity, a knot which cannot be loosened up, a navel that reaches down into a time before life began, before birth, that cannot be known. These dream elements that occupy the position of the navel point toward a certain origin, but they have no defined end; they move in every direction. This description of the navel provides us with a window into the theoretical importance of Goethe's poetry within Freud's process of theorization. Just as each dream has a navel which is umbilically linked to an unknown unconscious origin, so too do Freud's texts themselves possess a navel that is marked by references to *Faust*. The places where the threads of Freud's text become inextricably tangled are precisely the places where Goethe's words appear, shooting up out of the theory "like a mushroom out of its mycelium" [*wie der Pilz aus seinem Myzelium*].

In the following chapters, I will examine the dialectical relationships within and between Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Goethe's *Faust*, in order to illuminate the fraught relationship between psychoanalysis and literature. Instead of applying Freud's theory of the drives to *Faust*, I will attempt to come to my own "Auflösung" or "solution" by allowing the two works to reveal, unravel, and implicate each other. Shoshana Felman writes in the introduction to her edited volume *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* that the word "implication" derives from the Latin word "*implicare*," meaning "being folded within."<sup>21</sup> According to Felman, when we examine the way literature and psychoanalysis "implicate each other," we may find that literature does not

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 528; 414.

<sup>21</sup> Shoshana Felman, "To Open the Question," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 9.

exist “outside psychoanalysis, since it motivates and inhabits the very names of its concepts, since it is the inherent reference by which psychoanalysis names its findings.”<sup>22</sup> I hope to follow Felman’s approach over the course of this project, and probe the extent to which “the poet’s words” are embedded within Freud’s theories of death, the death drive, and repetition. Indeed, literature is folded within psychoanalysis in the same way that Mephistopheles is folded within Faust’s clothes and Goethe is enfolded within Freud’s.

I am therefore turning to Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Goethe’s *Faust I* with a wish to find a framework for understanding death in the time of the pandemic. In my first chapter, I examine how Freud theorizes death in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in a way that is informed, clarified, and complicated by the poet. In my second chapter, I turn to Goethe’s *Faust* in order to read the language of blood as an analogy for the death drive, which I argue propels the drama onward. In my final chapter, I discuss the respective endings of each text so as to understand more about the end of life and to find a way to bring my project to a proper end. I conclude with some comments on rhythm. Over the course of this project, I stand with Freud as an *advocatus diaboli*. In the end, I hope to have demonstrated how we must read literature and psychoanalysis together in order to better understand death and drive. These are the ideas I have in mind as I set out to read Freud and Goethe on equal footing, side by side, as if they had written a contract signed in blood.

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<sup>22</sup> Felman, “To Open the Question,” 9.

## Death and Drive in Freud's *Beyond*

Our unconscious is just as unreceptive to the idea of our own death, just as desirous of murder toward a stranger, and just as divided (ambivalent) toward a beloved as the man of the primitive times.

*Unser Unbewusstes ist gegen die Vorstellung des eigenen Todes ebenso unzugänglich, gegen den Fremden ebenso mordlustig, gegen die geliebte Person ebenso zwiespältig (ambivalent) wie der Mensch der Urzeit.*<sup>23</sup>

### Death After Life: To Speculate

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is Freud's first text to deal systematically with the (in)famous drives: the life drive, also known as Eros, and the death drive, sometimes called (but not by Freud) Thanatos. In this text, Freud takes a speculative approach in his move beyond the language of the pleasure principle to provide a better method of understanding the treatment-resistant phenomena that began appearing in the clinic after the war.<sup>24</sup> No matter how Freud approached the analysis of patients who had returned from the war, it seemed that certain masochistic compulsions, traumatic dreams, and uncontrollable symptoms, whose point of origin were unreachable by memory, nonetheless continued repeating in his patients' waking lives. Prompted by the presence of death (and death-like symptoms) all around him and guided by his speculative approach, Freud was able to think life and death in new ways. Likewise, if we seek to raise again the question of death, to think death in new ways, we must throw ourselves back into Freud's line of thought and follow it diligently to see where it will lead. My inquiry into death will deal with Freud's notion of the death drive on the level of its repetitive structure. I will leave the notion of death as some impossible end for later; I will focus instead on the death that happened before life and the repetitive deaths that happen over the course of life. In thinking through death not just as the end of life, but also as the

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<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), Vol 14: 299. Freud, *Zeitgemässes über Krieg und Tod* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag, 2008), 21.

<sup>24</sup> "What now follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which readers will appreciate or ignore according to their particular perspective. Furthermore, an attempt to exploit an idea consistently, out of curiosity as to where this will lead" [*Was nun folgt, ist Spekulation, oft weitausbolende Spekulation, die ein jeder nach seiner besonderen Einstellung würdigen oder vernachlässigen wird*]. Ibid., 18; 23.

before of life and the content of life itself, I hope to follow Freud in the attempt to make death thinkable.

### Death Before Life: The Drives

Freud titles his text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but he posits this “beyond” as something that came *before* the pleasure principle.<sup>25</sup> This before can be understood developmentally as something earlier in the evolutionary history of the living organism, but at the same time, it can be understood as a kind of psychic primacy, on which all subsequent mental processes depend.<sup>26</sup> The text could be considered a theoretical return to the earlier idea of the pleasure principle as well, because the notion of the pleasure principle in the development of Freud’s thought came chronologically before the ideas in this work.<sup>27</sup> Freud’s *Beyond* is one of his most thought-provoking, but also one of his most confusing and ambiguous texts. A more precise understanding of the primacy of the drives will help to untangle some of the most difficult theoretical knots in Freud’s work.

What exists in the *beyond* that comes *before* the pleasure principle? In Chapter V, Freud discusses the drives [*Triebe*], which are the “most important and the most obscure element of

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<sup>25</sup> What is the pleasure principle? J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis write in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*: “One of the two principles which, according to Freud, govern mental functioning: the whole of psychical activity is aimed at avoiding unpleasure and procuring pleasure. Inasmuch as unpleasure is related to the increase of quantities of excitation, and pleasure to their reduction, the principle in question may be said to be an economic one.” (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 322.

<sup>26</sup> Freud asks us to imagine this hypothetical living organism: “Let us picture a living organism in its most simplified form as an undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation” [*Stellen wir uns den lebenden Organismus in seiner größtmöglichen Vereinfachung als undifferenziertes Bläschen reizbarer Substanz vor*]. Freud, BPP 28-29; JL 25-26.

<sup>27</sup> Freud became considerably less sure about the importance of an economic definition of pleasure and unpleasure over the course of his career. While the early Freud maintained that pleasure corresponded to the reduction of tension, later he became open to other possibilities, writing in *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*: “We will, however, carefully preserve this assumption in its present highly indefinite form, until we succeed, if that is possible, in discovering what sort of relation exists between pleasure and unpleasure, on the one hand, and fluctuations in the amounts of stimulus affecting mental life, on the other. It is certain that many very various relations of this kind, and not very simple ones, are possible.” Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 1964), Vol 14: 109-40.

psychological research” [*selbst das wichtigste wie das dunkelste Element der psychologischen Forschung*].<sup>28 29</sup> The drives come before the pleasure principle in order of importance; they are theoretically primary, but they are also the most obscure element of the theory. The obscurity of the drives is due in part to their interiority. The drives are the “representatives of all the forces originating in the interior of the body and transmitted to the mental apparatus” [*Die ausgiebigsten Quellen solch innerer Erregung sind die sogenannten Triebe des Organismus, die Repräsentanten aller aus dem Körperinnern stammenden, auf den seelischen Apparat übertragenen Kraftwirkungen*].<sup>30</sup> These drives, therefore, are of the body, and they move across to the mental apparatus. They take part in what Freud calls the “primary psychical process” [*Primärvorgang*]: the unconscious system, where investments [*Besetzungen*] can be, as in the dream-work, completely “transferred, displaced and condensed” [*übertragen, verschoben, verdichtet*].<sup>31</sup> The drives are primary on the level of psychic importance and position in the mental apparatus.

The drives are then modified by the more advanced processes, which still remain unconscious. The “secondary process,” the process which governs our waking lives, functions in a higher stratum of the mental apparatus and aims to “bind the [drive] excitation reaching the primary process” [*Es wäre dann die Aufgabe der höheren Schichten des seelischen Apparates, die im Primärvorgang anlangende Erregung der Triebe zu binden*], in order to bring the system to its most stable and constant form.<sup>32 33</sup> When the secondary processes fail to come to completion, “traumatic neurosis” [*traumatische Neurose*] may result.<sup>34</sup> The binding of the primary drive-impulses by the secondary

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<sup>28</sup> Throughout this project, I will be using the word “drive” for the German word “*Trieb*.” This correction of the Standard Edition translation of “instinct” for “*Trieb*” has become common practice.

<sup>29</sup> Freud, *BPP* 40; *JL* 35.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 40; 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-1; 35-6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 41; 36.

<sup>33</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis write that the pleasure principle and the reality principle together make up this secondary unconscious process. The reality principle is one of the principles which operates in mental functioning. It succeeds the pleasure principle developmentally, but never supersedes it. The reality principle modifies the pleasure principle, in order to give the organism a mode of postponing pleasure as a result of external factors. Laplanche and Pontalis, 324-5.

<sup>34</sup> Freud 41; 35.



process is necessary for the pleasure principle to govern the psychic apparatus. Indeed, this act of binding and reducing the excitation level of the system is what is most important about the more advanced unconscious processes, which include the pleasure principle.

As we see, these obscure drives are at work *before* the pleasure principle can dominate mental life; they take precedence over the pleasure principle in the sense that they sequentially come before it.<sup>35</sup> Freud tells us that the drives function “not, indeed, in *opposition* to the pleasure principle, but independently of it and to some extent in disregard of it” [*zwar nicht im Gegensatz zum Lustprinzip, aber unabhängig von ihm und zum Teil ohne Rücksicht auf dieses*].<sup>36</sup> Although the drives are not definitively positioned in opposition to the pleasure principle, they can by chance come into conflict with it. When the drives do happen to work against the grain of the pleasure principle and for a short while appear to dominate mental life, they give the impression that there is “daemonic force” or something of a “*dämonischen Charakter*” at work.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, we can say that the drives exist in proximity to the spirit world. Our contact with the drives is like our contact with ghosts or demons. These ghosts died before us, but now they have come back from the dead to haunt us again (and again) over the course of our lives. They are uncanny, insofar as they should have remained hidden,

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<sup>35</sup> But Freud demands a amount of caution when thinking about the “dominance” of the pleasure principle. He writes: “It must be pointed out, however, that strictly speaking it is incorrect to talk of the dominance of the pleasure principle over the course of mental processes. If such a dominance existed, the immense majority of our mental processes would have to be accompanied by pleasure or to lead to pleasure, whereas universal experience completely contradicts any such conclusion. The most that can be said, therefore, is that there exists in the mind a strong *tendency* towards the pleasure principle, but that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure,” [*Dann müssen wir aber sagen, es sei eigentlich unrichtig, von einer Herrschaft des Lustprinzips über den Ablauf der seelischen Prozesse zu reden. Wenn eine solche bestände, müsste die übergroße Mehrheit unserer Seelen Vorgänge von Lust begleitet sein oder zur Lust führen, während doch die allgemeinste Erfahrung dieser Folgerung energisch widerspricht. Es kann also nur\* so sein, daß eine starke Tendenz zum Lustprinzip in der Seele besteht, der sich aber gewisse andere Kräfte oder Verhältnisse widersetzen, so daß der Endausgang nicht immer der Lusttendenz entsprechen kann*] Freud 6; 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 41; 36.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

but here they are.<sup>38</sup> Like a riddle, the drives are at once concealed and revealed.<sup>39</sup> Like spirits, they cannot be properly seen, and this is why they are the most important object of our speculation.

Freud's drives originate within the body, they exist before the pleasure principle, and they often are independent of (and occasionally oppose) the pleasure principle. But what is the aim of the drives? What would it mean for the drives to have an aim in the first place? Later in Chapter V, Freud writes:

It seems, then, that [a drive] is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.

*Ein Trieb wäre also ein dem belebten Organischen innewohnender Drang zur Wiederherstellung eines früheren Zustandes, welchen dies Belebte unter dem Einflüsse äußerer Störungskräfte aufgeben mußte, eine Art von organischer Elastizität, oder wenn man will, die Äußerung der Trägheit im organischen Leben.*<sup>40</sup>

The drives came into existence before the pleasure principle, but they aim to reinstitute their primacy in psychic life. In this sense, the drives are restorative; they aim to reestablish some older, more primal state of things [*ein Früheres*].<sup>41</sup> The drives move along a “circuitous path” [*komplizierteren Umwege*] toward this goal; they are “an expression of the *conservative nature* of the living substance” [*den Ausdruck der konservativen Natur des Lebenden*].<sup>42</sup> Freud writes also that if the first forms of life were to pursue an existence according to primary processes only, without secondary-process intervention, then the “elementary living entity would from its very beginning have no wish to change; if conditions remained the same, it would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life”

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<sup>38</sup> Freud describes the uncanny in “The Uncanny” as “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.” Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1919), Vol. 12, 142.

<sup>39</sup> Brian Tucker argues in *Reading Riddles: The Rhetorics of Obscurity from Romanticism to Freud* that the central quality of a riddle is the interplay between concealing and revealing. Tucker writes: “The riddle then occupies the intermediate field between these two extremes: it neither completely suppresses nor completely reveals” (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 18-9.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, *BPP* 43; *JL* 38.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 44; 39.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 45; 41. *Ibid.*, 43; 38.

[*Das elementare Lebewesen würde sich von seinem Anfang an nicht haben ändern wollen, hätte unter sich gleichbleibenden Verhältnissen stets nur den nämlichen Lebenslauf wiederholt*].<sup>43</sup> Hence somewhat paradoxically, the goal of the drives is not located somewhere in the future, but rather at something which has taken place in the past.

The implication of this idea is that there is an earlier status – a before to life itself – that the organism aims to repeat. The organism aims to return to the “inanimate state” [*zum Leblosen zurückzukehren*] that preceded all life; I call this state the death-before-life.<sup>44</sup> Freud writes that when we look backwards, we see that “inanimate things existed before living ones” [*Das Leblose war früher da als das Lebende*], because “what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavored to cancel itself out” [*in dem vorhin unbelebten Stoff trachtete danach, sich abzugleichen*].<sup>45</sup> This pursuit of the animate substance demonstrates the relationship between repetition and negation. The primitive organism, Freud speculates, lived and died at an extremely short interval. It was only “external influences” [*äußere Einflüsse*] that led to a longer life for the organism, requiring “more complicated detours before reaching its aim of death” [*zu immer komplizierteren Umwegen bis zur Erreichung des Todeszieles nötigten*].<sup>46</sup> These detours lead the drive astray briefly, but they also allow the drive to maintain its original conservative aim. The word “detour” means “to turn aside” on a “roundabout or circuitous way.”<sup>47</sup> Likewise, “*Ummweg*” literally means “way around,” and it implies a deviation from the straight path. The detour or *Ummweg* has the function of prolonging life and delaying the ultimate aim [*das Ziel*], which is death. The aim of the drive, therefore, is to conserve the death that came before life.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 45; 39.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 46; 40.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 46; 41.

<sup>47</sup> Freud describes his whole career as an *Ummweg* in his autobiography: “My interest, after making a lifelong detour through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking.” Freud, “An Autobiographical Study” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1919) Vol. 20: 141.

The drives move according to this aim on a circular path that conserves and also repeats; when faced with forces from outside, the drive takes the scenic route.

Hence paradoxically, the drives move forward in order to conserve, and they have an aim at a death in the future that was also in the past. Freud asserts his twin theses: 1. “the aim of all life is death” [*Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*] and 2. “inanimate things existed before living ones” [*Das Leblose war früher da als das Lebende*].<sup>48</sup> Life emerged from nonlife and is driven to repeat this state of being. It is impossible for the drives to be conservative and also to repeat a state of things that has never before occurred. Freud writes: “On the contrary, it must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads” [*Es muß vielmehr ein alter, ein Ausgangszustand sein, den das Lebende einmal verlassen hat, und zu dem es über alle Umwege der Entwicklung zurückstrebt*].<sup>49</sup> A contradiction is present in this description. On the one hand, a drive is something that continues forward. It is something that compels us to move from point A to point B. In German, the word for drive, “*Trieb*,” has its roots in the Proto-Germanic “*dribana*,” meaning “to drive, push, compel to go.”<sup>50</sup> This is expressed in Freud’s use of the word “strive” [*streben*] as characterizing their tendency. On the other hand, however, the death drive is striving toward the complete cessation of movement.

Initially, following the notion of *striving*, it appears that the drives aim at a new *Grund* [ground, base, reason, bottom] or *Ziel* [goal]. They are in constant motion, however circuitous it might be, and it seems as if there must be an ultimate destination. It remains unclear whether the purpose of such a revolution is aimed at a new ground or instead at the absence of ground

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<sup>48</sup> Freud, *BPP* 46; *JL* 40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 45; *JL* 40.

<sup>50</sup> See “*treiben*” on Wiktionary Free Dictionary: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/treiben>.

[*Abgrund*—if the drives aim at a *Ziel* or if they aim only to maintain their revolutionary motion.

Freud answers this question:

Every modification which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instincts and stored up for further repetition. Those instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new.

*Die konservativen organischen Triebe haben jede dieser aufgezwungenen Abänderungen des Lebenslaufes aufgenommen und zur Wiederholung aufbewahrt und müssen so den täuschenden Eindruck von Kräften machen, die nach Veränderung und Fortschritt streben, während sie bloß ein altes Ziel auf alten und neuen Wegen zu erreichen trachten.*<sup>51</sup>

Freud himself pits this deceptive “change and progress” against the “ancient goal” of the drives. If the drives regressively move toward this ancient goal, *repression* forces the drive in the opposite direction, “towards change and progress.” While the unconscious drives aim to return, the repressed drive is “always pressing forward” [*ungebündigt immer vorwärts dringt*].<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> The drives can therefore move backwards and forwards. How can the movement of the drives be both progressive and conservative? Freud likens the motion of the drives to the movement of the earth around the sun: just as the earth revolves around the sun, the drives take “circuitous paths” [*alle Umwege*].<sup>54</sup> There is harmony in this apparent contradiction: the drives develop; they move forward—but their movement is circular. The most important characteristic of the drives is that, although they conserve, they do not move backwards. When a sphere moves in circular orbit, a point behind the sphere is also of course in front of it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Freud, *BPP* 45; *JL* 40.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 51; 45.

<sup>53</sup> This is a quote from Goethe's *Faust*: “*Ihm hat das Schicksal einen Geist gegeben, / der ungebündigt immer vorwärts dringt, / Und dessen übereiltes Streben / Der Erde Freuden überspringt.*” Goethe, *Faust*, 1856-60.

<sup>54</sup> Freud 45; 40.

<sup>55</sup> We might note that the celestial spheres do not take a circular shape, but rather an elliptical one. Shoshana Felman describes Lacan's discussion of the Copernican Revolution in her book *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight*. Lacan plays with this word *ellipse*, which in French has two different semantic centers: *ellipse* means the non-circular geometric figure, and the word *ellipsis* is a rhetorical figure of speech that means omission, obscurity, or an eclipse of language. In elliptical movement, there is always a round path; when moving along an elliptical line, the point where one begins will always be intersected once more. But with an elliptical path, as opposed to a circular path, there are two focal

Here we should take careful note of the previously discussed passage regarding the “more complicated *detours*” that seduce the drives “before reaching its aim of death” [*bis zur Erreichung des Todeszieles nötigten*].<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup> This problematizes Freud’s notion of the so-called “self-preservative” [*Selbsterhaltungstrieb*] drive, which postpones the organism’s death.<sup>58</sup> The self-preservative drive does not, as is commonly assumed, work against death just because it postpones death, nor does it only function to preserve, or conserve, the organism’s life. Rather, the self-preservative drive protects the organism’s ability to die “in its own fashion” [*auf seine Weise*].<sup>59</sup> Life itself is not necessarily at stake—it is only a byproduct; what matters is the organism’s particular death. The self-preservative drive only operates with respect to death. Often, these self-preservative drives are mistakenly juxtaposed with the previously discussed drives, which are conservative. Freud maintains, however, that all of the drives are conservative when he writes:

The [drives] which watch over the destinies of these elementary organisms that survive the whole individual, which provide them with a safe shelter while they are defenseless against the stimuli of the external world, which bring about their meeting with other germ-cells and so on—these constitute the group of the sexual [drives]. They are conservative in the same sense as the other [drives] in that they bring back earlier states of living substance; but they are conservative to a higher degree in that they are particularly resistant to external influences; and they are conservative too in another sense in that they preserve life itself for a comparatively long period.

*Die Triebe, welche die Schicksale dieser das Einzelwesen überlebenden Elementarorganismen in acht nehmen, für ihre sichere Unterbringung sorgen, solange sie wehrlos gegen die Reize der Außenwelt sind, ihr Zusammentreffen mit den anderen Keimzellen herbeiführen usw., bilden die Gruppe der Sexualtriebe. Sie sind in demselben Sinne konservativ wie die anderen, indem sie frühere Zustände der lebenden Substanz wiederbringen, aber sie sind es in stärkerem Maße, indem*

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centers, and as a point moves along an elliptical line, it will not always be the same difference from the center. When we speak about ellipses and ellipsis, like metaphor, there is simultaneous *sameness* and *difference*. This is what distinguishes the language of the ellipse from the language of revolution, and this is what Lacan is trying to point out about Freud’s Copernican Revolution, which is not just a return to origins, but also what Felman describes as the way in which “a reflexive movement, in returning to and upon itself, in effect subverts itself—finds something other than what it had expected, what it had set out to seek; the way in which the answer is bound in effect to displace the question; the way in which what is revolving, what returns to itself, radically displaces the very point of observation.” Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 67.

<sup>56</sup> Freud 46; 41.

<sup>57</sup> By “seduce” I mean “to lead” (Latin: *educere*) “astray” (Latin: *-se*). See “seduce” in Wiktionary Free Dictionary.

<sup>58</sup> Freud 46; 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; 41.

*sie sich als besonders resistent gegen äußere Einwirkungen erweisen, und dann noch in einem weiteren Sinne, da sie das Leben selbst für längere Zeiten erhalten.*<sup>60</sup>

Both the death drive and self-preservative drive press forward only to reach a point from the past. They are progressive, because they move around a circle, as well as conservative. The death drive strives to conserve a previous state of inanimacy and operates repetitively. The self-preservative drive propels the living being forward in order to keep a path of its own, in order to conserve its specific death. What is highly at stake for the self-preservative drives is the organism's "own" death, or rather the own-ness of their death, and with this own-death the organism's particularity.

While the drives are equally conservative, Freud's uses of the word "conservative" are cleverly unequal. The death drive moves to conserve a previous state of inanimacy. If the self-preservative drive were to be conservative in the same way as the death-drive, it would need to push toward the previous state of selfhood before life began. This scenario would be supported by the Aristophanes myth from Plato's *Symposium*. In Chapter VI, Freud discusses this myth about an androgynous being with four arms, four legs, and two faces, who was tragically torn apart and left to desire their other half. After this division, in sex and erotic love, each half "threw their arms around one another eager to grow into one" [*sie umschlangen sich mit den Händen, verflochten sich ineinander im Verlangen, zusammen zu wachsen*].<sup>61</sup> According to this myth, the modern individual lives only as a part of what they once were, and in sex with a representative of their other half, they repeat an earlier mode of unified existence. Before Freud calls to his aid the poet-philosopher's myth, he first discusses a set of "experiments on protista" which demonstrate the process of "conjugation" after cellular division. These experiments provide us with a model for how reproduction functioned before multicellular organisms enter the scene. The experiments on protista that Freud describes show the way in which conjugation has a "strengthening and rejuvenating" effect [*stärkend und*

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 48; 42.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 70; 62.

*verjüngend*].<sup>62</sup> This effect goes beyond mere conservation. The self-preservative drives not only prevent improper ends or short-circuited deaths, they also renew life itself. The life drive gives some poor soul a drink to make him young again.<sup>63</sup>

What is at stake with the life drives and the death drives is not progression and conservation—we have already established the fact that these two modes are not mutually exclusive. What differentiates these drives, on the contrary, is the principle of union versus the principle of destruction. The Aristophanes myth shows us the act of restoring union, which Freud describes as the aim of Eros. Because Freud clearly tells us that his new theory is *dualistic*, we are compelled to believe that there are also a set of “destructive instincts” [*Destructionstriebe*] that aim to break bonds and annihilate all existing unities. In Freud’s final binary, the death drive takes over as the “primal,” “daemonic” force which strives to destroy and disintegrate existing bonds, while sexuality goes over to the side of the binding process.<sup>64</sup>

Freud’s final theory of the drives is both dualistic and dynamic. Freud is not concerned with isolating the drives, as he explicitly writes in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*: “What we are concerned with are scarcely ever pure instinctual impulses but mixtures in various proportions of the two groups of [drives].”<sup>65</sup> In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud writes that the death drive is impossible to see except when it combines with Eros: it “eludes our perception... unless it is tinged with eroticism.”<sup>66</sup> The two drives—the life drive (or Eros) and the death drive—sometimes hide each other and render the other theoretically inaccessible. Sometimes the death drive exists in a form that is so destructive to the mental apparatus that all forms of unity and all forms of love are impossible. Sometimes Eros

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 66; 59.

<sup>63</sup> Just as the Old Peasant and the Witch give Faust a drink in Goethe’s *Faust*. See page 50.

<sup>64</sup> J. LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 99-100.

<sup>65</sup> See Freud *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 125.

<sup>66</sup> “Da wir aber dazu genötigt sind, müssen wir den Eindruck gewinnen, daß die Todestriebe im wesentlichen stumm sind und der Lärm des Lebens meist vom Eros ausgeht. Nach unserer Auffassung sind ja die nach außen gerichteten Destruktionstriebe durch Vermittlung des Eros vom eigenen Selbst abgelenkt worden.” See Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), 121-22.



dominates mental life so intensely that all hints of destruction—all analyses—appear only to aid an eventual synthesis. Whether it is, in the end, destruction that serves to provide the materials for binding to take place, or binding that sets the groundwork for eventual destruction, still resists understanding. The drives will not be pulled apart. They are bound up with each other and they operate only in tandem, not unlike Aristophanes's multi-limbed creature.

In sum, when we think about death as something occurring before life, we recognize the event of death-after-life as a repetition. This discovery is also crucial in understanding the movement of Freud's drives over the course of our lives. The drives conserve and progress, they move us onwards, and yet they regress. The drives can synthesize matter and analyze matter, bind lovers together and pull them apart. The drives may hide each other, but it is precisely in their interplay that they reveal each other. These contradictions must not be interpreted as a theoretical dilemma; on the contrary, the only way to engage with the logic of the drives is to understand their movement dialectically. To learn more about the dialectic at play in the drives, I will discuss the way that death, always tinged with eroticism, operates within life.

### Death Within Life: Repetition

In the previous section, I established how death as an event after life can be observed as a repetition of death-before-life, since death has actually already taken place. I discussed the idea of a death-before-life in Freud's presentation of the drives, which are at work in the primary process that comes before the pleasure principle enters the scene. The death drive works in tandem with the erotic drive over the course of life, and the work of the drives is the motor behind the specific course of a particular life. Thus, death is not only a singular event but also a drive that is at work in all the little repetitions that occur during life. These many repetitions throughout life hold the basic structure of death, as both origin and end. I have established in the previous sections that the death

drive, as repetition, has a circular structure. We can see this idea in its inverse, too: every repetition within life reminds us of the structure of death. In this section, I will discuss the way that death may be situated within life in the form of repetition.

Over the course of life, everyone—even the self-proclaimed “healthy” individual—is sure to encounter many repetitions; many things seem to return constantly in our lives. For instance, when it seems like every time I look at the clock it says 11:11, I might claim: “This has happened ten... or could it be eleven... days in a row!” What is the universe trying to tell me? In active situations, when the subject has chosen their own fate, the return of the same seems relatively non-threatening. In passive situations, however, the continuous return of the same seems alarming and uncanny—perhaps even daemonic.

To describe the “perpetual recurrence of the same thing,” [*ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*] Freud uses an example from literature.<sup>67</sup> <sup>68</sup> He recounts a story written by Torquado Tasso in *Gerusalemma Liberata*, wherein the hero Tancred accidentally kills his beloved Clorinda when she is disguised as the enemy.<sup>69</sup> After Tancred buries Clorinda, he goes through a magic forest and slashes a tree that appears to be threatening him, but the tree turns out to be holding Clorinda’s soul prisoner, and the bleeding tree speaks in Clorinda’s voice. Unbeknownst to him, Tancred has killed Clorinda twice; he repeated the murder “unwittingly” [*unwissentlich*].<sup>70</sup> Freud also includes a clinical example when he recalls the “woman who married three successive husbands, each of whom fell ill soon afterwards and had to be nursed by her on their death-beds” [*Man denke zum Beispiel an die Geschichte jener Frau, die dreimal nacheinander Männer heiratete, die nach kurzer Zeit erkrankten und von ihr zu Tode gepflegt werden*

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<sup>67</sup> Freud, *BPP* 23; *JL* 21.

<sup>68</sup> Freud might have borrowed this phrase from Nietzsche – Nietzsche’s “eternal return of the same” or “eternal recurrence” which appears for the first time in *The Gay Science* [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*].

<sup>69</sup> Goethe also composed a play that follows the legend of *Torquado Tasso*.

<sup>70</sup> Freud 24; 21.

*mußten*].<sup>71</sup> Both Tasso's Tancred and this perpetual widow find themselves repeating the most upsetting moments of their lives, and their repetitions have a certain air of fate about them. Together, these two cases lead Freud to his claim: "If we take into account observations such as these, based upon behavior in the transference and upon the life-histories of men and women, we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle" [*Angesichts solcher Beobachtungen aus dem Verhalten in der Übertragung und aus dem Schicksal der Menschen werden wir den Mut zur Annahme finden, daß es im Seelenleben wirklich einen Wiederholungszwang gibt, der sich über das Lustprinzip hinaussetzt*].<sup>72</sup> Just as soon as Freud names the repetition compulsion as such, though, he pulls it back. He writes that it is only in "rare instances" [*in seltenen Fällen*] that the repetition compulsion can be observed "in pure effects."<sup>73</sup> But just as quickly as he pulls it back, Freud throws the language of the repetition compulsion back into the argument: "Enough is left unexplained to justify the hypothesis of a compulsion to repeat—something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides" [*Es bleibt genug übrig, was die Annahme des Wiederholungszwanges rechtfertigt, und dieser erscheint uns ursprünglicher, elementarer, triebhafter als das von ihm zur Seite geschobene Lustprinzip*].<sup>74</sup> Perhaps the difficulty of recognizing the repetition compulsion in the larger theoretical schema that Freud is laying (or maybe *playing*) out is due to Freud's undying attachment to the pleasure principle.

Even though the compulsion to repeat is psychically primary to (i.e. more primitive than) the pleasure principle, Freud has not altogether abandoned the language of the previously theorized pleasure principle. Freud writes:

But if a compulsion to repeat *does* operate in the mind, we should be glad to know something about it, to learn what function it corresponds to, under what conditions it can emerge and what its relation is to the pleasure principle—to which, after all, we

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 25; 22.

have hitherto ascribed dominance over the course of the processes of excitation in mental life.

*Es bleibt genug übrig, was die Annahme des Wiederholungszwanges rechtfertigt, und dieser erscheint uns ursprünglicher, elementarer, triebhafter als das von ihm zur Seite geschobene Lustprinzip. Wenn es aber einen solchen Wiederholungszwang im Seelischen gibt, so möchten wir gerne etwas darüber wissen, welcher Funktion er entspricht, unter welchen Bedingungen er hervortreten kann, und in welcher Beziehung er zum Lustprinzip steht, dem wir doch bisher die Herrschaft über den Ablauf der Erregungsvorgänge im Seelenleben zugetraut haben.<sup>75</sup>*

Freud is developing his idea of repetition, which seems to work against the grain of the pleasure principle, while still seeming to remain tied to the primacy of the pleasure principle as such. In continuing his search for the connection between the pleasure principle and the compulsion to repeat, Freud himself seems reluctant to move totally “beyond” [*jenseits*] his prior theory. He introduces the idea of the repetition compulsion into his discourse, retracts it, and reintroduces it. What kind of game is Freud playing?

It is called the “*Fort! Da!*” game! Freud’s encounter with this game occurred while he was living with some mysterious child “under the same roof... for some weeks” [*ich lebte durch einige Wochen mit dem Kinde und dessen Eltern unter einem Dach*].<sup>76 77</sup> In the following, Freud writes about “the first game played by a little boy of one and a half... invented by himself” [*das erste selbstgeschaffene Spiel eines Knaben im Alter von 1/2 Jahren*].<sup>78</sup> I have reproduced Freud’s entire *Fort! Da!* game description here to aid my close reading of this embedded text. It will become clear after examining this child’s

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 13; 11.

<sup>77</sup> The most personal comment Freud makes about the little boy is made in a footnote: Freud says: “When the child was five and three-quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really ‘gone’ (o-o-o), the little boy showed no signs of grief. It is true that in the interval a second child had been born and had roused him to violent jealousy” [*Als das Kind fünfdreiviertel Jahre alt war, starb die Mutter. Jetzt, da sie wirklich ‚fort‘ (o—o—o) war, zeigte der Knabe keine Trauer um sie. Allerdings war inzwischen ein zweites Kind geboren worden, das seine stärkste Eifersucht erweckt hatte*]. Freud, BPP, 16; JL, 14. We should note that even in this footnote, Freud does not identify his own relationship to the boy, and why he was living under the same roof as him for some weeks. This boy is, in fact, Freud’s grandson Ernst. The mother who died is Freud’s daughter Sophie. I discuss this crucial omission on page 23-25.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 13; 11.

game that Freud's own theorizing repeats the *Fort! Da!* dynamic that he describes in this anecdote.

Freud writes:

The child was not at all precocious in his intellectual development. At the age of one and a half he could say only a few comprehensible words; he could also make use of a number of sounds which expressed a meaning intelligible to those around him. He was, however, on good terms with his parents and their one servant girl, and tributes were paid to his being a 'good boy'. He did not disturb his parents at night, he conscientiously obeyed orders not to touch certain things or go into certain rooms, and above all he never cried when his mother left him for a few hours. At the same time, he was greatly attached to his mother, who had not fed him herself but had also looked after him without any outside help. This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o', accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word 'fort' ['gone']. I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play 'gone' with them. One day I made an observation which confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o'. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da' ['there']. This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. As a rule, one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untriringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act.

*Das Kind war in seiner intellektuellen Entwicklung keineswegs voreilig, es sprach mit 1 1/2 Jahren erst wenige verständliche Worte und verfügte außerdem über mehrere bedeutungsvolle Laute, die von der Umgebung verstanden wurden. Aber es war in gutem Rapport mit den Eltern und dem einzigen Dienstmädchen und wurde wegen seines „anständigen“ Charakters gelobt. Es störte die Eltern nicht zur Nachtzeit, befolgte gewissenhaft die Verbote, manche Gegenstände zu berühren und in gewisse Räume zu geben, und vor allem anderen, es weinte nie, wenn die Mutter es für Stunden verließ, obwohl es dieser Mutter zärtlich anhing, die das Kind nicht nur selbst genährt, sondern auch ohne jede fremde Beihilfe gepflegt und betreut hatte. Dieses brave Kind zeigte nun die gelegentlich störende Gewohnheit, alle kleinen Gegenstände, deren es habhaft wurde, weit weg von sich in eine Zimmerecke, unter ein Bett usw. zu schleudern, so daß das Zusammensuchen seines Spielzeuges oft keine leichte Arbeit war. Dabei brachte es mit dem Ausdruck von Interesse und Befriedigung ein lautes, langgezogenes o—o—o—o hervor, das nach dem übereinstimmenden Urteil der Mutter und des Beobachters keine Interjektion war, sondern „Fort“ bedeutete. Ich merkte endlich, daß das ein Spiel sei, und daß das Kind alle seine Spielsachen nur dazu benütze, mit ihnen „fortsein“ zu spielen. Eines Tages machte ich dann die Beobachtung, die meine Auffassung bestätigte. Das Kind hatte eine Holzspule, die mit einem Bindfaden umwickelt war. Es fiel ihm nie ein, sie zum Beispiel am Boden hinter sich heranzuziehen, also Wagen mit ihr zu spielen, sondern es warf die am Faden*

*gehaltene Spule mit großem Geschick über den Rand seines verhängten Bettchens, so daß sie darin verschwand, sagte dazu sein bedeutungsvolles o—o—o—o und zog dann die Spule am Faden wieder aus dem Bett heraus, begrüßte aber deren Erscheinen jetzt mit einem freudigen „Da“. Das war also das komplette Spiel, Verschwinden und Wiederkommen, wovon man zumeist nur den ersten Akt zu sehen bekam, und dieser wurde für sich allein unermüdlich als Spiel wiederholt, obwohl die größere Lust unzweifelhaft dem zweiten Akt anhing.<sup>79</sup>*

This is the game [*das Spiel*] that the unnamed child plays: he throws a string away and then pulls it back. It goes away, it disappears, *f-o-o-o-r-t*, and then it comes back, it reappears *da*. The game is repeated over and over again. It is “complete,” and the child can perform this game himself. Freud tells us a little about the child who conducts this enigmatic ceremony, as well.<sup>80</sup> First, the child is “not at all precocious in his intellectual development” [*war in seiner intellektuellen Entwicklung keineswegs voreilig*]; he is not a particularly smart kid and he knows only a few words. The child is, however, obedient, well-behaved, undramatic. He did not protest when his parents left, even though he was “greatly attached to his mother” [*obwohl es dieser Mutter zärtlich anhing*]. But in the game, there are some remnants of the parents who have gone *fort!*

Let us trace the trajectory of Freud’s analysis of this encounter with the child. The “obvious” analysis, according to Freud, interprets the repetition in this game as an effect of the repressed renunciation of the satisfaction of the drives. This interpretation sees the game as evidence of “[drive] renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting” [*Triebverzicht (Verzicht auf Triebbefriedigung), das Fortgehen der Mutter ohne Sträuben zu gestatten*].<sup>81</sup> The drives have been abandoned, but their traces that

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 13-4; 11-13.

<sup>80</sup> But only a little—Freud reveals certain material and conceals other material. In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud commented on this tendency: “If I was to report my own dreams, it inevitably followed that I should have to reveal to the public gaze more of the intimacies of my mental life than I liked, or than is normally necessary for any writer who is a man of science and not a poet.” Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, xxiv. Freud also comments on this tendency for Goethe in his “Address Delivered in the Goethe House at Frankfurt”: “But, I admit, in the case of Goethe we have not yet succeeded very far. This is because Goethe was not only, as a poet, a great self-revealer, but also, in spite of the abundance of autobiographical records, a careful concealer. We cannot help thinking here of the words of Mephistopheles: *Das Beste, as du wissen kannst, Darfst du den Buben nicht sagen*,” Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1919), Vol. 21: 210. Goethe, *Faust*, 1840.

<sup>81</sup> Freud, BPP 14; JL 13.

evade repression are repeated. With this interpretation, Freud claims that there is “no doubt” [*kein Zweifel*] that the second act, “*da!*,” is attached to “greater pleasure” [*die größere Lust*].<sup>82</sup> According to this interpretation, the game expresses instinctual satisfaction that has been renounced, repressed, but still nonetheless remains *da!* The language of repression detains us in the territory of the pleasure principle. The goal of the pleasure principle is to reach the level of zero-excitation, and it seems that the game helps to accomplish this. Freud hypothesizes first that “It may perhaps be said in reply that her departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter that lay the true purpose of the game” [*Man wird vielleicht antworten wollen, das Fortgehen müßte als Vorbedingung des erfreulichen Wiedererscheinens gespielt werden, im letzteren sei die eigentliche Spielabsicht gelegen*].<sup>83</sup> According to this reasoning, even if some behavior seems to operate against pleasure of one kind, it is still ruled by pleasure of another kind; “pleasure,” therefore, is still the aim of the game. But Freud quickly pulls this idea back. This hypothesis cannot be maintained because the child repeats the “*fort!*” far more frequently than the “*da!*” Freud writes about that “the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending” [*Dem würde die Beobachtung widersprechen, daß der erste Akt, das Fortgehen, für sich allein als Spiel inszeniert wurde, und zwar ungleich häufiger als das zum lustvollen Ende fortgeführte Ganze*].<sup>84</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the “greater pleasure” is actually tied up with the “*fort!*” though. Perhaps there is some other influence to be accounted for.

Freud proposes that this other motive at work generates pleasure out of the conversion of passivity into activity; he calls it the “drive for mastery” [*Bemächtigungstrieb*].<sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup> He postulates that the

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<sup>82</sup> Freud 14; 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 15; 13.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 15; 14.

<sup>86</sup> This translation is imperfect. In German, “*sich bemächtigen*” has to do with taking, seizing, or usurping. Mastery suggests ordered domination, which does not hold up in the German.

child's repetitive game functions in order to bind the traumatic memory of the leaving parents and the energy that is used in the child's libidinal connection to the parents. Only when this energy is bound up with the trauma can the child master his trauma. For Freud, the instinct to master is usually considered asexual, independent of sexual pleasure, and it is often "acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not" [*der sich davon unabhängig macht, ob die Erinnerung an sich lustvoll war oder nicht*].<sup>87 88</sup> But Freud is not yet ready to separate the instinct for mastery from the pleasure principle. He adds one more detail to his interpretation: the boy's game of mastery might work like revenge, as if he were to say "All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself" [*Ja, geb' nur fort, ich brauch' dich nicht, ich schicke' dich selber weg*].<sup>89</sup> To support this interpretation, Freud found out a year later that this boy was observed saying "Go to the front!" [*Geb' in K(r)rieg!*] while playing on the floor (in reference to his father, who was fighting at the front).<sup>90</sup> This line of thinking on the drive to mastery is supported by previous theory: by both the Oedipus Complex, in which it makes sense that a young boy would unconsciously wish for his father to leave him with complete access to the mother, and by clinical experience with children that shows their tendency to discard "objects instead of persons" [*Wir wissen auch von anderen Kindern, daß sie ähnliche feindselige Regungen durch das Wegschleudern von Gegenständen an Stelle der Personen auszudrücken vermögen*].<sup>91 92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Freud 15; 14.

<sup>88</sup> J. LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis write that Ives Henrick argues, over the course of a series of articles, that the instinct to mastery is originally asexual; it may be libidinalized secondarily through a fusion with sadism. J. LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis, 219.

<sup>89</sup> Freud, *BPP* 15; *JL* 14.

<sup>90</sup> Freud 15; 14.

<sup>91</sup> Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex is a prime example of the way that myth permeates Freud's psychoanalytic discourse. The Oedipus Complex follows Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*: a story about Oedipus, the King of Thebes, who is responsible for killing his father and marrying his mother. Freud's Oedipus complex in the positive form involves the desire for the death of the parent of the same sex (the competitor) and a sexual desire for the parent of the same sex. On October 15, 1897, Freud wrote to Fliess: "we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*... The Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he feels its existence within himself." Freud, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess* (Cambridge: Belknap Press: 1913), 272.

<sup>92</sup> Freud 16; 14.



However, Freud is “left in doubt” [*in Zweifel*] about whether or not the present inquiry is indeed associated with the pleasure principle as he had hitherto defined it.<sup>93</sup> He wonders if “the repetition carried along with it a yield of pleasure of another sort” [*der Lustgewinn aus anderer Quelle*], i.e. a form of pleasure that could not be felt as such due to the work of repression.<sup>94</sup> But then again, Freud seems quite comfortable in the language of the pleasure principle while examining the *Fort! Da!* game. He even leads himself back into the language of wish-fulfillment, the theory from *The Interpretation of Dreams* most tied to the pleasure principle, when he writes “it is obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time—the wish to be grown up” [*Aber andererseits ist es klar genug, daß all ihr Spielen unter dem Einflüsse des Wunsches steht, der diese ihre Zeit dominiert, des Wunsches: groß zu sein*]. Ultimately, though, at the end of Chapter II, Freud clears away all previous doubts about the relationship between the game and the pleasure principle:

The consideration of these cases, which have a yield of pleasure as their final outcome, should be undertaken by some system of aesthetics with an economic approach to its subjective matter. They are of no use for *our* purposes, since they presuppose the existence and dominance of the pleasure principle; they give no evidence of the operation of tendencies beyond the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it.

*Mag sich mit diesen, in endlichen Lustgewinn auslaufenden Fällen und Situationen eine ökonomisch gerichtete Ästhetik befassen für unsere Absichten leisten sie nichts, denn sie setzen Existenz und Herrschaft des Lustprinzips voraus und zeugen nicht für die Wirksamkeit von Tendenzen jenseits des Lustprinzips, das heißt solcher, die ursprünglicher als dies und von ihm unabhängig wären.*<sup>95</sup>

Why was the process that led up to this conclusion so zigzagged? There is something about pleasure and unpleasure that seems difficult for Freud to pin down or master. He throws out the possibility that there is something “beyond” the pleasure principle just as the child throws the wooden reel, but then pulls back the idea that has been “*da!*” in his mind all along. The crucial aspect of Freud’s theoretical dilemma is that it rests on the idea of repetition. Repetition can be both pleasurable and

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 16; 15.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 17; 15.

frightful. Neurotics worry themselves with repetition, children use repetition like a toy and a tool, and repeated events sometimes haunt literary figures like some malign fate.

Why is Freud inserting himself into the game of the child? The first time Freud attempts to thoughtfully intrude on the child's game, he is rejected. Freud intrudes onto the *Fort! Da!* game with his own play-idea—the wooden reel could be “pull[ed] along the floor behind him, for instance, and [he could] play at its being a carriage.”<sup>96</sup> But neither he nor his idea is necessary; the child is complete in his game in the way that he imagined it. Freud's second intrusion into the game, however, is mimetic. Freud absorbs the *Fort! Da!* movement into his own theoretical logic; he throws the pleasure principle *fort!* and then brings it *da!* (which means in German both “here” and “therefore”) in the conclusion.

Freud's various interpretational moves in the course of his examination of the “*Fort! Da!*” game might be helpful as we try to understand how Freud attempts to move beyond the pleasure principle and into a theory of the drives and repetition. It is quite possible, for example, that he is seeking—ultimately in vain—a release from the excitation the observation caused him. Or is he trying to master something, and if so, what? Is there a latent content here behind the manifest content? To help understand what it is about the pleasure principle that generates so much ambivalence over the course of Freud's examination, it is useful to note a crucial elision (or navel) in the text. The unnamed child is Freud's grandson Ernst, the son of his daughter Sophie who died during the Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918. Freud wrote half of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* while Sophie was alive and half after she had died. When we ask, “What is this theoretical *Fort! Da!* game mastering?” one answer might be “the death of Sophie.” Freud omits her name, killing her and sending her “*fort!*” on the narrative level. Franz Wittels reads the text as evidence of Freud's inability to mourn Sophie's death; he went so far as to say that Freud's theory of the death drive is a

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 14; 13.

symptom of the grief that Freud experienced upon Sophie's death.<sup>97</sup> Freud took care to defend himself against possible critiques that involve his daughter. He wrote to Eitingon: "The *Beyond* is finally finished. You will be able to confirm that it was half finished when Sophie was alive and full of health."<sup>98</sup> But what an odd kernel of self-defense this is. Freud remains totally vulnerable to Karl Kraus's famous criticism: "Psychoanalysis is the mental illness for which it claims to be a cure."<sup>99</sup> Or alternatively, the text where Freud claims to theorize death in a new way only functions in order to postpone or evade mourning a death which Freud experienced in real life.<sup>100</sup> But we must remain nonetheless wary of the effect of such readings—they have the potential to bring our inquiry to an improper end. This conclusion cannot be our ending point, because it will never be anything more than speculation.

When *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was published, Freud's colleague Ernest Jones began distancing himself from Freud. He claimed that Freud had always suffered from anxiety about death, both his own death and the deaths of loved ones. According to Jones, Freud was almost phobic of the idea of bodily deterioration and old age.<sup>101</sup> Jacques Derrida, in his text *The Postcard*, went so far as to say that Freud's theoretical *Fort! Da!* game served as Freud's way to "send [himself] a message of [his] own death."<sup>102</sup> We must not abandon our investigation for a simple autobiographical totalizing

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<sup>97</sup> William M Johnston, *The Austrian Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 250.

<sup>98</sup> Freud to Eitingon, July 18, 1920, in *Sigmund Freud and Max Eitingon, Correspondence, 1906-39* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 2004), 230.

<sup>99</sup> Johnston, *The Austrian Mind*, 250.

<sup>100</sup> It could be said that Freud investigates rather than loves; this is how Freud compares Goethe's Faust and Leonardo da Vinci ("the Italian Faust"). In his 1910 paper on Leonardo, Freud writes: "Because of his insatiable and indefatigable thirst for knowledge Leonardo has been called the Italian Faust. . . . A conversation of the force of a drive into various forms of activity can perhaps no more be achieved without loss than a conversion of physical forces. The example of Leonardo teaches us how many other things we must account for in connection with these processes. The postponement of loving until full knowledge is acquired ends in a substitution of the latter for the former. A man who has won his way to a state of knowledge cannot properly be said to love and hate; he remains beyond love and hatred. He has investigated instead of loving." Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 75.

<sup>101</sup> See Elizabeth Roudinescou's chapter "Dark Enlightenment" in *Freud: in his Time and Ours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 225.

<sup>102</sup> Derrida, *The Postcard* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 355.

explanation that has the function of dissolving all of the important incongruities of the text. The question of Freud's possible inability to mourn the death of his daughter Sophie will remain open. This autobiographical information shows us that, while covering up the death of his own child, Freud tells us a story about *repetition* in his grandson's game. This emphasis on repetition is what drives us forward in our present inquiry on death. After Freud moves through his discussion of *Fort! Da!*, we are left to wonder if this child's repetition has something to do with a death drive that exists beyond the pleasure principle, but Freud tells us that the game "gives no evidence of the operation beyond the pleasure principle, that is of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it."<sup>103</sup> In this passage, Freud leaves us in the dark about the relation between the repetition compulsion and the death drive. But this darkness is precisely where the repetition compulsion dwells: "beyond" the rational binary of pleasure and unpleasure, or pleasure and reality, that Freud has trouble letting go of.

Repetition has consistently been a problem in psychoanalysis on the practical level. The analyst aims to help the patient uncover and remember their repressed material and weaken their resistance to treatment. In psychoanalytic treatment, uncovering the repressed material means loosening the repression and the resistance. A common misunderstanding insists that there is an unconscious entity doing the repressing, but repression is actually directed by the ego, which is both conscious and unconscious.<sup>104</sup> In repression, the unconscious material is pressing ever forward

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<sup>103</sup> Freud, *BPP* 17; *JL* 15.

<sup>104</sup> The ego goes through several theoretical developments over the course of Freud's career. In this paper, I focus on Freud's theory after 1920. Before 1920, Freud had already put forth his first topography of the mental apparatus, which involved primary and secondary processes as its major schematic entities, while the second topography focused more on psychical conflict in all its modalities, among the instinctual id, the prohibiting super-ego, and the defensive and mediating ego. The change from the first to the second topography does not indicate any theoretical supersession, but rather an "adding on" and a developing of previous thoughts. One thing which becomes more important over the course of Freud's theoretical developments is the prominence of the unconscious part of the ego. Freud writes in *The Ego and The Id*: "We have come upon something in the ego itself which is also unconscious, which

[(*dringt immer vorwärts*)] into consciousness. The repressed material must then become conscious for the symptom to be revealed and for its power to be diminished. While the resurfacing of repressed material will surely be unpleasurable—the repression and the resistance both exist under the dominion of the pleasure principle—one can imagine that pleasure will ultimately result from the reduced power of the repressed. But the cases of patients coming to the clinic after fighting in World War I demonstrate the fact that un-pleasurable moments of trauma can repeat uncontrollably. These patients who suffer from traumatic neurosis experience dreams that “have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation where he wakes up in another fright” [*den Charakter, daß es den Kranken immer wieder in die Situation seines Unfalles zurückführt, aus der er mit neuem Schrecken erwacht*].<sup>105</sup> We recall that Freud previously defines “fright” as “the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise” [*Schreck aber benennt den Zustand, in den man gerät, wenn man in Gefahr kommt, ohne auf sie vorbereitet zu sein, betont das Moment der Überraschung*].<sup>106</sup> Although the patients who come into the clinic seem to be more consciously consumed by the activity of forgetting their accident than fixating their thoughts on it, their symptoms imply a certain fixation of psychical energy on a traumatic moment from the past. The analyst, then, aims to help the analysand recognize their repetition as pertaining to some traumatic moment from the past.<sup>107</sup> Although Freud does not consider the repetitions of the *Fort! Da!* game to be identical to the dreams of neurotics coming back from war, both instances share the repetitive structure. In these cases, repression, a key element of the pleasure principle, does not appear to be working on the material which is being

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behaves exactly like the repressed—that is, which produces powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious.” Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Freud, *BPP* 11; *JL* 10.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> It should be noted that these repetitions work contrary to the analyst’s pleasure, too. The analyst aims to help the patient remember (and identify their repetition) rather than repeating unconscious material to oblivion.

repeated. Why is this? We must deduce that the repetition compulsion is capable of overthrowing the pleasure principle and repression alike. But does this capability necessarily situate the repetition compulsion *beyond*?

Freud is stuck between two claims: first, that the repetition compulsion is a manifestation of repression (in the realm of the pleasure principle) and second, that the repetition compulsion thwarts repression and is independent of the pleasure principle. What is it in the repetition compulsion that points us to something *beyond* the pleasure principle? Samuel Weber, in *The Legend of Freud*, writes: “Freud never appears to have recognized, much less reflected upon, the problems raised by his description of the repetition compulsion as a manifestation of repression, on the one hand, and as being independent of the pleasure principle, on the other.”<sup>108</sup> The most interesting part of this dilemma we find ourselves in is the fact that Freud, as he theorizes a form of death which occurs within life, is studying repetition. For Freud, death-within-life is a repetitive process; similarly, the phenomenon of repetition within life is linked with death. But Weber remarks that “in order to conceptualize the notion of binding, Freud cannot avoid resorting to that of *repetition*: as a temporal process, binding is inconceivable except as a form of repetition,” thus highlighting the relationship between repetition and binding, which Freud associates with Eros.<sup>109</sup> Freud describes the birth of the erotic drive using the myth of Aristophanes, which I discussed in the “Before” section. But when Freud attempts to theorize the idea of binding, he defines it using the concept of repetition. Gilles Deleuze describes the relationship between binding and Eros as working according to the structural condition of unity.<sup>110</sup> The binding in sexual union that occurs when the androgynous being is united with its missing part is unthinkable except as a form of repetition of an earlier state of things. But if we understand this quality of repetition “to bind” psychic energy, just like the pleasure

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<sup>108</sup> Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 122.

<sup>109</sup> Weber 122.

<sup>110</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 111.

principle binds excitation to return the organism to a level of zero-excitation, then how is it possible that repetition also forces Freud beyond the pleasure principle? Repetition, although it is not itself beyond the pleasure principle, drives Freud beyond the pleasure principle, because it does not lead to any pleasurable conclusion. Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, rather than leading to a new ground [*Grund*] leads us, after a series of theoretical detours, to an abyss [*Abgrund*], a complete absence of ground.

For now, though, I will leave what is *beyond* behind. What is important for my inquiry is the idea that when Freud theorizes about the death drive, he cannot avoid the phenomenon of repetition, and when Freud theorizes repetition, he cannot escape death. As my analysis of Freud makes clear, we encounter death repeatedly within our lives – when we mourn, when our cells conjugate and divide, when we experience repetition. Death is not just some state from before life, or some looming future after life; it is something we encounter within our lives repeatedly. The repetition compulsion, understood in this way, may not be itself, in the end, *beyond* the pleasure principle. The repetition compulsion does, however, indicate that the pleasure principle is not the only process governing our psychic lives. Repetition is bound up somewhere between the death drive, which destroys and analyzes all existing bonds, and Eros, which forges bonds and synthesizes. Sometimes repetition works on behalf of death and love simultaneously. Its position is paradoxical.

Perhaps Freud did not make it all the way *beyond the pleasure principle*. He did, however, show us that some portion of the beyond can be found in the death which occurred before life and within life in the form of the death drive and the repetition compulsion. In this text, Freud also leaves us a clue as to where to look next in our striving for some kind of beyond: “the poet’s words” or Goethe’s drama *Faust*. Indeed, poetry functions as the furthest beyond of Freud’s speculative project, the frame of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – carrying Freud across moments of theoretical breakdown or aporia, providing examples where even life provides none, offering an ending where

Freud is unable to conclude.<sup>111</sup> We have followed Freud diligently to see where his speculative line of thought would lead him, and now we must push ahead just like the drives which, in Mephistopheles's (and Goethe's) words that Freud quotes, are "always pressing forward" [*ungebändig immer vorwärts dringf*].<sup>112</sup> Just as Freud finds himself turning to the literary in the moments when speculation hesitates, so too does my speculative path lead me to the realm of the literary and to Goethe's *Faust*.

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<sup>111</sup> Instead of a conclusion, Freud points us elsewhere into the world of poetry. After all, the last words of *Beyond the Pleasure* principle are, indeed, the words of the poet Al-Hariri via Friedrich Rückert (see footnote 2). The idea is that "What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping... The Book tells us it is no sin to limp." Goethe's Mephistopheles limps too: In "Auerbach's Wine-Cellar in Leipzig, Siebel asks "Why does the fellow limp with that one foot?" [*Was hinkt der Kerl auf Einem Fuß?*]. Goethe, *Faust*, 2184. Like the limping devil, therefore, we move forward with our inquiry on death slowly. After all, it is no sin.

<sup>112</sup> Freud 51; 45.



The Force of Blood in Goethe's *Faust*<sup>113</sup>

Illness was near. Already possessed by shadows,  
the blood flowed darkly; yet, though for a moment suspicious,  
it swells out into its natural springtime.

Again and again interrupted by darkness and downfall,  
It gleamed earthly. Until, after terrible pounding,  
it walked through the inconsolably open door.<sup>114</sup>

*Nah war die Krankheit. Schon von den Schatten bemächtigt,  
drängte verdunkelt das Blut, doch, wie flüchtig verdächtigt,  
trieb es in seinen natürlichen Frühling hervor.*

*Wieder und wieder, von Dunkel und Stürz unterbrochen,  
glänzte es irdisch. Bis es nach schrecklichem Pochen  
trat in das trostlos offene Tor.*

In this book every word has been lived, profoundly and intimately; the most painful things are not lacking in it; it contains words which are positively running with blood.

*Hier ist jedes Wort erlebt, tief, innerlich; es fehlt nicht am Schmerzlichsten, es sind Worte darin, die geradezu blutrinzig sind.*<sup>115</sup>

Over the course of his exploration of the death drive, Freud chooses Goethe's *Faust* as his interlocutor and inspiration. This turning to *Faust* is not specific to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; indeed Freud, throughout his oeuvre, can be found quoting *Faust* in moments of significant theoretical discovery.<sup>116</sup> It is clear in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, too, that Goethe has something to say about death that Freud can't quite say himself. Indeed, *Faust* illuminates, clarifies, and obfuscates death for Freud. In this chapter, I shall turn to Goethe's drama and ask: how does Goethe think death in *Faust*? And how might Goethe's *Faust* inform our thinking on death more broadly?

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<sup>113</sup> This title is inspired by the short story by Miguel de Cervantes entitled "La fuerza de la sangre."

<sup>114</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke Sonnet XXV (excerpt), translation my own.

<sup>115</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1911) 81. Deutsch: Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 34.

<sup>116</sup> Freud quotes *Faust* in the sixth chapter of *Die Traumdeutung*, in chapter twelve of *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, in the second chapter of *Das Unheimliche*, in the sixth chapter of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in *Totem und Tabu*, and in *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*. Avital Ronell writes on the citational modes where Goethe appears in Freud's work in her *Dictations: On Haunted Writing* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 4.

There are several entry points to an inquiry on the question of death in *Faust*: Faust's initial thoughts on suicide when he contemplates drinking poison from a vial; the figure of Mephistopheles, who claims to be "the spirit which always negates [*der Geist der stets verneint*]; and the question of whether or not Faust dies at the end of the drama.<sup>117</sup> While none of these entry points alone can answer the question of the meaning of death in the play, together they raise the broader question of how death *drives* the action, motivates it, and draws it onward. In this respect, it seems that death courses through the veins of Goethe's *Faust* like blood. In the following, I will closely examine the language of blood in the play, returning at the end of the chapter to the broader dynamics of death in *Faust*. My claim is that *Faust* presents us with a way of thinking death dialectically: neither as an annihilation nor as a supersession of life, but as something circulating through one's own body that must be encountered repetitively so long as one lives.

### Tödliche Kräfte

At the beginning of the tragedy, Faust finds himself drawn to a liquid substance that threatens to bring him and his story to a premature end. This liquid is contained in a vial, shaped like a skull, sitting on the shelf. Faust meets the vial, and he addresses it:

But what is there that holds my gaze—  
 does that vial act as a magnet on the eye?  
 Why do I sense a sudden gentle brightness,  
 As what in some dark forest moonlight stirs about us?  
 I greet you, vial of vials! With reverence  
 I take you down—my homage to  
 the human wit and skill embodied in you.  
 You essence of soporific forces,  
 you extract of all subtle poisons,  
 bestow your favors on your master!

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<sup>117</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, 1338. Translation modified. I should note that I will be focusing primarily on *Faust I*, published in 1808, but especially in my section on endings, I will also account for *Faust II*, published after Goethe's death in 1832.

I see you, and my pain is eased,  
 I hold you, and my striving lessens—  
 my turbulence of spirit slowly ebbs away.  
 I am transported to the open sea,  
 its surface sparkles down below,  
 and a new day beckons to new shores.

*Doch warum heftet sich mein Blick auf jene Stelle?  
 Ist jenes Fläschchen dort Augen ein Magnet?  
 Warum wird mir auf einmal lieblich helle,  
 Als wenn im nächt'gen Wald uns Mondenglanz umweht?  
 Ich grüße dich, du einzige Phiole!  
 Die ich mit Andacht nun herunterhole,  
 In dir verehr' ich Menschenwitz und Kunst.  
 Du Inbegriff der holden Schlummersäfte,  
 Der Auszug aller tödlich feinen Kräfte,  
 Erweise deinem Meister deine Gunst!  
 Ich sehe dich, es wird der Schmerz gelindert,  
 Ich fasse dich, das Streben wird gemindert,  
 Des Geistes Flutstrom ebbet nach und nach.  
 In's hohe Meer werd' ich hinausgewiesen,  
 Die Spiegelflut erglänzt zu meinen Füßen,  
 Zu neuen Ufern lockt ein neuer Tag.<sup>118</sup>*

The “vial of vials” contains a set of “subtle forces” [*feine Kräfte*] that act in “deadly” [*tödlich*] ways.<sup>119</sup>

The German word “*Kraft*,” like the English word “craft,” which can be defined as “the strength and skill in our hands,” was originally associated with the clenching of the muscle.<sup>120</sup> There is a special commingling of force and body in both the English and the German words, and this is also the case with the liquid substance in the vial. The *Kräfte* within the vial have the potential to operate on Faust’s body and thought. The deadly forces within the vial pull Faust in—he says that his gaze is drawn to the vial, as if by a kind of magnetism. The vial’s forces hold Faust’s eyes and welcome him.

<sup>118</sup> Goethe 686-701.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 694.

<sup>120</sup> See “*Kraft*” in dem deutschen Wortschatz von 1600 bis heute (DWDS): “*Mit Kraft würde sich dann ursprünglich die Vorstellung der Muskelanspannung verbinden*”: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/kraft>.

It casts a “gentle brightness” [*belle*] or “moonlight” [*Mondenglanz*] on him. While Faust gestures toward the vial, it seems like the vial also reaches out toward him. Faust and the vial encounter one another, and both extend a hand in greeting.<sup>121</sup>

But what is the effect of this encounter between Faust and the vial, and what exactly becomes of their meeting face-to-face, hand-in-hand? The deadly vial soothes his body: Faust sees the vial and his “pain is eased” [*es wird der Schmerz gelindert*]. When he holds the vial, his “striving lessens” [*das Streben wird gemindert*] and the “turbulence of [his] spirit ebbs away” [*Des Geistes Flutstrom ebbet nach und nach*].<sup>122</sup> In Faust’s contemplation of the vial, its deadly substance functions as an opposing force to that which is “striving” and “turbulen[t]” within Faust. This opposing force is not a force of stagnation, though, but one of lightness. There is nothing stagnant about Faust’s vision of the deadly vial, which has the power to transport him to an “open sea” where he can see the promise of “a new day” [*In’s hohe Meer werd’ ich hinausgewiesen / Die Spiegelflut erglänzt zu meinen Füßen, / Zu neuen Ufern lockt ein neuer Tag*].<sup>123</sup> Faust’s death is certainly at stake in his meditation on the vial. But the death that he thinks is not a fixed end; rather, the death that the liquid offers is light, open, and quiet. He imagines there is something about these deadly forces that is glimmering and transporting. What is deadly here has the potential to carry Faust to a new state of being.<sup>124</sup>

As Faust gazes at the vial, he is thinking about his own death. It becomes clear that Faust imagines that the deadly force of the vial will on the one hand, counter his striving, and on the other hand, power him onward toward the new day. Faust imagines death as an absence of turbulence and a cessation of forward momentum, but with a new day ahead. At the same time, though, Faust is

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<sup>121</sup> In German, the language of the hand is within Faust’s name: “*die Faust*” means “the fist.”

<sup>122</sup> Goethe 697-701.

<sup>123</sup> Goethe 699-701.

<sup>124</sup> In his contemplation on the vial, Faust reveals something of a desire-toward-death. Faust’s fantasy of the “*tödliche Kräfte*” within the vial provides a promising analogy for Freud’s *Todestrieb*. In the same way that Freud’s death drive does not necessarily entail “a wish for death,” it becomes clear Faust’s thoughts of suicide are not thoughts about death itself, but rather thoughts about *driving toward* a new state of quietude and serenity.

drawing toward this fantasy of a serene death; this fantasy for ultimate quietude becomes part of Faust's striving. At this point in the play, though, Faust has not located the forces that strive on within his own body, and he has not discovered the force of blood.

### Töne und Tränen

When Faust touches his lips to the vial, he moves one step closer to discovering the forces that work within his body. Before that, though, transcendent forces intervene. Like a princess saved by a prince's kiss, Faust is saved from the vial's forces by song just as he kisses the vial: church bells ring and the Angels' chorus sings "Christ is arisen! / Joy to the mortal / freed from the baneful, / insidious ills / that man is heir to" [*Christ ist erstanden! / Freude dem Sterblichen, / Den die verderblichen, / Schleichenden, erblichen / Mängel umwanden*].<sup>125</sup> The touch of the vial initiates the song at the very moment that it grazes Faust's lips.<sup>126</sup> Both the vial and the chorus extend toward Faust, but they do so in different ways. The chorus does not act on his body in the same way that the vial did; it is one step removed. But Faust feels that the chorus is extending itself toward him, albeit more abstractly: "Celestial tones, so gently strong, / why do you seek me here amid the dust?" [*Was sucht ihr, mächtig und gelind, / Ihr Himmelstöne, mich am Staube?*].<sup>127</sup> The song of the chorus does not interact with Faust's body in the same way that the vial did; it does not hold or pull him, and it does not welcome or receive him either. Rather than exerting an impersonal, magnetic force like the vial, the chorus acts as an agent actively seeking Faust out. If the vial and Faust's body are drawn to touch each other, the chorus seems to want to intervene to prevent this communion. But far from diverting Faust from a

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<sup>125</sup> Goethe 737-741.

<sup>126</sup> Like Freud's self-preservative drive, this song rescues Faust from a premature end, or in Freud's words, a death that is not his own. Or perhaps the chorus is only protecting Faust's ability to die "in his own fashion" [*auf seine Weise*]. Freud, *BPP* 47; *JL* 41.

<sup>127</sup> Goethe 762-3.

physically-driven path, the chorus's song ultimately carries Faust one step closer toward discovering the forces at work within his body. This happens via Faust's memory.

In Greek, memory is embodied in the mythological Titaness *Mnemosyne*, the daughter of Heaven and Earth and the bride of Zeus. In nine nights, she bears the nine Muses.<sup>128</sup> Memory functions as a bridge between Heaven and Earth as the source from which poetic waters flow. The Muses, Music and Poetry, were once together within the womb of Mother Memory.<sup>129</sup> Faust's memories of childhood are awakened by the Chorus, and the waters that flow from Faust's memories take the form of tears: "some strange sweet longing would compel me / to rove through wood and meadow, / and to a flood of ardent tears / I'd feel a world arise within me" [*Ein unbegreiflich holdes Sehnen / Trieb mich durch Wald und Wiesen hinzugehn, / Und unter tausend heißen Tränen / Fühlt' ich mir eine Welt entstehn*].<sup>130</sup> Faust's tears of memory nurture an entire world inside him [*Fühlt' ich mir eine Welt entstehn*];<sup>131</sup> it is only when Faust discovers this world within his body that he can pronounce himself the Earth's once again [*die Erde hat mich wieder!*].<sup>132</sup> Whereas the vial is an external force, the song of the chorus functions as a force from within: it inspires an ungraspable [*unbegreiflich*] longing operating on him from within, driving [*treiben*] him on. It is through song, memory, and tears that Faust is able to feel—and through feeling discover—the forces at work in his body.

But the forces of the vial and the chorus reach toward different goals: while the force within the vial pushes Faust in the direction of death and the end of his striving, the force of the chorus

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<sup>128</sup> Martin Heidegger writes in *What is Called Thinking?*: "Memory, Mother of the Muses—the thinking back to what is to be thought is the source and ground of poesy. This is why poesy is the water that at times flows backward toward the source, toward thinking as a thinking back, a recollection" [*Gedächtnis: die Mutter der Musen: das Andenken an das zu-Denkende ist der Quellgrund des Dichtens. Das Dichten ist darum das Gewässer, das bisweilen rückwärts fließt der Quelle zu, zum Denken als Andenken*]. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 11.

<sup>129</sup> Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 11.

<sup>130</sup> Goethe 774-7.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 777.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 784.

drives Faust onward.<sup>133</sup> In Faust's tears, though, he discovers a force within his own body: one that is both progressive and regressive. Upon his discovery of the force of tears, Faust is pressed backwards toward memories of his past, but through this regressive motion, he also finds himself moving towards a new life. The heavenly sounds of the chorus "summon [Faust] now again to life" [*Ruft (der Klang) auch jetzt zurück mich in das Leben*]<sup>134</sup>—to a life renewed.<sup>134</sup> The operations of this internal force are difficult to decipher. How can something that is regressive also be progressive and life-renewing?

The process of life-renewal in the case of the vial involves an initial life-annihilation, which then promises a future affirmation in the form of renewed-life: a life substituted for a new but changed life in death, depicted as a new day on the distant shore [*Zu neuen Ufern lockt ein neuer Tag*].<sup>135</sup> The life-renewing process that Faust recognizes in the song of the chorus also involves a substitution: Faust asks if the song of the Angel chorus is a prophecy of a new agreement to bind the heavenly and earthly spheres [*Ihr Chöre singt ihr schon den tröstlichen Gesang / Der einst, um Grabes Nacht, von Engelslippen klang, / Gewißheit einem neuen Bunde?*].<sup>136</sup> By asking about a covenant, he takes one step closer to discovering the forces at work within his own body. Although the chorus does not answer his call, there is certainly a new covenant to come: the contract between Faust and Mephistopheles, signed in blood, "a very special juice" [*ein ganz besonderer Saft*].<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> It would seem that these opposing forces can serve as useful analogies within the body of the text for Freud's life and death drives; over the course of my chapter, though I hope to complicate this initial interpretation.

<sup>134</sup> Goethe 770.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 701.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 746-8. Just as Jeremia prophesied that there would be a new communion between God and the chosen people found by Christ based on the older Jewish covenant.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 1740.

### Excursus on Blood

Blood is a special juice. Like tears, its source is within the body; but unlike tears, blood is meant to remain inside the body—with the notable exception of menstruation. When blood is flowing out of the body, there is often something wrong. Blood has a wealth of symbolic connotations and associations: bloodlines have been used to signify purity and impurity, in order to justify racist designations. “The family blood” connotes hereditary relation between family generations. “To have blood on one’s hands” means to be responsible for someone’s death, and “to play piano with blood” means to play with passion. It is also important to say that “blood” can connote both life and death. In the non-metaphorical sense, a woman bleeds rhythmically at monthly intervals, and her blood can signify either fertility or non-conception. Perhaps most important is the movement of blood: it pulses through our body to the repetitive rhythm of a heartbeat. We say that it circulates within us. Blood exerts a pressure; it can coagulate and clot. Each one of our blood cells contains our entire genetic code. Blood helps our immune systems fight diseases, it brings our tissues oxygen so that we can move, and it carries hormones through our bodies. Blood cells, like all of our cells, die off and replicate themselves constantly. In *Faust*, blood carries Faust’s fault and debt [*Schuld*] when Gretchen feels it on his hands. Blood is the substance that binds Mephistopheles and Faust together.<sup>138</sup> It courses through the play’s veins and enables Faust’s striving.

Altogether, we notice an intricate array of liquids at work in Goethe’s *Faust*: early on, the potion of the vial and the tears of memory. Faust is also later given a

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<sup>138</sup> Goethe 1740.



drink by a peasant who hopes that it will add days to his life and later drinks a rejuvenating potion from the Witch that makes him young again. And finally, there is blood, which is both the liquid carrier of death throughout the play and the *Kraft* that drives the entire drama onward.

### *Am Anfang war das Blut*

We know that Faust and Mephistopheles end up bound to each other via a contract signed in blood. But what is at the origin of Faust's contract with Mephistopheles—when do they meet? The origin of their contract can be found in the beginning of the scene “Faust's Study” [*Studierzimmer*], when Faust attempts to translate “the holy original” [*Das heilige Original*] Bible into German.<sup>139</sup> <sup>140</sup> While the poodle that he had let into his house barks—a veiled announcement of the solution to come in the form of Mephistopheles—he opens the book and translates: “In the beginning was the Word” [*Im Anfang war das Wort*].<sup>141</sup> But Faust is unhappy with this initial effort, because he cannot concede that words have such a high value [*Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen*].<sup>142</sup> He therefore moves through a series of other possibilities: “In the beginning was the Mind” [*im Anfang war der Sinn*], “In the beginning was the Power!” [*im Anfang war die Kraft!*], and “In the beginning was the Act” [*im Anfang war die Tat*].<sup>143</sup> <sup>144</sup> Thus, we find ourselves confronted with the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 1222.

<sup>140</sup> Here we might notice an echo of Martin Luther. When Luther had been outlawed after his famous defiance of the emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in April 1521, he was imprisoned in the Wartburg, where he began his translation of the New Testament into German. Tourists are still shown the stain on the wall of his study where, according to Lutheran lore, he through his inkpot at the devil.

<sup>141</sup> Goethe 1224.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 1226.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 1229.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 1237.

following chain of signifiers: Word, Mind, Power, and Act. Through this process of translation, the Word becomes an Act.<sup>145</sup>

One immediate effect of this displacement of the Word by the Act is the barking of the poodle Mephistopheles. Once the barking becomes too distracting, Faust must stop translating to shut it up, using a spell. The poodle propels Faust into action, but the action he takes involves words, albeit words meant to take on a kind of magical agency. With the aid of Solomon's Key, "the Spell of Four," Faust appeals to the four elements to try to exorcize the poodle, but he finds that the four elements do not reside in the poodle, and so he must try something stronger. Faust goes on to use a spell that demands, if the poodle is a "fugitive from Hell" [*Ein Flüchtling der Hölle*], that it behold "this Sign" [*dies Zeichen*].<sup>146</sup> On the one hand, it would appear that words still hold some power, since the spell asks that the creature from Hell "read" the sign [*Kannst du ihn lesen*].<sup>147</sup> But on the other hand, language is becoming diffuse. In the place of a name, the spell provides only a description, calling its addressee: "Him that was never create, / Him whose name must not be spoken, / Who pervades the universe, / though transpierced by lance accursed" [*Den nie entspross'nen, / Unausgesprochenen, / Durch alle Himmel gegossnen, / Freventlich durchstochnen?*].<sup>148</sup> A quality of this hell-fugitive is the unspeakability of his name; this signifier is prohibited.

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<sup>145</sup> In "The Question of Lay Analysis," Freud carries out a hypothetical conversation with an "impartial person" about the practice of psychoanalysis. After Freud explains to this person that the analyst and the analysand agree on a fixed hour in which the analysand talks and the analyst listens to the speech of the analysand, he remarks on the reaction of this "impartial person": "And no doubt he is thinking too of Mephistopheles' mocking speech on how comfortably one can get along with words..." [*Es geht ihm gewiß auch die Spottrede Mephistos durch den Sinn, wie bequem sich mit Worten wirtschaften läßt...*] and he imagines that this person would say "So it is a kind of magic; you [the analyst] talk, and blow away his ailments" [*Das ist also eine Art von Zauberei, Sie reden und blasen so seine Leiden weg*]. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 14: 212. In what follows in this essay, Freud evokes some distant past when the Word once took precedent over the Act, and then becomes displaced by them, and this is what happens in Faust's translation of the Greek bible. In the psychoanalytic discourse, according to Freud, the Word returns to its ancient primacy over the Act once again; the Act is translated back into the Word.

<sup>146</sup> Goethe 1298-1300.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 1305.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 1306-9.

It is precisely in this crisis of the word, in the act of naming-without-really-naming, that Mephistopheles appears in his human form. The spell's words prompt Mephistopheles to change shape, effectively translating himself from poodle into man. But Mephistopheles's own sign—his name—still remains unknown. In this passage, Mephistopheles is not explicitly named as “devil”; rather, he is called “a fugitive from Hell” [*Ein Flüchtling der Hölle*].<sup>149</sup> There is something about Mephistopheles that defies signification. Indeed, “What do you call yourself” [*Wie nennst du dich*] is Faust's first question to Mephistopheles.<sup>150</sup> But Mephistopheles rejects the question using Faust's own logic. Mephistopheles answers: “That seems a petty question / from one who is so scornful of the word / and who, aloof from mere appearance, / only aspires to plumb the depths of essence” [*Die Frage scheint mir klein / Für einen der das Wort so sehr verachtet, / Der, weit entfernt von allem Schein, / Nur in der Wesen Tiefe trachtet*].<sup>151</sup> Mephistopheles does not refuse to speak his name, he merely points out a contradiction: why would someone who cares only for the signified ask about something as arbitrary as a name? Faust adjusts his question according to Mephistopheles's critique and asks now “who are you” [*Wer bist du denn?*].<sup>152</sup> Mephistopheles refuses to reveal his name, so Faust asks him about his essence.

Mephistopheles provides three answers:

1. I am “A part of that force / which, always willing evil, always produces good”; “I'm a part of the Part that was all, / part of the Darkness that gave birth to Light—” [*Ein Teil von jener Kraft, / Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft; Ich bin ein Teil des Teils, der Anfangs alles war, / Ein Teil der Finsternis, die sich das Licht gebär*].<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 1299.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 1327.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 1327-30.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 1334.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 1336-7; 1349-50.

2. “I am the spirit of Eternal Negation” [*Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint!*].<sup>154</sup>
3. “my essence is / what you call sin, destruction, / or—to speak plainly—Evil” [*So ist denn alles was ihr Sünde, / Zerstörung, kurz das Böse nennt, / Mein eigentliches Element*].<sup>155</sup>

These answers are incongruous. There is a contradiction in the Part Mephistopheles is part of, that once was “all” [*alles*]: what it wills is not what it produces. Mephistopheles and the Part are both eternally negating, but what the Part negates is the evil that it wills—or perhaps it negates its very will—and the result of the negation is “good.” A double negative yields a positive. Does Mephistopheles, only part of the Part, also will evil while producing good? Whereas the contradiction in the Part’s *Kraft* between good and evil is moral, Mephistopheles confronts a morally neutral contradiction between “Something” [*Etwas*] and “Nothing [*Nichts*].<sup>156</sup> Mephistopheles’ morally neutral contradiction negates the Part’s moral contradiction. There is no single contradiction, but rather an un-ending process of eternal negation; the contradictions flow like blood out of Mephistopheles’ gaping “*Nichts*.” But no matter how much Mephistopheles negates, there is always a force persisting: “To think how many I’ve buried, / yet fresh young blood keeps circulating. / On and on—it could make anyone see red!” [*Wie viele hab’ ich schon begraben! / Und immer zirkuliert ein neues, frisches Blut. / So geht es fort, man möchte resend werden!*].<sup>157</sup> Mephistopheles’s principal problem has to do with ever-circulating blood. The blood has a circular direction—this cyclical motion is what keeps it fresh and perpetually *wieder neu*. It can also be said that life repeats itself, in the same way that a point moving along a circular path will find itself in the same position again and

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 1338).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 1342-1344.

<sup>156</sup> Mephistopheles is a creature of contradiction who is himself not comfortable with contradiction: this is the contradiction at the core of Mephistopheles’s very essence. He is always negating, always contradicting even himself. This is one of the fundamental tenets of psychoanalysis: we must reject the fundamental logical prohibition of contradiction. In his essay “Negation,” Freud writes at the end of his essay that “in analysis we never discover a ‘no’ in the unconscious” [*Zu dieser Auffassung der Verneinung stimmt es sehr gut, daß man in der Analyse kein ‘Nein’ aus dem Unbewußten auffindet*] Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* Vol. 14: 15.

<sup>157</sup> Goethe 1371-2.

again. With circulating blood and circulating life, repetition is at work; for Mephistopheles, the never-ending repetitive cycle of the blood is a problem—it happens against his will.<sup>158</sup>

Although it might sound like yet another Mephistophelean contradiction, it is no accident, considering Mephistopheles's predicament, that blood is the chosen medium for his contract with Faust. Even though blood and Mephistopheles have a history, where blood flows onward regardless of Mephistopheles's powers of destruction, Mephistopheles nonetheless suggests the liquid of blood for Faust's signature; blood is, in the end, a more stable guarantor than the word. This contract is as follows: Mephistopheles agrees to serve Faust on earth so long as Faust serves him "beyond" [*driiben*].<sup>159</sup> Faust adds a wager onto their contract: the day that Mephistopheles successfully lulls him into complacency will be his "last day" [*letzte Tag*].<sup>160</sup> According to this contract and wager, Faust and Mephistopheles bind themselves together. Mephistopheles says "I'll bind myself to serve you here" [*Ich will mich hier zu deinem Dienst verbinden*] and urges Faust to bind or commit himself to the wager in exchange [*Verbinde dich*].<sup>161</sup> Faust agrees, but is concerned about the death of the word and the fact that it "begins to die" [*erstirbt schon*] by the time it is written on the page: "The word begins to die before it's left the pen, / and wax and goatskin take control. What do you, evil spirit, want from me— / marble or brass, foolscap or parchment? / You are at liberty to choose" [*Das Wort erstirbt schon in der Feder, / Die Herrschaft fñhren Wachs und Leder. / Was willst du böser Geist von mir? / Erz, Marmor, Pergament, Papier? / Soll ich mit Griffel, Meißel, Feder schreiben? / Ich gebe jede Wahl dir frei*].<sup>162</sup> Faust bemoans the ephemeral mortality of the word, and he turns to Mephistopheles with his dilemma.

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<sup>158</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses repetition and the "perpetual recurrence of the same thing," [*ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*]. Freud, BPP 23; JL 21.

<sup>159</sup> Goethe 1656-9.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 1692-8.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 1656, 1672.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 1726-33.

Mephistopheles's solution to this problem is, of course, blood. As Mephistopheles revealed before, blood contains in it something immortal; after all, no matter how many people die, blood continues to circulate. Therefore, Mephistopheles urges Faust to sign their contract with his own blood:

How can you work yourself up so quickly  
 To this heat of rhetorical exaggeration?  
 Any small scrap of paper is alright.  
 A tiny drop of blood will do to sign your name.

*Wie magst du deine Rednerei  
 Nur gleich so hitzig übertreiben?  
 Ist doch ein jedes Blättchen gut.  
 Du unterzeichnest dich mit einem Tröpfchen Blut.*<sup>163</sup>

In this passage, blood binds Mephistopheles and Faust together; it is the very material of their contract. A radical alternative to the word, Faust's blood replaces his name and acts as his signature. It is something that can be written, a signifier of identity, and a form of insurance. If Faust replaced the Word with the Act in his translation of the Bible, the substitution that Mephistopheles and Faust make here is between the Word and Faust's blood. There is something about that "very special juice" [*ganz besonderer Saft*] that works against death, destruction, and negation.<sup>164</sup> Hence while the substance within the vial is a deadly liquid *Kraft*, the blood here does seem to function as a liquid *Kraft* of everlasting Life. This is very interesting, considering the fact that the blood was chosen by the Negator-in-Chief Mephistopheles.<sup>165</sup>

In Faust's earlier attempt to retranslate "In the beginning was the Word" [*im Anfang war das Wort*] as "In the beginning was the Act" [*im Anfang war die Tat*], he did not completely replace the

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 1734-1737.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 1740.

<sup>165</sup> He has once again negated/contradicted himself! And this is another way that Mephistopheles propels via negation what is against his ostensible will; he is wearing Faust's clothes again here, or perhaps they are beneath his own.

primacy of the word with the act; after all, “Act” is just another word.<sup>166</sup> When Mephistopheles enters the scene, we see exactly how the word can be displaced by act; in the act of signing the wager with blood, the blood takes primacy over the word. The function of blood as a binding agent reveals itself in this instance of the contract scene. Faust’s blood is what binds Mephistopheles and Faust together; it is the substance that initiates the project of the drama, enabling the story to continue onward.<sup>167</sup> In the beginning of Faust’s journey was the blood: *Am Anfang war das Blut*.

### *Blutschuld von deiner Hand*

Blood is also associated with heritage. What do we know about the inheritance in *Faust*? We already know something about Mephistopheles’s lineage: when Mephistopheles changes to his human form and introduces himself in Faust’s study, we learn that he is part of Mother Night, who once gave birth to, and is now under siege by, the Light. But what is Faust part of? While Mephistopheles is part of a maternal lineage, we only learn about Faust’s paternal lineage.

Specifically, we know that his lineage is haunted by the plague that once ravaged the village traversed by Faust and his student Wagner in the scene “Outside the City Gate” [*Vor dem Tor*]. When we hear the story of Faust’s father, it is accompanied by yet another liquid, which an old peasant gives to Faust with the hope that it will extend Faust’s life [*Die Zahl der Tropfen, die er hegt, / Sei euren Tagen zugelegt*].<sup>168</sup> The peasant gives Faust this drink in exchange for his work with his father during the plague: “Many a man is here alive / who, at the time your father stopped the plague, / was snatched by him at the last moment / from the burning frenzy of his fever” [*Gar mancher steht*

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<sup>166</sup> Goethe 1224; 1237.

<sup>167</sup> In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud writes that the death drive is impossible to see except when it combines with Eros: it “eludes our perception... unless it is tinged with eroticism.” Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 121-22. The death drive and Eros cannot ever be fully detangled, and it does seem that the death drive serves the binding process. When we observe the way death drives the story onward, it does seem to be working as a life-propelling drive, as well. In this inquiry on blood, it does indeed seem that death is an erotically binding force.

<sup>168</sup> Goethe 988-90.

*lebendig hier, / Den euer Vater noch zuletzt / Der heißen Fiebermut entriß, / Als er der Seuche Ziel gesetzt*].<sup>169</sup>

The peasant credits Faust's father with stopping the plague, and he credits Faust, the "helper" [*der Helfer*], with surviving the plague: he "would enter every stricken house / and yet, although they carried off so many corpses, / you always would come out unharmed" [*Ihr geht in jedes Krankenhaus, / Gar manche Leiche trug man fort, / Ihr aber kamt gesund heraus*].<sup>170</sup> Just like the ever-circulating blood that continues in spite of death, the young Faust continues to live in spite of the plague—he appears to be immune.

Faust is respected for his family history, and he is treated in the village as a hero; as Wagner notes when they pass by, there is a father pointing Faust out to his young boy, and the people are throwing up their hats "as if the blessed sacrament were going by" [*Als käm' das Venerabile*].<sup>171 172</sup> Faust has inherited an honorable status from his father and from their role in the plague among the villagers. But Faust's memory of the plague is much different from the Old Peasant's story. Faust tells Wagner that the praise that he and his father receive is undeserved, because his father's alchemical medicines were only mystical speculations that ended up killing more people than they healed:

That was our medicine—the patients died,  
and no one thought to ask if anyone was healed.  
And so, with diabolical electuaries,  
we ravaged in these hills and valleys  
with greater fury than the plague.  
I have myself dosed thousands with the poison;  
they wasted away—and I must live to hear  
the brazen murders adulated

*Hier war die Arznei, die Patienten starben,*

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 997-1000.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 1006; 1002-4.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 1021.

<sup>172</sup> Interestingly the blessed sacrament in the Catholic Church is the blood and body of Christ in the form of consecrated wine and bread at a celebration of the Eucharist.



*Und niemand fragte: wer genas?  
 So haben wir, mit höllischen Latwergen,  
 In diesen Tälern, diesen Bergen,  
 Weit schlimmer als die Pest gegeben,  
 So welkten hin, ich muß erleben  
 Daß man die freche Mörder lobt.*<sup>173</sup>

According to Faust, his father's medicines were actually more dangerous poison than the plague. Faust calls these medicines "hellish" [*höllisch*], and he admits that he and his father were "murderers" [*Mörder*]. For Faust, it is not honor that he has inherited from his father, but rather the *Schuld* of murder.<sup>174</sup> Faust is left to atone for the guilt but also pay back the debt of the murders that he and his father committed.

Wagner hopes to console Faust with a hopeful idea of progress. Ever the Enlightenment progressivist, he postulates that in youth one honors his father so that when he becomes a man, he can augment the collective knowledge and surpass his father [*Wenn du, als Jüngling, deinen Vater erst, / So wirst du gern von ihm empfangen; / Wenn du, als Mann, die Wissenschaft vermehrest, / So kann dein Sohn zu höh'rem Ziel gelangen*].<sup>175</sup> Wagner assures Faust that he must not be disturbed about his guilt, because all he must do in order not to be *schuldig* is "augment our knowledge" [*die Wissenschaft vermehrest*], reaching a higher mark than his father, so that his son [*dein Sohn*] might do the same. According to Wagner's philosophy, steps forward in the name of progress [*Fortschritte*] work against guilt and function so as to pay back debt. But the idea that Faust's progress might negate his *Schuld* over the course of the play should be treated with some skepticism.

Faust is already skeptical of Wagner's optimism here, and his skepticism is justified by his father-child relationship later in the play. Faust does go on to have a child with Margarete, but the

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<sup>173</sup> Goethe 1048-1055.

<sup>174</sup> The *Schuld* that Faust has inherited from his father is multivalent: it carries the connotation "guilt," "fault," and also "debt."

<sup>175</sup> Goethe 1060-3.

father-son progression is not carried out in the way that Wagner imagines. Faust impregnates Margarete before marriage, leading to her imprisonment; it is Margarete who is *schuldig* according to the law.<sup>176</sup> Faust tries to attribute the *Schuld* to Mephistopheles—he blames Mephistopheles for tempting them into sex. Mephistopheles rejects this displacement of guilt, re-invoking Faust’s family history to bolster his point:<sup>177</sup>

And what about the risk you run? Guilt of blood spilled by your hand, still lies upon the town! Avenging spirits hover where the slain man fell and lie in wait for the returning murderer.

*Und die Gefahr der du dich aussetzest? Wisse, noch liegt auf der Stadt Blutschuld von deiner Hand. Über des Erschlagenen Stätte schweben rächende Geister und lauern auf den wiederkehrenden Mörder.*<sup>178</sup>

Not only has Faust, according to Mephistopheles, inherited his father’s *Blutschuld*, he is also responsible for Margarete and the child he impregnated her with, for the death of her mother and brother, for the fact that Margarete is now in jail, and he will be responsible for Margarete’s execution. He is accountable for a great deal of spilled blood, past, present, and future; it is his fault and his debt [*Schuld*] to carry. The fact that Faust has not adequately paid his debt means that the blood “still lies upon the town” [*noch liegt auf der Stadt*].<sup>179</sup> Until Faust’s debt is paid, spirits will hover around him to avenge his wrongdoings. Faust, therefore, has inherited the *Blutschuld* of his father, and he carries it on his hands. As we have seen, the hand is closely associated with the *Kraft* of blood. A product of the force of the hand, though, is always *Schuld*. Faust is responsible for the acts of his hand and he carries his father’s debt in his blood; for this reason, Faust is doomed to

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<sup>176</sup> This is also the predicament of Cervantes’s Leocadia in the short story “The Force of Blood” [*La fuerza de la sangre*], from which the title of this chapter derives, when she is impregnated by a nobleman (unnamed “for the sake of discretion,” but given the name Rodolfo for the sake of the story). Leocadia, though, manages to translate the dishonor of her rape back into honor when she marries Rodolfo later in the story. In the end of the story, Cervantes writes that their fortune together is something “granted by heaven and by the power of the blood which the valiant, noble, and Christian grandfather of Louis [Leocadia and Rodolfo’s son] saw spilled on the ground.” Here blood functions as a mediator here between earth and heaven.

<sup>177</sup> Goethe 52-5.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Goethe 52-3.

perpetually repeat acts of filial and genealogical *Blutschuld* until his father's debt is paid.<sup>180</sup> Faust now faces the ethical dilemma of how he can atone for a *Blutschuld*.

Faust is not the only one affected by this guilt. In prison, Margarete takes this guilt upon herself, claiming responsibility for the bloodshed. She admits “I am the one who killed my mother, / I am the one who drowned my child” [*Meine Mutter hab' ich umgebracht, / Mein Kind hab' ich ertränkt*].<sup>181</sup> But to what extent is Margarete actually responsible for these deaths? Although the “Gretchen Tragedy” [*Gretchen Tragödie*] lures us to interpret the events as an infanticide, there is no narrative certitude that Gretchen did, in fact, murder her child. Instead, we have only a gap between the “Walpurgis Night Dream” [*Walpurgisnachtstraum*] and the “Expanse of Open Country” [*Trüber Tag*] scenes. The statement “I am the one who drowned my child” [*Mein Kind hab' ich ertränkt*] should be treated with some doubt. Her statement right before, “I am the one who killed my mother” [*Meine Mutter hab' ich umgebracht*], after all, is only partially accurate; she tried to give her mother a sleeping potion, but she ended up unintentionally poisoning her. It is more likely that Faust and Mephistopheles are behind the mother's death, since they concocted the potion as a means of furthering their plan to sneak into Margarete's room. Similarly, we do not have direct evidence that Margarete drowned her child—this is only what the guards told her: “To hurt my feelings they took it from me, / And now they're saying I killed it” [*Sie nahmen mir's um mich zu kränken / Und sagen nun, ich hätt' es umgebracht*].<sup>182</sup> Nonetheless, Margarete attempts to take on the debt of her mother and

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<sup>180</sup> In a footnote in *The Ego and the Id (1923b)* Freud affirms the following: “The battle with the obstacle of an unconscious sense of guilt is not made easy for the analyst. Nothing can be done against it directly, and nothing indirectly but the slow procedure of unmasking its unconscious repressed roots, and of thus gradually changing into a *conscious* sense of guilt... it must be honestly confessed that here we have another limitation of the effectiveness of analysis; after all, analysis does not set out to make pathological reactions impossible, but to give the patient's ego *freedom* to decide one way or another” 50. In response to this illumination, analyst Miguel Gutierrez-Pelaez writes in *Confusion of Tongues: A Return to Sandor Ferenczi* that “The unconscious sense of guilt is a deadly element of the death drive, impossible to disentangle through psychoanalysis” (London: Routledge, 2018), 37.

<sup>181</sup> Goethe 4507-4508.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 4445-6.

child's deaths, thereby justifying her own execution. Margarete believes that there is blood on her hands, but when Faust visits her in prison, she discovers something different:

Give me your hand. Yes, this is not a dream!  
 You dear, dear hand! But oh, it's wet.  
 Wipe it off! I can't help thinking  
 There's blood on it.  
 Oh God, what have you done!  
 Put up your sword,  
 I beg you.

*Gib deine Hand! Es ist kein Traum!  
 Deine liebe Hand! – Ach aber sie ist Feucht!  
 Wische sie ab! Wie mich deucht  
 Ist Blut dran.  
 Ach Gott! Was hast du getan!  
 Stecke den Degen ein;  
 Ich bitte dich drum!*<sup>183</sup>

Margarete becomes aware of Faust's *Blutschuld* when she feels wet blood on his hands. Faust's *Blutschuld* is associated with an action [*eine Tat*], and Margarete demands to know what this action is [*Was hast du getan!*]. What is interesting, though, is that in her realization of Faust's *Blutschuld*, Margarete still seems to will her own death. Even when she realizes that there is blood on Faust's hands, she decides to take on Faust's *Schuld*, and to pay back his debt with her own death.<sup>184</sup> Perhaps Margarete feels that she shares Faust's guilt, because their blood is shared by their child: "Wasn't the baby given to us both, / to you as well? I can hardly believe it is you!" [*War es nicht dir und mir geschenkt? Dir auch—Du bist's!*].<sup>185</sup> Margarete assumes Faust's *Schuld* as her own.

Faust's *Blutschuld* is what connects Faust with his lineage, and it is also subject to being repeatedly misrecognized by the people around him. While Margarete ultimately misrecognizes

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 4511-4517.

<sup>184</sup> In this way, Margarete presents an alternative model to Wagner's for the expiation of Faust's *Schuld*. Margarete provides a more Christian model, involving the sacrifice on an innocent woman, whereas Wagner suggests a classic Enlightenment model that involves a continuous process of formation [*Bildung*].

<sup>185</sup> Goethe 4509-10.

Faust's *Schuld* as her own, Wagner initially misrecognized Faust's *Schuld* as honor. Faust's father was a murderer—he passed his *Schuld* to his son, and Faust is fated to repeat his father's *blutschuldig* actions. Wagner's hope that the *Schuld* Faust inherited from his father will be cancelled out with his own striving does not come to fruition. Faust's *Schuld* does not become the responsibility of his child; instead, it mistakenly becomes Margarete's. By assuming that Faust's debt is her own, and by attempting to assume Faust's *Schuld* in her death, Margarete attempts to render Faust's debt in the dative case.<sup>186</sup> But this is impossible. Faust's *Schuld* is his own burden to carry, and he carries it beyond Margarete's death.<sup>187</sup>

Thus, pumping through the play is the force of blood. In the force of blood, we notice an intricate dynamic that involves death, *Schuld*, and the hand. Spilled blood connotes death. To spill blood means to murder violently. *Schuld* appears where blood is spilled, and it appears on the hands as blood. To have blood on one's hands means to be *schuldig*. There is something about *Blutschuld* that is prone to repeated misrecognition. It becomes clear that although *Schuld* may be passed from one person to another, through the blood of genealogy or filiation, death cannot be displaced, substituted, or in any way transmitted.

### *Aufgeregtes Blut*

I hope to have established a movement of blood through time in the form of Faust's lineage, which stretches back to his father's *Blutschuld* and forward to his son's death. There is a tension in the nature of that movement, though. On the one hand, blood, as I have discussed, *circulates* repetitively through the body and, in the context of inheritance, repeats itself in the next generation. On the other hand, blood's movement is *progressive*—it is “moving ever onward” [*drängt immer*

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<sup>186</sup> This idea is similar to Heidegger's concept of death's dative from *Being and Time* that Derrida explains in *Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 43-44.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. Heidegger speaks about the irreplaceability and *Eigentlichkeit* of death in *Being and Time*.

*vornwärts*]. Blood has pressure, and one might even say that blood *strives*. Here I am reminded of the two narratives put forth by Wagner and Faust regarding the expiation of Faust's father's *Schuld*: will it repeat over and over again, as Faust fears, or will it be overcome through ever stronger filial striving? Later in the play, Faust is left alone with this question as he gazes at the ocean's waves:

The ocean far below attracted my eye;  
 It surged and rose to towering heights,  
 Then it abated, scattering its waves,  
 That hastened to assault the low, broad shore.  
 And I was vexed—for arrogance,  
 Unbridled blood, will always cause  
 Uneasy feelings in a spirit  
 That, though free, respects all laws and rights.  
 I thought it chance, but looking close I saw  
 The surge desist, and then roll back and leave  
 The goal it had so proudly reached;  
 At certain times what happens is repeated.

*Mein Auge war aufs hohe Meer gezogen  
 Es schwoll empor, sich in sich selbst zu türmen.  
 Dann ließ es nach und schüttete die Wogen,  
 Des flachen Ufers Breite zu bestürmen.  
 Und das verdroß mich. Wie der Übermut  
 Den freien Geist, der alle Rechte schätzt,  
 Durch leidenschaftlich aufgeregtes Blut  
 Ins Mißbehagen des Gefühls versetzt.  
 Ich hielt's für Zufall, schärfte meinen Blick,  
 Die Woge stand und rollte dann zurück,  
 Entfernte sich vom stolz erreichten Ziel;  
 Die Stunde kommt, sie wiederholt das Spiel.<sup>188</sup>*

Faust finds the sea, just like the vial from *Faust I*, irresistible. Both the sea and the vial attract Faust's eye: he said about the vial, "does that vial act as a magnet on the eye?" [*Ist jenes Fläschchen dort Augen ein Magnet*] and here, "The ocean far below attracted my eye" [*Mein Auge war aufs hohe Meer gezogen*]. Earlier, the sight of the vial eases Faust's "turbulence of spirit" [*Des Geistes Flutstrom ebbet nach und nach*], lessens his "striving" [*das Streben wird gemindert*], and transports him to a similar vision of the

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<sup>188</sup> Goethe 10198-10209.

“open sea” [*bohe Meer*] which “sparkles” below him [*Die Spiegelflut erglänzt zu meinen Füßen*]. But this instance with Faust and the sea is not just a repetition of the scene with the vial; there are key differences.

The turbulence that was in Faust’s spirit shows itself in the ocean: it is surging, towering, assaulting, and it “storms” the shore [*Dann ließ es nach und schüttete die Wogen, / Des flachen Ufers Breite zu bestürmen*].<sup>189</sup> While the vial and the peaceful vision of the sea lessened Faust’s striving, this sea frustrates him [*Und das verdroß mich*] (10202). Faust locates the source of the frustration within himself: “And I was vexed—for arrogance, / Unbridled blood, will always cause / Uneasy feelings in a spirit” [*Und das verdroß mich. Wie der Übermut / Den freien Geist, der alle Rechte schätzt, / Durch leidenschaftlich aufgeregtes Blut / Ins Mißbehagen des Gefühls versetzt*] (10202-5). Faust’s blood is the source of his anger at the withdrawing ocean. The motion of the sea is stifled, and its surges and retreats are repeated: “At certain times what happens is repeated” [*Die Stunde kommt, sie wiederholt das Spiel*].<sup>190</sup> Is it the pressure of his “unbridled blood” that most distresses him? If it were merely the pressure of his blood that distresses him, the abatement of the surge should be reassuring, just as his “striving” was “lessened” [*Streben wird gemindert*] in the vial scene. Or—and this seems more likely—is it the repeated thwarting of his excited blood that is trying his patience? Close examination of the passage reveals that in fact both motions are to blame for Faust’s annoyance [*Verdruss*]. The spontaneous welling up of the blood’s power quickly becomes an excessive arrogance [*Übermut*] that inevitably displaces the mind’s freedom of movement with a deflating unease.

Far from being deterred by the sight of the excessive force crashing in on itself, Faust begins to plot a way to capture the “power” [*Kraft*] that drives the waves by isolating it and holding it in his hands. This would allow him to dominate the ocean: he announces that the sight “has inspired me to

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<sup>189</sup> Goethe 10200-1. Translation modified.

<sup>190</sup> Goethe 10209.

venture to new heights, / To wage war here against these forces and subdue them” [*Da wagt mein Geist sich selbst zu überfliegen, / Hier möcht’ ich kämpfen, dies möcht’ ich besiegen*].<sup>191</sup> Faust decides to wage war on the ocean, he desires to capture its power and its *Kraft*; Faust’s fantasy is that he will be able to use the ocean’s *Kraft* not to power his own striving, but to master his own “unbridled blood” [*aufgeregtes Blut*].<sup>192</sup> Thus, Faust sets out to capture the *Kraft* of the ocean—a force that he finds outside of himself, in Nature. Faust is interested in harnessing all of *Kraft* both within and without his body. The effect of this mastery over both blood and ocean, counterintuitively, is freedom.<sup>193</sup> What is Faust’s concept of freedom in his encounter with the ocean?

According to Faust’s line of thinking, the ocean is not free because of its turbulence. Faust finds a parallel to the ocean’s tempestuousness in his own unbridled blood, whose arrogance [*Übermut*] displaces [*versetzt*] his free spirit [*der freie Geist*], leaving him with an “uneasiness of feeling” [*Ins Mißbehagen des Gefühls*] akin to the ocean’s ebb. In both the cases of the ocean and the blood, excitement turns freedom into manic arrogance which then crashes down like a wave into its own depletion. Faust is trying to rescue the freedom of spirit: the ocean’s spirit and his own. Faust aims to break the repetitive turbulent cycle of excess and deficiency by channeling the *Kraft* within the ocean and his blood.<sup>194</sup> Faust’s project of mastery over the ocean is ultimately a project of freedom from repetition.

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<sup>191</sup> Goethe 10220-1.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 10204.

<sup>193</sup> In the beginning of their journey, Mephistopheles tells Faust that he will teach him how to be free in life: “Take my advice and get yourself / an outfit similar to mine, / so that, released from bondage, you can learn / what life and freedom really are” [*und rate nun dir, kurz und gut, / Dergleichen gleichfalls anzulegen; / Damit du, losgebunden, frei, / Erfahrest was das Leben sei*]. Goethe 1540-3. At their journey’s end, Faust crafts a very different kind of freedom.

<sup>194</sup> This is a gesture of sublimation in Freud’s terminology.



Ein Ozeanisches Gefühl

As we have discussed, there are two key ocean scenes in *Faust*: first, when Faust imagines a calm ocean at the beginning of the play when he contemplates the vial, and second, when Faust comes into direct contact with the ocean later in the play and declares mastery of the ocean as his next venture. Faust has a very special relationship with the ocean, and it is therefore fitting that his adventure begins and ends with an oceanic feeling.<sup>195</sup>

Faust ventures to protect the land from the destructive ocean. He orders the Lemures and their “overseer” [*Aufseher*] Mephistopheles to build a massive dike between the shore and the waves, in order to limit the ocean and prevent it encroaching on the shore. Mephistopheles, literally seeing over into Faust’s future, knows something that Faust does not know: this project is Faust’s last. Mephistopheles prophetically jokes that Faust is not directing the construction of a dike (translated “canal” in the English), but he is instead digging his own grave: “The word I heard was more banal: they mentioned graves [*Grab*], not some canal [*Graben*]” [*Man spricht, wie man mir Nachrichten gab, / Von keinem Graben, doch vom Grab*].<sup>196</sup> And this play on words turns out to bear some truth; as Faust professes his project of mastering the ocean, he realizes that he has found a way to access a certain form of immortality—he has found a way to live on past his death in the form of a legend:

A marsh stretching along those mountains  
Contaminates what’s been reclaimed so far;  
To drain that stagnant pool as well

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<sup>195</sup> In the second paragraph of *Civilization and its Discontents* [*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*], Freud recalls an “oceanic feeling” that one of his Romain Rolland described to him in a letter, after having read his 1927 text on the *Future of an Illusion*: “It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of ‘eternity’, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded — as it were, ‘oceanic’. This feeling, he adds, is a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith; it brings with it no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious energy which is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems, directed by them into particular channels, and doubtless also exhausted by them” [*Diese sei ein besonderes Gefühl, das ihn selbst nie zu verlassen pflege, das er von vielen anderen bestätigt gefunden und bei Millionen Menschen voraussetzen dürfe. Ein Gefühl, das er die Empfindung der „Ewigkeit“ nennen möchte, ein Gefühl wie von etwas Unbegrenztem, Schrankenlosem, gleichsam „Ozeanischem“. Dies Gefühl sei eine rein subjektive Tatsache, kein Glaubenssatz; keine Zusage persönlicher Fortdauer knüpfe sich daran, aber es sei die Quelle der religiösen Energie, die von den verschiedenen Kirchen und Religionsystemen gefasst, in bestimmte Kanäle geleitet und gewiss auch aufgezehrt werde*]. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 1-2. Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Frankfurt: Marix Verlag, 2010), 9-10.

<sup>196</sup> Goethe 11557-8.

Would be a crowning last achievement.  
 If I can furnish space for many millions  
 To live—not safe, I know but free to work  
 In green and fertile fields, with man and beast  
 Soon happy on the new-made soil  
 And settled in beside the mighty hill  
 A dauntless people's effort has erected,  
 Creating here inside a land of Eden—  
 Then there, without, the tide my bluster to its brim,  
 But where it gnaws, attempting to rush in by force,  
 Communal effort will be quick to close the breach.

*Ein Sumpf zieht am Gebirge hin,  
 Verpestet alles schon Errungene;  
 Den faulen Pfuhl auch abzuziehn  
 Das Letzte wär das Höchsterrungene.  
 Eröffn' ich Räume vielen Millionen,  
 Nicht sicher zwar, doch tätig frei zu wohnen.  
 Grün das Gefilde, fruchtbar; Mensch und Herde  
 Sogleich behaglich auf der neusten Erde  
 Gleich angesiedelt an des Hügels Kraft,  
 Den aufgewälzt kühn-emsige Völkerschaft.  
 Im Innern hier ein paradiesisch Land,  
 Da rase draußen Flut bis auf zum Rand,  
 Und wie sie nascht gewaltsam einzuschließen,  
 Gemeindrang eilt die Lücke zu verschließen.<sup>197</sup>*

Faust imagines that his name will be remembered as the one who finally dictated the ocean's borders, protected the land from the waves, and symbolically delineated the relationship between life and salty oceanic death. But Faust's miraculous realization does not come as a discovery of some kind of immortality; likewise, Faust does not imagine that the barrier he is building between the land and the waves will last forever. On the contrary, Faust hopes that people will repair the barrier everyday anew, constantly strengthening it in spite of erosion by the elements; Faust's final wisdom rests on the idea that the barrier will give these people a way of symbolically preventing and

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<sup>197</sup> Goethe 11559-11572.

postponing death. Faust declares the ultimate knowledge when he says: “To this idea I am committed wholly, / it is the final wisdom we can reach: / he, only, merits freedom and existence / who wins them every day anew” [*Ja diesem Sinne bin ich ganz ergeben, / Das ist der Weisheit letzter Schluß: / Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben, / Der täglich sie erobern muß*].<sup>198</sup>

Faust’s final realization, therefore, is that freedom is a *repetitive* pursuit; people must constantly work together to repair the dike between the land and the ocean, just as they must repetitively seize freedom every day. Whereas Faust thought he was searching for a freedom *from* repetition, he instead finds a freedom *to* repete. In this final realization, Faust finds an alternative to the striving that dictated his movement throughout the text. Faust’s ultimate wisdom is also what allows him to find his own death. This takes me to a crucial question: how, exactly, does Faust die? Faust’s last words in his human form are the following:

If only I might see that people’s teeming life,  
Share their autonomy on unencumbered soil;  
Then, to the moment, I could say:  
Tarry a while, you are so fair—  
The traces of my days on earth  
Will survive for eons!  
Envisioning those heights of happiness,  
I now enjoy my highest moment.

*Solch ein Gewimmel möcht ich sehn,  
Auf freiem Grundmit freiem Volke stehn.  
Zum Augenblicke dürft’ ich sagen:  
Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!  
Es kann die Spur von meinen Erdetagen  
Nicht in Aonen untergeben. —  
Im Vorgefühl von solchem hohen Glück  
Genieß ich jetzt den höchsten Augenblicke.*<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Goethe 11573-6.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 11579-11586.

My claim is that Faust's final wisdom allows him to die his own death, and this death that Faust finds for himself is ultimately a creative death.<sup>200</sup> Faust finds an alternative method of movement to the striving that dictated his path previously throughout the drama. His striving was forward pressing, driving, and each one of his new ventures functioned merely as a repetition of his last. Before, Faust's striving took the form of pressing ever onward, stepping ever onward, vowing never to stop, always refusing and denying the possibility of his death. Perhaps Faust imagines that if he never says "*verweile doch, du bist so schön*," he would be able to evade death. Thus, Faust proceeds on with a frenetic forward momentum, because he hopes to win his wager with Mephistopheles. If Faust were to lose the bet, to address time directly and invite the moment to stay a while in all its beauty, Faust would be submitting himself to his death, giving himself over to his last day. What actually happens in the end of the story, though, is neither a denial of nor a submission to death. Faust does not continue to deny his death in his forward-moving striving, refusing to say "*verweile doch*." But Faust also does not decide to merely say "*verweile doch*," so as to submit himself to death. Instead, Faust finds a creative alternative: he decides to speak the words of "*verweile doch*," but in the subjunctive mood: he says "I could say: / Tarry a while, you are so fair—" [*Zum Augenblicke dürft' ich sagen: / Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!*].<sup>201</sup> Faust refuses to either strive [*Streben*] or stay [*verweilen*], and he refuses to either deny or submit to death. Faust finds another way to die, his own way, in the subjunctive mood: he *could* die. The subjunctive mood is, after all, the language of possibility, fantasy, and in the end, Faust's freedom. The subjunctive mood, though, does not grant Faust a possible escape from his death; the clocks stop, and Faust does die.

But even when the clocks stop, the story continues onward as Faust's spirit rises. His ultimate motion upwards, his *Aufhebung*, is the result of his ability, in the end, to understand death

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<sup>200</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes that the self-preservative drive protects the organism's ability to die "in its own fashion" [*auf seine Weise*]. Freud BPP 47; JL 41.

<sup>201</sup> Goethe 11581-2.

dialectically. In the realization that death must not be either denied or submitted to, Faust has discovered an existential freedom, a way to live “actively free” [*tätig frei*] that is repetitively constituted daily [*täglich*]. He has found his own creative death, and this death must be negotiated every day. This death is not life-destroying like Mephistopheles predicts when he says “the end will be annihilation” [*Und auf Vernichtung läuft's hinaus*], but rather life-driving. In this final discovery of his own death, Faust thinks death not as a destruction of the body, but as something which has always existed within it. Faust felt this very death in the force of his blood, pulsing to the rhythm of his heartbeat through his veins, those small *Graben* that direct the blood all throughout our bodies and allow us our movement, weaving like red ribbons through our flesh, always signifying our mortality.

Goethe does not think death in *Faust* as either re-creation “beyond” or annihilation, as a serene or a stormy ocean scene, or as something to which we must submit or whose possibility we must deny; rather, Goethe thinks death dialectically and creatively, as something that emerges out of the denial-submission polarity and constantly negotiates between them throughout the body of the text and within our very mortal [*sterbliche*] bodies. Death is indeed the drive that draws Faust – and us [*uns*] onward [*hinan*]: we might even call it the *Todestrieb*.

## A Death of One's Own

The End of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

At the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud turns to the “words of the poet,” writing “We may take comfort, too, for the slow advances of our scientific knowledge in the words of the poet: ‘What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping. / The Book tells us it’s no sin to limp’” [*Was man nicht erfliegen kann, muss man erhincken. / Die Schrift sagt, es ist keine Sünde zu hinken*].<sup>202</sup> Freud uses the words from Friedrich Rückert’s translation of al-Hariri as a source of comfort, as a way of justifying the slow, limping progression of science, and, ultimately, as a way to end his text “in its own way” [*auf seine Weise*].<sup>203</sup> This gesture toward the literary at the end of the text, however, is not new; as we have seen, it is repeated throughout the text with a certain persistence. Freud turns to the myth *Androgyne* in his discussion of the conservative nature of the drive; he references Torquado Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* as he unfolds his theory of the compulsion to repeat; and, of course, he quotes Goethe’s Mephistopheles to describe the onward motion of the drive. When we read the poetry of Rückert at the end of the text, we are reminded of these previous incursions of the literary; thus this ending becomes less like an ending and more like a directive to read the text again regressively—to read the text backwards, in order to adequately listen to what it is that Freud is doing with his poets. We might recall other crucial moments when Freud turned to Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Goethe and wonder about the status of literature and poetry [*Dichtung*] in Freud’s wider body of work.<sup>204</sup> There is something concealed within these literary moments, something beyond what Freud means

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<sup>202</sup> Freud, *BPP* 78; *JL* 69.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; 41. Translation modified.

<sup>204</sup> Freud quotes *Faust*, specifically, in almost all of his major texts: in the sixth chapter of *Die Traumdeutung*, in chapter twelve of *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, in the second chapter of *Das Unheimliche*, in the sixth chapter of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in *Totem und Tabu*, and in *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*.

to say.<sup>205</sup> Freud repeatedly turns to literature in the moments where his theory stumbles. It is clear that this repetition is also a return, but it is not clear whether this repetition is a return *to* or a return *of* the repressed. What is clear is that these literary navels within the text are bound up with each other, and they have a daemonic quality about them.

As I detailed in my first chapter, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is a text about endings, beginnings, and what happens and repeats in between; it is a text that provides us with a mode of thinking death not just as an ending but also as a beginning. Freud posits the idea that the death drive pulses throughout our lives, circulating and repeating itself, sometimes making "the task of living more difficult" [*die eine Erschwerung der Lebensaufgabe erzielen*].<sup>206</sup> What we learn from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that death is itself a repetition of an earlier state of things. The aim of the death drive, which moves between birth and death proper, is to restore this prior state of inanimacy: "the drive is an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things" [*Ein Trieb wäre also ein dem belebten Organischen inwohnender Drang zur Wiederherstellung eines früheren Zustandes*].<sup>207</sup> This idea leads Freud to his first thesis, that "the aim of all life is death" [*Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*].<sup>208</sup> What occurs between birth and death are the detours that the organism takes throughout life. It is important, though, that the detours do not lead toward an improper end—Freud writes that the organism wishes to die only "in its own way" [*auf seine Weise*].<sup>209</sup> These detours must not short-circuit the organism's life. We might wonder if this idea of the short-circuit, or a death that comes too soon, lurks throughout Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* within its references to the literary.

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<sup>205</sup> Jacques Lacan: "It is obvious that in analytic discourse, what is at stake is nothing other than what can be read: what can be read beyond what the subject has been incited to say." See Lacan's Seminar XX, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 29.

<sup>206</sup> Freud, *BPP* 77; *JL* 69.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 36; 38.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 46; 40.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; 41. translation modified.

Sabine Prokhoris writes: “It seems as if Freud calls the poets to his rescue whenever he senses a weak spot in his reasoning, or finds himself disinclined to proceed scientifically.”<sup>210</sup> Is the end of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* the result of an end that came too soon—is this an improper end to the text? Was Freud “haunted by Goethe’s ghost” as Avital Ronell claims in her text *Dictations: On Haunted Writing*?<sup>211</sup> Is the ghost of the Poet coming after Freud, in order to collect its debt? Or was he seduced (led astray) by the words of the poet in such a way that terminated his theoretical project in a kind of *Liebestod*? Before Freud quotes Rückert in the very last lines of the text, he writes that “We must be patient and await fresh methods and occasions of research” [*Man muß geduldig sein und auf weitere Mittel und Anlässe zur Forschung warten*], in order to find more answers.<sup>212</sup> Freud urges his readers to patiently wait for science to catch up. Freud calls for patience, and he also warns against stubbornness: “We must be ready, too, to abandon a path that we have followed for a time, if it seems to be leading to no good end. Only believers, who demand that science shall be a substitute for the catechism they have given up, will blame an investigator for developing or even transforming his views” [*Auch bereit bleiben, einen Weg wieder zu verlassen, den man eine Weile verfolgt hat, wenn er zu nichts Gutem zu führen scheint. Nur solche Gläubige, die von der Wissenschaft einen Ersatz für den aufgegebenen Katechismus fordern, werden dem Forscher die Fortbildung oder selbst die Umbildung seiner Ansichten verübeln*].<sup>213</sup> It is not clear at the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* whether or not he has perhaps brought the text to “a not-good end” [*nichts Gutem*].<sup>214</sup> Freud leaves his meta-psychological inquiry open; he tells us that the science of posterity will carry his project through.

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<sup>210</sup> Sabine Prokhoris, *The Witch’s Kitchen: Freud, Faust, and the Transference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>211</sup> Ronell *Dictations: On Haunted Writing*, xxvii.

<sup>212</sup> Freud, *BPP* 77; 69. Translation modified.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 78; 69.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*



Freud does carry his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to a proper end as a poetic text, though. When Freud quotes Rückert, there could be no better end to this text, which is folded up in the literary throughout. While Freud limps along at a rhythm, waiting for science to catch up with him, he embeds the poet's words within his own. Since biology will not answer Freud, or provide him with sufficient evidence for his claim that there is in Eros a need to restore an earlier state of things, he turns toward myth. In Plato's *Androgyne*, he finds the search to recover a lost primal unity. Freud apologizes for his mythopoetic detour, but he also acts pleased with positioning himself alongside Plato as a "poet-philosopher." The detours into poetry, myth, and literature are some of the most crucial elements of Freud's project in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Peter Brooks, in "Freud's Masterplot," writes: "*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is itself a plot which has formulated the dynamic necessity of its own detour."<sup>215</sup> When we read the lines from Rückert at the end of the play, we are compelled to return to all the other literary moments in the text which function as plot points throughout Freud's inquiry.

Freud already senses in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* what he would conclude seventeen years later in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" that the practice of analysis is inherently incapable of coming to an end, because it always opens up more questions than it answers.<sup>216</sup> The process of *Auflösung* in analysis is never-ending. Psychoanalysis therefore needs literature to establish for itself an end where there seems to be none. After all, this is precisely what Freud does at the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He acknowledges that he has not yet reached a good end to his theoretical project, but he does not want to appear to leave his inquiry open. He references poetry from outside the text, not in order to serve as evidence for his speculative endeavors in the place of science, but rather to punctuate the story that he has narrated throughout the text. Poetry repeats itself

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<sup>215</sup> Peter Brooks "Freud's Masterplot," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis, The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 294.

<sup>216</sup> Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," 23.

throughout Freud's text; because of this, it is through poetry that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* finds its own way to end. At the same time, it is poetry, and not science, that draws Freud *himan*.

### The End of *Faust*

Goethe's *Faust* ends when Faust discovers how he can die his own death. What is Faust's own death, and how does he discover it? In the previous chapter, I wrote that Faust *creates* his own death in a way that neither submits to death nor denies its inevitability; Faust actually affirms his death as a possibility, and in doing so, he finds his freedom. When Faust pronounces the words to end his bet with Mephistopheles "Stay a while you are so beautiful" [*Verweile doch du bist so schön*], he does so in the subjunctive mood: he says that he *could* speak these words, asserting his choice either to do so or not to do so.<sup>217</sup> In Faust's final pronouncement, he does not deny or negate death—he affirms his death as his ultimate possibility. Faust never would have discovered this affirmation if he were not allied with the Spirit of Negation, Mephistopheles.

Géza von Molnár in "Mysticism in a Secular Context and Goethe's Metamorphoses of the Circle: An Illustration with Reference to *Faust*" describes how this affirmation comes about.

Mephistopheles seems to be the only emissary from the unknowable realm, and he turns out to be the principle of negation with which Faust must ally himself if he is ever to encounter the "Yes" that supersedes it. This ultimate affirmation cannot be addressed to any particular aspect of being; it cannot be, to paraphrase Plato's definition of absolute beauty, 'yes' here and 'no' there. Ultimate affirmation must apply to being itself in its totality, which can only occur from a vantage point of the Whole and not the part, not from the perspective of the mortal but the immortal.<sup>218</sup>

This "ultimate affirmation" at the hands of the "immortal" is exactly what we see at the end of the play: the affirmation of being itself in its totality that directs Faust's soul at the end of the play is

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<sup>217</sup> Goethe 1582. Translation modified.

<sup>218</sup> Géza von Molnár in "Mysticism in a Secular Context and Goethe's Metamorphoses of the Circle: An Illustration with Reference to *Faust*" in *Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 178.

carried out by the angels, spirits, and the “eternally feminine” [*das Ewig-weibliche*].<sup>219</sup> The angels proclaim that they are permitted to draw Faust’s spirit on because he has responded to the forces from the heavens with unending striving.<sup>220</sup> Faust kept the promise that he made at the beginning of the play to strive ever onward: “It is to strive with all my might / that I am promising to do” [*Das Streben meiner ganzen Kraft / Ist g’rade das was ich verspreche*].<sup>221</sup> In the end, it is not any singular action or even the greatest wisdom that redeems Faust from his *Schuld*; it is rather the sheer fact of his striving that grants Faust redemption and his “ultimate affirmation.”

Von Molár writes that while the ultimate affirmation of being in its totality must be carried out by the immortal, “the individual, who must judge from the viewpoint of the part, can only affirm the Whole by negating its parts.”<sup>222</sup> We might remember how, when Mephistopheles introduces himself, he describes himself as “a part of the Part that in the beginning was all” [*Ich bin ein Teil des Teils, der Anfangs alles war*].<sup>223</sup> Faust’s path is characterized by a process of negating the parts in order to affirm the whole, but this negation is part of a more complex dialectic, as well:

This is a positive negation, quite different from negation that is equivalent to despair. It is negation affirmed, an acceptance of negation that extends not to any particular but over the entire range of partiality itself. Simultaneous affirmation and negation is at the heart of the dialectic process Goethe refers to as striving, a process that does not allow for a goal implicit of cessation in its attainment.<sup>224</sup>

When Faust utters his last words, he affirms the final negation of his being; he affirms the inevitability of his death. When Faust says ‘yes’ to the moment in the subjunctive mood and asks it to stay a while, he is also affirming the finitude of time with respect to being. Paradoxically, it is through this affirmation of the moment’s finitude that it has the possibility to infinitely stay. Only in

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<sup>219</sup> Goethe 12110-1. Translation modified.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 11934-41.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 1742-3.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 1349.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 178.

the subjunctive mood *could* the moment stay. When Faust thinks about the result of his last wisdom, he presents an illustration of a new way of being: he envisions a mode of being where human-kind works together to constantly ward off the threat of death, neither denying the fact that death will mark the end of life nor despairingly submitting to it.

In Faust's affirmation of death, he also affirms the finite nature of the time that contains the human being. Actually, finitude in *Faust* takes both temporal and spatial forms. At the beginning of the play, Faust was unable to tolerate finitude spatially. He rejected his cramped study and sought a mode of existence free from human confinement. In the end, though, discovering a certain confinement within the finitude of time and space is exactly how Faust affirms his freedom. Faust realizes, as he constructs the dam between the land and the ocean, that he must constantly affirm and re-affirm his status of being within the finite nature of time and space, and humankind must continuously affirm and accept, but also defend themselves against, the encroaching ocean and potentiality of death, every day. In the construction of this dam, Faust is also actively delineating the finitude of human existence; he is literally building its boundaries. Von Molár writes:

No matter how limited an individual's sphere of activity, as long as it is not permitted to confine its agent to inaction through inducing either a false sense of final accomplishment or the conviction of its ultimate futility, striving, that is to say, free agency affirming the self within its limits as an integrated and interrelated part of the universe, is possible.<sup>225</sup>

Faust's striving involves the task of continuously finding freedom through activity. This is a task in which humankind must engage together; people must stand together, united against the waves crashing against the dam. This freedom involves the affirmation of negation; it is therefore fitting that Faust was required to ally himself with the Spirit of Eternal Negation in order to find this last affirmation. *Der Herr* charges Mephistopheles with the task of prodding Faust onwards, thereby

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 179.

directing Faust's journey as a course through negativity from the very outset. But there is nothing futile about Faust's path through negativity. Faust's negations serve the goal of affirming the whole.

Once Faust finds this freedom, the angels descend from heaven in order to carry Faust's spirit upwards and onwards. It is only once Faust has discovered this freedom that he can unite with this new immortal unity of all being. In Faust's discovery of his inherent freedom, and in his affirmation of death and the limited nature of being in time, Faust has found a way to create his own death. Faust's "own death" consists of an ascension into freedom, heaven, and unity. Faust creates this death for himself through an affirmative path of constant negation. Faust's final affirmation in his death also marks the end of the play.

### Reading and *Nachträglichkeit*

Both Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Goethe's *Faust* find their proper ends. And yet, both endings send us back through the text—they each necessitate the process of re-reading. The end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, just like the end of *Faust*, makes a linear reading impossible. Freud's ending involves a repetition of the literary event; because Freud ends with the literary, he emphasizes the status of his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* not only as a scientific text, but also as a mythopoetic text. Freud states that the "the aim of all life is death" [*Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod*], and that death is a repetition of "an earlier state of things" [*eines früheren Zustandes*].<sup>226</sup> Can we then make the claim first, that the text itself aims at its end, and second, that its literary ending is merely a repetition of an earlier state of things? If we choose to pursue this line of thinking, we might speculate about the text's origin. We know that the literary does repeat with a certain persistence throughout the text, but does literature also constitute the text's origin? This is the speculation that

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<sup>226</sup> Freud, *BPP* 46; *JL* 40. 43; 38.

the ending of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* necessitates. This line of thought is *nachträglich*—it takes place in the after math, *après coup*.

But Freud's *Beyond* does not only end in poetry—poetry also can be found in the origin of Freud's concept of the death drive. Specifically, there is solid evidence for the claim that Goethe's *Faust* functions as a certain origin for Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud quotes the play explicitly after he has identified both the death drive and the sexual (life) drive as conservative forces that seek to restore a previous state of things. According to Brooks, when Freud uses Goethe's language to say that the drive is “always pressing forward” [*ungebändigt immer vorwärts dring[en]*], he is deconstructing the tendency to believe that humans drive toward perfection, along the lines of Goethe's striving Faust.<sup>227 228</sup> Perhaps this is what Freud intended to do when quoting Mephistopheles's words; however, I claim that this quote reveals to us something about Freud's project that has been concealed. This quote functions like a navel, and it speaks something more primary about Freud's theoretical project: the story of Faust, surely one of the most quoted literary works in Freud's oeuvre, functions as “an earlier state of things” [*eines früheren Zustandes*] for psychoanalytic theory.<sup>229</sup> We learned in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the organism's repetitions operate according to the conservative nature of the drives, and this is how we must read the repetitive allusions to the literary in the text itself. I do not wish to claim that Goethe fathered psychoanalysis—but he was by Freud's side when psychoanalysis was conceived.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 51, 45.

<sup>228</sup> Peter Brooks “Freud's Masterplot,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis, The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 294.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 43, 38.

<sup>230</sup> In her text *Dictations: On Haunted Writing*, Ronell discusses the relationship between Freud and Goethe's mutual paternity, and a shared debt [*Schuld*]. Regarding Freud's quote (“Thus I was reminded of the duties of parents to their children. Goethe's words gained a fresh meaning in this context”), Ronell writes: “Thus Freud names the debt that he feels he had originally forgotten, namely, the debt that parents have toward their children. His own debts or duties are recalled to him only after he is reminded by Goethe of the primal debt that children incur. While Goethe's words gained (a fresh meaning), Freud only has increasing charges to contend with; his debt seems to be growing faster, and Freud is naturally afraid of getting the worst of the bargain.” Ronell, *Dictations: On Haunted Writing*, 27. Ronell goes on to discuss Freud's *Faust* quote in *Totem und Tabu*: “What you have inherited from your fathers, / acquire it to make it yours” [*Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, / erwirb es, um es zu besitzen*]. In this quote, Ronell writes that Freud attributes to Goethe the

The ending of *Faust*, like the ending of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, requires us to read with *Nachträglichkeit*.<sup>231</sup> I propose that in the play's last lines, "the eternally feminine draws us on" [*das Ewig-weibliche zieht uns hinan*], motion "hinan" is also motion backwards through the text. As I have discussed, what propels Faust onwards and upwards is ultimately an affirmation of the *via negativa*. Faust rises into the heavens at the end of the play not because he has found the meaning of his life, but because he has exhausted his possibilities in the world in his striving. Faust's apophatic striving, though, as I have discussed, is actually a process of affirming the whole by negating its parts; Faust only can affirm the whole of his being by negating the possibilities of his existence one by one. According to this idea, Faust's journey on Earth must be negative for his journey in heaven, directed onward by "the eternally feminine" [*das Ewig-weibliche*] rather than Mephistopheles, to be positive. At the end of the play, we begin to understand the meaning of Faust's pact with Mephistopheles, who is "the spirit who is always negating" [*der Geist der stets verneint*].<sup>232</sup> Whereas we were led to think, upon first reading of the play, that Faust's striving was essentially creative while Mephistopheles's

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intuition of Freud's meta-psychological theory; in doing so, Freud finds a way not to murder his father Goethe. But Freud also attributes a more primary position to his own psychoanalytic theory which Goethe had intuited; the theory, therefore, predated Goethe's *Faust*. Ronell goes on to write: "But if Freud agrees to be Goethe's creditor, to place himself in the position of Goethe's father, he is now forever running the risk of being attacked, crushed, destroyed, and consumed by his guilty (*schuldig*) son. For if psychoanalysis is the father of Goethe's intuitions, then that which surpasses or astonishes Freud in Goethe's text is equivalent to neglect of debt with respect to psychoanalysis, or to Goethe's murder of the father. Like the archetypal victim of the animated design—or the dream-victim—Freud will have made himself exceedingly vulnerable to successive attacks (*Angriffe*)," Ronell 27-8. These are the oedipal dynamics at stake between Goethe and Freud. It is therefore not possible to claim that it is either Freud or Goethe who exists in the position of the primal father. As Ronell demonstrates, they engage in this process of fathering, and disavowing the father, *together*. The status of fatherhood is very much at stake in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, my focus text: in this work, Freud also turns to Goethe, and Freud also is undoubtedly thinking about his own status as father of his daughter Sophie, who died in the pandemic halfway through his writing of the text. Freud is very aware of the debt that parents have toward their children in *Totem und Tabu*, and in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we see Freud negotiating with his own paternal debt in real time, in a way that always remains umbilically connected to Goethe.

<sup>231</sup> Freud's first seduction theory describes the experience of trauma as a folding in of time back on itself. An event originally experienced in a harmless way might become traumatic if another experience attributes to the first experience a sexual meaning. By association, the second experience folds itself back upon the first, and retroactively acquires the same feeling of the first, seemingly harmless experience. In the second experience, the subject is taken by surprise and has not yet acquired the proper defenses. The subject therefore represses the memory of this second experience. Paula Mieli, in *Figures of Space: Subject, Body, Place*, writes that trauma is constituted in a temporal region called *Nachträglichkeit*, whereby the present moment invests past moments "with a resounding meaning-effect, endowing it with the status of revelation. Mieli, *Figures of Space: Subject, Body, Place* (New York: Agincourt Press, 2017), 32.

<sup>232</sup> Goethe 1338. Translation modified.

negation was essentially destructive, we see by the end how Faust's creation and Mephistopheles's destruction are dialectically intertwined in Faust's negative striving. This interpretation of Faust's striving necessitates the process of re-reading and re-interpreting the story. We go back to the pact scene, back again to the Prologue in Heaven [*Prolog im Himmel*], and we wonder about the relationship between *Der Herr* and our friend Mephistopheles. Due to this "eternal" process of re-reading, *Faust* is a text that can never be exhausted. It must be read and re-read every day anew. In this way, reading *Faust* can be just like working "actively free" [*tätig frei*] to repair the dam between the ocean and the land.<sup>233</sup>

According Freud's work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, passive repetitions have a daemonic character, and they give the impression of a "perpetual recurrence of the same thing."<sup>234</sup> I make the claim in my first chapter that repetitions within life carry the *structure* of death, as something that repeats a state before life. When we repeat, we are either passively or actively dealing with death within life in a structural way; when we encounter the structure of death within life in the form of repetition, we are encountering the death drive. But what has our inquiry on literature added to this discussion of repetition and the death drive? Brooks claims that "Narrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered: a *sujet* repeating the *fabula*, as the detective retraces the tracks of the criminal."<sup>235</sup> Narrative has the structure of repetition, as do poetic devices: rhyme, alliteration, assonance, meter, refrain take us in our ear, in our mouth, and in our eye back to something earlier in the text.<sup>236</sup> The act of reading requires us to recall earlier moments in the text; with each new literary allusion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we are reminded of those that came before it. The insistence of the poetic throughout Freud's text indicates

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 11564. Translation modified.

<sup>234</sup> Freud, *BPP* 23; *JL* 21.

<sup>235</sup> Brooks, 285

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 287.



to us that the poetic ending was anticipated from the beginning. The beginning of Freud's text presupposes its end. And when we think about the idea of the "end" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it is hard not to think of the death of the organism as well, which sets the death-drive into its repetitive motion throughout life. This is how we can read Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the text itself builds a metaphor for its own meta-psychological theory; it performs the same structure of beginning, ending, and repeating that it theorizes.

I am proposing a method of reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Faust* in light of their respective ends; these endings might shed "more light"—"mehr Licht," as Goethe is reputed to have said just before he died—on the relationship between reading and death. According to Walter Benjamin in "The Storyteller" [*Der Erzähler*], we seek in literature the knowledge of death that we cannot find in our own lives, because death is the "authority" of narrative [*Der Tod ist die Sanktion von allem, was der Erzähler berichten kann. Vom Tode hat er seine Autorität geliebt*].<sup>237</sup> Freud makes a similar claim in his essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" when he writes:

It is an inevitable result of all this that we should seek in the world of fiction, in literature and in the theatre compensation for what has been lost in life. There we still find people who know how to die—who, indeed, even manage to kill someone else... There alone too the condition can be fulfilled which makes it possible for us to reconcile ourselves with death: namely, that behind all the vicissitudes of life we should still be able to preserve a life intact. For it is really too sad that in life it should be as it is in chess, where one false move may force us to resign the game, but with the difference that we can start no second game, no return-match. In the realm of fiction, we find the plurality of lives which we need. We die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves; yet we survive him, and are ready to die again just as safely with another hero.

*Es kann dann nicht anders kommen, als daß wir in der Welt der Fiktion, in der Literatur, im Theater Ersatz suchen für die Einbuße des Lebens. Dort finden wir noch Menschen, die zu sterben verstehen, ja die es auch zustande bringen, einen anderen zu töten. Dort allein erfüllt sich uns auch die Bedingung, unter welcher wir uns mit dem Tod versöhnen könnten, wenn wir nämlich hinter allen Wechselfällen des Lebens noch ein unantastbares Leben übrig behalten. Es ist doch zu traurig, daß es im Leben zugehen kann wie im Schachspiel, wo ein falscher Zug uns zwingen kann,*

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<sup>237</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 101. Walter Benjamin, "*Der Erzähler*" (Berlin: Parthas Verlag, 2008), 119.

*die Partie verloren zu geben, mit dem Unterschied aber, daß wir keine zweite, keine Revanchepartie beginnen können. Auf dem Gebiete der Fiktion finden wir jene Mehrheit von Leben, deren wir bedürfen. Wir sterben in der Identifizierung mit dem einen Helden, überleben ihn aber doch und sind bereit, ebenso ungeschädigt ein zweites Mal mit einem anderen Helden zu sterben.*<sup>238</sup>

According to Freud, reading involves a dealing with death; in reading, we can achieve a certain immortality as we survive the hero with whom we have identified. In our repeated survival of our heroes, we are playing a game with death, not entirely dissimilar from the previously discussed *Fort! Da!* game. We might think that these two games are very different: while the little boy is mastering a traumatic event that took place in the past and transforming the loss of his mother into an active rather than a passive experience, the play in reading involves the attempt to master an anxiety about something that has not yet occurred. What we learned in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* though, is that death is something which repeats “an earlier state of things” [*eines früheren Zustandes*].<sup>239</sup> Death is not just looming in the future—it has already taken place. In the act of reading, I suggest that we strive to master our own death like the little boy playing the *Fort! Da!* game. This mastery does not necessarily need to take the form of denial or submission to death. As *Faust* teaches us, there is another way: we can actively work to prevent our death everyday by continuously repairing the boundary between the land and the ocean—between life and death. Freud provides us with another way to understand the wisdom at the end of his essay on war and death: “*Si vis vitam, para mortem*. If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death” [*Wenn du das Leben aushalten willst, richte dich auf den Tod ein*].<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), Vol 14: 291.

<sup>239</sup> Freud, *BPP* 43; *JL* 38.

<sup>240</sup> At the end of “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” Freud writes that he has arrived at a “revision of the old saying *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want to preserve peace, arm for war” Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” 300. This ending, also, requires “*nachträglich*” reading. Freud turns to language that exists outside the text and rearticulates it, rewrites it, and revises it. It is in this “re” that the change takes place.

When we read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Faust* together, we discover a way to think death through the practice of reading. Narrative is structured by repetition, and the end of a story is implied in the beginning. The endings of both *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Faust* force their readers to take their own *via negativa* and re-read—*nachträglich*. When we read we are dealing with repetition, and we are dealing with death; in this way, we can understand reading as a practice of learning how to die one's own death. In this method of reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Faust* together, the dam between literature and psychoanalysis falls away: Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is just as much an intra-literary text as Goethe's *Faust* is intra-psychoanalytic. As Shoshana Felman writes in her text *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*, "the methodological stake is no longer that of the *application* of psychoanalysis *to* literature but, rather, of their *inter-implication* in each other."<sup>241</sup> The ocean's tides come crashing onto the shore and threaten our previously set boundaries. But this is why we must engage with the continuous process of reading and re-reading, and we must destroy these boundaries in order to build them anew.

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<sup>241</sup> Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*, 49.

## CONCLUSION

The Rhythm of the *Fort! Da!*

The Freudian death drive speaks through repetition—it operates within life, aiming to restore a previous state of things—and, in this sense, it has a rhythm. The child’s game in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has a rhythm as well. The child sends his spool *fort!* and then pulls it back *da!*; he also sends it *fort!* and *fort!* again without bringing it *da!* If we acknowledge the quality of negativity involved in sending the spool away—a spool which we might consider metonymic for Freud’s dead daughter, the child’s mother—we must attribute a corresponding quality of positivity to the spool’s reappearance. But the child nevertheless repeatedly negates the negative motion away: he too, like Mephistopheles acts as the “spirit that always negates.” Finally, Freud’s logic has a rhythm. Freud goes *fort!*—into unexplored scientific territory, into the “waters of Schopenhauer’s philosophy” [*in den Hafen des Philosophie Schopenhauers*], or into the world of poetry—and then comes back to the *Da!* of his theory.<sup>242</sup> Like the child, Freud moves *fort!* more than he returns *da!*; there is a limping rhythm in Freud’s striving. This rhythm of the *Fort! Da!* deals with what is on the other side, *jenseits*, beyond. Indeed, the rhythmic structure of the *Fort! Da!* game enacts the very framework that Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, of non-life yielding a life that presses ever forward, *fort!* toward death. The rhythm of the *Fort! Da!* reveals the meter and rhyme—the heartbeat—of Freud’s *Todestrieb*.

In Goethe’s *Faust*, the death drive speaks through the language of blood. It circulates and repeats throughout the body of the text in poetic meter. This blood-poetry often signifies death; and there is often something erotic about it as well. Faust finds that his blood is linked to the sea. Just as his blood moves to the rhythm of a heartbeat, there is also a rhythm with the ocean’s waves. The waves go *fort!* and *da!*, back and forth, back and forth. Faust sends them *fort!* actively when he

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<sup>242</sup> Freud, *BPP* 59; *JL* 53.

constructs a dam between the sea and the land. Goethe's poetry is not only rhythmic on the level of its content, in the language of blood, it is also rhythmic in its poetic form.<sup>243</sup> In Goethe's meter and rhyme, there is simultaneously similarity and difference: the beat stays the same while the sounds change, or perhaps the sound of the words stays the same while the meaning changes. Some material—either on the level of form or content—goes *fort!* so that material can emerge *da!*

The word rhythm comes from the Ancient Greek “ῥέω” (*rhéō*) meaning to flow, stream, or gush.<sup>244</sup> In Greek, rhythm flows like water and gushes like blood. But rhythm also flows in a temporal way—it flows through time. We have the impression that time flows infinitely, without stop or end or break, as continuously as the blood in our veins, but our everyday time-measures introduce into this current a single motion and then a stop. The hands on our watches move then stop, then move then stop, etc. On a digital clock, numbers flash onto the screen, and then disappear, and then the next numbers appear. This is how we commonly understand rhythm: as a flashing of instants, as a stimulus which comes and then goes, as a heart that throbs and then releases. In rhythm, there is always a dialectic of being (*da!*) and nothingness (*fort!*).

This dialectic is at play also with Freud's theory of the drive, which rests on the concept of the repetition compulsion. And we see this same dialectic at work when Faust erects a dam between the ocean and the land. Faust sublimates the rhythm of the waves that disturb his free spirit and his unbridled blood as they repeatedly move *da!* and *fort!* into the rhythm of everyday work on the dam for his fellow human. Herein lies Faust's final wisdom: the rhythm of everyday work is where freedom really lies. The dam that Faust builds with the Lemures symbolically functions as a caesura, a break between life and death. But this caesura is only an impartial break; it serves not to prevent

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<sup>243</sup> Among the twenty-six meters employed in *Faust I*, the most characteristic one is the *Knittelvers*, a funny pentameter rhymed in couplets, full of irregularities. Goethe also uses the stately *Madrigalvers*, a meter rhymed in couplets, with verses of four, five or six iambic feet. Goethe also used the *Stanzestrophe*, a stanza consisting of eight iambic pentameters rhyming “*abababc*.”

<sup>244</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 100.

death, but rather to postpone it. Faust's dam—working as a caesura—sublimates the rhythm of the repeatedly crashing waves into the rhythm of everyday work to repair the dam. The work of rhythm is enabled by the caesura, the break that punctuates the borders between land and water, life and death. But Faust's dam isn't really a caesura, a "cut" in the rhythmic motion—maybe it could be better notated by a musical *corona* (Italian: *fermata*). The musical corona implies a rhythmic stasis in which the last note of a cadence is held in the conductor's hands. Paul Celan shows us in his 1948 love poem, "Corona," the function of this rhythmic stasis when he accelerates and crescendos into the final lines of the poem: "It is time, that it be time. It is time" [*Es ist Zeit, daß es Zeit wird. Es ist Zeit*]. The time collapses into these last lines until the *corona* on "time" [*Zeit*] in its third repetition. There is a rhythm in Celan's time that drives toward its own stasis.

And in these times of the coronavirus, it is as if a corona (Italian: *fermata*) were placed at the ends of the musical phrases of everyday life. We are now experiencing a tonal and rhythmic stasis: we are no longer singing, meeting, or gathering. It is the time of feeling the emptiness, the gap, the loss of life that the virus has brought with it. Derrida asks in his "Choreographies" how we would "breath without punctuation, without the multiplicities of rhythm, steps, how would we dance?"<sup>245</sup> Indeed, music, speech, poetry, walking, and dancing—the materials of life itself—depend on presence and absence, stimulus and release, and the space in between: this is the rhythm of *Fort! Da!*

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<sup>245</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Choreographies," *Points...* (*Interviews, 1974-1994*), ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf & others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 97.

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