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Vielleicht hier, um zu sagen: Bildung and Elegy

in the *Duineser Elegien*, *Du côté de chez Swann*, and *Misérable miracle*

A Thesis Presented

by

EMILY HEILKER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the

University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

September 2016

Program in Comparative Literature

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I would also like to thank my family and friends. They, too, have been patient with me, even when I was growing impatient with this project and myself.

ABSTRACT

VIELLEICHT HIER, UM ZU SAGEN: BILDUNG AND ELEGY
IN THE *DUINESER ELEGIEN*, *DU CÔTÉ DE CHEZ SWANN*,
AND *MISÉRABLE MIRACLE*

MAY 2016

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In the wake of the industrialization, urbanization, and global conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Europe was forced to call into question its Enlightenment faith. In particular, *Bildung*—as the cultural education of the individual that emerged out of the Enlightenment—lost its footing amidst experience's new texture of trauma. This thesis will examine Rilke's *Duineser Elegien*, Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, and Michaux's *Misérable miracle* as each work pertains to and reconceives of the intertwining of *Bildung* and elegy, as a literary form both underpinned by and unconvinced of Bildung. For them, I will argue, elegy served as a potential form for re-writing historical indifference and for preparing, through limit-experience and loss, linguistic antidotes for the elision of difference produced in history's wake.

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INTRODUCTION

In his 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin notes how the "current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth is *not* philosophical"[1] and that such "amazement is not the beginning of knowledge."[2] The "things" to which he was referring were, of course, the various iterations of fascism on the rise in Europe. Their prevalence flew in the face of assumptions about progress that had been operational in Europe since the Enlightenment. They suggested that "the tradition of the oppressed"—in which "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule"[3]—might offer up a more accurate picture of the world. Chiefly, this residual desire for *Aufklärung* manifested itself in a sustained faith in the possibility of progress and of knowledge's expansion—in other words, in the continued success and benefits of scientific and technological mastery of both the external world (in the tradition of Bacon's scientific method) and the internal one (in the tradition of Locke's exploration of human understanding). In the wake of the events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, even these dregs of Enlightenment faith were called into question.

Objections that started out small grew big. Technological advancements that had propelled the growth of Western Europe—and chiefly Belgium, France, and Germany on the continent[4]—in the nineteenth century also came to implicate changes in social and

[1] Benjamin, 257.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Roessler, 122

economic structures that were not always positive. While industrial capitalism could be credited with urbanization, increased birth rates, and reduced death rates,[5] it had likewise combined with nationalism to compel Europe into an expansionist land race (colonization) and arms race (the burgeoning military-industrial complex).[6] Furthermore, these endeavors had subsumed the population with their need for labor, consumers, and soldiers. As a result, the distance between labor and capital, the need to fold into the rhythm and tempo of mechanical life, and mandatory military training[7] countered any sense of control produced by technological developments. This pressure and socio-political reorganization—though only drawing general attention much later and after it was too late for circumspect action—then culminated, in the twentieth century, in two world wars.[8] The first reinforced progress' failure, using new technology to trump all preceding wars in bloodiness and brutality, and the second only escalated the violence through mechanization as manifested in the extermination camps and through the atomic bomb.

The twentieth century, then, had to face not only the failure of progress, but also the question of why. Science, knowledge—the supposed bedrock of the new civilization, of the world exposed, comprehended—had become destructive, and the cause for that seemed to rest in humanity. Guilt, shame, and horror were joined by a sense of disorientation and a deep need to re-evaluate the assumptions of *Bildung*, "education in

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[5] The population of Europe "increased dramatically from 270 million in 1850 to over 460 million by 1910" (ibid., 156).
[6] "Per capita spending for arms more than doubled in France between 1870 and 1914, while Germany's spending increased more than sixfold" (ibid., 209)
[7] Ibid.
[8] For a more extended discussion of the interrelation of industrialization, modernization, the world wars, and the rise of fascism please see Robert O. Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism*.

and through culture,"[9] that had developed for the last two centuries, along with the scientific ideals of the Enlightenment. After all, how could people have committed themselves to the unconscionable madness of the Holocaust, Nazism, fascism, and totalitarianism in an array of manifestations? Any sense of having come to understand the human psyche or of being able to educate a proper, humanist subject and citizen faded.

It is for this complex of reasons that this century is often known for, and approached in terms of, trauma. Blow after blow transformed the landscape, literally and figuratively, and the mode of preparing for these hits, *Bildung*, had proven itself to be, at best, ineffective or, at worst, the problem. It should be no surprise then if the same century also becomes known for its elegies. After all, the elegy, as a form of ritualizing grief into mourning, serves as a potential tool for navigating aftermaths. Indeed, as *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* puts it, "the number of works in the elegiac mode makes it clear that in poetry the twentieth century has been a 'distinctly elegiac age.'"[10]

Although the elegy has a long and varied premodern history, my focus will be on its post-Renaissance ascendancy; as critic Theodore Ziolkowski notes, "during the eighteenth century it became once again one of the most popular literary forms in Europe."[11] This version of the elegy as a genre is primarily characterized, not by specific features[12], but rather by "a movement: from grief to consolation."[13] That is, the elegy

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[9] *SEP*
[10] *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 324.
[11] Ziolkowski, 62.
[12] This point is up for debate. Ziolkowski, to whom I have made reference, makes a case for the "classical German elegy" (1795-1950), which does remain in contact with the elegiac distiches of the Greek tradition and shares several tropes across many of its manifestations. However, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* argues that the German elegy is particularly detached from an elegiac tradition when considered alongside other European variants—the *Duino Elegies* being a notable exception and perhaps a

follows the writer, usually a mourner, through the process of grieving and towards a reconciliation with death, particular or general. This reconciliation is thought to take place by what "has been well described by Abbie Findlay Potts [as] *anagnorisis*"[14]:

> Insofar as this term is employed by literary critics—variously translated from the Greek to mean 'recognition', 'revelation', 'discovery' or 'disclosure'—it tends to be used in relation to drama. But if *anagnorisis* may be said to crown the plot of dramatic and epic poetry, and to reward the logic of didactic poetry, it is 'the very goal' of elegy, 'determining the whole procedure'[15]

The writer of elegy, in other words, undergoes an experience that imbues him or her with new insight that makes the bearing of death not as difficult as it had been previously (i.e. before the writing of the elegy), although the form of this experience is not necessarily identified in the course of the work, and is instead at times transposed into the literary process. One may conclude, then, that *anagnorisis* highlights the functional (rather than literary or pleasure-based) nature of the genre: elegy is a form of writing meant to do work.

In this fashion, *Bildung* and elegy are deeply intertwined. Indeed, the elegy, as a processual work, "is essentially the poetic form created in response to the concept of *Bildung* as defined by bourgeois humanism,"[16] which otherwise emerges in the fictional form of the *Bildungsroman*, starting with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, and in various pedagogical endeavors. For my purposes—an exploration of the way in which *Bildung* functions or does not function following the challenge of the trauma of the

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product of Rilke's contact with France. For more on the history of the elegy in the German language tradition, see *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 323.

[13] *The Cambridge Introduction to Poetic Form*, 101.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ziolkowski, 286-7.

twentieth century—between *Bildungsroman* and elegy, I favor the latter. The *Bildungsroman*, as a starting place, is too ill-equipped to deal with the possibility that progress may fail. Indeed, well into the twentieth century it still frequently operates as if it could portray the development of the bourgeois subject and citizen without becoming a caricature of itself. Elegy, on the other hand, is designed to absorb shock, the signature of twentieth-century, traumatic experience.[17] It already comprehends the violence of learning—that the struggle is, "on the one hand, how to access, how *not to foreclose* the crisis, and, on the other hand, how to *contain it,*" to borrow from Shoshanna Felman's writing on the intersection of pedagogy and trauma. [18]

To think of it another way: the elegy, in the twentieth century, exists not just as a genre but also as a mode. As the category of the bourgeois subject breaks down, so too do the literary genres through which he is to be educated. Thus, elegy becomes an expansive attitude infiltrating other forms of writing, though always maintaining the same concern with mourning and *anagnorisis.* Or to think of it yet another way: with the traumatic structure of shock dominating modern European experience, any writing that aims to approach the shaping of modern subjectivity must confront the elegiac challenge. They must be able to handle the subject negotiating its limits, the limit-experiences during which human boundaries are maxed out and the relationship between the individual and the social is at stake. For the authors I will be discussing here, that means that the elegy (and the elegiac) serves as the occasion for patching—through whatever permutation of life and art—excess into the fabric of narrative.

[17] For more on "shock," see Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire."
[18] Felman, 54.

Keeping this understanding of the elegy in mind, I would like to make some brief remarks about the authors and works I will be focusing on here: Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* (*Duino Elegies*), Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*), and Henri Michaux's *Misérable miracle* (*Miserable Miracle*). Of these texts only one (Michaux's) was written after WWII and in the wake of the collapse of illusions of progress.[19] The other two were composed in the early 1910s-20s[20] under the auspices of intense urbanization and industrialization[21] and increased warmongering[22]. Before *Bildung* collapsed entirely, it was already breaking, and the sense of the lie of history was already felt.

That aside, these texts also share several other features: the time period of their writing, the fact that each piece implicates and mourns the death of a specific person (a friend, a lover, and a wife, respectively), their retroactive situation within high modernism, their shared interest in and interrogation of the mimetic, and the fact that the process of writing for each work was protracted and required extended editing or iterations or both. In these three works, each writer is engaged in a reinvention of the space of revelation, as they strove to untangle some of the consequences of *Bildung*'s

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[19] Michaux began to take mescaline in 1955 and first published on the subject in *Misérable miracle* in 1956. See *Mescaline 55*, 9.

[20] See the chronologies in the *Cambridge Companion to Rilke* and the *Cambridge Companion to Proust*.

[21] Both Proust and Rilke were deeply concerned with the idea of the "city," which recurs frequently in *Du côté de chez Swann* and the *Duineser Elegien* (not to mention in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, to which the *Elegien* are largely a response). For more on the city in these volumes, please see Gerald Gillespie's *Proust, Mann, Joyce in the Modernist Context,* Edward Timms' and David Kelley's *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, and Eleanor E ter Horst's "Urban Pastoral: Tradition and Innovation in Apollinaire's 'Zone' and Rilke's 'Zehnte Duineser Elegie."

[22] It is important to keep in mind that World War I did not pop up out of nowhere nor did the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the subsequent collapse of the network of treaties in Europe trigger the war by itself. Rather, "it is a definite possibility that Europe was already by 1913 standing on the brink of war. By this time many Europeans appear to have viewed a major conflict as inevitable. The division of the major powers into two blocs, however uncertain the respective commitments may have seemed, were regarded by many as providing the basis for an inevitable major conflict" (Roessler, 216). In other words, World War I was as much a symptom of modernization as it was a cause of the trauma that would follow in its wake.

failure. I consider the strategies they used—not to explain the damage or solve it, but to contain it—an important goal that this essay should itself adopt.

In the first chapter, I will be looking at Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duineser Elegien,* first published in 1923, though written between 1912 and 1922. Of the works under consideration, this text adheres the most closely to the category of elegy; in addition to its title, it borrows large-scale structure, meter, and tropes from the classical elegy. However, Rilke complicates his elegy through his modernization of the form: he secularizes it, thereby removing any kind of divine intercessor, and positions language as the answer to human "fleetingness." These changes in his ontological topography lead him to reframe his concept of the Open and how humanity relates to its trajectory through time.

In the second chapter, I will turn to Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, first published in 1913, the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), which Proust began writing in 1908 and only finished with his death in 1922. This text is the most obviously curious in its relation to elegy. Yet, as I will show, it will be worth considering it in an elegiac light. Doing so highlights the overlap between *Bildungsroman* and elegy as well as the tension between the time of the story—time as produced through linguistic signification—and the time of referents—the time the experience signified might occupy. Finally, Proust complicates concerns with human movement through time by an awareness of the Open's interrelation with embodiment.

In the third and final chapter, I will turn to Henri Michaux's *Misérable miracle,* first published in 1956. This text—the first in the cycle of Michaux's five drug books, begun in 1954 and not finished until the early 1970s, when he wrote an addendum for this

volume—again may seem ill-suited to elegy. However, it would be a mistake to situate it otherwise. In addition to the typical genre-bending nature of Michaux's work—his prose poems become pseudo-ethnographies, his drawings become alphabets—I think it essential to show that, at its core, *Misérable miracle* concerns itself with the same problematics I will be discussing in the first two chapters, especially the possibility of *anagnorisis* that is livable by a subject. For if Proust was concerned with the embodied consciousness and therefore the way the subject was situated hermeneutically in relation to history, Michaux seeks to press the issue by exploding consciousness through the alteration of the body.

CHAPTER 1

RILKE

1.

In early 1903, Austro-Bohemian writer Rainer Maria Rilke began a correspondence with Franz Xavier Kappus, a would-be poet who found himself, as Rilke had been not too many years before, stuck in a military academy and wondering about his future. The letters they wrote between then and 1908 were published in part after Rilke's death in 1926 and have since become famous under the title *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (*Letters to a Young Poet*). In them, Mr. Kappus poses for the slightly older writer a variety of questions about public life and career, and Rilke responds, not in kind, but by transforming Mr. Kappus' questions into an interrogation of how to face those questions. In particular, Rilke addresses the misconception many people have about the progress of their lives: he notes that "[i]t is only because so many people have not absorbed and transformed their fates while they were living in them that they have not realized what was emerging from them."[23] In other words, a life need not swerve, constantly taken by surprise, shocked by the workings of the external world or by the churnings of the world developing within a person; it only does so because of a person's lack of awareness of his or her situation and of him- or herself. Among the aspects of this fate that person has failed to absorb, Rilke includes mortality (both in the letters and in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (*The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*), his own contribution to the *Bildungsroman)*. It is, therefore, not a surprise that he takes death, and particularly young death, so hard. For a man centered so thoroughly on being self-made the violent

[23] *Letters*, 86.

exertion of that which lies beyond his control must be a shock. For him, the elegy must also be a particularly important challenge.

In the *Duineser Elegien*, Rilke braces for that challenge, as he seeks to transform—to absorb—death and make it his own. Begun in 1912 shortly before the outbreak of World War I, the *Elegien* took ten years to complete and is thoroughly inscribed with, if not the events of Rilke's life, the turmoil of it during this period. Indeed, it was not until the death of the nineteen-year-old dancer Wera Ockama Knoop (to whom the *Sonette an Orpheus* (*Sonnets from Orpheus*), written shortly after the *Elegien*, were dedicated) that he was motivated to finish the work; learning of her death on New Year's Day of 1922, he goes on to complete the *Elegien* in February of that year.[24]

In the *Elegien*, he recalls and elaborates on a "vision" that he experiences in 1912 while staying at Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis' Duino Castle, where the position of humanity in relation to time (figured as space, and projected into a topography[25]) is explored. Through a series of comparisons of adult humans to angels, animals, children, and puppets, Rilke considers human precariousness *as subjects*, their fleetingness, "that we don't feel very securely at home / within our interpreted world…."[26] Furthermore, Rilke seems to return to the drama that has been central to his subjecthood since the *Briefe*, and which is the essential problem of *Bildung* and its failure: the paradox of a self

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[24] *Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, 22.

[25] Nor was this particular version of displacement arbitrary. As Rosenthal points out in *Mourning Modernisms*, "[b]y the late nineteenth century, what was once an end to be attained—the cartographic saturation of the globe by empire, industry, technology—became a limit to be displaced and deferred. If, as some have argued, the imperial project of territorial mapping induced a shift in the thinking and location of utopia, a dislocation from space to time, modernism responded by co-opting the claims of perfectibility and questioning the utopian extension of progress" (Rosenthal , 4-5).

[26] *Duino Elegies*, 21.

that both *absorbs* its fate and from which fate emerges, a self made by its surroundings, its objects, on the one hand, and a self who builds through self-determination, on the other. The human subject, caught for a brief moment in time, is it made of the world or of itself?

In what follows, then, I would like to take my first step into elegy by looking at the mapping of the subject in the *Duineser Elegien* as its skates along the limit between inside and outside, negotiating *Bildung*'s failure. More particularly, I would like to examine how Rilke constructs and deconstructs these spaces through the linguistic binding of the "interpreted world." In doing so, one can see how Rilke encapsulates his task in itself: he fights death by driving language toward apotheosis and identifying humans—poets really—as the only possible bearers of this god. After all, Rilke had to write the *Elegien*, in which one sees him find the impetus for this elevation of language, before he could realize that the only thing to do for Knoop was to dedicate the *Sonette* to her, he had to write for himself the possibility of writing and of writing the world.

2.

In order to understand how Rilke configures subject and object within the *Elegien*, it will be useful to start by mapping them in relation to the ideas of inside and outside. For while "the *Duineser Elegien* corresponds surprisingly closely to the generic norm of the classical German elegy,"[27] it nonetheless "constitute[s] an anguished testimony to the tragedy of the modern consciousness, which has alienated itself from the security of wholeness and unity."[28] In other words, although maintaining—with slight

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[27] Ziolkowski, 251.
[28] Ibid., 241

alterations—the form of the elegy, Rilke nonetheless problematizes its assumptions, especially the values adopted from Christian humanism, in order to repurpose the form and make human frailty reconcilable without the Christian guarantees of God and the afterlife. Or one might say, Rilke adapted the elegy in order to bring the elegiac structure back into touch with the structure of modernity. After all, what use—and yes, I mean, *use*—is an elegy that does not help its reader to exist within the framework, the ethos of that reader's world? While older elegies might have bearing on Rilke's present—in writing the *Duineser Elegien*, Rilke did in fact obsess over Hölderlin's[29]—they could not give him the answer that he desperately needed. As Walter Benjamin puts it in "Unpacking My Library," "[w]riters are really people who write books not because they are poor but because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like."[30] Rilke needed an elegy that could tell him how to deal with the shock of death in his modern context, in a world that had thought futilely that, through scientific mastery, it would escape death.

In the case of the *Duineser Elegien*, the work of mourning and reconciliation occurs over a series of ten interlocking poems that act as the total surface for the work of mourning. I say "the total surface" because, in the *Elegien*, Rilke is reverting to old strategies. As Paul De Man, one of the most precise commentators on the poet, posits in his *Allegories of Reading* (1979), Rilke is prone to using the central figure or figures of a given poem in order to define the parameters of its world. By starting out with a broken or incomplete version of the figure, Rilke can, over the course of a poem, make it whole and thereby lead his reader through difficulty and into a space of positive transformation,

[29] *Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, 17.
[30] Benjamin, 61.

what De Man calls "promise." This form of activation falls under the rubric of "chiasmus," which "crosses the attributes of inside and outside and leads to the annihilation"[31]—or one might say, in slightly less absolute terms, the objectification—"of the conscious subject."[32] In other words, through chiasmus and its movement of the subject into the position of the object, Rilke manages to create a space of reverberation between subject and object through which is revealed the incompleteness of either the subject or object perspective and the totality that only exists in their combination.

Not surprisingly, this model of making whole is ideal for the construction of the elegiac—the movement of grieving and reconciliation, of *anagnorisis*—especially when one opens up the meta-dimension that De Man finds essential to understanding Rilke's writing. De Man does not just posit the figure as a way of representing a transition from negativity into positivity in the referent. Instead, he also asserts that this figuration is self-reflexive, that the figure consistently refers to language's act of making in the world—i.e. back to itself and its articulation of the shared subject-object threshold. The result is that the world of the poem is, quite literally, the poem itself, and the figure "is not selected because it corresponds analogically to the inner experience of a subject but because its structure corresponds to that of a linguistic figure."[33] That is, the figure corresponds, not to a consciousness, but to a set of relations working in the body of the text: the poem (its syntax, its form) determines the appropriate figures of expression rather than the poet's subjectivity.

For De Man, it is this appeal—rhetorical, rather than a matter of good or bad faith—to readers' brokenness, their sense of powerlessness and alienation, that has made

[31] De Man, 37
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

Rilke's work so popular. Readers mistake the figuration of the poetic voice for the subjectivity of the poet and, in him, someone to whom they might relate. In the process, however, they also miss what makes Rilke's poetry both interesting and important, namely, the language, the medium that allows this apparent transparence. It also suggests what will become one of the primary concerns of this thesis: the submission of the author to language. After all, the mistake of readers is to see in Rilke's poetry another individual for them to confront when, in fact, what they encounter is Rilke's submission to language and its circulation. This fact will become particularly clear later on this chapter, as the *Duineser Elegien* offers one of the obvious statements of Rilke's elevation of language.

Before getting into the *Elegien*, however, and in order to start investigating the overdetermination of language risked as it oscillates between its role as tool and as possessing force, it will be necessary to push De Man's assertion of language's primacy in Rilke's poetry one step further. De Man's correspondences stop in relating the figure to language in lieu of relating it to the subject. For my part, I will argue that, not only does the figure correspond to language, but that the subject likewise corresponds to language. Which is to say, the figure matches, not a consciousness expressing itself, but the language that also creates consciousness's thoughts. Thus only that which is already caught up in language is or can be constituted as part of the system of figures. Or rather, the system that one knows is constituted by language's mesh.

Understanding this extra step will also be important to untangling the phrase "the total surface" used above—because it is in taking this next step that Rilke connects the language of the poem not just to itself, but also to the world beyond. For this reason, I would like to turn to the work of Maurice Blanchot. Blanchot—who De Man criticized

for being too psychological and biographical in his approach to Rilke—wrote a series of essays, collected in his 1943 *Faux pas*, bridging the discussions of language in relation to the subject and also of interiority and exteriority. An examination of one of the essays in particular, "How Is Literature Possible?" should help suss out the path forward across "the total surface" of the *Elegien*.

3.

In his "How Is Literature Possible?" Blanchot discusses French writer, editor, and critic Jean Paulhan's *Les Fleurs de Tarbes, ou la terreur dans les lettres* (*The Flowers of Tarbes, or: Terror in Literature*). In this treatise on rhetoric, Paulhan concerns himself, according to Blanchot, with the ambiguity surrounding clichés, dividing writers up into two camps based on their use of them. He begins with the "literary terrorists" who fear "becom[ing] the victim of words, the soul of laziness and inertia, prey to ready-made formulae."[34] They strive to release themselves from preconceived language and thought through the absolute avoidance of cliché and convention. The second group, by contrast, Paulhan identifies as the "rhetoricians," who supposedly stick to tradition and the body of rules that accompanies it. They are the group against whom the literary terrorists pit themselves and, as the book progresses, come increasingly to resemble straw men. What also becomes increasingly clear is that these two groups are nothing more than ways to identify insurgencies against literary tradition. The so-called terrorists—which Paulhan evokes as a reference to the dialectics of history, borrowed from Hegel and reintroduced in France through the lectures of Kojève and the writings of Jean Hyppolite[35]—

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[34] Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, 77.
[35] Syrotinski, 82-3.

encompass a huge number of different, even conflicting, aesthetics; what they share are their new bodies of negative rulings, of anti-rules, created in response to a sense of reification in language and literature. These rules, however, according to Paulhan, only establish a new set of verbal ticks. In other words, the terrorists cannot exit tradition through its negation; they only reconstitute it. That which they so wanted to avoid resurfaces in the form of new stutters.

This situation—rules and anti-rules—is not particularly interesting: inversion rarely creates anything new, anything transformative, as it leaves intact the relationships and dynamics of the initial situation (properly wielded chiasmus being a notable exception).[36] However, the question that the issue of literary terror triggers is worthy, as Paulhan discovers, of exploration. This question is the title question of Blanchot's essay—*how is literature possible?*—and it is not as off-topic as it initially appears.

The argument goes something like this. If the rules and anti-rules of writing are really not different from one another, then neither is the writing that makes use of them. Surrealism, for example, which prided itself on escaping the literary entrapment of romanticism and reaching into the public sphere, the politic beyond, in reality only created more art: André Breton's revolution never happened. Thus, says Blanchot,

> the concept that we have just learned to know under the name of Terror is not any aesthetic or critical concept whatsoever; […] it is literature, or at least its soul. The result of this is that when we call Terror into question in order to refute it or to show the consequences of its logic, it is literature itself that we question and drive toward nothingness.[37]

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[36] This ineffectiveness is, of course, dependent on the isolation of the relation to be inverted. Once that relation is working in the context of other relations, there is much more potential for re-configuration, for re-situating.
[37] Blanchot, *Faux pas*, 80.

In drawing into question counter-formalist rules, one does not in fact arrive at an interrogation of those who would seek to break down the foundations of literature. Rather, one finds oneself interrogating those very foundations, asking how literature—any literature—works. And that question can be much more easily answered than can any question about adherence to specific literary schools, any *ars poetica*. After all, "literature exists."[38] Like technology, it proves itself in that it *works*. One does not need to know *how*, only that *it does*.

Blanchot's belief in literature's existence proving itself brings one to another juncture where he begins to diverge from De Man. Whereas De Man is satisfied with Rilke's poetry being a reflexive poetic act, Blanchot sees language, even when it is the driving force, as being bound up with the world of the subject's interiority, as well—though not because that interiority creates anything. Rather, because it works the other way around. Indeed, through his reading of Paulhan, Blanchot turns inner experience completely *inside out*. As he puts it,

> One might say [Paulhan's] Copernican revolution consists of causing language no longer to revolve around thought but rather to imagine another very subtle and complex mechanism in which thought, in order to rediscover its authentic nature, revolves around language.[39]

The interior of thought, consciousness, is actually dependent on the stratification of existence according to language, the tissue of the exterior—and Blanchot goes on to clarify what exactly this "complex mechanism" is by turning to translation.

In considering the activity of translation, it would be easy to make the mistake of imagining translation as a matter of matching the words of two languages, so that the

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[38] Ibid., 81.
[39] Ibid., 83.

target language seems to mirror the source language. However, as Blanchot shows, there is more to translation than a mere one-to-one correspondence—what one might call *reflection*—of words across languages. Blanchot turns his attention to an essay on translation that Paulhan initially wrote for, but then excluded from, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*. In it, Paulhan "notes that a suitable study of translation would reveal a method to reach authentic thought."[40] In other words, a complete study of translation would not only trace back from the translation of a text to the original text, but also from the original text to the original thought. Blanchot then goes on to say that

> [t]he immediate thought (the one that consciousness has seen for us with a gaze that dissected it) is deprived of what can be called its stereotypes, its premises, its cadence. It is false and arbitrary, impure and conventional. We recognize only our own gaze in it. On the other hand, if we submit it to the rules of rhetoric, if we surprise attention through rhythm, rhyme, and the order of number, we can hope to see the mind returned to its stereotypes and its premises, united once again with the soul from which it had separated. Thought will come back pure, a virgin and innocent contact, not at all apart from words but in the intimacy of speech, through the use of clichés, which alone are able to rescue it from the anamorphoses of reflection.[41]

In speaking a thought, in returning it to language and to language's clichés developed in social space, that thought is forced into the realm of possibility that language holds, is forced into the realm beyond the small experience of the individual, and is made sensitive to the linguistically ordered world. It is surprised by the regulatory exterior of language that best opens onto the possibilities of thought. Otherwise, a thought can only construe itself through the finite net of one's own experience, one's own subjectivity, one's own gaze—the result of which, is not the new, not the open, not the outside, but instead only the trap of reflection, the *mise-en-abyme*. Thus, in lieu of affirming the *inwardness* of

[40] Ibid., 84.
[41] Ibid.

inner experience, Blanchot, via Paulhan, affirms the *outwardness* of the experience construed through language. Subjectivity, as the product of language, secures its claim to a place on the surface.

And thus one returns to the "total surface" of the *Elegien* on which the work of mourning takes place in the poem. The total surface of the *Elegien*, as can now be gathered, is constituted through the text itself—the artifice of language that creates the realm of possibilities in its articulation of thought, the techniques of outwardness. The working through of mourning and of reconciliation with death all takes place within this body of text and the responses it generates. Thus, the outwardness borrowed—in this case by Rilke—comes from a variety of places: the German language, including the syntax from which, according to De Man, Rilke builds most of the figures of his poems; the literary, historical, and religious traditions to which Rilke frequently alludes; the philosophical assertion and contestation of *Bildung* that underpins the *Elegien*; and the poetic forms Rilke borrows, such as, in the case of my focus here, the elegy. Thus, the 'total surface' also refers to Rilke's project of totalizing figuration. But what then is the figure of the *Duineser Elegien*? What does Rilke use in his attempt to confront mortality?

4.

There are a number of recurrent figures over the course of the ten poems (and approximately thirty pages) comprising the *Elegien*—that is the hazard of expanding the technique Rilke developed in earlier works, like the short lyrics of the *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*), into a sustained sequence. However, while several of these figures play an important role in creating localized totalities within individual poems or across one or

two, the only figure—and here I use this term to refer to the symbol which also functions through chiasmus, through, and the word is appropriate here in all its extremity, “annihilation” enacted through rhetoric—that really strives to encapsulate the total expanse of all ten poems is that of the Angel. Mentioned in the first few lines of the first elegy and returned to repeatedly over the course of the poems, the Angel acts as Rilke’s unifying structure. Made available to Rilke by the Christian humanist tradition out of which (and against which) he writes, in Rilke’s conception, the Angel has a particular perspective on that which is at stake in mourning death, namely, *time*. [42] After all, death is the temporal limit, the most obvious and universal limit, on humanity. Humans die. There is no way around that.

Unless, of course, you are outside of time, with its passage meaning little or nothing to you. Angels seem to have this advantage: they

> *wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter*
> *Lebenden gehn oder Toten. Die ewige Strömung*
> *reißt durch beide Bereiche alle Alter*
> *immer mit sich und übertönt sie in beiden.*[43]
>
> are often unable to tell
> whether they move among living or dead. The eternal
> torrent whirls all the ages through either realm
> for ever, and sounds above their voices in both.[44]

In other words, unlike “the living / [who] make the mistake of drawing too sharp distinctions,”[45] the Angel does not separate out those who have reached the end of their

[42] Of course, Rilke repeatedly insists on his Angel not belonging to the Christian tradition. That does not mean, however, that he does not borrow from it—indeed, he cannot help but borrow from it, even in re-purposing it. For more, see *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, 23.
[43] *Duino Elegies*, 24.
[44] Ibid., 25.
[45] Ibid.

passage through time from those who are still in its bowels. Instead, the Angel sees "the eternal / torrent" encompassing everyone. Time is a factor of human perception, not, according to Rilke, Angelic perception. Furthermore, there is the matter of this last line: the torrent, in addition to whirling, "sounds above their voices in both." I think it safe to understand "both" ("*beide*") to pertain here to the two realms, one of the living and one of dead, in which humans speak. The idea of *voice* is important, as I will explain in more detail in a moment, because it is through the voice that humans, on the one hand, mourn and "wail" (the primary word Rilke uses to describe mourning) and, on the other, it is the avenue through which humans reveal language. The whirlwind in which the Angels see all humanity caught is indifferent to the sounds of either, as are, thus, the Angels. And here one arrives at the downside of this broad perspective. The anguish of humans at death makes no sense to angels. An appeal to them is incomprehensible. The Angels' inhuman perspective makes them blind to human suffering.

Thus, over the course of the first elegy, the gesture of Rilke's figure begins to reveal itself. The Angel unites time, on the one hand, and reveals the indifferent cruelty of such a unity, on the other. This fact underlines the disruption of the possibility of *Bildung*, of education within culture and therefore within history. After all, the Angel in the whirlwind is an image popularized in the eighteenth century, where it pops up in works by Joseph Addison and Alexander Pope and in a letter between John Page and Thomas Jefferson.[46] (It is also familiar to contemporary ears because of its use and abuse by George W. Bush as he sought to capitalize on a revival of US messianism). However, in each of those iterations, the Angel is interfering in human affairs—in the development of history. It directs the storm and lends to history a drive, inevitability, a destiny. Rilke's

[46] Bobrick, 186.

Angel, by contrast, does not even perceive the storm, let alone concern itself with human tribulation. If anything, Rilke's Angel is more in line with the famous "Angel of History" from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History."[47] And yet, Benjamin's Angel maintains a relation to history—the difference there from the eighteenth-century models is that it lacks control, as does humanity. Rilke's vision is far more brutal. It removes the relevance of the Angel, and of the divine, by making the Angel indifferent altogether. Rilke's vision of the elegiac challenge is thus, despite its formal proximity to the classical elegy, a rather extreme departure from the tradition.

The question, then, to which Rilke must pursue an answer, is how humans are able to handle the indifference of their possible intercessors. How can they get a handle on the grief that the Angel cares nothing for? And, as the last line of the stanza quoted above suggests, it has something to do with *voice*—not as it relates to wailing (wailing is a form of grieving but contains no possibility of reconciliation or reformulation), but as it relates to language. For language, poeticized by Rilke as voice, seems to offer something like a human parallel to that which the Angel offers to the structure and possibilities of the poem: it brings together the living and the dead under the auspices of both. Furthermore, it suggests continuity between theses two phases of human life which otherwise seem completely out of step.

5.

[47] See Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*.

Language, like human being, faces time as a limitation. After all, it unfolds across time and must be processed *through* time. Language, however, has one advantage over humans, namely, that it *endures*. Indeed, even as it changes, it continues to exist as artifact and as a tracery image of that which exists—and changes and decays and dies—in time. In other words, language—language's body—finds itself in a somewhat paradoxical position. It both experiences time and transcends it. It both participates in and builds history. It suffers decay and development, and yet remains unchanged.

It is for this reason that, in the *Duineser Elegien*, when Rilke makes claims about the purpose of humans, whom he idealizes as poets, he assigns them the task of transforming the world into words:

> *Bringt doch der Wanderer auch vom Hange des Bergrands*
> *nicht eine Hand voll Erde ins Tal, die allen unsägliche, sondern,*
> *ein erworbenes Wort, reines, den gelben und blaun*
> *Enzian. Sind wir vielleicht h i e r, um zu sagen....*[48]
>
> For the wanderer doesn't bring from the mountain slope
> a handful of earth to the valley, untellable earth, but only
> some word he has won, a pure word, the yellow and blue
> gentian. Are we, perhaps, here just for saying….[49]

In these lines, Rilke describes a wanderer descending to humanity, from mountain to valley, bringing something with him. This moment is odd within the *Elegien* for a number of reasons. For one thing, there is the matter of its chronology. Neither the landscape nor the mountain range has yet been identified at this point in the ninth elegy. Instead, this passage points forward, telescoping into the allegory of the Laments, which dominates the tenth and final elegy and which ends with the youth standing with the elder

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[48] *Duino Elegies*, 74.
[49] Ibid., 75.

Lament at the foot of "the mountains of Primal Pain"[50] that the youth must, and does, climb. Thus, while it is in the ninth elegy that the youth (the wanderer, the human, the poet) returns from the mountain slope, it is not until the tenth elegy that this same youth begin his climb up it.

The question of chronology becomes both recurrent and absent in the *Elegien*. On the one hand, chronology has been invalidated by the totality constructed via the figure of the Angel in the first elegy—history has no place here because the Angel cannot recognize it, so neither does succession. On the other hand, this flattening of time and space's substitution for time mean that the moments in which time does function sequentially stand out. Thus, another oddity of these four lines is the ambiguity of the mountain slope. After all, while one reads of the wanderer's descent and of the youth's ascent, at no point does Rilke describe what happens on the mountaintop itself. The implication of sequence and its inversion draws the reader's attention to what is not described, to the step left out. Indeed, these circumstances create the only event in the *Elegien* that stands out clearly *as* an event, one that its non-telling delimits as a moment of actual change.

Traditionally, when a wanderer scales a mountain, he encounters the divine. Take, for example, Petrarch or Augustine, Moses or Dante. Even the modern counterparts of these wanderers stage their revelations about the failure of revelation in the mountains—the wanderer/madman of Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*) being the most relevant. The mountaintop—the pinnacle, the point of triumph over the ordeal of the climb—is thus supposed to be the sight of revelation, of vision, a stage for the event's occurrence. And so it is for Rilke, according to the structure both in the poem

[50] Ibid., 85.

and external to it. Not only did he begin writing the *Duineser Elegien* following his own Alpine vision, but it is also on a mountaintop that the young poet that Rilke describes experiences his own revelation. Of course, neither Rilke's revelation nor that of his poet has anything to do with the divine. That avenue of possibility has already been foreclosed through the indifference of the Angel. Instead, the mountain of Rilke's revelation, though not connecting humans to the heavens, still returns them to the earth of which the mountain is made. Therein rests the heart of the *Elegien*, the insight into language as a tool that pivots Rilke into the space of *anagnorisis*.

Stones and rocks become symbols for Rilke's contemporaries and literary descendants. In poems by César Vallejo and Wislaw Szymborska[51]—just to name a few—stones become a way to reconsider things *as* things. In these lines of Rilke's, where it is the *earth* that becomes that which language cannot appropriate, one begins to see a foreshadowing of this tradition. Indeed, perhaps it could even be said to be traceable back to Rilke, whose own thing-poems, his *Dingegedicht*, originated in the period of his secretarial work for the sculptor Rodin in the 1910s.[52] Either way, rocks, stones, and the earth act as roadblocks to language, and it is their presence here that creates one of the most interesting problems for the *Elegien*. *Anagnorisis*, the goal of elegy, does not, one must remember, come easily. It can only result from the working through of shock—i.e. through the overcoming of an obstacle, an ordeal. The question for the reader, however, is, what is the ordeal in the *Duineser Elegien*? Was the mountain climb the ordeal, or was the mining of this ordeal for language the ordeal? Or, to put it another way, all of a sudden, there appear to be two struggles that Rilke is addressing in the *Elegien*, and it is

[51] I am thinking of Vallejo's "*Piedra negra sobre una piedra blanca*" and Szymborska's "Conversation with a Stone."
[52] *Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, 15.

unclear which ordeal culminates in the *anagnorisis* necessary to the elegiac genre. First, there is the struggle of mourning and reconciliation with death, i.e. there is the struggle of and with shock, with traumatic experience. This ordeal seems to manifest in the *Elegien* in the representation of the mountain climbing, the existential heave-ho. However, the second ordeal appears to concern, not the climbing of the mountain, but what happens once the climbing has stopped. It concerns itself with the performance of representation. In other words, the second ordeal asks, how does one wrest language from experience?

In many ways, this question rests at the heart of my inquiry, not only in this chapter but also in this thesis in general. Not because of what it asks exactly, but because it points to the process being investigated: preparation for limit-experience, for the shock of limit-experience, for awareness of one's limits, for and of the elegy. For, if the struggle of the elegy in the twentieth century is to renegotiate the human relationship with death after *Bildung*'s failure, to make *anagnorisis* work despite progress's hopelessness and the absence of the divine, it can only do so by retelling the narrative of humanity's passage through time without guarantees. For Rilke, this need means that the elegy must return the reader to a fixation on the role of language. After all, language, as the engine of the processing of experience, does not just beckon the subject into the realm of the social, into history. It also, à la Blanchot and Paulhan, produces the subject and, I would argue, the time of the subject, which *is* history. Thus, humans are, as Rilke says in the saddest of the elegies, the fourth elegy:

> *Wir sind nicht einig. Sind nicht wie die Zug-*
> *vögel verständigt. Überholt und spät,*
> *so drängen wir uns plötzlich Winden auf*

und fallen ein auf teilnahmslosen Teich.
Blühn und verdorrn ist uns zugleich bewußt.[53]

We're never single-minded, unperplexed,
like migratory birds. Outstript and late,
we suddenly thrust into the wind, and fall
into unfeeling ponds. We comprehend
flowering and fading simultaneously.[54]

Humans are overly weighed down by a sense of being too late, too far behind the current of events. They only know what they need to know to act after the present has already been converted into past action, after they are already *überholt,* antiquated. They see a determined, if not purposeful, rush into the future, and this pressure has its consequence: the flaw of the deadline. They find themselves unable to create, unable to sustain the present, the opposite of history, as a result. It forces them to feel their impending demise and occludes the Open in which things are possible. Language embeds humanity into a timeline—of progress, of *Bildung*—that in turn braces them against a future that entraps. Every possibility already senses its closure, its "fading," its death.

At the same time, however, Rilke discovers and argues for the fact that it is language that allows humanity to mourn the loss of this Open and to return to it anew. After all, the present is just a tense through which humans carve out action, change, difference. For while, as Henri Bergson says in *Matière et mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*), "[t]here is for us nothing that is instantaneous,"[55] one can still, through language, give the impression of instantaneity and of the protracted instantaneity of the static moment, the limitless moment. Paradoxically, this same maker of history is also that which allows humans to outlast any given moment—their given moments—in

[53] *Duino Elegies*, 40.
[54] Ibid., 41.
[55] Bergson, 69-70.

history. Thus, in the eighth elegy, the extreme joy of which counterbalances the fourth elegy, the flower that had been cursed to only bloom in light of fading is not pressured by that demise at the hands of the outside world:

> *Wir haben nie, nicht einen einzigen Tag,*
> *den reinen Raum vor uns, in den die Blumen*
> *unendlich aufgehn. Immer ist es Welt*
> *und niemals Nirgends ohne Nicht:*
> *das Reine, Unüberwachte, das man atmet und*
> *unendlich w e i ß und nicht begehrt.*[56]
>
> We've never, no, not for a single day,
> pure space before us, such as that which flowers
> endlessly open into: always world,
> and never nowhere without no: that pure,
> unsuperintended element one breathes,
> endlessly knows, and never craves.[57]

The negative possession of "*wir haben nie, nicht einen einzigen Tag*" launches Rilke into some of the most poignant, if abstract, lines of the *Elegien*. In them, he uses an almost apophatic strategy: he invokes through negation and through the admission of the impossibility of the thing except as it exists as a negation of the possible, i.e. as a virtual thing. Thus, "nowhere" only exists as an alternative to some "where"—the non-place, the utopic place. And of course, likewise, and keeping in mind that Rilke has consistently mapped the trajectories of time onto topography, this nowhere is also a no-when: the non-existent moment of the expansive present.

Language thus both creates and alleviates the pressure of human mortality, the weight against which the elegy strives. Through it, Rilke can break the desire behind grieving. He can write of the world presenced, not unfolded, which is available otherwise

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[56] *Duino Elegies*, 66.
[57] Ibid., 67.

only to the unhailed, those not implicated, at least not yet, in history (for Rilke, children, animals, and his Angel). Rilke trades in, not only the Interior for the Outside, but also the Outside for the Open, where what is possible is.

CHAPTER 2

PROUST

1.

If Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* recounts the vision through which he realized the need to, in the face of human fleetingness, reach through death into the Open of possibilities via language, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* enacts another alternative, as he watches a boy—also named Marcel—grow into an artist. Sharing qualities with the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman*, and prefiguring autofiction, *À la recherche du temps perdu* nonetheless operates in the mode of elegy. After all, growing up, as figured by Proust, involves two things: an "apprenticeship" to art, to use a term borrowed from Gilles Deleuze's *Proust et Signes* (*Proust & Signs*), and the development of an understanding of the boundaries of the self. Although this model of limitations most obviously echoes the *Bildungsroman*'s trajectory through various modes of living[58], it also underscores the most obvious human limitations, time and death.

Time is, as one can tell from the title of the complete work, the focal point of Proust's project. However, Proust does not concern himself with utopic time as Rilke does. Instead, he uses memory and art—writing, the very book one reads—as methods for finding, in the face of time's persistent passing, time *regained* (the title of the last of the seven volumes). This time offers him something resembling the *anagnorisis* by which the elegy culminates. Indeed, it gives the narrator Marcel a sense of joy, continuity, and expansion as Proust plays off of what Walter Benjamin describes in "The Image of

[58] See Goethe's *William Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*).

Proust" as "convoluted time"[59] or what might be considered, in light of the last chapter and Rilke's techniques of figuration, a sense of the thing made whole. For while these temporary joys may be represented in the sensuous encounters described in Marcel's story, the implication is that the lasting joy is somewhere else: the text itself. The *Recherche* should never be claimed as simply autobiographical, but there is still the suggestion that the person being "built," the individual undergoing *Bildung* and coming into being is, more or less, the author, Proust. The result is a text that demonstrates its aesthetics by reshaping life into art, in its creation of a temporal whole from fragmented experience.

In this chapter, I will focus only on the first volume of the *Recherche*, that is, *Du côté de chez Swann*, published in 1913, in which Proust starts out his exploration of "the sensuous signs of involuntary memory," which "represent […] the effort of life to prepare us for art and for the final revelation of art."[60] Although the full impact of the elegiac cannot yet be felt in this volume of the *Recherche*—while Proust's parents died only shortly before he moved into the apartment in which he would write the bulk of the *Recherche*[61], his sometimes lover Agostinelli did not die until 1914[62], after the first publication of *Du côté de chez Swann*—it lingers there nonetheless and dramatically impacts both how Proust approaches the transcending of human limitation and the generic model of the *Bildungsroman*. Proust consistently focuses on individuals who face

[59] Benjamin, 211.
[60] Deleuze, 65.
[61] Carter, 133-4. And of course, it is also perhaps worth noting the general tumult of these same years. In France, 1906 also marked the conclusion of the Dreyfus Affair, which had shaken faith in the Catholic Church as it conservatives affiliated with it were revealed to be involved in the manipulation of the case. For more on this rupture, see Roessler.
[62] *Cambridge Companion to Proust*, 62. Although the *Cambridge Companion to Proust* gets wrong the year when Agostinelli enters Proust's life (it suggests 1912—a fact corrected by Carter: 1907 (135-7)), it does nonetheless correctly describe the circumstances of Agostinelli's death in a plane crash, the epitome of industrial modernity's failure.

shortcomings, either as a result of psychology or of social station, and there is no hero, no one of grand stature in the *Recherche*. Instead, the *Bildungsroman*—which began "as a *comforting* genre" [63] in which "the traditional plot of the coming-of-age novel humanizes the notion of progress by endowing time with a completely *productive* function"[64]—circles in on itself and explores the possibility of the timeline that becomes infinite only within the confines of a life adapted into a textual body. Where Rilke found a door in the elegiac word allowing him to go on, Proust found a dwelling wherein the elegy climaxed in the joy of time regained.

2.

As with the previous chapter, consideration of genre will help to inscribe some boundaries useful for entering Proust's work. Most broadly the *Recherche* is a novel, detailing the semi-fictional life of its main character, Marcel, and more particularly it should be lumped into the category of the *Bildungsroman*—though, as I have already stipulated, a *Bildungsroman* toying with the elegiac operations to which *Bildung* also lends itself. The term *Bildungsroman* derives from "lectures by the early nineteenth-century critic Karl Morgenstern." [65] According to him, the term describes a two-fold project: first, it depicts the protagonist's (or in the *Bildungsroman*'s nascent stages, the hero's) *Bildung*, and, second, "by means of this depiction, it promotes the *Bildung* of the reader to a greater extent than any other type of novel." [66] In other words, the novel of *Bildung* is a story of the education and development of both its protagonist and, through

[63] Bell, 40.
[64] Ibid.
[65] *Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, 77-8.
[66] Ibid.

example, its reader. It dates more or less to the eighteenth century when, in the ethos of the Enlightenment, educational theories were a primary focus and literature and the social sciences were closely intertwined. [67] Of course, this means that the *Bildungsroman* runs into many of the same problems that the simultaneously developing educational theory ran into, and which has already been discussed in relationship to elegy. Both of them suffered from the centripetal force of cultural normativity—i.e. an education toward the norm—with desired traits and practices reinforcing prior classism, racism, sexism, nationalism, and imperialism. Furthermore, these trajectories of education were aligned with trajectories of personhood—wherein personhood is recognition of those visible to the law as citizens. The *Bildungsroman* thus became, not a novel about the education of a subject (whatever that might mean), but rather the novel of the education of a *certain kind* of subject, most often white, male, and wealthy, or at least, white, male, and productive according to capitalist designations. The story of the development of the individual also became that of the development of the nation.

The developments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were therefore sure to have an impact on the conception of the *Bildungsroman*. What began as a question of "how […] the increasingly autonomous, free self [might be] reconciled to a self concerned with, and constrained by, the greater social good"[68] transformed into a matter of how the individual self might be squeezed into the mechanical life that undergirded the goal of productivity. In the case of narrative, this increasingly paradoxical time, both increasingly regulated and increasingly unassimilable, forced

[67] Bell, 1.
[68] Ibid., 37.

"[t]he replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation."[69] In other words, segments of experience replaced continuity and narrative, and the image created by these segments of experience became both too big and too complex to grasp. It also became a social fabric from which it was very hard to constitute a person who felt any sense of coherency.

Bearing these difficulties in mind, I would like to return, then, to the elegy. As was discussed above, elegy charts the process of mourning, of transforming grief into reconciliation. It culminates in *anagnorisis*, that is, a moment of revelation which, while pertinent to other genres, figures most prominently in the elegy. It is thus no casual remark when critic Theodore Ziolkowski suggests that the elegy is the "poetic counterpart of the *Bildungsroman*"[70]—or, more properly given the history of the two genres, that the *Bildungsroman* is the novel form of the elegy:

> For *Bildung*, in contrast to the erudition prized by earlier generations, implies an ideal of personal cultivation and learning for its own sake. Knowledge and 'culture' are valued only to the extent that they contribute to the personal development of the individual. It is this task that the classical German elegy was ideally suited to fulfill since its very structure was conceived in order to demonstrate the anagnorisis achieved by the individual through meditation on problems of culture.[71]

Structurally—in terms of both their sequencing over time and their goals—elegy and *Bildungsroman* resemble one another. They both strive to join the individual to the world in which he or she lives and which binds him or her, and they are both invested in describing the process of doing so, in order to bring the reader along for the protagonist's transformation. They do, however, emphasize slightly different dynamics in this process.

[69] Benjamin, 159.
[70] Ziolkowski, 101.
[71] Ibid., 101-2.

The *Bildungsroman*, as has been described above, is meant to educate, to create through the reflection of the protagonist in the reader a pattern for becoming a subject. The elegy, on the other hand, is not so much about creating a person who fits society's norms, as it is about accompanying a reader through the mismatch between limitations and the subject. In other words, the elegy charts an individual's confrontation with his or her limits, especially death, while a *Bildungrsoman* suggests ways to avoid such a confrontation through conformity and acceptance.

In light of industrialization, the World Wars, and the accompanying questioning of progress, however, the *Bildungsroman* becomes dysfunctional, and the elegy takes over the *Bildungsroman*, possesses it. Elegy is a genre ready to swallow shock, rupture—it has been designed specifically *to* swallow shock and rupture. It is supposed to tame the impact of death, to force its disruption into the continuity that the eighteenth century's sensibility of progress assumes undergirds the history of which the individual is striving to become a part. The elegy thus has less distance to travel, fewer changes to make than the *Bildungsroman*, when it comes to being ready for the challenge of modern experience.

3.

In the case of the *Recherche*, and *Du côté de chez Swann* in particular, the possession of the *Bildungsroman* by the elegy takes place in specific ways. *Du côté de chez Swann* is composed of three parts: "Combray" (1 and 2), "Swann in Love," and "Place-Names: The Name." In what follows, I shall focus on the first and last of these

sections.[72] In “Combray,” Proust narrates, slowly, at a pace even slower than real-time, his protagonist Marcel’s disorientation upon waking up from sleep and the memories of other wakings in other places that his mind releases into the vacuum formed by those first ambiguous moments. In particular, he follows through a series of memories that focus on and around his grandparents’ house in Combray, where he would spend his summers. In “Place-Names: The Name,” Proust’s sleepy and sleepless peregrinations return to Combray but in the context of a larger world of possibilities summoned to him, not only by the sensations of the past and the names of places he has already been, but also by the imploring nature of names connected to the not-yet-experienced. In both cases, sleep stands as the ground of the *Recherche*, the ground from which it emerges, is raised. It serves as the dark vastness through which the traveler (Marcel) moves and encounters the figments of the past and the possible futures.

In the structuring of the plot and the system of signs that generate it, one can track the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman*. Most simply, Marcel grows up, and, along the way, he learns to interpret the sensible world and the world of society. Just as much, he is introduced to art and develops an artistic sensibility, which eventually produces the story one is reading. Indeed, beginning with his grandmother, who “could never resign herself to buying anything from which one could not derive an intellectual profit, and especially that which beautiful things afford us by teaching us to seek our pleasure elsewhere than in the satisfactions of material comfort and vanity,”[73] and continuing with his friend Bloch and the reticent art engagement of Charles Swann, the protagonist develops a love

[72] While “Swann in Love” is both worth the read and relevant to the problematics I will be exploring, it is more significant in the context of later volumes that I will not be addressing in this chapter. Thus, for the sake of brevity and focus, I will leave it out.
[73] Proust, 40.

of literature that inclines his uncle to go so far as to dub him a young Victor Hugo (a fact which he leverages into his first encounter with a dodgy courtesan).[74] What is more, *Du côté de chez Swann* culminates, from the vantage of the reader and the narrator rather than that of the protagonist—or one might say, from the vantage of the artist consumed with the shape of the whole, rather than localized, text—with the inclusion of the young narrator's description of his experience of the steeples at Martinville. In other words, one reads in this first volume why Marcel decides to become—and how he begins to become—a writer.

This experience of the steeples does not, however, correspond to *anagnorisis* in the same way that Rilke's culminating ascent to the mountaintop did. Instead, it is one of many small instances of *anagnorisis*, of reconciliation with life—and death. De Man, as one saw in the last chapter, posits that Rilke uses totalizing figures, on the one hand, to rig the gesture of making-whole into the constitution of the poem, and, on the other hand, to guarantee that the signifiers in the poem always point back at themselves and away from the potential referents. The result is that, even in the face of human limitation—human termination—the language of the poem offers the poet a way out: while language brings humans into history and makes them aware of their own passing and its immanence, it also gives them the capacity to conceptualize their limitations and keep living despite them.

In *Du côté de chez Swann*, by contrast, the question of the whole is decidedly more complicated. From the perspective of construction, it and the final volume, *Le Temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*), are the only volumes in the whole of the *Recherche* that Proust conceived of as a unit. He wrote the *Recherche* "between January 1908, when

[74] Ibid., 80.

[he] began to jot down ideas for a new fictional project, and November 1922, when – already terminally ill – he envisaged a highly controversial reorganisation of the novel's penultimate volume, *Albertine disparue*."[75] However, the work as a whole did not evolve in a linear fashion. Rather,

> [h]is creative approach was essentially thematic: he worked around an idea, character, or place, giving little attention to chronology and plot; only at a later stage, when he had a clearer vision of his project, did he assemble hitherto disparate fragments into a more coherent sequence by means of a sophisticated 'cut and paste' technique not dissimilar to the 'montage' used by modern film makers.[76]

In other words, Proust did not set out with a particular story in mind—that he found later—but instead sought to extend his novel via the gradual exploration of certain characters (person or place) and certain problems (such as voluntary and involuntary memory, the sensible and names). In this fashion, he developed first *Du côté de chez Swann* and *Temps retrouvé* and subsequently the intervening five volumes, the last of those on his deathbed when he re-wrote the part of Albertine.[77] Nonetheless, because of this framing, while a lot can happen to change an author and his formulation of his work over the course of fourteen years, *Du côté de chez Swann* changed little, only differing slightly from the original 1913 edition when it was re-issued in 1919.

The takeaway here is that the structure of *Du côté de chez Swann* is not a matter of closed circuitry that could be set up to aid in the creation of a reconciliatory moment. It is not designed to lead into the single, cumulative moment of *anagnorisis*—the moment when Rilke realizes that the poet may not be able to sustain the weight of the perishable

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[75] *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, 52.
[76] Ibid., 54.
[77] Ibid., 61-62.

earth but that he can harness language in order to document it. There are, so to speak, too many moving pieces in *Du côté de chez Swann*—and in the *Recherche* as a whole—for that to work. That said, Proust methodically uses the structure of memory in order to navigate the elusiveness of wholeness. Instead of creating a large-scale structure to destabilize and force completion, he can thus create *pockets* of wholeness. In other words, while neither the life nor the *Bildung* of Marcel can be delimited as a whole entity—after all, "none of us constitutes a material whole, identical for everyone"[78]—a moment in that life can be. It can be complete in that it has passed—or rather, it can be *completed* once it has passed. For just as the boundaries of the text allow it to include the infinite, so, too, do the boundaries of a moment allow it to be expanded. Thus, for Proust, real time past can bear a resemblance to Rilke's utopic time. To explain, let me turn then to the central problem of the *Recherche*, and that which underlines its elegiac quality, namely, limitations.

4.

If Proust finds in *Du côté de chez Swann* pockets of completeness, he must do so, however, through the repetition of incompleteness—localized, as already mentioned, but also conceived, not rhetorically, but experientially. Thus, Proust negotiates his protagonist Marcel's relationship with the external world through a series of encounters in which Marcel feels his place in the world, his bounds, and his sense of control over himself threatened. None of these moments take on the dramatic nature of real violence—Proust does not force his characters to suffer through substantial trauma. However, in the case of the first and third parts of *Du côté de chez Swann*, he does endure social and

[78] Proust, 19.

metaphysical anxiety at the hands of his surroundings. Take for example, the lamp that appears early on in "Combray." When Marcel is a small boy, he suffers great anxiety at being isolated from his family. Indeed, much of the first part of "Combray" depicts the drama of the goodnight kiss from his mother he must forgo when his parents have company. In addition to this after dinner drama, however, there are the hours Marcel dreads spending alone just before dinner. In an attempt to assuage his fear, his mother and grandmother get him a lamp projecting the story of Golo into his room. These good intentions, however, actually make worse Marcel's anxieties:

> *Mais ma tristesse n'en était qu'accrue, parce que rien que le changement d'éclairage détruisait l'habitude que j'avais de ma chambre et grâce à quoi, sauf le supplice du coucher, elle m'était devenue supportable. Maintenant je ne la reconnaissais plus et j'y étais inquiet, comme dans une chambre d'hôtel ou de <<chalet>>, où je fusse arrivé pour la première fois en descendant de chemin de fer.*[79]
>
> But my sadness was only increased by this since the mere change in lighting destroyed the familiarity which my bedroom had acquired for me and which, except for the torment of going to bed, had made it tolerable to me. Now I no longer recognized it and I was uneasy there, as in a room in some hotel or "chalet" to which I had come for the first time straight from the railway train.[80]

The distraction, the pseudo-company of the story in light, does not protect Marcel from his solitude. It does nothing to offer him connection or warmth. Instead, it has the effect of possessing the room, much like the elegy possesses the *Bildungsroman* in Proust's attempted story of growing up. It makes the room unfamiliar. It turns it into a place as strange as any unknown way station. In effect, Marcel is haunted by history—especially given that the story Golo is a part is of the Merovingian history of France, best known for Clovis I, often identified as the founder of the nation. The founding figures of France

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[79] Proust (French), 9.
[80] Proust, 9.

enter into Proust's *Bildungsroman* as ghosts, as the prolonged dead, as those who never found any kind of reconciliation with mortality.

Or at least, Golo appears that way to Marcel, who has yet to recognize the other half of language's role. After all, while he is beckoned into history's rapid progression through the lamp's storytelling (which is simultaneously art and, through the memories of the stories Marcel has heard, language), he is prevented from participating in the making of the story—it is no accident that this encounter is with projections. They threaten him with not only the *unheimlich*, but also with metaphysical erasure and the power of the aesthetic:

> *je ne peux dire quel malaise me causait pourtant cette intrusion du mystère et de la beauté dans une chambre que j'avais fini par remplir de mon moi au point de ne pas faire plus attention à elle qu'à lui-même. L'influence anesthésiante de l'habitude ayant cessé, je me mettais à penser, à sentir, choses si tristes.*[81]
>
> I cannot express the uneasiness caused in me by this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room I had at last filled with myself to the point of paying no more attention to the room than to that self. The anesthetizing influence of habit having ceased, I would begin to have thoughts, and feelings, and they are such sad things.[82]

Marcel finds himself, on the one hand, thrust into history and, on the other hand, removed from his quotidian manner of insertion into that history and left without the "anesthetizing influence of habit." He is outside the social group, but he is not allowed to remain coiled in the space that he has constructed by his own conventions. He has been left with "thoughts and feelings," even fear, at losing the "room I had at last filled with myself" to "this intrusion of mystery and beauty"—that is, his own language, his personal language, has suddenly been flattened by the looming communal language in which he

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[81] Proust (French), 10.
[82] Proust, 10-1.

does not yet participate and with which he has not yet figured out how to coexist. Proust thus captures the moment when "while a child's quite small we take it / and turn it round and force it to look backwards at conformation, not that openness"[83] that Rilke describes just before his assertion of utopic space and time in the *Elegien*. There is not yet any relief here in art for Marcel, only pain.

5.

Proust's Marcel does, however, move beyond that pain: that is the point of the text, the cause for the possession by the elegiac. However, he does so by returning to the question that I posed with regards to Rilke in the first chapter: how does one wrest language from experience? Or, how does one make of earth—rocks, bodies, feelings—language?

Since initially posing that question, I have progressed further in the discussion of the relationship between language, history, and *Bildung.* Elegy—like the better-known *Bildungsroman*—takes up as its task the modeling of the subject's fabrication from the social. As such, it concerns itself with the double-ordeal of mourning: reconciliation with loss, on the one hand, and articulation of that loss, on the other. In other words, it addresses the paradox of language as that which constitutes thinking. Language is both that which makes one aware of futurity and thus one's finiteness as well as that which extends one beyond one's limits by allowing one to partake of the social experience and its continuity. We are called into history by the need to borrow language, and we give to history, contribute to history through language.

[83] *Duino Elegies*, 67.

As a result of this dynamic, humans become the conduit of language. This allows a restatement of the question posed with regards to Rilke above: how can humans enter history? The question is not limited to "humans" as a collection of selves defined as consciousnesses, as one might think based on the discussion of Paulhan and Blanchot in the first chapter. Rather, in this light, "humans" has to do with the non-dualistic complex of consciousness situated in bodies. Proust drives his reader to ask not just how consciousnesses enter history, but also how bodies do. Where Rilke sees earth only in the objects surrounding him, Proust also sees it in himself. Indeed, for Proust, to move beyond language—and history—as a source of pain, to be able to participate in it, requires the recognition of the earth in the object and the earth in himself. The body, or earth, is the bridge that corresponds across time and which enables language to pass.

With this correspondence in mind, one can look, then, at the incident of the madeleine. Closing out the first section of "Combray," it forms a matching bookend for the magic lamp incident at the section's beginning. It is also the first episode in *Du côté de chez Swann* in which Marcel undergoes *anagnorisis*—here meaning the transformation of language's pain (mortality's pain, history's pain) into joy, if a joy that Marcel only slowly begins to understand. Conducted through a series of leaping moves across eleven paragraphs (though the second paragraph consists of only a single line), the passage contains an intensity appropriate to joy but which is as hard for the careful reader to understand as it is for Marcel.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the passage, it will perhaps be useful for me to offer up an outline of its contents. First, Proust acknowledges Marcel's limited memories of the time he passed in Combray (those surrounding bedtime) and the way

they stood out “in a building whose other part remains plunged in darkness.”[84] He dubs these memories as belonging to voluntary memory. Proust then transitions—using a metaphor borrowed from “Celtic belief”[85] in paragraphs two through five—to how Marcel remembered more of Combray through the taste of a madeleine in tea, the activation of corresponding sensations in his body across time. This kind of remembering, reinforced through the paragraphs that follow, is, Proust suggests, the complement of the memory already identified, namely, involuntary memory. He also claims that this kind of remembering is largely the product of chance. Next Proust describes Marcel’s process of remembering in paragraphs six through ten: how he had to work repeatedly against his own mind, which refused to follow the sensation, and how the memory finally came to him by breaking out of the depths within him. Last but not least, in paragraph eleven, Proust describes the emergence of this other Combray—the Combray he explores narratively and in more detail in the second part of “Combray”—from his cup of tea.

There are a couple ways one might proceed with a discussion of this incident. For my part, I think it best to begin by examining briefly the interpretive framework that Proust embeds in the description of Marcel’s experience. After all, in addition to fraying out the various forms of longing—desire for the comfort of the mother, for the reciprocation of love, for the presence of someone long since dead—Proust, more so than anywhere else in “Combray,” also propounds in the moments leading up to his protagonist’s tea-washed epiphany. Indeed, part of the passage’s difficulty rests in the

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[84] Proust, 43
[85] Ibid., 44

competition between the schema of interpretation Proust puts forward and the mode of the text's construction.

With regards to Proust's framework, then, the most important aspects to keep in mind are, first, his use of the body-bridge in order to distinguish between the two types of memory he finds operational in his project (voluntary and involuntary), and, second, the importance of chance to the revival of memory. As I have identified above, voluntary memory, which Proust identifies as "the memory of the intelligence," [86] that is, pre-formulated memory, memory already remembered as stories, suffers from a limited ability to recall the past. Indeed, "the information it gives about the past preserves nothing of the past itself,"[87] but rather, in Marcel's words, keeps it "all really quite dead for me."[88] Involuntary memory, on the other hand, is memory triggered by the correspondence of bodies. Proust makes this point clear—and very clearly situated within the elegiac mode—through his choice of analogy. He introduces the concept via the discussion of "the Celtic belief […] that the souls of those we have lost are held captive in some inferior creature"[89] waiting for one to recognize and thereby release them to "return to live with us."[90] As with the lost soul, "the past is hidden outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach, in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us)."[91] Thus, Proust uses matching sensations of the body in order to move between moments in time and to therefore allow a past moment to be, not

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 44-5.

remembered, but revived, relived and made available again as experience before narrative dissection.

Chance also plays a role in this reanimation. The past cannot be revived in just any fashion—after all, the revival of the past for Proust is a parallel procedure to the ordeal for Rilke. For Proust, the path of involuntary memory combines chance—the factor that he emphasizes at this point in *Du côté de chez Swann*—with sensitivity to the body, methodical attentiveness, and skilled artistry—though the last of these qualities, though implied through the text itself and the ambiguity of Proust and narrator Marcel, is not yet dwelled on in Proust's framing of his text (Proust saves that for the second part of "Combray," where he includes writing by the younger Marcel). You see, much as in the writing of the surrealists who would follow Proust—think of Breton's *Nadja* (*Nadja*)—chance acts as a catalyst for the characters in the text, believably, while at the same time obviously being a matter of persistence and staging and therefore not at all a matter of chance. Again, one stands at the border between the body and language. It is for this reason that art, and especially the art of language in literature, is so important.

In the case of the madeleine, however, while chance plays a key role in offering up the object in which the past is stored—it is mere chance that Marcel's "mother, seeing that I was cold, suggested that, contrary to my habit, I have a little tea"[92]—it is by far the least interesting part of the episode. Indeed, if anything, the emphasis on chance distracts from the real work done in the passage about the madeleine. Marcel's reaction to the intrusion of something he cannot quite identify, what Deleuze calls "violence"[93] but is perhaps more properly called the unassimilable, as well as the manner in which he

[92] Ibid., 45.
[93] Deleuze, 15.

records this reaction are the more important parts, the *preparatory* parts, the parts where investigation and aesthetics begin to play a role. Indeed, these, one might call them, *preparations of language* allow Proust to process the unassimilable and transform it into the thick weave for which he is known. Not to mention, it is this action that recalls the discussion to its goal: to understand how one wrenches language from experience.

In his essay “Metonymy in Proust,”[94] French literary theorist Gérard Genette shows a sharp eye in analyzing Proust’s style as he tracks the relationship between metaphor and metonymy in the *Recherche*. In particular, he argues that any analysis of Proust’s use of metaphor that neglects to also address his use of metonymy fails to detect an important component of the texture of Proust’s work. For indeed,

> without metonymy, there is no sequencing of memories, no story/history, no novel. For it is metaphor that regains Lost Time but it is metonymy that revives it and sets it in motion, that gives it back to itself and to its veritable ‘essence,’ namely the flight-from-itself and the Search-for-itself that it is.[95]

In other words—and in a manner that echoes my conclusions above about Rilke and *his* use of metaphor (figure)—metaphor allows for the transference of moments past into the present. It serves as an access point to an articulation of that which is lost, that which calls for elegy. It is the linguistic figure that binds together the body that, on the level of the referent, is marked by sensations’ resemblance. However, while metaphor signals to the transference—the possibility of transference, of re-routing of experience into reference—it is metonymy, as Genette points out, that allows those moments of access to

[94] All citations to this essay will be taken from the edition printed in the Norton Critical Edition of *Swann’s Way*.
[95] Genette, KL 10168-10171.

become wormholes into other worlds. It is metonymy that enables the joy that is central to the elegiac work of the *Recherche*.

In the episode of the madeleine, these shifts are hard to detect. If Proust played the episode of the magic lamp *sforzato*, this time, he goes for the long *crescendo*. To approach it, however, I would like to focus in on paragraph six. Not only does this paragraph serve as the structural midpoint of the eleven-paragraph sequence, but it is also the paragraph in which all of Proust's discussion of voluntary and involuntary memory gets put to use. Proust has metaphorically linked up the "Celtic belief" about souls that "have overcome death and […] return to live with us"[96] to the act of memory—"It is the same with our past."[97] Subsequently, in this paragraph, paragraph six, he can begin to explore the implications. It is here, then, that Marcel starts the process of focusing his attention on the sensation that the madeleine seems to trigger in him:

> *Et bientôt, machinalement, accablé par la morne journée et la perspective d'un triste lendemain, je portai à mes lèvres une cuillerée du thé où j'avais laissé s'amollir un morceau de madeleine. Mais à l'instant même où la gorgée mêlée des miettes du gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d'extraordinaire en moi. Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause. Il m'avait aussitôt rendu les vicissitudes de la vie indifférentes, ses désastres inoffensifs, sa brièveté illusoire, de la même façon qu'opère l'amour, en me remplissant d'une essence précieuse : ou plutôt cette essence n'était pas en moi, elle était moi. J'avais cessé de me sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel. D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie ? Je sentais qu'elle était liée au goût du thé et du gâteau, mais qu'elle le dépassait infiniment, ne devait pas être de même nature. D'où venait-elle ? Que signifiait-elle ? Où l'appréhender ?*[98]
>
> And soon, mechanically, oppressed by the gloomy day and the prospect of another sad day to follow, I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a bit of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had

[96] Proust, 44
[97] Ibid.
[98] Proust (French), 44.

> invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause. It had immediately rendered the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, by filling me with a precious essence: or rather this essence was not merely inside me, it was me. I had ceased to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Where could it have come to me from—this powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected to the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it went infinitely far beyond it, could not be of the same nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I grasp it?[99]

Proust here describes the first moments of Marcel's pivotal encounter with the madeleine and the encroachment of involuntary memory. Conducted through stream of consciousness, the description takes full advantage of Proust's ability to slow down time. Over a period of one hundred and fifty-eight words in French (or one hundred and ninety in English), Proust manages to expand the few seconds it takes for Marcel to take a bite of his cookie dipped in tea—and he will continue to expand it over more than three pages, up through paragraph nine. In line with this expansion, one also begins to see Proust shift his dependency from metaphor to metonymy. After all, at this stage, all Marcel can determine of this event is that a "delicious pleasure" filled him for no apparent reason. His body responds to the taste of the dipped cookie and that is where the sensation registers—not as memory, not as narrative, not as a thing linguistically structured, figured. Language instead circles around its subject, hinting, searching, as the body-as-bridge begins to emerge and re-enforce the metaphor deployed in the first five paragraphs of the madeleine episode. With this limited leaping between homologous subjects, Proust becomes focused on what "was connected to the taste," to the governance of contiguity. Only once does he call out to sameness, the sameness of love, and, as for that, as an analogy, it returns Proust to the territory of contiguity—among love's primary risks is the loss of the distinction between individuals. In doing so, in

[99] Proust, 45.

slowing down the pace of events and focusing on the connected, Proust thus allows himself to make room for "the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me" and to set up the inquiry that will ensue in the second half of the paragraph.

Likewise, in a gesture that matches this shifting focus of logical relations to proximate ones, Proust explores performatively the interiority-exteriority conundrum already highlighted in the previous chapter and which serves as the primary point of contention in the process of *Bildung*. In the first part of paragraph six, the reader sees Proust's Marcel first turn "inside me," a gesture that constitutes him simultaneously as subject and object, before recognizing that it is the body that contains "a precious essence" that "was not merely inside me, it was me." In other words, Proust performs, in a manner Rilke might admire for its figurative rigging, a movement of splitting and then uniting his protagonist. In seeing himself as a thing filled with something else, Marcel begins to see himself as an object. While not a move that would be effective with every character (given that *Bildung* strives to standardize people and that only certain bodies—traditionally, the straight, white, male norm—have been allowed to enter into history as active and self-actualizing subjects), this objectification allows Marcel an important scrambling of vantage points. It is as if he is watching himself being swept up into the space of the social, being made into one body among many—all through the medium of the language in which the narrator now writes. Of course, the real turn is the next step where Marcel makes a great leap towards the *anagnorisis* that the mind calls for in light of the body: the moment of realizing that he is also that which fills himself up. Even when he is an object, he is also a subject. In other words, whereas in the case of the Golo lamp of his childhood the exterior imposition of another world deepened his sadness, his

sense of being erasable and contingent in the face of a history that did not allow him to participate, in the case of the madeleine, the world rising up, that essence, *is* him. He can thus begin to understand his limitations, thereby making himself back into a subject. For it is only through this process of recognition of his own standing as earth that he can comprehend himself as limited—as mortal—and have the potential to participate in history.

It is also for this reason that the rest of the paragraph represents one of the most triumphant, complicated, and paradoxical moments in *Du côté de chez Swann.* It strives to represent the moment in which sensation transforms into re-lived memory (the moment of *anagnorisis*). However, Proust is *re-presenting* it—i.e. communicating it through the medium of language—and therefore, it would seem, undercutting the living nature of the encounter. It would do so, if Proust's aim were not twofold: on the one hand, to defer the future by being able to enter the Open, and, on the other, to be able to rejoin history as a participant. Proust does not just want to reach the moment of *anagnorisis*, of revelation; he also wants to be able to live in light of that revelation—to convert his grief into a ritual of mourning. As Genette states in a similar moment of descriptive adroitness on the part of Proust, he wants to "customiz[e] it among the various analogic virtualities."[100] One might call this Proust's effort to incorporate his own death:

> *Je bois une seconde gorgée où je ne trouve rien de plus que dans la première, une troisième qui m'apporte un peu moins que la seconde. Il est temps que je m'arrête, la vertu du breuvage semble diminuer. Il est clair que la vérité que je cherche n'est pas en lui, mais en moi. Il l'y a éveillée, mais ne la connaît pas, et ne peut que répéter indéfiniment, avec de moins en moins de force, ce même témoignage que je ne sais pas interpréter et que je veux au moins pouvoir lui redemander et retrouver intact, à ma disposition, tout à l'heure, pour un éclaircissement décisif. Je pose la tasse et me tourne vers mon esprit. C'est à lui*

[100] Genette, KL 9797-9799.

de trouver la vérité. Mais comment ? Grave incertitude, toutes les fois que l'esprit se sent dépassé par lui-même ; quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien. Chercher ? pas seulement : créer. Il est en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore et que seul il peut réaliser, puis faire entrer dans sa lumière.[101]

> I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third that gives me a little less than the second. It is time for me to stop, the virtue of the drink seems to be diminishing. Clearly, the truth I am seeking is not in the drink, but in me. The drink has awoken it in me, but does not know this truth, and can do no more than repeat indefinitely, with less and less force, this same testimony which I do not know how to interpret and which I want at least to be able to ask of it again and find again, intact, available to me, soon, for a decisive clarification. I put down the cup and turn to my mind. It is up to my mind to find the truth. But how? Such grave uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is also the obscure country where it must seek and where all its baggage will be nothing to it. Seek? Not only that: create. It is face-to-face with something that does not yet exist and that only it can accomplish, then bring into its light.[102]

In this paragraph, there are quite a few clues as to Proust's burgeoning awareness of what involuntary memory is enabling him to do, the possibilities awakened. In addition to the continuing pursuit of connection, there is the matter of the change in tense. Up until this point, Proust has described the past *as* past and has made full use of the past tenses available in French, even when excavating it. Here, however, beginning with "I drink a second mouthful,"[103] Proust switches to the present—and he stays in the present until the moment when, four paragraphs later in paragraph ten, he announces how "suddenly the memory appeared."[104] What makes this choice interesting is how it insists on the present tense for the staging of Marcel's experiment: his testing of himself and of the cause of the pleasure he experienced when taking a bite of the madeleine needed to happen in this realm of possibility, when he can still admit that he "do[es] not know how to interpret

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[101] Proust (French), 44-5.
[102] Proust, 45-6.
[103] Ibid., 45.
[104] Ibid., 47.

[this truth].” Indeed, in almost Dostoevskian fashion, Proust uses the present to extend the moment before remembering, before deciding how to remember and what to “create.” The experiment happens in the Open before language—prefigured by the next paragraph’s “murmur of the distances traversed” [105]—forces it into the stream of history, thereby closing the initial metaphor, when the memory arises from the teacup in a form Marcel can manage well enough to tell his readers, one which, it is implied, will be the basis for the rest of the book.

If Rilke wanted to understand how utopic time might be accessed, Proust wanted to understand how it might be lived with through real time. His novel, which begins with insomnia and works through a desire and failure to produce work, captures the possession of the *Bildungsroman* by the elegy. After all, the mind struggling towards business, towards the occupation of time, comes up short, cannot build very much. It is the body in action and the mind at rest that creates the chance for *anagnorisis* for Proust. Only after this moment of the stalled-out present that belongs to the Open can language re-activate and properly take up time.

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[105] Ibid., 46.

CHAPTER 3

MICHAUX

1.

Approximately thirty years and another world war after the publication of the *Duineser Elegien* and Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, Henri Michaux returned to the elegiac challenge. Rather than casting for utopic time through allegory as Rilke had done, or seeking to exchange utopic time for real time as Proust had done, Michaux instead sought to resituate the experiment of the Open at the intersection of scientific and religious practice, in a form of real-infinite time. He did so through the procedural ingestion of a series of drugs—though primarily mescaline—over the course of several years beginning on January 2, 1955.[106] The states he entered under their influence he then recorded through writing and drawing and eventually curated in a series of five books: *Misérable miracle* (*Miserable Miracle*) (1956, 1972), *L'Infini turbulent* (*Infinite Turbulence*) (1957, 1964), *Paix dans les brisements* (*Peace in the Breakage*) (1959), *Connaissance par les gouffres* (*Light through Darkness*) (1961, 1967), and *Les Grandes Épreuves de l'Esprit et les innombrables petites* (*The Major Ordeals of the Mind and Innumerable Small Ones*) (1966). In serializing his drug experiences, Michaux, like Rilke and especially like Proust, demonstrates his interest in *Bildung* through the process of revision in relation to life—even going so far as to expand and reissue three of the five books, as is reflected in the multiple publication dates.

For Michaux, as for Rilke and Proust, the idea of *Bildung* is narrated not only through the story of his work's production, however. It is also built into the narrative arc

[106] *Mescaline 55*, 9.

of the books themselves and therefore made available for consideration by the reader. In this chapter, I will look into *Misérable miracle*, the first of these books—and also the last of them as a result of revision—in which *Bildung* manifests itself through elegiac contestation. Although Michaux never identifies the motivation for his experiments in either the published texts or in letters with his co-conspirators (Jean Paulhan and Edith Boissonnas)—it seems likely that the prolonged suffering and eventual death of Marie-Louise Michaux by fire in February 1948[107] was a factor. Michaux had reached the limit of what he could handle, and the spiritualism to which he had turned, according to friends, immediately after her death was not sustaining him. [108] In order to reconcile himself to death, Michaux planned on using mescaline—and the real-infinite, the "corporeal infinity," that he might discover through it[109]—to negotiate the space of limit-experience, wherein personal language and history contend.

2.

We should again begin the discussion with considerations of genre. As already mentioned, elegy is a poetic form reinvented in the eighteenth century in light of interest in *Bildung*. Although its formal features were limited (and continued to slough off in increasingly modern iterations of the genre), it does possess an arc from grief to *anagnorisis*. Indeed, this trajectory is what holds together its ritualization of mourning through reconciliation with death. Such is the outline of the work an elegy is meant to do.

When it comes to *Misérable Miracle*, however, although Michaux is primarily known as a poet, poetry is not the form he chooses to use. Or rather, it is not the only

[107] *OC II*, XVI.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Michaux, 67.

form. The book is composed of four kinds of materials: the prose that forms the primary body of the text, "*des raccourcis*"[110] or "epitomes"[111] running along the outer margins of the pages; groupings of drawings done just after the drug dosing; and pages from Michaux's handwritten notes made during the course of the experiences. Interleaved together, these media form into four segments—"*Avec la mescaline*" ("With Mescaline"), "*Caractères de la mescaline*" ("Characteristics of Mescaline"), "*Le Chanvre indien: Notes pour server à un parallèle entre deux hallucinogènes*" ("Indian Hemp: Notes to Serve as a Comparison Between Two Hallucinogens"), and "*Expérience de la folie*" ("Experimental Schizophrenia")—accompanied by introductory and summary remarks and a series of addenda. The progression through these sections, while seemingly experimental—that is, organized chronological in correlation with the dosages—is actually a carefully constructed narrative, moving from initial trials up to and through an ordeal. In the first of these books, "With Mescaline," Michaux describes the experience of being on mescaline in terms of its effects on his self. Midway through, Michaux includes a series of drawings of the "*sillon*"[112] or "fissure"[113] that invades his field of inner vision and which seems to be his record of his self splitting open. The chapter then finishes with excerpts from his notes, thereby including a signature of Michaux's state of mind at the time of ingestion of the drug. In the next section, "Characteristics of Mescaline," Michaux concerns himself with describing mescaline as an actor, the way it works as a "disorder of composition"[114] that is "above all interested in covering

[110] *OC II*, 620.
[111] Michaux, 6.
[112] *OC II*, 625.
[113] Michaux, 13.
[114] Ibid., 62.

ground."[115] In the third of these parts, "Indian Hemp," Michaux experiments with hashish in order to create another point of reference for the effects of mescaline on perception. Finally, Michaux caps his experiments with a fourth trial of mescaline in "Experimental Schizophrenia" (the first three experiments with mescaline were described in "With Mescaline" and "Characteristics of Mescaline"), during which Michaux overdoses, supposedly accidentally. Michaux begins his mescaline experiment as merely "an exploration. By means of words, signs, drawings. Mescaline, the subject explored."[116] However, through the moment of the overdose, he rigs the experiment—just as Rilke rigged his figuration—in search of a revelation, not about mescaline at all, but about himself. Michaux submerges himself in mescaline in order to make the discovery that would allow for the moment of *anagnorisis*.

3.

The relationship between language and the body is much more complicated in Michaux's work than it is in either the *Duineser Elegien* or *Du côté de chez Swann*. For Rilke, the body hardly appears at all, showing up only as one of the many elements that compose the worldly ineffable, and even then only by implication—Rilke prefers to keep the body (and the other) at a distance. Proust, on the other hand, grounds his literary practice in the body. As the receptor of the world's sensations, the body serves as the bridge between corresponding moments in time. Without it, there is no entry point into history and no material for language to carve its path through and into art. When it comes to Michaux, however, the body is very much in charge, to a degree even Michaux

[115] Ibid., 64.
[116] Ibid., 5.

sometimes finds uncomfortable. For, although his plan had certainly been to surrender himself to the drug, it is not clear that he understood what that would mean; he seems consistently surprised by mescaline's "easy seductions"[117] and the way in which its alteration of his body chemistry alters him.[118] Indeed, Michaux does not seem to understand the difference in the stakes between his earlier works—in which he, according to critic Carrie Noland, "experiments with the gestures of sign making in order to find a performing body beyond them"[119]—and his mescaline writings, in which the body and the mind are implicated together in a process of distortion. As British psychiatrist Humphrey Osmand puts it in a letter to Louise Varèse, the English translator of *Misérable miracle*, dated 4 June 1960, "[o]ne feels that [Michaux] intended to be a spectator & in some unexpected way he was caught & resented this."[120] Michaux's insides and outsides, his private mental observation deck and his acting body, to Michaux's surprise and chagrin, turned out to be interlinked. Mescaline would not provide an out-of-body experience that Michaux could watch.

Michaux instead found himself buffeted on the waves of mescaline competing with his self. In order to conceptualize this competition, however, Michaux approaches mescaline as if it were, like himself, an artist. Michaux—the Michaux that Michaux recognizes—and mescaline are each described as producing a variety of signs, each writing in his/its own style, alphabet, language. These signs are what Michaux attempts to describe in some cases, and record in others, for his readers. Although it is difficult to

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[117] Ibid., 60.

[118] The begrudging willingness with which Michaux allows himself to be carried off by mescaline—at least, in the first of his mescaline books—is part of what makes his project interesting: he relinquishes until near the end of his experiment the expected narrative. After all, far too often, as David Lenson says with regards to the hallucinogen LSD in his *On Drugs*, "We are not receptive to the idea that the terrain might conform to the map" (145).

[119] Noland, KL 116-7.

[120] Louise Varèse Papers, SSC.

define clear events in *Misérable miracle* (a risk whenever experiment dominates a narrative), encounters between the two languages do seem to occur, moments where Michaux recognizes that "Mescaline and [he] were more often at odds with each other than together." [121] In particular, Michaux shows interest in what happens to natural language when it appears in the mescalinian mind. He had gone in search of infinity—perhaps something like the utopic time which Rilke hoped to find, through language, a time alleviated in which the dead appeared. However, instead of coextensive infinity, Michaux, in moving his infinite from the virtual into the real, stumbles into serial infinity. Mescaline, "by the speed of its components, got beyond the possibility of measurement and precluded the very idea of counting and appraising, "[122] thus "bec[oming] a 'model' of the infinite."[123] Michaux thus finds that mescaline unfolds language just like everyone else—only at a different pace and to a different degree. Whereas people tend to follow syntax and changes in logic or image when they move through language, mescaline has only one rule: "[a]ssociated with words, [it] proceeds by enumeration."[124] It does not pause. It does not dig in—to life, to texture, to sentiment, to body. Instead, it glides along the surface of thought, "the enemy of poetry,"[125] with "[a]n image appear[ing], only if evoked by a thought, a word, an abstraction."[126]

In identifying this shift in the nature of the infinity at stake in mescaline, manifested in the execution of language by the drug, I have also pointed towards the transference of infinite time from the virtual into the real—a transference that mirrors

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[121] Michaux, 7.
[122] Ibid., 70n.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., 62.
[125] Ibid., 61.
[126] Ibid., 63.

Michaux's transference of the rigging from the syntactic, as in Rilke's work, to the bodily. It is important to acknowledge this fact before turning to the other side of the equation that I have begun. Michaux does not just submit natural language to mescaline; mescaline also submits mescalinian language to Michaux's body. I mentioned earlier the two primary types of graphics present in *Misérable miracle*: drawings, fairly abstract, of the furrow that rends Michaux's interior vision and Michaux's handwriting samples, which act as signatures of the state of Michaux's consciousness.[127] In addition to these two types of graphics—which seem to hold a status within the text equivalent to any of the writing contained therein—however, Michaux also includes, in the second section, "Characteristics of Mescaline," what instead might be described as a diagram or illustration:

[127] It is perhaps worth noting that, although these notes are meant to display the extreme state in which Michaux was, thanks to their deviation from something like standardized handwriting, Michaux's handwriting is actually usually quite bad. Indeed, unless he is trying very hard to be clear—as when he writes the caption on the mescalinian alphabet I am about to discuss—his handwriting is very hard to discern, mescaline or no. Time with his letters to Louise Varèse has taught me that. So perhaps Michaux's consciousness was not as far distorted from its usual state as he would like his readers to think.

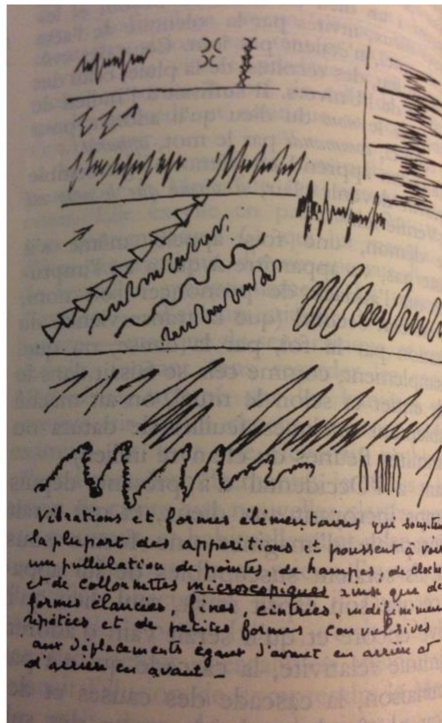

Image 1: Michaux's Mescaline Alphabets [128]

In it, one sees a return to Michaux's earlier interest in alphabets and the use of "the format of a child's primer" already explored in his 1951 *Mouvements* (*Movements*). [129] Different kinds of lines, zigzags are organized into blocks divided by lines, emphasizing both their distinctness and their variation—as if they were, indeed, letters (Paulhan seems to have had similar suspicions[130]) that might be repeated over and over again, that one might train oneself to control and use. Indeed, although Michaux does not say so explicitly, only hinting as he calls them "*vibrations et formes élémentaires*" in the first line of the caption below, these different lines seem to be more controlled imitations of the lines that appear in Michaux's furrowed drawings. In the first of the furrow drawings, which appears part way through "With Mescaline," one sees the furrow as composed

[128] *OC II*, 678.
[129] Noland, KL 2095.
[130] *Mescaline 55*, 140.

through a series of dense, tornado-like lines somewhat reminiscent of the figure of the scribble in the upper right-hand corner of the primer. The last of the furrow drawings in "With Mescaline" shows the same dense markings as in all of the first furrow near its centerline, though its edges are drawn via a series of looser, back-and-forth gestures that bud into loops at their ends, in a fashion resembling the two lines immediately below the one looked at earlier in the primer.

The point, of course, of articulating such resemblances is that the lines contained in the primer are Michaux's attempt to document the mescalinian alphabet—and thus the mescalinian possession. Just as Proust found his encounter with the magic lamp to be a matter of possession by another story, so too does Michaux find his with mescaline—the terms of the encounter are simply different. Mescaline does not tell stories. It perpetrates only repeated abstractions, non-signifying signs. Though a product of Michaux's body, it does not feel body. It cannot.

It is likely for this reason that Michaux's mescaline primer is situated within the context of a discussion of the gods. Mescaline is a drug synthesized from peyote, which, while possessing its own long history, holds a particular place in twentieth-century French literature. French writer, actor, and theater theorist Antonin Artaud took peyote in 1936 in an attempt both to distance himself from the European culture he considered poisonous and to detox after serious heroin abuse.[131] Michaux may not have suffered from drug addiction (at least when he started taking mescaline; the waters get murkier as he tries a variety of drugs over the next two decades), but he was suffering from a desire to distance himself from the European culture and institutions that had inflicted WWII on the world. That is part of Michaux's elegiac project, after all. In taking mescaline,

[131] Artaud, 15.

Michaux sought to accomplish what he had in his youth accomplished through, as he would write a few years later in 1957, "voyage *contre*."[132] He had traveled against, in the first place against geography. With mescaline, however, he traveled against the self that had been geographically and culturally defined. As a result, when he turned to mescaline, he also turned to the gods it might bring, gods that might appear and return his gaze where Rilke's Angel had been indifferent. The Tarahumara stands in contrast, for Michaux, to "*l'Occidental d'à présent.*"

It is thus to the Tarahumara that Michaux turns when it comes to language as the key to the gods—though, in fact, one wonders if this relationship was the reason mescaline was the drug of choice in the first place, its potential for verbal evocation. As Michaux points out,

> They sought a god seeking the Peyotl, and the other gods, incited by the solemnity of the sacramental act, were never far off. The gods of volcanoes, of fire, of harvests, of rain, the god of the stars and of the Universe. It was enough for an Indian to pronounce the *name* of the god he worshiped, for the god, *by order* of the word, *to appear*.
>
> What we learn in demonology seems now quite clear: *that the name is everything.* Here verified.
>
> The demon, once called, even if he does not exist, will appear to anyone who, being in the second state, has had the imprudence or the audacity of pronouncing his name.[133]

The Tarahumara took peyote as part of a religious rite through which they sought the presence of the gods. In Michaux's interpretation, however, these encounters with deities are the product of the same phenomenon that he experiences with mescaline: a sign (a word) generates an image, never the other way around. Thus, one names a god and that god manifests—or at least, something manifests that looks like what the speaker expects

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[132] *OC II*, CXXXIII.
[133] Michaux, 65.

from the name. For although Michaux does not want to dismiss the gods of the Tarahumara—that was never the point of this experiment—he does want to bring the discovery of verbally manifested gods back into the fold of European thinking. Thus he returns to demonology, noting the power the name usually embraces and, in point of fact, the emptiness of the demon that the name conjures. In other words, it positions Michaux to ask what it would mean if gods were only things conjured up by words—not only because of how that would demote divinity, but also because of how it would raise up language.

4.

Here, one arrives yet again at the apotheosis of language. Whereas Rilke identified language as supreme because it is both that which forces humanity into awareness of its own frailty and death and that which allows humanity to continue after death, Michaux comes to a similar conclusion by another angle. For him, language is the medium through which humanity has created its divinities. Thus, instead of finding earth on a mountaintop and returning to the valley with a word, Michaux focuses on how language, once spoken, conjures earth, real or not (and demons, real or not).

The consequences of language's elevation are not small. However, to understand their full implications, one must consider what the projective power of language means for several key points in this discussion, especially bodies, the Open, and history. I have discussed already the emptying of the sign that takes place with mescaline—i.e. disembodiment as an abstraction that operates solipsistically and that is only capable of producing itself. In some ways, this fact allies mescaline with the idea I discussed in the

first chapter in opposing reflective language to the sort of language I decided to promote, language that reaches out of the abyss of the self and into the well of linguistic social norms. Both reflection and mescaline operate by the scary rule of repetition without difference—or at least, they approach such a method asymptotically within the context of infinity. After all, if a word is repeated successively forever, how much difference really exists between the hundredth and the hundred and first time it occurs, or the thousandth or the thousand and first?

In fact, this asymptotic elimination of difference *is* limit-experience. As Deleuze says, "[d]ifference is what constitutes being, what makes us conceive being."[134] In other words, limit-experience is that which eliminates the particularity of being—almost—in favor of something like Being, and which also coincides with non-existence. It is experience that wonders about and at the coincidence of everything and nothing. More importantly, for my purposes, it considers the passage towards death and negotiates the moment of death that elegy wants to avoid acknowledging and yet must acknowledge, in order to carry out its purpose.

Of course, if repetition is the mechanism of concern with mescaline, that also means time is as well, and perhaps all of history. The limit-experience of mescaline operates in a time unlike those explored by Rilke and Proust—one that unfolds but has no meaning, no difference, in its unfolding, no sense of progression, as every moment resembles every other moment. Most importantly, while it is a form of time without future, it is *not* a time with possibility, as is the time of the Open. This contradiction seems to be the site of difficulty for Michaux. On the one hand, as Michaux reports, "[o]n

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[134] Deleuze, 41.

that sensational Sunday when [he] was able to change times, [he] lived in security."[135] On the other hand, the security of that time is still subject to the questionability of the vision. Mescaline seems to respond to anything conjured in language. Name the demon; see the demon. Name the god; see the god. The god thus becomes suspect. Mescalinian time becomes suspect. Security becomes suspect again. Mescaline does not actually provide the relief of utopic existence in real time. The succession of mescalinian instants become so similar that they resemble stasis, and are filled with language's phantoms.

For this reason, it is also clear that, in taking mescaline, Michaux has problematized the circuit of history—or even opted out of it. He delays the flow of language, which, thinking back to Rilke, derives its power from its simultaneous ability to linger and to become. Of course, Michaux, too, makes efforts to bring his ordeal back to history—he writes about his experiments with mescaline and publishes those writings. However, it is not clear Michaux is actually eager to return, or if the return is instead merely the automatic completion of the project with which he set out. In other words, the return is a necessary component of the elegiac challenge—the poet must return with the word from the mountaintop, must complete the second ordeal—rather than the product of any real *anagnorisis*.

This assertion is supported by a number of factors. There is the fact that Michaux goes on to write another four books after *Misérable miracle*, documenting other attempts to use drugs to compel Michaux through mourning and into comfort with death. There is also the matter of the addenda to *Misérable miracle*. In them, Michaux wonders about younger generations and their use of drugs and acknowledges that, while "[a]vec les

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[135] Michaux, 66-7.

années, [il] avai[t] fait des progrès…vers des états importants, vers ceux qui comptent"[136] ("[o]ver the years, [he] made progress…nearing the important states, nearing the ones that count"[137]), that drugs could not accomplish everything he thought they could and still controlled him more than he controlled them. Finally, there is the matter of the attempted overdose, when Michaux, by "une erreur de calcul"[138] ("an error of calculation"[139]), took six times the recommended dosage[140]—easily enough for the damage from the mescaline to have been permanent, if not fatal. It seems as if Michaux was trying to force his reconciliation with the limit in order to obtain that final point in the elegiac arc.

Though Michaux says little about history, it is easy to understand, from what he does say, why he might not be eager to return to historical time. One sees in Michaux's work three different kinds of time competing: the time of mescaline, the time of information, and the time of the story. I have already discussed mescalinian time—it is the time of modeled infinity. However, what this kind of time was meant to assuage, through reconstitution in the elegiac form, was the traumatic rift between the two other kinds of time, borrowed from Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire"—informational time and the time of the story. The incompatibility of these two forms of time is how Benjamin explains twentieth-century trauma. It is not only a matter of devastating loss of life and the failure of *Bildung*; it is also a question of the pace of life and the incomprehensibility of the individual to that pace. According to Benjamin, the "communication, produced in response to the heightened intensities of industrial capitalism, and 'the boundless maze of indirect relationships, complex mutual

[136] *OC II*, 784.
[137] Michaux, 179.
[138] Ibid., 723.
[139] Michaux, 112.
[140] Ibid.

dependencies and compartmentations' of the city"[141] corresponds "to the interruptive, amnesiac temporality of shock."[142] In other words, the rush of mechanical life, divided and speeding, has a corresponding mode of interpretation by human consciousness: "consciousness shields the self from such shocks by registering them without retaining them, protecting the organism against over-stimulation by isolating them from memory. Memory becomes unconscious."[143] The mind refuses to synthesize its experiences, but rather allows them to fall to the side. All of which is to say, individuals in the twentieth century are overwhelmed by stimulus, by information, and find themselves unable to shape such information into narrative, into story. Time in the twentieth century has become, like Rilke's Angel, increasingly indifferent to history and its constitution through the articulation of the experience of individuals.

For Michaux, this conflict is staged in terms of spirituality and religion, though in different terms than its staging by Rilke. Indeed, Michaux thinks of time as the nihilistic deity of western thought:

> *Quant à l'Occidental d'à présent, depuis longtemps incroyant aux dieux, et qui serait bien incapable d'imaginer une forme sous laquelle ils seraient susceptibles de lui apparaître, ce que son esprit saisit, seul dieu qu'il aperçoive encore et qu'il serait vain d'adorer, c'est l'infinie relativité, la cascade qui n'a pas de terminaison, la cascade des causes et des effets, ou plutôt des précédents ou des suivants, où tout est roue entraînte et* roue entraînée.[144]
>
> As for the Westerner today, so long an unbeliever in the gods and now incapable of imagining a form in which they might appear to him, what his mind grasps, the only god he can still conceive, a god it would be vain to worship, is infinite relativity, the unending cascade, the cascade of causes and effects, or rather of

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[141] Osborne, 136.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] *OC II*, 677.

> what goes before and of what comes after, where everything is driving wheel and *follower wheel*.[145]

The Western God is nothing, Michaux argues, but relativity. It no longer has available to it any kind of utopic time or messianic time, both of which tend to be eschatological or at least teleological in nature, because the Western imagination falls short in its ability to create narrative. It cannot perceive anything more than motion falling forward into more motion, into the next moment. It cannot synthesize into, as Benjamin says, the time of story, but can only take part in the furious multiplication of data points, facts, information. And of course, how could it—the Western imagination and god, products of language—possibly handle elegy in a fashion that is anything more than nihilistic resignation to being crushed beneath the wheels of time?

For Benjamin, Proust's turn to the body and to involuntary memory was the best answer available, for through it, he managed to become as close to a modern storyteller as possible. However, for Michaux, storytelling no longer works. He has lived too long in informational time. Instead of seeking to repair it into the time of story, he looks for a time that can handle the dissipation—that can collect it. It is for this reason that, in *Misérable miracle*, the body of the text functions as a record more than as a story synthesized from experience. In this way, Michaux might be said to use Benjamin's theory of translation—which, like Paulhan and Blanchot's sees the translation of experience into language as the problem standing, finally, behind the issue of translation between languages—as a response to Benjamin's assessment of the replacement of the story (and history) by information and its infinite relativity. In it, Benjamin argues that, "[w]hile, in fact, all the individual elements—words, sentences, contexts—in foreign

[145] Michaux, 65-6.

languages exclude each other, in their intentions the languages supplement each other."[146] In other words, while foreign languages fail to reflect each other, they do act in parallel with regards to what they are attempting to enact. Furthermore, the flurry of information, while not necessarily synthesizable, may be grouped. For Michaux, that means that he can use the different media—prose, margin-filling epitomes, drawings, and handwriting samples—as different languages to triangulate around the limit-experience of mescaline. They can prop up the experimental form appropriate to the elegy within the context of the new informational time, as exposed—modeled—in mescaline.

Thus, one arrives at Michaux's answer to elegy: the modeled infinity of mescaline. In the wake of the felt impossibility of story, Michaux sought to make something out of its replacement, informational time, by reconsidering the possibility of reconciling with death through the elegy and its ritualization of mourning. However, Michaux had to figure out a way to promise *anagnorisis* even when he himself could not provide it. To do so, he recorded the language battle staged in the non-historical time of mescaline, the time without future, wherein he hoped to find the divine. While mescalinian time also proved to lack the possibilities of the Open and no god showed itself as more than a product of language, Michaux also—like Rilke and Proust—found that language, specifically the language of his multiple mescalinian translations tracking his rigged body, was enough to bind together the moment of crisis and, as Felman suggested was necessary, contain it.

[146] Benjamin, 84.

CONCLUSION

In the chapters above, I have traced the elegiac negotiations operative in Rilke's *Duineser Elegien*, Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, and Michaux's *Misérable miracle*. Although each work results from a specific encounter with death, these works also capture responses to an era, the traumatic twentieth century, and to the struggle for *rapprochement* between the individual and the new, inhuman time that emerged from the industrial revolution. In particular, Rilke, Proust, and Michaux challenged the assumptions of *Bildung*. As the cultural education of the individual that emerged out of the Enlightenment and which underpinned literature, pedagogy, and politic alike, *Bildung* was losing its footing amidst its new realities. To be shaped into the citizen idealized in *Bildung* required one to be white, male, straight, and capitalistically productive (well-suited to mechanical time), eliding all other possibilities. It also, in the context of the mass death re-shaping the political and military landscape, required the citizen to become dispensable. The result was that *Bildung* idealized a construct of self that eliminated the individual. Experience's new texture became one of trauma, of unabsorbable shock, of death without the time or space for ritualization, reconciliation, or accommodation. In opposition to these developments, then, writers like Rilke, Proust, and Michaux re-kindled a commitment to elegy, to the narrative it offered, and to the possibility of *anagnorisis* at its core. For them, elegy served as a potential form for re-writing historical indifference and for preparing, through limit-experience and loss, linguistic antidotes for the elision of difference produced in history's wake.

Of course, none of this is to say that these elegiac efforts were aware of each other or even that the strategies Rilke, Proust, and Michaux each deployed necessarily developed a consistent trajectory—though the results, I think, are suggestive. Indeed, as I have argued above, each felt his own way through elegy, through the absence of a clear relationship between the individual and history, toward possible reinventions of the form. In the case of the *Duineser Elegien*, Rilke secularizes the classical elegy by rigging an Angel into a figure of divine indifference: outside of time, they are unaware of human suffering and death. Instead, the poet of Rilke's *Elegien* must turn away from the divine and back toward the human—i. e. away from God and towards language—a feat that Rilke manages through the literal and figurative elevation offered by the trope of mountaintop revelations. He is able to invert the tradition of God descending to earth through the Word, replacing it with the Word pulling earth from the mountain itself. Language, Rilke claims, is what reveals the idea of the "future" to people, what introduces humans to history. At the same time, however, language is the only thing capable of defying history—of outlasting it—and, when properly used, of bringing the earth with it. The writing of the poem becomes the author's way of re-asserting the individual. The textual body of Rilke's elegy, then, not only does the speculative work of thinking through the collision of modernity's impersonality with the fact of individual loss and mourning, but it also becomes a demonstration of the frame of capture: it enacts the way in which language—the language of a specific historical moment—maintains circulation, life, through literary work, through registering the precise word, and without any need for sacred communications. In doing so, Rilke accesses what he calls the

“Open,” which seems to be the utopic time in which possibilities exist without the closure of impending future.

In *Du côté de chez Swann*, Proust is likewise concerned with the power of his linguistic medium and of the textual body implicated in the confrontation of the individual with history. In this case, Proust has taken the elegiac impulse and funneled it into the *Bildungsroman*, the novelistic exploration that emerged concomitant with the concept of *Bildung*. Proust has also, however, concerned himself with another body, the body of his protagonist, Marcel. In doing so, in giving attention to the physicality of Marcel’s body, to its potential to conjure, Proust manages to re-purpose the *Bildungsroman*, usually reserved for a discussion of the individual as a citizen—i.e. in the context of the nation—as a novel about the development of a person as an individual in an individual body. The gap between these two modes allows Proust to emphasize the confrontation between individual and history that is essential to elegy, to retract the search for a ritual of mourning back into lived time, and to re-situate it within a hermeneutics based in embodiment. Language again acts as a mediator; yet, it does so most powerfully when triggered by the body’s memory in episodes like that of the madeleine, in which a combination of metaphor and metonymy gather bodily sensations into narrative possibility. The utopic time pointed towards by Rilke through the suggestiveness of the word becomes, with Proust, a time regained by coiling within textual passage.

With Michaux’s *Misérable miracle*, the balance between textual body and human body tips toward the weight of the human. Mescalinian infinity—“corporeal infinity”—becomes the goal of this multimedia, autoethnographic lab report. However in doing so,

Michaux's return to the concerns of Rilke and Proust becomes a more extreme iteration. Although language retains its status as key witness to experience—and key collaborator in resisting experience's disintegration—it relinquishes its ability to answer the elegiac challenge by reconciling the writer with death on its own. Instead, Michaux situates the burden of response in the body. It is the body—the protagonist's body and the author's—that has to be rigged; to this end, Michaux ingests six times the recommended mescaline dosage and submits himself to possession by the drug. The result, however, is not an infinity like the extensive one anticipated by Rilke but is rather a serial infinity resulting from repetition—which leaves for Michaux much of the same ambivalence with which he began. On the one hand, it gives him access to limit-experience, the asymptotic elimination of difference, which bridges life and death (among other things), and removes the pressure of the future. On the other hand, possibility—which entails variation, meaning, and thus narrative—is also, for the most part, foreclosed by the use of homogenizing replication. Mescalinian infinity as channeled by Michaux into a curated collection of fragments thus suggests a way of gathering the body and its sign into an elegiac mode nonetheless compatible history's indifference.

In Rilke, Proust, and Michaux's works, then, one sees tested the degree to which language—as it circulates in the social space where it makes history, nations, and even consciousnesses possible—can be responsive to the individual embodied. How can language bridge the gap between one body and the swarm? Can it grab it through the senses? Can it gather it up into a world? Can it be not just representational, but also a trace? The language of elegy is utilitarian. It is language sustaining and containing, reconciling crisis—the crisis of being human, human limits. To deploy it, to engage in

elegiac writing, it is to make demands of author and reader alike. I began this thesis softly, Benjamin's call to the state of emergency figuring as a familiar reference point. However, his call is toward the ponderousness of events sliding by unnoticed—and to that not noticing. While I am not sure if there is for Benjamin a hazardous nostalgia underlying this call (perhaps to a time, and a kind of time, in which people noticed?), I do think it safe to say that he identified well the call sensed by the writers I have here addressed and who were his contemporaries. Rilke, Proust, and Michaux wrote new iterations of elegy that sought to reground history in the experience of the body that is the source of human limitation, both in terms of the death it suffers and the hermeneutics that it permits. Thus, while their works, their attention to language and its possibilities, in no way solve the issues at stake, in them, one can nonetheless find strategies for resisting, narratively, the indifferent winds of history and for re-introducing into history the body of the individual upon which the marks to be noticed are inscribed.

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