AFTER GRIEF?
WHAT KINDS OF INHUMAN SELVES?

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I THE INHUMAN

In his Introduction to the collection of essays and lectures gathered together in the volume entitled *The Inhuman*, Jean-François Lyotard asks 'what if human beings, in humanism's sense, were in the process of, constrained into, becoming inhuman (that's the first part)? And (the second part), what if what is "proper" to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?'.[1] What Lyotard has in mind are two senses of inhuman. Firstly, he means the inhuman-ness of techno-scientific complexification and the ways in which its 'metaphysical' language is used to legitimate political and/or socio-economic choices. Lyotard calls this metaphysical logic 'development'. Secondly, he means something raw and savage, something excessive in relation to what we usually and carelessly think of as human, but which actually – in its resistances to the 'human' and in the pain, terror and joy by which it is in the main constrained to *be* 'human' – constitutes precisely the human-ness of human beings. Elsewhere, Lyotard has referred to this as the sublime.[2]

> We should ... remember that if the name of human can and must oscillate between native indetermination and instituted or self-instituting reason, it is the same for the name of inhuman. All education is inhuman because it does not happen without constraint and terror; I mean the least controlled, the least pedagogical terror, the one Freud calls castration and which makes him say, in relation to the 'good way' of bringing up children, that in any case it *will* be bad (close in this to Kantian melancholy). And conversely, everything in the instituted which, in the event, can cut deep with distress and indetermination is so threatening that the reasonable mind cannot fail to fear in it, and rightly, an inhuman power of deregulation.[3]

In this article, I want to bring together two kinds of arguments about the contemporary – one concerning postmodern nostalgia (a form of melancholia) and the other concerning the sublime. I will also draw briefly upon the later work of Michel Foucault on practices of the self, and upon a recent paper by James Miller which considers the latter,[4] in order to discuss the relinquishment of humanism's narcissisms and to ask what kinds of inhuman, but principled, selves might now be imagined.

1. J-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Polity Press, Cambridge 1991, p2.

2. See, for example, J-F. Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', trans. R. Durand, in Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984; and J-F. Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' in *The Inhuman*, op.cit.

3. J-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p5.

4. J. Miller, 'From Socrates to Foucault: The Problem of the Philosophical Life', in this collection.

II GREEN DREAMS AND NARCISSI: THE SYMPTOMATOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY ELEGY

5. E.L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany*, Cornell University Press, 1990.

The substance of my argument revolves around an understanding of the subject of Enlightenment Modernity as haunted by specific kinds of unresolved narcissisms. Drawing upon the work of Eric Santner, my contention will be that, if we are to think ourselves 'beyond' modernity, and yet still remain socially and politically continent beings, these narcissisms must be relinquished.[5] The question which arises from this proposition concerning the need to work through unresolved narcissisms (and hence, as a corollary, to develop appropriate techniques for a different but necessary sense of self) is how such 'invented selves', with a necessary narcissism but of a different sort (one characterized by the experience of disintegration but seeking integration on a basis other than that of Romanticism and a universalised idea of unity), can at the same time be imagined as selves possessing a necessary social and political integrity.[6] A central problem in beginning to try to answer this

6. Fredric Jameson's 1984 essay, 'Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London 1991 charts the disintegrations of contemporary subjectivity. His closing demand for a new 'aesthetics of cognitive mapping' seems directed towards the task of imagining forms of integrity for social and political selves.

question is that of identifying a language (and hence a practice) in which the resolution of narcissistic fantasies can be thought. I will be suggesting that the contemporary insistence of nostalgic forms can be understood as a symptomatology – of modernity coming to grief – which does direct us towards such a language.

Postmodernism is a rather overdone term. Lyotard notes, however, that it has been used, albeit 'badly rather than well',[7] to designate something of the inhuman transformations of which he writes. But this task – one which is essentially elegiac – of relinquishing the narcissisms of Romanticism, and of thinking about (in humanism's and Romanticism's sense) inhuman selves – seems to me to constitute the task and obligation of what might as well be called the ethos appropriate to, for want of a better designation, the postmodern. The argument which follows is essentially directed towards attempting to think through, albeit in an initially limited way, a politics (in the broadest sense) of what is now usually referred to as the postmodern.

7. J-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p5.

In his careful and illuminating work on elegy, Peter Sacks has written compellingly of the twentieth century's difficulty with the use of traditional elegiac forms.[8] In particular, and with detailed reference to the poems of Yeats, Pound and Auden, Sacks notices modern disenchantment with the elegy's traditional need both to demonstrate reverence for the father and the law, and also to offer consoling figures of 'continuity and regenerative power'.[9] In the post-war poetry of Geoffrey Hill, Sacks finds consolation linked to the most bleak images of judgement. In 'Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings' (1955) and 'Two Formal Elegies' (subtitled 'For the Jews in Europe') (1955-6), Sacks notes Hill's 'refusal to console without first stressing decimation and the bleak harshness of judgement',[10] and notes also the invocation of the terrible God of the Old Testament, of ancient sacrifice, and of a martyrdom which is barely Christian. The presence of this fearsome God, Sacks suggests, stands as a figure for the ' "fierce heart" brought to judgement'.[11] This harsh and

8. Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, Johns Hopkins University Press, London 1987.

9. *Ibid.*, p301.

10. *Ibid.*, p309.

11. *Ibid.*, p310.

demanding God stands in sharp distinction to the loving God of Christian doctrine. In the more recent 'Veni Coronaberis' (1978), harshness is tempered by the traditional elegiac images of spring and rebirth –

> The crocus armies from the dead
> rise up, the realm of love renews
> the battle it was born to lose
> though for a time the snows have fled

– but, in spite of this, love does not conquer all, not for ever after. Sacks says that this poem 'performs the mourner's submissive recognition of the inevitable defeat, almost from birth, of "love". As we have seen so often, an admission of that defeat is crucial to the establishment of any consolation'.[12]

I want to suggest that the emergence of the term postmodernism in British cultural debate over the past fifteen years or so can be linked – especially in its close deployment with the 'deconstructive' languages of contemporary theory – to deep undercurrents of thought presently at work in almost all aspects of British cultural life. Further, I want to suggest that these undercurrents are engaged in what Eric Santner calls 'rhetoric of grief'.[13] These nostalgic languages – of loss, fragmentation and dismemberment, or of pastiched and collaged reassemblings of English green dreams – confront what Santner, again, has called the 'no longer possibles' of a certain kind of (humanist, Romantic) subject and a certain kind of (narcissistic, melancholic) space for 'love'. They enact the failure of the Symbolic Law of a Father increasingly seen in his sublime aspect as the 'leering', dangerous and unstable, 'father-*jouissance*' in whose fictions faith may no longer be placed. In what follows, I will discuss grief in its double aspect – as mourning and as melancholia – in order to argue that this melancholy, narcissistic subjectivity, and its infantile aim of laying hold of, rather than submitting to, the sublime, must be relinquished so that the mourningful invention of new symbolic worlds and selves can be imagined.

One of the most persistent contours traced in the cultural and political life of the past decade and a half in Britain – the period of New Right government from 1979 to the present – has been what I would like to call, borrowing a little from Graham Swift, the 'green dream of England'. This nostalgic dream is well caught – albeit with a great degree of self-conscious irony – in Swift's 1992 novel *Ever After* (*EA*).[14] In a passage towards the end of the novel, the narrator and central protagonist, Bill Unwin, is meditating upon the identity of his unknown father – a train driver on Brunel's Great Western Railway where Bill, as a child, used to go train-spotting:

> But as I grew up in those far off days, I saw myself as a child of the future. I was enamoured – little thinking that the object of my passion was doomed, too, soon to become an anachronism – of that roaring, hurtling, up-to-the-minute thing, the steam engine. And, hardly appreciating that my wish was the oldest wish in the book, I wanted to be, as every little boy was

12. *Ibid.*, p311.

13. E.L. Santner, *op. cit.*

14. G. Swift, *Ever After*, Pan Books, London 1992.

supposed to want to be – ha! – an engine driver ... Between Aldermaston Wharf and Midgham, where the Reading-Newbury line clipped the side of the hill and entered a short cutting – a favourite spot for these enthralled vigils, so limply known as 'train-spotting' – I could look out on a vista which might have formed the model for one of those contrived scenes in a children's encyclopaedia, depicting the theme of 'Old and New'. River, canal and railway line were all in view ... I must have seen it once – many times – that living palimpsest. And no doubt I should have been struck by some prescient, elegiac pang at the sight of those great expresses steaming only to their own oblivion, and taking with them a whole lost age. O West Country world! O creamy, bucket-and-spade summers! O thatched cottages and smugglers' coves! O nestling market towns! O green dreams! O Mendips! O Quantocks! O England! (*EA* p199).

In the passage which follows, Unwin makes the Freudian subtext (the phallic symbols of every boy's train-driver fantasies, and the unconscious wish for recognition and identification[15]) quite explicit:

And the great thing, of course, as the mighty engines sped by, was to catch a blurred and exalting glimpse of those heroes of the rails. To leap up in a frenzy of adulatory, emulatory waving, hoping for the magic return wave. And one of those knights of steam, though I never knew it, one of those lords of the footplate ... was – my father ... he is mounted, appropriately enough for my sureptitious begetter, on a giant phallic symbol. I see him careering round the countryside, siring bastard after bastard. Sometimes I think he is grinning at me, leering at me – oh yes, he is waving all right – as he rushes unrecognizably by (*EA* p200).

The nostalgic contours of Southern England, and the 'elegiac pang' for the father not simply lost but neither known nor knowable, are reflected in *Ever After*'s other story – the tale within the tale – which is of the mid-nineteenth-century loss of faith experienced by Bill's distant maternal relative, and surveyor for the Great Western Railway, Matthew Pearce. Here, a theme which is constant throughout Swift's work – that of the weak, troubled, or troubling father – is explicitly linked to the crisis which modernity articulates. This is not merely Nietzsche's 'death of the divine Father' but is, more broadly, the crisis of the 'paternal fiction' in general.

If the paternal fiction is that fiction – enunciated in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as the castrating '*Nom/non du père*' – whereby the sign (and the possibility of symbolic worlds and selves) is the consolation offered for the loss of the narcissistic oedipal relation, in what ways can we understand its collapse to be signified by a symptomatology of nostalgia? As Jean Starobinski's essay on the topic makes clear, the structure of nostalgia is melancholic.[16] What I want to suggest is that the contemporary – the postmodern – can be understood in terms of the tasks of transforming a pathological melancholia into a healthy mourning.

In the psychoanalytic account, the ending of narcissism, and the loss which that establishes, is the ground upon which subjectivity becomes possible. Under the Name of the Father, and according to his symbolic law, loss is made good – or made good enough – by the substitutions of the sign. In this way, the whole panoply of order, hierarchy and difference is organized as a consolation for loss. As in the movement of elegy, the grieving infant is offered the compensations enacted in displacements and replacements. In elegy, this is the replacement of one poetic voice by another. In the elegiacs of psychoanalysis, the compensation is the supposed identity of the subject of the enunciation with the subject of the enounced – the identity of the subject of the voice as identity, difference and placing, in other words. Every shattering of narcissism, every experience of the loss of a loved object, must recapitulate these processes of symbolization and symbolic re-building. Loss imposes itself as an obligation (to life rather than death) and as a task. The name we give to the task is, of course, mourning.

The language which psychoanalysis provides for bereavement consists in Freud's division of the experience of grave loss into two modalities: mourning and melancholia.[17] Mourning is a state of sickness which is so 'normal' that no-one ever comments upon it. The processes of mourning involve the recapitulation of all earlier experience of loss, and the reconstitution, or invention, of a self shattered by the loss of an object in which profound investments have been made. The experience of mourning consists in the lengthy process whereby 'each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it'.[18] Freud calls this process 'reality-testing'. Melanie Klein's account of mourning processes makes even clearer the extent to which this process consists not only in the rebuilding of an outer reality, but in the dialectical rebuilding of an inner, psychical, reality also.[19] Klein's account paints a more vivid picture of the fragmented (psychotically violent) psychical condition which the mourner must recapitulate and renegotiate in order to recover.

Melancholia, on the other hand, is a pathological condition. Any experience of grave loss recapitulates the 'original' ending of primary narcissism. The successful mourner is one who – upon the basis of an earlier successful negotiation of fundamental loss – is able to negotiate the later loss. The melancholic is one who has never properly negotiated the ending of narcissistic fantasies, and whose narcissisms are thus unresolved. The melancholic has never satisfactorily negotiated the fact that 'you and I have edges'.[20] He remains caught in the compulsions of the narcissistic fantasy that the self-completing object can be had, and that the Real (the 'reality' of the 'whole and the one' in Lyotard) can be seized hold of. In other words, the melancholic remains caught in the compulsion to repeat the trauma of loss in order to master it (a thing he has never properly done). He remains under the thrall of the promise of *jouissance*. Unable to acknowledge the fact of loss, he is compelled to repetition and to the return to and of the traumatic event in

17. S. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917[1915]), *On Metapsychology*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1984.

18. *Ibid.*, p253.

19. M. Klein, 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States' (1940), in J. Mitchell, (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1986.

20. Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p19.

dreams, fantasies, and other substitute forms. Whilst, in part, such repetitions are an attempt at mastery of trauma, their 'other' side may lie in the desire to repeat the condition of *jouissance* which is *not being*. As Freud's discussion in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' makes clear, the melancholia of unresolved traumas remains under the sway of the death drive.[21]

21. S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), *op.cit.*

Since he has never fully negotiated the fact of difference, the melancholic experiences the loss of the other as the loss of himself. His condition is characterized by disavowal. He both knows he has lost something and also disavows the fact. Under the compulsions of repetition and the death drive, this often – at worst – leads sufferers of melancholia to suicide. At best, the unresolved narcissism of melancholia may lead to what Eric Santner calls the 'elegiac loop' of disavowal.[22] Typically, this also leads to the development of what Santner calls 'fetish narratives'. These either claim that 'nothing was really lost', or else stage the site of loss elsewhere:

22. Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p29.

> Narrative fetishism ... is the way an inability or refusal to mourn employs traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere. Narrative fetishism releases one from the burden of having to reconstitute one's self-identity under 'posttraumatic' conditions; in narrative fetishism, the 'post' is indefinitely postponed.[23]

23. E.L. Santner, 'History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma', in S. Friedlander, (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1992, p144.

The above quotation is taken from Santner's essay on the German refusal to mourn the Holocaust, but he places this within a broader conception of the postmodern more generally. Certainly, the melancholic inability to negotiate, or to bear shared witness to, loss (and the development of narratives of disavowal and displacement), can be seen as having political consequences – as Santner's discussion of contemporary German historical and aesthetic debates, in the essay referred to above, indicates.

But, as a symptomatology of the contemporary, nostalgia is not necessarily simply melancholic through and through. As is the case with all symptoms, it contains the seeds of its own cure – albeit in distorted or troped form. The regret over loss (castration) which nostalgia speaks may also bespeak a 'future-oriented remembering' in *both* senses of the word 're-member'.[24] As Susannah Radstone, in an article particularly concerned with feminist working-through of regret, points out, it is possible to find – in feminine elegiac forms – a 'remembering [which] works through nostalgia's fantasies of plenitude (remembrance as defence against *dismemberment*) but is sustained by nostalgia's desire that things might be different'.[25] Contemporary nostalgia thus marks a sort of half-way house between melancholia and mourning. It can appear as a dangerous form of disavowal, but it can also turn its face to the future.

24. S. Radstone, 'Remembering Medea: The Uses of Nostalgia', *Critical Quarterly*, Autumn 1993, p59.

25. *Ibid.*, 'Remembering Medea', p60.

On one hand, we can understand the melancholic's fantasies of sublime plenitude in terms of the unresolved narcissism which, refusing castration, seeks to maintain the condition of undifferentiation associated with unspeakable joy in the mother's body and desire. But the register of

plenitudinous *jouissance* should alert us also to the aesthetic mode in which such awesome plenitude is expressed. Although Terry Eagleton's reading of Burke places the sublime to the Father's account,[26] this 'Father' must be understood to be the dangerous *'père-jouissance'*: 'behind the father who is the bearer of the law, and as such reduced to the "Name of the Father" (i.e. the dead father), there is the horrible castrating figure that Lacan has called the 'father-*jouissance*', the father who wouldn't die and who comes to haunt the Law (and actually endows it with its effectiveness)'.[27] It is this 'leering' father-*jouissance* which haunts *Ever After* and which Bill Unwin, in learning to mourn, must also learn to lay to some form of rest.

From the 'Now' in Swift's first novel, *The Sweet Shop Owner* (1980), to the 'Here and Now' in *Waterland* (1983), and beyond to the various haunting paternal fictions of *Ever After*, Swift's work is marked by the emergence of sublime and uncanny figurations within the supposedly safe and loving spaces of the domestic and familiar. His 'dream of England', drawing on a long and by no means always conservative Romantic tradition of such dreaming, is one in which the urge is to make an *unheimlich* 'home' bearable. But whilst the leering father may finally endow the law with its effectiveness, his uncanniness makes him a deathly 'disturber of love'.[28] The effectivity of a Symbolic Law based upon a certain kind of space for narcissistic love, but one from which the good (i.e. dead) Father is absent or withdrawn, is thus called into question. The withdrawal of the loving Father, and the appearance of figurations of uncanny *père-jouissance* which haunt modern subjectivity from within, can, however, be historically placed. They co-incide with European Enlightenment and with the formulation of a Romantic aesthetic.

Swift's novels are, from his first to his latest, engaged in a sustained struggle with the problems of Romanticisms of all kinds. This 'problem' can be cast in terms in which the Romantic aesthetic, and all the varied romanticisms which flow from it, can be seen as an historical response to a certain narcissistic structure of subjectivity. The Romantic emphasis on the momentary overcoming of difference – a fleeting intimation of unity within diversity, and the final promise of 'absolute knowledge' in the whole and the one – is an essentially narcissistic formulation. Swift's problematizing of Romanticism, and his turn to the more open-ended form of allegory, mirrors similar contemporary theoretical responses made elsewhere. I want, thus, to expand upon the idea of the sublime, and its relation to narcissism and to mourning, by looking at two theoretical uses of the category of the sublime. These are those offered by Jean-François Lyotard, and the Lacanian theorists Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar.

III THE SUBLIME AND UNCANNY SUBJECT OF MODERNITY

It seems clear, from, for example, Lyotard's writings on the sublime, Slavoj Žižek's writings on the same in terms of the Lacanian idea of the Real, and from Mladen Dolar's writing on the uncanny, that a common thread can be

26. T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Blackwell, Oxford 1990, p55.

27. M. Dolar, ' "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny', *October*, Fall 1991, p10.

28. Dolar, 'Wedding-Night', p10; Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), *Art and Literature*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1985, p353.

29. See, for example, Lyotard on the sublime in 'Answering the Question' and also *The Inhuman, op.cit.*; S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London 1989; Dolar, 'Wedding-Night'.

30. See also, R. Wolin, 'Modernism vs. Postmodernism', *Telos*, Winter 1984-5.

31. Dolar, 'Wedding-Night', p7.

identified in some contemporary critical thought.[29] Briefly, this thread is one which conceives modern subjectivity as haunted by something which – with the advent of Enlightenment modernity – becomes unplaceable and, strictly speaking, unrepresentable with the demise of a world integrated within the schema of the sacred.[30] For Lyotard and Žižek, it is named by the category of the sublime. For Dolar, it appears in the modality of the uncanny:

> It seems that Freud speaks about a 'universal' of human experience when he speaks of the uncanny, yet his own examples tacitly point to its location in a specific historical conjuncture, to the particular historical rupture brought about by the Enlightenment. There is *a specific dimension of the uncanny that emerges with modernity.*[31]

As Dolar's discussion makes clear, what becomes unplaceable is, in obvious and simple terms, the fact of a *meaningless* death and the unplaceability of the death drive which now emerges in uncanny ways. As Foucault, amongst others, notices, it is Baudelaire's consciousness of the fact that modern selves are all 'celebrating some funeral – mutes in love, political mutes, bourgeois mutes' which makes him such an acute observer of modernity.[32] For Baudelaire, *the* painter of modern life (Constantin Guys) is one who is able to show the defiant mock heroism and self-ironizing melancholy of the dandy, and the dark funereal frock coat, as the *necessary* attitude and fashion of the time.[33]

32. M. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', P. Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1984, p40.

33. C. Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' in C. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. J. Mayne, Phaidon, London 1964.

Both Žižek and Dolar make use of the Lacanian tripartite schema of Symbolic, Imaginary and Real in order to argue that what becomes unplaceable (sublime in Žižek's discussion, uncanny in Dolar's) and unsymbolizable in modernity is the fantasy of the self-completing object:

> What I am interested in is not the uncanny as such, but the uncanny that is closely linked with the advent of modernity and which constantly haunts it from the inside. To put it simply, in premodern societies the dimension of the uncanny was largely covered (and veiled) by the area of the sacred and untouchable. It was assigned to a religiously and socially sanctioned place in the symbolic from which the structure of power, sovereignty, and a hierarchy of values emanated. With the triumph of the Enlightenment, this privileged and excluded place (the exclusion that founded society) was no more. That is to say that the uncanny became unplaceable: it became uncanny in the strict sense.[34]

34. Dolar, 'Wedding-Night', p7.

In the psychoanalytic account, the self-completing object is the *objet petit a* retrospectively associated with the mother and with the state of primary narcissism in which no distinction between self and other is yet possible. This condition of completion and wholeness is ruptured by the mimetic specular image (in whatever form it is granted). With that recognition, there is already a

split: 'I cannot recognize myself and at the same time be one with myself. With the recognition I have already lost what one could call 'self-being', the immediate coincidence with myself in my being and *jouissance* ... The Mirror double immediately introduces the dimension of castration'.[35] The desire constituted within this split is the desire of the other, the desire of the *objet petit a*. But this little object is, in fact, always lost to the Real (the traumatic and unsymbolizable *fact* of loss). One *cannot have it*. It is this lack (which the Symbolic Order promises to make good – an endlessly deferred and awful gift) which founds the subject. To lay hold of the Real – to possess the object in all its appalling and sublime plenitude – would be to lack the lack which founds the subject, and to be *not* a subject:

> the Lacanian account of anxiety differs sharply from other theories: it is not produced by a lack or a loss or an incertitude; it is not the anxiety of losing something (the firm support, one's bearings, etc). On the contrary, it is the anxiety of gaining something too much, of a too-close presence of the object. What one loses with anxiety is precisely the loss – the loss that made it possible to deal with a coherent reality. 'Anxiety is the lack of the support of the lack,' says Lacan: the lack lacks, and this brings about the uncanny.[36]

In the face of seemingly meaningless death, modern man searches for the secret which only the dead seem to possess; the 'little letter' which, as in A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, for example, lies buried in the grave but which 'tells' everything and thus 'closes' the Romance.[37] But the secret the dead possess is terrible *jouissance*. To *attain* one's heart's desire (the Romantic fantasy) would be to move beyond Eros and the pleasure principle. As we know, what lies beyond the pleasure principle is ghastly repetition and death. To say 'I hope you attain your heart's desire' can only be the most dreadful of curses.

In essence, what we are being asked to consider in discussions such as Dolar's is, firstly, the idea that symbolic formulations within sacred systems make 'lack' good in the form of a transcendant parent figure (or ideal Subject) which will, eventually – 'after' or 'with' death – fill in the void which human life on earth experiences, and, secondly, that modernity exposes the Real as the sublime 'lack of the lack'. The psychoanalytic account of the subject, as offered by Lacan, is of one fundamentally caught between narcissism and its impossibility. To be a subject is to be divided and lacking – and yet always to seek the little object of desire supposed to restore wholeness and 'intactness'; supposed, in other words, to complete the narcissistic circle. When this difficulty of subjectivity could be symbolized (in the forms of the sacred) as attainable (albeit by death), the promise of plentitudinous self-presence (narcissistic self-completion) seemed to hold good. What Lacanian psychoanalysis dolefully theorizes is the impossibility of such narcissistic makings good. The problem which psychoanalytic theories of the subject seem to propose is that of asking how on earth something good can be made from something really quite bad?

This elegiac question, of finding something good from something bad, is in

35. *Ibid.*, p12.

36. *Ibid.*, p13.

37. A.S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance*, Chatto & Windus, London 1990.

fact addressed within psychoanalytic theory, but in a slightly different register – that of an account of the psychical processes of grief. Significantly, this account is one which offers a theorization of something like a technique of self-mastery. At least it describes a manner of understanding the re-invention of a shattered self in the form of a mastering of narcissistic fantasies of dependence upon and completion by the other. The successful mourner must struggle again and again with the harsh fact of an irreducible difference, and with renunciation, until she has both made it her own and also made from its substitutive symbolizations, in a sense, a consoled self. Before I return to Freudian melancholy, however, I want to look briefly at Lyotard's account of the significance of the idea of the sublime, since this adds some political force to arguments about the dangers of narcissism.

Lyotard's discussion of the postmodern in 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?' also leads his readers to a contemplation of narcissism. The modern can only take place, says Lyotard, with the discovery of the unreality of reality. Realism is a response to this. Realism tries to cover over the unreality of reality with an insistence upon 'unity, simplicity, communicability'.[38] Aesthetic – perhaps particularly literary – realism remains, on the whole, under the dominance of Romanticism which offers an aesthetic of unity (and the apprehension of Truth) in the momentary transcendance of the symbol divulged by the genius to the man of taste. Romanticism, as has often been said, offers a secularized version of the overcoming of the dualism articulated by Descartes. The form of the beautiful provides, momentarily, an overcoming of alienation.

For Lyotard, the sublime is a form of barbarity (its formless unpresentability is precisely what discloses its sublimity) which prevents the 'unity from diversity' which marks a Romantic aesthetic. Since Romantic aesthetics (and social, political and psychological Romanticisms) are directed towards an apprehension of 'the whole and the one', the sublime – for Lyotard – must be preserved as the necessary irritant which prevents the possibility of the narcissistic fantasy of 'completion'. This latter is the fantasy that reality (the noumenal in-itself as a positivity; the *objet a* and the Real in Lacan) can really be seized hold of. For Lyotard, this fantasy always leads to terror:

> The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return to terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.[39]

38. Lyotard, 'Answering the Question', p75.

39. *Ibid.*, pp81-2.

Bearing in mind that I have suggested that psychoanalysis does provide a language in which the ending of narcissism can be understood, and that, as Santner points out, this language includes the idea of social witness as essential to the reconstitution of the grieving self,[40] ('mourning without solidarity is the beginning of madness'[41]) I now want to turn to one of the most insistent symptomatologies of the contemporary: nostalgia. In current debates, nostalgia is almost always identified as something socially regressive and politically reactionary. What I want to argue is that, as a particularly insistent symptomatology of the present, nostalgia needs to be thought about in a little more detail because, as a symptom of a collective melancholy which is also potentially 'future-oriented', it can be understood as directing us towards possible modes of resolving contemporary dis-ease.

The history of the term is instructive. In an article published in 1966, Jean Starobinski shows that the idea of nostalgia emerged as the medicalization of a condition long recognized as a form of melancholia.[42] *Heimweh*, or home-sickness, was recognized as a condition very similar to love-melancholy. Both these conditions were recognized as (what would come to be thought of as) pathological states in which the loss of a primal love object remained unresolved. In love-melancholy it was the loved object as lover, in nostalgia (homesickness) it was the loss of the original *Heim*.

The term nostalgia (from the Greek *Nostos* – meaning the return, usually or most often to one's original dwelling place, and *Algos* – meaning pain, sickness or sorrow) was coined by Johannes Hofer in 1688 in order to describe the symptoms exhibited by young Swiss mercenaries away from home for the first time. In particular, Hofer noted that the young soldiers' distress was especially due to separation from their mothers, from their good breakfast soups, and from 'the thick milk from their own valley'.[43] As Starobinski points out, 'The modern psychiatrist should be thankful to Johannes Hofer for underlining straight off the role of this deprivation: the loss of childhood, of "oral satisfactions", of motherly coaxing'.[44] In sum, what Hofer identifies as nostalgia is the melancholia which results from unresolved narcissisms.

Once it becomes possible to understand that the symptomatology of contemporary nostalgia is a symptomatology of grief, it becomes equally possible to understand that postmodern nostalgia might most usefully be thought about in terms of the formulation of a language of mourning. The structure of nostalgia is melancholic, and this provides a clue to its contemporary significance. In fact, and as I have argued elsewhere,[45] because contemporary nostalgias are so overdetermined by the extensive and collective image-repertoire provided by mass forms of communication, postmodern nostalgia takes particularly collective psycho-social forms. It indicates a shared symptomatology which points towards a possible *future* community of interest and towards possible social and political formulations. As Starobinski points out, the longed-for *Heim* is no longer the village home of the seventeenth and

40. Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p40.

41. *Ibid.*, p26.

42. Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia'.

43. *Ibid.*, p87.

44. *Ibid.*

45. W. Wheeler, 'Nostalgia Isn't Nasty: The Postmodernizing of Parliamentary Democracy', *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1994.

46. Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', pp102-3.

47. *Ibid.*, p103,

eighteenth centuries. With modernity the nostalgic affect assumes new names: 'anaclitic depression ... maternal deprivation' and 'regression'.[46] In Staro-binski's words, with modernity 'the village is interiorized'.[47] Contemporary nostalgia is a symptomatology which is both more starkly psychical ('interiorized') and, via a mass image-repertoire, collective.

I suggested earlier that Melanie Klein's account of the processes of grief gives a clear indication of the extent to which mourning tasks involve symbolic rebuilding. My question involves asking what forms such rebuilding might take for subjects in the process of abandoning the narcissisms of Romantic humanism or, in Lyotard's terminology, in the process of becoming inhuman.

V AFTER LOVE

In *Tales of Love*, Julia Kristeva traces a history of western narcissism from the convergence of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian thought in the 1st century A.D., through Plotinus to medieval scholasticism, and on through Romanticism to the present. She concludes that this narcissian subjectivity reaches its limits in

48. J. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, Columbia University Press, New York 1987.

modernity.[48] Gradually deprived of the various religious and secular symbolic structures which have been its supports, narcissistic subjectivity finds its last 'space for love' in psychoanalysis and, specifically, in the transference. After the withdrawal of theology 'in the face of a philosophy that grounds *being* on knowledge rather than on affection ... The receptive mind of a disappointed Goethian Jew, living in Central Europe between the two wars, continues to be the only one to come forward as capable of fitting out – with considerable risk

49. *Ibid.*, p61.

and uncertainty – a new space for love'.[49]

Very briefly, Kristeva's argument is that the crisis of contempory experience consists in the failure of symbolizations which would allow narcissian modern subjectivity to find a proper space for love. Only psychoanalysis, as the site of transference love, any longer provides such an *unheimlich* 'home'. These are the 'stakes' and the 'crisis' of psychoanalysis. Concerning contemporary subjects, Kristeva asks of psychoanalysts,

> Are we concerned with rebuilding their own proper space, a 'home' for contemporary Narcissi: repair the father, soothe the mother, allow them to build a solid introspective inside, master of its losses and wanderings, assuming that such a goal is attainable? Or does not the abundance of sufferers who find their fulfilment, their relaxation, and their satisfaction only in intoxication (from drugs to sacred music, which do away with individuality and sex for the sake of infinity) indicate that a psychic era has come to an end? I see psychoanalysis rather as the instrument of a departure from that enclosure, not as its warden. Does the old psychic space, the machinery of projections and identifications that relied more or less on neuroses for reinforcement, no longer hold together? Well, it may be

50. *Ibid.*, pp379-80

> because another mode of being, of unbeing, is attempting to take its place.[50]

So what is the new mode of inhuman 'unbeing' to be? For Kristeva, 'Freud, the post-Romanticist, was the first to turn love into a cure: he did this, not to allow one to grasp a truth, but to provoke a rebirth'.[51] And for Kristeva this rebirth lies in 'imagination as an antidote for the crisis'.[52] Santner writes in a similar vein on contemporary theoretical and creative practices when he suggests that the relinquishment of a certain form of narcissism is a prerequisite for the imagination and invention of new 'postmodern post-holocaust' selves. His focus, as with Kristeva, is the moment at which love breaks down, but he places this within the Freudian account of mourning. In doing so, he offers, perhaps, a more specific account of the ways in which psychoanalysis might be thought of as providing 'an instrument of departure' from a psychic era that has come to an end. In other words, in the reflections upon mourning, psychoanalysis offers some account of the ways in which the narcissistic subjectivity it theorizes might be transformed – or cured of a certain kind of love. The contemporary analytical task, it transpires, is precisely the elegiac work of rebirth that the task of mourning inscribes. Both Freud's and Melanie Klein's work on mourning suggests that the task of mourning consists in a recapitulation of the ending of primary narcissism and thus in the work of rebuilding or, perhaps more accurately, inventing symbolic worlds and selves. This is, as Kristeva argues, an imaginative task in the proper psychoanalytic sense. She says, 'Speaking, writing? Is that not again building "one's own", be it polyvalent? While waiting for social institutions to integrate such extra-terrestrials, those survivors of primary narcissism, it is still in the imagination and symbolic realizations that their faltering identity will best find a way to construct itself as necessarily false – imaginary'.[53]

The psychoanalytic – specifically the post-Lacanian – account of the subject offers, then, the story of a self at the limits. This self is no longer supported by the fictions of the symbolic structures which should hold it in place. These are, themselves, increasingly invaded by a sublimity of the sort figured in *Ever After* as an unknowable and libidinally incontinent father. But rather than seeking (as in socially and politically conservative formulations) to bring the Father (and the subject) back to his place, perhaps – as with Swift's Unwin ('The world will not shatter because of a single – misconception' (*EA* p204) – we should submit to the sublime, to Geoffrey Hill's terrible Father of Judgement as the harshest figure of negativity, and to the failure of narcissistic 'loves' of all kinds. In this way we might, collectively, begin to mourn.

But this psychoanalytic prescription to grieve remains vague. It was, perhaps, always hard enough to mourn, even in a world where the wearing of weeds, the period of mourning, the meaning of loss, were all more or less solidly encoded. The final question I want to ask is this: what theorists can we find, beyond disintegration, who offer either any model for mourning now, or any outline of the inhuman selves postmodern mourners might become? It is here, in the final part of my argument, that I want to turn to an alternative account of the invention of worlds and selves.

51. *Ibid.*, p381.
52. *Ibid..*

53. *Ibid.*, p380.

VI THREADS THAT BIND

Michel Foucault's late work on technologies of the self is, of course, centrally concerned with the contingency of the selves we have happened to be. Recent psychoanalytic and Foucauldian accounts of modernity to some extent converge around the matter of endings and beginnings of certain kinds of selves. Kristeva sees psychoanalysis as providing the 'instruments of departure' for a psychic era that has come to an end. I have described these 'instruments' in terms of the psychoanalytic language of melancholia – which fails to depart – and mourning – which succeeds in departing. In his description of what he terms the contemporary ethos of a 'limit-attitude',[54] Foucault describes the instruments of departure as genealogical in design and archaeological in method. In other words, in discovering the contingencies of what we have counted as knowledge, and of what we have been, we may learn to exercise some freedom in regard to the contingencies of what we might be willing to count as truth, in regard to the means by which a relation to truth is established, and in regard to what we might become.

What every successful mourner discovers, nonetheless, is that however historically contingent the re-invented self, there can be no contingency between the symbolic forms invented and the life that is lived. In other words, for successful mourning to take place, there must be threads which bind. Not only must there be the poetic coherence between the painfully altered 'living' and the elegiacly transformed 'dead', but there must also be a personal poetic: a coherence between what is thought and said on the one hand, and what is done on the other. This is not, and cannot be, an injunction to continue investments in something which can no longer be had. It is an injunction to find something good – and thus consoling – in the fact of shattering, loss and transformation itself. The 'sign' which substitutes for the 'thing' must, in other words, have sufficient integrity to bear the dead weight it carries. Without wishing to enter into the notable difficulties of Freud's use of the term, it is worth pointing out that the process of sublimation is one in which such elegiac reparations, inasmuch as they must convert libidinal energy from one aim to another, must necessarily forge adequate connections.[55] Celeste Schenck has argued that specificly feminine elegiac forms evince a strong will towards connectedness rather than simply towards substitution.[56] This raises interesting questions – which I shall not pursue here – about whether we would want to think the 'binding institutions'[57] of a different symbolic ordering as being, precisely, 'paternal'. One thing is certain, however: forms of symbolization – worlds and selves – in which there are no such binding threads cannot console.

In the years immediately preceding his death, and perhaps with an exceptional stoicism in which he was able to transform his own recognition of the mourner's task by bringing it to bear on the theoretical questions raised by his work on techniques of the self, Foucault increasingly focussed on the matter of ethical coherence and the means by which, historically, such a relation to

54. M. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in P. Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1984, p45.

55. For a comprehensive overview of sublimation as the term appears in Freud's work, see J. Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Hogarth Press, London 1985, pp431-4.

56. C. Schenck, 'Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Spring 1986.

57. D. LaCapra, 'History and Psychoanalysis', *Critical Enquiry*, Winter, 1987.

truth had been established.

In a series of interviews – 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress' – given in April 1983, just over a year before he died, Foucault described two walks – both meditative exercises in ascetic self-mastery, and examples of what he called practices of the self.[58] The first is a walking exercise recommended by the Stoic philosopher Epictetus. The second is a Christian walking exercise performed by a young, seventeenth-century seminarist. What Foucault is looking at here is the problematic of the self as this emerged in seventeenth-century European cultures, and the ways in which such a problematic gives rise to 'thought'. Specifically, he is interested in historical responses to this problematic. The Christian re-activation of Epictetan Stoicism was one such response; Cartesianism provided another. As we know, it was the Cartesian account which, as it were, won the day, but at a cost. That cost, says Foucault, was the breakdown of a certain relation – in which an ethics is grounded – between ascetic self-mastery and the truth.

Each walk involves a series of confrontations with the world. Speaking of the ways in which Christian doctrine, in the wake of the religious crises of the sixteenth century, was able to avail itself of – or to 'reactivate' – a number of ancient Stoic practices, Foucault says:

> Let me take as an example the walking exercise recommended by Epictetus. Each morning, while taking a walk in the city, one should try to determine with respect to each thing (a public official or an attractive woman), one's motives, whether one is impressed by or drawn to it, or whether one has sufficient self-mastery so as to be indifferent. In Christianity one has the same sort of exercises, but they serve to test one's dependence on God. I remember having found in a seventeenth-century text an exercise reminiscent of Epictetus, where a young seminarist, when he is walking, does certain exercises which show in what way each thing shows his dependence vis-a-vis God – which permit him to decipher the presence of divine providence. These two walks correspond to the extent that you have a case with Epictetus of a walk during which the individual assures himself of his own sovereignty over himself and shows that he is dependent on nothing. While in the Christian case the seminarist walks and before each thing he sees, says, 'Oh, how God's goodness is great! He who made this holds all things in his power, and me, in particular,' thus reminding himself that he is nothing.[59]

Foucault says that the two walks correspond inasmuch as neither employ techniques designed to uncover an inner truth of the self, but are attempts to 'determine what one can and cannot do with one's available freedom'.[60] The Christian exercise is no longer, here, concerned with 'discovering a truth hidden inside the self' – its principle is not confessional – but, rather, it invokes a relation between self and world. It is not a delving within, but is a building of the self from without as it were. But, even as the seminarist walks, an account of

58. Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', *Foucault Reader, op.cit.*

59. *Ibid.*, pp368-9.

60. *Ibid.*, p368.

the self is emerging in which this ascetic work on self and truth will be displaced. Foucault says:

> In European culture up to the sixteenth century, the problem remains: What is the work which I must effect upon myself so as to be capable and worthy of acceding to the truth? To put it another way: truth always has a price; no access to truth without ascesis ... Descartes, I think, broke with this when he said, 'To accede to truth, it suffices that I be *any* subject which can see what is evident.' Evidence is substituted for ascesis at the point where the relationship to the self intersects the relationship to others and the world. The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth ... Thus, I can be immoral and know the truth.[61]

61. *Ibid.*, pp371-2.

Where the two walks do not correspond, however, is in the marked difference between the Stoic's prideful independence and the Christian's humble dependence. Where the Epictetan Stoic masters himself in a process characterized by indifference to an indifferent world, the Christian self is mastered in relation to a world which exists entirely in and through God's love. For the Christian, what the world reveals is his yearning for the divine love before which the self is known in all its aching humility. This relationship of love – in which I must love myself in order to be worthy of God's love – is something with which we are familiar from Plotinus, medieval scholasticism and Christian mysticism. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (c.1349), for example, describes the transcendence of God as 'dwelling hid in the "dark cloud of unknowing" which can be pierced only by "the sharp dart of longing love" '.[62] Julian of Norwich, similarly, expressed her faith in 'the ultimate triumph of love'.[63]

62. J.R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, A & C Black, London 1980, p128.

63. *Ibid.*, p129.

The trope in the two walks is something/nothing. Whilst the stoic gathers his mastery of sensations and desires together in a castrating gesture of cutting off from the world and from dependence upon it, and thus delineates a self, the Christian is full of a narcissistic yearning in which his self is only completed and made whole in the knowledge of his dependence upon a world entirely granted by divine goodness and love.

The seminarist's meditation, borrowing from Epictetus, suggests one particular response to an historical point at which the self emerges within a problematic in which, eventually, it is recognized as posing certain kinds of questions which must be answered. At the same moment, the Cartesian account of the self offers a different – and in many ways opposed – answer. For reasons arising out of the conditions in which the problem of the self was historically recognized as such in the seventeenth century, the Cartesian answer proved the most compelling. At the same time, however, it also produced all the problems – of dualism, of representation and truth, and of morality – which Enlightenment then attempted to answer. In a world in which theology no longer served, this answer was, perhaps, most evidently sought in aesthetic Romanticism and, beyond that, in Romanticisms of many dangerous and

ductive kinds. The development of Romanticism – with its aesthetic model of transcendent unity potentially graspable within diversity – clearly answers to an historical *structure* of the subject (that narcissistic structure described by Kristeva) from which Cartesianism had not escaped.

Whilst Cartesianism offered an historically compelling solution to the problematic of the self as it was posed for seventeenth-century European culture, the Cartesian subject still inherited this narcissistic structure of the Christian tradition which was, by the eighteenth century, displaced into, and indeed became part of the formulation of, aesthetics. Adorno's famous question about the possibility of poetry after Auschwitz probably marks the limit-point of this two-hundred-year-old Romantic self and, with it, the limit-point of its narcissistic fantasies of totalization (the yearning for what Lyotard has described as 'the whole and the one') more generally. We may say that, under the emblem of Auschwitz and everything it means, the era of the humanist subject and its particular rationalities reaches its limits.[64]

In an interview given a month before his death, Foucault described what he meant by 'thought'.[65] 'Thought' is the motion by which one detaches oneself from a certain habitual way of doing things – acting, reacting and so on – in order to establish this familiarity as an object and to reflect upon it as a problem. 'Thought' arises precisely when what has been familiar and habitual becomes difficult and strange. A problematic arises when something necessitates 'thought' in this sense. 'Thought' is very like mourning. A year earlier, Foucault had also suggested that the final anchoring-point of critical thought, the final place where one might reach a judgement concerning a thinker's ethos, could only be found in the degree of vigilance exercized by that thinker in relation to his or her own life. In other words, the final anchoring point of all critical 'thought' is to be found in the personal ethos – the 'demanding, prudent', meditative self-mastery – of the critic.

In an echo of the critical language of 'thinking', 'saying' and 'doing' used to describe the 'limit-attitude' in the 1984 'Enlightenment' essay, Foucault, here, draws a specifically ethical connection between 'thinking' and 'saying' on the one hand, and 'doing' on the other. Cut free from this ethical connection, mere theory can be turned in any direction:

> I do not conclude … that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is … The key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos.[66]

The Stoic's exercise – in which there is self-pride, but not yearning love, and a self-mastering in the relation between one's thoughts and words on the one hand, and one's actions on the other – re-emerges and attains clear outlines in

64. See Foucault, 'Space, Knowledge and Power', *Foucault Reader*, p249.

65. Foucault, 'Polemics, Politics and Problematizations: An Interview', *Foucault Reader*, p388.

66. Foucault, 'Politics and Ethics: An Interview', *Foucault Reader*, p374.

Foucault's last works. It is, perhaps, a fitting elegy to suggest that Foucault's legacy may be not only to have provided the 'instruments' for mourning the selves we have been, but also to have provided a design, a method. and an ethical anchoring-point for 'thought' in inventing the selves we might become.

Finally, I want to turn to James Miller's discussion.[67] Miller asks, of Foucault. how can we understand his project? One answer is offered by Foucault's 1984 essay 'What is Enlightenment?'.[68] In this Foucault suggests that the ethos of the contemporary should be understood as a 'limit-attitude'[69] which would consist in discovering the ' "contemporary limits of the necessary," that is ... what is not, or is no longer, indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects'.[70] This involves a 'practical critique' of the 'singular' and 'contingent' constraints through which 'we' are − or have been − produced as subjects.[71] The practical critique takes the form of the genealogy of the present. As such it is (inevitably) potentially transgressive. But Miller's question is slightly different. Stemming from his work as a biographer of Foucault. Miller implicitly asks how we can think the contingencies and dissonances of a human life in terms of *one* life. In other words, how might we think some sense of unity (of this one particular life and thus of a continent group of lives) *without* humanism's narcissistic search for completion?

The answer Miller offers, and I take it as a useful model of the symbolically ordered life which is inhuman, takes the form of a discussion of the concept of the good life, by which Miller means the philosophical life. It is significant that the contemporary idea of the good life is the self-gratifying life. In its original Platonic formulation, the good life meant the integrated life. Miller's argument draws upon Nietzsche ('The only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves anything, namely trying to see whether one can live in accordance with it, has never been taught at universities: all that has ever been taught is a critique of words by means of other words'[72]), upon Nietzsche's attentiveness. in *The Gay Science*, to the rule of 'a single taste', whether morally 'good' or 'bad'. which should govern the invented self, and upon Foucault's 'frankly utopian hope that, in a different society, perhaps organized under different rules of conduct, *all* of us might be able, despite the difficulties, to exemplify what I have been calling "a philosophical life" '.[73]

In other words, anything can be done with ideas and 'theory', but 'thought' − understood as the hypercathecting then decathecting task of mourning the loss of others, ideas, or selves − allows the mourner to discover a principle of freedom in relation to the world and self he or she can invent. 'Thought', however, demands integrity.

VII CONCLUSION

I have suggested that nostalgia is a form (but potentially future-oriented, and perhaps in a 'feminine' mode) of melancholia, and that − in recognizing this − we might be able to think about the processes whereby humans can relinquish Romantic narcissisms and be inhabited by the inhuman as a form of resistance

67. J. Miller, 'From Socrates to Foucault'.

68. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?'.

69. *Ibid.*, p45.

70. *Ibid.*, p43.

71. *Ibid.*, p45.

72. F. Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983, p187.

73. Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics', p350.

to Lyotard's other inhuman. A certain narcissism is both inevitable and necessary. Taking the symbolic rebuilding of mourning tasks as a model, I have suggested that a form of necessary narcissism that is imaginable can be drawn from Foucault's discussions of the ethical invention of the self. Without the ethos of integrity, whereby access to truth is gained by some form of self-discipline – a mastery of the idea of non-mastery, an elegiac renunciation of the 'harshest' kind – self-invention can only remain caught in the elegiac loops of desire which imagine possession of the object as a possibility.

Writing on the contemporary elegies of Geoffrey Hill, Peter Sacks says,

> We saw in our study of revenge tragedies and of 'Lycidas' that the issues of justice and of judgement become prominent precisely when the inherited fictions and modes of consolation have grown weakest. And as 'Lycidas' revealed, only the bleakest scenarios of dismemberment, drowning, and divine revenge could reinstate a language of comfort. Hill's power draws on this situation. His elegies are sacrificial and expiatory in the extreme. By recognizing not only the connection between the horror of contemporary history and the violence of ancient theology but also the necessity of extreme chastisement for the gain of any solace, he has written some of the few consoling poems of our time.[74]

74. Sacks, *English Elegy*, p310.

Psychoanalysis describes 'healthy' mourning in terms of the final recognition of the impossibility of narcissistic desire and transcendent, all-fulfilling 'love'. The melancholic Hamlet-identified narrator of Graham Swift's *Ever After* begins (following the deaths of his wife, mother and father, and his own foiled suicide-attempt), 'I feel as though I have *moved on*, in some critical but indefinable way, from what I was before. I have left my former self, whatever that was, behind. I am changed ... I simply feel as though I have become some-one else'. (*EA* p3) *Ever After* is an elegy to the modern self which also, finally, confronts the problem of consolation, and of the adequacy of symbolic forms in which a new, postmodern self can be invented. The adequacy of the substitutive signs discovered at the novel's end is minimal – a highly ambiguous repetitive one-sentence narrative ('He took his life, he took his life' (*EA* p261)) which, hanging precariously between the deathly and erotic senses of the verb, hangs between melancholia and mourning also. Just as the necessary narcissism of the mourner must be one which tolerates castration and the 'no longer possibles' of enjoyment in the 'whole and the one', so the reader is similarly asked to bear with, and bear witness to, a difference which cannot ever, after all, be finally resolved.

Nostalgia points towards grief and towards the invention of new social selves. Understanding the tasks of the contemporary as essentially elegiac may help in thinking through the symbolic forms in which human selves can become inhabited by the inhuman whilst, at the same time, being capable of resisting the disintegrations of that other, absolutely unethical, inhumanity of which Lyotard writes.