

Sacramental Imagination: Eucharists of the Ordinary Universe

Richard Kearney

Preview

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The basic thesis of this essay is that several of our great modern novelists—Proust, Joyce and Woolf—epitomize a singularly sacramental imagination which celebrates the bread and wine of the everyday. In Joyce this takes many forms but culminates, in my view, in the passing of the seed-cake from the mouth of Molly to that of Bloom on Howth Head in the last scene of *Ulysses*. In Proust it assumes the guise of several epiphanies, most famously those which occur at a Parisian Supper party chez les Guermantes in *Time Regained*. In Virginia Woolf, the eucharistic vision expresses itself in a magical feast of *Boeuf en Daube* presided over by Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, recalled in a painting composed after her death by Lily Briscoe.

In all three narratives we witness the consecration of ordinary moments of flesh and blood *thisness* into something strange and enduring, far from the otherworldliness of Platonic or metaphysical dualism. My suggestion in what follows is that a specific phenomenology of incarnation, adumbrated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Julia Kristeva, may help us discern the grammar of transubstantiation operating in these sacramental accounts of the sensible universe. I begin with a brief sketch of such a phenomenology before moving on to consider in more detail certain eucharistic epiphanies in these three modernist novels. In conclusion I will examine our findings in the light of a new hermeneutics of the religious imaginary, advanced by Paul Ricoeur and others, and will propose the paradigm of *ana-theism* as a way of returning the sacred to the profane.

A Phenomenology of Flesh

Husserl blazed a path towards a phenomenology of the flesh when he broached the crucial theme of embodiment in *Ideas 2*, a theme largely ignored by Western metaphysics since Plato. This may seem strange given that almost fifteen hundred years of the history of metaphysics comprised what Gilson called the “Christian synthesis” of Greek and Biblical thought. But metaphysics (with some exceptions) managed to take the flesh and blood out of Christian incarnation, leaving us with abstract conceptual and categorical equivalents. It would take Husserl and the modern phenomenological revolution to bring Western philosophy back to the flesh of pre-reflective lived experience.

Husserl himself, however, for all his talk of returning us to the “things themselves,” remained caught in the nets of transcendental idealism and never quite escaped the limits of theoretical cognition. Heidegger took a step closer to the flesh with his existential analytic of “moods” and “facticity,” but the fact remains that the Heideggerian *Dasein* has no real body at all: it does not eat or sleep or have sex. It too remains, despite all its talk of “being-in-the-world,” a captive of the transcendental snare. While Scheler made sorties into a phenomenology of feeling and Sartre offered fine insights into shame and desire, it was really only with Merleau-Ponty that we witnessed a credible return to the flesh; and not just as cipher, project or icon, but as *flesh itself* in all its ontological depth.

Here at last the ghost of Cartesian and Kantian idealism is laid to rest, as we finally return to the body in all its unfathomable *thisness*. It is telling, I think, that Merleau-Ponty chose to describe his phenomenology of the sensible body in sacramental language, amounting to what we might call—without the slightest irreverence—a Eucharist of profane perception. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1944), we read:

Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but *is* also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form

of communion.¹

Merleau-Ponty goes on to sound this eucharistic power of the sensible as follows:

I am brought into relation with an external being, whether it be in order to open myself to it or to shut myself off from it. If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called just now a sacramental value, this is because the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds in them his momentary law.²

We shall have occasion to refer to numerous idioms of eucharistic empathy in the work of our three novelists below. Suffice it for now to note the curious paradox that it is precisely when Merleau-Ponty traces the phenomenological return all the way down to the lowest rung of experience (in the old metaphysical ladder, the *sensible*) that he discovers the most sacramental act of communion, or what he also likes to call “chiasmus,” the crossing over of ostensible contraries, the most in the least, the highest in the lowest, the first in the last, the invisible in the visible. Here we have a reversal of Platonism and Idealism, a return to flesh as our most intimate ‘element,’ namely, that which enfolds and envelopes us in the systole and diastole of being, the seeing and being seen of vision. Phenomenology thus marks the surpassing of traditional dualisms (body/mind, real/ideal, inner/outer, subject/object) in the name of a deeper, more primordial chiasmus where opposites traverse each other.

This is how Merleau-Ponty describes the enigma of flesh as mutual crossing-over in his posthumously published work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964): “The seer is caught up in what he sees ... the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity.” So much so that “the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002), 246. I am grateful to John Manoussakis for this reference. See his extended discussion of this theme in *God after Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007).

² *Ibid.*, 248.

is this Visibility, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it.”³ It is here, I suggest, that Merleau-Ponty gets to the heart of this nameless matter and descends, in a final return, a last reduction that suspends all previous reductions, to the incarnate region of the “element”: “The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of Being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the thing as well as my body) some ‘psychic’ material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts ‘material’ or ‘spiritual.’” No, insists Merleau-Ponty, “the flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we would need the ancient term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing* midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of Being wherever there is a fragment of Being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being.”⁴

Returning to examples of painting—Cézanne and Klee—in *Eye and Mind* (1964), Merleau-Ponty expounds on this chiasmic model of the flesh as a mutual transubstantiation of the seer and the seen in a ‘miracle’ of flesh: “There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted ... There is no break at all in this circuit; it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here. It is mute Being which itself comes to show forth its own meaning.”⁵

In *Signs* (1960), a collection of essays devoted to questions of language and art, Merleau-Ponty repeats his claim that the flesh of art is invariably indebted to the bread of life. There is nothing so insignificant in the life of the artist, he claims, that is not eligible for “consecration” in the painting or poem. But the “style” which the artist creates converts his corporeal situation into a sacramental witness at a higher level of “repetition” and “recreation.” The art work still refers to the life-world from which it springs, but opens up a second order reference of creative possibility and freedom. Speaking specifically of Leonardo de Vinci, he

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), cited in Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1986), 88–89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” in *Continental Aesthetics*, ed. R. Kearney and D. Rasmussen (New York: Blackwell, 2001), 288f.

writes: “If we take the painter’s point of view in order to be present at that decisive moment when what has been given to him to live as corporeal destiny, personal adventures or historical events, crystallizes into ‘the motive’ (i.e. the style), we will recognize that his work, which is never an effect, is always a response to these data and that the body, the life, the landscapes, the schools, the mistresses, the creditors, the police and the revolutions which might suffocate painting are also *the bread his work consecrates*. To live in painting is still to breathe the air of this world.”⁶ In short, the bread of the world is the very stuff consecrated in the body of the work.

We will return to this aesthetic of transubstantiation in the discussion of our three authors below. But before leaving Merleau-Ponty, I wish to mention one other intriguing passage in *Signs* where the author, who is no theologian and certainly no Christian apologist, has an interesting interpretation of Christian embodiment as a restoration of the divine within the flesh, a kenotic emptying out of transcendence into the heart of the world’s body, becoming a God beneath us rather than a God beyond:

The Christian God wants nothing to do with a vertical relation of subordination. He is not simply a principle of which we are the consequence, a will whose instruments we are, or even a model of which human values are the only reflection. There is a sort of impotence of God without us, and Christ attests that God would not be fully God without becoming fully man. Claudel goes so far as to say that God is not above but beneath us—meaning that we do not find Him as a suprasensible idea, but as another *ourself* which dwells in and authenticates our darkness. Transcendence no longer hangs over man; he becomes, strangely, its privileged bearer.⁷

This insight of “immanent transcendence” is not of course original to Merleau-Ponty. Many Christian mystics, from John of the Cross to Hildegard of Bingen and Meister Eckhart, said similar things. As did Jewish sages like Rabbi Luria and Rosenzweig or Sufi masters like Rumi and Al’Arabi. Indeed I am also reminded here of the bold claim by Teilhard de Chardin that God does not direct the universe from above but underlies it and “prolongs himself” into it. But what

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), cited *Modern Movements*, 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 83–84.

Merleau-Ponty provides is a specific philosophical method, namely, a phenomenology of radical embodiment, to articulate this “nameless” phenomenon of sacramental flesh. And it is arguable that a number of recent phenomenologists have followed Merleau-Ponty’s lead (or parallel path) when seeking to inventory the sacred dimensions of the flesh—I am thinking especially of Jean-Luc Marion’s writings on the “flesh” as a saturated phenomenon in *In Excess* or Jean-Louis Chrétien’s phenomenological commentary on the Song of Songs.⁸ But Merleau-Ponty has the advantage, in my view, of not only being the first phenomenologist to explicitly identify the sacramental valence of the sensible but also of maintaining a certain methodological agnosticism with regard to the theistic or atheistic implications of this phenomenon. Indeed his philosophy of “ambiguity,” as he liked to call it, is particularly well suited when it comes to interpreting the sacramental idioms of eucharistic epiphany in Joyce, Proust and Woolf.

Merleau-Ponty is no crypto-evangelist, as several of those belonging to the “theological turn” in phenomenology have been accused. On the contrary, he keenly observes the methodic suspension of confessional truth claims recommended by Husserl. And this chimes well, it seems to me, with the poetic license enjoyed by artists and writers when it comes to the marvel of transubstantiation in word, sound or image, for poetic license entails a corollary confessional licence from which no reader is excluded. In this respect, we could say that the phenomenological method, which brackets beliefs, is analogous to the literary suspending of belief and dis-belief for the sake of all-inclusive entry to the “kingdom of as-if.” And this suspension, I will argue, allows for a specific ‘negative capability’ regarding questions of doubt, proof, dogma or doctrine, so as to better appreciate the ‘thing itself,’ the holy *thisness* and *thereness* of our flesh and blood existence. The attitude of pure vigilance and attention that follows from such exposure to a “free variation of imagination” (the term is Husserl’s) is not far removed, I believe, from what certain mystics have recognized to be a crucial preparatory moment for sacramental vision, calling it by such different names as “the cloud of unknowing” (Julian of Norwich), the “docta ignorantia” (Cusa) or, in Eastern mysticism, the “neti/neti”—neither this nor that—which paves

⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud; Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2004). See also the work of Catherine Keller, *Face of The Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) and John Manoussakis, *op.cit.* Nor should we omit reference here to Gabriel Marcel’s intriguing philosophical reflections on incarnation and embodiment, which exerted a considerable influence on the ‘religious’ phenomenological writings of Ricoeur and Levinas.

the way for the highest wisdom of reality. True belief comes from non-belief, or as Dostoyevsky put it, real “faith comes forth from the crucible of doubt.”⁹ In the free variation of imagination, indispensable to the phenomenological method, as in all great works of fiction and art, everything is permissible. Nothing is excluded except exclusion. All is possible. By allowing us to attend to the sacramental marvel of the everyday without the constraints of any particular confession, Merleau-Ponty offers fresh insights into a eucharistic character of the sensible.

For reasons of economy, and limited competence, I will confine my remarks in the second part of this paper exclusively to three modernist writers of fiction. That similar arguments could be made, and perhaps more cogently, with regard to the sacramental vision of musicians, painters and poets is undeniable, especially when one considers how such artists work more closely with the sensible and carnal than novelists do. But that is a task for others more expert than I in those disciplines.¹⁰

Before moving on to a close reading of our novelists, however, I wish to mention one other contemporary philosopher—Julia Kristeva—who also has had much to say on the sacramental imagination, especially as it relates to what she explicitly calls an aesthetic of “transubstantiation” in Proust and Joyce. As a linguist and psychoanalyst by formation, Kristeva adds new perspectives to the phenomenological vision of Merleau-Ponty which she also espouses. In particular she ventures rich insights into the workings of unconscious tropes and associations in modernist writing about sense and sensibility. In *Time and Sense*, Kristeva offers this example, amongst many others:

A sensation from the past remains within us, and involuntary memory recaptures it when a related perception in the present is stimulated by the same desire as the prior sensation. A spatio-temporal association of sensations is thus established, relying on a link, a structure, and a reminiscence. Sensation takes refuge in this interwoven network and turns into an *impression*, which means that sensation loses its solitary specificity. A similarity emerges out of all these differences, eventually

⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1990).

¹⁰ See for example the work of my colleagues Frank Kennedy on music and Steven Schloesser on painting (especially Rouault) and what he calls “mystic modernism.” Steven Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris: 1919–1923* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

attaining the status of a general law in the manner of an idea or thought. The ‘general law,’ however, is no abstraction, for it is established because the sensation is *immanent in it* ... This process keeps the structure from losing its sensorial foundation. Music becomes word, and writing becomes a *transubstantiation* in those for whom it creates ‘new powers.’¹¹

Kristeva links this aesthetic of transubstantiation, which she finds in Joyce and Proust, back to the writings of the later Merleau-Ponty, which she calls “mystically significant.”¹² Indeed her notion of a “general law” of ideational sensation is surely not unrelated to Merleau-Ponty’s reference to a “momentary law” cited above. Most specifically, Kristeva relates the eucharistic aesthetic to the chiasmic relation between the visible and invisible, the inner feeling and outer expression that Merleau-Ponty describes as a reversible interpenetration of *flesh*. Refusing the dualistic division of spirit and body into two separate substances, both Kristeva and Merleau-Ponty counsel us to rethink flesh more phenomenologically as an “*element*, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being.”¹³ And in this respect, Kristeva keenly endorses Merleau-Ponty’s claim that “no one has gone further than Proust in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible,”¹⁴ though she (like us) would want to add Joyce to the list. Indeed identifying Merleau-Ponty’s model of reversibility with the notion of “transubstantiation” in Proust and Joyce, Kristeva sees this miracle of the flesh as a model both for therapeutic healing and for reading literary texts.

In both cases, the reversible transubstantiation of word and flesh expresses itself as a certain catharsis.¹⁵ Kristeva goes on, rather boldly, to suggest

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 251.

¹² *Ibid.*, 246. Transubstantiation is defined as: (1) “The changing of one substance into another”; (2) “The conversion in the Eucharist of the whole substance of the bread and of the wine into the blood of Christ, only the appearances (and other ‘accidents’) of bread and wine remaining: according to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church 1533 ” (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2349). What fascinates both Joyce and Proust about this process, according to Kristeva, is that such an act, mixing the secular and the sacred, combines both an “imaginary” and “real” character.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁵ See Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 247: “*A state of flesh*,” writes Kristeva, “appears to underlie the therapeutic act, but it can become a true *therapeutic* act only if language is led to the reversible and chiasmic sensation that supports it” (what Proust calls the “impression” or “transubstantiation”). For

that it is their aesthetic of transubstantiation which saves writers like Proust and Joyce (and we would venture to include Virginia Woolf) from the prison of linguistic idealism, to which certain structuralist readings have consigned them. This, mind you, is a linguistic semiotician speaking: “Although Proust never stops “deciphering,” his world does not consist of “signs.” At any rate, his world is not made of sign–words or idea–signs and certainly not of signifiers and signifieds.”¹⁶ Proust, Kristeva observes, was disappointed or amused by “empty linguistic signs” and preferred instead the fluidity of “atmospheric changes,” a “rush of blood,” a sudden silence, an “adverb springing from an involuntary connection made between two unformulated ideas.”¹⁷ Kristeva finds support for this aesthetic of “real presence” in the young Proust’s aversion to “signs” and “strict significations,” and points to the fact that Jean Santeuil (Marcel *avant la lettre*) conceives of art as a “work of feeling” which focuses on a “sort of obscure instinct of permanent brilliance” or “lava about to overflow,” as well as on “what is not yet ready to come forth.”¹⁸ The paradigmatic Proustian text, she avers, rises up “against the abyss between language and lived experience” and operates as a work which expresses “the vast array of impressions that the hero’s sentence strives to communicate (despite his reservations about language) by associating weather, villages, roads, dust, grass and raindrops through a mass accumulation of metaphors and metonymies.”¹⁹

This, Kristeva surmises, paves the way in Proust “for the *impression*, which makes up for the weakness of linguistic signs.”²⁰ And so words are only useful for Proust when they exert an “evocative power” over our “sensibility” and display a kinship with a sort of “latent music” (the terms are Proust’s).²¹ Resisting the temptations of semiology and Platonism, Proust’s eucharistic writing aims for

Kristeva this reversibility of flesh can take the form of (i) a literary act of writing and reading as a “two-sided sensoriality” or (ii) a psychoanalytic act of transference and counter-transference. One recalls the following observation by Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*: “Reading is at the threshold of spiritual life and can lead us to it though it does not constitute it ... For someone who is lazy, books play the same role that psychotherapists do for those afflicted with neurasthenia.” Cited in Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 385. Kristeva cites and comments on a number of key passages from Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible*, 246f.

¹⁶ Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 251.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

a “lively physical expressiveness that resists the passivity of the civilized sign.”²² It strives instead towards a language of the lived body: what Proust called “the vigorous and expressive language of our muscles and our desires, of suffering, of the corruption or the flowering of the flesh.”²³

What pertains to Proust, I will suggest, also pertains to Joyce and Woolf, and it to a closer reading of their novels that I now turn. Whether we are concerned in these works with an aesthetic religion or a religious aesthetic, or both, is something I wish to bear in mind throughout.

James Joyce

Joyce invokes idioms of transubstantiation to describe the writing process. Already in the *Portrait* Stephen Dedalus describes himself as a “priest of the eternal imagination,” transmuting the “bread of daily experience” in the “womb” of art. This is more than irony. Taking his cue from the sacramental operation of transubstantiation in its liturgical formulation, Joyce treats the transformative act of writing as the “advent of new signs and a new body.”²⁴ This act of textual

²² Ibid.

²³ Marcel Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve*, cited in Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 252. I think Kristeva is close here to the hermeneutic model of extra-linguistic ontological refiguration which Paul Ricoeur speaks of in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984). See Ricoeur’s claim, for example, that “What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of this experience.” Ibid., 78–79. Or again in “Life in Quest of Narrative”: “My thesis is here that the process of composition, of configuration, is not completed in the text but in the reader and, under this condition, makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative. I should say, more precisely: the sense or the signification of a narrative stems from *the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader*” (which is already ‘prefigured’ by the world of the author). In David Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*

²⁴ See Julia Kristeva, “Joyce the Gracehoper” in *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 172–188. See in particular her opening statement on 173: “Joyce’s Catholicism, which consisted of his profound experience with Trinitarian religion as well as his mockery of it, impelled him to contemplate its central ritual—the *Eucharist*—which is the ritual par excellence of identification with God’s body and a springboard for all other identifications, including that of artistic profusion. This ritual is also prescribed by the Catholic Faith. It is likely that the cultural context of Catholicism—which Joyce had completely assimilated—was challenged by a biographical event that endangered his identity and enabled him to focus his writing on the identificatory substratum of psychic functioning, which he masterfully laid out against the backdrop of the grandest religion.” And she goes on: “The obsession that Joyce

transfiguration is itself echoed at several key junctures within his texts. I have written elsewhere of the pivotal role of “epiphanies” of repetition in *Ulysses* where Joyce treats a remembered event as both past (separated by time) and really present (regained miraculously in the epiphany of the moment),²⁵ and yet there is a deeply deconstructive lining to much of Joyce’s deployment of eucharistic and epiphanic allusions. Indeed *Ulysses* itself may be read as a series of anti-Eucharists or pseudo-Eucharists leading, I will suggest, to a final eucharistic epiphany at the close of Molly’s soliloquy.

Let’s start at the beginning. The novel opens, significantly, with Buck Mulligan’s mimicry of Mass on the turret of the Martello tower. He is carrying a shaving bowl for a chalice and mockingly intoning the liturgical “*Introibo ad altare Dei*.” Holding the sacrificial bowl he addresses Stephen as a “Jesuit” before adopting a priestly tone: “For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine Christine: body and blood and soul and ouns. Slow music please. Shut your eyes,

the ‘Gracehoper’ had with the Eucharist theme is exemplified by his many references to transubstantiation or to Arius’s heresy, to the consubstantiality between father and son in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and between Shakespeare, his father, his son Hamnet, as well as to Shakespeare’s complete works in the sense of a veritable source of inspiration. Let us recall, moreover, the condensation of *trinity* and *transubstantiation*; in Joyce’s umbrella word “contransmagnificandjewbangtantiatality.” Ibid., 174. Pointing out that Joyce had read both Freud and Jung by 1915, Kristeva offers many intriguing psychoanalytic readings of Joyce’s eucharistic aesthetic including the following: “In this way can Dedalus–Bloom achieve the plenitude of his text-body, and thus release his text to us as though it was his body, his transubstantiation. The narrator seems to say, “This is my body,” and we know that he sometimes identifies with HCE in *Finnegans Wake*. As for the reader, he assimilates the true presence of a complex male sexuality through textual signs and without any repression. This is a prerequisite for enigmatic sublimation: the text, which restrains but does not repress libido, thereby exercises its cathartic function upon the reader. Everything is to be seen and all the places are available; nothing is lacking and nothing is hidden that could not indeed be present.” Ibid., 176–177. Other informative treatments of Joyce’s sacramental aesthetic include William Noon, *Joyce and Aquinas* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), Robert Boyle, *James Joyce’s Pauline Vision: A Catholic Exposition* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), and J. Houbedine, “Joyce, Littérature et religion,” *Excès de langage* (Denoel, NY, 1984).

²⁵ See my “Joyce: Epiphanies and Triangles” in Richard Kearney, *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays 1976–2006* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 131f; and “Traversing the Imaginary: Epiphanies in Joyce and Proust” in *Traversing the Imaginary: Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007). On epiphany in Joyce see also George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 112f. On parodied, failed or deconstructed Eucharists in Joyce’s stories, “Sisters,” “Clay” and the “Dead,” see the work of theologian, Joseph O’Leary, e.g. “Enclosed Spaces in ‘The Dead’” in *English Literature and Language* (Tokyo: University of Sophia, 1997), vol. 34, 33–52.

gents. One moment. A little trouble with those white corpuscles. Silence all.” Mulligan’s black mass is followed, in the next episode, by Bloom’s morning feast of fried kidneys, during the course of which, as Molly later recalls, he delivers himself of “jawbreakers about the incarnation” before burning the bottom of the pan! Later again in the novel we witness Stephen’s parodic Mass in nightgown and Bloom and Stephen’s failed Mass over a cup of cocoa in the penultimate *Ithaca* chapter, not to mention the mock-allusions to transubstantiation in the Oxen of the Sun and Scylla and Charybdis episodes.

This series of pseudo-Eucharists may be read as a long *via negativa* which eventually opens up the space for the “kiss” of the seed cake on Howth Head in the final chapter. This “long kiss” between Molly and Bloom when they first went out, as recalled by Molly in her soliloquy, is redolent with sacramental associations. It could be said, for example, to reprise not only the “kisses of the mouth” celebrated by the Shulamite woman in the *Song of Songs* but also the eucharistic Passover of Judeo-Christian promise. Molly’s remembrance of the “long kiss” where she gave Bloom the “seedcake out of (her) mouth” might be thought of as a retrieval of a genuine eucharistic gift of love after the various deconstructions of failed or parodied eucharists—and loves—recurring throughout the narrative. And it is this kiss which triggers off, in true kairological fashion, the earlier memory of Molly’s first kiss as a young woman in Gibraltar: a first kiss which becomes the final kiss of the novel itself, climaxing in the famous lines: “How he kissed me under the Moorish wall . . . and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.”²⁶ This kiss may, of course, also be read as an epiphanic repetition of the particular moment on June 16, 1904, when Joyce finally went out and found pleasure with Nora Barnacle: the day subsequently known as Bloomsday on which *Ulysses* is set. Nor should we forget that the closing chapter in which Molly remembers times past (and future) is, according to Joyce’s notes, dedicated

²⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 204. On the subject of the eschatological kiss see also our comparison between Molly and the Bride of the Song of Songs in “The Shulamite’s Song: Divine Eros, Ascending and Descending” in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). One might also compare and contrast this kiss with another moment of recollected love in Joyce’s story *The Dead* where Gretta recalls her kiss with Finbar Fury her first love: a scene that is also associated with a sacramental feast, celebrating the Incarnation of the Word at Christmas.

to the “flesh”; and that it crowns a narrative which Joyce described as his “epic of the body.”

In repeating a past moment, epiphany gives a future to the past. It somehow transubstantiates the empirical *thisness* of a particular lived event into something sacred and timeless.²⁷ So when Molly recalls her first kiss as a young woman she does so—tellingly—in the future tense! “Yes I *will* yes.” And we might be tempted to suggest that Molly’s promissory “yes” here epitomises Walter Benjamin’s intriguing notion of “messianic time” as an openness to “each moment of the future as a portal through which the Messiah may enter.” This is, in short, epiphany understood as a transfiguring of an ordinary moment of secular, profane time (*chronos*) into sacred or eschatological time (*kairos*).

It is also worth noting that epiphany, in its original scriptural sense, involved witnesses who come as strangers from afar. This could be read, in terms of a sacramental hermeneutics, as an event of textual openness to new, strange and unprecedented meanings through the textual encounter between *author*, *narrator* and, above all, *reader*. Such a sacramental reading epitomizes the “desire to open writing to unforeseeable effects, in other words, to the Other. It is a function of a responsibility for the Other—for managing in writing a place for the Other, saying *yes* to the call or demand of the Other, inviting a response.”²⁸ And here we might recall Derrida’s invocation of Elijah (also a favorite figure for Leopold Bloom) as a messianic model of the reader: the unpredictable Other par excellence who calls the text forth and is called forth in turn by the text. This notion of *Ulysses* as an open textual invitation to “refiguration” in the reader finds confirmation in Joyce’s repeated appeal to the “ideal reader,” a gesture somewhat akin to Proust’s appeal to his future reader who would discover in his book the book of his/her own life. One of Joyce’s most telling refrains in the letters is, “is there one who understands me?” In other words, both Joyce and Proust (as we shall see) invoke the sacramental idiom of transubstantiation to convey the miracle of textual composition and reception. In both cases, we are confronted with a miracle of *repetition* that recalls the past forwards and explodes the

²⁷ See our discussion of Joyce’s proximity to Duns Scotus’s notions of *haecceitas* (thisness) and *ensarkosis* (the ongoing enfleshment of the divine in the world) in “Joyce: Epiphanies and Triangles” in Kearney, *Navigations*, 131f.

²⁸ Rudolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 230. Gasché is here elaborating on Derrida’s reading of Joyce in “Ulysses Gramophone” in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992).

chronology of time.²⁹

But how are we to read these novelistic “repetitions,” in Kierkegaard’s sense of *repeating forward* rather than merely recollecting backward?³⁰ What is the particular genre, idiom or style which performs such gestures? To borrow a phrase from Joyce himself we might call it “jokoserious,” for it is a way of celebrating the eternal in the moment by bringing us back to earth. Molly, for example, is a mock-heroic parody of the elevated and aristocratic Penelope. She repeats her Homeric prototype forward by opening up new modes of reinscription. One only needs to compare Molly’s all-too-mundane musings with the following description of Penelope in the last scene of Homer’s *Odyssey*: “So upright in disposition was Penelope the daughter of Icarius that she never forgot Odysseus the husband of her youth; and therefore shall the fame of her goodness be conserved in the splendid poem wherewith the Immortals shall celebrate the constancy of Penelope for all the dwellers upon earth.” This is a far cry from Molly’s final cry. Certainly Penelope could never say of her beloved what Molly says of her’s: “as well him as another!” And yet it is typical of Joyce’s irony that in turning Homer’s epic heroism on its head, his characters curiously maintain the truth of the situation in a kind of creative repetition. Bloom is strangely blessed with his wife (however unfaithful) and does manage to defy her suitors (however indirectly and passively); Molly does not forget Bloom and her ultimate affirmation is “celebrated” by many “dwellers upon earth!” In short, transliterating Penelope and Odysseus into Molly and Bloom Joyce performs a daring act of eucharistic comedy. And, so doing, he proves his conviction that the “structure of heroism is a damned lie and that there cannot be any substitute for individual passion.”³¹

Molly’s rewriting of Penelope conforms to the basic features of comedy outlined by Aristotle and Bergson, namely, the combining of more with less, of the metaphysical with the physical, of the heroic with the demotic, of Word with flesh. And we might add, bearing in mind a central motif of comedy, the combining of death with love. Recall that the novel begins with a series of death and burial themes, lived or remembered: Stephen’s mother, the Blooms’s son,

²⁹ On this later point see Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*

³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941).

³¹ James Joyce, Letter to his brother Stanislaus, 1905, cited by Declan Kiberd in his Introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition of *Ulysses* (London, 1992), x. The letter begins: “Do you not think the search for heroics damn vulgar?”

Paddy Dignam—and that it ends with a call to love: *eros* defying the sting of *thanatos*. Molly's ultimate passing from *thanatos* to *eros* is prefigured several times during her soliloquy, from fantasies of being buried (e.g. "well when Im stretched out dead in my grave then I suppose I'll have some peace I want to get up a minute if Im let O Jesus ... O Jamsey let me up out of this pooh sweets of sin.") to the climatic cry of eschatological bliss: "Yes I will yes." And it is surely significant that Molly herself is "full with seed" as she records her fantasy of death and rebirth, just as Bloom himself is described as a "manchild in the womb."

In her final memory of the kiss, Molly echoes the Shulammitte woman's celebration of wild flora in the *Song of Songs* as she affirms that "we are all flowers all a woman's body." Indeed the culminating Moorish and Mediterranean idioms of sensory ecstasy and excess are deeply redolent of the Shulammitte's Canticle, itself styled after the Jewish–Babylonian nuptial poem or epithalamium. And this impression is amplified, I think, by the multiple allusions to seeds, trees, waters and mountains and irresistible passions between men and women. "What else were we given all those desires for?" Molly asks. If there is something irreducibly humorous in this replay of the *Song of Song's*, there is something deeply serious too. As always in Joyce, the scatological and the eschatological rub shoulders—as do Greek and Jew, Molly and Bloom, life and death. And they do so without ever succumbing to some totalizing synthesis. Joyce's comic transubstantiations do not amount to Hegelian sublations (*Aufhebungen*), in spite of Derrida's one-time suspicions.^{3 2} Joyce keeps the dialectic open to the end,

³² Derrida offers a useful gloss on the language of Molly/Penelope in an intriguing footnote to his commentary on the relationship between Greek and Jew in Emmanuel Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 320–321. Commenting on a phrase in *Ulysses*—"Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet"—Derrida attributes this not only to "woman's reason," as in Joyce's text, but he also identifies Joyce here as "perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists." *Ibid.*, 153. The implication here seems to be that the discourse of "feminine logic," associated with Molly/Penelope, is one which, for Levinas at least, suggests an 'ontological category' of return and closure, namely, Ulysses returning to Penelope in Ithaca, Stephen and Bloom returning to Molly in Eccles Street where they may find themselves 'atoned' as father–son, jew–greek, greek–jew etc. It is not quite clear where Derrida himself stands towards Joyce in this early 1964 text, though it is evident that he thinks Levinas would repudiate the Joycean formula as overly Hegelian and Greek (that is, not sufficiently respectful of the strictly Jewish/Messianic/eschatological need for a radically asymmetrical relation of self and other). In his later essay, "Ulysses Gramophone," first delivered as a lecture to the International Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt, 1984, he makes it clear that the "yes" of Molly/Penelope marks an opening of the text beyond totality and closure to an infinite and infinitely recurring 'other.' Jacques Derrida, *Ulysses*

refusing the temptation of metaphysical closure. The eucharistic transformation of death and rebirth is carried out on earth. Word is always made flesh of our flesh.

Elsewhere I have written about the importance of epiphany in Joyce.³³ And epiphanies, as Joyce knew from his studies with the Jesuits in Clongowes (especially Father Darlington), imply Magi. I have suggested that the three Magi who witness the epiphany of meaning are Stephen, Bloom and Molly; each reincarnates a seminal moment in the author's own life. But, as suggested above, the Magi may also be interpreted more textually as *author*, *actor* and *reader*. Thus we might say that while a) the lived action of Joyce's world 'prefigures' the text, and b) the voice, style and plot of the actors (Stephen–Bloom–Molly) 'configure' the meaning in the text, it is c) the reader who completes the narrative arc by serving as a third witness who 'refigures' the world of the text in his/her return to lived experience. Our own world as readers may thus be said to be enlarged by the new meanings proposed by the text.

This triangular model of epiphany, celebrated in the sacrament of word-made-flesh, always implies a re-birth. It constitutes something of a miracle of meaning, the *impossible* being transfigured into the *newly possible*. And here we

Grammophone: Deux Mots sur Joyce (Paris: Galilee, 1987). Even if it is a response to oneself, in interior dialogue, "yes" always involves a relay through an other. Or as Derrida cleverly puts it, *oui-dire*, saying yes, always involves some form of *oui-dire* or hearsay. "A yes never comes along, and we never say this word alone." Ibid., 300. With this relay of self through the other, this willing of yes to say yes again, "this differing and deferring, this necessary failure of total self-identity, comes spacing (space *and* time), gramophonizing (writing *and* speech), memory ..." Ibid., 254. And this 'other' clearly implies a reaching beyond the text of *Ulysses* itself to the listener, the reader, an open call for our response.

In this sense we would say that *Ulysses* is a deeply anti-Hegelian book. Molly's finale does not represent some great teleological reconciliation of contradictions in some absolute synthesis of Spirit, but an on-going affirmation of paradoxes, struggles, contraries, contingencies, spoken in a spirit of humor and desire. "What else were we given all those desires for?" asks the polymorphously perverse Molly, a far cry from the Hegelian triumph of Identity. We may conclude, therefore, that the story of struggle and trouble does not end when Stephen follows Bloom out of the library, it only begins ... And by the same token, Molly, when she finally arrives, does not put paid to Trinities as such, she simply reintroduces us, along with Stephen and Bloom, to another kind of trinity, one without a capital T and more inclusive of time, movement, natality and desire (all those things banned from the Sabellian Trinity of self-enclosed Identity parodied by Stephen in the National Library scene), and one might add, more inclusive of the reader. For like any epiphany, Molly's too calls out to an open future of readers.

³³ See Richard Kearney, "Traversing the Imaginary: Epiphanies in Joyce and Proust" in *Traversing the Imaginary: Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge*, ed. Peter Gratton and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

might invoke those famous biblical epiphanies when, for example, the three angels appear to Abraham (Gen 17: 6, 8) to announce the conception of an “impossible” child (Isaac) to Sarah; or, in Christian literature, when the three Magi bear witness to the “impossible” child Jesus in Bethlehem; or, again, when the three persons of the Christian Trinity herald the birth of an “impossible” kingdom, as in Andrei Rublev’s icon of the Blessed Trinity. Indeed this last Rublev example, featuring the three persons of the Trinity seated around a eucharistic chalice, could be said to foreground the pivotal role of the free space (*chora*) at the centre of the triadic epiphany. The movement of the three persons/angels/Magi around the still womb—which the Patristic authors named *peri-choresis* or the dance around the open space—may be read, hermeneutically, as the creative encounter of *author/narrator/reader* in and around the locus of the word. This suggests, moreover, that the triadic model of epiphany always implies a fourth dimension—namely, *chora* understood as the space of advent for the new (Isaac, Jesus, Pleroma). Eucharistic epiphany might thus be said to signal a miracle of reversible semantic innovation: of flesh into word and of word into flesh.

That the witnessing of the three personas is usually met with a celebratory “yes” (Sarah’s “laugh” in Gen. 17, Mary’s “Amen” in the Gospels, Molly Bloom’s final “yes I will yes”), is itself a significant illustration of how *kairological* time cuts across conventional time and opens up a surplus of possible meaning hitherto unsuspected and unknown. The epiphanic event may be seen, accordingly, as one which testifies simultaneously to the *event* of meaning (it is *already* here) as an *advent* always still to come (it is *not-yet* here). And in this way it re-enacts the Palestinian formula of the Passover/Eucharist which remembers a moment of saving while at the same time anticipating a future (“until he comes”).³⁴

³⁴ See our discussion of the eschatological temporality of the Palestinian formula in both Judaic and Christian messianism in “Enabling God” in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. J. Manoussaki (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); and also “Hermeneutics of the Possible God” in *Givenness and God*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Our own sketch of micro-eschatological possibility, temporality and carnality are powerfully articulated in Denise Levertov’s poem, “The Annunciation,” and especially in these lines: “The engendering Spirit/did not enter her without consent/God waited,” offering her the “astounding ministry . . . to bear in her womb/Infinite weight and lightness; to carry/in hidden, finite inwardness,/nine months of Eternity; to contain/in slender vase of being, the sum of power –/in narrow flesh,/the sum of light./Then bring to birth,/push out into air, a Man-child/needling, like any other,/milk and love.” *The Selected Poems of Denise Levertov*, ed. Paul Lacey (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2002), 162–163.

So I repeat: Molly's final cry blends and balances past and future tenses in a typically kairological way—"I *said* yes I *will* yes." Her scatological memories of all-too-human *eros* are repeated forward to the rhythm of eschatological time. Word becomes flesh as flesh becomes word. The secular and sacramental traverse each other.

At the beginning of *Ulysses*, the question is asked: "What is God?" to which Stephen replies: "A cry in the street." Perhaps the cry is Molly's and the Street is Eccles Street?

Marcel Proust

Sacramental idioms are also central to the work of Marcel Proust. Tropes of "transubstantiation," "resurrection" and "revelation" occur in several key passages of *In Search of Lost Time*. They generally signal a grammar for recovering the timeless in time, as in the famous madeleine episode, but also a grammar of artistic transformation, as in Marcel's final disquisition on the writing process in *Time Regained* (the final volume of the novel). If food and taste are the sensible idioms which produce the quintessential epiphany of the madeleine, I would suggest it is another epiphany at the end of the labyrinthine narrative which brings us even closer to Proust's sacramental vision. I refer to the penultimate scene chez les Guermantes when Marcel is left waiting in the library antechamber as a pre-prandial music recital is being performed. Having arrived late, Marcel experiences a cluster of epiphanies as he waits before entering the Guermantes's salon. Here in this antechamber of remaindered time certain achronic moments return to him.

Marcel's first involuntary memory is of entering the San Marco Cathedral in Venice, a site of eucharistic celebration par excellence. This flash of memory is triggered by his stumbling on some uneven cobblestones as he traverses the Guermantes's courtyard. Though he had been unable to take in the sacramental epiphany at the time (when he first visited Venice with his mother) he relives it now many years later here in Paris. We shall return to this momentarily.

Teresa of Calcutta expresses a similar sentiment when she writes of the same reversibility of eucharistic giving: "Into each of our lives Jesus comes as the bread of life—to be eaten, to be consumed by us. Then he comes as the hungry one, the other, hoping to be fed with the bread of our life, our hearts loving, and our hands serving." See also these lines by Yves Bonnefoy, "L'ange qui est la terre/Va dans chaque buisson et paraitre et bruler." I am grateful to Anne Davenport for this reference.

This “miracle of the courtyard” is followed by another involuntary memory brought on by the sound of a spoon striking a plate as a waiter in the dining room prepares the banquet table (for the feast to come). Then we have a third quasi-eucharistic epiphany as Marcel wipes his lips with a starched table napkin, the sensation suddenly recalling a luminous moment in his childhood when he sat in the dining room of the Grand Hotel at Balbec. And, finally, Marcel experiences a very formative (if forgotten) moment in his childhood: fetching a volume of George Sands’s novel, *Francois le Champi*, from the Guermites’s library shelves he suddenly relives an evening when Maman read this same book to him at bedtime in Combray. And it was this nocturnal reading which coincided, as we know from the opening scene of the book, with the inaugural moment when his mother left the dinner table with Marcel’s father and Swann to come kiss her son, Marcel, goodnight. Reading and feasting are thus intimately associated with the maternal kiss which set Marcel on his search for lost time, eventually culminating in the composition of the novel of that name.³⁵

³⁵ Contrast this inaugural—and ultimately lost—kiss of maternal ‘fusion’ with the disastrous kiss of ‘diffusion’ which Marcel experiences with Albertine later in the novel. The closest Marcel may be said to achieve a eucharistic kiss, beyond these two extremes, might be the brushing of his lips on the table napkin chez les Guermites which recalls the meal at the Grand Hotel in Balbec, or perhaps more emblematically, the image of the “star-shaped” cross-roads where the two diverging paths of his youth—le chemin de Méséglise and le Chemin de Swann—converge almost mystically, chiasmically, ‘transversally,’ in the figure of Gilberte’s daughter, Mlle de St Loup, at the final party. But this final kiss is a kiss deferred for others, in the future, just as the final meal chez les Guermites is a feast postponed: his lips touch the napkin but he does not eat.

It is significant, I think, that Proust’s novel does not end with the epiphanies in the library. Marcel does not stay in Guermites library anymore than Stephen in the National Library after his great insight into Hamlet. And though Marcel takes this occasion to announce an extremely elaborate theory of literature and life (as does Stephen), the text does not culminate with theory. Marcel leaves the Library and re-enters the everyday universe. It is here, in the midst of the chaos and commotion of a fragmenting Parisian community, that Marcel has what we might consider to be his ultimate epiphany: his meeting with Mlle de Saint Loup (Gilberte’s daughter).

Mlle de Saint Loup is to Marcel what Molly (via Leopold) is to Stephen. Both appear at the end of the story and lead the author–artist beyond the vain play of mimetic triangles and abstract trinities back to the ordinary universe of generation and gratuity. Was she not, Marcel says of Mlle de Saint Loup—“and are not the majority of human beings?—like one of those star-shaped crossroads in a forest where roads converge that have come, in the forest as in our lives, from the most diverse quarters?” And he adds: “Numerous for me were the roads which led to Mlle de Saint-Loup and which radiated around her.” Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, *Time Regained*, trans. A. Mayor and T. Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library Paperback, 1999), 502. Marcel then recalls the two great “ways”—the Guermites Way represented by her father, Robert de Saint Loup, and the Méséglise Way represented by her mother, Gilberte, the narrator’s first youthful love. “One of them

took me, by way of this girl's mother and the Champs-Elysees, to Swann, to my evenings at Combray, to Méseglise itself; the other, by way of her father, to those afternoons at Balbec where even now I saw him again near the sun-bright sea. And then between these two high roads a network of transversals was set up." *Ibid.*, 502. From this emerges Marcel's new vision of life as a large web where the various incidents of time past and time recovered crisscross in a "network of memories" which give us an "almost infinite variety of communicating paths." So that life resurrected in and through literature becomes a palimpsest of chiasmic overlaps and transversals that cannot be brought to a final close. Mlle de Saint Loup sets up a series of reverberations and recollections that resonate out into the future. She is the only character in the novel not 'recalled' from the past as such. She comes to Marcel out of the future as it were, taking him by surprise. And it is precisely by virtue of her 'messianic' advent into Marcel's world that she opens up a new *optique* on both the past, the present and the time-still-to-come.

This new *optique* is what Marcel now calls a three-dimensional psychology, one which leads from life to literature and back again. Marcel's recapture of the different planes and elements of his life, following his encounter with Mlle de Saint Loup in the party, makes him realize that "in a book which tries to tell the story of a life it would be necessary to use not the two-dimensional psychology which we normally use but a quite different sort of three-dimensional psychology"; a perspective which affords, he says, "a new beauty to those resurrections of the past which (his) memory effected while (he) was following his thoughts alone in the library." *Ibid.*, 505–506. Marcel, like Stephen after his Library epiphany, is now ready to 'part' with his past so as to regain it. He is prepared to pass from the "see this, remember"(epiphany 1) to the "will see"(epiphany 2). And again like Stephen, Marcel will be lead to his book and to a life-beyond-the-book by someone with whom he does not actually speak (Molly for Stephen; Mlle de Saint Loup for Marcel). In Gilberte's daughter, coming to him across the room in the Guermantes salon, Marcel sees the possibility of rebirth and renewal, another's life beginning again and going beyond his own. This young woman, he realizes, is the incarnation of time lost and regained. "Time, colorless and inapprehensible time, so that I was almost able to see it and touch it, had materialized itself in this girl ... still rich in hopes, full of laughter, formed from those very years which I myself had lost, she was like my own youth." *Ibid.*, 507.

Then comes the moment of decisive *anagnoresis* (see Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4.4.1448). While tempted to rejoin his old ambition to compose a great masterpiece which would "realize a life within the confines of a book!"—mimetically drawing "comparisons from the loftiest and the most varied arts" (*ibid.*, 507)—Marcel says no. He resists the temptation. "What a task awaited him!" he proclaims, taking his final distance from the persona of the Great Writer, now suddenly displaced into the third person—"How happy would he be, I thought, the man who had the power to write such a book!" *Ibid.*, my italics. But Marcel now knows he is not this man. He is not one of those Promethean romantic artists whose will-to-power would construct his work "like a general conducting an offensive," or an architect building a huge vaulted "cathedral," ensuring one's immortality even in the tomb, "against oblivion." *Ibid.*, 508. This Ideal Author of the Ideal Book is not for Marcel. He has learned, like Stephen in the wake of the Library episode, to "cease to strive." And again like Stephen, he has come to disavow "his own theory." He no longer believes in the Gospel of the Absolute Text. Instead, he resolves on a far more modest proposal: to begin a work which will serve not as a text in-itself and for-itself (the Grand Illusion of the self-sufficient-Book) but rather as a pretext for the renewed and resurrected life of his readers. Marcel's critical conversion is marked by the seemingly innocuous phrase, "But to return to my own case ..." The

Samuel Beckett has described this cluster of epiphanies as a “single annunciation,” and I think this allusion to the miracle of incarnation is telling. For in this scene Marcel comes back to the flesh. He is reminded, at this same Geurmantes’s party, that most of his loved ones are dead (Robert de St Loup, Grandmaman, Maman, Swann, Odette, Françoise), that Charlus is dying, and that he himself (Marcel) has just escaped a brush with death in a sanatorium. Marcel is brought back to earth, so to speak, and sees behind the masks of Parisian show and snobbery to the underlying reality of mortal flesh, transience and passing away. And it is only then, the author seems to imply, that Marcel is ready, at last, after many thousands of pages questing for the perfect work of art, to renounce his elite romantic pretensions and acknowledge that real art is an *art of flesh*—a literary transubstantiation of those contingent, fragile, carnal and seemingly inconsequential moments that our conscious will is wont to consign to oblivion (one recalls Merleau-Ponty on Da Vinci above). Marcel can finally assume his vision of “Combray and its surrounding world taking shape and solidity out of a cup of tea.”³⁶

word “But” is all important here. The full passage reads as follows: “But to return to my own case, I thought more modestly of my book and it would be inaccurate even to say that I thought of those who would read it as ‘my’ readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be ‘my’ readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician at Combray used to offer his customers—it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves. So that I should not ask them to praise me or to censure me, but simply to tell me whether ‘it really is like that,’ I should ask them whether the words that they read within themselves are the same as those which I have written ...” Ibid., 508. The author dies unto himself so as to be reborn in and through his readers. Marcel’s literary *metanoia* is complete. The die is cast. This ultimate epiphany expresses itself in a series of descriptions of writing as discovery and disclosure—midwifery, pregnancy, child-birth, mining, incubation, detection, listening, diving, excavation, repetition, revelation. Indeed it confirms Samuel Beckett’s own conclusion that for Proust, “the only fertile research is excavatory.” Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 25. The old romantic delusion of art as some Fiat of omnipotence gives way to a more humble profession. To an aesthetics of passion rather than imposition, of receptivity rather than volition, of humility rather than hubris. Epiphany as anaphany. In a world, ana-aesthetics.

And what do we readers learn from Penelope? What do we stand to gain, if anything, from our traversals of the Joycean and Proustian imaginaries? Less closure and consolation, I would wager, than keen vigilance and excitement before the open interplay between literature and life. Traversing the epiphanies of Marcel and Proust, something about our own sensibilities as readers is more finely attuned, just as something about our imaginations is more enhanced and amplified, graciously opened to new possibilities of being. After such odysseys the world we return to is, surely, never quite the same.

³⁶ Cited in Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 3f.

Julia Kristeva lays special emphasis on the San Marco epiphany, recalling as it does an earlier chapter in the novel, and an earlier moment in Marcel's life, when he visits Venice with Maman. Kristeva interprets this pivotal episode as central to the understanding of Proust's eucharistic aesthetic, combining as it does the various epiphanies of Maman reading, the madeleine and the stumbling stone. Examining various drafts of Proust's novels and a number of notebook entries on John Ruskin whose "religious aesthetic" greatly influenced him, Kristeva traces Proust's growing fascination with liturgical terms, such as "transubstantiation," "real presence" and the incarnational mystery of "time embodied" and "time resurrected."³⁷ She herself uses these same terms, deployed in the Catholic eucharistic rite, to describe the way in which Proust's characters relate to themselves, each other and the textual style of the novel through a mystical model of *cris-crossing times*:

As combinations of past and present impressions, the characters contaminate one another and fuse their contours; a *secret depth* attracts them. Like the madeleine soaked in tea, they allow themselves to be absorbed into Proust's style. These Proustian heroes and visions will eventually leave us with a singular and bizarre taste that is pungent and invigorating. It is the taste of the sense of time, of *writing as transubstantiation*.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 101. Kristeva comments interestingly on Proust's fascination with the Catholic Eucharist and links it with his aesthetic interest in John Ruskin: "For Proust, who was in search of the real presence of signs, the Mass described as taking place in 'the cathedrals that are the greatest and most original expression of French genius' proved to be a living example of the experience sought by his emerging aesthetic. The religion of the 'living God' was thoroughly attractive, and it was the primary source of Proust's interest in Ruskin ... Proust was sincerely disturbed by anticlerical laws and by the general anticlericalism of governing bodies. At the same time, he recognized that the *écoles libres* held a sectarian view of freemasons and Jews and noted that clericalism itself 'had completely freed itself from the dogmas of the Catholic religion ... The Christian spirit ... (has) nothing to do with the partisan spirit which we seek to destroy.'" With this in mind we see that John Ruskin (1819–1900) was the writer through whom Proust felt he could reinvigorate the religious aesthetic (or the aestheticized religion, for therein lay the entire question) in a modern and progressive fashion." Ibid., 100–101. Kristeva goes on to argue that Ruskin's seduction, was "aesthetic *as well as* religious." When Proust outlined his nascent conception of life as "real life" and artistic experience as a real presence, as "time embodied" and a "transubstantiation," he relied on this confirmed socialist, this admired or challenged modern man." Ibid., 101.

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

Kristeva goes on to cite many scenes which elaborate on this sacramental idiom of transubstantiation in terms of “translation,” “incarnation,” “metaphor” and “superimposition.”³⁹ For Proust it is the task of the writer to “search for an object” in which “each hour of our life hides,” for he believes that each time we achieve such a task we resuscitate those hidden moments in the form of epiphanies. In his writings on the aesthetics of Ruskin and Male, for example, Proust identifies two particular such moments, a bit of toast that will become a “madeleine” and a Venetian paving-stone: namely, two of the key epiphanies of *In Search of Lost Time*. Commenting on the example of the paving stone in San Marco Cathedral, Kristeva writes: “Tripping on the stone and then stumbling would thus be a way of having faith in the sacred. Indeed the sacred is made of stone: a ‘living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious’(1 Pet 2: 4–5)... The cornerstone, along with its manifestations in Proust’s writings, is thus presented as a sign of the cult of Jesus, as the real presence of essence. The cornerstone appears to have been Proust’s underlying motif, for between the cathedrals and the Mass ... Proust wished to fathom the mystery of ‘transubstantiation.’ He managed to do so by ... clearing his own path through everyday sensations, and by acknowledging an eroticism that influenced and increasingly overwhelmed the future narrator’s involuntary memory.”⁴⁰ Or again, “In contact with the ‘living stone,’ he (Marcel) himself becomes a ‘living stone,’ a ‘stream of light,’ a participant in the sacred, in ‘transubstantiation.’”⁴¹

Proust himself, of course, describes the coming together of different times and scenes as both “metaphor” and “resurrection.” And for Proust these terms are curiously allied if not identical. Both involve the translation of one thing in terms of another. True art, Marcel comes to realize, is not a matter of progressively depicting a series of objects or events (“describing one after another the

³⁹ Ibid., 102, 106, 108, 133, etc.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁴¹ Ibid., 108. Kristeva cites this telling passage from Proust’s *Contre Sainte-Beuve*: “Crossing a courtyard I came to a standstill among the glittering uneven paving-stones ... In the depth of my being I felt the flutter of a past that I did not recognize; it was just as I set foot on a certain paving-stone that this feeling of perplexity came over me. I felt an invading happiness, I knew that I was going to be enriched by that *purely personal thing, a past impression, a fragment of life in unsullied preservation* (Suddenly, I was flooded by a stream of light). It was the sensation underfoot that I had felt on the smooth, slightly uneven pavement of the baptistery of Saint Mark’s.” Ibid., 107. It is interesting that the other two novels under consideration here also end with touch-stones of a telling kind: the rock of the lighthouse which Mr. Ramsay touches in *To the Lighthouse* and the rock of Gibraltar where Molly’s final anamnetic fantasy concludes.

innumerable objects which at a given moment were present at a particular place”); it occurs only when the writer “takes two different objects” and “states the connection between them.”⁴² And here we return to Merleau-Ponty’s logic of sacramental perception. For it is the identification of “unique connections” and hidden liaisons between one thing and another that enables the writer to translate the book of life (that “exists already in each one of us”) into the book of art.⁴³ This is how Marcel puts it: “truth—and life too—can be attained by us only when, by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, with a metaphor.”⁴⁴ That Marcel privileges figures of

⁴² Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, 290.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 290. Gilles Deleuze makes the point in his *Proust and Signs* (London: Athlone Press, 2000) that Proust’s epiphanic experience of “essences” requires the “style” of art and literature to be brought to expression. Proust speaks here of “a qualitative difference in the way that the world looks to us, a difference that, if there were no such thing as art, would remain the eternal secret of each man.” Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 3, trans. Montcrieff and Kilmartin (Vintage, 2000), 895. In *Time Regained* Proust famously describes the move from the inner secret essence within each life to the style of literary art an act of “translation.”

Deleuze refers to a “final quality at the heart of the subject” due to the fact that the essence “implicates, envelops, wraps itself up in the subject” (Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 43) and so doing constitutes the unique subjectivity of the individual. In short, essences may be said to individualize by being caught or inscribed in subjects in what Proust referred to as a “divine capture.” Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 1, trans. Montcrieff and Kilmartin (Vintage, 2000), 350. The epiphanic translation of essence is also described by Proust as a “perpetual recreation of the primordial elements of nature” (*ibid.*, 906), implying that the essence retrieves the birth of time itself at the beginning of time. Invoking the neo-Platonic idea of *complicatio*—referring to an original enveloping of the many in the One prior to the unfolding of time (*explicatio*), Deleuze suggests that it is to this original timeless time, complicated within essence and revealed to the artist, that Proust points when he writes of “time regained.” And, one might add, it also has echoes of Leibniz’s view that each created monad represents the whole created world. Is this not close to what Proust is getting at when he writes of “Combray and its surrounding world taking shape and solidity out of a cup of tea.” *Ibid.*, 51. But in Deleuze’s reading of Proust, essence can only recapture this original birth of the world through the “style” of art—expressing that “continuous and refracted birth,” that “birth regained” in a substance (words, colors, sound) rendered adequate. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 46.

I think this can be linked with Walter Benjamin’s suggestion that Proust’s involuntary memory is “closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory,” for it is only when we can forget conventional time that we are open to the capture or recall of originary timeless time. Following Proust’s hint that “the only true pleasures are the one’s we have lost” (Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, 222), Benjamin defines the root of Proust’s “elegiac happiness” in terms of “the eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original, the first happiness” which occurs in

resurrection and transubstantiation in this work of metaphor is once again a confirmation of what I am calling—in Proust no less than in Joyce—a sacramental aesthetic.

But let us say a little more about the famous “The Trip to Venice” episode which follows immediately after the death of Albertine. The scene opens with a golden angel on San Marco campanile “announcing” a certain “joy.” Several themes are tightly woven into this short chapter to “reaffirm Proust’s notion of art as transubstantiation.”⁴⁵ Combray and Venice, childhood and

literature. Ibid., 200. Benjamin, like Deleuze, argues that the Proustian translation of essences—which I call epiphany—is only available through the mediation of literature. Indeed Benjamin goes so far as to claim that “the image of Proust is the highest physiognomic expression which the irresistibly growing discrepancy between life and literature was able to assume.” Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust” in idem, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and with an intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (Pimlico, London, 1999), 197. Proust’s use of literary metaphor extended the usual understanding of this trope to mean not just one thing standing for another—a notion deconstructed by Paul De Man’s famous reading of Proust—but one thing standing for the world. Or as Benjamin put it, “an experienced event is finite” but an involuntarily “remembered event is infinite because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it.” Ibid., 198. Commenting on the final meeting between Marcel and Mlle de Saint-Loup, described by Proust in terms of the “star-shaped crossroads” image, Thomas Gunn writes: “Thus the metaphoric, and expressive universe is created, which ... combines unity and diversity and every element is able to express any other. It is only in remembering and writing that metonymy is transmuted into metaphor. However, this is no longer a metaphor that aims to exclude contingency and metonymy but a metaphor constituted entirely by chance but raised to the level of metaphor with the potential to express the whole world.” Thomas Gunn, “On Proust’s Spiritual Exercises,” Seminar Paper, UCD, March 2005.

By contrast, my own reading of epiphany and transubstantiation as a two-way crossover between literature and life follows the more hermeneutic reading of Paul Ricoeur (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 2 [University of Chicago Press, 1985]) and Julia Kristeva (*Time and Sense*). As Ricoeur puts it, Marcel’s “decision to write has the capacity to transpose the extra-temporal character of the original vision into the temporality of the resurrection of time lost” (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, 145); and so doing it opens up a return journey to the life of the reader, refigured by the text towards new possibilities of being in the lived world. The reading of the text invites the reader to repeat the ‘spiritual exercises’ performed by the narrator in and through the text, so that “the process of composition, of configuration, is not completed in the text but in the reader and under this condition makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative.” Paul Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood (New York: Routledge, 1991), 26. In short, the hermeneutic reading espoused by Ricoeur, Kristeva and myself construes epiphany as a double translation between life and literature. Proustian translation would thus take the form of a bilateral ‘transversal’ from life to literature and from literature to life. This seems faithful to Proust’s own chiasmic image of the “star-shaped crossroad” where “roads converge ... from the most diverse crossroads.” Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, 502.

⁴⁵ Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 112.

adulthood, France and Italy, and the two distinct temporal sensations of past and present “condensed into a metaphor.” The scene plays out a dream of death and rebirth. “Death plays a role in this condensation. A reference to the grandmother’s death echoes Albertine’s more recent disappearance, which is now ready to be internalized and transformed into the innermost depths of writing.”⁴⁶ Recalling the mother’s presence under the window, the narrator confesses an impression of “getting closer and closer to the essence of something secret.”⁴⁷ Kristeva reads this visit to San Marco as pivotal to the entire development of the novel. It is, she claims, a crucial station in the initiatory journey between “The Death of the Cathedrals” chapter and the concluding volume, *Time Regained*, comprising what she calls a “voyage toward a *living* meaning.”⁴⁸ This is how she interprets the scene: “The mystery of this incarnate Venice resides in the mother’s presence ... the incorporation of mother and city ... A strange fusion is established between the mother’s body and Venice’s body. Sitting and reading underneath the pointed arches of an ogival window, the mother inscribes herself in the beautiful stones of Saint Mark’s. The window is identified with ‘a love which stopped only where there was no longer any corporeal matter to sustain it, on the surface of her impassioned gaze ... It says to me the thing that touches me more than anything else in the world: ‘I remember your mother so well.’ Through the magic of this infiltration, the Venetian window becomes the matter sustaining maternal love—the window *is* the love for the mother. The same process applies to the baptistery, where we find devoted women who appear to have been taken right out of a Carpaccio painting: “She (the mother) has her place reserved there as immutably as a mosaic.”⁴⁹

The word “fusion” here is telling, I suspect, given the French association with brewing beverages, e.g. the *infusion* of Linden tea in the madeleine episode. So that we might say that mystical fusion and liquid fusion brush shoulders across memory and time. Nor is it insignificant that Marcel’s anamnestic retrieval of the Venice baptistery in the epiphany of the Guermantes’s paving stone, is contiguous with the related recall of Maman reading the story of Francois le Champi and his foster mother, *Madeleine* Blanchet: a mystical–maternal association which

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Kristeva makes much of.⁵⁰ Kristeva concludes her psychoanalytic reading by suggesting that the Venice scene is best understood as an “incarnation founded on the love between a son and his mother.”⁵¹ She is well aware of the Marian and Catholic connotations of this Madonna and Child imaginary (analogous perhaps to the Mrs. Ramsay and James relationship in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*) and deems it highly significant that Proust redrafted the chapter several times and was revising it right up to his death, as witnessed in certain deathbed notes to Celeste Albaret—e.g. “cross out everything that occurs before my arrival with my mother in Venice.” Hurried by his final illness, Proust concentrated on communicating his own ‘aesthetic credo’ in this pivotal episode, which, for Kristeva, expresses itself in “the integration of the spiritual theme with the sensual theme, which includes the love for the mother in the celebration of Venice.”⁵²

Proust chose ultimately to emphasise the “interpenetration between Venice and his mother, between the angel’s light and the body,” and this choice “endures until the final typescript, inviting us to consider the trip to Venice “as an apotheosis of the madeleine and paving-stone episodes.”⁵³ For Kristeva, accordingly, Venice powerfully assumes the mystical role of a “sensual and symbolic Orient,” a city that becomes “maternal and thus stresses its own incarnation.”⁵⁴ We shall return to such ‘Oriental’ allusions in our discussion of Woolf below. This, concludes Kristeva, is the “cornerstone” of Proust’s entire eucharistic aesthetic, treating Venice as a “world within a world” (Proust’s words), the very character of “time embodied.” In this manner the visit to Saint Mark’s Baptistery may be read as the crucial link between the “erotic *bindungsroman*”—running from Maman and Gilberte to Albertine—and the annunciation of epiphanies in the “final pensive pages” of the novel.

But Venice is not the last station on Marcel’s journey; and Maman is not the last object of his affections. On the contrary, by the end of the novel it seems that Maman has been accepted as the “lost object” par excellence, prompting him to move from an aesthetic of melancholy to one of mourning and resurrection. As the novel progresses I believe that Marcel moves increasingly beyond the various transfers of amorous want and returns to the Madonna of the ordinary universe:

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3–22, 116. Kristeva also identifies revealing nominal associations here with Marie Madeleine in the Scriptures.

⁵¹ Ibid., 114.

⁵² Ibid., 115.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 116.

Francoise. The menial maid of the opening chapters now returns as “the Michelangelo of our kitchen,”⁵⁵ a quotidian creature capable of transforming a farmyard chicken into a delicious family feast of *poulet roti*. I would even suggest that by the final volume of the novel, *Time Regained*, Francoise, as everyday cook and seamstress, has become Marcel’s model for writing the novel. The narrator now confesses, after all, that “(he) should work beside her almost as she worked herself.”⁵⁶ This conjecture is confirmed, I believe, if we recall how Francoise is compared to Giotto’s *Caritas* in her being as well as her appearance (*pace* Swann) in the opening volume.⁵⁷ Replacing the endless litany of elusive metonymic muses—from Maman and Gilberte to Mlle de Guermantes and Albertine—Francoise re-emerges in the end as a post-muse of the everyday microcosm. The ethereal and unreal Albertine transmigrates back, as it were, into the Francoise of flesh and blood. The death of Marcel’s exotic fantasy lover is the occasion for the rebirth of the forgotten scullery maid. Curiously, it is Francoise’s very qualities of patient craft and endurance, grounded in a sharp sense of mortality and earthiness, that Walter Benjamin celebrates in his famous concluding image of Proust: “for the second time there rose a scaffold on which the artist, his head thrown back, painted the creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: the sickbed on which Marcel Proust consecrates the countless pages which he covered with his handwriting . . . to the creation of his microcosm.”⁵⁸ Kitchens and cathedrals, dying and creating—earthly frailty becomes the portal to art. Moreover, it is also Benjamin who would observe—whether thinking of the culinary seamstress Francoise or not—that “the eternal is in any case far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea.”⁵⁹

So where does this leave Maman? I suspect that by the time Marcel recalls Maman in the final Paris epiphanies—which trigger the involuntary memories of both the Venice visit and the bedtime reading of *Francois le Champi*—it is less a question of ‘fusion’ than of trans-fusion. Or of “transversal,” as Proust himself uses the term in Marcel’s final contemplative musings on time

⁵⁵ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 2, 23.

⁵⁶ Idem, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, 432.

⁵⁷ Idem, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 1, 95.

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” 210.

⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 69. One might also mention here John Caputo’s notion of holy “quotidianism” in his *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 155f.

embodied and regained. In other words, rather than embracing a form of immediate or magical union, Proust introduces the preposition *trans* to capture the sense of both identity and difference over time. Transfusion, transversal, translation, transubstantiation.

But a final word on Françoise. If Françoise is indeed Marcel's ultimate guide, it is perhaps no accident that the novel becomes fragmented in a number of different directions in *Time Regained* just when it appeared to reach closure and become whole (in the manner of some Hegelian teleology). Resisting the Hegelian temptation, the book remains undecided as to whether Marcel's projected novel is Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* or not. That is for the reader to decide. Indeed, it is curious how original readings of Proust (those of Ricoeur, Deleuze, Levinas, Benjamin, Ginette, Beckett, De Man, Blanchot, Kristeva, Nussbaum, Murdoch, Girard) manage in almost every case to *translate* the novel into the discourse of the reader—the ultimate definition of an 'open text,' or what we might also call, taking our cue from Merleau-Ponty's passage on eucharistic reciprocity and reversibility, a sacramental text.

So we might conclude that just as the marginalized Molly eventually returns as Stephen's promissory mentor, the previously mocked Françoise is now retrospectively restored as Marcel's most reliable guide. It was this housemaid, we recall, who was always the one pointing Marcel away from literature-for-literature and in the direction of literature-for-life. She was the mundane servant who, "like all unpretentious people," had a no-nonsense approach to literary vainglory and saw through all Marcel's literary rivals as mere "copiators"⁶⁰ It was Françoise, Marcel now realizes, who had "a sort of instinctive comprehension of literary work" capable of "divining (Marcel's) happiness and respecting (his) toil."⁶¹ And so Marcel ultimately resolves to labor as she did, stitching and threading from bits and pieces of cloth, "constructing my book, I dare not say ambitiously like a cathedral, but quite simply like a dress."⁶² The Muse is displaced by the maid. The fantasy persona of Albertine, the main source of Marcel's tormented jealousies and deceptions, is finally replaced by the seamstress of the real.

In this respect, Françoise—no less than Molly—is a reincarnation of Penelope. Proust operates a return from heroic wanderings to the weavings of the everyday. The marvels of literature are no longer to be sought in monumental

⁶⁰ Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6, 509.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

basilicas of grandiose design (or in great battle scenes—the novel is set in 1916) but in the intricate weft and warp of ordinary existence. And in this embrace of writing as weaving we find the literary trope of “metaphor” being allied to that of “metonymy.” The transformative and synthetic power of metaphor, which turns contingency into essence, is here supplemented by a second moment which returns essence to contingency, that is, to metonymy as a process of displacement and replacement, of humble stitching and re-stitching, of one thing ceding itself to another in the quotidian play of existence. This double process is what we have been calling transubstantiation: the reversible translation of word into flesh and flesh into word.

This new understanding of writing as a stitching of webs, tapestries, textures, texts, leads Marcel to the insight that he is the “bearer” of a work that has been “entrusted” to him and which he will, in time, “deliver” into other hands (that of the reader). The connotations of pregnancy and birth are pronounced. This intuition of the basic inter-textuality of writing comes to Marcel as a sort of deliverance from his own long fear of death. Affirming that genuine literature is a form of messianic “repetition” or remembering forward—from natality to mortality and back to natality again—Marcel finds himself “indifferent to the idea of death.”⁶³ Learning to die is learning to be reborn. “By dint of repetition,” as he says, “this fear had gradually been transformed into a calm confidence. So that if in those early days, as we have seen, the idea of death had cast a shadow over my loves ... the remembrance of love had helped me not to fear death. For I realized that dying was not something new, but that on the contrary since my childhood I had already died many times.”⁶⁴ Invoking the scriptural passage about the seed

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. The point is not that epiphanies never happened before the library scene; it is that Marcel was not yet ready to see and hear them for what they really were. He had not yet, to cite Deleuze, been fully trained in his “apprenticeship to signs.” And it is not until such apprenticeship is accomplished, through his recapitulative awareness of “being-towards-death” in the Library, that Marcel can finally acknowledge the preciousness of even the most banal and discarded events through the lens of time recaptured (*le temps retrouvé*). Art is less a matter of romantic creation than of epiphanic recreation. For, as Marcel asks, “was not the re-creation by the memory of impressions which had then to be deepened, illumined, transformed into equivalents of understanding, was not this process one of the conditions, almost the very essence of the work of art as I had just now in the library conceived it?” Ibid., 525. Such epiphanic understanding marks the moment of *anagnoresis*.

Otherwise put, time has to be lost before it can be recovered. Unless the seed dies, accidents cannot be retrieved as essences, contingencies as correspondences, obsessions as epiphanies. Only through the veil of mortality, can the sacred radiate across the profane world which the arrogant repudiate as ineligible for art. It is only after he renounces his Promethean will-to-write that Marcel’s

dying in order to flourish, Marcel's authorial self now faces the possibility of being posthumously reborn again as another, as one of those many harbingers of new life, epitomized by Mlle de Saint Loup or, more generally, by his future readers. Natality re-emerges from mortality. So that the final passage of the novel, recalling the dead Albertine and the dying count Charlus, invokes an enveloping movement of Time which swings back and forth, up and down, carrying us towards vertiginous and terrifying summits, higher than the steeples of cathedrals, before eventually returning us to earth again, "descending to a great depth within ..." In short, if time is all too wont to raise mortals "to an eminence from which suddenly they fall,"⁶⁵ might we not say that the Proustian acknowledgment of the

previously in-experienced experience is re-experienced in all its neglected richness (and the greater the neglect the greater the richness). It is precisely the rejected and remaindered events of Marcel's existence which return now, in and through literature, as 'resurrections.' The three personas of Marcel, as character, as narrator and as author, seem to crisscross here for the first time, like three Proustian Magi recognizing that the deepest acts of communion are to be found in the most fortuitous acts of ordinary perception.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 530–531. So what do these Proustian conclusions tell us about epiphany? They indicate, I suggest, that epiphany is a process which is 'achieved' in a series of double moves. First, that of mortality and natality. Second, that of metaphor (the translation of one thing into another) and metonymy (the disclosure of new meaning through the accidental contiguity of contingent things). Third, that of constructing and deconstructing. Moreover, it is in this last double-gesture that the text surpasses itself and finally reaches out towards its future readers. For if we begin with the notion that literature 'constructs' an epiphany based on the recreation of impressions recalled in involuntary memory, the literary text in turn 'deconstructs' itself in order to allow for the recreation of the reader. That is how Penelope's tapestry and Françoise's sewing works—stitching and unstitching, weaving and unweaving, endlessly. In a form of hermeneutic arc, the text configures an epiphany already prefigured by a life which is ultimately refigured by the reader. (See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, especially the section entitled "The Traversed Remembrance of Things Past" in Chapter 4). And this reader is one who not only co-creates the text with the author but re-creates it again as he/she returns from 'text to action.' So that if epiphany invites a first move from life to literature, it re-invites us come back again from literature to life. In both Proust and Joyce, it is indeed Penelope who has the last word.

Walter Benjamin identifies the Penelope motif of textuality in Proust thus: "For the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection." Benjamin, "The Image of Proust," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 202. Benjamin interprets this Penelope trope in terms of a textual process of weaving—unweaving, forgetting—remembering, composing—disrupting which manages to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary. Once again, Penelope's fidelity to the epiphanies of the everyday is affirmed: "Can we say that all lives, works and deeds that matter were never anything but the undisturbed unfolding of the most banal, most fleeting, most sentimental, weakest hour in the life of the one to whom they pertain." Ibid., 203. Or again: "Proust's most accurate, most convincing insights fasten on their objects as insects fasten on leaves, blossoms, branches, betraying nothing of their existence until a leap, a beating of wings, a vault, show the startled observer that

inevitability of this fall back into the ordinary universe enables fear to become love and literary delusion true writing?

Virginia Woolf

My third example of sacramental aesthetics is Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Mrs. Ramsey is also a mistress of the feast. Like Françoise before her, though in somewhat more urbane attire, Mrs. Ramsey is introduced in the first part of the novel as both cook and seamstress. She has a singular gift for "summoning together," for bringing couples into liaison, for holding her brood of eight children in maternal connection, and her husband in marriage. On the day we meet her, she has two main tasks: to give her son, James, some hope that he may sail to the lighthouse, and, secondly, to prepare a magnificent supper of *Boeuf en Daube* for her family and guests that evening.

But this is no ordinary boat trip and this is no ordinary meal. Mrs. Ramsey is frequently depicted by Woolf in mystical terms. Woolf's use of indirect discourse—*le style indirecte libre*—to convey what is going on in her various characters's minds gives the reader the impression, from the outset, that Mrs. Ramsey's soul is somehow porously interconnected with the scattered souls of those around her. And this sense of mysterious inter-being is confirmed in the last part of the novel when we find her devoted friend and painter, Lily Briscoe, recalling the same thoughts and qualities of Mrs. Ramsay herself (the term "unfathomably deep" for example, recurs in the minds of both, as do curiously

some incalculable individual life has imperceptibly crept into an alien world. The true reader of Proust is constantly jarred by small shocks." Ibid., 208. This emphasis on the microscopic and minuscule is repeated at the level of language itself where Proust, like Joyce, offers us a subatomic investigation of society in terms of exploring the reverberations and associations of the most everyday words and phrases, what Benjamin calls "a physiology of chatter." Ibid., 206. This reminds me, in turn, of Camus's observation that "all great deeds and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning. Great thoughts are often born on a street corner or in a restaurant's revolving door," (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, ed. G. Marino [New York: The Modern Library, 2004], 448), a passage followed by his curious eucharistic allusion to the finding in the "body, affection, creation" the "wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference on which (the rebel) feeds his greatness." Ibid., 478. I am also reminded here of the telling passage in Aristotle's *On the Parts of Animals* (645a,15–23) where he writes: "Every realm of nature is marvelous: and as Heraclitus, when the strangers who came to visit him found him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen and hesitated to go in, is reported to have bidden them not to be afraid to enter, as even in that kitchen divinities were present, so we should venture on the study of every kind of living thing without distaste; for each and all will reveal to us something natural and something beautiful."

sacred sentiments of “emptiness” as “fullness,” or the three “strokes” of the lighthouse beam which Mrs. Ramsay contemplates repeated in the three “strokes” of Lily’s brush on the white canvas). Virginia Woolf writes in her diary how she used this narrative voice as a “tunnelling process” deep into the minds of all her characters which would reach a point where they could all connect, have similar thoughts and all move to the same deep “rhythm.”⁶⁶ A rhythm which she describes as “resonant and porous, transmitting emotion without impediment ... creative, incandescent and undivided.”⁶⁷ Through this free indirect voice Woolf experiments with a “multi-personal representation of consciousness ... with synthesis as its aim.”⁶⁸

When dinner time eventually arrives, the tone is sacramental. We read how the gong announced solemnly, authoritatively, that all those scattered about (the house and garden) must “assemble in the dining room for dinner,”⁶⁹ and the meal unfolds accordingly as a eucharistic ritual. Mrs. Ramsay takes her place at the head of the table and assigns each person their proper seat. As she ministers the meal she presides over the assembly with a quasi-mystical sense of “being past everything, through everything, out of everything.”⁷⁰ The convened guests and family members unite around the candlelit dinner table:

Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candlelight, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily. Some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making

⁶⁶ Cited by Hillis Miller, in “The Rhythm of Creativity: *To The Lighthouse*,” in J. Hillis Miller, *Tropes, Parables, Performatives: Essays in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 159. I am very grateful to my colleagues in the Meaning and Transcendence Seminar at Boston College for several of the insights in this paper, in particular Mary-Joe Hughes, Dennis Taylor, Anne Davenport, Marty Cohen and Kevin Newmark.

⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (Hogarth Press), 102, cited in Hillis Miller, “The Rhythm of Creativity,” 169.

⁶⁸ Erich Auerbach, “The Brownstocking” in idem, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 536. See also 540, 552.

⁶⁹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 82.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there.⁷¹

There are many antagonisms and rivalries between different people at the table but Mrs. Ramsay contrives to deftly negotiate and mollify these differences, letting each person find their voice and making various marriage plans for various guests (Paul and Minta, Lily and Mr. Bankes), so by the end of the meal, everyone seems united in eucharistic communion. The messianic Mrs. Ramsay has worked her gracious magic on the gathering. The eschatological feast is at hand.

Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right ... just now she had reached security; she hovered like a hawk suspended; like a flag floated in an element of joy which filled every nerve of her body fully and sweetly, not noisily, solemnly rather, for it arose, she thought, looking at them all eating there, from husband, children and friends; all of which rising in this profound stillness (she was helping William Bankes to one very small piece more, and peered into the depths of the earthenware pot) seemed now for no special reason to stay there like a smoke, like a fume rising upwards, holding them safe together. Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity ... there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out ... in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling ... of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures ... The Boeuf en Daube was a perfect triumph.⁷²

Mrs. Ramsay's credo, as Lily will remember it in the final section of the novel, was "of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape ... Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said."

But this epiphany of union is shrouded with irony. Life does not stand still. A sense of elegiac doom hovers over the proceedings. In the midst of her musing, Mrs. Ramsay is caught by the awareness that "this cannot be." She finds

⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

⁷² Ibid., 104–105.

herself “dissociating herself from the moment.”⁷³ And for us readers it is equally short-lived. Within pages Mrs. Ramsay is dead and the novel descends, in the middle section, “Time Passes,” into an unconsoling exposé of transience and war. We also learn that Mrs. Ramsay’s ideal match-making has come to naught and that two of her most beautiful children have perished during the war. In retrospect, the “smoke” rising from the dinner table takes on connotations of a sacrificial offering. The paschal feast seems less a Passover than a passing-away. But this is not the end of the story. And we are still left asking, in the third part of the novel, what Mrs. Ramsay meant when she spoke of the “the thing is made that endures.” Was she thinking of the ‘perfect’ meal itself remembered by those who live after her and finally make their way to the lighthouse? Or of the work of art wherein Lily will resurrect Mrs. Ramsay and enable her to endure in the ‘finished’ portrait? Or of the novel itself which invites us, the readers, to revive Mrs. Ramsay’s eucharistic feat in the very act of reading and rereading?

The connection between things *lived* and things *made* brings us to the heart of the rapport between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily. Here we encounter a complex mysticism at work. Lily’s final brush “stroke” is, as mentioned above, a repetition of the “stroke” of the lighthouse with which Mrs. Ramsay intimately identifies. This identification occurs in the first part of the novel when Mrs. Ramsay sits down late one night when her children are in bed and, taking out her knitting, feels a strange peace as she unites with the world outside her window. A “wedge-shaped core of darkness” deep inside her, we are told, merges with the beam of light emitted by the lighthouse far out at sea. To the third stroke of the light on water, her own “unfathomable deep” blends with the depths of the ocean. We read that “often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light.”⁷⁴ Losing

⁷³ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 62. The references to Lily leaping into a “gap” and finding the third, final stroke which draws the “line, there in the centre” is interesting when we consider the image of the “wedge,” so intimately and recurrently associated with Mrs. Ramsay. This trope carries connotations of a deep inner emptiness or nothingness, as in references to “the wedge of darkness” or “the wedge-shaped core of darkness,” which holds out the possibility of some mystical fullness or completion. When we recall that Lily has been trying to compose a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay and James in the form of a “purple triangle,” one might be tempted to construe Lily’s finishing brush stroke as the line which completes the two-sided wedge, the missing third side so to speak, after which she can say, “it was done ... I have had my vision.” Ibid., 209. Interestingly, this vision coincides with the exact moment that the missing father, Mr. Ramsay, lands on the rock of the lighthouse and finds acknowledgement in the hearts of his children, James and Cam. He is, so to speak, finally accepted back into the picture of mother and child. This is the moment that Lily, back on shore before her painting,

herself in the things she beheld, leaving behind the “fret, the hurry, the stir” of her anxious self, there rises to her lips “some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity.” And it is in this moment of mystical communion with the surrounding universe, as deep calls upon deep, that Mrs. Ramsay adds: “We are in the hands of the Lord.”

No sooner has she uttered this prayer, however, than she revokes it: “But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said that?” Who indeed. And why feel so ashamed to have fallen back into the fold of common prayer? Because, apparently, it is somehow unearned, too easy, too quick. “She had been trapped into saying something she did not mean.” A “lie,” Mrs. Ramsay calls it, referring no doubt to the lure of an otherworldly deity, some Supreme Omnipotent Cause aloof and detached from the world of flesh, adjudicating our destinies. Resisting the temptation to escape into the hands of such a convenient God, Mrs. Ramsay embraces another kind of mysticism, where one is “alone with the alone” (as the Upanishads say), and where the natural universe of ordinary things is loved rather than abandoned: “It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leaned to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one’s being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover.”⁷⁵

suddenly finds her “razor’s edge” balance between “art and Mr. Ramsay.” The final “cut” is made, the third stroke applied to the wedge, the triangle completed and the work done. The novel concluded. This charged figurative imagery of wedge and triangle may be read, I suggest in aesthetic, psychoanalytic or Trinitarian terms, or all three combined. It is interesting how the same Vedantic trope of the “razor’s edge” was also used by Somerset Maugham as title for one of his novels. I am grateful to my colleague, Frank Clooney, for this link.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 63–64. This approximates to the Buddhist and Hindu view that the sacred is in all sentient beings. See the teaching, for example, of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche in this regard: “Pure perception is to recognize the Buddha-nature in all sentient beings and to see primordial purity and perfection in all phenomena.” Cited in John Makransky, *Awakening Through Love* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 92. The sacramental reference for all natural things is also evidenced in certain Biblical texts, such as the Song of Songs (which Mrs. Ramsay’s vision echoes in the final lines just cited), but also in the mystical nature visions of certain Christian mystics like St Francis, and Hildegard of Bingen (see in particular her notion of *veriditas*, or the divine “greening” of all things), not to mention G. M. Hopkins or Teilhard De Chardin. Woolf’s English Protestant culture may not, however, have made her familiar with such writings. Either way, Woolf’s mysticism, however ‘Asiatic’ its allusions at times, remains non-denominational and non-confessional. One might even say non-theistic or post-theistic (or ana-theistic as we shall suggest in our conclusion below).

But what is this post-theistic mysticism that Mrs. Ramsay incarnates? In a classic admission shortly before her death, Virginia Woolf spoke of the sudden shocks and surprises of life as tokens of “some real thing behind appearances.” She intimated that “behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern” and that all human beings are somehow “connected with this.” In short, she espoused the view that the “whole world is a work of art.” But no sooner had she made this confession than she added: “But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God.”⁷⁶ What does she mean by this triple denial? It would seem that Woolf is implying that the ‘pattern,’ the ‘real thing,’ is not *made* but *given*. It is not the product of creators—human or divine—but an intimation of some anonymous unfathomable love which connects all beings behind and beneath the appearances of agency and artifice. And this is, of course, where the problematic role of ‘art’ informs the novel, represented as it is by Lily Briscoe’s attempt to capture Mrs. Ramsay in a painting. For how can art—be it Lily’s painting, Mr. Carmichael’s poem, or Woolf’s own novel—ever hope to represent this miracle of ordinary life? Confronting her canvas, Lily too, we are told, is aware of something not herself, some ‘other thing’ which is ‘truth’ or ‘reality,’ something both there in the lampshade and also timelessly abstracted from it, a thing emerging “at the back of appearances.’ There is, Lily realizes, something suspect in art’s attempt to reduce the contingency and transience of life to “beautiful pictures” and “beautiful phrases.” What Lily needs to get hold of is the “jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it had been *made* anything.” She seeks to achieve that “razor’s edge of balance between two opposite forces,” namely art and life.⁷⁷ The problem therefore arises: how can art imagine the mystery of flesh without betraying it?

Let us take a closer look. Here we return to Lily’s final gesture. In the

⁷⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, cited by Martin Corner, “Mysticism and Atheism in *To the Lighthouse*,” in *Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse*, ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 43. In a diary entry of 9 May, 1926, Woolf notes how she had quarreled with her husband, Leonard, who “disliked the irrational Xtian in me.” Virginia Woolf, *Diaries*, vol. 3, 801.

⁷⁷ The metaphor of the “razor’s edge” is a famous verse from Katha Upanishads, 3, 16. Here is the full passage, concerning the discovery of the true mystical sense (Atman–Brahman): “Arise! Awake! Pay attention,/When you’ve attained your wishes! A razor’s sharp edge is hard to cross –/That, poets say, is the difficulty of the path.” And the passage goes on: “When a man perceives it,/fixed and beyond the immense,/He is freed from the jaws of death” (verse 15); or, again, if a person “proclaims this great secret ... during a meal for the dead,/it will lead him to eternal life” (verse 17). eucharistic echoes abound. One might also cite here the mystical notions of immanent–transcendence to be found in Hindu sages like Ramana and Ramakrishna or Christian-Hindu swamis like Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths.

closing sequence of the book, Lily is seeking a particular stroke of her paint brush which will, in a “leap” into the gap between art and life, somehow bring the two together, make the impossible possible; just as Mrs. Ramsay found that special “stroke of light,” beamed from the lighthouse at night, with which she could connect. Lily eventually has her ‘vision,’ as she sacrifices the goal of some pure, transcendental aesthetic for an aesthetic of ordinary things. And it is just as her anamnetic portrait of Mrs. Ramsay is being completed that she expresses this sentiment of disclosing the marvel of the everyday: “One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that’s a chair, that’s a table, and yet at the same time, it’s a miracle, it’s an ecstasy. The problem might be solved after all.”

Everything, it seems, revolves on this reversibility of higher and lower case It/it. The miracle consists in the transubstantiation of the higher into the lower, the extraordinary into the ordinary, transcendence into immanence. And vice versa. It is a moment both kenotic (the emptying of Word into flesh) and eucharistic (the celebration of the infinite in the finite bread and wine of quotidian experience).

It is the same “It” that Virginia Woolf writes of in February 1926, while she was composing this section of the novel, as she crossed Russell Square in London: “I see the mountains in the sky: the great clouds; and the moon which has risen over Persia; I have a great and astonishing sense of something there, which is ‘it.’” This “it” is something “out there,” some “other thing” beyond one’s will and personality. It is at once “frightening and exciting,” for it refuses to be humanized by our subjective projections and names, including the anthropomorphic name of ‘God.’⁷⁸ But for Lily Briscoe to achieve this aesthetic ‘vision,’ for her to effect the final brush stroke, draw “the line there, in the centre” of her canvas, so that she can finally say “It was done; it was finished,” for Lily to do this she first has to acknowledge the reality of Mrs. Ramsay’s death and absence. She has to let go her ideal *imago*, accept the cut of mortality and take the leap into the gap left behind.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary*, cited in Corner, “Mysticism and Atheism,” 48.

⁷⁹ See Hillis Miller, “The Rhythm of Creativity,” 152–153: “The goal Mrs. Ramsay reaches in the novel is death. The novel turns on the vanishing of her consciousness from the world and from the lives of the other characters.” Hence the significance of the “Time Passes” section of the novel which serves as prelude to Lily Briscoe’s finally applying her finishing stroke to the painting in part 3: “the line that stands for the dead Mrs. Ramsay and substitutes for her, that replaces the missing shadow on the step cast by Mrs. Ramsay, the wedge-shaped core of darkness which had been present there when Lily began her painting and Mrs. Ramsay sat knitting the reddish-brown stocking and

In terms of the novel's characters this means allowing Mr. Ramsay's

reading to James." Ibid., 153. Hillis Miller extends his reading of Woolf's spiritual-aesthetic vision to her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, in chapter 7 of his *Fiction and Repetition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) subtitled "Repetition as the Raising of the dead." He points out that the narrator of this novel "remembers all and has a power of resurrecting the past in her narration ... She rescues (the various characters) from time past and presents them again in language to the reader. Narration itself is repetition." Ibid., 178–179. He compares Woolf's attitude here to that of Proust, whom he reminds us Woolf greatly admired, and he goes on to suggest that the "universal mind" is, for her, part of the characters's minds and that if one "descends deeply enough into any individual mind one reaches ultimately the general mind of the narrator ... Deep down the general mind and the individual mind become one. Both are the same side of the glass, and the glass vanishes." Ibid.,

181. This relates back to what Woolf calls her "great discovery" of "tunneling" which she describes thus: "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect." Woolf, cited in *ibid.*, 182. But Hillis Miller's thesis is that Woolf's narrative not only 'repeats' the past but 'resurrects' it in another form in the action of the novel. Ibid., 191. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Dalloway has, as she presides over her dinner party at the conclusion of the novel, the "gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment." Woolf, cited in *ibid.*, 193. But the later, like the former, fails as a single character to bring everything together as she wishes. The sense of communion is only momentary at best and is interrupted by the news of Septimus's suicide and by her recognition of the real "mystery" of the "privacy of the soul" triggered by her observing the old lady next door climbing her stairs to her room. Woolf, cited in *ibid.*, 196. Hence her sobering insight, again akin to Vedantic wisdom, that "death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the center which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death." Woolf, cited in *ibid.*, 197.

But Clarissa's recognition of her kinship with Septimus's death (Woolf describes her as Septimus's "double" in the preface to the Modern Library edition), is not the last word. The party ends and the various characters leave. It is the narrator who therefore serves to revive the past the pasts of the characters themselves in what Hillis Miller calls a "double resurrection." As he puts it: "The victory of the narrator is to rescue from death this moment and all the other moments of the novel in that All Soul's Day at a second power which is literature." Ibid., 199. In other words, literature as tunneling, preservation and repetition. The "creative power," as Woolf once remarked, "to bring the whole universe to order." Woolf, cited in *ibid.*, 201. For writing is the only action which exists "simultaneously on both sides of the mirror, within death and within life at once." Ibid. Whence Miller's intriguing conclusion: "The novel needs for its structural completeness two opposite but similar movements, Septimus's plunge into death and Clarissa's resurrection from the dead. *Mrs. Dalloway* is both of these at once: the entry into the realm of communication in death and the revelation of that realm in words which may be read by the living." Ibid. While he admits that the relationship between literature and life remains ultimately "undecidable" in Woolf, he ventures this bold hypothesis: "The possibility that repetition in narrative is the representation of a transcendent spiritual realm of reconciliation and preservation, a realm of the perpetual resurrection of the dead, is more straightforwardly proposed by Virginia Woolf than by most of her predecessors in English fiction." Ibid., 262. But I would suggest that to the double resurrection of the past repeated in the character's minds and the character's minds repeated in the narrator's universal mind might be added a third resurrection: the repetition of these two resurrections in the mind of the reader.

atheism to cut through Mrs. Ramsay's mysticism. Lily has to admit what is 'other' to her fused and nostalgic memory of Mrs. Ramsay whom she has been invoking for solace and reunion: "Oh Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay!" Mr. Ramsay is the "opposite force" which resists her retrieval of Mrs. Ramsay and compels Lily to take a leap from the "narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea ... into the waters of annihilation." Before she can finish her painting Lily has to accept that Mrs. Ramsay is *gone*, passed away, past; for only then can she recall her again, posthumously, through the gap of atheism, the caesura of separation, the final stroke that cuts, like a sword-blade, even as it reconnects. Reconnects what? Lily to memory, a future to the past. To put it in other terms, Mrs. Ramsay is the "lost object," the deceased savior-friend whom Lily must relinquish if she is to move from obsessive melancholy to a mourning which accepts the real. And for Lily it is Mr. Ramsay—atheist and empiricist, irritant and exigent—who represents this cutting edge of the reality principle. As Martin Corner observes: "Mr. Ramsay is an unwavering witness to the non-humanity of the world; he therefore represents to Lily that otherness which must somehow be got into the picture if it is not to be false."⁸⁰ Mr. Ramsay testifies to the "thing itself before it has been made anything" (by knitting, cooking, painting, dreaming, fictionalising). And this thing, it transpires, is a no-thing. It is that emptiness, that void, that "unfathomable deep" which haunts the imaginations of both Mrs. Ramsay and Lily, the "wedge of darkness" which has to be faced and acknowledged before it can well up into fullness and Lily can say: "empty it was not but full to the brim."⁸¹ But first the letting go ... The renunciation of the illusion of a grandiose revelation, be it of art, metaphysics or religion, which trumps the world of flesh and blood, denies the universe of little things. "The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark."⁸²

Here, I submit, we encounter a mysticism less of fusion than of equipoise, less of triumph than of that "razor's edge" balance between opposites, celebrated by the Vedic sages of the Upanishads (and certain Jewish and Christian mystics). In this regard, what we have been calling Lily's, and Woolf's, atheistic mysticism takes on a more positive valence, recalling as it does the Asiatic features of Lily's countenance (those "Chinese eyes" the narrator frequently refers to). For the letting go of Mrs. Ramsay and the harmonious memory of the opening meal is

⁸⁰ Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 50.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 161.

also a letting go of our image of the all-powerful ‘Lord’ who ‘saves us,’ namely, the anthropomorphic deity of Western myth and metaphysics. It is only in the letting go—in the kenosis of ‘truth’ emptying itself of Godhead—that Lily can complete her painting at the very moment that Mr. Ramsay fulfills Mrs. Ramsay’s dream of bringing their son James (and daughter Cam) to the Lighthouse. The passage is significant: “He rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall, for all the world, James thought, as if he were saying, ‘There is no God,’ and Cam thought, as if he were leaping into space, and they both rose to follow him as he sprang, lightly like a young man, holding his parcel, on to the rock.”⁸³ It is precisely at this moment of *grounding* that Lily, watching from the shore, draws her final stroke and says, like a certain deity on the Cross yielding up to death, “It is finished.” *Consumatum est*. A moment of death and rebirth, of letting go and gaining back. A time when, at last, “empty flourishes form into shape.”⁸⁴

The mystical allusions of this closing paragraph of the novel are resonant and deep. I believe they confirm Woolf’s numerous mentions in her autobiographical writings of a reality which goes beyond God to achieve its epiphany of the ordinary, a sentiment not unlike the move made by Advaita and Buddhist mysticism, which refuses to think transcendence apart from immanence, nor unlike the famous prayer of Meister Eckart that “God might rid him of God.” This mysticism *after God*, is, I suggest, an affirmation of a Eucharist of the everyday, of a sacrament of common ‘reality,’ of an epiphany of ‘It/it’ residing at the core of Woolf’s own vision. In short, Lily has now found her miracle “on a level with ordinary experience”—a world at once itself and yet simultaneously transfigured into what Woolf calls “a reality of a different order,”⁸⁵ a world

⁸³ Ibid., 207.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 180.

⁸⁵ Cited in Corner, “Mysticism and Atheism,” 51. Corner concludes as follows: “What is Virginia Woolf saying about atheism and its relationship to mysticism? As far as atheism is concerned, her central insight is that if it is to progress beyond the stage of the “little atheist” it must be a faithfulness, moral as well as theoretical, to the nonhumanity of the world. She presents it as a training of the whole person toward a comprehended truth, a truth which must be grasped emotionally as well as intellectually. And this is a process which involves risk; only when a person is able to leap from the pinnacle of the tower, away from whatever limited certainties are available—the self-protective ego, the familiar life—does the process achieve its fulfillment. And here a paradox appears which connects Mr. Ramsay with Lily, the atheist with the mystic. Without God, the leap ought to end in disaster, in the chaos of that void which Virginia Woolf evokes so powerfully in part 2 of *To the Lighthouse*. But those of her characters who succeed in facing the world nakedly and without evasion are shown to discover, mystically or otherwise, that they are not leaping into a void. Something emerges to meet them—the rock beneath Mr. Ramsay’s feet, the

poised on a razor's edge where opposites balance without collapsing into sameness.

Conclusion

So what is the significance of the fact that our three witnesses of sacramental imagination, Joyce, Proust and Woolf, are all agnostics, and that the three characters who best embody their aesthetic vision are women (Molly, Françoise and Lily). Is this not a different kind of eucharistic language to the one which informs our traditional male-dominated liturgies (where usually no women need apply)? This is surely a sacramental vision of a new sort, or at least of the old revisited otherwise. It deploys the poetic license of fiction to suspend confessional creeds and doctrines in order to offer "free variations" of transubstantiation, namely the reversible 'miracle' of word-made-flesh and flesh-made-word.

Recalling the canonical definition of transubstantiation as "the transforming of one substance into another," we may say that we have identified three main kinds in our readings above: (1) *intra-textual*, (2) *inter-textual*, and (3) *trans-textual*. As instances of the first kind we may cite the numerous examples of one character being transfused into another (Mrs. Ramsay into Lily, Maman into Françoise, Penelope into Molly) or one spatio-temporal moment translated into another (the madeleine epiphany or the involuntary memory of Maman reading in Combray and Venice recalled years later in the Guermantes's library). As examples of the second (*inter-textual*) kind, we might cite the transmuting of

reality "at the back of appearances," the ordinary world transfigured into miracle and ecstasy, and for Virginia Woolf herself that abstraction which nevertheless resided in the downs near Rodmell and beside which nothing mattered. This is the key to her atheist mysticism. For her, atheism was the renunciation of inappropriate expectations toward the nonhuman world; but it was also a condition of that purified perception which would reveal the world as ordinary and yet miraculous, as nonhuman in its otherness and yet beyond everything worth our attention." *Ibid.*, 51.

For a more ecological account of Woolf's vision of cosmic interconnection, explicitly related to the ontology of flesh and entwining in Merleau-Ponty, see Louise Westling, "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World," *New Literary History* 30, 4 (1999): 855–875. Westling cites Woolf's 1908 vision of a "symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the mind's passage through the world, (achieving) in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments." She also makes much of Woolf's famous claim in 1925 that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." She endorses the view that for Woolf, as for Merleau-Ponty, the world is no longer to be conceived in terms of a Platonic/Cartesian dualism but rather a "sacramental engagement within the body of the world," as a "pulsating field of mind and matter in which everything is interconnected."

one narrative into another (Homer's *Odyssey* into Joyce's *Ulysses*, the Biblical stories of Elijah and St Stephen into the tales of Bloom and Dedalus, Georges Sand's novel into Proust's, or the numerous instances of the Scriptural Eucharist transliterated into the sacramental re-enactments of Mrs. Ramsay and Molly or of Marcel in his final epiphanies). And finally, we can identify key examples of the *trans-textual* transubstantiation of author into narrator, character and reader. This third model—involving the very process of writing and reading, of configuring and refiguring—is the one highlighted in the phenomenological analyses of Merleau-Ponty, Kristeva and Ricoeur. And it is with this final model, I suggest, that we encounter an opening of the world of the text beyond itself, both forward to the post-textual world of the reader, and backward (by way of implied regress from character to narrator to author) to the pre-textual world of the writer. This acknowledgement, however tentative and mediated, of some *extra-textual* element, intimating a life of action before and after the text, is in keeping with the sacramental paradigm of transubstantiation: a paradigm which, I have been suggesting, testifies to the unbreakable liaison between the body of the text and the bread of life. Or, to revisit the language of epiphany, between Word and Flesh.

Our three novelists may well be agnostics, apostates or atheists by turn, but this does not in the least prevent them from being haunted by a singularly mystical vision of things. It may, in a paradoxical sense, even contribute to such insight by predisposing them to something beyond the reach of many orthodox religious conventions (the history of religions, let us not forget, attests a deep complicity between mysticism and so-called atheism). Each writer, as I hope to have shown, bears witness to a special sacredness at the heart of the profane. But in each unique instance the mutual transfiguring of material bread and mystical body is anything but 'sacrificial,' in the dogmatic sense of an expiatory victim sacrificed to redeem sins and appease an Omnipotent Father. The sacramental aesthetic of our three authors is, I suggest, far removed from an economy of penalty, reward and judgment. On the contrary, it bears witness to literary epiphanies of radical kenosis and emptying where the sacred unhitches itself from absolute Being ("equality with the Father," as Paul put it) in order to descend into the heart of finite flesh. So that the birth of the son as an incarnate historical being attests to the demise of the Father as Immutable Master of the Universe. For unless the divine seed dies there can be no eucharistic rebirth. Or to put it in the words of the young Jewish mystic, Ety Hillesum, "by excluding death from one's

life we deny ourselves the possibility of a full life.”⁸⁶

I suggested at the outset that a certain phenomenology of flesh, outlined by Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva, might offer guidance in sketching a sacramental aesthetics that goes beyond sacrificial theology and dualist metaphysics. Several other contemporary philosophers, also hailing from the phenomenological movement, have, I believe, usefully discussed this possibility of a post-sacrificial sanctity and I would like, in these concluding pages, to engage with this debate about possibilities of a religion beyond religion. Jacques Derrida and John Caputo, for example, have both explored the idea of “religion without religion,” or a messianism without metaphysics. Caputo’s own notion of the “weakness of God” stems from a reading of Christian kenosis in light of a deconstructionist complicity between mysticism and atheism as identified by Derrida in *Sauf le Nom*. Here Derrida, who claims that he “rightly passes for an atheist,” has this to say: “The desire of God, God as the other name of desire, deals in the desert with radical atheism ... The most consequent forms of declared atheism will have always testified to the most intense desire for God ... Like mysticism, apophatic discourse has always been suspected of atheism ... If atheism, like apophatic theology, testifies to the desire of God ... in the presence of *whom* does it do this?”⁸⁷ In a intriguing dialogue with apophatic theology, contemporary thinkers like Stanislas Breton and Gianni Vattimo have shown how a kenotic moment of “nothingness” and “emptiness” resides at the core of a post-metaphysical faith. Faith, says Breton, “must inhabit the world and give back to God the being he has not.” Speaking more specifically of kenosis he talks of a process that follows “the descent of the divine into a human form, obedience unto death, the ignominy of the Cross. But at the very moment that the paroxysm of abasement touches the depth of nothingness, the shock of the negative, in its paradoxical power, commands the exultant ascent toward the point of origin.”⁸⁸ In the case of Vattimo, kenosis entails a reading of 1 Corinthians 12 (on love) which treats the Incarnation as God’s relinquishing of all power and authority so as to turn everything over to the secular order. Vattimo considers “God’s self-emptying and man’s attempt to think of love as the only law” as two sides of the same coin. And the conclusion of his “fragile” hermeneutic, while startling, is entirely consistent: namely that secularization is the “constitutive trait of authentic religious

⁸⁶ Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1983).

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 35f.

⁸⁸ Stanislas Breton, *The Word and the Cross* (New York: Fordham University Press), 114, 84f.

experience.”⁸⁹ Copernicus, Freud and Nietzsche need no longer, on this account, be seen as enemies of the sacred but, on the contrary, as “carrying out works of love”⁹⁰ I think that Gilles Deleuze is making a somewhat similar point when he declares that we must abandon the sacrificial instinct for scapegoating and instead identify with the lamb: “The God who, like a lion, was given blood sacrifice must be shoved into the background, and the sacrificed god must occupy the foreground ... God became the animal that was slain, instead of the animal that does the slaying.”⁹¹

But it is, in my view, Paul Ricoeur who most poignantly struggles with this post-sacrificial notion of death and resurrection in his final testament, written as he was dying, *Vivant jusqu'à la mort* (2007). Speaking of a certain kind of “grace” accompanying the experience of death, Ricoeur notes that “it is not important for this moment of grace that the dying person identifies with a particular religion or confession. Indeed, maybe it is only when faced with death that the religious becomes one with the Essential and that the barrier dividing religions (and non-religions like Buddhism) are transcended. Because dying is trans-cultural it is also trans-confessional and trans-religious.”⁹² Admitting his basic suspicion of “immediacy and fusion,” Ricoeur makes one exception for “the grace of a certain dying.”⁹³ Ricoeur talks about this grace as a “paradox of immanent transcendence,” of an especially “intimate transcendence of the Essential which rips through the veils of confessional religious codes.”⁹⁴ To encounter such authentic grace one must, Ricoeur suggests, forgo the will for one’s own personal salvation by transferring this hope onto others. He also speaks, in this respect, of renouncing the metaphysical fiction of an otherworldly Being dispensing punishment and reward in some kind of celestial tribunal. Theodicy must be resisted. Invoking instead the great Rhine mystics, Ricoeur remarks how they “renounced themselves” for the sake of opening to the Essential, to the point of being, in their contemplative detachment, incredibly active in the creation of new orders, in teaching, in traveling and tending to the

⁸⁹ Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005), 35.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36. See also in this regard, Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Déclision: Déconstruction du*

⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 122.

⁹² Paul Ricoeur, *Vivant jusqu'à la Mort* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2007), 45.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

forgotten of this world. By being available like this to the Essential they were motivated to “transfer the love of life onto others.”⁹⁵ God thus becomes a God *after* God, a god of the living rather than of the dead, of service rather than mastery, the dichotomy between ‘before’ and ‘after’ death suddenly dissolving.

And so here again we confront the basic scriptural paradox, so often invoked by Proust, that “he who clings to his life loses it and he who lets it go gains it.” Or to put it in Joyce’s terms, “without sundering there is no reconciliation.” In this context Ricoeur offers a startlingly refreshing reading of the Eucharist as a celebration of blood-as-wine, transubstantiation being taken as a sign of life and sharing rather than a token of sacrificial blood-letting.⁹⁶ The eucharistic commemoration of the giving of one’s life—“Do this in memory of me”—thus becomes an affirmation of the gift of life to and for the other rather than an anxiety about personal physical survival after death. In other words, when Christ said “it is finished,” he meant it. He was offering up his own personal life, in a second gesture of kenotic emptying (the first being the descent of divinity into flesh), so as to give life to others in service (Lk 22: 27) and in sacrament: the breaking of bread at Emmaus, the cooking of fish for his disciples when he returned—incognito—in the form of the risen servant, and ever after, down through human history, in the guise of feeding the “least of these” (*elachistos*). Ricoeur concludes his terminal testament with this remarkable note:

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. Hence the link between *death-rebirth in the other* and *service as gift of life*, and the link between service and feast. The Last Supper conjoins the moment of dying unto oneself and the service of the other in the sharing of food and wine which joins the man of death to the multitude of survivors reunited in community. And this is why it is remarkable that Jesus never theorized about this and never said *who* he was. Maybe he didn’t *know*, for he *lived* the eucharistic gesture, bridged the gap between the imminence of death and the community beyond. He marked a passage to glory (through suffering and death) without any sacrificial perspective.⁹⁷

The fact that Ricoeur calls himself a “Christian who writes philosophically” rather than a “Christian philosopher” seems to me significant

⁹⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 91.

here. For he is acknowledging the importance of a certain gap, a certain non-confessional space occupied by philosophy and art, which allows us to freely and imaginatively revisit, and at times anamnetically retrieve, the often forgotten, concealed or taken-for-granted resources of traditional religion. God must die so that God may be reborn. Or as Ricoeur puts it, “we must smash false idols so that genuine symbols can speak.”⁹⁸

I am struck by the relevance of these philosophical accounts for comprehending the sacramental vision of our three novelists. For in each case, I have suggested, we find the letting go of a certain fetish or fixation serving as a *via negativa* which permits the return of a second naiveté (Ricoeur): a repetition after the experience of death and nothingness which signals a new kind of ‘miracle,’ ‘resurrection,’ ‘grace,’ this time in ordinary events ignored first time around. For Joyce and Proust these moments of sacramental remembrance occur when their literary heroes (Stephen and Marcel) come to renounce their initial ‘great expectations’ and ultimately acknowledge the muse of the everyday (Molly and Françoise respectively). For Woolf it occurs when Lily finally recalls the failed painting of the “purple triangle,” depicting Mrs. Ramsey and James in the first part of the novel, with the final stroke which enables her, as a reincarnation or remembrance of Mrs. Ramsey, to have her “vision” and declare the painting “finished.” The bread and wine of quotidian existence are thus celebrated as eucharistic epiphanies—the kiss of the seed-cake between Molly and Bloom, the touch of a table napkin for Marcel, Mrs. Ramsay’s empty glove (like empty burial clothes?)—such that hitherto ignored moments are ‘resurrected’ out of passing time, retrieved for a new life which assumes and subsumes death, for a new generation of survivors (James and Cam, Mlle de St Loup, Stephen), and for a new community of readers. Unless the seed dies, the wheat cannot grow and the bread cannot be shared.

I am not suggesting that our three ‘sacramental’ novelists are in any sense religious apologists, or secret advocates of Christian liturgy. There are certain confessional writers who might be said to fit such a category—G. M. Hopkins, Claudel, Bernanos, even the later Elliot, not to mention Dante and many traditional religious writers throughout the centuries. My purpose here has not been to engage in doctrinal apologetics or to expose our three novelists as crypto-

⁹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles Regan and David Stuart (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 213f. Ricoeur also takes about the related notion of returning to a second naiveté of authentic faith after the dogmatisms and prejudices of one’s first naiveté has been deconstructed and purged.

Catholics *après la lettre*. No, it has been to explore the possibility of a certain post-credal mysticism embracing a eucharistic aesthetic where the secular and sacred unite. Thus while not wishing to exclude confessional writers from adherence to such an aesthetic I wish to suggest that it is particularly valuable for us in this secular era to consider how certain non-confessional authors deploy an art of transubstantiation to explore a mysticism of *God-after-God*, or as some might prefer to say of spirituality-after-religion. I have suggested, at the outset, that this after-faith may be helped by critical application of the sacramental phenomenology of flesh advanced by thinkers like Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva. The ‘after’ here should not be read as privative but as an affirmative function of ‘ana,’ that is of retrieval and resurrection *après coup*,⁹⁹ as in ana-mnesis or, as I formulated it elsewhere, in *anatheism*.¹⁰⁰

I use the term *anatheism* to refer to the return of the divine in the secular world after the death of God (taken in the metaphysical sense of a causal Being of otherworldly omnipotence and theodicy). Anatheism thus signals a *via affirmativa* following the *via negativa* of modern doubt and disenchantment. In this light, the agnosticism of Joyce, Woolf and Proust might, I submit, be read as a ‘negative capability’ which carves open the possibility of a sacramental mysticism, beyond the traditional dichotomy between theism and atheism, in other words, the possibility of a God after metaphysics and dogmatism, the possibility of a God of inter-religious hospitality. Meaning what? An opening towards a God who neither is nor is not but may be—depending on our response to each sacred moment. This calls for a special attentiveness to infinity embodying itself in daily acts of eucharistic love and sharing: an endless crossing

⁹⁹ See Jean-Francois Lyotard on the notions of “post” and “ana”—which he links specifically with a postmodern attitude to time and history—in his *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1984). Lyotard does not, however, consider these terms in the same religious light as we are doing here. We might also note the importance here of not only the Platonic model of *ana-mnesis* but also the Aristotelian idea of *ana-gnoresis*, a special kind of re-cognition through poetic awareness whereby we recall something previously forgotten and realize how different things are connected, how ‘this’ relates to ‘that’ etc. See the *Poetics* 4, 4, 1448f and *Rhetoric*, 1, 2, 23, 1371f.

¹⁰⁰ For a development of this ana-theistic aesthetic see our related texts, see my “Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology” in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Phenomenology*, ed. John Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); “Traversing the Imaginary: Epiphanies in Joyce and Proust” in *Traversing the Imaginary: Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007); “Enabling God” in Manoussakis, ed., *After God*; and “Hermeneutics of the Possible God” in *God and Givenness*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

over and back between the infinite and infinitesimal, the highest deity becoming, kenotically, sacramentally, the “very least of these,” the word made everyday flesh, on-going and interminable gift. It calls for transubstantiation.