RE-CONSTRUCTING DIALOGUE:

LITERARY SENSIBILITY AND NON-VIOLENT SUBJECTIVITY

by

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Kory Marika Gunderson

August 2009

DEDICATION

For David

"It is impossible," murmured Lucy, and then remembering the experiences of her own heart, she said: "No -- it is just possible."
E.M. Forster

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ABSTRACT

With this project, I seek to advocate the relevance of literary scholarship to the problem of the use of sanctioned violence to solve conflicts. I propose that, unlike the empirical sensibility, what I will call the literary sensibility is, at heart, a non-violent means for creating and recreating understanding. When the literary sensibility is used to negotiate the unknown into the known, each subjective participant in the encounter is able to grant and maintain his or her own integrity as well as the integrity of all other subjective participants as subjects. I define my understanding of the literary sensibility by engaging the work of Jacques Derrida, who is himself concerned with the philosophy of literature and the literary. I show that because of limitations within his understanding of subjectivity, the deconstructive interpretive act is ultimately violent. Derrida maintains a formal impossibility that would allow a subject to recognize an Other as a subject, and without this possibility, a subject can only objectify the Other, an act of subjugation and violence in which the Other has no agency to define terms (or itself). Derrida, I think, understands the violence of objectification and subjugation, but because he maintains the impossibility of understanding the Other as a subject, Derrida can only resolve the problem by perpetually deferring what, for him, is inevitable violence. Therefore, Derrida's treatment of the literary is at odds with what the literary sensibility can truly accomplish. In *A Room with a View*, E.M. Forster demonstrates and represents what I consider to be the subjective moment influenced by the literary sensibility. By engaging this work, I argue that we can maintain a possibility for re-constructing a dialogic meaning making process that allows for the same qualities of deferral, multiplicity, simultaneity, and literariness that deconstruction affords and prioritizes while, at the same time, providing an invitation to non-violent practice.

INTRODUCTION

"Art and religion do not solve our practical problems:
they only enable us to see the world truly."
Colin Falck

My first real encounter with hospitality occurred after I graduated from college, when my father and I took a trip to Greece. In many ways, we had become unfamiliar to one another while I had been away at school, and this trip was to be a clumsy attempt to reconnect. As we have continued to be relatively distant from one another in the subsequent twelve years, I suppose it is why I now use the word "clumsy," but the moment I will describe cannot be simply left to that word. The experience we shared in Greece has persistently raised the question in my mind of whether we are as estranged as it sometimes seems, or whether, at least in one moment, we can be said to have transcended what only appears to be a disconnection.

My Dad and I had taken so many retreats to Greece, but this time would be different than the other trips we had made. My Dad promised that this trip was to be less centered on obligations to our extended family and more focused on spending time enjoying activities that reflected our own interests. At my suggestion, my Dad agreed to share a hike to the top of Mount Olympus with me. This hike was one neither he nor I had ever made before and was something he now only considered because being in the mountains had become important to me while I had been away at school.

My Dad spent weeks prior to the trip preparing for the hike we were going to make. He was not accustomed to much outdoor activity but was enthusiastic despite his anxiety about what he perceived to be a perilous adventure. Mountain experiences had

not been ones that he sought out in his youth in Greece. Perhaps he carried with him part of the ancient superstitions? Though Mount Olympus is not especially tall, it is the highest point in Greece, and it typically generates its own weather patterns. Due to its height and climate, it stands apart from the surrounding plains, and it's not hard to see how Mount Olympus would earn the reputation of being the home of forces beyond human power.

The day of our trip arrived, and we drove to the trailhead from seaside through plains to foothills and up a small canyon. After all the talk of our preparations, we hiked quietly, and the entire trip only took a few hours. It's not especially clear exactly what transpired during our hike, but what happened afterwards leads me to suspect that we each caught a glimpse of the satyrs and dryads that are said to live there.

After we had ascended and returned, my Dad and I decided to enjoy a drink at a café. A sign hanging to the side of an outdoor veranda displayed the name of the café: *Φιλοξενια.* My Dad asked me to read it since I'm not particularly good at reading Greek and can always use the practice. "Hospitality," I said, "the love of strangers." "But not just love of strangers," he said, "also welcoming the new, which is always strange." As we sat on the terrace in the gentle valley breeze, we clinked glasses and celebrated the first summit my Dad had ever made, together.

In *The Singularity of Literature,* Derek Attridge holds the ideal of hospitality close to his heart and the heart of the text he writes to explain his understanding of what makes literature literary. "Hospitality toward the other – whether a person, a group, or a not-yet-formulated thought or formal possibility – implies a willingness not just to accept

the other into one's own domain, but to change that domain, perhaps radically in order to make the other welcome" (152). Hospitality, for Attridge, is a significant value or characteristic of a literary text; it is part of its literariness. It is this quality, which can also be thought of as an invitation, that secures in both textual and real spaces the ability of all participants in a moment the equal agency to authentically and safely participate in that space, even if for only a moment.

It had always seemed strangely, and somehow not so strangely, funny to me that the culmination of the first mountain ascent my father and I made together would be a toast in Hospitality. The memory of this experience, this momentary communion between my father from whom I had felt so estranged and me, persistently asked me to reconsider whether my father and I were actually as disconnected as I felt we were or actually as unable to find a common reality as I had thought. I now think that my father and I were able to create together a common reality that afternoon in the mountains in Greece; he invited me to reshape his experience of Greece in the mountains, and I allowed him to expand my experience of the mountains in Greece. Thus were we reconciled; a reconciliation that took place within what can be called a literary moment.

The experience of literary reconciliation, whether in real time and space or with and within a text, affects human beings profoundly, for part of what makes our experience human is that we are always striving to come into a knowing relationship with what is unknown to us, the radical Other. The Other is often perceived as frightening or threatening to us: a "perilous" mountain excursion, a seemingly overbearing father, or a new idea that would replace an old one, but the moment that is informed by what I will

call the literary sensibility allows us to encounter what we don't know or really understand without the threat of a literal or metaphoric total death because no one agent is an ultimate authority. The self doesn't wholly die in a literary moment nor does a new idea wholly supplant an old one; in the moment of a literary encounter with the Other, the prior self dies and is simultaneously is reborn, changed, renewed. Perhaps that is why the moment seems so profound; it doesn't really seem as though anything has changed, and yet everything has shifted.

Shifting is a primary concern of philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose work as a deconstructionist has come to represent the basis of certain mainline thinking regarding what constitutes the literary. Although Derrida's work has done much to expose the fallacy of binarism and reveal the properties of deferral in language, two points which I do not dispute, his work is occupied and consumed by representing that meaning shifts. The implied extension of this occupation suggests that a stable picture of reality can never be represented in language, and while this may be so, it characterizes only a portion of how language can be literary. Derrida's discussions within language are always concerning the tracing of the never-ending shifting of meanings that result from encounters between the known and unknown, but this is only one aspect of the literariness of meaning construction: the *becoming*. By concentrating on their *différance* exclusively, the thrust of Derridean thought overlooks that shifts in meaning also produce results in understanding. Understanding that is generated literarily, I would argue, corresponds to another mode of meaning construction: the *being*.

Being in this sense is a revision to the Platonic understanding of the essential being that takes place outside of lived reality. In my re-vision, being and the understandings associated with it, like all meanings, participate in reality and so alter from moment to moment, but understanding being in this way only illuminates that language cannot represent reality in totality. Derrida would argue, though, that all reality can only be experienced in terms of the images of language. As a result of this argument, he is sometimes interpreted to mean that we are unable to apprehend anything outside of language since language is the instrument through which all comprehension takes place. This interpretation, then, gets extended to mean that we cannot, and therefore should not, attempt to use the instrument of language to contemplate anything outside of language. In response to this interpretation I would offer Surrealist painter René Magritte's reminder that a painting of a pipe should never be mistaken for the pipe itself, and in fact, his can never be for he calls it, "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*." From a certain Derridean perspective, it is as though the painting of a pipe is formally impossible, but we know it is not, we are looking at it.



So backtracking to Derrida's understanding that all reality can only be experienced through the images of language, a constructed instrument, I am left

wondering why this experience of language in language, and thus of reality, cannot hold, even briefly, the sense of being I described. It seems to me that Derrida's meta-Structuralist move can be attributed to a rather disappointing lack of faith in humanity to act consciously. It's as though, for Derrida, no one is capable of the responsibility or accountability for remembering that the reality outside of language cannot be accurately represented by language and that every instance of language use is thus an injustice committed upon the reality which cannot be represented. Magritte does give his painting another title, "The Treachery of Images," but in these words Magritte is playing with us. His representation isn't really treacherous because it is performed consciously.

In his essay, "Why Write?," Jean-Paul Sartre asserts that "man is the means by which things are manifested…But, if we know that we are directors of being, we also know that we are not its producers" (662). He explains that, indeed, our language use creates the relationships between things but not the things themselves. He quips, "If we turn away from this landscape, it will sink back into its dark permanence…there is no one mad enough to think that it is going to be annihilated" (662). But this seems to be exactly the result of extending Derrida in a certain way; if we cannot stably understand reality through language, then reality itself is not stable, and the question of the existence of reality outside of language is then formally possible.

The formal impossibility of a reality, or being, that can represented, albeit imprecisely or momentarily, through language has, in my opinion, done a lot of harm to how we read literature, how we understand the purpose of literature, and how we are able to think about the quality of literariness. Literature and literariness involve creating a

shared understanding of a moment of reality, and so it is crucial to allow the possibility of being if we are to understand how the literary sensibility affords us this hospitable and non-violent mechanism for doing so, for the literary encounter is not the only type of moment in which the known is in contact with the unknown. A distinguishing feature of humanity is that we are able to utilize a variety of ways to perform the multiple processes of assimilating the unknown into the known (as well as a variety of ways in which we are able to talk consciously to ourselves about these multiple ways of knowing), but the various methods of assimilation do range in their ability to preserve the integrity of the known and unknown subjects. If we are interested in non-violently encountering the world, which I am, it becomes necessary to understand how the literary encounter is set apart.

In addition to suffering the loss of the possibility of meaning occupying a stable position even for a moment through the work of Deconstruction, the discipline in which we seek to understand, contemplate, and share the moments of life, ideas, and texts that we identify as literary also suffers in the historical moment in which we find ourselves that is culturally captivated by truths derived from aggressive empiricism. Explanations for how we have arrived at this moment have ranged from the philosophical argument within Existentialism that splits man from God, to the literary Modernist exploration of man's existence as ahistorical and asocial, to the socio-political perspective that modern industrial capitalism has dictated that all relationships and ideas are ultimately estranged from their producers. Another particularly interesting explanation, I find, is one that extends the rationalism that is a legacy of Enlightenment thinking to its extreme.

As a result, over the course of the twentieth century, the work of the literary scholar has of necessity sought to bear more directly on the practical world in practical ways, but it has been a tendency of some literary scholarship to assert the relevance of literature by first borrowing, and then justifying, the use of tools and/or subjects from other disciplines (such as science and philosophy) that seem more easily to relate to 'the real world.' The result has been that, overall, the discipline of literary studies has become dominated by a hyper-rational discourse, a discourse dependent upon logic and evidence, which itself has no space to be informed by the literary sensibility since empirical method seeks to establish an original and final authority rather than create a space for shared authoritative subjectivity.

The combination of hyper-rationality and deconstructive tracing has eddied the work of literary scholarship, in my opinion, in a solipsistic pool. This solipsism impoverishes the possibilities of utilizing and even understanding the literary sensibility, for as Augustine claims in his treatise "On Free Will," "it is just that he who, knowing what is right, does not do it should lose the capacity to know what is right, and that he who had the power to do what is right and would not should lose the power to do it when he is willing" (202). I would like to point to the ironic effort to support the arts that Natalie Angier offers in her recent article, "The Dance of Evolution, or How Art Got Its Start," as an example of this discursive disability.

In the article, Angier reported on the discussions presented at an interdisciplinary University of Michigan conference exploring theories of the evolution of human artistic impulse. Angier provided a summary of the argument of Ellen Dissanayake, the plenary

speaker, thus: the human biological imperative for cohesive social unity impelled the 'evolution' of art as the means to "quickly and ebulliently [draw] together" people, even strangers, "to treat one another as kin." The harmony generated by participatory art, music, storytelling, and dancing, she explained, is able to "trade up the relative weakness of the individual for the strength of the hive." Angier then compared Dissanayake's explanation of the community function of art to the published comments of David Sloan Wilson, an evolutionary theorist, stating, "the only social elixir of comparable strength is religion." While I don't think Angier consciously intended her article to privilege science over art, in fact I think she intended the opposite, the moves she makes here and throughout wind up doing just that. Angier's advocacy for art is undermined by her necessity for outside source "evidence" (from another scientist no less) to provide a "valid" explanation and demonstrates her reliance on scientific reasoning in order to explain the connective function of art for the human community. In this article, art and, by extension, religion can only be understood and valued in terms of science.

The benefits of Angier's advocacy in this article are ultimately limited. Angier does not apprehend the point that Colin Falck suggests in his quotation from *Myth, Truth, and Literature* and does not provide her readers with any substantial alternative to considering art or artistic impulse apart from the dominant viewpoint that art is simply inferior to science as a means through which to understand human experience (even though that is not what the presentations at the conference suggested). For Angier, art will never "make as much sense" as science as a way of explaining things.

Falck, however, discusses that "making sense" is not the primary task of art or religion, and here I will include literature, in the first place. For him, rather than explaining the empirical "truth" about the world, art and religion invite us and help us to see the world "truly," in the sense of a plumb line, as directly as it is possible for us to see. At first, this idea might seem contradictory; art, religion, and literature are media that we might say would and do obstruct direct vision. But while art, religion, and literature are indeed media, they (at their best) are self-conscious about their "media-ness," and work to help and invite us (or require and demand us, as the case may be) to re-direct our vision. This redirection is not meant as a distraction, but rather as a way to help the viewer review, re-view, see again. This mechanism helps looking become deliberate rather than a normal habitual act, and, as a result, we may see consciously and consciously see. Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, in *Art as Technique*, describes this process as *the* purpose of an artistic experience, "not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object – *(art) creates a "vision" of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it*" (781).

Empirical vision, on the other hand, attempts to mitigate and, if possible, eliminate obstruction; it attempts to be as purely objective as possible. This type of analytical practice, which attempts to rely on close readings, is often reductive to both the subject and the object of study, and too often it renders the object of study a dull and lifeless artifact. This methodology is particularly a problem when the object of study is a human being or the product of a human being since human beings are entrenched in a mediated world. Experience is layered, and peeling back a layer simply reveals another

layer. Though Clifford Geertz, in *Thick Description*, demonstrates a decidedly empirical program, his is an example of a situated empiricism, sensitive to its own relativity. He relates the following Hindu origin story to emphasize the impossibility of pure objectivity, "There is an Indian story…about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down" (1382).

Though empirical vision always will fall short of being objective, it is not to say that there isn't a time or place for attempted empiricism. We might think of empiricism as a mode of inquiry particularly well suited to suggest, from particular vantage points, solutions or answers to the practical problems of the material world within a certain context. Art and religion, however, are well suited for an arguably different time and place, when the need (or impulse) arises for an insight into helping us reconsider the very problem or question.

So, while the questions (and the answers, whether determinate or indeterminate) of the anthropological foundations of art and religion, their material origins, are certainly part of art's story, they are only a part. (I'll acknowledge here the argument that the abiding truth that idealism concerns itself with supersedes any material truth, but for the moment, I'm allowing that material, fact based truth can stand side by side with ideal, abstracted truth.) Mistakenly, Angier exclusively offers the biological explanations of art as grounds for its importance to human communities. She does not investigate, or even complicate the report by including, any evidence of or inquiry into other explanations of

its importance. Angier, seemingly without thought, describes some of the presentations as "freewheeling" and uses a cavalier tone of disbelief throughout, suggesting that an association between such fields as neurobiology and dance is less academically rigorous and more fanciful, as in the sense expressed by Horace in *Ars Poetica,* that it is inappropriate to "…mate the mild with the wild, so that snakes are paired/With birds, and tigers with lambs" (84). Horace, concerned with the formal qualities of poetry, warns against deviating too far from what we might call "recognizable discourse," and Angier staunchly maintains this doctrinaire position. Her discourse creates the impression that continues to suggest that non-science based explanations are inconsequential, but it is only, I would argue because Angier's discourse lacks a nuanced understanding of the literary sensibility.

In a nod to General Westmoreland, Angier can only destroy art in order to save it. Angier's seeming interest in and advocacy for the importance of art in the human community is discredited by the underlying assumption of her discourse that art must have a scientific explanation and is able to be conclusively explained by science. The scientists themselves who presented at the conference were challenging these assumptions, but Angier was not quite able to reflect this attitude in her own writing. This reliance on scientific language and reasoning to describe conditions that occur between science and art is symptomatic of the materialist epistemology that I would argue infuses the majority of our public and academic discourse today, even within the Humanities. Forty years after Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human

Sciences" no longer do "two interpretations of interpretation…together share the field" (926); empirical sensibility is not the whole story.

The literary sensibility, which enables an encounter with an Other subject with a hospitality that grants agency to all participants to act as subjects, is a tool that helps us understand and tell the rest of the story. It is arguably the literary sensibility of discourse that is the quality that both apprehends and comprehends the vital and fluid character of the human subject. The literary sensibility enables the text that operates with it to resist being made an artifact. Choosing not to apply a literary sensibility, keeps the object of study pinned into stasis and prevents it from participating in creating understanding.

When the empirical sensibility dominates, the ability for subjects and Others to share agency in the creation of meaning is decreased. In the historical moment we currently occupy, in which I feel called upon to speak towards how we can better understand the possibility of power sharing and behaving non-violently towards one another, the literary sensibility must be re-viewed. In some ways, the purpose of this paper might be said to serve as a rehabilitation of an ideal that has been known over the ages in a variety of incarnations. Each age accomplishes this same rehabilitation by re-naming the symbols that Ralph Waldo Emerson, in "The Poet," tells us "must be held lightly, and be very willingly translated into the equivalent terms which others use" (394). I have chosen to use the term "literary sensibility" because, for me, it draws from and calls to the ancient understanding of poetics, the Scholastic understanding of intellect, the Romantic understanding of imagination, and the post-Structural understanding of literature.

Perhaps, my attempt here to re-construct a meaning of literary sensibility can be likened to the effort of T.S. Eliot in "Four Quartets:"

> Trying to learn to use words…
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it.
> …And what there is to conquer
> By strength and submission, has already been discovered
> Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
> To emulate – but there is no competition –
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again: and now under conditions
> That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business (174-189).

In "The Derivation of the Literary Sensibility," in deference to Derrida, I perform a trace of how I have come to understand the literary sensibility as distinguished from the empirical sensibility by exploring his essay "Structure, Sign and Play" and its implications. In "Subjectivity and Dialogue," I supplement Derrida by re-membering the work Jean-Paul Sartre and E.M. Forster through the lens of literary sensibility, and in conclusion, I assert that it is the literary sensibility that invites us to reconsider how meaning is created and recreated, and at the same time engages us to create and recreate our understanding of the reality in which we participate.

THE DERIVATION OF THE LITERARY SENSIBILITY

"Only connect!...Live in fragments no longer."
E.M. Forster

In 1966, with the prominence of structural and ethnographic methodologies that attempted but failed "to provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradiction" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 867), the criticism of Jacques Derrida in his essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," that "structurality…compels a neutralization of time and history" (924) was perhaps necessary. In this famous essay, Derrida advocates a type of interpretation and meaning-making that "is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism" (925). The supplementarity, *différance*, and freeplay of language Derrida exposes in this essay have been of crucial importance to the transformation of the Humanities in the subsequent forty years since its publication by demanding that '*sign*ificant' pieces of post-structural writing, which is to say all writing, frame how history and culture in a certain moment and across certain moments construct modes of reality.

Over the last forty years, works informed by Derridean principles, such as those of Judith Butler, Paul de Man and Hélène Cixous, have intervened, as Derrida would have it, in healthy ways to de-center how we have come to understand the human experience and have (re)animated the Humanities by promoting the emergence of area studies, revitalizing the debate over the canon of Western thought, and questioning disciplinary boundaries. While these transformations have been beneficial overall, the

changes to the Humanities in the last half of the twentieth century have also come at the needless cost of a larger vision. As David Richter reflects in the introduction to his chapter, "Structuralism and Deconstruction,"

> Derrida has had more impact in departments of English and French than in philosophy…If the ultimate purpose of poetry [according to New Criticism] was to say something…then like traditional philosophy and the other human sciences, it was a discourse that sought "a truth and an origin"…In effect, the move from New Criticism to deconstruction principally involved abandoning the search for the balance and resolution behind the paradoxes and ambiguities of the text [in favor of] the pursuit of the posited void at the center of meaning (834).

The result of this move within literary studies, away from the understanding within a literary sensibility that language creates paradox and at the same time is also able to reconcile paradox, towards a skepticism of language and its ability to approximate meaning, has resulted in, among other effects, a hyper-specialization, 'located-ness,' and defensive subjectivity that has done less to illuminate the shared human experience and more to deepen our isolation from one another. It seems to say, "*Your* position is not and can never be *my* position. I can only, ever, speak from *my* position, so I never can occupy any other position from which to gain perspective on that position of *mine*. As soon as I occupy *your* position, it becomes *mine*." Indeed, it has been important to recognize that one human voice, no matter how extraordinary, cannot express the experience of all people, but to negate that human voices can or should speak to one another about experience, or that voices can create experience by speaking to one another, seems to abandon a unique aspect of the what literature affords us.

While Derrida's interpretation of the way language functions at times is neither unfounded nor the sole cause of these effects, Derrida's arguments do value certain features of language at the expense of other features that are also associated with the literary. Derridean principles, used as the foundation of knowledge production, preclude the ability to understand the literary sensibility and its invitation to non-violent practice.

If we consider Lévi-Strauss from Derrida's perspective in "Structure, Sign, and Play," Lévi-Strauss wants to "explain alleged differences" between groups of people without making qualitative distinctions (868). This undertaking is like trying to explain art by exclusively using scientific discourse. Derrida, in response, emphasizes that this type of work, which does not accentuate its historically constructed conditions of culture, language, and literature, creates only "a series of substitutions of center for center" (916).

Another way I might explain this 'central' Derridean idea is to say that language expresses who, what, where, when, how, and why. I would argue that meaning is 'located' at the intersection of all of these values. For Derrida, however, critiquing the mythological methodology of Levi-Strauss, which is focused on the who and the what in order to understand the why, the why becomes the 'center.' Derrida argues that in the methodology of Levi-Strauss, the why "successively, and in a regulated fashion…receives different forms or names" (916) without ever having any instance of being considered in radically different terms. He suggests that the why might be alternatively understood by examining where, when, and how. But since where, when and how are always shifting, are always variables dependent on history and culture, who and what, which are conditional values dependent on where, when, and how, will also shift.

This shift will always result in the why, the center, to shift as well. “This field is in fact that of *freeplay*, that is to say a field of infinite substitutions” (923).

The field of freeplay, though, while liberating language on one level robs it from the possibility of any referential purpose, even if only partial, on another because “there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the freeplay of substitutions” (923). The argument that because the who and the what can never reliably be expressed because they are conditional terms dependent on the perpetually variable when, where, and how, need not, however, result in the loss of the why, the center, or the disregard of the who and the what, as the author and the message are so often discredited from having any agency in Post-structuralist criticism.

In the move to relieve language from a seemingly burdensome purpose of partial reference, Derrida disregards that for which, as Steve Martinot in *Forms in the Abyss* says, the literary already accounts. “A text brings into existence what it refers to in the manner by which it refers to it in the very act of referring…poets knew it all along” (7). That language compromises all the time with its own inability to be referential, and as Derrida points out, “bears within itself the necessity of its own critique” (919) is a truth that the literary sensibility had understood long before the moment Derrida uttered this statement in critique of the empirical sensibility. Literary discourse maintains the possibility to retain a purpose, its why, its center, even if it can never fully achieve it. So the center can hold; it’s not all or nothing. Put another way, something is better than nothing.

Yet Derrida's work *was* groundbreaking, and I think this indicates how necessary his points must have been at that time *for sociologists and philosophers*. Today, though, texts that maintain strict adherence to Derrida's valuations seem only to get caught in self-reference. They forget that human science is the *inter*play between freeplay and 'truth,' and are as much a "destructive discourse" (Derrida 917) as work that assumes an essential, monolithic truth about human experience. Hélène Cixous' manifesto in "The Laugh of the Medusa," makes its claim "to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (1643). This projection, which she intends as the ultimate feminized freeplay, "is an explosive, utterly destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed" (1650). If Derrida himself acknowledges that the field of human science is always both desiring the "truth, [which is] full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game" and needing the "affirmation of the power of the will to assign and alter all values" (926) then why must Cixous steep herself in revolutionary overtones? Even though Derrida admits to "more than enough indications today to suggest we might perceive that these two interpretations of interpretation…together share the field" (926), his conclusion indicates a sense that the language of the "*différance* of this irreducible difference" is violent and in crisis, "it can only proclaim itself under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (926).

In the spirit of play: this is not good enough. Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, discusses that although Derrida's "undermining of hierarchies seems a step towards a world of equals in mutual recognition…this intent

seems undercut by [his] supposed stance outside of any affirmation of good" (488). For Derrida, the Other can only be a monster, as the subject is himself a monster. Deconstruction "swallows up the old hierarchical distinctions between philosophy and literature," but "nothing emerges from his flux worth affirming, and so what in fact comes to be celebrated is…the prodigious power of subjectivity to undo all the potential allegiances which might bind it" (Taylor 489).

Subjectivity is burdened with the potential for destruction, but this is not news, and Derrida's endless deferral of this destruction doesn't really do or say anything towards the responsibility of a subject to be conscious of this reality. Subjects cannot get out of the potential for imposing violence upon Others, but I don't think this has to mean subjects inevitably *will* impose violence. Derrida does concede that, in his moment, "there is a sort of question," but it is one "of which we are only glimpsing today the conception" (926). And so, he leaves the task of finishing the question for someone else. The Derridean interpretation of this move would say that this leaves an opening towards and for the Other in a hope of continuation, but really I think that Derrida doesn't answer the question himself because the only possibility of an answer for him is to be "finished," completed in a way a living meaning can't formally be completed, dead.

So I take up Derrida's question, at least in part, in the hope that I can a) play with Derrida on his terms, b) heal what I perceive to be an injury within this perspective, and c) offer a possibility for an alternative "ending" which is not an ending at all and which is suggested by the literary itself. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" provides us with one of the twentieth century's most complicated critiques of

objective analysis and empirical sensibility, but it is only a useful place from which to begin to build what constitutes the literary sensibility. Derrida questions the "structurality of structure" (915), and he develops his argument against the possibility of determining the structure of anything that takes place in language by revealing two fallacies inherent in language: the determinant center and the determinant boundary. He takes issue first with the determinant center and points out that when the structure of a thinking system can be perceived, it is the perception that creates a center, and therefore the center is a false origin. In other words, the "orienting and organizing" principle, the "center," of a system of thinking (in this case, all of Western thought and philosophy) is false because "the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere" (915). It would thus be a mistake to think that a knowable center can be prior to the structure itself.

When I initially began to explore this idea, I phrased it in the following way: once a person conceives of the structure of a thinking system that person is relying on a false center etc. I think my revision is important because in this explanation, a subject position is available, and in the statement I made above, it is not. It is closer to Derrida to understand that the thinking system structure as a text just performs, and to be fair, I made the revision. But texts cannot perform by themselves, and I think (and believe that Derrida would grant) that there is always a person with a mind through which the reality as suggested by the text is perceived. That mind, that person, is always the "center" regardless of the linguistic, historical, cultural, social, and psychological conditions in

which they exist, and why Derrida doesn't acknowledge this is ultimately my problem with his argument. Freeplay will still occur if the human mind is validated, centers will still shift and change and transform both within one mind and also between many minds.

Derrida claims that the contradictory coherence of the logical impossibility of the idea that "the center is not the center" (915) is the result of the forceful desire to master the anxiety of the unknown, "for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being *impliqué dans le jeu, d'être pris au jeu, d'être comme être d'entreé de jeu dans le jeu*" (916). The certain mode of being, which I understand as "way of making meaning," that is being implicated "in the game, caught by the game, from the beginning at stake in the game" is, I think, not one that is informed by literary sensibility. The mode of being to which Derrida refers, and which he will later name as empirical, is trapped and suffers anxiety because the empirical sensibility can only understand the dislocation or relocation of the center of a thing as the destruction of the thing itself.

Derrida identifies that the empirical way of making meaning is based more on mastering the anxiety of annihilation than coming into a knowing relationship with the unknown itself. Within this way of knowing, the logical impossibility and illusion that any center element is based on a fixed and stable meaning prior to the point of encounter must be overlooked. This invalidation of objectivity opens the space for Derrida to define freeplay and then set empiricism against the mode of being for which he would advocate.

Freeplay, for Derrida, does not simply indicate ambiguity within meaning but refers to the instability that must be present in order for meaning to arise at all. When I say "heart," you might wonder whether I mean "organ that pumps blood" or "courage,"

and you would need to consider the context in which I used “heart.” If I say, “my heart quickened,” my meaning still might not be clear to you, and you may wonder whether I was intentionally leaving the meaning ambiguous so that “my heart quickened” can be read both as “my heart beat more quickly” and “my courage rose” at the same time. This would be an example of a kind of play within meaning, but freeplay is the state of indeterminacy beyond which the word “heart” takes place. So rather than simply being able to apprehend the meaning of “heart” by its local context in the phrase, “my heart quickened,” instead, “heart” gets its meaning by not being “guts” or “head” or “feet” or “hands” etc. In this respect, we can only know the meaning of “heart” by what it isn’t rather than by what it is.

Derrida articulates that “totalization,” by which he means coming to the end of all the meanings that “heart” does not possess, “is therefore defined at one time as useless, and at another time as impossible” (923). Structure, then, which depends on a center that is not there and a outer limit that also is not there, makes “the empirical endeavor of a subject or a finite discourse a vain and breathless quest of an infinite richness which it can never master” (923).

But this does not mean we necessarily have to scrap the subject or its quest. In fact, this “infinite richness” seems like a quality not dissimilar to the “fluxional” quality that characterizes symbols for Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the quotation from “The Poet” that I mentioned in the Introduction, Emerson directs us to remember, “all language is vehicular and transitive…[symbols, i.e. poetic language] must be held lightly, and be very willingly translated into the equivalent terms which others use” (394). This necessity

of translation is quite close to the “field of infinite substitutions” (Derrida 923) that defines freeplay, but here it is explained with a joy that seems to be missing from Derrida. The poet, in the act of using language, “shall draw us with *love* and terror (emphasis mine)” (395) not just terror only.

Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark,* also acknowledges the distinctions between the literary and the empirical in a way, like Emerson, that mitigates the anxiety produced by the tension between them by referring to what amounts to love. The literary, she says, “illustrates and represents the transformations of biological, ideological, and metaphysical concepts” (1800). Morrison makes a distinction between literary knowledge and biological, ideological, or metaphysical knowledge; the literary is a function of the others. The biological, ideological, and metaphysical are entities that change, the literary captures the change, even if for but a moment. This would seem to indicate that the literary takes place, or occurs, in a space between, between transformations within a concept and between relationships among concepts.

Morrison is most concerned with the way that the literary can serve as a vehicle through which readers can observe how the biological and the ideological, particularly in regards to race, relate to one another, but her point bears on the issue of literary versus empirical discourse. Empirical discourse resists being transformed. Calling on the literary sensibility that Morrison describes as, “the private imagination interacting with the external world it inhabits” (1800), connection, whether between the biology of skin color and the ideology of freedom or the biology of brain function and the ideology of social

coherence, takes place because an individual chooses to employ the power of imagination to bridge a gap. For Morrison, a private subject in a literary moment uses the power of imagination, a power we can associate with love and also with hospitality, to connect to the Other rather than to be terrified by it and seek to destroy it.

Tension develops between the literary and the empirical, for Morrison, only when we change their relationship from one in which the literary is a function of the empirical to an equivalence. Morrison tells us that the relationship between the biological and the ideological is represented by an operation of the literary, "Literature redistributes and mutates in figurative language the social conventions of Africanism" (1800). We get into difficulty when we consider the literary and the biological as comparable values, that one can stand for the other, in terms of discourses and ways of making meaning. It is this reduction that creates the transitive situation between the literary and the empirical where it doesn't actually exist. Empirical discourse cannot conclusively express artistic reality in the same way that literary discourse cannot conclusively represent biological reality. More simply, love is not terror.

For Derrida, the "two interpretations of interpretation" are "absolutely irreconcilable" (926), but they are for Emerson and Morrison also. Derrida claims, "I do not believe that today there is any question of choosing" and that "the category of choice seems particularly trivial" (926), but this is only because he is entirely committed to dissolving binary structuring semantically. He has demonstrated using semantics that boundaries are always permeable, thus a human subject need not be relied upon to exercise what, for him, is a faulty human faculty. Emerson and Morrison maintain that

while there is a tension in the moment of encounter between the known and unknown because the human subject can respond in love for or violence towards the Other, with hospitality or rejection, with the literary or empirical sensibility, a human subject still can and will exercise a choice. Derrida seems to discount that a subject consciously will understand the social human necessity of creating boundaries in order recreate them.

SUBJECTIVITY AND DIALOGUE

"…though his words were querulous his heart began to glow secretly. Presently it burst into speech. 'You understand me…!"
E.M. Forster

Derrida's characterization of the discourse of *différance* and the radical Other as monstrous reveals his own deep anxiety about whether understanding is possible. In this characterization, he seems to say that any attempt at knowing the unknown will always be fearsome and the encountered unknown will always be incomprehensible. But I think this only reflects one type of conception of an encounter with the Other. In the encounter characterized by the literary sensibility, imaginative, connective, and hospitable capabilities mitigate the fear of the Other, and make a collaborative meaning making process possible. The self recognizes that it will not undergo a total annihilation, but a death and simultaneous rebirth as the result of a choice to engage the Other, which need not be feared. Jean-Paul Sartre's "Why Write?" examines the relationship in writing between the self and the Other, or the known and the unknown, and manages to preserve the possibility of understanding with the literary sensibility in a way that Derrida does not. Like Derrida, Sartre recognizes the slippage of language, but he maintains a relationship between the self and the Other, an economy, an ethical sensibility that is essentially different from what informs Derrida.

In Derrida's model the self is defined in terms of the Other and the Other is defined in terms of the self. Richter explains, "Rather than achieving meaning through presence, language strives toward meaning through the play…of a system that operates via formal differences that lack any content" (829). This treatment of binaries performs a

double negation: a neither/nor, rather than a collapse or transcendence: an either/or, a both/and. Like Angier, this treatment, using the terms of the self, denies the existence of the Other. Sartre's discussion of the collapse of binary structure is slightly different: "the meaning is no longer contained in the words, since it is [the reader] who allows the signification of each of them to be understood; and the literary object, though realized through language, is never given in language" (664). For Sartre, the meaning/purpose/center of a communicative act can have a presence; this presence relies, not on the author (the self) but on the reader (the Other). While the self is aware that "at the very interior of this object [the word or sign] there are more silences…the author does not tell. [The reader] must invent them all in a continual exceeding of the written thing" (664).

This move is not possible in the Derridean model because, here, the Other has no existence outside of the terms of the self, at least, the self can never really be sure. Because of this uncertainty, the Other always seemingly threatens the self. Derrida assumes that the acknowledgment that there is no center, no centered meaning, and no centered purpose in itself will guarantee a joyful freedom for writers and readers, but the result is more often the anxiety of annihilation. But in the moment of encounter, the self does risk annihilation as we know it. It encounters the Other and is changed, but this needs welcoming, hospitality, for better or for worse.

While it is arguable that the self, for Sartre, is never really sure of the existence of a radical Other, this self hopes for it and has faith in it. "The artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun…all literary work is an appeal" (665). Sartre's

trusted Other is able to function freely and to participate in communication, while Derrida's monstrous Other is trapped in what Martinot refers to as "an anti-dialectic in which the act of speaking to [the] other effects itself only as auto-affect, as speaking to oneself" (203). Additionally, Sartre's trusted Other and trusting self are not fraught with the same anxiety present in Derrida's model because, for Sartre "positional enjoyment is accompanied by non-positional consciousness of being essential in relation to an object perceived as essential" (669).

While Sartre's 'appeal' might resonate with Derrida's call to "read in a certain way," there is a subtle difference. Both Sartre's appeal and Derrida's freeplay require a leap; Derrida seems to say, "even though communication can't happen, play anyway," while Sartre seems to say, "converse, aware that most likely communication won't happen, but maybe." Although slight, this order of recognition is significant and figures (with Derrida's assumptions about the Other, assumptions about the literary, and assumptions about levels of knowledge) into the dismantling of the possibility of dialogue. The understanding that all language is subject to *différance*, however, need not require the passing "beyond man and humanism" nor what Jürgen Habermas, in "Modernity versus Postmodernity," calls a "false program of the negation of culture" (1951). Meanings shift, and through imaginative projection and trust in the Other, dialogue and the shared creation of an understanding of shared reality can continue to take place.

In his essay, Sartre discusses the result of being "proportionally less conscious of the thing produced and more conscious of our productive activity" (662), which I

understand to be another way to explain *différance*. When "we ourselves produce the rules of production, the measures, the criteria…then we never find anything but ourselves in our work" (662). This seems to me to correlate with problem of the empirical sensibility; inherent to this way of making meaning "the object is given as the essential thing and the subject as inessential. The [subject, then,] seeks essentiality in the creation and obtains it, but then it is the object which becomes inessential" (663). Empirical sensibility, thus, is not a means by which the integrity of the known and the unknown can be maintained at their encounter.

In the empirical encounter between the known and unknown, the self and the Other, the self's need to feel essential in relation to the world, explanations of which, I find, are compellingly provided by Jacques Lacan and René Girard, gets satisfied by unjustly making the object inessential. One resolution to this injustice is to make both the subject and object inessential, i.e. collapse the binary, but this is unsatisfactory, regardless of the logic of it, because the need to feel essential doesn't go away. Another resolution would be to endlessly defer the recognition that essentiality is understandable, i.e. trace the *différance*, but this is also unsatisfactory, regardless of the semantics of it, because the need exists in the present whether or not it will be resolved in the future. According to Andrew McKenna, in *Violence and Difference*, "what Derrida's critique lacks is any intersubjective dimension" (107).

Sartre suggests how we might account for this, though the conditions under which his suggestions occur, both his discussion and history itself, prove very difficult to attain. Sartre argues that a writer "does not create [a text] *for himself*" (663). This is

because “the operation of writing implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative” (663). Writing “can find its fulfillment only in reading” (665), but “these two connected acts [writing and reading] necessitate two distinct agents” (663). This is not to say that the self is understood in terms of the Other, but in terms of another self, and the ability to recognize another self requires freedom.

Sartre explains that “behind the various aims of authors, there is a deeper and more immediate choice which is common to all of us” (662). This choice is to act freely in an appeal to the freedom of the Other, and it is only through this act that a self is granted freedom for itself and the ability to understand itself as a self. The Other, too, must choose to act freely, for “if he is inattentive, tired, stupid, or thoughtless,” to which we might add oppressed by other linguistic, historical, psychological or social reasons, “he will never manage to ‘catch on’…in the sense that we see that fire ‘catches’” (664). For Sartre, freedom can only be attained “first, by recognizing it, then, having confidence in it, and finally, requiring of it an act, an act in its own name” (665). Having confidence, or *faith*, that the Other, freely, will act *in faith* seems to be what is missing from Derrida because he does “not believe that today there is any question of *choosing*” and that “the category of choice seems particularly trivial” (Derrida 926). Of course there can be no choice if there is no center or subject; unfortunately, however, without a subject, there also can be no freedom because freedom is, according to Sartre, “a perpetually renewed choice” (666).

The relentless deferral and tracing that Derrida performs in his writing, in my opinion, works less to require his reader to perpetually renew his choice and more to

constrain the reader into never being able to make a choice. In constructing his text to put off his own reading, any hope that Derrida has that a reader will complete him cannot be fulfilled. This move does not possess the "politeness toward the reader" (666) that Sartre says is a part of the "pact of generosity between author and reader" (668). This generosity, which comes out of the understanding that "both [writer and reader] bear the responsibility for the universe" (670), cannot "simply abstain from condemning the subjection of man by man" (671). The writer both reveals an understanding of the world, and at the same time provides an invitation "to the consciousness of others" (670) to act. Sartre describes the possible acts which arise in response to the appeal of the writer in three ways, as "generous indignation" which is a "promise" on the reader's part "to change," "admiration," which is a "promise to imitate," and "generous love," which is "a promise to maintain," (671). The empirical sensibility and, in my opinion, Derrida seem only to work with the first two, but the literary sensibility leaves space in which the third may also work.

E.M. Forster, in *A Room with a View*, provides an example of this tri-partite engagement and seems to operate with a prescient post-Structural literary sensibility. In writing the story of a young woman, Lucy Honeychurch, as she makes her entrée into provincial British society, Forster at the same time reads the British Modern identity. He at once admires this self in the representations he designs, is indignant towards it in seeking to illuminate its flaws, *and* he loves it in allowing it to perform in his story with all its flaws. In extending love towards the British Modern self he seeks to understand, Forster maintains a hospitable space for both this self and an Other to operate. Forster

accomplishes this in the act of his writing, but he also reflects this within his writing as well, in the characters and events of the story.

At the outset, Lucy is in Florence where, with her cousin and chaperone Charlotte Bartlett, she is ostensibly participating in the middle-class privilege of tourism. Inwardly, however, she hopes to more substantively engage "something quite different, whose existence she had not realized before" (16). Lucy, "in a state of spiritual starvation" (17), is aware of how stifling the culture in which she participates is to her sense of herself, but she is only moderately aware of how to go about freeing herself from the constraints of definitions placed upon her. Lucy's trip to Italy is meant to represent her opportunity to "find herself," but the mediation and manipulation of the tourist in a foreign culture simply repeats the stifling mechanisms of the home culture. Charlotte, who comes to represent pieces of this culture, rather than comfort, "gave Lucy the sensation of a fog" in her embrace (29).

In the course of the opening chapter, Forster introduces the Emersons as well, a father and son, who are also British, but who might be better described as travelers rather than tourists. No doubt these Emersons hearken to the Romantic ideals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and we see in both George Emerson and his father their desire to open themselves directly to as much of the experiences of Florence as are available to them, as they hope others would also. This openness is seen as "ill-bred" by the other tourists, and "the only person who remained friendly to them" is the Anglican vicar, Mr. Beebe.

When the Emersons hear that Lucy and Charlotte have rooms in the *pension* with no view of the river Arno, they demand that Lucy and Charlotte exchange rooms with

them at once. This transgression of manners appalls Charlotte, but it is in the exchanged room that Lucy is first able to breathe. In the room that comes to be occupied by Charlotte, George has left a "sheet of paper on which was scrawled an enormous note of interrogation. Nothing more" (29). This question mark can be read to signify his desire for answers and his melancholy at not being able to find them, a pertinent critique of the Romantic effort to "recollect in tranquillity (sic)…the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 316), and it can also be read to signify his sense that he cannot know "the answers" by himself. That he has left this sign in the hope of Lucy finding it is a possible reading, for Charlotte finds this message at first "meaningless" but then "gradually menacing" (29). In her sensibility, the sensibility of the empirical oppressor, George's question mark can only represent a threat to Lucy, and whatever the intentions signified by might be, they can only represent the possibility of her annihilation.

The remainder of the story, however, reveals just the opposite. George, and the relationship Lucy has with him, one of mutual recognition, reinvigorates, recreates, and renews the both of them. This is not an easy relationship to get into, however, and the path to it is guarded by propriety, stability, convention, and style in the name of Charlotte Bartlett and the other British guests at the *pension,* and in Britain by Lucy's fiancé, Cecil Vyse. Only by happy accident does Lucy first have a moment with the elder Mr. Emerson at the church of Santa Croce after she has been jilted by her cousin and her tour guide, Miss Lavish, and been left seemingly alone. She witnesses the kindness of Mr. Emerson to an Italian child, and "in her chastened mood, she no longer despised the Emersons" (41). The Emersons make what, to her, seems like a concerted effort to connect with

Italy, to experience where they are and who they meet without the frustrations and filter of another's authority, without a Baedeker describing the frescoes of Giotto "in the presence of whose tactile values she was capable of feeling what was proper" (38). These attempts to connect intrigue her.

She reveals to Mr. Emerson that she has lost her Baedeker and Miss Lavish, and Mr. Emerson mocks, "*That's* worth minding." In response, "Lucy was puzzled. She was again conscious of some new idea, and was not sure whither it would lead her" (41). Lucy stays with her nascent thought, though, and with the Emersons, and after engaging Santa Croce and the frescoes of Giotto together, expressing their own experiences of them, "they had cast a spell over her. They were so serious and so strange that she could not remember how to behave" (44). Lucy felt sure that "her mother might not like her talking to that kind of person, and that Charlotte would object most strongly" (48).

What feels strange to Lucy, though, is the opening of herself, in hospitality to herself, to the Other. To Santa Croce: "it must be a wonderful building. But how like a barn!" (38). To Giotto: "It is so wonderful what they say about his tactile values. Though I like things like the Della Robbia babies better" (47). In opening herself to an affirmation of the Other, she also affirms herself too. It is in this way that she is revealed to Mr. Emerson, *her* reader, who is "conscious of disclosing in creating, of creating by disclosing" (Sartre 664). His response is to transgress propriety again, and he talks directly to Lucy's heart.

> Let yourself go. Pull out from the depths those thoughts that you do not understand, and spread them out in the sunlight and know the meaning of them. By understanding George you may learn to understand yourself. It will be good for the both of you (48).

Mr. Emerson sees Lucy where she is, on the cusp of gaining a new sense of herself with her own voice. It is this sense that he, exceeding the Romantic ideals he represents, understands is created with affirmation in shared subjectivity. Though it is arguable that because he promotes the interest of his own son this can be seen as a selfish motive on his character's part, I think, rather, Forster would have us understand Mr. Emerson as unselfish. Mr. Emerson exercises the literary sensibility and understands that to "realize that by the side of the everlasting Why there is a Yes – a transitory Yes if you like, but a Yes" (49).

The literary reconciliation of the unknown is an affirmation that only takes place when a subject opens itself to and with a radical Other. As Nietzsche proclaims in *The Birth of Tragedy*, "being the *active* center of that world, [the poet] may boldly speak in the first person (emphasis mine)" (446). This is what Charles Taylor calls Nietzsche's "all-englobing affirmation of 'yea-saying,'" which, he reminds us, Nietzsche paired with a sense of "the arbitrariness of interpretation" in the relationship between Dionysus and Apollo (488). Taylor argues that Derridean thinking neglects this opening for "the saving inconsistency," which becomes for Nietzsche "something which deserved unconditional affirmation, yea-saying" (488-9). This pairing of affirmation and arbitrariness, of Dionysus and Apollo, is, of course, not an easy truth to understand, and as Lucy has only just begun this journey, she retreats and joins her cousin at the end of the episode in Santa Croce.

But Lucy, still, "was conscious of her discontent…'The world,' she thought, 'is certainly full of beautiful things, if only I could come across them" (69). Forster

understands that in order to engage the world, Lucy must span "across" something, a something which Sartre attempts to define. In her first encounters with the world, the unknown, Lucy confronts that meaning "is by nature a silence and an opponent of the word" (Sartre 664). "'Nothing ever happens to me,' she reflected" (Forster 69), but "nothing is accomplished if the reader does not put himself from the very beginning and almost without a guide at the height of this silence" (Sartre 664). Before she can live on her own in the consciousness she experienced by accident with Mr. Emerson, Lucy must become conscious of this necessity and stop measuring the world through self-reference. When she finds herself alone in the Piazza Signoria at "the hour of unreality – the hour, that is, when unfamiliar things are real" (70), her opportunity presents itself.

Lucy witnesses the murder of an Italian man. As he dies, "he frowned; he bent towards Lucy with a look of interest, as if he had an important message for her. He opened his lips to deliver it, and a stream of red came out between them…That was all" (70). At first, we might be inclined to think that it is in witnessing this event that Lucy becomes conscious, but "a crowd rose…It hid this extraordinary man from her" (70). The murder and the attempt to deliver a message represent how the self confronts the Other in the moment characterized by the empirical sensibility. In this sensibility, the Italian man's message is one that Lucy can never understand because it is the result of violence; additionally, culture intervenes to keep the meaning from her.

Alternatively, in the same moment, "Mr. George Emerson happened to be a few paces away, looking at her across the spot where the man had been. How very odd! Across something" (70). Both Lucy and George have witnessed the same event,

experienced an unknown, and it is here that Lucy becomes conscious, becomes liberated, comes into understanding, engages the literary sensibility: each acknowledges that the Other has also shared in that witnessing. In the humor that is typical to Forster, this consciousness is overwhelming to Lucy, and she faints. But as she opens her eyes again, "George Emerson still looked at her, but not across anything" (71).

In this moment, George and Lucy have shared in a common reality, a reality that through their participation in it shifts what each thought they knew. "The whole world seemed pale and void of its original meaning" (71). This participation, according to Sartre, is "an imaginary engagement in the action" (670). George and Lucy are witnesses. They witness a murder, an annihilation, and they can respond in two ways in order for their experience to make sense: with an empirical sensibility or with a literary sensibility. Lucy, out of her duty to propriety and with the empirical sensibility, indicates that she would rather be alone, but George resists. He risks standing at the brink of silence. He acts freely. He acts in the faith that Lucy can and will also act freely. George, in response to the murder, acts in kindness to Lucy; the murder calls him, not to murder, but to love.

George relates to Lucy that "the murderer tried to kiss" (73) the man he had murdered, and Lucy finds this odd. But of course she would! She is still struggling to break free from the empirical sensibility that cannot allow this paradox. Lucy's "heart warms towards him for the first time" (73) when she discovers that George has discarded the photographs that she earlier purchased in an impotent attempt to transgress the restrictions of her cousin. George, in love, calls Lucy to love, and she does. George and

Lucy understand that “something tremendous has happened” (74) and “they had come to a situation where character tells” (75). Lucy, still testing sensibilities, stops George:

> “How quickly these accidents do happen, and then one returns to the old life!”
> “I don’t.”
> Anxiety moved her to question him.
> His answer was puzzling: “I shall probably want to live” (76).

Lucy, beginning to exercise her literary sensibility responds to her anxiety by reaching out to George to co-create understanding. After this exchange, she contemplates his answer, given out of the faith of the literary sensibility that she will also answer, and what she hears is “some unexpected melody” (76).

The rest of Forster’s story chronicles how Lucy becomes fully conscious of the literary sensibility that was opened to her in this moment of consciousness. The story also reveals many of Forster’s other compelling critiques of: the role of women and how a woman’s identity formation differs from that of a man, the relationship between genders and the institution of marriage in the Modern age, the hypocrisy of the Anglican church and the role of religion and spirituality in Modern life, Britain’s imperial culture and its clash with other world cultures it would seek to dominate. At its heart, though, I think, is the moment in which Forster represents that dialogue is one of the possible events that can take place at the moment that the Other, which may be actual persons or simply what is known and what is unknown to one person, are able to act as equal agents in an encounter.

When one or the other or both cannot act as a free entity the results of the encounter will be confrontation, competition, colonization, cooptation, and/or conflict.

Although, I will grant, there are moments in which dialogue might not be desirable, I think that, for the most part, dialogue is not an event in which we have as many opportunities to engage as we might like, so I ask: what must we bear in mind in order to provide ourselves with the dialogic opportunity, for this just and non-violent event in which we can participate as a free entity in the name of the freedom of Others?

Both Sartre and Forster discuss and demonstrate that it is places in which the literary sensibility is operational that can offer us a way to understand how dialogue works as well as provide the moment to practice dialogue. Post-structuralism would have us understand that all language, all discourses, and all texts are subject to this need for negotiation, and while this perspective is meant to open every area of human endeavor to the type of dialogue I am considering, it risks paralyzing justice on the actual, lived level if it cannot grant that human subjects make choices.

AN INVITATION TO NON-VIOLENCE

"Life is indeed dangerous…It is indeed unmanageable, but the essence of it is not a battle."
E.M. Forster

Whether dialogue can actually take place in our contemporary context or is even a value that our culture is interested in upholding are real questions. In 2005, AT&T launched a marketing campaign anchored by the slogan, "Your World, Delivered" (Mook), and as part of this campaign, ran a television commercial that featured the promise, "Helping to create a world unlike any other. Your own." As the echo of auto-affection reverberates, I am compelled to ask: has the sentiment and desire to "reach out and touch someone" really been replaced?

It's possible. But even though our context is changing, we are still human beings. We still use language, and we still rely on it to approximate some form of communication. We still live in social constructs, and we still require means to mediate those constructs. Reconstructing dialogue would do what Derrida himself asks: "to conceive of the common ground" (926). This common ground can only be informed by principles of deconstruction since Derrida and his work are part of the history that precedes and influences it, but it will most usefully rely on an understanding of the relationship between the self and the Other that can be recognized by the literary sensibility: the being within each that negotiates the space between each.

The contemporary conditions of existence in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the twenty-first century: at war continuously, facing major climate issues, alienated from conventional patterns of domestic life and work, confronting changing

scientific understandings of our physical basis, are difficult for most people to assimilate into real understanding. In some cases, these conditions are not only difficult but impossible to understand. Most people live, have their being, and think at micro levels, local levels, whereas the above conditions function on macro levels, global levels. Literary sensibility, which is in itself a just frame of reference, enables us to rethink these conditions, as well as the Others with which we share them, in a non-violent way that allows for the possibility of understanding within each moment.

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