

by TYRONE WILLIAMS

Work/time =

and steed of Bellarophon
beneath whose hooves once again
new springs are loosed on Helicon

–Robert Duncan, *Passages 30 Stage Directions*

so that was what it meant to be
two-timed at the same time

–anonymous mine pony

[The following fragment has been authorized and approved by AETNA—Animals
for the Ethical Treatment of Non-Animals]

Pre-Bout: X in the Dressage Room

Alt ough X co ld sc le t e gr y gr en hi ls X l ft + X ri ht X w s
unselfc nscious f X s st tus s n out ider—n t bec use X w s n t o e f
t e n n-Xs b t bec use X w s t o mu h n n-X, t o ne gh n n-X. Rega ding
X s exper ences “o t th re,” t e all ged sou ce f h s alie ation
(anti-h rdness), t e exper ences f t e n n-Xs mir red h s, th ir den als
notwith tanding. Alt ough blind pots cou dn’t b m re luxu ious, t e f ne oa
s f be ng s me sh w-wh re-ho se, n n-Xs, l ke a l bi eds n gen ral, on y
s w t e ele ant spec acle f “po er” a d “gr ce” of eque train sh ws ,
t e “sp ed” a d “agi ity” f t e race rack-c m-ham ter wh el—t e on
y vi ble tr cks o t f t e sta les, t h ar s me ne gh/whi ny t.
N t a l “o t th re,” X wa ted t whi ny/ne gh, t l ve t e fu l dres
age.

St ll, X h d t gr n r re/sup ress X s Janu esque resen ments a
d be r do n/sub imate t e ta k a d ho f: a excl sive inte view

with one of the last surviving members
of the first wave of Scottish immigrants
in the 19th century. The idea for the story had come from X. X had
had to convince/cajole X's editor, a Te Kin man, Miller, that the
story was worth pursuing. X knew that the Miller would never run
anything too scurrilous, too stale-rouging, but X hoped that one of
the underground weelies would run an unexpurgated version.

Perhaps X was too non-X about the notice X was being wanted, but
that everything began turning dark gray X expected one singular gray
figure at the foot of the hills. How

long, X wondered, had that thing stood there, motionless against
the deepening gray. Then, soft had been cut by being
seen, the figure vanished into the dark hillside. From the slight,
occasional movement of brush and foliage, X ascertained the
creature was making its way down hill. X stood blindly at the
hillside—night had fallen completely—until the dark gray figure emerge
d out of the darkness, halting about thirty strides from X. X
detected the odor of the burro, a meek pack animal [slur]. X took
one tentative step forward and once again, soft once, the burro
turned its hindside to X and proceeded to retreat in spite
of that, X trailing/falling behind.

More accustomed to the hill than X, more stable-slicker [slur], the
burro managed to increase the distance/labor between X and itself, X
breathing with obvious difficulty while the burro, having reached the
hilltop, affected a far more implacable calm.

When X reached the burro X turned a deliberate stare on those
indifferent eyes. X wanted to provoke the burro, penetrate that exterior
of apparent disinterest. The burro did not exactly "return" X's
stare. Instead the burro seemed to withdraw even deeper into itself.
X gazed at another non-X [x x/mirror] but a dark gray blacker
than the enveloping black. Sifted/ft/fr bliners was X
that X jumped when the burro broke the silence with one single

word—"There"—accompanied by the barely perceptible shift of his right eye. Irritated by the burr's lacrimic manner, X turned and gazed down the backside of the hill. They were old, their movements slow, a deliberate attrition. X moved down the hill toward the hoses. As X approached one of the hoses raised his head and said, « Let's get this over with." The ear had to be led the colloquial expression, the marred but smoothed over/scrapped down by experience. X got the point—X would have to have his ears punched back during the interview. Affectedly/assuming a air of non-chalance, X sidestepped close—but not too close—the old station, pulled out his digital recorder, a pen and pad from his knapsack under his neck and, turning to the recorder, began the interview.

[What follows is the unedited version that neither the Miner nor various revolutionary publications had any interest in publishing in full, this despite what the young journalist-in-training perceived to be the radical character, to say nothing of the historical value, of the interview]

The Interview-Fight

er: How long were you a mine pony?

ee: Let's start from the beginning, or at least my beginning, how I remember or what I recall of what I was told, that which was passed down to me as "my" origins. Apparently my ancestors came over from Northern Scotland just before the outbreak of the 1776 Rebellion or, as we call it, the first colonial civil war (this is for human consumption, right?). Anyway, all my great-great grand parents were born and reared in mines. They died there, too, having never seen—perhaps having never heard of—the overground.

er: You mean, they—

ee: Right—and don't interrupt me again. Your "surprise" is telling, simply another index of how little your generation knows or cares about its—our—own history. As I was saying, they never saw the sky, the sun, never smelled trees or flowers. They never knew other animals existed. Their world was one monstrous pair of blinders. Ditto for all the generations until my father and his wife. He was born curious, eager to explore, to sniff the branches that cannot be seen, and though he too lived and died in the mines without having ever seen the upper world, he'd heard rumors of its existence and, as if by instinct, had gravitated toward a like-minded renegade herd, fellow stampeders, as it were. The other ponies heehawed derisively at the suggestion that a world a hundred times brighter and perfumed with a rarified air, with sweet hay, actually existed. My father and his friends were an unbearable source of humiliation for my mother who migrated from one of the more enlightened mine shafts. She, along with her mother, forbade my father from spreading his "lies" in my presence. Still, I heard fragments of the stories from his friends after he was killed in a bizarre "accident" (as had my grandfather, his father, an old steamer from the old herds...) during a partial shaft collapse due, it was later discovered, to rotting posts which had passed inspection as recent as the week before the cave-in. A horrible way to die, no doubt, but oddly enough it was a mine shaft collapse some ten years later—you might recall the Eastern Pennsylvania incident—that inadvertently led me to confirm those selfsame myths.

er: Yes, yes, this is what I want to focus on, your role as a pioneer, among the first of your generation to see the outside—excuse me, upper—world. Can you tell us a bit about that day, how it changed your life?

ee: As your own pathetic attempts at political correctness reveal, these terms—outside, upper, above, etc.—are all problematic, though I too cannot escape using them. I'd prefer "Other" if the bipeds hadn't appropriated it with such violence and abuse. I suppose the delineation of differences is a

phenomenon of existence—not just “life”—itself. I mean, and I’m ashamed to say, we had our own terms of distinction in the mines: stable-heads, straw-chokers, biped-suckers, shit-eaters, tail-swishers, Mr. Eds...

er: Mr. Eds?

ee: Yeah, you know, Wilbur-loving sell-outs...

er: Right, right—

ee: Let us repair to the narrative (senseless hewhawing)...We were down in shaft 17-D Mine L, owned by Rupert Turner & Co. It was early morning—I know that now—when suddenly—drumroll please!—I heard a loud boom. Clouds of sawdust and dirt began to billow from a recess near the shaft. Bipeds were running everywhere, tripping, falling over and cursing one another. Their shouts, their screams, the wild fear in their eyes, accompanied by our own frantic whinnying, paralyzed us. We could not move a haunch—not until the sting of a cracking whip flung us into action and we followed some of the miners streaming out through an escape valve, abandoning the crushed flesh, bone, columns and posts. When we saw the narrow passageway the miners wanted us to enter, a few—not me—balked, buckled, terrified, digging in their hooves. Another crack of the whip snapped them out of it and the herd was moving again. We seemed to swim through invisible darkness, the smell of the horses ahead—all sweat, shit and piss—and the dancing lamps affixed to the miners’ hats, our only guides. We surged up steep grades, plunged to the left, to the right, at irregular, halting velocities. I too was afraid but I just kept telling myself, they’re trying to save us despite ourselves, despite the fact we’re only horses. Eventually—even now I cannot say how long it took—in the distance, just beyond the dancing lamps and heaving flesh ahead, I saw a tiny orb of gray-green brightness steadily growing larger. I was stunned, terrified—I’d never seen such brightness, a thousand times brighter than the brightest miner’s lamp. I shrank away from the bright, we all did,

instinctively, again bringing the controlled stampede to a standstill. More cracks of the whip—more whinnying—and we were on the move once more. As we neared the end of the shaft engulfed in that unnatural gray-green brightness, the horses in front buckled, whinnying, the singing whip notwithstanding. In the end they had to drag us out into what they kept calling “the light.” When I dared to open my eyes I was in shock. I had never seen such bright grays and greens and another color which I later learned was called “blue.” The blue ceiling of this strange vaulted shaft seemed infinitely higher than the low roofs of the mines to which I’d grown accustomed. And that ground! Instead of the usual dirt and dust, it was a soft green-gray beneath my hooves. Even more amazing, this shaft seemed wall-less. No matter how much I sniffed I could not smell the familiar dirt and wooden enclosures I’d come to know—yea—love. Mist exhilarating was the air. My lungs had never taken in such pure, such sweet, fumes. It was nothing like the pungent tang of metallic residue that filled our chests like reversed armor. So taken was I with these new sensations that I did not notice some of the miners kneeling on the ground. They were pulling up parts of that soft green substance and chewing it. So we followed their example, bending our heads to do likewise, to eat the ground. So sweet was this “grass,” as they called it, that I started crying.

er: So how did you swing it so you could work on top?

ee: Watch it. I know what you’re getting at...We were above ground for only a few hours, but when they began to shepherd us to the mine entrance later that morning, I’m sure I wasn’t the only pony already plotting its return. I’d always been a good hard worker. I never slacked off, never took sick leave. The miners liked me. Now, we had long heard that some ponies—some of the “good” ones we’d slurred, derided—had opportunities for advancement “elsewhere,” but we’d always assumed elsewhere simply meant another, presumably “better,” shaft or nicer mine. Perhaps elsewhere, we thought, was a shaft where the feed was varied instead of the same three square channels—I mean, meals; perhaps elsewhere was a mine where you got daily—not

monthly—hosings. As I drew closer and closer to the entrance to the mine, I noticed, off to the side, a pile of bridles, horseshoes, mine wagons and old dressage. Others, I saw, noticed too. We all looked at one another, straining to contain our excitement. It was true. The old tales were all true. My father had been right. Ponies had been on top before. Given the general neighing and whinnying, pawing and snorting, I knew there'd be a slew of applications heading to the offices of the miners' bosses—bipeds of the bipeds, we called them. No pony had ever seen these bipeds but the miners assured us of their existence. They were rumored to reside within a huge pile of glass and wood in several of the shafts, though other rumors had it that the bipeds of the bipeds of the bipeds had a gigantic assemblage of glass and wood above ground. Given the depressed demeanors of the miners when they returned from these glass-wood contraptions—bent heads, shuffling feet, muttered orders—we had no reason to doubt their existence. At any rate, I applied as soon as I got my first break—they had us back on shift that afternoon—and within six months I was promoted, hauling ore from the shaft to the surface. Because promotions usually took a year to be processed, reviewed and approved (or denied)—one normally had to wait until a pony died or was sold off—there was some petty gossip that I'd been personally recommended by one of the miners with whom, it was alleged, I'd had "improper relations." A baseless lie! And for the record I'd like to state that I regard interspecies intercourse of any kind as abhorrent and contrary to the laws of nature and horses...

er: Fine—calm down, I believe you...Still, getting that promotion must have been a dream come true...

ee: Sure, sure, tres cool...until, that is...until I suffered the same fate that befell us all, thanks to the damn Watt...

er: Watt?

ee: James Watt...

er: Oh, I see...

ee: Do you? Do you understand that he changed everything—though few of us perceived the threat at the time—that he ruined my life, our way of life, even if we argue, still, about whether the “change” was, in the final analysis, for good or ill...

er: As in the argument that his work ultimately led to the liberation of the ponies from the mines...

ee: Yes, correct. One could make that argument about his work, but certainly not about Watt himself. He was in it for the money, poor businessman that he wound up being. Why do you think he slapped all those patents on the ideas of others? Haven't you read all this history? Haven't you learned anything? Don't you know the histories, the debates, all our equine lore? Let me break it down for you. On the right front hoof, Watt's improvement of steam engine efficiency meant that fewer and fewer of us would be bred to labor in the mines. On the rear right hoof, “freedom” has meant more divisiveness within the ranks, most of us consigned to farms and ranches while the few get to prance around in high-neighborhood shows and exhibitions or race around oval paths for the entertainment of bipeds. On the front left hoof, liberation from the mines blinded us to the fact that the revenue generated from mining served as one of the pillars for modern industrialism. There's more than a bit of irony in the fact that the distance we put between us and one of the pivotal spokes of modern wealth made us economically irrelevant. I mean, imagined what might have happened, how different things today might be, had we stayed in the mines long enough to outlast the bipeds who were themselves turning their attention to new objects and, need I add, new subjects, to exploit. What if horses owned the mines?

er: What about all the human—biped is such a slur—chatter about the

irreversible emergence of service economies? Their sites of modern industrialism are, now, little more than what they themselves refer to as rust belts of depression, unemployment, crime..

ee: Are you really equine? Are you just a Trojan, a mule in disguise? Is there anything between those big floppy Mr. Ed ears? Do you think this country constitutes the entire world? You think industrialism is passé in Indonesia, North Korea, China, Venezuela, Kenya, and Nigeria, to say nothing of eastern Kentucky, southern Arkansas... ?

er: But wouldn't your "plan," even if feasible, simply mean that horses would have the opportunity to join the class of labor exploiters?

ee: Bipedshit! I've heard that crap before, the so-called rear left leg argument. Listen, a horse is not a biped, which is precisely why they—your so-called "humans"—cannot possibly be considered animals. Haven't you read the various scientific and animalogical treatises that prove beyond any reasonable doubt the genetically-based warmth and compassion, the natural herd-like instinct, of all things equine? Even if you don't buy the scientific and animalogic studies' "objectivity," do you really believe that we, horses, would abuse other creatures—bipeds or not—after the centuries of abuse we've suffered? Don't you believe that we trot a higher path? How could we ever exploit...oh, I don't know...say, a mule...the way we were exploited?

er: So you're saying that if we had taken over the mines, if we had put mules and—what? burros?—to work, we would have been more equine than they humans were humane, right? Okay, then what would we have done about the premature deaths due—the medical data is indisputable—to various lung diseases brought on by the poor air quality in the mines? Do you realize how many pit ponies suffered permanent lung damage if they managed to survive their work years in the mines? And back to your original thesis—exactly how were we to "seize" ownership of the mines?

ee: Good questions—we would have provided our workers with a decent health care plan...As for taking over the mines, we had the power of economic backlash—the strike! Why so many of us were too timid to avail ourselves of this gambit is beyond me, but we could have threatened work slowdowns (notice, by the way, that some of our cousins, like the mule, who have exploited the work slowdown had a reputation for laziness before they ever took decisive action), could have held the bipeds in the iron teeth of economic terror. Yes, yes, I know that when a few renegade ponies tried to strike in some of the western salt mines, they were beaten and whipped back into service...Yes, it is a stain on equine history that the general population of mine ponies turned their heads away from the plight of their equethren, refused to slow down the line, much less join the rebels...But don't forget, they did win some concessions (no more months-old hay, for one, and I certainly hope you don't buy into those scurrilous rumors about some alleged internal study demonstrating that better-fed ponies would be more productive, that it was biped self-interest that led to improvements in our work conditions...). Plus—there are other ways...Remember some of those cave-ins? Some of that wood was so old all it took was an accidental bump...

er: How can you delude yourself? We were never going to own the mines! They'd rather blast and seal abandoned mines—never mine the ones still operational—than turn them over to us...

ee: So that's it, huh? You happy shilling for The Kingman Miner? You wouldn't want to own it, is that it? Guess those stock options and paid vacations are really paying off...

er: Look—there's no need for all that. I'm just a realist. You're turning this discussion into some kind of personal vixendetta where I've tried to canter on the higher ground of professional—

ee: I got your professional right here [edited for content]

er: As opposed to half-assed agit-prop?

ee: Heehaaawww! So much for your “professional”—

er: I’m sorry. I didn’t mean—

ee: Stop apologizing so damn much! Got your goddam head bent down so low no wonder you keep bumping into lamp posts while whinnying about how dark it is...

er: Fuck you!

ee: And the biped that rode you in (naturally)—[transcript cut off at this point]

Post-decision Roundup: X/non-X (with) Draw

At that point X turned off the recorder, paced his knapsack, glared at the old horse’s right eye—was it twinkling?—and plopped back under the hillside. X had failed. Instead of illuminating this well-known but unacknowledged aspect of equine history during the late 19th century, X had allowed the old goat [slur] to draw him in on the dozens. Still, X felt angry, frustrated. X had wasted his time. The old-fashioned equineism of the former company had been, and certainly was now, little more than romantic escapism. But if that were really true, why did X feel the old Ireland prude, feminine fieldism? X pondered the mystery of the appals X drew closer to the bureau, statuesque and implacable as ever, one line serene at the hill. X sensed that the bureau’s serene indifference accounted for its au fait timeliness. X passed by

the bureau without so much as one passing glance, angling down the hillside toward the parking lot where the AV waited in silence. The bureau watched X growing smaller and smaller. Then with one unconscious swish of his tail, the bureau set some peppy spinning off into the night.

Four Dialogues, Five Fish, One Bowl (interrogation procedures)

from ON SPEC

by Tyrone Williams

Preface 1

Absent a lead article, the title *Invisible Man* encapsulates Ralph Ellison's political and cultural philosophy. The unnamed narrator functions as an example of the absent indefinite article; he is just another black man poised at the edge of history, peering into the oblivion into which his alter ego, Tod Clifton, a man named, a definite article, disappears. At the same time, the exceptional circumstances of the unnamed narrator—his prestigious education, his public lectures, his enrollment in The Brotherhood—name him “the...,” a definite article like Tod Clifton. This undecidability, thematized in the bulk of the novel as the narrator's ambivalence, gets yoked to an old cliché of American history: the individual as simultaneously a part of, and apart from, a community. Had Ellison ended the novel prior to the Epilogue he might have avoided the scathing criticism he received from members of the Black Arts Movement. For the Epilogue—reinforced by the implied libertarian politics of the Prologue—tilts the table in favor of the individual. Insofar as the narrator's misadventures in the novel are due in large part to individuals who manipulate groups for their own ends (Dr. Bledsoe, Brockway, and Brother Jack), Ellison's valorization of the individual in the Epilogue may be read as an ideological gesture designed to stave off the implications of the narrative.

In a general and overly simplified way, one might say that Derrida's procedures in *The Gift of Death* are exemplary of deconstruction: to take and examine foundational oppositions that function as the "threads" of argument in a text (philosophical or literary)--and then undo the oppositions by demonstrating that, between any two oppositions, x and not-x, not-x is not only not the polar opposite of x but, in fact, is contained within x. Not-x is incorporated within x. Indeed x could not function as x without not-x. Derrida begins Chapter one by examining Jan Patocka's oppositions between the daemonic and responsibility. In Patocka's historical scheme, religion is the "passage" from the daemonic to responsibility. But this "history" of responsibility is problematic since, in classical thought, responsibility is ahistorical or transcendental. Moreover, as an emblem of ethics, responsibility is not bound to religious revelation. Thus, for Patocka, history is neither a "decidable object nor a totality capable of being mastered" (5-6) precisely because it is bound to responsibility and ethics. For Patocka to think history, responsibility, which, he claims, has not been done in Christianity, is to think of the Christian "self"--or rather to think out this notion of a Christian self--for the first time as that which stands paralyzed before the mysterium tremendum, itself "carried away" against and on a "past" mystery or secret (that orgiastic or daemonic mystery from which Plato tried to deliver philosophy). Thus the "turn" or conversion from Platonism to Christianity is a turn from one mystery to another, a procedure which resembles the "logic of sacrifice" (8) in that one keeps what one gives up (not only the incorporated orgiastic mystery in Platonism, itself incorporated in Christianity but of course, looking ahead, the Abraham-Isaac story, a paradigm of sacrifice). This notion of keeping what one gives up defines in general the Hegelian dialectic, the sublation of thesis and antithesis which, for our purposes, might be defined as daemonic (thesis), Platonic (antithesis) and Christian (synthesis or sublation). This would be true even though Patocka defines the Platonic conversion in terms of its incorporation of the daemonic (as opposed to the Christian repression of Platonism). Western historicity would thus have the structure of a secret: the relation between "these two conversions and three mysteries." This history, which is also the history of responsibility, however "impossible," is thus tied to a culture of death--

specifically, disavowals of death. The Platonic conversion consists of separating the soul from the body and asserting its immortality. The Christian incorporation of Platonism also asserts the immortality of the soul. But as this means that Christianity also envelops the daemonic within Platonism, Christianity—the privileged site of religion, of responsibility—necessarily ingests irresponsibility.

Preface 2

The conversion of epithet to epigraph hardly begins with “nigger”; this word can only be uttered after the qualifying phrases “for example,” “as an example,” and so forth. “African,” “colored” and “black,” for example, were once terms of reprobation “within” and “without” African, colored and black (and, yes, African-American) communities. All the same, it is impossible to deny the privileged status of “nigger,” though such privilege is inseparable from the “evolution” of race relations and race consciousness from before the founding of the United States of America through the 20th century. Thus the early work of comic Richard Pryor which, in the context of the chittlin’ circuit, leveled all these terms, was called in for/into questioning/question by his mid-career work in the 1970’s and 1980’s. It is only in this later era, after his “consciousness” is “raised,” after his popularity extends to national proportions, after his audiences are “integrated,” after he comes under criticism from those associated with the Black Arts Movement and its political-military wing (e.g., the Black Panthers), that Pryor famously “apologizes” for using the term in his shows and vows to never use it again. Were it not bastardized/ahistoricized beyond all significance, one could see in Pryor’s career a direct link between “political correctness,” in its original sense, and the deprivileging of a name (and thus, the reprivileging of a name—in this Afrocentric context, “African”), a move that, beyond all intention, consigns some “Africans” to historical irrelevance as it designates some “Africans” more African than other Africans, including, of course, some who dwell on the continent of Africa. The complications of these relationships and histories accounts—as one example

among many—for the transcendental contradictions that comprise the work of Harold Cruse.

This notion of irresponsibility within responsibility is developed in Chapter Two in terms of its technological "face" and clarified in Chapter Three in terms of the ethical-religious distinctions Derrida considers via Levinas and Kierkegaard. In Chapter Two Derrida demonstrates that Patocka follows Heidegger in attributing to techne in general the drift into alienation and indifference which, in turn, for Patocka, provokes the return of the daemonic. This return of orgiastic passion is the result of the leveling effect of technology, its destruction of the absolute unique individual and its substitution by "the role," mass society's individuated functions and offices. Thus the relationship between the "authentic" self and the role it plays in society is analogous to the relationship between the forgotten or veiled "mystery" of existence and technologism. But it turns out that technology veils this mystery not by burying it deep within the recesses of racial memory but by exposing it, by exposing, in effect, everything. Everything is potentially, eventually, explicable according to this scientific hubris. This is what Patocka means by "inauthentic dissimulation" which unveils all. On the other hand, "authentic dissimulation" keeps or hides the mysteriousness of mystery. Thus inauthentic dissimulation dissimulates authentic dissimulation according to what Derrida calls the "logic of the secret," demonstrated in an exemplary fashion in Poe's tale "The Purloined Letter." In Poe's short detective story, the secret is secreted in the open, in plain view, and thus remains invisible to all except the supra-rational detective. The conjoining of Poe and Heidegger leads Derrida to seeing in Patocka an overall concern with the apprehension of death as the essential mystery. According to the Platonic and philosophical models it engenders, the soul prepares itself for the approach of death which is also its freedom from the body. The Christian concept of the mysterium tremendum announces, however, another way to approach death--and that is to approach death, to give death to one's self in surrendering to the mystery of mysteries. This comes about by recognizing one's absolute singularity which is "given" to one by death.

And since it is from this site of death--which one paradoxically gives to oneself (by approaching death) even as one is giving one's unique one-ness by death--that one is called to responsibility. This is why Derrida says, anticipating the Abraham/Isaac story, only mortals can be responsible. One gives oneself death by taking death upon oneself. This call to death, to responsibility, comes from within--the call of the mysterium tremendum. This call from within to be responsible thus reverses the field of direction, and one is called to respond to the other. Thus Derrida poses Levinas--who valorizes the absolute other over and against the self--to Heidegger who, following Plato, still views the soul as essentially responsible to itself, to its own preparations for death. For Levinas, however, the fact of the other, the face of the other, halts the latent drive toward solipsism implied in the Platonic conception of the soul/body relationship and demands the outward turn toward the ethical dimension--responsibility toward and for the other.

Preface 3

What, then, was the pop moment of the music of pop songwriter Jimmy Webb? In an era of popsicles and lollipops, how does one "locate" Pops Staple, to say nothing of Pops? Papa, they called me, the little premature man who took to paper, not to the exclusion of but as supplement to the accoutrements of an American male's childhood--roughhousing, baseball and science fiction novels. Thus the mathematics and science books, the moving pictures made out of transparent plastic strips and cardboard boxes (usually grits or oatmeal), the experimentation with mercury, aluminum and other flammable metals. A moment with its own specific transitions--John Coltrane, Spirit, Pretty Things, Sly Stone, Andy Williams and Richard Harris, renegade deejays mix-a-lot, one of whom, out of the Windy City, launched the long-playing, if briefly played, Mozart of Pop, Cole Porter of country. "With strings" as code for Jewish plagiarists or alchemists in Tin Pan Ghetto, bass & rhythm and & lead as the equivalent of cool coon, small wonder that those awkward monstrosities--art-

rock, jazz standards, country-pop—rile both the Anglicized Church at Sunset and Vine and the “ironic” sympathizers of funkified devils. Pop ain’t s’posed to drawl and corn in a bright can’s just plain wrong.

Derrida clarifies and develops this difference between the Platonic and Christian concepts of the soul in Chapter Three. The mysterium tremendum is first defined as an effect of the dissymmetry between the divine regard or gaze and the mortal who is gazed upon or regarded (cf. St Augustine’s Confessions). This dissymmetry is not only a matter of scale (finite v. infinite, mortal v. immortal, etc.) but also of dimension: the finite as present, the infinite as absent (linked only via the Word, understood as spoken before the “fall” into bibliography, into the writing of a Bible, though Derrida critiques this privilege elsewhere). This dissymmetry moreover places upon the finite mortal responsibility to take on our own deaths. The example par excellence of this relationship is the Abraham-Isaac story. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham betrays ethics in the name of religion by speaking in order not to say anything (in short, he dissimulates). For to speak--to use language--one risks losing the singularity of death and decision and responsibility insofar as these all depend on secrecy. Hence the "scandal," the "paradox," of responsibility and decision— one must act without knowing why, perhaps even that, one acts. Kierkegaard thus understands the ethical as a temptation for Abraham. Hence the "paradoxical contradiction between responsibility in general and absolute responsibility." It is in this sense that (absolute) responsibility is simultaneously--in the instant of deciding--(ethical) irresponsibility. This is why the secret is intolerable for all ethics, dialectics, law and politics. But for the Christian the interiority of faith is inassimilable by any exteriority. Ditto for the other religions of the Book (Islam, Judaism). Thus the Abraham-Isaac story is paradigmatic, a rigorous faith beyond ethics. But as Derrida points out, the betrayal of the ethical incorporates one within it, however much it is subordinated to the absolute of religion. The renunciation of the manifest, the polis, the ethical, is always in the name of the nameless God--who keeps his

name, his reasons, his responses, secret. This renunciation is itself a choice that simultaneously includes and excludes others, which is why the Abraham-Isaac story of sacrifice is also the most common, the most banal, event of life. It demands silence since one can never justify why one chooses some others instead of other others. As responsibility, sacrifice demands only acquiescence—"Here I am, Lord"—which stands in an asymmetrical relationship to the permanent "Adieu" of God. Thus Abraham trembles. But is this also true for other others?

Preface 4

At the corner where the Harriet Beecher Stowe house resides as a museum (its overseer a surly female Negro tour guide shadowing the young white tourists), at the corner where Madison Avenue becomes Martin Luther King Drive (if you're going west, young man) and the reverse (if you're heading "back" east), across from the Shell station (South Africa narrows to a land's end which becomes Good Hope once you are at sea sailing east- or westward), in a city with its own Truth and Reconciliation Commission (amnesty as a function of social order), across from sundry fronts, where the avant-garde becomes advanced guards and the reverse (what is, perhaps, the only "place" of the local columnist, the enfranchised publisher and academic activist in "relation" to the Reverends, the Councilmen and women, to say nothing of the boots-strapped petite bourgeoisie), at the cornerstone where history shrinks into assigned readings (Discuss *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* in terms of the function of two minor characters, e.g., Toby and Bottom)...

This is the question broached in Chapter Four. The untranslatable title—" *Tout autre est tout autre*"—demonstrates the hetero-tautological dilemma: there is neither no sacrifice of ethical generality in any one sacrifice if every other is every other, nor is there sacrifice if the infinite other is infinite other. But this formula operates only in certain languages and thus its aphoristic quality

functions structurally as a secret within those languages. That God sees in secret can either mean the secret is the visible invisible, what has merely been hidden from view in full view, or the secret is absolute invisibility, what falls outside the register of sight and vision (touch, hearing, smell, etc.). This secret in the second sense is regarded by the other for the other--and so is never "my" secret. It is an orphan, homeless. What then is this "I" that trembles? Christian subjectivity for Kierkegaard arises as repressed Platonism: the light of the Good gives way to the gaze of a Face. This "I" is none other than that Face which regards me from within. Structurally, then, "I" am called (to) God when God calls (to) me. This sentence is reversible and always means the same thing (Jesus himself makes this point). But this blurring of the differences between God and me is reversed in the Abraham/Isaac story since it is there that God reinscribes sacrifice within an economy (he will return Abraham's son's life if Abraham offers him that life). This infinite calculation supersedes the finite calculation which has been renounced (we are to break with economy, to sacrifice economy--these are Christ's teachings).

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