Derrida and the Art of Embalming: Thanatopraxie in "Tithonus" and *A Tale of a Tub*

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Abstract: Taking a cue from Jacques Derrida's *Glas*, this paper seeks to understand the idea of thanatopraxie or embalming in art. It sees thanatopraxie as a strategy to (en)counter the prevalent idea of a "book" as the repository of the "truth" and the "divine." It argues that a work of art can only exist in the world by transforming into "what(ever) remains" of a work— a wo—. Thanatopraxie thus, brings down a work from the realm of the transcendental and the divine to the world of banal existence. And, in order to comprehend these maneuverings, this paper looks into "Tithonus" and *A Tale of a Tub* as texts where the "penetrable openings" are purposely kept open for the transformation of a work (in) to a wo—.

Keywords: thanatopraxie, Derrida, death, threshold, work, wo—

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When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.

—Antonin Artaud, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*

Books, like men their authors, have no more than one way of coming into the world, but there are ten thousand to go out of it, and return no more.

— Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*

Amidst the debris of D- words[1]— death, decreation, deconstruction, destruktion, déjà, doppelgänger, dissemination— scattered all over the pages, lurks the ghost of a dead body to be resurrected. The 'D' of Derrida makes sure that what(ever) remains of a book, the bo— , is embalmed and preserved not for the predictable and scheduled Future but for the unexpected coming of the Other, the Other-who-comes-without-my-being-able-to-predict-the-arrival ("*la avenir*"). This coming of the Other is without a date; the Other here is less of a guest and more in the sense of *a-tithi* (Hindi for "guest," literally meaning "without a date"). This what(ever) remains is not extermination or complete destruction in the conventional sense but rather in the Latin root *exterminatus*, the past participle of

exterminare (*ex* meaning "out of" and *terminus* meaning "limit," "boundary"). What(ever) remains is to be at the edge— of the end, the limit and the death (*finis*). The Other in western metaphysics is often associated with this limit, this end—death. For any understanding of a concept, the concept of concept, what is necessary is this "practice of death." It is in a way what keeps it alive— it is what keeps it away from becoming absolute and obsolete, unlike Hegel's idea of sublation (*Aufhebung*)— a doxology of ghost of the *Geist*, the spirit of the Spirit (the Absolute). In Derrida's thanatopraxie, we find killing for the sole purpose of preserving: an embalming not of the whole but of the hole/s (read punctures, gaps, aporias).

The word "aporia" comes from the Greek απορία meaning question, bewilderment, puzzle, and thanatopraxie is a "practice" which keeps these questions, bewilderments and puzzles animated. Thanatopraxie, literally meaning "embalming," is the set of tools to preserve a cadaver and in a way delay the degradation of the same. The emphasis here is on different strategic tools of conservation. It is not in thought but in do-ing death. It is what Herman Rapaport, while referring to Lord Macaulay's reading of Milton, calls "the debatable ground," the "inconsistency" or "the whole in ambiguity" (Rapaport 3). Milton, according to Rapaport, maneuvers thanatopraxie in his writings, that is, the practice of keeping deliberately the "openings" of the text open for the Other "to come"; and by doing so, preserving it not in the manner of the Christian transubstantiation— of bread and wine sublating into the body and blood of Christ— but in the manner of deconstruction. Rapaport goes on to explain thanatopraxie and its function in writing in the following way:

> And what is such a thanatopraxie but an economy of death, the production of a discourse which mourns and joyfully accepts the passing away of an antimony: idealism-materialism, presence-absence, truth-falsehood, an opposition articulated in so many ways, recovering itself endlessly within a chain of repeated displacement? With thanatopraxie one is beyond the pleasure principle, that is, beyond aesthetics, certainty, and finality. With thanatopraxie there is no rest and no equilibrium, there is no peace or home. Deconstruction per se makes no sense in terms of anything absolute, as any sort of end to which a thanatopraxie might lead, but marks only the loss of stabilizing antimonies, of decidable certainties, of definite points of reference. (8-9)

In thanatopraxie, there is neither the invocation of the absolute nor the monumentalization of the solute, neither the pleasure of presence nor of absence for, as Rapaport points out, in thanatopraxie we are beyond the pleasure principle, "beyond the choice of life or death: the joy of living and the solace of dying" (9).

Thanatos, the god of death, like his mother Nyx, the goddess of night was never worshipped. Derrida too, apparently overindulgent, never consecrates *thanatos*; more than the animal's death he was interested in the philosopher's death. In an interview given to *The New York Times Magazine* (January 23, 1994), Derrida says: "All of my writing is on death. If I don't reach the place where I have reconciled with death, then I have failed. If I have one goal, it is to accept death and dying." Derrida here is not referring to transcendental nihilism but rather thinking and writing at the threshold— not in the sense of *telos*, the ultimate, but "crossing over," less in the sense of death and more in the sense of *de-cease* ("end of the end"). And by this, he does not mean "death *has no* border" but "death is border"— keeping up the possibility of "overstepping," "trespassing" and "transgressing."

The French word for death, *trépas*, entails passage and trespass at the same time. Derrida, while referring to Seneca, writes: " . . . the border (*finis*) . . . would be more essential, more originary, and more proper than those of any other territory in the world" (Derrida, *Aporias* 3). For him, "death" is not the end but *by* the end. This thinking and writing at the threshold—"the term, the edge, the limit, the border"—of the proper(ty), of "the proper possibility," is thanatopraxie (5).

"What remains," therefore, after the crossing of the threshold? For whom the bell tolls? "What remains" of Hegel and "what remains" of Genet in *Glas*? Is it so that "what remains" of Hegel, becomes Genet? How to deal with the remains of Hegel, the—gel, and the remains of Genet, the—net? What to do with the "remains" of the "what remains"? How do the remains, the—gel and—net leak into each other? How do they preserve themselves? Do they preserve themselves by preserving each other, with the help of the D-words? What is this act of preserving? Why to embalm the remains of the "what remains" of Hegel and Genet or for that matter Derrida? For resurrection? For the Second Coming? Will these messiahs be able to save us, the meaning, the world, from the brink of Apocalypse? When is this messianic time (coming) and what is its eschatological significance? The word apocalypse comes from the Ancient Greek *apokálypsis* literally meaning "uncovering," disclosure, or knowledge. So, how does the sound of the death knell (*Glas*) evoke epistemological-eschatological implications? And, does this "unconcealment" not resurrect the spectre of Heidegger or his Destruktion? What to do with the "what remains" of Heidegger? How to reconcile with —gger?

Derrida begins *Glas* "post-humously" with what(ever) remains of the "work" in general and, Hegel and Genet in particular:

> what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?
>
> "*what remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole"* is divided in two.
>
> As the remain(s) [reste] (1).

Derrida weaves a text(ile) where the two, Hegel and Genet, enter into each other in a manner of relationship without a relation— at times hospitable and at times hostile. They call for attention, shout upon each other, un/noticeably leak and seep into each other, and create a design-without-a-pattern of some sort— in many cases one becomes the light, the other shadow— a reminiscence of Rembrandt himself and his technique of chiaroscuro. Sometimes, they are and become for each other the Absolute Other and sometimes, self-same other(s); the former stands for the incommensurable and inassimilable other while the latter is somewhere "between mimicry and mockery" (Bhabha 184). In *Glas*, the space which Hegel gets, the space Genet gets and the in-between spaces (which *are* far from being just symmetrical and double-columned) that they create are like warp zones in video game designing allowing continuous and instantaneous travel between different locations or spaces. It is a *crypt* both in the sense of archaeology and anatomy. It is a beautiful sarcophagus of what(ever) remains, the surface of which is gilded with D-words and the signature of J. Derrida. *Glas* has been conceived of as a rebus and a game. It is, in a way, more than just a game, it is a game to end the ontology of game: a Tagorean "*khela bhangar khela*"[2] or a Beckettian endgame.

A major section of the Hegel column constitutes the German philosopher's ideas on the patriarchal

family— the familial, the familiar, the filial, the filiation— as opposed to the right-hand side which constitutes the "vulgarity" of the homoerotic and kleptomaniac Genet. The juxtaposition of Hegel and Genet also entails philosophy-literature double bind. The text is also a double-bind (because of its unbiased-ness) of the sacred and the profane, high and low, serious and vulgar, socialism and solipsism, mind and body, male and female, serious and kitsch. It is an architectural wonder bearing the signature of Hegel and Genet and signature and countersignature of Derrida. Signature, in Derrida, stands for death and preservation, absence and presence, general and particular, identical and non-identical, and it is through a signature that a countersignature is validated and vice-versa. One signs not only to confirm one's "vital presence" but also "one's own absence" (Wortham 182); we not only sign in but also sign off. *Glas*, as a series of signatures and countersignatures, is life and death dancing along. "When I sign," J. D. / D. J. writes "I am already dead" (19). Death then is the déjà (the already) of any signature and in a way all writings. Caught in the continuous loop of signature-countersignature-signature, thinking and writing become forms of embalming, a thanatopraxie in *Glas*. The —gel, the —net, the J. D. / D. J. and others are (counter)signatures entailing both the death (of "what" or "is") and preservation (of "what remains"), simultaneously. *Glas*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak remarks, is "a fiction of Derrida's proper name turning into a thing . . . crypting the signature so that it becomes impossible to spell out" (24). It is a "simulacrum" of "what remains" of Hegel, Genet, (even) Derrida, and the notion of the "work" itself: *whose work is it anyway?*

In our reading of Alfred Tennyson's "Tithonus" and Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, we intend to analyse the (dis)semination of thanatopraxie in terms of content in the former and form in the latter. The idea is to ex(or)cise and de-scribe the de-written— the aporias— the poetical and hermeneutical impasses which once after something is exterminated (not in the sense of "chaos, annihilation, destruction, or cultural assassination" (Rapaport 6) but rather in the form of *Nichtung*), preserves it, for the "to come." Derrida writes:

> Our discourse irreducibly belongs to the system of metaphysical oppositions. The break with this structure of belonging can be announced only through a certain organisation, a certain strategic arrangement which, within the field of metaphysical opposition, uses the strengths of the field to turn its own stratagems against it, producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly delimiting it. (Derrida, *Writing* 22)

Thanatopraxie is a "strategic arrangement," a phenomenon of "delimiting" a text, and a "stratagem" to demystify a work from becoming holier-than-thou, a sanctum sanctorum. Thanatopraxie, as Rapaport points out, "is a calculated undermining of the ideology of the text as an onto-encyclopedic book or scripture" (18).

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Where I am, death is not; where death is, I am not, says Epicurus[3] or at least that is what Tithonus used to think about himself in the beginning. He has been living "forever" and now he is "whatever," that is, the "what remains" of "once a man / So glorious in his beauty and thy choice?" (Tennyson 91). He is centuries behind but "to be behind," Spivak points out "is to be before all else— in rupture with symmetry" (24). Death is "before all else" and in his practice of "before all else," Tithonus is

now practicing death: he is practicing thanatopraxie. Like mobilizing an auto-critique, he is now self-embalming in the process of being infinitely destroyed. Tithonus is in a "broken relationship" with the world but, for Derrida, the phrase itself is a tautology as any given relationship is "broken." In a r-e-l-a-t-i-o-n-s-h-i-p, one is (always, already) in rupture; it is only in rupture that relationships can exist: I am in rupture and therefore, I exist. Here, on the earth, for centuries, Tithonus *is* death without being dead. He is at the limit, by the end, and on the threshold: "at the quiet limit of the world" (Tennyson 91). He is, taking a cue from Rapaport, on the "debatable ground."

T-h-a-n-a-t-o-p-r-a-x-i-e as a *rupture* is "that textual threshold," to quote Rapaport, which "dialectically maneuvers textual registers or series out of alignment, imposes a contradictory crowbar or lever which produces a curious tilt in the operational devices of metaphysics" (8). The later Tithonus thus, is at *the* threshold; he is in fact the threshold, challenging the metaphysics of life / death, boon / bane, preservation / destruction, logos / telos and many others. He is a Derridean "textile" (from the Latin *texere* meaning "to weave"), weaving his own signatures and/with countersignatures on a daily basis. He is (*now*) in crisis; he *is* crisis. And this "crisis" is not only textual (or sartorial) and thanatological or for that matter not only biological, but also existential (the lack of meaning), gerontological (the lack of youth), theological (the lack of faith) and most importantly, ontological (Being as Lack). His being as Being is quite understandably in the lack as Lack. But we are not discussing these issues here as they may (also in their individual capacity) be the subject matter of a different forum altogether. We are, rather, more interested in the thanato-textual aspects of the poem.

In *Aporias*, Derrida raises a very pertinent question: Is my death possible? (21) For a possible answer of this (im)possibility, one can look upon Epicurus and Heidegger. We have already mentioned Epicurus and his "possible" answer: "Where I am, death is not; where death is, I am not." For Epicurus, death is an utter impossibility as my death is also the death of my understanding of death. If *I* don't think how can *I* exist, and if *I* don't exist how can *I* think? Therefore, either I exist or I exit. (In the last sentence, "I exit' is a paradox because, according to the ancient Greek philosopher, it is either "I" or "exit.") For Heidegger, on the other hand, death relates to the mine-ness: "death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all" (240). Death is an essential component of *Dasein* ("there being") and enables understanding mine-ness as different from that of *das Man* ("the They"). "Thus" Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, "death reveals itself as that possibility which is one's ownmost, which is nonrelational, and which is not to be outstripped" (239). For him, as opposed to Epicurus, death is a possibility or to be more correct a certain possibility of the impossible. So, is *my* death possible? Or is my death impossible? Or these are just rhetorical quest(ion)s and do not require a deeper understanding of who we are, how we live and how we die? Lest we become immortals.

Euthanasia ("happy death") becomes an important precondition for eudaemonia ("happy life") in not only "Tithonus" but also in "Ulysses." Tithonus's early *life* was symbolized by a range of thanatological signifiers: the reason of his predicament lies in the glaring absence of death. He envies those who are "happier dead" and gone. The "immortal age" beside "immortal youth" is no life at all; but as Maurice Blanchot writes in *The Space of Literature*: "For a human race weirdly destined to be immortal, suicide would constitute perhaps the only chance to remain human, the only way out toward a human future" (99). But as the poem begins, we find a marked change in the *being* of Tithonus. It is only after realizing and reconciling with the end within, that he could take an existential leap. The poem not only traces the journey of the protagonist from in-itself to for-itself but also from being "work"

to "wo—": from *being* a work to *becoming* a wo—. This be-coming wo—is the result of the coming of the other. The subject must take the other of the knowledge seriously, Michel Serres points out.[4] It is only because of the other that a subject / system is produced. The early Tithonus was a work; the later becomes the "what remains" of a work, the wo—. The poem exemplifies Tithonus's tryst with the practice of death.

Initially, before the beginning of the poem, we find that in his effort of becoming transcendental and sacred after receiving a transcendental and sacred "gift," Tithonus turns into a "holier than thou" work— a demi-god free and away from the mundane human condition. He becomes one of those sanctum sanctorum works which is not *open* and where there are no *openings*— as a consequence of his failure to preserve himself. As he was decomposing and to decompose himself as he was preserving, Tithonus was absolutely un-grounded, in a state of abyss, and hence crying incessantly: "Release me, and restore me to the ground" (Tennyson 91). In his effort of being like a "work," the early Tithonus ceased to exist like a wo—. To be a wo— is to *be* at the border (*finis*). A work can only have a "happy life" if it unreservedly embraces "happy death": only if it ceases to keep the entirety of "work" and becomes "what remains"— the wo—. A wo—, on the other hand, grounds and un-grounds itself, creates and destroys itself, preserves and decomposes itself — all at the same time. It is to *play* with all the D-words— to exist is to *be* in the play. It is only *after* reconciling himself with this play with-in that Tithonus understands the world with-out. It is the destructible which makes one indestructible. The poem "Tithonus" opens with this anagnorisis of Tithonus, this re-membering—to be *with* is to re-member. The poem begins with the protagonist's understanding of death as a mode of *wordling*.

Ulysses, unlike early Tithonus, turns Uly— he is far cry from the early Tithonus when he says: "I will drink / Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd / Greatly, have suffer'd greatly" (88); where the "lees" at the bottom of the barrel is a metaphor of living at the limit (*finis*). Ulysses has always lived at the edge, embracing the lees of life as a part of life. He has always been open to the other. Tithonus's realization, on the other hand, comes later, precisely with the beginning of the poem. The metaphors of lees, border and edge here entail death as a paradigm: especially when one looks at life from the point of view of the threshold, the limit, the end— the death. Life is grasped in its entirety, it looks not only finite but also whole or complete. Death as a(n) (im)possibility completes life which is always something "not-yet;" death is not an annihilation of "not-yet," but rather preserves within itself the possibility of "yet" and "not-yet." Ulysses, and later Tithonus's consciousness of death is therefore, not an example of transcendental nihilism; it is "a way to be" not "a way to end." In thanatopraxie, a text is towards-death; it not about the annihilation of a text, rather, about how a text is "text-istentially" aware of its limit, its *finis*. The *Dasein* of a text is produced through this awareness of the end. Text-istentiality[5] of a text is not in denial but an awareness of this towards-death. Death— and the family of D-words— help the text in destroying and preserving itself so that it survives for the future 'to come'. Future entails infinitude or rather infinite number of possibilities and among those possibilities lurks the possibility of death. But death as a possibility is paradoxical in nature; as it also means the annihilation of all other possibilities rendering the possibility of catapulting us from endlessly floating in the infinite space, from the infinitude of oblivion, from "the they" to "mine-ness." The consciousness of the same finitude does not make the later Tithonus finite, rigid or in any way limited; on the contrary, it makes him finite and infinite at the same time or to be more exact, infinitesimally

finite. D-e-a-t-h, in its practice of thanatopraxie, practices death.

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Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* is not only a satire but also a rhizome of micro-satires. It is a fabric, a *texere* of micro-sutures with different socio-political, economic, cultural and personal threads. "Built" on "the debatable ground," this anti-book— a book as a critique of the very idea of "book"— un-rests between Roman Catholicism and factional Protestant churches, and between the Whigs and the Tories. It is a text of friction and faction at multiple levels. It moves freely between satire and political realism, and between the strategies of Horatian and Juvenalian satires. It also plays upon authorial intention and intentional fallacy, and the idea of creation and imitation. *A Tale of a Tub* constitutes a "tale" and different "digressions." After the first three sections, tales become Digression and digressions remain Digression. And in doing all these, Swift keeps the authorial and the authoritative intention in tension, in (un)sustainable tension. These are what Rapaport would deem as "calculated undermining of the ideology of the text as onto-encyclopedic book or scripture" (18). It is in a way Swift's im/modest proposal to de-build and de-create or rather, D-build and D-create book or Book (read Scripture). It is in a way an assault on the idea of a book as something belonging to the realm of divinity and metaphysics and, even the idea of book as a living and throbbing organism. *A Tale of a Tub* is, to use Deleuze and Guattari analogy, a BwO— a book without organs— *corps sans organes.*[6] It is a book[sic] without any organization.

Deleuze and Guattari write: "You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a *limit*" (150) (italics our emphasis). Swift by employing thanatopraxie, that is, by employing different calculated risks or strategies, kills the work— the organism, the living body— and preserves it as a wo—, just as a body. *A Tale of a Tub* sublates from being a living body with its intention and intuition to simply a body. It is cast out of Heaven and falls from beauty and holiness. Through abyss, it reaches the "plane of immanence" and therefore, embalmed. Like the autumn leaves, dead and gone, the text waits, waits and waits to "hold back and renege." There is no pure Holocaust and there can never be one. Rapaport points out: "However rigorous and determined the *thanatopraxie* may be to embrace a purifying holocaust, what critics of deconstruction call nihilism, it is a disillusioned and disillusioning embrace which knows that the holocaust always will *hold back and renege*, will never purify completely, that it will always save and restore something, even it be but the letters gl—" (9; italics our emphasis).

The text-as-body and the body-as-text "is the indestructible that can be infinitely destroyed" (Blanchot, *The Infinite* 130). The form of *A Tale of a Tub* is like death or is death— it brings death for itself and concomitantly preserves (through embalming) itself. Like *Glas* where Derrida punctures and enables leakages in the Hegel and Genet columns, Swift is doing the same in his Tale and Digression and the ambiguous relationship between the two. "What remains" at the end of *A Tale of a Tub* is not a telltale, revealing a deeper secret meaning, but a ta— or a —le. "What remains" at the end of *A Tale of a Tub* are the "what remains" of the Work / the Author / the State / the Sovereign / the Divine.

The gargantuan and sacrosanct nature of a work or any work which considers itself to be a "commonwealth" is defied / defiled in this "Idiot" wo—. It throws a tub, a floating vessel, into the sea of infinity before a mammoth whale (read work), so that the latter is distracted from creating havoc to the vulnerable ship of micro reading. It also breaks the "contract"— the duty and the responsibility to

be in a "contract"— between the author-work-reader and the intention(al)-meaning. *A Tale of a Tub* is not only the thanatopraxie of the "book" in general but also Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651) in particular. The latter prescribes surrendering oneself to the "sovereign" and proclaims itself, as a "book," to be sovereign. It is this sovereignty, socio-politico, statist as well as narratological, against which Swift lays down his d-strategy. The "narrative without an authoritative voice" and the "polysemy of writing" (qtd. in Walsh 290) are put in stark contrast to the *authoritative* "coat" of the Father and the authorial intention of not meddling with it at any cost. The Father calls for an unconditional submission of the three brothers, Peter, Martin and Jack, to the will of the Sovereign. Swift, like Derrida, questions this will of the Sovereign and raises serious doubts on the existence of such sovereignty through what we have been discussing so far as thanatopraxie. Thanatopraxie makes certain that a work / book does not become Divine; it keeps the profanity alive in a wo— so that it ceases to remain or become a holy cow. "Every writing," as Terry Castle points out in his reading of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* "is a source of corruption, no matter what authority— natural, divine, or archetypal— we may wishfully invest in it. Because they constitute an earthly text, the Scriptures themselves pathetically and paradoxically make up part of the fallen world of writing […]" (Castle 37). Thanatopraxie deals with the "corruption," "earthliness" and "fallenness" of writing— the elements which we find in abundance in Derrida's *Glas* as well as in later Tithonus.

Swift was aware of the death of the "work"; the death of any work or for that matter any creation is not only inevitable but also necessary. The only mode which can preserve the corpse of the corpus is the "strategy" called embalming or thanatopraxie. "[T]he Tale, as well as *Gulliver's Travels,*" according to Clive Probyn, "reveals and explores Swift's most fundamental fears about the transience of all printed texts: 'a fear of supersession, the prospect of literary obsolescence, the anxiety of loss, the horror of obscurity, and the cancellation of history" (qtd. in Walsh 290). And, it is this consciousness of death in the wo—, which paradoxically, acts as the harbinger of freedom for it. It is the very consciousness of being transient, of not being immortal and indispensible, which keeps a wo— in-transit for long (although tempting, we are consciously avoiding the word "intransient" here). *A Tale of a Tub* remains in-transit and exists authentically as long as it understands itself as a being-towards-death; the latter keeps open the possibility of a "possible not-being" and meaning as something not-yet. Shakespeare writes in Sonnet No.18: "So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (Shakespeare 39). Shakespeare here is not referring simply to the mere oft-thought 'immortality' of the lines but the fact that any book or Scripture is at the end of the day a mere black ink on white paper: a corpse of a corpus. It should not declare itself to be sacred, holy or immortal. Each book has this tendency to become a Dorian Gray. Everything makes sense as long as we are mortal, "as long as men can breathe, or eyes can see;" the moment we attain immortality, or even come close to that, we will cease to produce literature. Mortality is a necessary precondition for the way we exist in / with the world; mortality is also a necessary precondition for the way a wo— exist in / with the world. It then becomes important for us and for any writing to die so that it does not suffer á la the early Tithonus from the anxiety of infinitude— of not being able to die. A *corpus* can only be preserved, according to Derrida, if it turns into a *corpse*. Lest, it "earth in earth forget[s]" to practice d-e-a-t-h. *A Tale of a Tub* is a *corpus* that is able to preserve itself, as it turns into a *corpse*.

Death is not only the other, it is also the other's death. Geoff Ward points out how "the dying

Henry James thought he was Napoleon" and how "in his own decline, Charles Baudelaire catching sight of himself in a mirror, bowed, thinking himself a stranger."[7] There is something about death and writing which bind them together. Like death, writing is not only the other, it is always other's writing. Every writing falls short of what it was intended to be. Every book outlives the author and in a way confers immortality upon him; at the same time leads up to a paradox where it alienates Swift from his own writing of the Tale. The book only accomplishes a mere fragment of what it was thought of: it is "always, already" incomplete and will never see the day of fulfillment. The alienation to the Tale therefore, not only makes it "other" to Swift— the Author, but also seems as if it is someone else's writing. It is never "I write," to re-appropriate Maurice Blanchot, it is always "*one* writes." He writes: "Do I die, humanly, a death which will be that of a man and which I will imbue with all of human intention and freedom? Do I myself die, or do I not rather die always other from myself, so that I would have to say that properly speaking I do not die?" (Blanchot, *The Space* 98).

Blanchot's thought on death, which is diametrically opposite to Heidegger's, also percolates into his idea of writing. The former always equates writing with death. For Blanchot, death is a chiasmus of what Heidegger thinks about death. As opposed to Heidegger's *the possibility of impossibility*, Blanchot thinks death to be *the impossibility of possibility*. Let us here re-appropriate Blanchot again, (de)*write* it in the manner of meta-writing and (re)situate it as a *problematique* in the mind of Swift: Do I myself *write*, or do I not *write* always other from myself, so that I would have to say that properly speaking I do not *write*? Writing and especially d-writing as evinced in Tennyson and Swift, discussed so far, is a practice of death (*trépas*). To write is this simultaneous act of dying and preserving what falls dead. It is this "fallen-ness" of a work which saves it from becoming redundant. By incorporating thanatopraxie therefore, writing is able to delay its degradation and preserve itself from being dead. It is death which saves one from being dead. Death (*trépas*) in writing (*écriture*) is then both a mode of annihilation and salvation.

Notes

1. The phrase has been taken from Gayatri Spivak's review of Derrida's *Glas*.
2. This roughly translates into "a game for the end of the game" or "a tie-breaking game." In the same poem, Tagore talks about another d-word, dance, the dance of living and dying.
3. The statement is generally attributed to Epicurus, the Classical philosopher; from Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* quoted in Epicurus and Gerson.
4. See Michel Serres. *The Parasite*.
5. It is a portmanteau word ("text" + "existentiality") entailing the reflective nature of a text. It conveys the "being there" of a text, that is, the way a text exists in the world and makes meanings.
6. In our thinking of book without organ (BwO) we are re-appropriating D & G's concept of Body without Organs (BwO); the French '*corps*' entailing here both a body and a body of works.
7. See Geoff Ward. "Dying to Write: Maurice Blanchot and Tennyson's 'Tithonus.'"

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