The Lost Futures of Simone Weil:
Metaxu, Decreation, and the Spectres of Myth

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Abstract

This dissertation places literature and myth at the suture of two of Simone Weil's most important concepts: *decreation* and *metaxu*. Decreation, or the decanting of subjectivity to become one with God, has become a fixture in Weil scholarship. Yet, the link between decreation and metaxu, the bridges that collapse self and other, has yet to be theorized. This study brings metaxu to the forefront of Weil studies to emphasize its role within the domains of community and culture, thereby signaling its unseen potential to harmonize the political and mystical strains of her thought. I counter decreation's salvific consolation with metaxu's radical materialism and its privileging of hybridity, relationality, and metamorphosis. Weil's writing combines a critique of capitalism (the hegemonic *gros animal*) with a frequent entanglement of Greek and Christian myth. A discussion of metaxu is brought to bear on literary revisions of classical myths from the 1980s and 1990s, an important peak in capitalism's global dominance. My work sets into a motion a metaxic hermeneutic to investigate literary revisions of myths of transcendence, but also transcendence as a key myth challenged by late twentieth-century literature.

In Chapter 1, I outline the importance of metaxu to Weil's writings on mysticism and locate its roots in Platonic philosophy, Greek Tragedy, and the myth of Prometheus—the subject of her most important (but nearly forgotten) poem. In Chapter 2, I analyze metaxu's relationship to specific iterations of violence and sacrality in Weil's "The *Iliad*: or the poem of Force" (1939) and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), which I interpret as an Americanized retelling of Homer's epic. In Chapter 3, I locate metaxu's connection to art and neoliberal globalism through Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999). Chapter 4 applies metaxu to issues of metamorphosis and hybridity through Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987). Butler

deconstructs notions of mysticism, eroticism, otherness, and species that are to be read against the patriarchal aesthetics of Homer, McCarthy, and Rushdie. By reading these texts together, a subversive and disruptive potential for metaxu will be revealed, one that heralds an important re-reading of Weil's oeuvre, as well as an ability to reshape the intersection of literature, myth, and mysticism.

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Sadly, Priscila Uppal will not get to read the finished version of a project that was first kindled in her classroom. A cherished committee member and a dear friend, her presence remains on nearly every page. I dedicate this to her memory, and to the many loved ones I've lost along the way.

Table of Contents

Abstract....ii

Acknowledgements....iv

Table of Contents....v

List of Abbreviations....vii

Introduction....1
Decreation and Re-Creation through Myth 5
Crossing distant worlds like the moon 13
Metaxu and Myth in Weil's Readers 16
Fleshing Out the Chapters 25
Endnotes....33

Chapter 1: In which the knot of Simone Weil's philosophy begins to be untied, and a man's liver is forever eaten by eagles 36
Part I: Mystical Literature and the Fall from Ecstasy....38
Part II: Decreation
The Two Movements of Weil's Kenosis 48
The Decreative Return 56
Part III: Metaxu....63
Part IV: The Need for (Mythical) Roots 74
The Sacrifice of Prometheus 80
Endnotes....96

Chapter 2: Pacts Between Men and Lions: The *Iliad* and *Blood Meridian* 101
Part I: Weil's "L'Iliade" and the rosy fingers of dawn
Force, Violence, and Bare Life 105
Dehumanization and the Centre that Cannot Hold 119
Part II: *Blood Meridian* and the evening redness of the West 134
American Imperialism through Iliadic Force 137
When God rides off into the sunset....146
Gnostic Deserts and the Haunting of the Sacred....154
The judge 163
The kid....169
Endnotes....176

Chapter 3: "Losing the Flowers of the Earth": Orpheus, Eurydice, and the Lost Future of Myth 182
Prometheus contra Orpheus....188
Earthquake Capitalism and the Hauntology of Myth 197
Rushdie, Weil, and (Under)World Literature 208
Subterranean Homesick Blues 217

Earthquake Songs……227
Metaxu and Mourning……235
The Lost Futures of Eurydice……240
Endnotes……256

Chapter 4: "Some Dawns Wait": White Gods, Black Aliens, and Lost Gardens……265
Of Myth and Monstrous Women……271
Space is the Place: Terraforming Mothership Earth……288
Metaxic Erotics: "What's Love Got to Do with It?"……303
Your Queen Is A Reptile……319
Endnotes……324

Conclusion……329
Endnote……339

Works Cited……340

List of Abbreviations

Giorgio Agamben

HS	*Homo Sacer*

Donna Haraway

CM	"A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century"

Mark Fisher

AC	*Acid Communism*
CR	*Capitalist Realism*

Herbert Marcuse

EC	*Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*

Cormac McCarthy

BM	*Blood Meridian*

Salman Rushdie

GF	*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

Simone Weil

AD	*Attente de Dieu*
CS	*La Connaissance Surnaturelle*
GG	*Gravity and Grace*
IP	"L'*Iliade* ou le poème de la force"
P	"Prométhée"
PG	*La Pesanteur et la grâce*

INTRODUCTION

> Underneath the opposition between objects and subjects, there is the whirlwind of mediators.
>
> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*

> A philosophy that does not include the possibility of soothsaying from coffee grounds ... cannot be a true philosophy.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*

Somewhere in London, a woman lies starving in a hospital bed, refusing to eat, and concentrating on the tubercular pain she guesses might be her ticket to God. Somewhere in the underworld, a woman plucks a flower in which she recognizes herself, smiling at its beauty despite its secluded abode. Somewhere in Prague, an overworked clerk with a fetish for Venus in furs awakes after a night of erotic dreams to find himself transformed into a bug. Shared by these three individuals is a transformative confrontation with some kind of *beyond* experienced through a rupture of the immanent/transcendent binary and a sometimes painful, sometimes ecstatic, reflection on the various subject positions possible though such a collapse.

The tubercular mystic, whose voice has steadily increased in volume since her death in that London hospital bed, is Simone Weil, a writer whose unshakable character and premature death have done as much to solidify her legacy as the richness of her thought. Her work has profoundly influenced a diverse group of writers from Iris Murdoch and Susan Sontag to Maurice Blanchot and Giorgio Agamben. Albert Camus declared her the only great spirit of her generation,[1] and when he became an editor at Gallimard, he quickly began the task of trying to publish everything she had ever written. It is through T.S. Eliot, professing her sainthood in his 1952 introduction to the *The Need for Roots*, that most English readers first became familiar with Weil's singular ideas. The first English translation of Weil, however, was Mary McCarthy's "The *Iliad*: or the poem of Force" (1945) in the little-known magazine *Politics*. The introduction

of Weil to English readers by way of a poet and novelist has proven prescient, as Weil has continued to influence the likes of Wallace Stevens, Stevie Smith, Elizabeth Hardwick, Flannery O'Connor, Seamus Heaney, and Anne Carson. Despite her continued influence on the literary imagination, Weil's poems, as well as her unfinished play, *Venise sauvée* (1955), remain largely unread or out of print. This circumstance is even more unfortunate if one is to believe the assessment of Weil's friend, Jean Tortel, who has claimed that Weil "would have sacrificed her whole work for the few poems she wrote" (Dargan 87).

The Lost Futures of Simone Weil argues for the significance of a Weilian analysis of late twentieth-century literature built around the entanglement of her key concepts of decreation and metaxu. Pursuant to this focus is a break from the way scholars typically respond to Weil's literary influence, but also Weil's influence as a writer of alleged mystical experiences. I demonstrate how renewed attention to the relationship between Weil's writing on myth and mysticism can productively (re)define the limits of the body, the spirit, and subjectivity as presented in late twentieth-century literature and critical theory. Moreover, a careful re-reading of her work reveals crucial insights through which some of the most pressing issues of the contemporary world—nationalism and racial violence (Chapter 2), patriarchy and unfettered capitalism (Chapter 3), ecological disaster and human exceptionalism (Chapter 4)—might be navigated. In addition to performing a detailed analysis of Weil's writing on Western myths, I am especially concerned with how myth is revised in twentieth-century literature as a way of theorizing the viability of something like mystical transcendence. Accordingly, I develop a Weilian hermeneutic to investigate literary revisions of transcendence but also transcendence as a key myth challenged by twentieth-century literature and philosophy.

My project places literature and myth at the suture of two of Weil's most important

concepts: decreation and metaxu. Decreation, or the decanting of subjectivity to become one with one's God, has become a fixture in Weil scholarship. Yet, the link between decreation and metaxu, the transcendental bridges that collapse self and other, has yet to be theorized. I present metaxu as a collapsing of the transcendental into an immanent horizon and argue that Weil's mysticism is actually a radical materialism that provides new possibilities for literary representations of mystical encounter and limit-experience. By emphasizing Weil's placement of metaxu within the domains of community and culture, I signal its unseen potential to harmonize the political and mystical strains of her thought. No study has yet been written that explores the link between metaxu and the prevalence in literature for a kind of subject-creation through confrontation with otherness. I will develop metaxu as a theory to chart how such otherness is collapsed and appropriated, empowered, and unleashed. Because Weil situates metaxu within the discursive networks of particular communities and individual relations, each of which is historically and culturally relative, metaxu is a polyvalent political apparatus through which to imagine new possibilities for interconnectivity that might arise in the future, as well as a way of imagining an alternative future to whatever seems promised by contemporary systems of power.

In the first two chapters, my re-articulation of Weil's philosophy will be balanced by two texts which exemplify her writings on mysticism, the "Prologue" of *La Connaissance surnaturelle* (1950) and *La Pesanteur et la grâce* (1947), as well as two texts which best illustrate her persistent dialogue with Greek myth, the poem "Prométhée" (1937-1943) and her essay "L'*Iliade* ou le poème de la force" (1939). Chapter 2 analyzes metaxu's relationship to specific iterations of violence and sacrality in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), which I interpret as an Americanized retelling of Weil's essay on Homer. In Chapter 3, I explore metaxu's connection to art through Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), a

novel that illustrates the weaponization of myth for a nostalgic, rather than progressive response to neoliberal globalization. I break from a rigid chronological division of the chapters, however, in order to counter the masculinist aesthetics of Homer, McCarthy, and Rushdie with an analysis of metaxu through Octavia Butler's *Dawn* (1987) and its treatment of metamorphosis and hybridity. In addition to the specific historical period that the three novels share, my analysis will also deploy a cross-cultural and cross-temporal recognition of their correspondence with poetry, critical theory, music, cinema, and theology. Following Weil's experiments with an early form of theory-fiction,[2] this interdisciplinary range will be approached not merely for its relation to certain strains evident in her work, but as texts that, despite their various mediums, are already theoretical interventions into similar themes.

More than apolitical events of mystical rupture, Weil envisioned decreation and metaxu as strategies of resistance against what she terms the *gros animal*, a socio-political iteration of modernity defined by capitalism, militarism, and cultural oppression that had culminated in the atrocities of WWII. I extend a study of metaxu's relationship to this *gros animal* beyond the mid-century readership directly influenced by her writings, and instead, examine her work through three novels published in the final decades of the century. Since Weil's critique of the *gros animal* is decidedly a Marxist critique of capitalism, I bring a discussion of metaxu to bear on literary and theoretical texts situated within what was arguably the peak of capitalism's global dominance (before, for example, the War on Terror and the stock market crash of 2008 exposed the weakness of such a system). The end of the twentieth century marked the naturalization of the ideological structures of Weil's *gros animal*; the solidification of neoliberal late-capitalism produced a pessimistic doubt that any alternative to capitalism was still possible. Mark Fisher describes this phenomenon as "capitalist realism" or the pervasive feeling that "it's easier to

imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" (*CR* 1).[3] From a Weilian perspective, the *gros animal* of the 1980s and 1990s is illustrative of the quintessential mantra of capitalist realism: you shall have no other gods before me. Fisher's work will be specifically addressed in my third chapter, but each chapter will associate the ubiquity capitalist ideology with either a legacy or an inescapable promise of cultural catastrophe. The specific historicity of my project will allow me to suggest ways that metaxu might still be mobilized to disrupt a now-globalized *gros animal* in order to facilitate a political project of reimagining possible futures rooted in compassion for the other and interspecies solidarity.

Decreation and Re-Creation through Myth

Weil's understanding of the separation between deity and creation is dependent on the Pauline notion of kenosis, according to which God empties itself of divinity in order for Christ to be incarnate as human. In fact, Weil's writing situates the Incarnation as a second (or corrective) kenosis. The first occurs when God self-empties so that *anything* can exist apart from God. Thus, all creation exists through an initial kenotic self-abnegation.[4] In *La Pesanteur et la grâce*, decreation is defined as a return to the uncreated, or "faire passer du créé dans l'incréé" (*PG* 81). *La Pesanteur*, arguably the most famous of Weil's texts, is a posthumous collection of fragments and aphorisms taken from her Marseilles notebooks and compiled by her friend and Catholic philosopher Gustave Thibon.[5] Despite Thibon's questionable editorial decisions, it is useful to compare the introductory sentence from the chapter titled "Décréation" with the introductory sentence of "Metaxu," in which Weil insists that every created thing is a porous means through which the subject passes on its decreative journey. There is a fascinating return of the 'I' in "Metaxu's" opening salvo, as Weil clarifies that "[t]outes les choses créés refusant d'être pour

moi des fins" (*PG* 81). The sections on decreation and metaxu parallel each other in numerous ways, but this initial juxtaposition between the movement into the *uncreated* (decreation) and the diaphanous intermediation of the *created* (metaxu) adds a horizontal, even rhizomatic, flight away from the abyssal telos of decreation. My approach to the uncreated/created dualism follows that of Mark C. Taylor, for whom "creation is never ex nihilo but is always a recreation that transfigures the tissue of the given" (*After God* 33). If this idea holds, how might Weil's decreation be rethought when examined in connection to metaxu?

My response is to redefine metaxic decreation as a decentering of the self in confrontation with others in the *created* world. It thus follows that a metaxic subject can overcome the stasis of its subject position without a decreative return or absorption into the void of an ineffable, uncreated deity. Weil notes that while metaxu are "intermédiaries vers Dieu" they are also "intermédiaries les unes vers les autres, et cela n'a pas de fin" (*PG* 229), thereby suggesting a metaxic movement that resists the consolation of a salvific or transcendent finality. If metaxic intermediaries lead to God, but also to each other (and without end), this indicates an experience in which both destinations share the same movement. The latter would not trace a telos from multiplicity and otherness to homogeneity or unitary absorption, but rather a metamorphic becoming through which the created world—as both a "porte fermée" but also "le passage" (*PG* 228)[6]—becomes a transformative space that redefines what forms of solidarity, coexistence, and spiritual encounters might be possible. Since metaxu is cultural, it necessarily defines the systems of relation that can exist in spite of the political stratification and organization of peoples through class, gender, and race. Ultimately, I wish to consider whether metaxu might offer a significant contribution to what interconnectedness could mean in a more compassionate future.

There is an evident tension in Weil's thought between the negative, worldly escape of decreation and the creaturely, political affirmation available through a re-examination of metaxu. Weil theorizes decreation as a self-divestment so that one can become an empty vessel into which God might enter. By way of contrast, Bernard Alwyn Taylor's *Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (1994) defines *μετα-χέω* as a verb: "to pour from one vessel into another" (372), an important distinction that suggests such decantation can be both active and passive, born from attentive stillness and fluid movement. The passivity of *attention* and *waiting* is featured prominently in the work of Weil's commentators, but my concentration on metaxu will uncover the importance of this unseen fluidity. Besides its use as a verb, *μεταξύ* is a Greek adjective meaning *in-between*. Out of these anachronistic usages, Weil has fashioned a noun to be used both in the plural and singular (metaxu is both simultaneously, and also object, subject, and liminal space between) to demarcate the space of the intermediary, but also the energetic potential vibrating within all bodies and objects.

I contend that a shift from decreative negation to metaxic affirmation reveals Weil to a be a philosopher of hybridity and metamorphosis whose idea of transcendence is far more materialist and immanent than is often suggested. Such a shift maintains a critical distance from claims to the veracity of Weil's own mystical experience, as well as the tenuous, even dangerous relationship myth and mysticism often entertain with whatever counts as truth. By interrogating the binaries of self/other and immanence/transcendence through the imaginative realms of literature and myth, it is useful to heed Amy Hollywood's challenge to adopt a suspension of judgement (if not quite belief) "as part of an ethical mode of listening" (*Acute Melancholia* 6). Indeed, Weil's own commitment to attention and waiting are never far from meditations on how to listen. While decreation has attracted a good deal of scholarly interest, Weil's concept of

metaxu continues to evade theorization, thereby obscuring a complete understanding of her philosophy and limiting its potential to inform readings of literary, mythical, and mystical texts.

In order to synthesize Weil's heteroglossic notebooks into the editorial commodity of *Pesanteur's* religious framing, Thibon has removed nearly all its references to Greek myth. Conspicuously, an allusion to the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe has survived in order to provide a narrative foothold through which the sticky concept of metaxu can be illuminated. In Weil's revision, they appear as two prisoners who communicate through the wall that separates them, tapping their messages through the obstruction because "[t]out séparation est un lieu" (*PG* 166). Weil alludes to the myth to demonstrate how God is crafty enough to fit through the fissure in the wall if only one is attentive. If Zeno's infinity stalks the interstice between prisoner and the centre of the wall, the decreative subject must make its way towards this elusive centre, the centre which descends farther and farther inward. Employing this narrative method, Weil is already bringing her concept of metaxu into the mythic realm from the outset. Moreover, she underscores the degree to which her metaphysics is always an aesthetics of paradox, prosopopoeia, ineffability, even erotics.[7]

When read through this myth, the story of metaxu becomes the love story between subject and otherness luxuriating in the erotics of liminal space.[8] As the two lovers express their desire by tapping on the dividing wall, the story is also one of translation and transmission, of a world in which seemingly impregnable barriers are latent with communicatory and intermediary potential. The tapping conveys the original language of neither lover, but instead forms a new language signaling an ineffable and transcendent space beyond as a place of exchange, reciprocity, and desire. Neither Pyramus nor Thisbe can actually dwell within the vibratory space of the wall, but their lovesick subjectivities nevertheless find communion within. Like the

imprisoned tapping, metaxic writing operates as a kind of textual Galehaut[9] through which imagined spaces, temporalities, and modes of being are made immanent. In Edith Hamilton's retelling of the myth, Pyramus and Thisbe share the same voice, and together, offer a prayer to the metaxic wall, the passage that is also the way through: '"[Y]ou let us speak together. You give us a passage for loving words to reach loving ears. We are not ungrateful.' So they would talk, and as night came on and they must part, each would press on the wall kisses that could not go through to the lips on the other side" (136). Weil's narrative emphasizes captivity by the removal of the wall's aperture that persists in some accounts of the myth. As such, the prisoners must invent a new language with which to communicate an experience that transcends the body and its grammar.

Through the use of myth as analogy rather than didactic allegory, Weil does not recreate the myth as a Bride of Christ motif. Nowhere does she take the perspective of Thisbe awaiting the amorous reply of her transcendental lover Pyramus. The architectural dimensions of the *mise-en-scene* are very much horizontal, with neither character privileged over the other. There is a sense of equal imprisonment that resists the hierarchical structure of deity-mystic by analogically depicting God as mutually captive.[10] Just as "[t]here are knots of arborescence in rhizomes" (Deleuze and Guattari 20), what separates them is a vertical wall while they themselves share a non-hierarchical plane of exchange. Furthermore, this metaxic wall does not simply separate the lover from their deity; it is not the dark void of death through which the soul must pass in decreative relief from its mortal coil. This metaxic bridge is tangibly real—a cold wall of clay, rock, and mineral. Whatever its molecular composition, it becomes metaxic when the impenetrability of its materiality gives way to a communicative porosity, a supple and affective plasticity.

Hamilton's account of Pyramus and Thisbe begins like a fairy tale: "Once upon a time the deep red berries of the mulberry tree were white as snow. The change in colour came about strangely and sadly. The death of the two young lovers was the cause" (135). In a metaxic reading, the bodies of these once-captive lovers become porous and metamorphic, even with the mulberry tree which may have had its own opinions regarding the love affair. Despite how Weil is painted by her critics, her allusion to the myth does not offer the mystic and her God the finality of a murder-suicide. The tryst/triste of Pyramus and Thisbe is one of erotic and thanatotic connectivity, both immanent and transcendent. The tension between metaxu and decreation can be observed in the tension between love and death, metamorphosis and disappearance. Although precociously hidden in Weil's prose, Hamilton's retelling also reveals a metaxic causality between humans and nonhumans. The secret of the mulberry colour is the unspeakable love of Pyramus and Thisbe that overspills in encrypted signs before the tragic couple is even introduced.[11] To be metaxic means that the *withdrawnness* of the mulberry tree simultaneously contains the deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe, their unrequited love, the familial conflicts that keep these lovers apart, the fabric that fails to soak up all the blood, the calloused hands of the worker who weaves the fabric, and even the calico cat who purrs contentedly to the soft hum of the loom.

Why is Weil's allusion to this myth so relevant? And why is its omission from critical examinations of Weil so detrimental to an accurate account of metaxu and its broader impact on her philosophy? Myth is not an infrequent rhetorical device used to scaffold an unrelated metaphysical inquiry, but pervasive enough to be palimpsestic, even coextensive, within a textual assemblage in which Christianity forms only a part of a larger literary bricolage. This is not to suggest that Weil's writings are always innocent in their subservience to Christian myth.

Therefore, if some recuperative potential for a metaxic decreation is to be located, it is best to examine how it functions in the two principle mythical systems that inform her particular ideological allegiance—the Greek and the Christian. This intertextuality also serves to ground metaxu in a literary heteroglossia rather than a closed and inflexible theology. Weil explores myth as the germinal narrative of transcendental immanence in her approach to mystical experience, but also as a proto-speculative fiction which she treats as the aesthetic narrativization of the sacred. My analysis seeks to use myth as just such an *ur-text*, but also tries to examine this trajectory (myth to mysticism to modern literature) without positioning Christianity as the teleological finality to myth's prophecy. By overcoming this temptation, metaxu might just serve to rescue decreation from a hierarchical power structure that directs it towards a definable kataphatic theology or a directionless apophatic void.

Throughout history, a belief in the sacred has been communicated through oral and written myth, and here I wish to blur the tenuous distinction between myth and the biblical stories that have claimed authority in opposition to myth. My investigation into myth will therefore involve both Greek myth and Judeo-Christian myth, the two forms which predominantly dialogue with one another in Weil's writing. For example, it has been easy for critics to read "Prométhée" through a Christian lens, but I engage with the poem as an early example of Weil's attempts to think about the nature of decreation and metaxu in a polyvalent context. While the following chapters pursue a shared philosophical and historical focus, the figure of Prometheus will also serve as a mythical linkage between each chapter, as Cormac McCarthy introduces a new Prometheus at the close of his novel (Chapter 2), Herbert Marcuse proposes Orpheus as a necessary counter to Prometheus in modern culture (Chapter 3), and Butler's *Dawn* was instrumental in the development of Donna Haraway's Prometheus-inspired

cyborg myth (Chapter 4).

Mircea Eliade defines myth as the narration of "the irruption of the sacred into the world" (*The Sacred and the Profane* 97) while Claude Lévi-Strauss believes myth to act as a kind of literary history of the sacred.[12] This dissertation is thus situated at the intersection of mystical and mythic literature and its conception of the sacred as "a shifting marker of a radical otherness, separation [and] opposition" (Irwin xxii) with the power to open the world to a potential state of metamorphic becoming. As a result of monotheistic claims to a singular sacred truth, Western representations have often departed from the pluralism and instability evoked in Weil's Greek myths. Religion and myth are thus studied as two divergent sites for transgressing binaries such as sacred/profane or self/other. Equally transitive and transgressive, metaxu is a paradoxical concept of both destabilization and binding that has much to offer in terms of understanding the shared origins and (rhetorical) schism of myth, mysticism, and the religious apparatus that tries to appropriate visionary narratives for its own ideological dominance. The mystical and the mythical always involve a certain destabilization of the subject, and I argue that a metaxic structure acts as the space, conduit, and event of this destabilization.

I question, therefore, whether such destabilization extends to the unicity of a historically phallocentric subject by presenting a metaxic subjectivity of radical openness that offers a pluralistic alternative to the binary foreclosures of sexual difference. Although a definition of myth as the narrative of sacred immanence (Eliade) usefully positions myth as a kind of mystical literature or sacred history (Lévi-Strauss), this can also immediately subjugate the reading of myth to a historically patriarchal discourse of the sacred. I propose that Weil's metaxu must be read alongside literary revisions of myth as a way of critiquing the socio-political ideologies that underpin them. More recently, scholarship on Weil has returned to her writings on Homer and

tragedy. There is, however, as yet no systematic study of how Greek myth operates as a primary lens through which Weil approaches Christianity as an institutional power both narrativizing and legislating discourses of cosmological understanding. I suggest how such a study might unfold by privileging the pluralistic instability of Greek myth at the suture of metaxu and decreation rather than the consoling myth of Christian salvation. By doing so, one might better understand mysticism's role as *mediating* rather than *unifying*, and thus reclaim the subverted metamorphic power that metaxu generates.

From their inception, the mythical and mystical have shared an aesthetic of radical alterity erupting within the phenomenal world. This project concerns the way twentieth-century literature represents a certain openness of the phenomenal to the influence (or, alternatively, indifference) of the noumenal. My intention is to prove the unexplored potential for Weil's metaxu to keep its mediating power while ensuring that multiplicity, hybridity, and otherness are dynamic forces of a uniquely modern sacrality found in literature that destabilizes the hierarchal dependency of Weilian decreation. Ultimately, the goal of this study is twofold: to fill a lacuna within Weilian scholarship by articulating a new theory of metaxu, and to set into motion a hermeneutic through which to read literary representations of mystical encounter, limit-experience, and metamorphosis, as well as their various political consequences.

Crossing distant worlds like the moon

In developing a Weilian hermeneutic through which literary revisions of myth will be read, I also suggest a new way of reading Weil that is more in concert with her notebooks than the editorial framing of *Pesanteur*, a text that has come to represent the cornerstone of Weil's spiritual writings. Compiled by Thibon, *Pesanteur* arranges key passages from the daunting

pages of her notebooks into thirty-seven separate sections or chapters. Although Thibon's editorial skills are considerable given the source text, his decision to ignore the colourful juxtaposition that one finds in Weil's notebooks betrays an obvious difference in motivation. If she is to be classified as a Christian writer, Weil's work shares an affinity with Norman O. Brown's belief that "[i]t is all one book, which includes the gospel according to Ovid, Saint Ovid the Martyr[….] It is all one book; blossoms on one tree.… One tree in kaleidoscopic metamorphosis" (21-22). In the notebooks, metaphysical speculation abounds in aphoristic prose, but woven throughout are challenging gnomic sequences in several languages; mathematical theorems; sublime parataxis; ancient Greek; musings on music and literature; and meditations on war that read like the ekphrasis of Otto Dix painting the tortured soul. Taken together, these notebooks form a kind of apophatic heteroglossia. Various styles rub up against each other to create a jarring contrast in which each form seems to disclose its own impermanence, as though only by writing a certain form into being can it be effaced or transpierced by its transcendental referent.

With their own pervasive use of literary and mythic allusion, Weil's notebooks are crucially dialogic. Joan Dargan reflects that "[i]mages of fixity and stillness contrast with the instability of levels of discourse within a given passage" (39). Murdoch paints a vivid description of Weil as a writer "determined to regard everything as potentially related to everything else, in an intense synthesizing vision" ("Knowing the Void" 157). This synthesis, however, registers as a kind of metaxic interconnectedness rather than the dialectical synthesis that Thibon forces onto the notebooks in the attempt to make Weil more readable. Unfortunately, such a feat is accomplished by Thibon emphasizing a singular focus, thereby eschewing Weil's marginal status for greater adherence to a hegemonic discourse whose resemblance to the *gros animal* might

seem less obvious by including Weil in its ranks. As intertextual allusion gives way to decreative lament (and vice versa), Weil's writing resembles a kind of hauntology[13] in which the spectre of Greek literature still clings to the sand-encrusted rags of a Christianity that took root through the colonialization of rival gods and the annexation of their metaphysical empires. While I agree that Thibon's Christological approach is integral to Weil's (especially later) thinking, I also broach decreation and metaxu by way of this haunted heteroglossia in order to excavate new possibilities for Weil's philosophy, especially in its ability to shed light on literary works that experiment with the same dialogic dyad of myth and mysticism.

What is clear from Weil's notebooks (if such an adjective can ever be confidently employed to describe them) is not so much a definitive interpretation of texts and traditions, but a comparative strategy of reading that is all too often abandoned in the pursuit of achieving an explicitly Marxist, feminist, or Christian reading. My examination of Weil, and my theorization of metaxu through literature, will be informed by a comparative strategy that respects Weil's own strategy of reading, which was itself something akin to a metaxic methodology of yoking disparate ideas and disciplines together in order to illuminate their hidden correspondences. I take as my starting point Natalie Melas's injunction that a comparative methodology is one that must attend to "inclusiveness and a non-hierarchical transversality" (41). Weil's approach to cultural historicism was thematically rhizomatic and part of an interconnected world system that privileged cross-contamination over monologic totality. Broadly speaking, my project will follow such an intersectional, cross-temporal, cross-cultural, and transdisciplinary approach. Implicit to this intersectionality is an approach that takes the affective and phenomenological experience of spirituality seriously, while refusing any institutional or authorial claims as to their veracity and authenticity.

This methodology is adjacent to the practices of world literature that have taken shape in the period immediately following the publication of my primary texts; the chapter on Rushdie (an early figurehead of world literature's globalism) will specifically address Weil's relevance to some of its concerns. Throughout each chapter, however, I will use Weil's theory of metaxu as a conceptual lynchpin to "mediate between [theoretical] cores and peripheries" (Deckard and Shapiro 8). Emmanuel Levinas criticized Weil as early as 1963 for using what he called a "World Literature" approach to the Bible, contrasting passages of the Old Testament with '"chosen bits' of civilizations foreign to Europe …[and] with a disconcerting generosity go[ing] into ecstasies over the slightest trace of the Divine, which crosses distant worlds like the Moon" ("Simone Weil" 136). Following the generous intertextuality of Weil's writing, I aim to demonstrate how a trans-historical approach that moves from ancient myth to twentieth-century literature is not only an effective way of reading Weil, but of reading authors insistent on returning to myth at a time when nostalgia, pastiche, and grand narratives were conceived as threats to a progressive futurity.

Metaxu and Myth in Weil's Readers

After inspiring numerous poets and novelists in the wake of her death, Weil's influence in literary criticism has been always been contentious. In 1958's awkwardly titled *Brave Men: A Study of D.H. Lawrence and Simone Weil*, Richard Rees published the first book-length study in English to compare Weil with a novelist, but his analysis rarely moves beyond uncritical sycophancy; he claims within the first few pages that to compare anyone to Lawrence would be the equivalent of "introducing the god Pan into a conference of the PEN club. He is even more *sui generis* as an artist than either Hopkins or Whitman, though possibly a combination of these two might have produced a being of a uniqueness remotely comparable to his" (8).[14] A few

decades later, Gabriele Griffin's *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (1993) would supply a new benchmark of comparative affinity. Although heavily biographical, Griffin does an excellent job outlining the degree to which "[c]ritics disagree about whether or not Weil's work ought to be read in the light of her life" (64) and in the instances where her work is read separately, "it is done from a desire to preserve the integrity of Weil's writings from her abnormal experiences and her abnormal behaviour" (65). Griffin herself criticizes Eliot's initial assessment of Weil in order to link Weil with Murdoch on a much more intimate level. Griffin argues that it "is possible to read Weil's work and life both as colluding with and as protesting against traditional paradigms of femininity" (67) and this is a protest she finds integral to Murdoch. Furthermore, Griffin argues that Weil denied her own femininity by engaging in such male-dominated domains as philosophy, the war effort, factory work, and various labour movements. Paradoxically, Griffin also suggests that Weil's writings are a "retreat into the traditionally female role of instrument through which the spirit speaks" and therefore, relies upon "traditional gender attributions" which never allow her to successfully claim an "authentic female self" in the world of men (91).

In Weil and Murdoch, Griffin locates a shared struggle to become "honorary male[s]," arguing that "Murdoch must have seen something of her own predicament, found an echo to her situation, namely, the continual struggle between self-assertion and self-denial inherent in the position of the heterosexual 'honorary male'" (290). Several decades removed, Rees's influence persisted.[15] On the opposing spectrum, Deborah Nelson's *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (2017) is an overdue reassessment by challenging the politics that prescribe the conceptual boundaries of gender through which Weil is ceaselessly read by her critics. I build upon the work of Nelson and others to question the long-standing problems of

theorizing gender and the body through Weil's philosophy. As an addendum to identity politics, a theory of metaxu would offer a new way of re-contextualizing the politics of the body without ever transcending its own necessary materiality and its various embodiments.

Although scholars are returning to Weil's oeuvre with more frequency in the fields of theology, political theory, and gender studies, her contribution to literary studies, myth, and aesthetics has received scant critical attention. A field-defining collection of essays from 2010, *The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later*, still represents an accurate reflection of the state of Weilian scholarship in the twenty-first century. Featuring contributions from Eric Springstead, Lawrence Schmidt, and other eminent Weil scholars, the collection contains fifteen essays on Weil and covers a wide range of disciplines. Not a single one, however, addresses Weil's importance to the study of literature or myth.

Commentary addressing Weil's influence on literature has arguably concentrated more on English authors, specifically poets, than those writing in French.[16] Adrian Grafe's short but thorough overview, "Simone Weil Among the Poets" (2008), centres on the major British poets inspired by Weil, specifically Heaney, Michael Symmons Roberts, and Elizabeth Jennings. Grafe has identified several authors who have been influenced by the centrality of kenosis in Weil's writings. Although Grafe's recognition of this influence does not extend to an analysis of the relationship between kenosis and decreation, his work is, along with James R. Lindroth's essay on Weil and Wallace Stevens (1987), a welcome study of Weil's profound contribution to poetry.

Lindroth's essay is found in *The Beauty that Saves* (1996), an anthology devoted to Weil and aesthetics that remains one of the most important contributions to Weil scholarship. The primary focus, however, is more commonly authors other than Weil, with the occasional smattering of her biography and much finger-pointing to vague connections between her and the

artist in question. Weil's arguments about tragedy, affliction, and literature are more successfully outlined in Katherine T. Brueck's *The Redemption of Tragedy: The Literary Vision of Simone Weil* (1995).[17] Although Brueck does not analyze any genres or authors that Weil herself did not explicitly write about, *Redemption* successfully articulates a reading of tragedy against what Brueck considers to be a problematic secularism in approaches to Greek literature. Her text presents a "Christian view of human wretchedness in a fashion comparable to that of classical tragedy" (3) and is grounded in Weil's famous statement from *Pesanteur* that, "L'extrême grandeur du christianisme vient de ce qu'il ne cherche pas un remède surnaturel contre la souffrance, mais un usage surnaturel de la souffrance" (146). It is Weil's belief that the Attic tragedy of Sophocles and Aeschylus inherited the Homeric model of unconsoled suffering and blind necessity, and through a similar prefiguration to theological typology, passes it on to the gospels (and later Shakespeare and Racine). Brueck's text is exemplary of the ways in which academics have traditionally focused on tragedy as essential to Weil's interpretation of Christianity.

I must also acknowledge a debt to William Desmond's extensive writing on *metaxology* or a philosophy of the "between." Especially in his trilogy *Being and the Between* (1995), *Ethics and the Between* (2001), and *God and the Between* (2008), Desmond has done more than any philosopher to label the relationship between self and other as *metaxic* when it maintains otherness and difference. Elsewhere, in "Being, Determination, and Dialectic" (1995), Desmond argues that "[t]he metaxological sense keeps open the spaces of otherness in the between, and it does not domesticate the ruptures that shake the complacencies of our mediations of being" (763). The transposition of metaxu to the ethical sphere is an easy way to argue its applicability to contemporary issues, yet matters of mediation, liminality, and hybridity also concern the

material, corporeal, and political designation that metaxu is given both in Weil's notebooks and Thibon's subsection in *Pesanteur*. I therefore propose a significant break from the work of Desmond in that his purpose has been to use metaxu for a Christian ethical system while exorcizing (decreating?) Weil entirely from any discussion of metaxu. Departing from Desmond, I return Weil to the forefront of theorizing metaxu in order to illuminate the "spaces of otherness" within her writing where a *metaxology* can transcend the ethico-religious dimensions in which Desmond's philosophy is entrenched.

More significantly, my analysis is aligned with Charity K. M. Hamilton's essay "Troubled Bodies: Metaxu, Suffering and the Encounter with the Divine" (2013), which, although not explicitly working within literary studies, enacts a theory of metaxu that extends to diverse academic fields. Hamilton examines the female body as a potential metaxu and uses this critical frame to "question whether the concept of the body as *metaxu* offers feminist theology a philosophical … argument for a … re-evaluation of the female body [and its] relationship to God rather than something which distances women from God" (89). Resonating with Luce Irigaray's concept of the sensible transcendent, metaxu "uncovers a new conception of subjectivity in which transcendence is rooted explicitly in immanence" (Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* 199), thus rescuing the metaxic body from being devalued in a transcendent-immanent dichotomy. Thus, it is my contention that while the traditional Judeo-Christian God of Hamilton and Weil exists as a mimetic counterpart for the decreative body, the re-imagined metaxic body demands (perhaps even produces) a very different sacred otherness to which it stands in relation.

Hamilton underscores that "[t]he concept of the body as *metaxu* between the soul and the Divine is not a reproduction of a form of dualism which stands the body and soul in separation but rather it is the potential that the body and soul are inseparable so that the physical actions of

the body and that which occurs within the body could link *or* separate from the Divine" (93). At times, Hamilton proposes a theory the goal of which is to challenge a theological perspective *for* and *from within* the institution of faith, but she nevertheless offers an interesting dynamic to metaxic (im)possibility. She states that the "concept of a body which is truly female is one which seems an oxymoron," arguing that if "the female body is […] constructed by patriarchy [then] it is not itself" (94). Hamilton warns that "the female body which is constructed by patriarchy cannot be decreated through the hope that it will become a truly female body and thus *metaxu*" (94). Hamilton differentiates between a kind of authentic or inauthentic female body by contrasting an identity imposed onto a body through patriarchal control with a body decreated from such ideological constructions. Hamilton's position is that within the phallogocentric symbolic order, something like an authentic female body is inevitably absent, as any patriarchal construction of the female body fails to represent adequately that which must be communicated by, and through, a community of women to overthrow history's essentializing discourses.[18]

My focus on metaxu builds upon Hamilton's recognition of metaxu as a useful model for dismantling the symbolic terms that underpin traditional theologies of the body in which "the thing most absent from the female body is the female body itself. Is it possible that this abstention although not chosen allows for the space which Weil claims needs to be vacant in order to create that 'gateway' to the Divine?" (94). In part, what must be decreated is the patriarchal construction of a femininity inscribed onto the body from the outside. Although not immediately evident in Weil's writing, Hamilton's call for an authentic femininity (at least as many as there are bodies) marks a necessary stage in the development of the body as metaxic rather than decreatively ecstatic. In this stage, the body opens to new forms of identity and non-identity through the decreation of any assignations of gender that are not its own creation. This

metaxic agency[19] would not be exclusive to women, but inclusive of all constructions of identity that institute a break from patriarchal definitions and the persistence of binary models. Hamilton's view of decreation and metaxu as mobilizing concepts for feminist politics will prove fruitful for the final two chapters of this dissertation as I outline a metaxic feminism suppressed in Rushdie (Chapter 3) and empowered in Butler (Chapter 4).

While metaxu continues to be under-mined within critiques of Weil and literature, the concept of decreation continues to draw the attention of writers, especially since Carson's *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (2005), a diverse collection that includes an opera titled "Decreation" and an essay that illuminates the affinities among Weil, Sappho, and the thirteenth-century mystic Marguerite Porete. The crucial lesson that Carson finds these women, metaphysicians of love, teaching is that, "Love dares the self to leave itself behind, to enter into poverty" (162).[20] Attuned to Weil's paradoxes, Carson postulates that although the act of writing involves the construction of a "big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice" (171), decreation might only be possible in writing where the self is "thrown outside its own centre" (161). Decreation, therefore, involves not only a metaphysical or ethical position, but suggests an inherently literary and aesthetic mode not dissimilar to the apophatic self-effacement of Samuel Beckett. Furthermore, the self-dispossession of metaxic decreation stresses the degree to which this renunciation occurs in the liminality of intermediary space and can thus be both material and metamorphic.

In *Decreation and the Ethical Bind: Simone Weil and the Claim of the Other* (2017), Yoon Sook Cha recognizes the importance of this mythic influence and includes a perceptive examination of Weil's essay, "L'*Iliade* ou le poème de la force." Cha argues that its treatment of decreative supplication provides an ethical stance towards the other that is pervasive in Weil's

work during WWII. According to Cha, Weil's writing contains a primarily ethical and political preservation of the other through a self-dispossession:

> [she] throws one's own creaturely existence into question and necessitates a shift away from an egocentric perspective toward one where the "I" disappears. In effecting one's "disappearance," one does not, however, relinquish one's obligation to the other. Nor is one let go. Instead, the difficulty lies in being bound to the other through this very renunciation of one's "I". (Cha xii)

Cha interprets this disappearance in terms of decreation, but an obligation and a binding to the other, whether on a dualistic or communal scale, must also be envisaged in terms of a metaxic relation to the other. Put simply, decreation is disappearance and metaxu is binding. Decreation, and the "shift away from an egocentric perspective" (xii), is the necessary precondition for a "creaturely" metaxu.[21] For my own part, I am explicitly concerned with this question of the creaturely and distinguish decreation as an *undoing* of the creaturely from metaxu's comparative *releasing* of the creaturely, that is to say, a movement of self-effacement that might be usefully categorized as a *becoming-creaturely*. Chapters 2 through 4 will sketch arguments regarding animality and a becoming-creaturely that situates metaxu in a genealogy stretching back to Homeric and Ovidian metamorphoses. Contemporary philosophers of the animal and non-human peoples have importantly pressured the human-animal distinction that has been a cornerstone of Western politics and metaphysics since at least Aristotle, and I outline a theory of metaxu commensurate with "a postmetaphysical concept of relation and community" (Calarco 79) with a multispecies priority. The *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* (1940) identifies μεταχωρέω (metaxu) as a verb meaning "to go to another place," and interestingly, this word was used in relation to migratory birds of passage.

Carson and Cha are representative of how insightful applications of decreation to literature should work in concert with literary readings of metaxu. While Cha rewrites the story of decreation and its importance to Weil's later literary texts ("L'*Iliade*" and *Venise sauvée* importantly among them), the mediating force of metaxu is mentioned in only one passage. Somewhat tellingly, the reference is biographically applied to Weil's own hands—limbs that remain functional even when unmoored from the ego that has historically laid claim to its body. Cha references Françoise Meltzer's reading of Weil's metaxic hands[22] to articulate a body that is capable of becoming metaxic when released from the egoistic "I," and thus, a metaxu generative of both psychic *and* physical metamorphosis. Cha's book is similar to others (though considerably more successful) in its presentation of a dualistic schema that separates Weil's *bios* from the metaxic other who is protected by an ethically decreative (self-renunciating) stance. Cha's book is an important contribution to the current re-shaping of Weil studies, and its privileging of decreation only strengthens the need for a consideration of metaxu within Weil scholarship.[23] It is my contention that there is a significant lacuna within the field, as the concept of metaxu continues to be ignored and decreation is often beholden to a limited theological approach.[24] If, as Meltzer opines, the metaxic hands are "the site of struggle for Weil" (623), then the site of struggle—for both Weil and Weilian scholarship—is a metaxu that has been left untheorized for too long.

Fleshing Out the Chapters

The first chapter of *The Lost Futures of Simone Weil* begins with an analysis of Weil's account of her alleged mystical experience in order to discuss its connection to a tradition of visionary literature. My arguments will be framed by Gershom Scholem's writings on mystical

literature and engage with Dargan's critique of Weil's narrative account. I will then offer a more thorough presentation of Weil's concepts of decreation and metaxu in order to argue for a re-reading of Weil's work in a literary or aesthetic mode in addition to a strictly religious or philosophical one.[25] This distinction complicates the traditionally mimetic understanding of kenosis and decreation in order to focus on the neglected role that metaxu plays within this paradigm—and how something like a metaxic poetics might subsequently form as a useful hermeneutic tool. I will conclude with an introduction to a metaxic theory of myth and a discussion of how metaxu sutures myth and mysticism in a way that productively redefines the field of Weil criticism. In concert with scholarship from Dargan and Marie Cabaud Meaney, I will extend Weil's theories beyond Thibon's posthumous assemblage and forge a new dialogue between Weil and theorizations of myth and mysticism.

This initial chapter brings metaxu to bear on the what I regard as a decreative impasse in Weil's work in order to identify a "conception of subjectivity in which transcendence is rooted explicitly in immanence, rather than posited as antithetical to it" (Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* 199). After two World Wars and the murder and displacement of millions of people, much has been written about the spiritual crises that spread in the wake of a half-century that also claimed Weil's life. And yet, a notion of sacrality has somehow prevailed, haunting the writings of some of the most fervent atheists, as literature became, if not the new space of metaxic existence, the only one viable. Chapter 1 introduces a reading of the sacred as something that violently wrenches the subject out of profane being; this foundation will serve as a contrast for Chapter 4's interest in the efforts of Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément in *The Feminine and the Sacred* (1998) to re-appropriate the sacred against the profane world of historical patriarchy. In theorizing metaxu's transgressive potential within patriarchal structures, I will critique Weil's

reworking of the *Timaeus* (*c*. 360 BCE) to demonstrate metaxu's immanent departure from the transcendent "wet-nurse" of Plato's khora. One of the questions that informs this project is whether a fleshing-out of metaxic theory can return a radical materialism to the metaphysical thought of Weil. Might a refocused attention on metaxu append a sacred mobilization of the body that rethinks the political viability of a decreative pursuit that can only be synonymous with death? How might a metaxic theory usefully complicate Gilles Deleuze's statement that "[t]he One is not the transcendent that might contain immanence but the immanent contained within a transcendent field" (30)? Ultimately, in privileging metaxu above a strictly decreative focus, I wish to re-introduce Weil as a writer for whom mystical encounters can only ever be found in the political mobilization of a sacred and metamorphic materiality.

Chapter 1 will conclude with an investigation of how the influence of myth in Weil's writing reveals an important dimension to Weil's spiritual writings. Dargan has rightfully suggested that in *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* (1951),[26] Weil "casts Hellenic inspiration as the main, self-evident precursor of Christianity, with no recognition of Judaism as a source" (27). While this will be problematic for writers like Levinas, it underscores the degree to which Weil's work on myth offers a neglected but crucial entry-point for her spiritual writings. Central to this chapter will be the first sustained analysis of Weil's poem "Prométhée" in light of Weil's mysticism. I will consider some of the ways that myth functions as an extension of a dangerous religious ideology (Roland Barthes; Hans Blumenberg) but also the method by which metaxu works to alternately support and destabilize this procedure. Finally, I hope to promote a new way of reading Weil's work, but also an original hermeneutic through which to read literary texts that similarly return to myth in order to challenge (or perpetuate) a prevailing hegemonic ideology.

Chapter 2 pairs Weil's famous wartime essay "L'*Iliade*, ou le poème de la force" with a

reading of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), a novel that is an overt (if unacknowledged) adaptation of Weil's "L'*Iliade*" for an American mythos. The pairing of these two texts begins from the perspective of György Lukács's notion that "[t]he novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88). In Weil's essay, Homer provides a stark mirror for the embattled Europe of 1939 through its vivid descriptions of the displacement of the human subject and the threat of social collapse through the hubristic attempt to control violence. I will use Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" (1986) to illuminate Weil's thesis that divine force, rather than Achilles or Hector, is the true hero of the epic, while McCarthy's text envisions the consequences of such divine force in a gnostic world of violent colonial expansion. Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* is, I argue, inspired by his unpublished dissertation on Weil, and I will expose the links between *homo sacer* and decreation by examining the problematic link between violence and sacrality—a link that reveals a crisis of metaxu in McCarthy's text that serves to frame the (im)possibility of transcendence within the American mythos. It is not unfair to equate the horrors committed by the judge's disciples with the innumerable atrocities of the *Iliad*. If McCarthy's prose luxuriates in this horror, however, it is only to expose what has been quietly sanctified in both the Homeric myth and its descendent: the mythopoesis of manifest destiny.

This chapter contrasts some of Weil's historically specific observations about bodies and transformation alongside Jane Bennett's contemporary theorizing of vibrant matter and Anat Pick's incorporation of Weil into a philosophy of sacred vulnerability shared by humans and nonhumans alike. Weil's ideas about decreation will also be juxtaposed with Benjamin's distinctions between divine and mythic violence, as well as Franz Fanon's writings on colonial dehumanization. Each of these concepts will act as theoretical lenses to understand metaxu in a broader context and will allow me to formulate a provisional literary critique that is based on

transformation—transformation in terms of character, metaphor, and the ontological status of the human. Part of the methodology for this chapter includes a deconstruction of the anthropomorphic God, while probing what new forms take up residency in its absence and subsequently retain or appropriate the former sacrality of such a position. To that end, I show the role that a belief in a sacred otherness plays in creating nationalistic myths while sketching a metaxic philosophy in which the divine centre has "shifted its residence" through kenosis "from transcendence to immanence" (Caputo, *After the Death of God* 68).[27] The gnostic wilderness of McCarthy provides a unique contextual environment for the kind of immanence endemic to modernity, specifically in the ways it interacts with and undergirds the colonial structures that usurp Indigenous territories.

Chapter 3 counters a Homeric influence with Ovid in order to expose the metaxic crisis evident in twentieth-century retellings of the myth of Orpheus. Marcuse has positioned Orpheus as the modern antithesis to the Prometheus who creates culture through toil and self-renunciation. I will explore some of the consequences of this binary by tracing the persistence of the Orphic myth within twentieth-century literature as an exemplar for art's purpose of responding to loss, death, and alienation. Central to this chapter is a focus on Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, through which I pursue a reading of Orpheus and Eurydice in order to examine the consequences of the metaxic struggle embedded within the very structure of myth itself. I contend that this struggle represents an essential problematic in the viability of theorizing myth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Typically, mystical transcendence is understood as a vertical movement away from the self and towards a deity. This chapter will make the case for a metaxic decreation in the form of a katabasis that shifts from a heavenly transcendence to an inner, chthonic, aesthetic, and communal space of sacrality.

I situate Rushdie's novel in a patriarchal genealogy that runs from Ovid and Virgil through to *Ground*'s neoliberal instantiation of a male artist-subject in opposition to a female voiceless-object. I sketch this genealogy to demonstrate the potential for a metaxic intervention to problematize the myth's treatment of sexual difference, as well as the binaries of immanence/transcendence and human/nonhuman. My analysis of Rushdie will be primarily guided by two theoretical frameworks. The first is a queer and feminist reading of the novel's response to the myth's gender dynamics and the reclamation of the lost voice of Eurydice. The history of Orpheus's queerness extends back as far the ancient Greek poet Phanocles, but my chapter will engage with H.D.'s "Eurydice" (1917), Beatriz Preciado's *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013), and Céline Sciamma's film, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), to propose a lost queer future of Eurydice that might be possible to reclaim through a proper theorization of metaxu. My use of the term "lost future" is not coincidental, as my discussion of Rushdie's novel in the context of world literature, world music, and globalism is informed by Fisher's writings on capitalist realism and hauntology.[28] Approaching both Orpheus and Rushdie's music through Fisher's work on music and hauntology will allow me to question Rushdie's complicity in capitalist realism's culture of nostalgia, as well as whether a literary return to myth might be symptomatic of a longing for a lost future of interspecies collectivity and metamorphosis.

My final chapter offers a rereading of Octavia Butler to counter the crisis of metaxu as demonstrated by McCarthy and Rushdie and to theorize metaxu's transformative potential after the apocalyptic collapse of Weil's *gros animal*. With careful attention to the politics of metamorphosis in *Dawn* (1987), the first novel of Butler's *Xenogenesis* (1989) trilogy, this chapter emphasizes the difference between a decreative and a metaxic framework in order to

challenge the traditional way of approaching mystical encounters. Butler dismantles notions of mysticism, eroticism, otherness, and species that are to be read against the patriarchal constructions of the previous chapters. The eventual acceptance of metamorphosis by the novel's heroine, Lilith, marks an openness to a metaxic transfiguration that is registered as abject by the novel's other human characters. While I acknowledge metaxu's relationship with Kristeva's theory, more attention will be paid to her dialogic explorations of a feminine and feminist sacrality with Clément. The perspective of the humans' resistance to Lilith represents a decreative reading of metaxic metamorphosis, recognizing only death and dehumanization as opposed to interspecies coexistence and reciprocity.

Butler's novel rewrites both Judeo-Christian and Greek myth in order to rescue the figures of Lilith and Medusa from cultural narratives that have cast them as monstrous or demonic threats to male power. Since Weil's idea of metaxu is in part influenced by Diotima's teaching of the demonic Eros in Plato's *Symposium*, I examine what a demonic and erotic metaxu might actually look like. At the core of Butler's mythic revisionism is a feminist politics that explores issues of colonialism, racism, and sexual difference from a complicated perspective in which master/slave dialectics are overthrown for the pragmatism of cooperative survival. I do not intend to rehash debates between an older idealism and a third wave materialism; this chapter will situate Butler's speculative feminism alongside the works of contemporaneous writers like Clément, bell hooks, and especially Haraway, in order to demonstrate their parallels and augment the thematic concerns of Butler's corpus. My use of Haraway will serve to bookend the first chapter by providing a link between Weil's "Prométhée" and the Promethean cyborg myth that has permeated cultural theory ever since Haraway's critique of Butler in "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985). Like the cyborg myth, a metaxic poetics is also "about transgressed boundaries, potent

fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (*CM* 154). A theory of metaxu intersects with posthumanist theories like Haraway's in that it postulates that human beings have perhaps never been separate from the nonhuman.

Butler provides an answer to whether or not myth and mysticism can survive the patriarchal, apocalyptic, Enlightenment project, formulated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as the integration of the irrational into the obedient systems of modern logic and rationality (3). In what capacity has myth been appropriated to rationalize, but also *diagnose* forms of alterity (queer, female, divine, nonhuman) as irrational? *Dawn* allows me to broach such questions through a focus on metaxu and metamorphosis as political strategies of resistance against a corrupted myth of transcendence. Pursuant to this, I construct a theory of metaxu that solidifies Weil's relevance to debates within late twentieth-century literature, specifically as they concern issues in Afrofuturism and Indigenous practices of decolonization and storytelling. This chapter highlights a theoretical concern that will serve as one of the central leitmotifs throughout this dissertation: metaxu's potential to reshape ecological approaches to the nonhuman turn in contemporary philosophy. Butler's oeuvre is inherently tied not only to the nonhuman perspectives that emerge in Haraway, but also writers such as Pick, Alphonso Lingis and Timothy Morton. A balanced intersectional approach must confront the politics of race, gender, and ecology. If, as Weil contends, metaxu are found in socio-cultural structures, they must be understood in the context of ecology and the decreative suicide of an entire biosphere. By applying Weil to Butler, I also hope to demonstrate how literary approaches to metaxu complicate traditional readings of Weil by tethering her mysticism to deep concerns with patriarchy, capitalism, and the dehumanizing forces of the *gros animal*.

My discussion of these novels extends the philosophical potential of Weil's metaxu by way of three main incarnations: the conflation of violence and sacrality; music and politics; and recreated formations of the body through metamorphic possibility. Charting a similar course to Weil's non-linear, elliptical, transcultural movement from ancient myth to twentieth-century politics, each of these chapters investigates a myth that has helped shape the history of transcendence in the Western literary imagination (Prometheus, the *Iliad*, Orpheus, Lilith), but also *transcendence as myth*. Given Thibon's textual authority over the presentation of metaxu, I approach metaxu as an unfinished theory or project, even a concept that resists all attempts to totalize it within some catch-all taxonomical container. Perhaps Weil's concept of metaxu also remained inoperative because it is so clearly a way of collapsing the transcendental into an immanent horizon. Each chapter, therefore, while seeking to return metaxu to its neglected place at the forefront of Weil's spiritual philosophy, approaches the very idea of metaxu *as metaxic* and thus interwoven with theories both classical (khora, kenosis, metamorphosis, sacred) and contemporary (hybridity, hauntology, abjection, nonhuman subjectivity) in order to understand more fully the potential of a Weilian hermeneutic within literary theory.

Endnotes

[1] Weil appears as an archetypal figure in *The Rebel* (1951) and, as Deborah Nelson has noticed, the priest in *The Plague* (1947) displays obvious similarity to Weil, especially in a sermon that draws heavily from Weil's essay "L'amour de Dieu et le malheur" (1942).

[2] Gregory Marks has also recognized a similarity between Weil's writing style and the theory-fiction celebrated by Reza Negarestani, Simon Sellars, Mark Fisher, and others. Marks, author of the blog *The Wasted World: Gothic Pasts and Posthuman Futures*, has included Weil's *An Anthology* (1986) on a political theory reading list for theory-fiction.

[3] Fisher attributes this phrase equally to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. See also Francis Fukayama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992); and Jodi Dean's *The Communist Horizon* (2012) and "Capitalism is the End of the World" (2019).

[4] Weil adopts this theory from Isaac Luria's notion of *tzimtzum*, which I will discuss further in Chapter 1.

[5] Weil continued to write a series of notebooks after her departure from Marseilles in 1942 and her arrival in New York and London, the latter of which has been published by Gallimard as *La Connaissance surnaturelle*.

[6] Translated by Arthur Wills as the "way through" (*GG* 200). Occasionally, citations of Weil's translators will prove efficient for syntactical and argumentative cohesion.

[7] By the term erotics, I mean to suggest that a properly metaxic environment should bear the potential for myriad forms of eroticism that are not reducible to a sexual or even human character. One should read the term erotics as a specific discipline—like ethics and politics (and intricately bound up in each)—that requires a "more-than-human" practice of inquiry.

[8] Plato's *Symposium* (*c*. 385-370 BCE), relates that Eros is neither mortal nor immortal but the liminal creature acting as interpreter between humans and the divine realm. Eros is thus inherently metaxic, but one can extrapolate from Weil that the reverse might equally be true, that metaxu is inherently erotic.

[9] Galehaut brought Lancelot and Guinevere together. In Dante's *Inferno,* Francesco and Paolo succumb to their love by reading the book *Galehaut*. A textual Galehaut, therefore, is a text that brings two lovers together. Giovanni Boccaccio makes famous use of this in *The Decameron* (*c*. 1353).

[10] The myth of Pyramus and Thisbe as an allegory of metaxic intimacy imagines an exilic dynamic wherein each person reaches out towards the emancipatory love that would constitute their rescue. Their mutual imprisonment constitutes a horizontal restructuring such that if one of them symbolizes God, this must be a God who is also a prisoner and shares the same ecstatic desire.

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[11] Consider Octavio Paz's famous reference to "the love unseen and the love unheard" ("Proem" 483).

[12] See especially Lévi Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964).

[13] I will discuss hauntology further in Chapter 3. Although the concept originates in Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993), it gained increasing popularity as a musical genre in the 2000s with artists such as Burial and labels such as Ghost Box. The most fruitful linkages between hauntology as music and theory are arguably found in the work of Mark Fisher, especially *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) and *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher* (2018).

[14] Rees champions Weil for her ability to exemplify Lawrence's *ideal man*, while adopting the opinion of a friend that Weil "was so much interested in the poorer districts of Harlem that if she had stayed in America she would have become a negress" (15). Inevitably, my interest in metaxu's relationship to metamorphosis will have to contend with the misogyny and racism inherent to such appropriation. Rees's comments reflect a particular climate of Weil's reputation, appearing only a few years after *Time* magazine informed its readers that "Simone Weil was an absurd and unattractive woman. Almost constantly ailing, painfully humorless and so intense she was either irritating or ridiculous, she agonized through a short life of 34 years and died in 1943 in a gesture that seemed to typify her gift for fruitless heroics" (48).

[15] This trend culminates in Neal Oxenhandler's bizarre, unfounded hypotheses that Weil's asexuality was caused by an older man accosting her as a youth and that her bizarre temperament was due to being weaned off her mother's milk too early. His fusion of literary criticism and overly-confessional memoir, *Looking for Heroes in Postwar France* (1996) is to be avoided.

[16] Poets who have demonstrated Weil's influence include Seamus Heaney, Geoffrey Hill, Fanny Howe, Czesław Miłosz, George Oppen, and Wallace Stevens; Anne Carson, Jorie Graham, and Stephanie Strickland have each written entire books of poetry dedicated to her.

[17] Brueck has abridged this text for inclusion in *The Beauty that Saves* under the title "The Tragic Poetics of Simone Weil."

[18] Hamilton's challenge of hegemony from within institutionalized religion is thus curious, even if motivated by the pursuit of empowerment through self-representation.

[19] My use of this word reflects the work of Hollywood, Mary Keller, and Talal Asad—writers who question the difference between *agency* and *subjectivity*. If agency is affective (Asad) and occurs within the interrelation of bodies and systems of power (Keller), then becoming-metaxic specifically concerns an agency within and against the systems of power in which it locates its subjectivity.

[20] As effective a definition of decreation as anything Weil has provided, this also has the benefit of highlighting its correlation with the Incarnation through which God is said to cast aside his

divinity in order to become an impoverished carpenter. As I wish to align metaxu with Eros, it is significant that Diotima declares the mother of Eros to be Penia (poverty).

[21] One should consider, for example, the ways in which a very similar statement by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri is the harbinger for a radical politics of community that arises through the disappearance of individualized identity: "This revolutionary process of the abolition of identity, we should keep in mind, is monstrous, violent, and traumatic. Don't try to save yourself—in fact, your self has to be sacrificed! This does not mean that liberation casts us into an indifferent sea with no objects of identification, but rather the existing identities will no longer serve as anchors" (*Commonwealth* 339).

[22] See Meltzer's "The Hands of Simone Weil" (2001).

[23] Sharon Cameron's "The Practice of Attention: Simone Weil's Performance of Impersonality" (2003) is arguably the most celebrated treatment of decreation and no mention of metaxu is made within its pages. The same can be said for Bloomsbury's broad and philosophically rich *Simone Weil and Theology* (2012).

[24] John Desmond's essays "Flannery O'Connor and Simone Weil: A Question of Sympathy" (2005) and "Flannery O'Connor, Simone Weil, Writing, and the Crucifixion" (2010), provide notable examples. O'Connor's alignment with Weil's metaphysics are well-known, as she learned from Weil that when trying to depict the supernatural, the object of the writer's attention should not be on the transcendental, but on the natural world and its transportive moments of suffering and forsakenness.

[25] Hollywood and Barbara Newman's use of the term "imaginative theology" may be instructive here. See Hollywood's *Accute Melancholia* and Newman's *God and the Goddesses* (2003).

[26] This title was chosen by the Dominican priest, Joseph-Marie Perrin, and is indicative of the subjugation of Greek sources to Christian authority, a trend that continues in Weil studies to this day.

[27] Weil's philosophy offers a sober contrast to John Caputo's skepticism of Thomas J. J. Altizer "merrily danc[ing] in the street over the metaphysics of immanent presence, nay, over 'total presence,' brought about as the dialectical offspring of 'total absence' or negation" (*After the Death of God* 68).

[28] Fisher forms his idea of "lost futures" by adapting Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. In *Specters*, Derrida does not mourn the death of Communism after the fall of the Soviet empire, but the fact that it was never truly able to exist as anything more than an anticipated virtuality. That which haunts, for both Derrida and Fisher, is not the loss of an historical socialism through the commanding victory of capitalism, but a future socialist horizon, a lost future that may never arrive.

CHAPTER 1

In which the knot of Simone Weil's philosophy begins to be untied, and a man's liver is forever eaten by eagles

> We are part of it;
> we admit the transubstantiation,
>
> not God merely in bread
> but God in the other-half of the tree
>
> that looked dead—
> did I bow my head?
>
> ……………………………..
>
> it was *the Angel which redeemed me*,
> it was the Holy Ghost—
>
> a half-burnt-out apple-tree
> blossoming
>
> H.D., *Trilogy*

There was once an old monk who is said to have remarked that his words turned into fluttering butterflies whenever he tried to get them to behave long enough to describe his frequent visions. Weil's "Prologue" is a textbook case for the difficulties in writing about mystical encounters when, by necessity, it confronts language with ineffability and fights logic with the unknown, the paradoxical, and the impossible. In Plato's *Timaeus*, the titular character warns that the ineffable liminality of the khora—precursor to metaxu and the medium between the divine and the sensible world through which everything is mimetically called into being—can only be approached through "a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception.… We look at it as in a dream" (52b2-4). When Gustave Thibon was compiling *Pesanteur* from selections in Weil's Marseilles notebooks, he omitted a description of metaxu that directly echoes Plato: "Le devenir, *μεταξύ* entré le Modèle at le Porte-empreintes. Le lieu

n'est que le porte-empreintes vu en songe" (*Cahiers II* 403). Weil's enigmatic metaxu provides a substitute for what James Winchell calls the "bewitching … structural relation not only to the unspeakable, but also to radical alterity, or the unknowable" (82). Accordingly, this chapter aims to release the concept of metaxu from the confines of Thibon's editorialized section in *Pesanteur* in order to open it up to new forms of radical alterity. As a form of "bastard reasoning" without patriarchal parentage, I will argue that metaxu operates as a kind of material, immanent, even embodied version of Timaeus's khora.

The following chapter is divided into four main parts, the first of which positions Weil alongside (and against) three dominant interpretive methods: Thibon's reading of Weil's notebooks; biographical critiques of Weil's work; and Weil's own narrative account of her mystical vision. One of the questions this chapter will investigate is how the "dream state" of Timaeus might be a necessary ontological stance in relation to the ineffable or unspeakable and how effective a critical methodology might be if it is influenced by this same position. Moreover, what happens if Timaeus's model is also seen from a dream state? For dream states—like surrealism, or Werner Herzog's "ecstatic truth"[1]—are capable of offering deeper perspectives that illuminate or counter the scaffolding that often keeps the mystery of the real at bay.[2] Similarly, this chapter suggests an approach to Weil and metaxu that allows for the philosophical rigour of "bastard reasoning" and the analysis of mystical writing as a form that often dispenses with the conventions of grammar and syntax in its aim to communicate the ineffable. Failing to approach Weil in such a manner renders metaxu abstract instead of ontically localized in its full complexity.

The middle sections of this chapter will elaborate on the decreative/metaxic dyad outlined in the Introduction in order to challenge the dominant current through which decreation

has traditionally been defined. The main purpose of this chapter is to present the previously unseen significance that metaxu offers to present Weil as a writer of resistance against the classical hierarchies that inform theological dualism, especially through the latent strains of pluralism, alterity, and hybridity permeating her work. These features inform her metaphysics, but also her reading of myth, and the final section of this chapter will lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters by arguing that Weil's reading of myth is one of her most persistent experiments in theorizing metaxu. Central to this final section is a reading of Weil's nearly-forgotten poem, "Prométhée," in which I argue that the Promethean myth serves as a taproot text for Weil's Christian imagination and recasts the rock of Prometheus as the very foundation upon which Christ's church was built. A metamorphosis promised by myth (and foreclosed by history), as well as an ontological condition of suffering and exile (represented through Prometheus) are key literary influences in Weil's most religious texts. *Weil Unbound* might be a more flippant title for a chapter that hopes to prove Weil's untapped relevance to contemporary literary theory by suggesting new methods for reading dissent in texts whose participation in patriarchal, capitalist, and white supremacist ideologies silences the voices of alterity and their cries for radical forms of solidarity and community.

Part I: Mystical Literature and the Fall from Ecstasy

Scholem argues against the possibility of a mystical experience that does not fit squarely within the confines of organized religion. As he states in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), "there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract, that is to say, a phenomenon or experience which has no particular relation to other religious phenomena. There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish

mysticism and so on" (6-7). Scholem's rejection of "abstract" mysticism was influenced by a concern for an increase in pantheism, and a desire to take communion with God away from the dogmatic systems of monotheistic religions.[3] The mysticism of Weil—both in its philosophical theorizing and its personal visionary accounts—poses an interesting problem for Scholem's criteria. Weil's status as a marginal figure, refusing to submit to the Church that would ordinarily authenticate mystical experiences, has no doubt impacted the controversy surrounding her deathbed conversion which has been fueled by Christian writers hoping to relegate her criticisms of institutional religion to a vitriolic and less awakened youth. At the same time, Weil's account is nevertheless entangled with the same ideological apparatus as organized Christianity. Similarly, one recognizes a common appropriative effort by Weil's commentators to reclaim her from the periphery to serve their own disciplines. A perpetual outsider whose work touches on a vast number of subjects, Weil fits everywhere and nowhere, having been labeled as a pseudo-mystic, pseudo-Marxist, pseudo-feminist, pseudo-Christian, even a pseudo-Jew.[4]

Nevertheless, Weil stakes her claim on the margins of epistemological structures that imagine "le centre du monde" and tries instead to "discerner tous les points du monde comme étant des centres au même titre" (*AD* 148). Especially within the Christian tradition, however, mysticism has frequently been a writing of the margins—often by women and heretics—that the hegemonic forces of religion must either struggle to appropriate or else condemn, often violently. Heretical to Scholem's centralization of access, Weil's mysticism is removed from hegemonic centres, not to carve out a *new* centre, but the rupture of *all* centres. Walter Kauffman is likewise skeptical of Scholem's religious fidelity, clarifying that an individual "will generally give his experience a religious interpretation, or even have his experience in religious terms, only when he stands in a religious tradition" (330). Perhaps for an artist, efforts to represent a mystical

experience will be purely creative: the abstract painting of Hilma af Klint; Paul Klee's angels; Dizzy Gillespie composing "A Night in Tunisia" on the bottom of a garbage can.

Art's connection to mystical experience resides at the core of my investigation into Weil's work. Besides the poets that she herself has influenced, Weil's most powerful mystical experience arose from the continuous recitation of George Herbert's poem, "Love (III)" (1633). Thus, it was the incorporation of the aesthetic into meditative space that prompted her visionary experience—a vision in which she does not leave her body, but rather brings a hydroid (or potentially hyperreal) duplicate of her body to an alternate space in which metaxic communion is possible. In Weil's account of her mystical experience, Christ takes her away to the attic of a church where they drink wine, feast on bread,[5] and converse for three days. Its startling conclusion is as follows:

> Un jour il me dit: «Maintenant va-t'en.» Je tombai à genoux, j'embrassai ses jambes, je le suppliai de ne pas me chasser. Mais il me jeta dans l'escalier. Je le descendis sans rien savoir, le coeur comme en morceaux. Je marchai dans les rues. Puis je m'aperçus que je ne savais pas du tout où se trouvait cette maison.
>
> Je n'ai jamais essayé de la retrouver. Je comprenais qu'il était venu me chercher par erreur. Ma place n'est pas dans cette mansarde. Elle est n'importe où, dans un cachot de prison, dans un de ces salons bourgeois pleins de bibelots et de peluche rouge, dans une salle d'attente de gare. N'importe où, mais non dans cette mansarde.
>
> Je ne peux pas m'empêcher quelquefois, avec crainte et remords, de me répéter un peu de ce qu'il m'a dit. Comment savoir si je me rappelle exactement? Il n'est pas là pour me le dire.

> Je sais bien qu'il ne m'aime pas. Comment pourrait-il m'aimer? Et pourtant au fond de moi quelque chose, unpoint de moi-même, ne peut pas s'empêcher de penser en tremblant de peur que peut-être, malgré tout, il m'aime. (*CS* 10)

The violence of Christ essentially kicking Weil down the stairs causes many problems of interpretation. She ascends to the attic of the Church so that she can view the world below from its perspective but is then forced to return to a peripheral wandering in order to seek the truth. Weil's experience helped shape her belief that truth is not power, but solitude, suffering, and detachment, and thus cannot be contained within any religious order that demands worship as the worldly idol of an otherworldly truth. Weil refers to such institutions as a *gros animal*, that is to say, any cultural ideologies that corruptly bind the ego to profane temporalities and kataphatic approaches to God. This binding force and ersatz power is also called gravity (*pesanteur*).

Weil's alleged mystical encounter arises out of an aesthetic experience that arguably subverts the religious orthodoxy to which Herbert's poem belongs—even if, by Weil's admission, it transforms the poem into prayer (*AD* 37). In fact, Weil narrates her encounter as an inversion of Herbert's poem, beginning with the consummating banquet of bread and wine and progressing towards the anorexic soul that is drawn (or cast) "back / Guilty of dust and sin" (1-2). Weil narrates an exchange between herself and Christ that lasts for three days, suggesting a shared intimacy that makes her abandonment all the more visceral. Rather than an abstract heavenly deity in the "Prologue," Weil describes a human Christ with appetitive desires. In the top of the cathedral where they spend their weekend sojourn, they share a communion of bread and wine. Weil recollects that while the bread did not taste out of the ordinary, nothing she has since tasted has come close to approximating its distinct flavours. The wine, however, tastes like both the sun and the earth where the church's city has been built.[6] For such a rational and precise

writer, Weil neglects to provide any details as to the nature of their conversation and the insights she obtained. All revelations are esoterically hidden, subservient to the katabasis-like fall back into the body and the social world of metaxu. Engulfed in the lonely sting of rejection and abandonment, there remains a subtle but persistent voice deep inside her that wonders whether "peut-être, malgré tout, il m'aime" (*CS* 10).

Dargan's assessment of a "master-slave relationship between God and the self as imagined by Weil" (58) is especially curious in light of this ending, because Weil is left to ponder desperately whether Christ still loves her. Such speculation reveals her belief that Christ, casting her from the attic in such a manner, might be equally dependent on her as a medium of his love, and that some synthesis between deity and mystic might still be possible through decreative commitment.[7] The violent banishment in Weil's vision opens up myriad interpretive difficulties. Emil Cioran diagnoses the *rediscovery of the body* as the crisis to befall all mystics: "Once the high intensity of ecstatic trance slows down, the return to the ordinary begins, and with it the surprise of rediscovering a body which has forgotten itself. All saints complain about the rediscovery of the body, that is, about the fall from ecstasy" (*Tears* 24-25). Dargan agrees that "the ecstatic moment cannot be regained" and takes from Weil's account the "bitter knowledge that we have no firm roots on earth or in heaven. Against this injustice on the human and cosmic scales, we can only oppose a particle of hope" (64). Weil's return back to the body registers as a failure to decreate successfully and the subsequent shock of re-embodiment. In opposition to cosmic justice expressed as transcendental estrangement, I would like to counter the violence of Weil's mysticism with a theory of metaxu in which this "particle of hope" (64) might multiply through the proliferation of such unfixed roots.

A metaxic reading of Weil's account provides a far different interpretation than one adhering to a strictly decreative approach to transcendence. Indeed, one might suggest that although their approaches are profoundly different, Weil is concerned with the same problem that Bruno Latour outlines in his theorization of the hybrid. By examining metaxu apart from the ultimate theological goal of decreation (a goal that would foreclose metaxu's possibilities), one could equally argue that Weil seeks to "direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization" (Latour 11). If Weil's theory of decreation effaces the human subject in order to appease some kind of existential separation anxiety, a theory of metaxu seeks to reroute decreation to question what might be gained through hybridity and coexistence. From a metaxic standpoint, every narrative of a mystical encounter is to be read as the hauntological trace of hybridity. Even in otherworldly accounts approved by worldly authorities, an aspect of the divine entity is perceived to linger in memory, in heightened consciousness and inspiration, in both longing and mourning.

Weil's retelling is similar to other mystical accounts in that the human is also experienced as a kind of trace that returns with an all-too visceral inevitability. The embodied ego awakens like a revenant or bad dream, prompting Weil's recollection of being kicked down the stairs to be read as the jarring and symbolic return of the subject's isolation. Indeed, it is not the ecstatic encounter with Christ that is violent and rupturing, but the return of the subject's confused belief in its own unicity. By this same logic, when mystics speak of becoming one with Christ, they suggest a sublimated desire for hybridity. Weil's noetic retelling thus betrays a possible belief in the purification of the self through hybridization and transformative confrontations with otherness. Religious ideology re-frames such an experience of hybridity as an ecstatic confrontation with a divine other in whom all difference is collapsed. Conversely, a

theory of metaxu recuperates the decreative failure in order to expose the dangers of articulating a rupturing experience of otherness as symptomatic of a primal desire for wholeness. Left to wander the streets, Weil experiences a powerful sensation of place and locality, returning her to the obligations of community. Contrary to the failed myth of a decreative return, the inquisitive conclusion to the "Prologue" questions whether this multiplicity of spaces, of peoples and networks, might be the divine trace of continuity that the mystic seeks.

Most studies of Weil inevitably confront the challenge of comparing her writing to her biography as though it were a rite of passage. In the introduction to *The Need for Roots*, Eliot confesses that "the only kind of introduction which could merit permanent association with a book by Simone Weil would be [written] by someone who knew her" (v). Somehow, this opinion has continued to limit the way critics approach Weil's texts. In contrast to Eliot's description of Weil as "a difficult, violent and complex personality" (v) suffering from an "excess of temperament" (vii), Deborah Nelson has helpfully reappraised Weil's "austere" (1) and "dour" (2) nature in connection to five other women who "argued passionately for the aesthetic, political, and moral obligation to face painful reality unsentimentally" (1). Nelson's book, *Tough Enough*, provides a secular reinterpretation of the pseudo-hagiographical treatments of Weil that have preceded it.[8] Even such critically astute studies as Alexander Irwin's *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred* (2002) are indicative of a trend in Weil scholarship to be overly concerned with the politics of sainthood. Cioran characterizes a saint as a mystic with politically-minded ethics (*Tears* 6-7), while Levinas differentiates the mystic's martyrdom from the political violence of sainthood, and thereby criticizes Weil for aligning redemption with personal suffering or decreation (although he does not use this specific term) to the detriment of a praxis of action and social justice.[9] While certainly a rosy view of the

kinds of politics shared by ordained saints, it is likely that Weil would agree with the estimations of Levinas and Irwin, who regard her as a failed saint and politician.

The idea of decreation so elusively resists any attempt to imagine it that there is almost an audible sigh of relief in some critics who point to Weil's death as a conveniently representative example of decreation and, therefore, an explanation for how such a relentlessly political writer could turn away from the world through self-starvation. How must one's understanding of decreation change, however, when the dissolution of her body occurred in a hospital bed attached to machines instead of alone in some anchorite's grotto? Weil's death nearly provides a visual metaphor for the directions in which she found herself continually torn: earthly apparatuses dripping fluids into her body to keep her heart beating while she slowly slipped towards what she hoped would be her God. Presaging my final chapter on Octavia Butler, one imagines a becoming-cyborg as one of the many iterations of a metaxic decreation. Weil's death highlights an important debate that persists in contemporary discussions of the relationship between mystical experience and violence. While it may be difficult to accept this pursuit of suffering as the path to some ultimate truth, Weil's death unfolds into a new textual existence, for, as Carson surmises, it is perhaps only in writing that she becomes decreatively successful (161). Through posthumous publication, and an international circulation of her texts in translation, those inspired by the teachings of Weil are inspired by a movement from agonized flesh to cultural production, distribution, and textual materiality—a becoming-technology (if not quite cyborg). In effect, Weil's texts become a new kind of metaxic body. And if decreation is only achieved in writing, then a metaxic philosophy is best articulated through literary analysis. After all, perhaps at the very heart of all transcendental metaphysics, any departure from the earthly realm is always a collapsing into an explicitly aesthetic one.

To read Weil against the grain of traditional scholarship, one must attempt a kind of decreation of Weil's *bios*, and the religious ideology commonly attached to it, in order to expose the vertiginous character within her own representations of transcendence. No study of Weil has yet used decreation as a methodological strategy to pass through Weil the mystic and renegade saint in order to uncover what remains. One of the main theses of this project is that such a reading is consistent with a metaxic poetics, as well as Weil's own efforts to acquire the perspective of "un paysage tel qu'il est quand je n'y suis pas" (*PG* 95). In un-Weiling Weil, I follow the insight of Cha who asks how one can "read Weil's writerly project when her 'I' keeps reinscribing itself precisely at the place where it would vacate itself? But the opposite, maddeningly, is also true: attempts to correlate the life and the writing are confounded by the recession of the 'I' at the moment it would seem most logical to insist itself" (xiv). As I have suggested, this reinscribed 'I'—even at the moment of its decentering (and the viewing of a landscape when there is no longer an 'I' that sees)—is the very paradox of metaxu and reveals the second 'I' to be the marker of a metaxic, metamorphosed, entirely new subject position. The purpose of metaxu is to reinterpret decreation as morphological.

Dargan recognizes the "[a]bsoluteness of conviction" that had earlier fascinated Blanchot, but also the narrativized "self-annihilation" and "[i]mpersonality of reference" described by Cha (39). As a writer of mystical visions, Weil appears to Dargan as being "asked to bear the impossible burden of containing absolutes, expunging levels of reference that are inferior. To Weil, this is not an absurd demand; it is a necessary one: 'The tree is quite truly rooted in the sky' (40). Nevertheless, the jouissance one might expect to find in an ecstatic writer is, in Weil's texts, sporadic, even disappointing, if the reader presumes a specific and predetermined syntactical structure by which to represent the ineffable. Indeed, for all the

bewitched signifiers and sky-rooted trees, Weil's is foremost a language that laments its inevitable failure to communicate jouissance and metamorphosis.

In Weil's notebooks, one gleans the tactic of certain negative theologians who cannot rest until every single kataphatic permutation is conjured up and dismissed. This is not only Weil's approach to the representation of her God, but her own subject position in relation to it. More than the mystic's jouissance, her writings seem to confess to a decreative melancholia, or a belief that one must detach from one's own identity if one is to successfully to return to God. Weil is haunted by the divine, but nevertheless writes of mysticism as a kind of exorcism of the self's discontinuity. She deploys a paradoxical strategy that at once aims to conjure the trace of a revelatory mystical vision, but also an experience in which the self might disappear through the collapse of the self/other binary that separates the mystic from her divine counterpart.

Although Scholem positions mysticism as the only possible outcome within a messianic paradigm, he gestures towards a revenant mythology that modern mysticism might engender to navigate (psychic) fragmentation, (ecological) death, and (cultural) dissolution. The aim of mysticism, according to Scholem,

> [is to] piece together the fragments broken by the religious cataclysm, to bring back the old [mythic] unity which religion has destroyed, but on a new plane, where the world of mythology and that of revelation meet in the soul of man[.…] To a certain extent, therefore, mysticism signifies a revival of mythical thought, although the difference must not be overlooked between the unity which is there before there is duality, and the unity that has to be won back in a new upsurge of the religious consciousness. (8)

In this schema, mysticism represents a return to a mythical time when deity and human shared a coextensive environment, before religion interposed a transcendental divide the two. One might

argue that modernity has moved past a "religious cataclysm" and into a post-secular historical period in which pluralistic modes of spirituality can be mobilized against oppressive and "cataclysm[ic]" religious institutions. Scholem's diagnosis, however, remains relevant in its attention to a certain existential and communal fracture evident in the world—one that Weil could only seek to repair by her own removal. If, as she believed, it is the purpose of all things to be transpierced by the light of God (what Herbert defines as "Love"), it is thus a refracted light dispersed through atomistic bodies and the metaxic collectives that should ostensibly bind them. With the return of myth to the "new plane" of mysticism, Scholem gestures towards a lost future, rather than a lost past, and I would argue that herein lies a key difference between a nostalgic approach to decreation and a future-oriented theory of metaxu that employs a mythic mode to move beyond the "religious cataclysm" in which Scholem finds his world mired. I share Morton's curiosity, however, as to whether the desire for the collapse of the transcendent into the immanent sphere is evidence of a nostalgia for an illusory pre-lapsarian past or, alternatively, whether their imagined separation might have been untenable in the first place.[10] In such a world, metaxu would be operative as a bridge to link various subject positions to one another, without being reducible to a conduit to some transcendental deity hidden on the other side of an ontological chasm.

Part II: Decreation

The Two Movements of Weil's Kenosis

Weil defines the world, and her God's place within it, in terms of a self-divestment in which God is emptied of divinity in order for creation to be possible. Since there can be no space apart from God into which creation can unfold, God withdraws inward, making a kenotic space

within rather than *without*. This idea denotes a clear influence by Isaac Luria's sixteenth-century interpretation of the Kabbalah, specifically his notion of *tzimtzum*, or the creative contraction of God's inner light (*Or Ein Sof*).[11] Weil combines this first movement of *tzimtzum* with the Pauline notion of kenosis, found in St Paul's second epistle to the Philippians,[12] by which God repeats a similar movement with the Incarnation of Christ.[13] In Weil's writing, therefore, kenosis becomes a typological concatenation of *two* movements, each sharing an abyssal distance between deity and creation, and each sharing a certain metamorphosis from singularity to multiplicity and difference. I differentiate between decreation and metaxu in terms of the former's desire to return to a state of uncreated singularity, and the latter's desire to maintain a creative multiplicity. In *Pesanteur*, it is the kenotic distance that is most prevalent, a distance in which the presence of God can only be expressed as an absence, resulting in a divine exile or (to steal a term from Lukács) transcendental homelessness. Like the abyssal wall that separates Pyramus and Thisbe, an apophatic void persists between the created and uncreated. If this liminal space is codified as evil, being separate from God, it is nevertheless necessary in that, Weil admits, it allows her to "mieux comprendre la possibilité d'aimer l'amour divin à travers le malheur" (*AD* 37). Necessity is a key feature of Weil's somewhat gnostic theodicy, and she uses the term to define the necessary godlessness in which the world is mired.

By way of the second movement of kenosis, the Incarnation provides a model for how to love through suffering. In Christ's suffering, Weil discovers a decreative responsibility to return to the uncreated through self-sacrifice—a responsibility for which the ultimate symbol is Christ's cross. Weil argues that one achieves goodness through submission to something outside oneself, declaring that "le bien réel ne peut venir que du dehors, jamais de notre effort. Nous ne pouvons en aucun cas fabriquer quelque chose qui soit meilleur que nous" (*PG* 53). Cioran shares the

sentiment that goodness is an unnatural quality for humanity, and must, therefore, either come from an external force or by some miraculous action that alters its very nature. He begins *The New Gods* (1969) with a telling passage:

> With the exception of some aberrant cases, man does not incline to the good: what god would impel him to do so? Man must vanquish himself, must do himself violence, in order to perform the slightest action untainted by evil.… It is difficult to say what station the good man occupies among what we call beings, even if he is one. Perhaps he is a ghost? (3)

God, and therefore even goodness, operate by way of a kind of hauntology. For Weil, "[l]'absence de Dieu est le mode de présence divine" (*PG* 75), and this presence is distributed through the affect of abandonment. Even Christ is condemned to a godless necessity. Weil declares that she is "sûre qu'il n'y a pas de Dieu, en ce sens que je suis tout à fait sûre que rien de réel ne ressemble à ce que je peux concevoir quand je prononce ce nom" (*PG* 132).[14] Binaries of being/non-being and real/unreal are destabilized by Weil's relentless capacity to dream of other worlds, other subject positions, other truths that arise from unbinding and uprooting. In a sense, it is only through dream-logic that the permanence and stability of the created world is shown to be illusory.

It is not the kataphatic representation of an apophatic divinity that poses the greatest problem for Weil, but rather, the elaborate systems of ontological consolation through which the *gros animal* provides a compensatory antidote for capitalism's broken promise of fulfillment. Decreation is a form of social resistance that cannot be coopted, nor even marketed as modern hunger-artist spectacle. "Celui qui n'a pas su devenir rien court le risque d'arriver à un moment où toutes choses autres que lui cessent d'exister" (*PG* 161). The *gros animal* nevertheless gains

its authority by the appropriation of certain forms of religiosity, predominantly ritual and devotion, through which it aims to root the (potentially decreative) subject into a stratified system of power that presents stability and permanence as divinely mimetic. Writing as a European Marxist in the 1930s and 1940s, Weil saw first-hand how tenuous the stability of socio-political regimes could be. Nevertheless, she demonstrates unwavering support for the preservation of the weak force of God, prefiguring Caputo's belief that "beneath all its talk about weakness […theology] conceals a love of power" (*Weakness of God* 15).[15] A proper political orientation must be compatible with a theological perspective attuned to an impermanence so profound that kenosis and decreation exist as its exemplars.

The parallels with a theology of weakness may seem obvious, but Weil's theology is always a radical form of materialist politics. As such, her work has profound relevance for the period of late twentieth-century capitalism engaged in my literary analysis. She recognized something that Fisher articulates in one of his final lectures on postcapitalist desire; namely, that "power itself is pathological. To hold power is to inherently be oppressive, therefore it's better to be wounded; it's better to be the wounded, the abject, because you're not actually holding power, which is oppressive" (*Postcapitalist Desire* 61). In this regard, Weil may in fact suggest an answer to one of his most important questions: "What is a political project which doesn't aim at capturing power or building power in some way?" (*Postcapitalist Desire* 61). A decreative politics is not the domain of an obscure metaphysics but rather, "[l]a méditation sur le mécanisme social est à cet ègard une purification de première importance. Contempler le social est une voie aussi bonne que se retirer du monde" (*PG* 249). Weil condemns the *gros animal* because its *ersatz* power preaches a dissociation from the reality of suffering that defines a life without God. The more one consumes, the *gros animal* assures, the less one is supposed to

suffer; the more one suffers, the more one must consume. This cycle has only become more pronounced in late capitalism, a future that Weil so presciently feared. The pervasiveness of mental health issues and addiction (managed, of course, by the pharmacological interests that monetize the illnesses increasingly produced by the same capitalist system) points to its undeniable instability.[16] Consumption feeds the systems of capital, but also strengthens the entrenchment of egotism from which the decreative subject must extract itself. Ever-vigilant against oppressive systems of power, Weil advocates a politics of disempowerment in the form of the self-directed violence of decreation—one of the most fundamental commitments that one can make in order to detach oneself from the systems of power to which it is bound.

Although Weil's reading of the Passion of Christ relegates the potential for decreative jouissance to a commitment to bodily suffering, Christ's body also reveals a need for the tension between flesh and spirit to proliferate outside of a single corporeal shell. Such a movement is thus trans-historical and metaphysical, but also the breaking of a patriarchal body that would institute itself as the universalized appendage for the plurality of all suffering. Herein lies a crucial problematic when interpreting Weil, for she often advocates the pursuit of spiritual pleasure brought about through the painful shedding of whatever is impermanent, that is, whatever cannot return to God. The dynamics of metaxu's interplay with decreation bring nuance to the holy suffering promulgated by an ideology rooted in kenosis. A theory of metaxu pressures Weil's own decreative subjectivity by promoting a dialectic of openness and fluidity rather than a tethered paralysis to dogmatic religiosity. As a theorist of metaxu, Weil offers an embodied challenge to any apophatic theology that turns the body into something to discard, thereby justifying all the pain it might suffer. If a theorization of decreation and metaxu must ultimately contend with Weil's adherence to a patriarchal form of Christianity, the "valorization

of sacrifice and laceration" that Hollywood associates with phallocentrism is nevertheless complicated by metaxu's comparative "reconfiguration of subjectivity in terms of openness, fluidity, and a temporality rooted in becoming rather than in being" (*Sensible Ecstasy* 205). In describing a divine absence that is felt as hauntological presence, Weil also comes close to the doubleness and hybridity that, since Émile Durkheim, has come to be viewed as a marker of a heterogeneous sacrality in opposition to the unified totality of the phallocentric model. One might, for example, juxtapose the plurality of metaxic bridges with the mimetic unicity of the *gros animal*—a patriarchal structure that is fundamentally undermined by the apophatic void in which Weil finds it situated. The shift from decreation to metaxu is a shift from unicity to multiplicity, but a multiplicity that privileges intermediation and relationality.

The apophatic tradition retains the ineluctable transcendence of the divine, effectively barring reason from accessing God, and so one might conclude that the mind takes it upon itself to create a God in the absence of an immanent deity. Paradoxically, this constitutes a God created by the mind to which the mind forbids itself access, like Feuerbach's projection of a human ideal complicated by neurotic deferral. Perhaps this is something Irigaray realized in her own treatment of Feuerbach; kataphatic representations of God have been historically exclusionary, positioning women as other to men and, by extension, the ostensibly masculine traits projected onto this Feuerbachian deity. Weil aligns with Irigaray's position that there can be no proper political and social order until one decreates from the patriarchal institutions of religion imbedded within it. Irigaray argues that in the creation of a new sacred space, women "would be the mediators and bridges. Not only in mourning for the dead God of Friedrich Nietzsche, not waiting passively for the God to come, but by conjuring it up among and across us, within and between us, as resurrection or transfiguration of blood, of flesh, through a

language and an ethics that is ours" (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 129). In light of Irigaray's challenge to religious structures, negative theology carries the danger of jumping beyond systemic crises with too much ease and too little reflection. By omitting metaxu from Weil's kenotic philosophy, one ignores the "mediators and bridges" that might be built to stretch over an abyssal chasm in order to connect those voices of alterity who may not share an allegiance to a patriarchal God.

Weil's treatment of kenosis is most significant in helping her reader understand the ways in which decreation is essentially mimetic. Given that mimesis inherently depends upon representation, Weil's decreative apophasis is not without paradox. To participate in the kenotic process of creation is to attempt a similar divestment and to become the subject of one's own apophasis. To describe this process of *aphairon* (a cutting away) to get to the *apeiron* (the boundary without limit), Pseudo-Dionysus uses the metaphor of a sculptor who "remove[s] all the impediments that hinder the clear perceptive of the latent image and by this mere removal display[s] the hidden statue itself in its hidden beauty" (195). If apophasis is a means of approaching God through negativity and the removal of all anthropomorphic qualities, Weil presents the fundamental excavating cut as not an outward one, but one directed to one's own ego (*PG* 75). Rather than removing all the standard means of kataphatically representing God, what must actually be removed is anthropomorphism itself—a task which in the final analysis is revealed to be the same thing.

If God is a *deus absconditus*, one might choose to consider absence as the final quality to be removed in an apophatic cutting. This causes at least two significant problems. Firstly, the apophatic-kataphatic dynamic becomes a dialectical relation, as absence becomes affective presence, thereby smuggling kataphasis into an apophatic Trojan Horse as though trying to

breach the divine darkness. Secondly, it will be nearly impossible to distinguish between the final stage of apophasis and the revelatory lack of any God behind the final apophatic cut. As Derrida remarks, "the apophatic moment" is also interminable, and can thus "only indefinitely defer the encounter with its own limit" ("How to Avoid Speaking" 81). Apophasis must always go to the very limits of kataphasis, engaged in a paradoxical process of simultaneous addition and subtraction not unlike the Fort-Da game in Freudian psychoanalysis, constructing kataphatic representations in order to do away with them.

From this perspective, decreation becomes the salvific feature necessary for Weil's apophasis, a Jacob-like victory over the angel, "and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness" (Conrad 20). In a very real sense, apophatic theology is the fullest and most complete form of kataphatic theology in that, like Penelope, it weaves a shroud of kataphasis for a deity who may never arrive. One day, Penelope weaves the shroud of wisdom, but no patriarch comes to claim it. The next day, a shroud of goodness is woven, but her husband remains aloof, lost in the stratagem of battle or in the arms of another woman. One might wish for a different ending to the Odyssean homecoming, one wherein Penelope weaves a shroud to bury the suitors and claim the throne of Ithaca for herself. Instead, Odysseus returns in the form of a poor beggar and is redeemed. Although Penelope engages in a decreative creation, weaving only to unweave (analogically similar to what Weil would describe as the mystical call of waiting and attention), the story ultimately succumbs to the familiar positioning of the patriarch as the rightful claimant for the vacated seat of power. Almost no revisions of the Homeric myth allow for the possibility that Penelope herself might claim the authority to restructure her kingdom, and this foreclosure approximates one of the principle difficulties with a kataphatic

theology—namely, that it is almost always guided by a phallocentric symbology to define the limit without.

The Decreative Return

Weil empowers the decreative subject with a form of agency she calls attentive waiting, a commitment to bearing one's own cross in order to provide grace with a space in which it might enter. As the mimetic creatures of a decreative deity, Weil testifies that "nous sommes la crucifixion de Dieu. L'amour de Dieu pour nous est passion. Comment le bien pourrait-il aimer le mal sans souffir? Et le mal souffre aussi en aimant le bien. L'amour mutuel de Dieu et de l'homme est souffrance" (*PG* 105). Decreation, therefore, appears as a kind of spiritual suicide enacted out of love. Common suicide is not an option, however, for death is something to be feared if it precedes a successful decreation. The hagiographic controversy surrounding Weil's death concerns the plausibility of a decreative movement that could ever coincide with the tuberculosis and self-starvation that would ultimately claim her life. It has not been difficult for some critics to diagnose her with a morbid pathology that found her detesting the body as an obstruction to the divine. Sharing the perspective of Levinas and Sontag, it has been argued that her manic mysticism demanded it, as though the physical suffering constant throughout her young life was symptomatic of her body's inability to survive her quest to decreate. More accurately, Chris Kraus proposes that "[p]ain marked the meeting place between her soul and body, the center of her nervous system" (144). One might, therefore, view mystical experience as a temporary living decreation possible through an encounter with divine love that is so self-annihilating that one begins to disappear, to be effaced and annulled in the copula of spirit and flesh: "l'infini dans un instant" (*PG* 137).

Weil became interested in the idea of decreation during WWII; the severity and even violence of decreation is testament to the arduous task of searching for purpose amidst those traumatic years of atrocity. She was drawn to the regenerative potential it offered and used St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians as scaffolding over the abyss into which peace, hope, and an entire generation of people were disappearing. Paul's instruction was to cast "off the old self with its practices and clothe[… oneself] with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator" (Colossians 3: 9-10). In building decreation from this, Weil envisions a method by which one's body and soul can become a medium through which Christ can reach the suffering masses:

> C'est Dieu qui par amour se retire de nous afin que nous puissions l'aimer. Car si nous étions exposés au rayonnement direct de son amour, sans la protection de l'espace, du temps et de la matière, nous serions évaporés comme l'eau au soleil; il n'y aurait pas assez de je en nous pour abandonner le je par amour. La nécessité est l'écran mis entre Dieu et nous pour que nous puissions être. C'est à nous de percer l'écran pour cesser d' être. (*PG* 36-7)

Decreative affliction can be seen as a state of suffering beyond mental and physical pain that allows one to be brought to that state of detachment where a communion with God is possible. As Weil insists, "[l]'agonie est la suprême nuit obscure dont même les parfaits ont besoin pour la pureté absolue, et pour cela il vaut mieux qu'elle soit amère" (*PG* 139). And again: "[a]imer la vérité signifie supporter le vide, et par suite accepter la mort. La vérité est du côté de la mort" (*PG* 54). Weilian scholarship has long treated decreation as part of a cyclical movement wherein the created self passes into the uncreated, opening itself up as a vessel for God's love. "Dieu ne peut aimer en nous que ce consentement à nous retirer pour le laissir passer, comme lui-même,

créateur, s'est retiré pour nous laisser être. Cette double opération n'a pas d'autre sens que l'amour" (*PG* 93). The inwardness of decreation thus mirrors kenosis even in terms of this inner turn.

Weil explains that "[l]es feuilles et les fruits sont du gaspillage d'énergie si on veut seulement monter" (*PG* 155).[17] A decreative attention recognizes this tree as an emblem suffering, as the cross that must be hoisted upon one's back: "Il faut se déraciner. Couper l'arbre et en faire une croix, et ensuite la porter tous les jours" (*PG* 45). Weil teaches that one is to love such Christly suffering not because it is useful in getting to God, but because it defines the real—specifically, the real obfuscated by the *gros animal* and from which it installs itself as both protector and arbiter of a constructed reality.[18] Suffering is the necessary modality of being inherited from kenotic existence. Thus, to accept it is not to lessen the suffering, but to suffer willingly and without consolation (*PG* 93).[19] One's cross is to be claimed rather than chosen, for it must be followed by an act of acceptance beyond the decision of the will. To regard it in any other way than this is to efface "le mystère salutaire et l'amertume salutaire. Souhaiter le martyre est beaucoup trop peu. La croix est infiniment plus que le martyre. La souffrance la plus purement amère, la souffrance pénale, comme garantie d'authenticité" (*PG* 103). In Weil's estimation, while the *gros animal* is a state of perpetual (unholy) suffering that is imposed rather than freely chosen, one must even avoid the seemingly agential suffering of institutional believers, for their choices are encumbered by the consolation of false righteousness.

Weil also elaborates her thoughts on the cross in *Attente de Dieu*:

> Ce que j'appelle bon port… c'est la croix.… De tous let êtres autres que le Christ don't il est question dans l'Evangile, le bon larron est de loin celui que j'envie davantage. Avoir

> été aux côtés du Christ et dans le même état pendant la crucifixion me paraît un privilège beaucoup plus enviable que d'être à sa droite dans sa gloire. (32)

For the writer professing the spiritual benefits of labour, the cross is synonymous with work. Although far too weak and malnourished to be successful, Weil was constantly drawn to physical labour, whether in field or factory. To many, her Marxist idealism might appear like the anachronism of a bygone era in which an alternative to capitalism was a more viable position; one could more easily imagine forms of labour the dignity of which could be salvaged from increased privatization, deregulation, and indentured precarity. Now, as it were, the demands of capital are such that individual survival depends upon the sacrifice of one's dignity and participation in systems of labour and consumption that are inherently exploitative and parasitic. In his unfinished and posthumously published *Acid Communism* (2018), Fisher explains that neoliberal freedom "is not freedom from work, but freedom *through* work" (779), a Weilian sentiment that now appears dystopian. Spiritual dignity through work has been coopted by neoliberalism, if not completely secularized, for the neoliberal *gros animal* has attempted to rule by a kind of divine decree; and despite its eventual collapse—if only by the anthropogenic climate crisis that will surely be its crowning legacy—it yet persists through the deployment of a resilient bestiary of market-based sacrality.

In *Pesanteur*, Weil concedes that "[l]e travail est comme une mort. Il faut passer par la mort. Il faut être tué, subir la pesanteur du monde. L'univers pesant sur les reins d'un être humain, quoi d'étonnant qu'il ait mal? (207). Springstead restates this position accurately when he suggests that "[a]ffliction may very well be a window on transcendence, but it is only because it forces [humanity] to a realization of [its] own creatureliness…. On this account there cannot be any question of … rising to meet God, for the weight—the gravity—of the entire world of

necessity rests on his back" (84). For Weil, mysticism must always contain a certain degree of violence because at its core is the transformation of mortality and suffering into something productive and beautiful. If it is a broken and fractured world by kenotic necessity, a religion like Christianity becomes irrelevant if it ignores this base reality. As such, to empty oneself is to open oneself up to the weighty pressure of the universe, and for Weil, "il n'y a pas d'autre contrepoids que Dieu" (*PG* 109).

In Weil's understanding, the Passion of Christ is not meant to save the world from its earthly suffering, but to demonstrate how to suffer. One cannot be saved from the cross but, rather, given the cross as one's very means of salvation. Like Alain Badiou's assessment of St. Paul, Weil's discourse is a discourse of militant weakness. Arthur Rimbaud's "You follow the red road to reach the empty inn" might be an ideal way to describe the path of such kenotic existence ("Childhood" 60). John's gospel teaches that there are many mansions in heaven (14:2). In Weil's apophasis, the mansion of heaven would be like an empty inn in which the decreative traveler seeks to lay her head, and it is in that emptiness that God would be found. The road to salvation is thus a red one, the trail of the Passion marked with blood, suffering, and self-sacrifice. Following the teachings of John of the Cross, "divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but also affliction and torment" ("The Dark Night" 401).

If one is tempted to regard the crucifixion as an anti-mystical moment, it is because of Christ's forsakenness at the moment when he is lost to God and, simultaneously, the moment when God fully abandons itself, placing a kind of abyssal distance between the fractured split of its own self. But the cry of "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (Matthew 27: 46) is projected outwards to a transcendental space that dies in the Incarnation. This cry finds no interlocutor because it seeks it outside the human self in a renunciation of the body and its anguish. Even

when Christ is literally nailed to his own bloody materiality, indeed when no human in history should be more in tune with the machinations of the body, he seeks an elsewhere, an ecstatic encounter that would allow him to escape his body, rather than descend into it.[20] Weil contends that Christ's love for his father was at its purest during his crucifixion, for this was the moment when Christ loved his God without understanding the reason for his forsakenness. "L'abandon au moment suprême de la crucifixion, quel abîme d'amour des deux côtés!" (*PG* 102). When suffering reaches a state where it instills "dans l'âme le sentiment de la perpétuité, en contemplant cette perpétuité avec acceptation et amour, on est arraché jusqu'à l'éternité (*PG* 67). It seems that for decreation to be possible, that is, for one to return the gift of kenotic divestment with full acceptance, one must be emptied of both understanding and curiosity. One must be capable of posing no further question, emptied of the desire to know. Decreation is only possible once both will and desire have been extinguished. To question why Christ had been forsaken is the proof of God's kenosis, that is, the proof that God was indeed fully human. Weil takes the unorthodox opinion that to die in the strength of knowledge, as the martyrs did for Christ and the church, is infinitely easier than to die without the understanding of one's purpose. For Christ to have fulfilled such a kenotic return, however, would necessitate the final realization (not yet understanding) that God had indeed forsaken him. If Christ is quoted *in extremis* when he utters "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?," the preservation of the Aramaic registers a linguistic breaking point precisely at the event of Christ's emptying.

Through the Incarnation, the transcendental no longer occupies the only possible seat of divinity, a movement prefigured by the ecstatic hybridity of a trinitarian God. In comparing the work of John Milbank and Žižek, Creston Davis offers the following synthesis:

> God's act of Incarnation saves the world from itself by opening up a way beyond the material realm into the beyond of the infinite life of God, whereas for Žižek the same event signals the reality of a radical, even Kierkegaardian leap of faith without guarantees—the abyss opens up, allowing for the coordinates of a life of real yet terrifying freedom for both God and human beings. (18)

Through the crucifixion, an idea of the sacred is constructed as something released from the solitary confinement of one man's body. For those who subscribe to such a belief, a mystical encounter becomes possible through encounters with other bodies, shifting the dualistic mystical exchange to a space of fractured multiplicity. Charles Taylor's paradigm in *A Secular Age* (2007) repositions God as a new necessity or order operating in the world through the meeting space of the vertical axis of a transcendent sacred with the horizontal axis of the earthly domain. In the literary texts explored in the next few chapters, metaxu will be theorized in relation to this same meeting place—one in which the sacred manifests as a collapsed verticality within the cultural structures of the profane.

Far too often Weil's critics neglect the important role that an embodied sacrality plays in her work. At times, it appears strange that a writer who advocated for political revolution could be so obsessed by decreation, a tactic that might be better aligned with a Leftist accelerationism. Weil's texts recall the teaching of Jorge Luis Borges, for whom any "book that does not contain its counter-book is incomplete" ("Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" 77). Weil herself promotes constant reflection on the paradox that contradictory viewpoints might be equally true: "Méthode d'investigation: dès qu'on a pensé quelque chose, chercher en quell sense le contraire est vrai" (*PG* 174). A suitable counter-reading of decreation is therefore skeptical of a gnostic condemnation of the flesh while privileging the human transfiguration at the core of the

Incarnation. Weil's early writings regard Marxist materialism as something close to a complete philosophy, with the exception that it has no place for the supernatural. Her work supports Davis's assessment that one can never escape the "truth … that humanity is material; thus the material world cannot be written off in favor of some kind of retreat into an ethereal transcendence" (3). Weil does not argue for the negation of the material world. She is more accurately read as a materialist who perceives the created world as the means of transcendence. If metaxu is ontic, then one must deterritorialize the ontic in such a way that it might adhere to a new materialism—a political and multi-species framework that does not promise ecstatic transcendence but only the rupture of the corrupt frameworks that would entomb its shifting modalities and complexities. Decreation is thus a way of redirecting the constant movement and metamorphosis to a single transcendent teleology, one that must be avoided if the space of the deity is not relegated to some transcendent otherworld but the immanent world that continues to shift around us.

Decreation has also become a concept synonymous with a certain passivity,[21] yet *Pesanteur*'s section on decreation is saturated with verbalisms: begging, crushing, emptying, as well as renunciation, elevation, and abasement. More accurately, Irwin describes decreation as a "mystical transformation" brought about through the internalization of force (xxvii). With Weil's notion of metaxu, one becomes privy to a movement or energy within all created things propelled by "une force déifuge" (*PG* 82). While the concentration on a movement of passivity is a recognition of a decentering of the self, it leaves little room for a radical form of subjectivity that might survive the self without being reducible to the absorption into a transcendental divine. To stop one's analysis at passivity, therefore, is to stop one's analysis at decreative renunciation

without fully exploring the various modalities of being that persist through a submission to alterity.

Part III: Metaxu

Decreation is frequently written about in contradictory terms: as a divestment of attachment to the body but also as an ecstasis *through the body*, as though one could descend to the limits of the body (in contrast to metaxu's openness to horizontal, vertical, even rhizomatic movement) in order to de-create or become the un-created. Similarly, decreation is presented as a numinous limit through which to transcend the mind, the will, and desire (in all their phenomenal intersectionality). Weil defines decreation as an "[i]mitation du renoncement de Dieu dans la création. Dieu renounce—en un sens—à être tout. Nous devons renoncer à être quelque chose. C'est le seul bien pour nous" (*PG* 82). When Weil writes of metaxu, however, there is a far less depressing tone to her prose. She writes not of death, but of "ponts" (229), "biens terrestres" (230), and "échelons" (230). Decreation conjures up notions of individual resignation, whereas metaxu involves a communal obligation with metaphors of enchanted infrastructure. The realm of metaxu is the space where the in-between becomes the interdependence of created beings. Weil argues that it is the purpose of all created things to act as metaxu, as intermediaries for one another. My focus on the embodied decreation of metaxu seeks to correct an important oversight in Weil scholarship.

Indeed, it is *sight* and the perception of the decreative subject that are at issue here. Weil insists:

> Si seulement je savais disparaître, il y aurait union d'amour parfait entre Dieu et la terre où je marche, la mer que j'entends [.…] Je ne désire nullement que ce monde créé ne me

> soit plus sensible, mais que ce ne soit plus à moi qu'il soit sensible. A moi, il ne peut dire son secret quie est trop haut. Que je parts, et le créateur et la créature échangeront leurs secrets. (*PG* 94-5)

Weil's idea of a metaxic decreation is one in which she becomes the conduit through which such secrets are whispered. Desmond suggests that "[a]rt offers us a way to the metaxological community of self and other" because "intimacy is born of patient perception. Art needs distance, respect, aloofness, in order to be allowed to speak to us out of the quiet spaces of its otherness" (156). Desmond acknowledges no debt to Weil despite her mutual insistence on an important "distance" or "space of otherness" that arises between the viewing subject and her own self. Unlike non-metaxic decreation, a metaxic decreation must make way for the creaturely as well as the divine. Weil does not ask to be Thisbe to God's Pyramus, but rather the empty fissure within Pyramus and Thisbe's wall. When contemplating her mystical experience, Weil relates that through "un extrême effort d'attention me permettait de sortir hors de cette misérable chair, de la laisser souffrir seule, tassée dans son coin…. Cette experiénce m'a permis … de mieux comprendre la possibilité d'aimer l'amour divin à travers le malheur" (*AD* 37). Buried in *Pesanteur's* section on "Effacement," she admits that metaxic effacement does not promise a heavenly re-union, but rather aspires to enable "cette table que j'ai devant moi ait l'incomparable fortune d'être vue par Dieu" (*PG* 93). A metaxic decreation is not a physical death, but an overturning of the perspective by which the subject exists over and above creaturely entities. In fact, one of the most quoted lines from *Pesanteur* is an enigmatic desire expressed as "[v]oir un paysage tel qu'il est quand je n'y suis pas" (95). If this reads like an impossible koan—for how does one see something as it is when one is not there?—this is because metaxu reshapes Weil's thought as a search for a sensible materiality through the perspective of another.

Weil is a writer for whom the mystical is to be conceived as the unveiling of what is concealed. Metaxu plays an important role in this unveiling by illuminating decreation as the necessary effacement of a subjectivity constructed in defense against an openness to the other. But what if the withdrawn part of the human subject is something that, if unconcealed, threatens the very definition of the human, not to mention what kinds of 'mystical' relationships it might form with other beings in its vicinity? If decreation is a decentering of the human subject, perhaps metaxu might also become a liminal meeting-place that proves that "there is no intrinsic superiority of human ways of accessing the thing" (Morton, *Dark Ecology* 18).[22] Although Weil often suggests a divine perspective through which the world's mysterious concealment can be overturned, the slipperiness of metaxu within her writing puts pressure on the tenability of this very perspective. For the same reason that Morton employs the term *species* in his work, I deploy the terms *metaxic aesthetics* or *metaxic poetics* because they are similarly "open, porous, flickering, distant from what is given to [one's] perception" and "deracinate [the human] from its pampered, ostensibly privileged place set apart from all other beings" (*Dark Ecology* 24). Furthermore, they designate the particular ways in which Weil's aesthetic perspective enables the observer to pass through suffering in order to experience the created world from new subject positions, whether they be those of a God, a landscape, a poem, or a Benedictine chant.

In this sense, a metaxic philosophy shares with Irigaray the notion of a divinity experienced as a sensible transcendence in which the subject opens itself to the other in recognition of its fragmentation or partiality.[23] A decreative philosophy leads Weil down the dangerous road of having such partiality be overcome by a transcendent figure codified in exclusively masculine terms. A sensible transcendent attempts to overcome the division between transcendence (spirit/mind) and sensibility (body); like Irigaray's term, metaxu engenders the

"sacralisation of material reality" in which all forms of difference are legitimized, not simply ones contingent upon the sorts of hierarchies that define the work of both Irigaray and Weil (Morny xvii). Although a definition of the sacred is greatly contested, metaxu's relationship to sacrality approximates the version espoused by Durkheim and Kristeva. This sacrality is inherently split, for example, between the angelic and the corpse, or something derived from collective rites that are either celebratory or expiatory. Even when one ignores Weil's occasional skepticism that a salvific return is an achievable prospect, decreation can be more effectively understood as a becoming-other-than-oneself, especially a becoming that is generative of otherness through a falling *into the world* rather than an ecstatic escape from it. When Weil writes of metaxu, she explores something far more terrestrial. Metaxu are the "vrais biens terrestres"[24] (*PG* 230)—the bodies, objects, subjects, and communities that act as intermediaries within a mystical exchange between others. If Weil believes them to be sacred within an otherwise profane (or at least phenomenal) world, what becomes of such stepping stones if they are understood to be both beautiful and abject, angelic and monstrous?

As blessings and stepping stones, metaxu provide the liminal intermediateness that allows the phenomenal world to reach across seemingly impassible ontological gaps. Weil describes an affective decreation as the eternal joy found in God through an exilic uprooting from "toute patrie terrestre" (*PG* 91). Prying these most basic ontic entities away from a religiously-codified decreative purpose is thus also to free them from the *gros animal* that would seek to control them. Weil localizes metaxu within culture, country, and tradition, but these structures are necessarily shaped by the ideological conflations of their particular historical period. Therefore, do the marginalized and outcast, the wretched and dispossessed, have equal access to the metaxu as they are currently dispersed in socio-political domains? How is the

presence of an *outside* policed by the cultural forces *inside*? What must be sought, perhaps, is a heretical, and even seditious metaxu that would include all people, and even all nonhuman peoples if they are to be included in a kinder formation of culture and community. This is precisely why metaxu, as bridges to an outside and opposing order, offer a transgressive and disruptive retaliation to religious and cultural ideologies of late capitalism.

The point of metaxu is not to die and unite with a deity in some imagined afterlife, but to become a medium through which others can encounter an alien power. Not to die, but to become diaphanous, to become other as the fullest expression of oneself, and to become a bridge through which others can encounter a sacrality arising from a decanted, porous subjectivity. Levinas explains metaphysical desire as follows:

> [It is a] movement going forth from a world that is familiar to us … an 'at home' which we inhabit, toward an alien outside-of-oneself, toward a yonder.… The other metaphysically desired is not 'other' like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate.… I can 'feed' on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. Their *alterity* is thereby reabsorbed into my own identity as a thinker or a possessor. The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*. (*Totality and Infinity* 33)

It is through a metaxic potentiality that Weil recognizes an "absolutely other" concealed in the bread, land, and landscape. The landscape possesses no subjectivity requiring egoistic decreation. Yet in the apprehension of this landscape as an ecosystem of myriad metaxic subjectivities, it is the decreative subject who must step aside in order to perceive the way entities and objects interact with each other in a way that resists being "reabsorbed into [… the]

identity [of] a thinker or possessor" (33). Weil and Levinas need the "absolutely other" to sate their "metaphysical desires." Weil, however, is more of a creative than a systematic thinker; the metaxic philosophy that she releases into what might approximate a religious system complicates the very metaphysics upon which it seemingly depends.

St. John of the Cross describes the process of emptying the self as a purging of "strange Gods, all alien affections and attachments" ("The Ascent of Mount Carmel" 129). To bring metaxu into dialogue with decreation is thus to force a critical re-examination of precisely what it means to be *alien*.[25] Certainly for St. John (and for Weil in many places), that which is alien is understood as that part of the self that exists in discontinuity from the apophatic deity found in the abyssal depths of the dark night. Yet when Weil suggests that it would be better to be the mud that obeys God rather than God itself, one finds a strange (if unintended) overturning of a hierarchical structure in which an anthropomorphic divinity sits above a commitment to an amorphic becoming inherent to mud's existence (*PG* 87).[26] St. John's return to God is a decreative closing-off to otherness; metaxu, on the other hand, is a process of opening the self to "strange Gods [and] alien affectations" (129) to explore the possibilities of becoming amidst a vast diversity of otherness. In this comparison, decreation and metaxu share an aversion to attachment, understood as the human self that one transfers into things—"la réalité du moi transportée par nous dans les choses" (*PG* 16). Metaxu complies with Weil's prioritizing of detachment in that it brings the self into intimate contact with others only so that it might decreatively allow an alien presence to transform its very contours. To put this another way, a metaxic subject approaches the detachment of decreation as a complicated process of recognizing that it is precisely these strange, alien identities that share the kenotic world in which

the self is subsumed. They possess their own mysteries, their own concealed secrets, their own unique relationships to an immanent transcendence.

Metaxu is not strictly a part of the unconscious but a clearing opened within the metaxic subject when the "conscious/unconscious distinction [is made] irrelevant" (Kristeva, *Powers* 7). Through such a rupture, one becomes a liminal or "borderline subject [… whose] speech constitute[s] propitious ground for a sublimating discourse ('aesthetic or 'mystical,' etc.) rather than a scientific or rationalist one" (Kristeva, *Powers* 7). In this manner, to decreate metaxically would be to open oneself to the abject and to purge those very attachments and affectations that ordinarily prevent the self from becoming-alien. This is another way of obeying Weil's call to "[p]rendre le sentiment d'être chez soi dans l'exil" (*PG* 45). That which is alien is not that which is external to the self, but that part of the self that girds itself against the metamorphic purpose of its own becoming and the metaxic openness of the created world. Kraus, for example, has found it essential to theorize Weil's relationship to anorexia as a means of getting *outside* the body[27] and how Weil's own pursuit of the ecstatic could be juxtaposed with an investigation into how "[t]hose who seek out Aliens form groups and give up little pieces of themselves. The empty spaces in each person turn into receptors allowing Aliens to enter through the porous surface of your skin" (181). The most adventurous possibility for a metaxic encounter would thus demand a shift away from the choreography of human relations, power structures, and identities. In its place, metaxu does not articulate itself as the apolitical romance of perpetual flux, but participation in a network of vibrant correlation liberated from the anthropomorphizing energies of the creative ego (against which Weil warned), but also the solitary hermetic retreat of the non-metaxic decreative subject.

In the *Timaeus*, the dialogue's titular character describes the khora as the liminal space between being and becoming that receives divine impressions and forms them into matter (49a). Weil's writing on metaxu reverses the direction of Plato's inseminating descent in order to make this space accessible to both sides as a kind of decreative way-station. Metaxu are intermediaries, stepping stones, both to God *and* to each other. They are barriers *and* doorways, a dynamic corrective to Plato's khora. Reversing the arrow of becoming, this re-working of Plato allows for an access to a metaxic khora—a liminal space of undomesticated crossings. Timaeus argues that the khora is necessary to reconcile the otherwise irreconcilable realms of being (the forms) and becoming (Weil's created world of things). He struggles mightily with the description of this ambiguous third term of reconciliation and when he articulates it as "a receptacle of all becoming" (49a6) he immediately expands this definition of an ambiguous container by personifying it, famously calling it the "wetnurse" (49a7) of becoming. Misogynistic and classist, this has inaugurated a lengthy history of attending to the problematic representation of the khora as a feminized receptacle for the emergence of masculine forms. Weil is not exempt from this either, as she describes the mother of Christ as "la Matrice, la Nourrice, le Porte-Empreintes du *Timée* que tout devenir" (*Cahiers III* 240). The latent eugenics of the *Timeaus* are evident as Plato imagines being to have escaped the womb-like khora without inheriting any of the maternal khora's traits. Similarly, through such a procedure, the khora has also been stripped of all qualities and attributes, left "totally devoid of any characteristics" (50e5-6). It is not difficult to recognize that by Plato's own logic, the khora can never be associated with or analogically collapsed into the figures of the wet-nurse, the mother, or the womb, for these figures are presented within a cosmology that implicitly rejects the feminine. If the khora is an empty receptacle that imprints nothing upon mimetic materiality, how can it be that this

materiality possesses the feminine qualities exorcised from Plato's patriarchal theory? The paradoxical impasse to which Timaeus is blind is activated as the very power of the metaxu that is denied to the khora.

In Plato's cosmology, the relationship between khora and womb is decidedly metaphorical. Since Weil is interested in the ability of individuals to become metamorphic or metaxic, one could entertain Benjamin's promotion of metamorphosis as the inevitable transformation to which all beings are subjected in a world where metaphoricity is impossible ("Franz Kafka" 131). Any Greek lexicon will inform its reader that a variant of metaxu—μεταχωρ-έω—refers to changing the place of the fetus in the womb. Metaxu retains the womb-like nature of the khora, but as wet-nurse, emerges with a feminine energy that disrupts the heterosexist mimesis of kenosis and decreation. According to Timaeus, the khora is strictly an interstitial receptacle through which the forms impress themselves upon the phenomenal world. In Weil's reimagining, this khora exists within the phenomenal world itself, resembling a kind of hyper-object[28] as bodies, ideas, traditions, political regimes, and artistic production must metamorphose to become interstitial, liminal, khoric. Or rather, escaping the notice of Timaeus, the khora has actually impressed *itself* onto the material world of becoming, possibly through some mimetic alchemy, but perhaps through an entirely separate movement into becoming that Plato's philosophy cannot accommodate. In using the term metaxu instead of khora, Weil is able to present a kind of "wandering cause [48c] [in which] the khora holds the potential for uncontrolled generation, for dynamic change that is neither a product of the eternal form nor its diminution in the realm of becoming" (Sheldon 212). Metaxu lacks the indefinable non-identity of the khora and thus, arrives flush with its own particular political intricacies. Weil's definition of the family (tellingly absent in her mention of the family as metaxu) entails the patriarchal

structuring of her theology. The patriarch, the wet-nurse, the bastard: this is precisely the family dynamic disrupted through metaxu.

If Weil's metaxu allows for a critique of this highly problematic sexual symbology, it does so in a manner consistent with Timaeus's own dream logic or dream perspective. Timaeus warns that the invisibility of the khora demands that the apprehension of this strange liminal space can only be accessed through analogy, that is, "a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception.… We look at it as in a dream" (52b2-4). Equally ontic and surreal, metaxu demands a new kind of sense perception and Weil associates this dream-like state with myth and art. Thus, one of the undercurrents of a metaxic aesthetics resides in its effort to create a language of resistance through which to theorize new possibilities for mystical and metamorphic exchanges. One way in which Thibon's editorial skill is to be commended is that *Pesanteur*'s chapter "Effacement" follows the chapter on decreation, while the chapter on metaxu leads into "Beauté." Notably, beauty plays a far greater role than decreation in the mystical visions Weil claims to have experienced. Moreover, if all "biens terrestres" possess the same potential for intermediacy, Weil's account of her own experience suggests that art is an equally viable route to such dream-visions.

By examining a metaxic aesthetic through Weil's writing on myth, I propose a new direction for Weil studies that might unleash the event of aesthetic creation locked within decreation. To abandon metaxu's purpose to the paradigm set forth by traditional scholarship on decreation deprives it of any power greater than its passive willingness to receive as the empty receptacle of the ontic. Consequently, it would emerge only as a result of abjection, subjugation, violence, and suffering—nihilistic in its rejection of life and its deferral to a transcendent rather than immanent truth. A metaxic aesthetic can be discerned in Weil's writing on myth and art

where the act of destruction and divestment precipitates a kind of creation, even perhaps a necessary stage in all creation, like the conjuring of a darkness before a mythopoetic cosmogony. The Pseudo-Dionysian metaphor of the sculptor who chisels away at the block of marble in order to make the inner substance appear reveals the aesthetic symmetry of being in relation to the void. When Weil posits that one's task is to "faire passer du créé dans l'incréé" (*PG* 81), this passage forms a model of artistic creation, of Penelopean weaving and unweaving that allows the relationship between being and non-being to become far more dynamic. This is an aesthetic reconfiguration of kenosis's reductive theological stance that something can only come into existence through violent decreation. Penelope's craft occupies an important role in this dialectic in that she understands absence as *elsewhere* and *not-yet*; this is an absence that questions the simple amalgamation of space and time. Penelope also transforms the space of spiritual waiting into one of active aesthetic creation, where art is not an activity which contradicts the passivity of waiting but serves the essential function of marking and measuring this time and space. Only through a privileging of metaxu in the work of Weil can it be revealed that kenosis is an act of creation rather than merely abandonment.

The following section begins this dissertation's examination of the role metaxu plays in literary texts that rewrite myth in order to explore the kinds of subject formation possible within various constructions of mystical crisis. While this examination will be far from exhaustive, it will demonstrate an as yet unexplored potential for Weil's metaxu to keep its mediating power while ensuring that multiplicity, hybridity, and otherness are dynamic forces of a uniquely modern sacrality found in literature that destabilizes the hierarchical dependency of classical metaphysics. Derrida theorizes that "there is only one khora, even if it can be pure multiplicity of places" (107) and Weil's continuous return to Greek myth provides one of the most significant

indications that metaxu are not simply singular, but innumerable, opening a space for limitless combinations of confrontations with alternative subject positions.

Part IV: The Need for (Mythical) Roots

Within the notebooks of Weil, one finds a quotation from Aeschylus that she translates as "La connaissance par la souffrance — La connaissance par la transformation" (*Cahiers III* 24).[29] Although this quotation displays a symmetry that her mathematical mind must have certainly appreciated, critics of Weil have typically neglected this same symmetrical tendency in her own work. Arguably the result of Thibon's prejudicial editorializing, the Weilian notion of transformation has become uprooted from its relation to Greek literature, heedless of Weil's appeal to the need for roots. The juxtaposition of myth's immanence and mysticism's transcendence has become the almost apocryphal strain of her writing, yet provides many of her keenest insights into formations of subjectivity through the intersection of phenomenal and noumenal spaces. If the epistemological movement from knowledge through suffering to knowledge through transformation traces a movement from Aeschylus to Christianity, it must also be read as an act of *rooting* and a return to Aeschylus—a continuous one, in fact, since Weil translates this line no fewer than five times throughout her notebooks. Thibon's editorial skills are invaluable in the history of Weilian scholarship, but fundamentally he imposes a misreading of her notebooks that resembles a perennial form of Christianity whereby any divergence from certain traditional orthodoxies can nevertheless be integrated into a specifically Christian core of metaphysical truth. One cursory look in the index[30] reveals these notebooks to be crucially dialogic texts that have been ignored for the sake of monologic control. Even Weil's experiments

in orthodox Christian theology suggest discontinuous pathways available to any single religious tradition or practice.

Since the publication of *Pesanteur*, the insights of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault have brought crucial attention to the mechanisms through which religious discourse imposes "detachment" and "humility and mortification" (Foucault, "Government" 157) as a means of "subjecting [the individual] to the ruling ideology" (Althusser 133). Through *Pesanteur*, Thibon functions as the editorial administrator of such ideology; while Weil needs no assistance in perpetuating an ethics of self-annihilation, I question whether her interest in myth and literature can offer a theorization of detachment and suffering that is not entirely subsumed by religious ideology. Of course, both author and text are socially and historically determined, and Thibon's ideological appropriation of the notebooks works to efface the discourses of myth and literature that inform and extend the intricacies of metaxu. There is no doubt that Weil's "return to myth – a return to a story without root, whose meaning is thus obscure" (Rougemont 19) problematizes her work with a new set of approaches to ethics, politics, gender, and violence. Beginning with a discussion of her approach to myth and concluding with a reading of her overlooked poem, "Prométhée," this chapter's final section uses Weil's treatment of myth to begin a critique of religious ideology that will persist throughout the following chapters. Furthermore, it investigates whether an aesthetic theory of metaxu might open trapdoors within cathedrals, and thereby disrupt the hegemonic discourse of an ideology working to silence the many voices of alterity within it.

The *Note de l'éditeur* in Gallimard's publication of *Cahiers I* specifies that the writings contained in *Pesanteur* "datant des années 1940 et 1941, ainsi que des premiers mois de l'année 1942" (7). Meaney, however, dates the beginning of the first *Cahiers* from as early as 1933 and

indicates that Weil returned to this writing while in Marseilles during WWII. To be sure, any effort to supply an accurate date for each fragment is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, Meaney's chronology proves that an interest in Greek thought and literature pre-dates Weil's mystical experiences. Published in 2007, Meaney's *Simone Weil's Apologetic Use of Literature: Her Christological Interpretations of Classic Greek Texts*, is the first book-length study of Weil's interpretation of Greek texts. Meaney, however, focuses only on the writing that followed Weil's professed mystical vision. Her text supports Scholem and Underhill's view that mysticism cannot occur outside of a particular religious institution and that subjects are constituted by the available models imposed upon them by the surrounding culture. For all of Weil's protestations against organized religion, Meaney contends that she still sought to "Christianize society, and her interpretations of the classics were just one way of achieving her goal" (12).

The well-researched chronology that Meaney provides still poses certain unanswered questions. For example, she reports that in "1938 [Weil] had the time to reread the dramas of Aeschylus and of Sophocles as well as the *Iliad* … when she was on sick-leave. These works were therefore fresh in her mind at the time of her first mystical encounter in 1938. This might explain why she immediately saw these texts in a Christological light" (16). This sequence of events also suggests that the re-reading of these works may have influenced her understanding of the mystical encounter she claims to have experienced. Yet, in Meaney's interpretation, there is no possibility for a dialogical exchange between a reader and the symbolic modes of cultural influence that shape one's subjective experience. Such an exchange would open Weil's writing to multiple interpretations, including myth's role as the transgressive disruptor of a specifically Christian metaphysics. Part of Blanchot's interest in Weil comes from the "fact that this young intellectual, without any religious ties and as though naturally atheist, should almost suddenly, at

about age twenty-nine, be the subject of a mystical experience of a Christian nature, without this event seeming in any way to modify either the movement of her life or the direction of her thoughts" (*Infinite* 107). This view is no doubt anathema to a large contingent of Weil scholars, but helpfully disrupts a firmly entrenched effort to position her pre-mystical texts as somehow beholden to a later conversion.

The use of Greek myth certainly does not preclude an adherence to the patriarchal ideology that informs Christian myth. The structuralist critiques that followed the Nazis' appeal to mythology have proven invaluable for recasting Western myth as a carrier of dangerous power structures, whether they be patriarchal, racial, heterosexist, classist, or nationalist. In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes famously describes myth as ideology masquerading as essence in order to naturalize history (130–131). While demonstrating the pervasive transformation of myth into capitalist ideology, Barthes attacks the myths that are propagated and distorted to serve the political machinery of Western culture. *Mythologies*, along with Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944), have done much to make myth pejoratively synonymous with the propaganda through which consumer culture turns unwitting suspects into the agents of their own oppression. As Fisher keenly observes, "the capitalist dystopia of 21st-century culture is not something that is simply imposed on us – it was built out of our captured desires" (*Ghosts of My Life* 21).

In contrast, Blumenberg professes the inadequacy of analyzing myth in terms of what it preceded (science and capitalism). Instead, he urges a refocused perspective on the feeling of an existential lack of control which, he believes, is where the need for myth first arose.[31] At the heart of capitalism is the transition from existential fear into an anxiety managed through consumption and the oppressive forces of labour on which it depends. Yet if consumption

functions through the seductive promise of control, this is to forget the function of myth that Blumenberg locates in the development from primitive to symbolic animal. He views a return to myth as a necessary prehistorical structure of logic used to survive the dissolution of cherished value systems. Writers affiliated and adjacent to the Frankfurt School, as well as those like Blumenberg and Fisher directly inspired by its approach to myth, effectively describe the era in which Weil's "Prométhée" was produced. I engage them here in order lay the groundwork for later chapters when I argue for Weil's proximity to the work of feminist authors for whom the act of mythic revisionism constitutes a necessary political project of dismantling patriarchal constructions of femininity and reclaiming the silenced voices of historical alterity.[32]

Weil believed that the "fondement de la mythologie, c'est que l'universe est une métaphor des vérités divines" (*CS* 145). Thus, if one looks to myth for the revelation of hidden divine truths, one finds no divinity that does not adhere to a fundamentally metamorphic and imaginative structure. Blumenberg postulates that the "term *metamorphoses* is not a mere collective title for myths,[33] but designates the principle of the formation of myth itself, the fundamental form of a still unreliable identity belonging to the gods who are pressing their way out of formlessness into appearance" (352). If decreation is defined as the mortal mimesis of a divine kenosis, one might suggest metaxu as the mimesis of the metamorphic principle that Blumenberg locates in both the Gods and the aesthetic structures used to track their epiphanic movements (91).[34] Therefore, by highlighting metaxu's connection to metamorphosis and myth, one can more adequately theorize both its function in Weil's schema and its profound potential to reconfigure her philosophy through the conception of a sensible transcendence that is inherently metamorphic and migratory.

To return myth to its rightful place in Weil's philosophy is also to challenge "the heart of a monotheistic heritage dedicated to the rigorous exclusion … suppression, displacement, or eradication of myth in the interests of monotheism" (Scholem xxiii). Consequently, I wish to employ a definition of myth that resists the dangerous collapse of myth's inherent pluralism into the totalitarian unity that Barthes, Adorno, and Horkheimer proclaim to be such an inevitable symptom of twentieth-century culture. Myth, deployed as the "rewriting, refolding, and refleshing" (Palmer 507) of cultural narratives, can serve as an attack on the monolith of truth in all its impossible infallibility and unwavering permanence. Myth opens up an event not merely to variation and lethetic interpretation[35] but to a founding principle of impermanence and metamorphosis that counters the annihilating stasis of the decreative mystical union.

The Sacrifice of Prometheus

It is often forgotten that Weil was also a poet and aspiring playwright.[36] Tortel's confession that Weil would have sacrificed her entire oeuvre for the handful of poetry she penned is perhaps startling, but "Prométhée" casts an important light on her later religious works, especially since it dates from around the same time as her first reported mystical experiences (Pétrement 531). Written in 1937, only a few years before her essay on the *Iliad* and the notebooks that would constitute *Pesanteur,* the poem is seldom discussed by Weil's critics, neither in the treatment of her writings on the Greeks, nor in the fledgling outlier we might call Weilian literary criticism. Peter Winch's *Simone Weil: The Just Balance* (1989), is a notable exception, introducing the reader to the balance and interconnectivity that would become familiar themes in Weil's later work:

L'acte s'ajoute à l'acte; rien n'est seul;

Tout se répond sur la juste balance.

Il naît des chants purs comme le silence

Parfois du temps s'entrouve le linceul. (*P* 23)

Winch translates this final line as "There are times when the shroud opens halfway" (214). Recalling Penelope's weaving of the shroud, it is possible to read this opening as simultaneously the unweaving of decreation or the opening of the soul. By contrasting the "linceul" or "shroud" of Prometheus as the shroud of being, the removal of the shroud occasions the return to a form of non-being consistent with an apophatic and decreative theology.

Weil's preoccupation with myth acts as a primer for her later writing on spirituality. The speaker of her poem declares: "Il naît des chants purs comme le silence" (*P* 23), as if to prefigure the poet's mystical experience listening to the chanting monks of the Solesmes Monastery. The speaker interprets the "purs" of music and art to be the ability to bring forth the sacred silence that resides within the vacated, decreated artist. The very notes of the song contain its potential cessation, even the impossibility of song, mirroring Weil's God, which must contain its own death. As above so below; Weil believes that the only possible purity of the human being lies in the ability to renounce one's self. Heaney remarks that her entire oeuvre "is informed by the idea of counterweighing … [and] tilting the scales of reality towards some transcendent equilibrium" (4). A few years after Weil writes her poem, Thibon will begin *Pesanteur*'s section "Le Moi" with a similar sentiment: "Nous ne possédons rien au monde […] sinon le pouvoir de dire je. C'est cela qu'il faut donner à Dieu" (*PG* 73).[37] The early meditation on art and myth in "Prométhée" can be read as the latent (silenced) Hellenism that gives her Christian mysticism balance. I suggest that this apparatus of balance within Weil's writing creates a strange mirroring effect, not unlike the syntactical pairing of "silence" and "linceul" as near-reflections of one

another: “Il naît des chants purs comme le silence. / Parfois du temps s’entrouvre le linceil” (*P* 23). The joining of the sibilants “silence” and “linceul” presents a shroud or veil that is opened just enough to peer into the silence that lies beyond the song, perhaps to the rent in the real that opens upon its final notes. “L’acte s’ajoute à l’acte” (*P* 23) implies that the song, born in silence, will usher forth a new world in which the song is no longer heard because, answered by one’s divine muse, it no longer needs to be sung.

Cornel West champions the power of music to become “the grand archeology into and transfiguration of our guttural cry, the great human effort to grasp in time our deepest passions and yearnings as prisoners of time. Profound music leads us—beyond language—to the dark roots of our scream and the celestial heights of our silence” (xix). West and Weil each locate an inheritance from Christ’s “guttural cry” within the sublime heights of certain works of art, as well as archetypal figures like Prometheus. This cry of affliction, whether shouted to the heavens, transformed into radical love through John Coltrane’s saxophone, or silenced in the acceptance of decreation, suggests a metaxic aesthetics that reaches outside human experience for meaning. In this sense, the poem implies a metaxic aesthetics for the purpose of compensating for the difficulty of successfully decreating. Through “Prométhée,” Weil begins to propose an aesthetic and metaxic alternative with images of beauty and suffering so acute that they approach the metaphysical: “Parfois du temps s’entrouve le linceul” (*P* 23). A year after penning the poem, she had an experience at Solesmes that seems to perform the same feat. In the “Autobiographie spirituelle” (1942) that Weil writes to Fr. Perrin just before her death, she describes the power of song, its (en)chanting and its words, to create an aesthetic space into which she rises after leaving her wretched flesh heaped in a corner (*AD* 36). “Prométhée”

suggests a prefiguring influence on the mystical visions that would come to define her status as a Christian writer.

The Prometheus of Weil's poem is presented as an antecedent of Christ. In her prose fragment "Zeus et Prométhée" (1952) she clarifies that "la similitude de l'histoire de Prométhée avec celle du Christ deviant d'une evidence aveuglante" (45). This is another way of saying that Prometheus might be the face of Christly divinity once the shroud of Christianity is removed. Consider the concluding stanza in which Weil's speaker links the crucified Christ with the suffering of Prometheus:

> L'aube est par lui une joie immortelle.
>
> Mais un sort sans douceur le tient plié.
>
> Le fer le cloue au roc; son front chancelle;
>
> En lui, pendant qu'il pend crucifié,
>
> La douleur froide entre comme une lâme.
>
> Heures, saisons, siècles lui rongent l'âme,
>
> Jour après jour fait défaillir son coeur.
>
> Son corps se tord en vain sous la contrainte;
>
> L'instant qui fuit disperse aux vents sa plainte;
>
> Seul et sans nom, chair livrée au maleur. (*P* 24)

A syncretic reading is surely the easiest here, but the speaker presumes the suffering of a God so tremendous that it cannot be contained in a single body. The advent of a Christ becomes a kind of consolation to ease the torment of a Prometheus from whom no more pain can be extracted. Alone and utterly abandoned, the affliction of Prometheus prefigures decreation. To have a mere sojourn of bodily suffering and divine abandonment is an altogether earthly punishment; one

cannot help but be reminded of the very earthly suffering undergone by even the most irreligious soldiers dying on the battlefields while Weil writes this poem.

Winch argues that "[t]he most striking and important connection made in … ["Prometheus"] is probably that between the kind of 'order' to be found in human behaviour and the notion of an 'order of nature' within which the objects with which we have dealings are systematically connected *with each other*" (55). Winch isolates four important lines:

> Il fut l'auteur des rites et du temple,
>
> Cercle magique à retenir les dieux
>
> Loin de ce monde; ainsi l'homme contemple,
>
> Seul et muet, le sort, la mort, les cieux. (*P* 23)

For Prometheus, the invention of the ritual repeats the encircling of a space (both in place and time) to which the Gods can no longer gain access. This ritualized "[c]ercle magique à retenir les dieux" (*P* 23) operates in opposition to the Althusserian rituals through which the inescapability of Weil's *gros animal* might be inculcated. Winch explains that the space of ritual is a "space within which human beings are freed, temporarily, from their constant obsession with natural necessities … [and able to] communicate with [the Gods] otherwise than through experiencing the heavy hand of those natural necessities" (Winch 58). In the figure of Prometheus, one locates the source of a gift that allows mortals to be freed from gravity (pesanteur) and the "heavy hand" that seeks to mediate between the speaker and her God.

In *Myth and Reality* (1963), Eliade suggests that ritual is a repetition of the past that ruptures the present for the sake of creating anew. As a gift from Prometheus, ritual in Weil's poem is a repetition not of divine abandonment or expulsion, but an inscription within the terrestrial sphere of a metaxic space that contains that which is forbidden to it. Prometheus's

punishment is tied to the creation of a profane space that had never before existed. In Eliade's schema, ritual brings the outside within and, similar to Winch's account, might even be weaponized against the *gros animal* whose appropriation of ritual for secular purposes ensnares the individual within the profane temporality of capital:

> [R]itual abolishes profane, chronological Time and recovers the sacred Time of myth. Man becomes contemporary with the exploits that the Gods performed *in illo tempore*. On the one hand, this revolt against the irreversibility of Time helps man to "construct reality"; on the other, it frees him from the weight of dead Time, assures him that he is able to abolish the past, to begin his life anew, and to re-create his World. (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 140)

The gendered pronouns of Eliade are not merely symptomatic of an earlier, less enlightened time, but a still-prevalent construction of reality in which male subjects call upon classical male archetypes to "recreate his World." If Weil's poem argues that ritual constitutes the human mimesis of a Promethean action, the question has to be, who gets to administer this ritual? Might women and genderqueer subjects seek their own rituals that do not derive from the Promethean, Oedipal, or Christly re-enactment of male-on-male violence? "Prométhée" offers a compelling glimpse into the ways a patriarchal Grecian mythology seamlessly transitions into a patriarchal Christian mythology. In "Prométhée," Weil reveals the troubling ease with which myth and religion, their ideologies standing in opposition to each other only as reflections, can each represent metaxu as a gendered space, even while founded on the dissolution of identity.

In Weil's poem, the sacred flame that Prometheus bestows to his privileged humans becomes a metaxic technology and the instrument that separates the human from the rest of earth's bestiary. For Weil and Blumenberg—whose *Work of Myth* charts the literary and

philosophical history of the Prometheus figure—this flame represents the higher consciousness that imagines the possibility of both the sacred and humanity's relation to it. It is the gift that destroys and purifies, a marker of its metaxic energy. In the linking of ritual space and sacred/stolen flame, the speaker seems to envision a Promethean Christ figure set to deliver the metaxic potentiality that will occasion the spark of divine contact. One might also imagine Prometheus as the rebellious thief hanging next to the crucified Christ, a Prometheus memorialized in the myth of a stolen sacrality foreign to the profane. To step into the ritualistic circle of such sacrality is thus transgressive, carrying with it a divine punishment, sacrifice, or violence done to the mediator.

The significance of aligning Christ with Prometheus at the outset of WWII resonates with the similarly incendiary genealogy that H.D. would use to weave a kind of sacred continuity among the fragments left in the wake of war. In both H.D.'s *Trilogy* (1944-1946) and Weil's "Prométhée," "gods always face two-ways" (H.D. "Walls" 2) and the speakers of their poems reveal a concealed hope that

> living within,
>
> you beget, self out of self,
>
> selfless,
>
> that pearl-of-great-price. ("Walls" 4)

While Weil's Prometheus is left to suffer alone, passing this "pearl-of-great-price" onto a mortal community he will never meet, the speaker of "Walls" explains that even after the flesh melts away, its "outer husk dismembered," a spiritual community of women yet survives, having "passed the flame" ("Walls" 1). H.D.'s flame, therefore, stands as an important contrast to the patriarchal myth and a possible alternative for a metaxic flame whose modern incarnation

perpetuates a devastating violence. The speaker of "The Walls Do Not Fall" compares the bombing of London to an "Apocryphal fire" ("Walls" 1), the carnage of which exceeds that of Zeus's Thebes, yet is contaminated with the same Promethean violence ("Angels" 6). The speaker of "Walls" imagines herself and her companions as "companions / of the flame" and "initiates, / born of one mother" ("Walls" 13) instead of the decedents of Promethean rebellion. Throughout the three parts that comprise *Trilogy*, it is not the voice of any speaker that offers continuity, but this inheritance. This flame these companions share has ignited another ritualistic circle more capable of excluding the Gods who pose such a dire threat. The broken body of this Promethean Christ is "difficult to disentangle / from its art-craft junk-shop / paint-and-plaster medieval jumble" ("Walls" 18). Instead, it is the Holy Ghost ("open to everyone" rather than merely Adam's sons) that acts as metaxic "go-between," "merg[ing] the distant future / with most distant antiquity / […] in a simple dream-equation" ("Walls" 20). Moreover, a metaxic flame links the Mother Mary with such goddesses as Uriel, Aphrodite, and Astarte. The speakers of *Trilogy* urge their companions to "re-light the flame" ("Angels" 11) in order to rebuild its community after the senseless suffering of the war.

Weil's cross is always situated at the moment when time opens up into the infinite—when, despite the "ruin everywhere," yet "eternity endures" ("Walls" 1)—when the speaker of "Prométhée" experiences the sensation of eternity through the agony of a Christly pain. Prometheus, "haï des dieux, abandonné des hommes" (Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* 91) is forbidden the consolation of a heavenly return and must continually descend into the hell of his own tortured flesh in the silence of the Gods. Rather than face two ways, as H.D.'s speaker suggests, it is also possible to read Prometheus and Christ as facing the same way, each with twin male gazes. If Weil envisions the rock of Prometheus as the mythical double for the one

upon which Peter chooses to build his church, then the church becomes the bloody rock upon which Christ receives eternal punishment. Through the implicit identification with a Christly suffering, Christ is also subject to a kind of Promethean crucifixion, one that does not end in darkness on the third day but continues perpetually and dictates the agony of decreative purpose. In *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, Weil actually suggests that "[l]'histoire de Prométhée est comme la réfraction dans l'éternité de la passion du Christ" (94). When comparing her poem on Prometheus with her wartime essay on the *Iliad*, it is possible to speculate on the degree to which Weil sought a form of mysticism through pain and violence "during a historical moment in which concrete political action seemed hopeless and the threat of death pervasive" (Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* 62).[38]

In contrast, Weil's poem does not teach her reader how to rebuild but how to suffer, or rather, how to orient one's suffering towards a higher purpose. In "Zeus et Prométhée," Weil argues that through his torture, Prometheus initiates humanity into the wisdom of the Gods: "C'est en crucifiant Prométhée que Zeus a ouvert aux hommes la route de la sagesse" (45). This is reflected in first stanza of "Prométhée" when, after a litany of torments that Prometheus must suffer, the reader is addressed directly and assured that "En proie aux dieux, criant sous leurs atteintes —/ Sans Prométhée, hommes, vous seriez tels" (*P* 22). If Weil's Prometheus offers humanity the means of no longer being the prey of the Gods, H.D.'s rekindled flame offers the means of no longer being the prey of human aggressors who fear no god's wrath.

Although the exact date of the poem is difficult to pinpoint, it seems clear that Weil returned to the myth of Prometheus soon after her visit to the basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi, when she was compelled to kneel for the first time in her life.[39] Although it is difficult to compare the basilica's architectural grandeur with Herbert's poem, Weil once again

has a profoundly religious response to an overwhelming aesthetic experience. Moreover, as prolific a writer as she was, there is something telling in that each time she experiences something that one might call mystical, a turn to myth shortly follows, a turn that does not often fit into the standard narrative of Weil's biography. Moreover, the poetic form itself seems to disrupt the essayist prose of most of her published oeuvre. "Prométhée" was the first poem that Weil wrote in eight years, initiating a comparative flurry of poetic inspiration from which five more poems and an uncompleted tragedy would follow. Just as she would turn to the *Iliad* in order to contemplate the ravages of war, the myth of Prometheus helped Weil to understand more clearly, through a comparativist perspective, the realities of pain and abandonment she saw around her. Unable to expunge such trauma, she sought justification and even purpose in a violent sacrality.

While some versions of the myth depict Prometheus as a rogue thief (Hesiod, Aeschylus), others also present him as the demiurgic creator of humanity (Sappho, Ovid). In Weil's interpretation, Prometheus helps her to locate the maxim that a mystical "woundedness and its recognition are necessary for opening one human being to the other. The greater this woundedness and laceration—the more the self is exploded and ripped apart—the fuller the communication that occurs between the nonself and the now ruined other" (Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy* 82). Weil's philosophical speculation requires metaxu in order to sustain such violence beyond the fragile body. Promethean bodies become the site of torture, a torture that is sustained eternally so that the connection between the divine and the earthly body might be kept intact. In situating metaxu within the myth of Prometheus, Weil also suggests an underlying precept for metaxic mediation, namely that it is always, to some degree, a transgression against a

transcendent, isolated, and authoritarian divinity—one who chooses the seat of its being across a transcendental divide.

Weil's poem begins with the gift or grace of fire, without which humanity would resemble pitiable animals:

> Un animal hagard de solitude,
>
> Sans cesse au ventre un rongeur qui le mord,
>
> Le fait courir, tremblant de lassitude,
>
> Pour fuir la faim qu'il ne fuit qu'à la mort; (*P* 22)

The consequences of Prometheus's gift are enumerated in succession, all leading up to a divine punishment through which Weil imagines the genealogical relationship between Prometheus and Christ. If the ritualized circle drawn by Weil's Prometheus is to remove divinity from a space upon which temples are to be built, Prometheus is subject to a Dantean contrapasso. On the rock upon which his body is broken, his divine self is fully realized as eagles disembowel him eternally. Prometheus's very being is emptied out (his liver is only a side effect). If death offers something like the apophasis of subjectivity, the real anguish of Prometheus lies not in his torture but in his inability to ever arrive at the apophatic emptiness that seems to be promised by his perpetual emptying and disembodying. The continued renewal and regeneration of his liver and his intestines is the kataphatic tease that makes death (even death as apophasis) truly deferred and inaccessible. The anguish of Prometheus is his tortured liminality, or the prison of in-betweenness (metaxic without decreative release). Weil discerns a juxtaposition between Prometheus and mystical suffering that reverberates throughout the history of Christian mystical literature. Hollywood has articulated this relationship as "the desire for (divine) wholeness and plenitude and the ecstatic anguish of the realization that one cannot be everything … [T]wo

seemingly antithetical experiences so often emerge in such close proximity to each other" (*Sensible Ecstasy* 149). Weil's poem, however, goes a step further, as the desire for wholeness and emptiness are both refused an elegiac resolution; no Hercules comes to rescue this Prometheus, but given that he is "crucifié" (*P* 24) it slowly becomes clear that Christ takes up the role of both Prometheus and Herculean liberator.

Weil's poem makes an artist of Prometheus ("flame artiste"), and in so doing, promotes a bond between aesthetics and a de-creative metaxu that is both regenerative and annihilatory (*P* 22). Besides the gift of fire, Weil's Prometheus is also "l'auteur des signes, des langages. / Les mots ailés vont à travers les âges / Par monts, par vaux, mouvoir les coeurs, les bras." (*P* 23). Promethean language is thus also metaxic and, in its winged proliferation, shows metaxu to be mobile, trans-temporal, engaged in the production of affective bodies. Promethean language is the cause and affect, the first movement of which is a punishable one. As such, these signs and languages, these words that traverse mountains (ascent) and valleys (descent), reveal a metaxic interconnectivity rooted in the profane, in the effacement of divinity, a redrawing of the place of being that the speaker defines as magical. Here, magic is an opening to the metaxic current of existence that ruptures the stable identity of the self so that it can proliferate, augmented in epiphanous being.

In the fifth stanza of Weil's poem, silence is embedded within song; in the fourth, a silent sacrality is made receptive to the song of the human world that Prometheus helped to create: "L'âme se parle et tâche à se comprendre. / Ciel, terre et mer se taisent pour entendre / Deux amis, deux amants parler tout bas" (*P* 23). "Prométhée" thus presents at least three kinds of silences. The first is the non-being existing within being, perhaps even as that which being presents: death in life, silence in song. The second form of silence is an attentive form of

listening to hear the language of love and companionship. Weil's stanza links the natural world and the transcendent world together as heaven, earth, and sea all strain to hear the lovers speaking to one another. Weil offers a symmetrical equilibrium here through the coupling of the heavenly and the terrestrial with a coupling of two friends or lovers—couplings that perhaps cannot exist outside this cosmological balance. The lovers, whispering in barely audible tones, suggest a third form of silence: the language that is noiseless, pre or post-verbal, as though each lover were silently listening to their interlocutor's soul trying to understand itself in, and through, its relation to the lover. Consider the echoes that one finds in the "Effacement" chapter of *Pesanteur*: "Je dois me retirer pour que Dieu puisse entrer en contact avec les êtres que le hasard met sur ma route et qu'il m'aime. Ma présence est indiscrète comme si je me trouvais entre deux amants ou deux amis.… Quand je suis quelque part, je souille le silence du ciel et de la terre par ma respiration et le battement de mon coeur" (94-95). The self that does not become metaxic is the wall between Pyramus and Thisbe, or between self and other, through which no communication be heard.

Already in "Prométhée," one finds the paradoxes that will become such a hallmark of Weil's writings: the return to the uncreated as decreative pursuit of the created; the becoming non-being of being; the silence that reverberates in each musical note or linguistic sign; the abyssal but primal node around which the human self orbits. Metaxu is not only the space of transition from one to the other, but also the secret oscillation burgeoning within each. A metaxic hermeneutic positions the latent metaxu or site of becoming-other within a natural order that not only precedes but potentially undermines historical forms of religions. In this light, the religious construction of narratives and institutions is revealed as an effort to contain, expunge, or appropriate the metaxic energy that poses such a threat. The collapse of a religious structure

through H.D.'s metaxic genealogy of goddesses, for example, constitutes the collapse of the other that prescribes, manages, and reduces the potential of becoming to a single (decreative) trajectory. In concert with Scholem's definition of mysticism as "a revival of mythical thought" that "piece[s] together the fragments broken by the religious cataclysm" (8), metaxu must be understood as a mystical rather than religious concept; it is, however, a mysticism that affirms a falling *into* the world rather than away from it. Scholem regards mysticism as an historical stage succeeding religion but does not yet articulate this stage as the end of violent patriarchy (H.D.) or the *gros animal* masquerading as divine power (Weil). While Scholem seeks mystical unity between the earthly and the divine, the metaxu of Weil is more akin to H.D.'s in its possession of a power that originates in myth and survives the cataclysmic religious stage articulated by Scholem. Through a metaxic reading, Prometheus is not a myth that reinstates the Name-of-the-Father, but depicts humanity as the descendant of a divine rebellion against such a patriarch.

Weil's Prometheus is a complicated figure in the context of Scholem's three stages (myth, religion, mysticism). Through the gift of fire to humanity, he is the dispenser of a sacred flame that is both transgressive and essential, for without it, humanity is an "animal hagard de solitude" (*P* 22). In this sense, he is a purveyor of the immanence associated with both the mythical and the mystical stage in that he brings to humanity a noumenal substance that was once alien. Its transgressive nature, its stolen noumenality, is the marker of its sacrality. Through the invention of the ritualized circle that keeps the Gods at a distance from the world, however, he is the figure by which the religious stage comes into existence through the banishment of the Gods and the separation of the phenomenal and noumenal. Through the theft, however, this is a phenomenal, earthly, profane existence that still possesses a stolen sacrality and a haunting of the mythical past. Weil's Prometheus is thus the figure who bridges all three of Scholem's stages.

From the Prometheus of myth and the Attic theatre of Aeschylus, to the prefigured crucifixion of Christ, Weil was drawn to tragedy, and this has complicated a theorization of metaxu divorced from her vision of a sacrificial violence implicit to this suturing process. As such, the poem's punitive focus demonstrates a movement from sacred to profane (or vice-versa) that involves the abjection, condemnation, and contamination of the body. Prometheus's punishment is not only one of disembowelment, but one of exclusion, a key marker of the sacred for Kristeva, Eliade, Rudolph Otto, and other twentieth-century theorists who define the sacred in terms of an intrinsic heterogeneity. There is also a decreative ritual evident in the drawing of the Promethean circle and in the silent listening of the heavens that depicts a severance from the sacred to coincide with self-effacement and self-renunciation. Within the Promethean circle, the divine renounces itself to form an arena in which it is other, thus making itself sacred through its difference.

And yet, there is a metaxic quality to the poem that disrupts the Christianized decreation through which it might otherwise be read. The final line describes Prometheus as "[s]eul et sans nom, chair livrée au malheur" (*P* 24). Although this could easily double as a passage from *Pesanteur*, this affliction does not re-unite Prometheus with God but binds him to a human otherness; the self-emptying is not a backwards movement of decreation, but forwards towards a people whom he loves and bestows with beautiful gifts: "L'aube est par lui une joie immortelle" (*P* 24). At the conclusion of the poem, Prometheus's cries are lost to the wind and silenced to the point of near-inaudibility, pushing towards a meaning that can only be communicated through the line of flight language takes away from itself. Weil is famous for lamenting that looking and eating cannot be the same action. Similarly, the final words of Prometheus are not heard, but eaten by the eagles (thereby becoming the fabled winged words), and subsequently spread

throughout the world by sharp-taloned pollinators.[40] I would like to suggest that Weil's most profound reflection on the myth of Prometheus arose in the form of a poem because she was cognizant of Georges Bataille's insight that "poetry describes nothing that doesn't slip towards the unknowable" (*Theory of Religion* 21). Hidden within *Cahiers II*, Weil defines metaxu by the statement "Toute représentation qui nous tire vers le non représentable" (141). In "Prométhée," the unknowable is not Zeus or even the Christian divinity who finally claims Prometheus as its prodigal son, but the unknowable others who will one day hear (and take up) the cries of Prometheus, carried forth by the eagles or the winds of time.

Endnotes

[1] See especially "On the Absolute, the Sublime, and Ecstatic Truth" (2010), the translated text of a post-screening talk given in Milan.

[2] Weil's account of her own mystical experience is similar to that of a dream, even one that offers a second dream within the primary narrativized dream—a dream *en abyme* situated at the threshold between communion with Christ and Christ's rejection that precipitates the traumatic fall back into the body.

[3] For an excellent historical account of the philosophical objections to pantheism, see Mary-Jane Rubenstein's *Pantheologies: Gods, Worlds, Monsters* (2018). Such fears have been rehearsed since at least the accusations levied against Baruch Spinoza, and Scholem evokes Evelyn Underhill in arguing that "the great mystics were faithful adherents of the great religions" (6) rather than pantheists or theological anarchists. In her letter to Fr. Perrin, however, Weil confesses that she was lucky never to have read the mystics before her visionary experiences and can, therefore, be less skeptical that she had "fabriqué ce contact absolument inattendu" (*AD* 38).

[4] In "Simone Weil Against the Bible" (1952), Levinas argues that Weil's minimal understanding of Judaism undermines her reading of the entire Old Testament: she vilifies certain passages without context, and often ignores the accessible passages due to the failures of the indigestible ones (135). Levinas also suggests that Weil's ignorance of Jewish history leads her to an awkward acceptance of Christianity. While a more secular critic than Levinas might regard Weil's criticisms of orthodox Jewish theology deserving, I also remain curious as to the degree of culpability that must be shared by Thibon's selective Christianizing of *Pesanteur*. For example, Thibon's "Introduction" to *Gravity and Grace* contains many passages that have been omitted from nearly all French editions of *Pesanteur* (no ellipses mark their removal). One such unabridged passage reads as follows: "Thank God, I do not suffer from any *a priori* anti-Semitism, but what I know from experience of the qualities and faults of the Jewish temperament does not fit in any too well with my own and is particularly ill-adapted to the demands of everyday life together" (4).

[5] One might compare this to Weil's belief that one must "[d]evenir rien jusqu'au niveau vegetative; c'est alors que Dieu deviant du pain" (*PG* 87).

[6] Dargan compares Weil's recollections to the cigars from Charles Baudelaire's poem "Generous Gambler" (1864), whose "taste and odor awoke in the spirit a nostalgia for unknown lands and pleasures" (61). In fact, Dargan contrasts "the bare unremarkable church" setting of Weil's "Prologue" with Baudelaire's "opulent den" (57) and claims that the entire Prologue can be read as "a gloss on Baudelaire's [poem] as if taking up the challenge of the gambler's inquiry after God himself" (61). Although Baudelaire was a poet for whom Weil showed little affinity, Dargan's approach corresponds with Georges Bataille's suspicion in *Blue of Noon* (1957) that Weil might seamlessly operate in conjunction with her sacrilegious mirror image. Whereas Baudelaire's poem ends with a prayer, calling on god to "make the devil keep his promise!"

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(138), Weil's narrator is violently kicked down the stairs of the church by Christ and left to wander aimlessly in the streets below.

[7] It was just this implacable certainty in the face of self-delusion that interested Blanchot. See especially his essay on Weil in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969).

[8] Of equal importance is Nelson's recognition of tragedy as the factor that unites Weil's political and religious writings.

[9] This critique is found in "Simone Weil Against the Bible." No less critical is Sontag, who condemns Weil's politics for being anchored in a hatred for the body and an obsession with suffering. See her *New York Book Review* essay, "Simone Weil" (1963).

[10] See especially *Ecology Without Nature* (2007).

[11] Luria's *tzimtzum* is found in *Tree of Life* (1573), a still-influential kabbalist text that is nevertheless heretical to many orthodox Jews. Weil's substantial debt to Luria no doubt perplexed commentators like Levinas and Blanchot, who criticized her occasional disregard for Jewish tradition. Martin Buber's "Spirit and Body of the Hasidic Movement" (1922) and "God and the Soul" (1945) provide two other examples of how *tzimtzum* was interpreted around the time of Weil's writings.

[12] It is not clear which translation of the famous passage of kenosis from Philippians 2:7 Weil first encountered. She owned a well-used *Bible Rabbinate* edited by Zadoc Kahn while her own writings generally contain her translations from the Greek. Many of these translations demonstrate a clear familiarity with the less ostentatious translations that follow the Catholic *Bible de Port-Royal* (such as those of John Nelson Darby (1885) and Auguste Crampon's *Sainte Bible* (1923)). In these, Philippians 2:7 proposes that God "s'est anéanti lui-même," consistent with Weil's frequent use of "neant" to describe the void into which the created world first emerges. Weil's familiarity with the still-popular Crampon edition is also suggested by the Catholic upbringing of her philosophy teacher, Alain (née Émile Chartier), and the friendships with two of her most frequent religious interlocutors, the Dominican Joseph-Marie Perrin and the Catholic Thibon.

[13] Kenosis was debated heatedly in the nineteenth-century between German and British theologians. First promulgated in Germany by Gottfried Thomasius, see also Charles Gore (1853-1932), liberal theologian and bishop of Worcester, Birmingham, and then Oxford.

[14] Meister Eckhart professes an identical sentiment in his sermon "Renouamini spiritu." In Derrida's translation: "You must love Him inasmuch as he is a Non-God, a Non-Intellect, a Non-Person, a Non-Image. More than this, inasmuch as He is a pure, clear, limpid One, separated from all duality. And we must eternally sink ourselves into this One, from the Something to the Nothing" ("How to Avoid Speaking" 121).

[15] I will have more occasions to discuss Caputo in the next chapter but the link between Caputo and Weil should be apparent here in terms of an opposition to a theology of power and an ethical dedication to the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised.

[16] If Fisher's essays on depression and mental illness are some of the most powerful meditations on this topic, his unfortunate suicide in 2017 also exemplifies the importance of a social model of depression and anxiety, similar to the social model of disability.

[17] The metaphoricity through which much of her critique arises allows her descriptions of decreation to remain a relevant spiritual and a political project. For example, Weil's concern that the *gros animal* subjugates each person through a disintegration of metaxic community and a rootedness to an individualism defined by oppressive capital and material consumption has only proven more prescient in the years since her death.

[18] The real—originally a Lacanian term—has become a colloquialism of critical theory over the last few decades. Following Fisher, I use it to refer to the *really real*, the ontologically aloof or inaccessible real that is obfuscated by the constructions of reality disseminated by socio-political hegemony. In other words, as Weil would have it, the *gros animal*.

[19] In this sense, Weil's decreative mimesis of Christ's suffering somewhat resembles Lacan's idea of mysticism and feminine jouissance in that it "provide[s] access to the real…[and] shattering and ecstatic encounter…with 'that which is.'" (Hollywood, *Sensible* 194).

[20] In *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003) and many lectures, Žižek reveals a fascination with G. K. Chesterton's insight that Christ's lonely plea at the intersection of the cross's vertical and horizontal axes is essentially a plea for consolation, the end of pain, and the rescue from the tortures of the body. Therefore, Christ's plea becomes the singular moment in all world religions where God doubts himself.

[21] Thomas Carl Wall calls this a radical passivity in "Radical Passivity: Levinas, Blanchot, and Agamben" (1999) while Alessia Ricciardi uses the phrase "active passivity" in "From Decreation to Bare Life: Weil, Agamben, and the Impolitical" (2009). In "Flannery O'Connor, Simone Weil, Writing, and the Crucifixion" (2010), John Desmond contrasts Weil's passivity of decreative waiting with O'Connor's emphasis on "the need to work steadily and not wait passively for the Holy Spirit to inspire" (38).

[22] The issue of nonhumans will become a greater focus in forthcoming chapters, but metaxu may even suggest a short-circuiting of the hierarchal demands of such statements as: "Même si on pouvait être comme Dieu, il vaudrait mieux être de la boue qui obéit à Dieu" (*PG* 92).

[23] See especially Irigaray's *I Love to You* (1990).

[24] Arthur Wills translates them as "earthly blessings" and "steppingstone[s]" (*GG* 202).

[25] This will be the focus of Chapter 4's comparison of Weil with Octavia Butler.

[26] Rather than biblical clay or Herbert's dust, Weil's "boue" is the lowest and most profane substance which, although lacking in the ontological stability of form or composition, still retains its connection to the divine. This is just one of the many instances in which Weil's religiosity gives way to a neo-Platonic, gnostic, even alchemical dimension.

[27] Although Weil's eating disorder is partially what killed her, Kraus positions Weil's anorexic decreation as a strategy shared by certain artists in the attempt to attain limit-experiences and reach altered states of consciousness.

[28] Morton would describe this as an entity so massively distributed that it cannot be grasped empirically, but nevertheless receives articulation into an uncanny thinkable form (i.e. the Internet, global warming, the human species, etc.).

[29] In her short reflection, "Zeus et Prométhée" (1942), Weil translates this as "Par la souffrance la connaissance" (43) and describes it as "la doctrine enseignée aux initiés des mystère" (44).

[30] This is to be found only in the two-volume translation by Arthur Wills and not in Plon's original publication nor the *Oeuvres* published by Gallimard.

[31] In *Work on Myth* (1979), Blumenberg offers the example of when early humans left the jungle for the savannah and no longer fit any biological niche. This "*absolutism of reality*" (7) refers to humanity's anxiety in the face of its powerlessness, and so the human becomes a symbolic animal (*animal symbolicum*) in order to cope with its dread. Myth translates or rationalizes anxiety into fear, that is, into concrete dangers and problems that can be faced. Therefore, Blumenberg argues, to argue that humanity is free of myth is equal to saying that humanity is free of all its biological and existential dangers. I would add that a philosophical or literary return to myth can actually revive the importance of fear as a necessary affective response to one's surroundings, especially in a time of global capitalism that depends upon ecological disaster, racial violence, and the oppressive forces of subaltern labour.

[32] In addition to the writers featured within these pages, one might also compare texts as diverse as Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969); Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1972); Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979); Kathy Acker's *Eurydice in the Underworld* (1997); Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard's *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (2006); and Ursula Le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008).

[33] As a title, it also points to the clever subversion of an imposed taxonomic logic designed to contain the unstable quality of myth. Adorno and Horkheimer contrast the mythic with the "Homeric spirit [that] takes over and 'organizes' the myths, [and through this strategy] comes into contradiction with them" (35). As opposed to Homer, who collapses the restless plurality of myth into the unified principle of the hero narrative (*Odyssey*, *Iliad*), Ovid's title retains impermanence and the instability of that which appears whole.

[34] Similarly, in *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1966), Altizer describes God as "a forward-moving process of kenotic metamorphosis" (91).

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[35] For three examples of lethetic reading, see Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942); Kafka's "Prometheus" (*c.* 1918); and Roberto Calasso's *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (1988).

[36] Begun in 1940 and never finished, Weil's tragedy, *Venice sauvée*, was published in as complete a manner as possible in Gallimard's *Poèmes, suivis de Venise sauvée*.

[37] This will become the critical sentiment by which Carson links Weil to Sappho.

[38] Much has been made of Weil's life-long suffering, her debilitating headaches, her self-starvation, her commitment to manual labour, and her willingness to join the front lines of WWII as a nurse. As such, despite Hollywood's claim that Weil was a sadist (*Sensible Ecstasy* 309), it is unfair to align her mysticism with "self-indulgence and escapism from the demands of history" (*Sensible Ecstasy* 79).

[39] This story is related in *Attente de Dieu*.

[40] In Robert Eggers' film, *The Lighthouse* (2019), the most successful recent adaptation of the Promethean myth, the liver-eating seagulls are necessary to the Titan's punishment. As creatures for whom the entrails of the hero are claimed as a just reward, they are integral to both the psychic downfall depicted in the film and the manner in which the boundary between the noumenal and the creaturely is altogether nonexistent.

CHAPTER 2

Pacts Between Men and Lions: The *Iliad* and *Blood Meridian*

> Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away. In this work, at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded, by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to. For those dreamers who considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past, the *Iliad* could appear as an historical document; for others, whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, today as yesterday, at the very center of human history, the *Iliad* is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors.
>
> Simone Weil, "The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force"

> It makes no difference what men think of war, said the judge. War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him.… Seen so, war is the truest form of divination. It is the testing of one's will and the will of another within that larger will which … binds them.… War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is God.
>
> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

In her "Autobiographie spirituelle," Weil explains that because of her visionary experiences, she began to feel that "Platon est un mystique, que toute l'*Iliade* est baignée de lumière chrétienne, et que Dionysos et Osiris sont d'une certaine manière le Christ lui-même; et mon amour en a été redoublé" (*AD* 38). One's mystical experience is inevitably to be coded in the symbology of one's spiritual beliefs, but according to her *Cahiers*, Weil began planning an essay on the *Iliad* as early as 1938, predating the mystical experience narrated in *La Connaissance surnaturelle*. Therefore, the conversion to which she invites the likes of Homer and Dionysus occurs late in her career and is indicative of a Christianity with a pluralistic and open-ended textual identity. This chapter argues that Weil's "L'*Iliade,* ou le poème de la force" represents a sorely neglected contribution to her writings on religion and mysticism, but also the literary influence from which decreation and metaxu may even germinate. Appearing in two parts in the December 1940 and January 1941 issues of *Cahiers du Sud*, "L'*Iliade*" was

completed in Marseilles after Weil had escaped the Nazi occupation of Paris. The essay offers a condemnation of Homeric heroism and a fearful polemic against the powers that believe they can control violence without being utterly transformed. In this chapter, I use the adjectival metaxic to describe any instance of metamorphosis that complicates the theodicy involved in Weil's articulation of such transformation; Weil's "L'*Iliade*" presents specific kinds of bodily and spiritual transfigurations that are symptomatic of a violence that destroys while eliminating the possibility for regeneration.

Rather than celebrating the courage and valour of war, the central argument of "L'*Iliade*" is that "force" is "[l]e vrai héros, le vrai sujet, le centre" (*IP* 11) of the epic. Following Lukács's notion that "[t]he novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88), I argue that McCarthy's, *Blood Meridian*, is an Americanized re-writing of Weilian force and a novelistic epic in which the Homeric "lumière chrétienne" (*AD* 38) risks being eclipsed by the colonial powers that act as its torch-bearers. The *Iliad* straddles the line between myth and nation-founding literary text, not simply by the region that would one day become Greece, but by a Western form of nationalism that discerns its own masculinist militarism reflected in the *Iliad*'s heroic poetry. Set during the conquest of Indigenous territories in the immediate aftermath of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), *Blood Meridian* reappraises America's history as connected to a violent religious and mythical legacy brought to its shores as part of a formidable imperialistic arsenal. By outlining how the misappropriation of force turns both victim and victor into a mere *thing*, Weil's essay on the *Iliad* promotes a reading of *Blood Meridian*, and perhaps other texts about violence and war, as critiques of a multifaceted transgression against the divine.

This chapter is divided into two parts, the first of which presents a theorization of metaxu's relationship to violence and sacrality through Weil's "L' *Iliade*." As the first literary

analysis of metaxu in relation to this essay, it may serve as an original contribution to Weilian scholarship even removed from the second half of this chapter. "L*'Iliade*" might approach WWII through a 2500-year-old poem, but the ways in which a metaxic metamorphosis becomes operative in Weil's essay is prescient of more contemporary philosophical approaches. Weil's anxieties about dehumanization and objectification will be used to pressure the *Iliad*'s treatment of nonhuman or objectified beings. Instrumental here will be Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter and Anat Pick's Weil-inspired work in animal studies, through which I will situate Weil as a thinker who anticipated trends in feminist materialism as well as certain iterations of the so-called "nonhuman turn." This re-evaluation is especially concerned with Weil's representation of the power relations between men, women, and slaves, as well as Helen's disappearance from the centre of the poem. I argue that Weil's philosophy is partly de-anthropocentric in that she expands the confines of human subjectivity to locate a space of consciousness between the human and the divine. Weil's consideration of violence and its relationship to demarcating the space between the sacred and profane will be examined alongside Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" and Agamben's *homo sacer*, a concept that I will flesh out through a reading of both "L'*Iliade*" and *Blood Meridian*. In Weil's estimation, the soul-destroying violence of Homer's poem offers a stark mirror for the military and ethical crises that defined WWII, especially in its vivid descriptions of the displacement of the human subject and the threat of social collapse through the hubristic attempt to control violence. She turns to the *Iliad* as if to suggest that the grand narratives of religion, myth, and human progress have actually *not* completely failed, insofar as they were always narratives of cultural rupture, ungrounding, even annihilation.

Similarly, the second part of this chapter investigates *Blood Meridian* as a return to myth, in this case the *Iliad*, that bridges late capitalist instrumentality and dehumanization with

the white supremacist hordes that overran Indigenous territories and peoples for the sake of colonial empire a century and a half earlier along the Mexican border. Politically, this is a tactic of racial genocide that continues in various forms unto the present day. Mythically, this is narrated through the tropes of a biblical apocalypse that accentuates the horror of colonial violence, while yet privileging a Eurocentric Christian framework. In its fusion of Homeric and Christian myths, it is a novel illuminated by Weil's essay and, by extension, underscores Weil's relevance to understanding late twentieth-century literature. If decreation involves the project of moving the self out of the way (Carson 167) so that what Weil calls "grace" might fill the decanted vacuum, the violence of Homer and McCarthy depict a botched decreation within cultural landscapes defined by a certain crisis of metaxu. The ambiguity with which Weil defines force allows it to take on semi-divine dimensions, especially through the intrusion of the Greek pantheon onto the battlefield; the gnostic mystery surrounding McCarthy's judge character complicates a setting that more adequately resembles a world in which God has died or left humanity to its own profane misery. In Weil's "L'*Iliade*" a violent and unstable force intoxicates men to the point of inhuman transformations. The members of *Blood Meridian*'s Glanton gang attempt to conjure a similar kind of violence for an imperialist project of cultural genocide. As a novel that explores the Iliadic roots that inform a national mythos, *Blood Meridian* provides a useful entry-point for the recurring examination of metamorphic, liminal, non-human or, more broadly, metaxic subjectivities that will appear throughout the next three chapters.

Part I: Weil's "L'*Iliade*" and the rosy fingers of dawn

Force, Violence, and Bare Life

In "L'*Iliade*, ou le poème de la force," Weil depicts the processes of dehumanization and objectification inherent in war as the subverted image of decreation. Rather than the displacement of the individual so that divine grace might fill the vacant self, one finds an encounter with a near-divine force that reduces the body to an objectified thing or "chose" (*IP* 11). Force enslaves those with whom it comes into contact, especially the soldiers who attempt to wield it and "devant quoi la chair des hommes se rétracte" (*IP* 11). For the soldiers of the *Iliad*, none of whom may voice the terror of adolescents thrust into battle, force is invited as the evil counterbalance to grace—that is, something that possesses them entirely, but does not quite absolve them of their responsibility. Participation in war conscripts them to force, even if they are also manipulated by the war machine of the *gros animal* and led to the slaughter with tearful pride and promises of glory. Force binds the self to the phenomenal world, thereby prompting a soldierly metamorphosis quite different than what Weil affords to the decreative mystic.[1] Weil describes force as liminal, escaping the realm of the noumenal to corrupt the battlefield by turning soldiers into mere things (*IP* 11). If the personified language of force allows it to become "[l]e vrai héros" (*IP* 11) of war, the intent is not to undermine human culpability; like the personified autonomy of Fisher's capital or the sovereignty of Benjamin's divine violence, Weil's force is something that, once unleashed, obeys its own systems of logic and relentless proliferation. Using Homer's text as an exemplar for the violence laying siege to Europe, Weil sought to illustrate how force can never be contained in a single battle, stratagem, or body.

Weil's fascination with force can be traced as far back as 1934's *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*, where force possesses a decidedly political and

economic quality, oppressing the working class through systems of labour and production that subjugate and enslave under the threat of starvation and death. These origins are understood by Irwin as the "culmination of the process by which modern industrial capitalism inverts the relationship between human beings and things" (170). The transformations into instruments of labour, of dehumanized means to capital ends, emerge as profane mirrors to decreation, defined by Weil in terms of a movement into the uncreated. Everywhere in her work there exists this doubled, mirrored movement: forced transformation from without and decreative transformation from within; force that institutional power exerts over its citizens and workers, and a natural force imbedded in all things that demands a submission to the uncreated divine. In the former, the body and soul of the worker is at stake. In that latter, the soul of the agential mystic is put at risk. For his part, Irwin is well-attuned to this mirrored aspect, "symmetrical but opposed" (59) within Weil's analysis of power. He defines "Weil's mystical spirituality … [as] seek[ing] to enact in the inner realm a transformation of the soul that in some respects corresponds to the dehumanizing metamorphosis effected on the battlefield, yet is oriented in the opposite direction: toward an 'upward' rather than a downward exit from the human condition" (58-59). One of the things that I intend to destabilize over the course of this chapter is the reliance on supposedly axiomatic binaries that both Irwin and Weil employ regarding "on the one hand … tempestuous elemental forces like 'fire, flood, wind' and on the other … 'frightened animals, trees, water,' and other forms of passive matter" (Irwin 55). Implicit within such a reading is a kind of force-centric gaze that has defined the way that Weil's essay has been interpreted, thereby perpetuating a similar form of symbolic objectification. While I do not mean to dismiss Weil's approach to force and violence as inherently dehumanizing and objectifying, I nevertheless propose a new

way of interrogating her essay that pressures the ease with which such nonhuman entities as animals and trees are reduced to passive and inert matter.

There are three main ways in which force reduces a human to a thing in the *Iliad*: the first is through the murder that transforms a person into a corpse; the second, through the theft of someone's consent or power to refuse; and the third, through the theft of someone's reason. Weil discerns force to be "ce qui fait de quinconque lui est soumis une chose" (*IP* 11). Mary McCarthy's first English translation is somewhat more interesting to consider than James P. Holoka's[2] in that she translates force as "that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing" (3). As such, it is double-natured; it is a force that one is subjected to but also the essential attribute that precipitates the transformation into an object. Weil outlines a tripartite function of "héro … sujet … centre" (*IP* 11), and it is the pluralistic "X" that resists Weil's attempts to categorize it. McCarthy's translation mimics the unnamable ineffability of Weil's "veritable Dieu, celui qui n'a pas de nom" ("Zeus et Prométhée" 45). Their ineffability is similar in that Iliadic force appears as an excess to both being and language. It is conceptually ambiguous, variously appearing as an abstract entity and a reified tool. Contaminating the realm of the profane, it destabilizes all it encounters and "l'âme humaine ne cesse pas d'y apparaître modifiée par les rapports avec la force" (*IP* 11). Force complicates the idea of metaxu insofar that it produces both metamorphosis and decreation—not decreation by way of the soul's divestment from the body, but in the body's release from the soul to return to a vibrant and creaturely matter.

Weil reads the *Iliad* as a founding document of Western culture that instills within its history the transgressive overreaching of humans who would seek to wield a violence that even the Olympian Gods are powerless to contain. If Weil's force is not isomorphic to her concept of

grace, it nevertheless resembles a noumenal power capable of entering the bodies of soldiers attempting to employ it for individual glory or political honour.[3] This idea of force bears certain similarities to Benjamin's notions of mythical and divine violence. In his essay "Critique of Violence," Benjamin distinguishes between "law-destroying" divine violence and the "lawmaking" mythic violence in opposition to the divine (297). He characterizes mythic violence as being used in the service of the state and the laws that are created to legitimize that use of violence. In Weil's "L'*Iliade*," force is akin to a law-destroying divine violence that one attempts to appropriate as law-restoring mythic violence. Weil represents it as a liminal dynamic between civilization and the divine, demonstrating a kinship with Benjamin's mythic violence, even as it sweeps through battlefields in the guise of divine beings and threatens to turn into a divine violence to the detriment of all.

Weil's ineffable force transpierces those who circulate within the militaristic networks in a corrupted version of metaxic intermediacy. There are metaphysical truths that she claims to find in Homer's verses that offer stark contrasts to the dynamics of power and violence that operate throughout Weil's Europe. It is possible that she would agree with Benjamin that the Gods who join the fight between the Trojans and the Greeks are indicative of a violent power that extends far beyond the soldiers engaged in combat. In Hitler's war, however, there are no Gods to embolden the exhausted infantry and no kings to raise swords against each other. The Greeks may regard violence as a necessary means to rescuing Helen and the pride of Agamemnon; Allied Europe may regard violence as a necessary means of stopping Germany's military campaigns. In Weil's essay, violence is a disempowering end unto itself rather than a means of obtaining power and control. Thus, even while possessed by the likes of Athena and Apollo, the soldiers are configured as the descendants of Prometheus; that is, as wielders of a

divine and transgressive force that will bring death rather than Weilian grace or the "divine justice" of Benjamin. Benjamin also notes that while mythic violence "sets boundaries, [divine violence] boundlessly destroys them: if mythical violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood" ("Critique" 297). Weilian force weaves between the mythical and the divine. Humanity attempts to employ it with law-restoring violence while lethal Gods demand the blood of expiating sacrifices.

In *Homo Sacer* (1995), Agamben acknowledges a debt to Benjamin's theory of violence, but also demonstrates an interpretive comingling of Benjamin and Weil's writings.[4] Agamben describes sovereign authority as the power of death extended from the king to a community as a whole (88). In Weil's reading of the *Iliad*, sovereign violence enacts a similar movement to the incarnated crucifixion, extending from the solitary figure of the king to all those who take up his banner. The state's monopoly on legitimized violence overflows onto the battlefield as every soldier is tasked to administer and suffer violence as a matter of honour and civic duty. The war outside of Troy's walls, however, erupts into a violence that cannot be controlled by any human power and overspills beyond the confines of the law. Similarly, Agamben describes the sovereign as the "point of indistinction" between outside and inside, law and violence, law and nature (*HS* 32). Nature and violence become linked in this context, as the medium through which law and violence become indistinct. Agamben's "point of indistinction" is possibly derived from Weil, and Alessia Ricciardi has likewise questioned whether Weil's inability to distinguish between society and nature in her analysis of force is a critical error or a prophetic observation (86). Agamben's model of indistinction is also congruent with Benjamin's in that divine violence

neither posits law nor preserves law through violence but is the dissolution of the link that sovereign violence must preserve at all costs.

Exactly what Weil means by the designation of *divine* cannot be reduced to a single interpretation, especially since the Gods of the *Iliad* can bestow men with the power of violence but are also not immune to its indiscriminate chaos. One possible reading would articulate the Gods as instruments of retribution akin to a Dantean contrapasso—a poetic justice that makes a thing of all those who would use violence against others. Weil suggests that Buddhistic Kharma and Greek retribution originate in the same sacred geometry (*IP* 22). Benjamin describes mythic violence as a "manifestation of the Gods" in their "archetypal form" (294) and the Gods of the *Iliad* become the personification of both the divine and sacred transgression; that is, the aspect of a divine power over life and death that is smuggled into anthropic war, and through this convergence, makes anthropic war problematically and paradoxically sacred. The devastation that comes at the hands of the Gods is the punishment for the state that seeks to preserve itself through the appropriation of divine force for political and nationalistic ends. As retribution for such transgression, the momentum of battle is rarely swung by human hands. As Weil asserts,

> les dieux disposent souverainement de la Victoire et de la défaite; c'est toujours eux qui provoquent les folies et les trahisons par lesquelles la paix est chaque fois empêchée; la guerre est leur affaire proper, et ils n'ont pour mobiles que le caprice at la malice. Quant aux guerriers, les comparisons qui les font apparaître, vainqueurs ou vaincus, comme des bêtes ou des choses ne peuvent faire éprouver ni admiration ni mépris, mais seulement le regret que les hommes puissent être ainsi transformés. (*IP* 38)

Rather than celebrating a protean movement into other forms of being, Weil regrets the metamorphosis of men into “bêtes” or “choses,” a form of objectification she understands as a constant threat to the stability of human subjectivity.

When Diomedes recognizes that Hector is possessed of divine force, he concedes to a superior opponent whose hand rages with a power not of his own:

> Now, again you’ve escaped your death, you dog,
>
> but a good close brush with death it was, I’d say!
>
> Now, again, your Phoebus Apollo pulls you through,
>
> the one you pray to, wading into our storm of spears.
>
> We’ll fight again—I’ll finish you off next time
>
> if one of the Gods will only urge *me* on as well. (11.425-430)[5]

Achilles repeats this exact speech to Hector at the end of Book 20 when Apollo saves him (20.508-513). However, in between these two divine rescues, Hector loses the favour of the Gods and becomes a very different kind of warrior:

> As Zeus turned things over
>
> ……………………………………….
>
> Zeus began with Hector, he made the man a coward.
>
> Hector leaping back in his chariot, swerving to fly,
>
> shouted out fresh orders— ‘Retreat, Trojans, now!”
>
> He knew that Zeus had tipped the scales against him. (16.759-766)

Those who attempt to master force for themselves, often fall out of favour with the Gods: “Zeus had given him over to his enemies now / to be defiled in the land of his own fathers” (22.475-476). Weil values Homer precisely due to this indiscriminate oscillation between favour and

abandonment. The precariousness with which one enjoys such preferential treatment creates the kind of battlefield where the divisions between victor and victim, human and nonhuman are perpetually in flux. Indeed, Weil's definition of the hero is "une chose trainee derrière un char dans la poussière" (*IP* 12).

This flux mirrors what Weil saw consuming Europe at the time of the essay's publication, but also characterizes her own fluctuating perspective as to the participatory value of war and military aggression.[6] For every passage which seems to glorify the battle, or at least prefigure the views of Fanon, who believed that the same violence that made humans into objectifying things must be appropriated in order to reclaim one's humanity (*Wretched* 37), Weil refrains from espousing Fanon's revolutionary optimism because she cannot take the side of either the Greeks or the Trojans in a righteous war against a vilified oppressor. In her reading of the *Iliad*, and despite her vociferous criticism of Nazism, she is less interested in causes than the effects of a violence which withholds the power of reflection, and consequently any appeal to justice or prudence.[7] The soldiers of Weil's essay abandon any recourse to reason and misinterpret their possession by violent force as a kind of invincibility. "[I]ls ne considèrent pas leur propre force comme une quantité limitée, ni leurs rapports avec autrui comme un équilibre entre forces inégales. Les autres hommes n'imposant pas à leurs mouvements ce temps d'arrêt d'où seul procèdent nos égards envers nos semblables, ils en concluent que le destin leur a donné toute licence, et aucune à leurs inférieures" (*IP* 22). Such is the fate of one who believes that the temporary sharing of his king's sovereign power grants him permanent control of a Promethean power belonging to a higher order of being.

One of the reasons Greek myth is so useful for Weil's analysis of violence is that she can position such things as force and necessity (*Anankē*) as cosmological rules to which even the Olympian deities are bound and unable to control.

> Dès lors ils vont au-delà de la force dont ils disposent. Ils vont inévitablement au-delà, ignorant qu'elle est limitée. Ils sont alors livres sans recours au hasard, et les choses ne leur obéissent plus. Quelquefois le hasard les sert; d'autres fois it leur nuit; les voilà exposés nus au malheur, sans l'armure de puissance qui protégait leur âme, sans plus rien désormais qui les sépare de larmes. (*IP* 22)

The *Iliad* provides a unique problem for Weil's metaxic worldview because it is not the human ego that obstructs the decreative path to God, but warring Gods who violently possess human bodies without salvific purpose. Weil's concept of force stands opposed to both gravity and grace; like grace, it has origins that are not of this world, even though, like gravity, it roots each soldier to a debased form of materiality. And yet, as outlined in her essay, the bodies of each soldier nevertheless resemble metaxic bodies transpierced with an ephemeral and ineffable force as they are given over to the machinations of certain deities. Put differently, I am arguing that an experience of metaxu in the *Iliad* does not necessitate *what* or *whom* the transcendent other is that meets the human subject in a space of mediation. Homer's battlefield depicts this space as a crisis of metaxu, or rather, conducive to what I would designate an *impure* metaxu insofar as Bataille argues that the impure and the pure are "equally sacred" (*Accursed Share* 133).

Agamben's notion of "*homo sacer*" or "sacred man" is the individual "*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (*HS* 8). By comparison, the hubris with which the Iliadic soldier wields his permission to kill often blinds him to his own reduction to bare life and his capacity to be killed with impunity. The metaxu of "L'*Iliade*" can be located on the threshold between sacred

and profane, shifting between divinely-enchanted human, animal, and thing. Its shifting, liminal status problematizes the taxonomical reading of any valuation of life separating the human from the nonhuman within the confines of the same political body. In this sense, rather than the sovereign power who legislates who may live and who may die, the metaxic body might also serve as the counter to the objectified body of bare life. This is an especially important reframing in that, not only does it suggest a very different kind of politics, but it also rejects the hierarchical dualism of a sovereign/bare life or master/slave dynamic. The antithetical metaxic body is something that, through decreative metamorphosis, is available to the *homo sacer* as potentiality.

Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1998) can be read as an effort to rethink the link between bare life and a forced form of decreation imposed upon the *homo sacer* from the outside. Agamben declares that "the human being is what remains after the destruction of the human being, not because somewhere there is a human essence to be destroyed or saved, but because the place of the human is divided" (*Remnants* 134). Death and objectification propel the self towards a divided or fragmented type of haunting. In the very first book of the *Iliad*, Achilles is introduced when he hurls great fighters' souls down to Hades while the bodies become "carrion, feasts for the dogs and birds" (1.4-5). The particular vitalism of these carrion corpses is thus not simply "matière inerte" (*IP* 32) as Weil would suggest, but something dynamic that both nourishes and regenerates, perhaps especially when removed from the various discourses that would trace the trajectory of a soul after its separation from the body. In some ways, the marriage of soul and body that marks an individual's vitality (in a Christian reading of the *Iliad*) creates a bastion against an organic process of transformative decay that leads from the self to a source of nourishment for another being. Weil's analysis of the soldier-turned-thing as a corpse with a displaced soul renders these soldiers into a homogenous and yet hybrid swarm of

deathward bodies set apart from the heterogenous world of individuated persons. If they can be abjectly sacred in Weil's interpretation, it is because their bodies remain while their souls depart, thus presenting a tragic inversion of decreation.

The parallels between Weil's "chose," Agamben's bare life, and even Kristeva's abjection suggest an overly broad devaluation of Weil's metamorphosed and objectified thing that might encompass both corpse and sacred entity. For example, in *The Powers of Horror* (1980), Kristeva explains that "the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (4). Weil's essay does not distinguish in full between the corpse and the becoming-corpse of the soldier or "ghost army" (*BM* 46) regarding them both as human and nonhuman entities subjected to dehumanizing violence. As soon as "la guerre a rendu sensible la possibilité de mort qu'enferme chaque minute," she writes, "la pensée deviant incapable de passer d'un jour à son lendemain sans traverser l'image de la mort" (*IP* 28-29). As death infects the living, the bodies of these soldiers become coextensive spaces split between a violent vitality and a thanatotic energy directed outwards and inwards—an abjection that undermines any redemption to be found in militaristic credo or promised glory. Kristeva further describes the corpse as a "decaying body, lifeless … blurred between inanimate and the inorganic.… A body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter, it is to be excluded from God's *territory* as it is from his *speech*" (*Powers* 108). While the soldiers in the *Iliad* would conceptually align with Kristevan abjection to a large degree, they are not ostracized by divine presence. Furthermore, the soldiers are often God-driven and propelled by an ecstatic force that originates beyond them, a discrepancy that points to a Homeric structure that both naturalizes mythic violence and passes it down as mythic inheritance.

The abject bodies of "L'*Iliade*," as well as those of Kristeva, recall Durkheim's notion of a sacrality that is inherently split between the pure (angelic) and the impure (corpse). Durkheim argues that "[n]ot only is there no clear border between these two opposite kinds [of sacred] but the same object can pass from one to the other without changing nature. The impure is made from the pure, and vice-versa. The ambiguity of the sacred consists in the possibility of this transmutation" (78). Weil's "L'*Iliade*" presents an example of just such an "impure" sacrality, but through it, brings the corpse, the object, and the nonhuman into metaxic potentiality and a liminality that breaks the sacred/profane divide. Many critics of Weil would decry this as a fundamental misappropriation of her definition of the sacred; i.e., that an impure sacrality is, by definition, the absence of the sacred because the sacred cannot be impure. I would insist, however, that this is a misreading of the scope of Weil's concept of metaxu and its ability to engage with theorists as diverse as Durkheim and Kristeva. Inherited from the Greeks, Weil discusses the importance of metaxic bridges to a transcendent *elsewhere* but warns that "[n]ous ne savons pas … si l'on y passait, qui l'on trouverait de l'autre côté" ("En quoi consiste l'inspiration occitanienne?" 62). Although referring directly to metaxic encounter with the noumenal, this is the kind of ambiguous and open-ended potential for metaxu that would never be allowed in Thibon's chapter on metaxu because it leaves available other possibilities that do not fit neatly within a kataphatic Christian mystical framework.

Weil's concept of force contaminates representations of both sacred and profane, especially in terms of its interaction with a form of decreative embodiment prescient of certain new materialisms. There is, as Bennet suggests, a "potentially violent vitality intrinsic to matter" (61) and this particular vitality is a resource fought over by the decreative subject and the political and military forces that seek to make it serve its own ends. The vital materialism of

Bennett also helps shed led on the metaxic materiality of "L'*Iliade*" that is subverted through the chaotic intervention of warring divinities running amok in the physical world. In Book 5 of the *Iliad*, Apollo rescues Aeneas and whisks him away to a mountain temple so that he might be healed. In his stead, Apollo installs a phantom Aeneas so that none may be the wiser: "like Aeneas to the life, wearing his very armor" (5.19). Aeneas is mortal and susceptible to murder with impunity in the game of war, yet simultaneously revered from above and protected from harm. This phantom entity radiates traces of the human and the divine (as an instance of being-in-force and also as a becoming-corpse). Warm blood no longer flows through the entity's translucent veins, and yet this nonhuman emits the battle cry of a divine cover-up; with each strike of his murderous sword, an ontological terror unfolds wherein human life is interchangeable with a phantom simulacrum. Whether one is struck down by the real Aeneas or his phantom doppelgänger, one falls victim to the same death. To fight side-by-side with this phantom form of Aeneas is to align oneself with the replaceability of the human subject by a body that conceals a fundamental lack or absence at its core. The battlefield is therefore a space in which bodies are already, to one degree or another, hollowed out and replaced with automatons; it is a space where being is replaced with simulacra, and where the body struggles against the slippage of individuality in the face of seamless substitution.

The transformation of human soldiers into things, animals, and corpses designates an expulsion from the human world but also the measure of militaristic victory. Homer's poem becomes mythic in its retention of the nonhuman actors that a political history would leave expelled. Christological interpretations of Weil's essay tend to focus on the divine intervention within political spheres; there remains a certain vitality, however, even within the most dehumanized bodies, as these humans-turned-things can "impede or block the will and designs

of humans but also … act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett viii). Weil would likely agree with Bennett's contention that the human body is "internally heterogenous" (57) insofar as Weil's metaxic bodies manifest a spark of otherness to which its flesh becomes appendaged. This otherness is a monistic element for Weil whereas Bennett's is a pluralism, both internal and external, "populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners" and a "flesh [that] is not fully or exclusively human" (112) but is a veritable ecosystem of organisms from the human down to the microbial level. The metaxic structure within Weil's reading is one where, because of force, the movement of the human subject can be propelled both ways simultaneously—in ascendant communication with a helpful God and in the descent of a body whose openness to nonhuman "swarms" (Bennett 112) will proliferate as it decays. The soldier becomes not a mere object but a liminal creature between human and object; its veins flow with death in a way that an object cannot. Within Weil's schema, to call this liminal figure *vibrant matter* akin to Bennett's theorizing would be to understand death as providing a curious vibrancy, while returning to material bodies a (supernatural or ecstatic) porosity that Bennett does not allow. In contrast to vitalists like Henri Bergson, for whom "[t]here must exist a life principle that (sometimes) animate[s] matter, which [is] not itself material even though it t[akes] on existence only when in relation to matter" (Bennett 63-64), Weil's force manifests as the animating thanatos of material life, thereby rewiring the decreative death drive outward into bloody murder.

A version of bare life is exhibited in Weil's "L'*Iliade*" as a kind of life that is continually on the brink of death or in constant metamorphosis into a force-saturated "chose" robbed of its spirit. If being is also a being-in-language, then bare life is that which finds a spirited interlocutor

with the dead. Hector still speaks to the corpse of his victim, Patroclus, as though he were still able to receive his taunts even as his soul leaves his body:

> Why, Patroclus—
>
> why prophesy my doom, my sudden death? Who knows?—
>
> Achilles the son of sleek-haired Thetis may outrace me—
>
> struck by *my* spear first—and gasp away his life! (16.1006-1009)

In a moment of mirrored justice, Achilles speaks with the fallen Hector, demonstrating the equilibrium between soldier and corpse. Incapable of knowing about the conversation that Hector had with the corpse of his friend Patroclus, he "taunted Hector's body, dead as he was, 'Die, die! / For my own death, I'll meet it freely—whenever Zeus / and the other deathless Gods would like to bring it on" (22.430-432). In speaking to the dead Patroclus, Hector becomes an interlocutor for Achilles at the moment of his own death. Perhaps because he is the only soldier incapable of cruelty (*IP* 31) or because, as Madeline Miller suggests in *The Song of Achilles* (2011), he is the embodiment of an erotic energy in opposition to war's unbridled violence, the death-cloaked Patroclus will serve as the poem's defining example of the body whose sacrality is consummated through ritualized mourning: "Then all night long, ringing the great runner Achilles, / Myrmidon fighters mourned and raised Patroclus' dirge" (18.413-414).

Dehumanization and the Centre that Cannot Hold

In 1937, Weil described Helen as the centre of Homer's poem. In 1939, however, the centre can no longer hold, and Weil pivots to introduce a nonhuman "force" as the *Iliad*'s primary subject (*IP* 11). Towards the end of "L'*Iliade*," Weil decides that it is Patroclus, not Helen, "qui d'une certaine manière se trouve au centre de poème" (*IP* 31). Unlike Miller, this

shift in perspective does not address the potential for a queer love story at the core of the Western literary imagination; rather, this shift is commensurate with a patriarchal militarism that ignores any pretense that the story might include a woman even as its displaced centre. I will return to the displacement of Helen momentarily, but this shift alone should cause concern for readers who position Weil's essay against the patriarchal structuring of her meditations on Christianity.

Patroclus becomes the figure whose essence cannot be exhausted or captured in a totalizing taxonomy. If one posits his body as "sacred," it is both pure and impure, as well as a metaxic intermediary between each. Just as the Myrmidons encircle the heroic Achilles in the ritual to consecrate death, each army encircles that which is removed from it, investing it with symbolic power. To put it simply, the way that Achilles and the Achaeans mourn over the death of Patroclus and sing dirges into the night for his solitary loss demonstrates that, even in this transformation into a corpse, all things are *not* equal, and some are imbued with great affective force. The reverence that transforms the dead companion into a symbolic hero also seeks to recuperate the impure transition from spirit to corpse that follows the pattern of Christ's incarnation. This ritual pervades the battle, or rather, the battle functions ritualistically as a continuous re-enactment of the cyclical movement from sacred (force) to profane (corpse). Quite elegantly, Weil theorizes that the art of war "n'est que l'art de provoquer de tells transformations" (*IP* 33). Herein lies one of the principle truths that remains unreconciled in any strictly Christological reading of Weil's essay; despite her avowed mystical experience, spirituality never ceased to be an aesthetics of metamorphosis in her writing. If the *Iliad* is Christological, it is because both war and Christianity share the same art, that of transforming the profane into the sacred.

Since force is, for Weil, the unnamable X that exceeds even language's power to control it, the battles frequently take place in the metaphorical space of figurative metamorphosis. Book 5 of the *Iliad* offers a telling of example of Diomedes's transfiguration once beset by force:

> down the plain he stormed like a stream in spate,
> a routing winter torrent sweeping away the dikes:
> the tight piled dikes can't hold it back any longer,
> banks shoring the blooming vineyards cannot curb its course—
> a flash flood bursts as the rains from Zeus pour down their power,
> acre on acre the well-dug work of farmers crumbling under it—
> so under Tydides' force the Trojan columns panicked now… (5.93-102)

Only a short time later, Diomedes attacks in the form of a lion:

> Now, long ablaze as he was to fight the Trojans,
> triple the fury seized him—claw-mad as a lion
> some shepherd tending woolly flocks in the field
> has just grazed, a lion leaping into the fold,
> but he hasn't killed him, only spurred his strength
> and helpless to beat him off the man scurries for shelter,
> leaving his flocks panicked, lost as the rampaging beast
> mauls them thick-and-fast, piling corpse on corpse
> and in one furious bound clears the fenced yard—
> so raging Diomedes mauled the Trojans. (5.150-159)

In this instance of metamorphic fluidity, Diomedes displays the crushing extent of the displacement or rupture of a singular identity. Put differently, Diomedes attacks as a man with

glittering bronze armor; transforms into storm and raging river; back into an Argive; then into a lion; and finally, back into a man. Over and over Diomedes shifts between a divinely possessed man and another non-human figure, controlled throughout and motivated by the might of Athena.

Weil writes very little about Diomedes's possession, since this is not merely a succession of transformations into a series of degenerate things, but a progression of metaphorical transformations at the hand of a God. The metaphoricity that tries to capture each soldier's transformations resembles the manner in which mystical writing frequently stretches into the realm of the poetic in its appeal to radical modalities of being that cannot be contained in literal language. The figurative language used in the *Iliad* cannot contain this God's force, just as the body of Diomedes cannot contain it; and no anthropomorphic gaze or form can contain it either. Nowhere does Weil distinguish between this force that makes corpses of the soldiers and the divine force that makes soldiers the puppets of Gods—a taxonomical omission that further complicates the nature and role of the divine in Homer's epic. In fact, after Diomedes has murdered countless soldiers in battle, he spies Aphrodite on the battlefield and "gouge[s] her just where the wristbone joins the palm / and immortal blood came flowing quickly from the Goddess" (5.380-381). Diomedes causes Aphrodite to flee back to her mother's arms on Olympus, thereby corporealizing the deity; even if Aphrodite is not quite an objectified *thing* in this instance, she is configured as a God who fears the power of an ordinary human, toppling the very hierarchical structure that Weil's cosmology seems to support. Homer narrates Aphrodite's mother as saying: "the man who fights the Gods does not live long" (5.461). This moment can be read as the beginning of a retribution for subjecting Gods to the same metamorphic descent as humans. Aphrodite's humiliation and defeat here is a clear indication of the authority that love

has in a world that recognizes violence as a dominant power. The *Iliad* reveals a world where love cannot win because Aphrodite becomes a symbol of its weakness or its distance from the human battlefield.

In Weil's reading of the political climate of Europe through the *Iliad*, she constructs a theory of violent force that does not simply kill but destroys the spiritual bond of collective life. Through the act of war, the "material and the supernatural meet … in the reality of vulnerable bodies whose oppression is not a crime against humanity but a violation of the sacred" (Pick 49). Weil argues that the power of transforming humans into things "est double et s'exerce de deux côtés; elle pétrifie différemment, mais également, les âmes de ceux qui la subissent et de ceux qui la manient" (*IP* 32). At its root, Weil's concern with force is a concern with metamorphosis, the secret of war that the *Iliad* lays bare through a proliferation of metaphor:

> Les guerriers appraissent comme les semblables soit de l'incendie, de l'inondation, du vent, des bêtes féroces, de n'importe quelle cause aveugle de désastre, soit des animaux peureux, des arbres, de l'eau, du sable, de tout ce qui est mû par la violence des forces extérieures. Grecs et Troyens, d'un jour à l'autre, parfois d'une heure à l'autre, subissent tour à tour l'une et l'autre transmutation. (*IP* 32)

War is thus a constant state of violent transmutation. Weil does not confuse Homeric with Ovidian metamorphosis. Instead, she dehumanizes all such transformations in order to highlight the death that would otherwise be elided by a militaristic myth that would champion such metamorphoses as instances of heroic masculinity.

Nevertheless, there is a metaxic ethos evident in Weil's descriptions of metamorphosis that challenges a teleological framing towards any specific political goal. Even when a person becomes a flame or a flood, it is an entity hanging on the precipice of becoming, in the next

moment, a frightened animal. Nonhuman objects can likewise revert to human form, a reversal that only further destabilizes the stability of the human subject, whether victim or victor.

> As a lion charges cattle, calves and heifers
> browsing the deep glades and snaps their necks,
> so Tydides pitched them both from the chariot,
> gave them a mauling. (5.180-183)

Diomedes (also known by his patronymic Tydides) might become a lion, but Echemmon and Chromius undergo a symmetrical and corresponding metamorphosis into cattle and heifers. They are united in a complex relationship of metamorphic inter-reliance, of subjugating passivity and violent momentum (*IP* 32).

Weil argues that to enter into the oscillating relationship of wild animal/frightened animal is to become something nonhuman, but her argument is fundamentally problematic due to its anthropocentric simplifications of animal ontology. Weil paints with large brush strokes when constructing a human/nonhuman binary that includes animals, stones, and natural elements within the same generic classification of soulless, dehumanized beings.[8] If the metamorphosis into nonhuman entities is a perversion of the metaxic model outlined in *Pesanteur*, I would claim that this is a necessary perversion. Although Weil ascribes nonhuman beings with a species category of dehumanized object or thing, she nevertheless demands that in order to counteract the violence of force, one must recognize this animal or object as possessing value. Justice, mercy, and compassion require solidarity with those one designates as dehumanized or animalistic objects.

In Weil's "L'*Iliade*," one does not quite find a version of Bennett's nonsubjects even if its dehumanized and hybrid characters might temporarily encompass the subject position(s) of

the nonhuman. Force possesses the metamorphic power to "transformer un homme en chose … qui reste vivant. Il est vivant, il a une âme; il est pourtant une chose" (*IP* 13). Bennett, on the other hand, is interested in vibrant matter because "the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest" (ix). Weil's "L'*Iliade*" represents war as this fantasy turned against humanity itself, but how can violence be theorized if it does not produce the destruction of the human, as she suggests, but its proliferation into other bodies of vulnerability?

Even in the *Iliad*, the bodily transformation from human to nonhuman does not necessitate the dissolution of human subjectivity, but rather discloses a part of human subjectivity that is always in excess of itself—an excess that Weilian force makes manifest. This disclosure reveals the nature of this new being's relationship to sacrality and the infiltration of the phenomenal world alongside transcendental immanence. In Weil's approach to Homer, I find a similar dissolution of "the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic" (x) that Bennett tries to map in her study of vibrant matter. The battlefield itself becomes "a turbulent immanent field in which various and variable materialities collide, congeal, morph, evolve, and disintegrate" (Bennett xi). Weil, of course, rejects the conception of a human body that could provide an adequate receptacle to quell any movement of the divine. Similarly, force is by its very nature restless, and the possibility of a force-ful embodiment does not offer any consolation of a *stillness of being* for a creaturely becoming—a stillness through which Weil might distinguish a successful and decreative return.

By communing with a force that exists beyond it, the human body's liminal foundation is brought to the forefront and "a different economy of relations between animal and human"

(Agamben, *The Open* 12) is produced. For example, after Athena hears the prayers of two men, they become lions in her protection:

> Their prayers rose and Pallas Athena heard them.
>
> Once they'd appealed to Zeus' mighty daughter,
>
> into the black night they went like two lions
>
> stalking through the carnage and the corpses,
>
> through piles of armor and black pools of blood. (10.346-350)

Agamben recalls that Hobbes defines "sovereignty by means of a reference to the state in which 'man is a wolf to men' … a zone of indistinction between the human and the animal, a werewolf, a man who is transformed into a wolf and a wolf that is transformed into a man—in other words, a bandit, a *homo sacer*" (*HS* 105-106). Standing over the beaten Hector as a sovereign overlooking a sovereign, the characterization of Achilles demonstrates the state of war in the *Iliad* as one in which all sovereigns are also instances of *homo sacer*. Heedless of his victim's gasping demands, Achilles scolds Hector for losing sight of what war truly means. On the threshold of Troy, but still outside its walls, they are unmoored from its laws and the legalistic grammar that holds no referent outside its boundaries:[9]

> don't talk to me of pacts.
>
> There are no binding oaths between men and lions—
>
> wolves and lambs can enjoy no meeting of the minds—
>
> they are all bent on hating each other to the death. (22.309-312)

As I argue later in this chapter, *Blood Meridian* depicts a similar state of (dis)order where "beyond men's judgments all covenants [a]re brittle" (*BM* 106). Homer, McCarthy, and

Agamben each identify “a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion” (*HS* 105).

This framework resembles the one that Weil identifies in relation to WWII. The boundaries between soldier and monster, hero and wargus,[10] begin to crumble. Agamben warns that the “lupization of man and humanization of the wolf” is a permanent potential in a warring society “in which everyone is bare life and a *homo sacer* for everyone else” (*HS* 106). In the *Iliad*, the ceaseless transformation into nonhuman actors paradoxically naturalizes human aggression while yet distancing it from the rational, lawmaking citizen. Every instance of transformation, however, is a rupture of the law-preserving violence and the use of myth to naturalize masculinist cruelty. The bestial transformations in Homer provide a mirror for the inhuman transformations used to preserve and authorize political power. What Weil reads as a definitive human/non-human hierarchy ruptured on the European battlefield is a condemnation of the organization of human and nonhuman peoples into hierarchical systems of value in order to legitimize violence. One must first create a category of base, brutal, nonhuman peoples without rights or reason before one can legislate an individual’s proximity to this sphere of vulnerability. Weil’s essay does little to recuperate the nonhuman or the animal as figures of affliction on their own merits even if, throughout the *Iliad*, to become bestial is often synonymous with divine possession. As a text that occupies the border between myth and history, with Gods prowling the all-too-human battlefield, the *Iliad*’s role as a historical myth of militarism and Eurocentric heroism fundamentally misconstrues the role of nonhuman actors—whether natural or supernatural—to challenge the thresholds of political ontologies from within their very bodies.

In *Creaturely Poetics*, Pick is drawn to Weil's essay because it envisions a non-human entity (force) as its central hero, and her work resonates strongly with the Trojan battlefield and its state of "vulnerability as a universal mode of exposure" (5). Pick recognizes Weil's "vulnerability" as a valuable counterpart to Agamben's "exposure to death" (3) in that it disrupts the contested divide between human and animal or non-human "since the relationship between vulnerability, existence, and beauty necessarily applies across the species divide and so delivers us beyond the domain of the human" (3). *Creaturely Poetics* identifies animals as "constitut[ing] an exemplary 'state of exception' of species sovereignty" (15) in that "when it comes to animals, power operates with the fewest of obstacles" (15). The metamorphic nature of bodies in Weil's "L'*Iliade*" challenges the traditional notion of mysticism that arises through an anthropocentric theology, for mysticism involves the displacement and departure from human subjectivity. Therefore, to read force as a kind of transcendental power made immanent through violence is to de-anthropomorphize the mystical.[11] One of the reasons Pick's book is so significant for Weil studies is that it attempts to reclaim a quality that is akin to the Iliadic process of metamorphic dehumanization as a powerful strategy of agency.

In this regard, it is useful to compare Pick's reclamation of the dehumanized subject with that of Fanon, for whom dehumanization is an inevitable process of colonial subjugation, but also the state through which a community might reclaim an authentic humanization against the colonial powers that once determined its political ontology. I do not, of course, mean to suggest that Fanon believes dehumanization to be of especial value (non-colonial interference is obviously to be preferred), but his nuance provides a crucial insight into one of the more controversial arguments of Weil's essay: namely, that the individual oppressed by dehumanizing force is actually another kind of species, "un compromis entre l'homme et le cadavre" (*IP* 16).

For Fanon, employing the same descriptors as Weil, decolonization requires a symmetrical movement and the substitution of one "species" with another (*Wretched* 1). In "L'*Iliade*," something like a spiritual or ethical decolonization from force can only occur through the acts of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. The same hand that penned these arguments for such virtuous passivity, however, had also joined the Communist wing of the Durutti Column and fired a machine gun at an enemy airplane. Even Weil, therefore, understands the need for non-decreative violence when it is the only means of liberation available from a (specifically capitalist and fascist) colonizer. Similarly, Fanon views decolonization as a struggle that "transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor.… It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of [hu]man, with a new language and a new humanity" (*Wretched* 2). There are times in the *Iliad* when transformation marks the act of being "crushed to a nonessential state" but there are also moments when transformation, especially into an animal able to crush others, points to a transformation that briefly allows the soldier to float above the mortality of the war. Although they become something that cannot be crushed, they receive no outlet through which to become an actor for anything but militaristic violence.

Weil asserts that "[a]ussi impitoyablement la force écrase, aussi impitoyablement elle enivre quiconque la possède, ou croit la posséder. Personne ne la possède véritablement. Les hommes ne sont pas divisés, dans l'*Iliade*, en vaincus, en esclaves, en suppliants d'un côté, et en vainqueurs, en chefs, de l'autre" (*IP* 19). Is this equilibrium, in which all individuals are equally victimized by force, consistent with Homer's poem or is there an elision of gender and class that Fanon and Pick's mobilization of dehumanization can only partially salvage? For example, what of Achilles, who refuses to join in the war because his power to objectify his slave Briseis is taken away? Briseis is robbed of her humanity[12] and Achilles is unwilling to accept another

person's claim to his property. He thus refuses to join Agamemnon in the war, rejecting his pleas for aid like a petulant child whose toy has been stolen. The inability to contain violence does not undermine the fact that certain people have the *right to objectify*. In the *Iliad*, the contention over women as property becomes the occasion to demonstrate masculine heroism and courage, but after the war is over, does the status of women and slaves change to the same degree as the men who put down their swords?

The Grecian camps lie beyond the walls of Troy, but also beyond the wives who are left to guard the sanctity of home, love, and family—the ontic elements of metaxu "qui réchauffent et nourrissent l'âme et sans lesquels, en dehors de la sainteté, une vie *humaine* n'est pas possible" (*PG* 230). The transformations from human to nonhuman become further contextualized through Weil's pessimistic assessment of a life deprived of metaxu, especially as [p]resque toute l'*Iliade* se passe loin des bains chauds. Presque toute la vie humaine s'est toujours passé loin des bains chauds" (*IP* 12). In lamenting the distant memory of comforting warmth, as well as the displacement of Helen and Briseis, Weil depicts a violent erasure of the feminine and maternal figures that might offer a necessary counterpart for a myth whose patriarchal symbology is so permeated with death. Fanon describes the colonized subject whose (in)humanity is defined by the colonialist gaze; similarly, Helen is constructed by the male gaze and yet never seen. Her invisibility and displacement become the catalyst for the entire war.[13] This erasure sacrifices a metaxic eros for a decreative violence without salvific purpose except in those brief calming moments of reflection, prudence, and mercy towards a suppliant. As an exclusively male narrative of redemption, however, Weil recognizes a classical division of gendered bodies within her politics of metamorphosis. The suppliant is granted a redemptive return because of the systemic misogyny of a society using myths of masculine sovereignty to

justify its crimes. If Helen is still a central figure of the story, she is a dislocated centre, a victim of politicized myth in which the most prominent women are deities who fight to restore wounded male pride.

The first book of the *Iliad* concerns the battle of winged words and threats over two women: Chryses, captive and prize of Agamemnon, who must be returned to her father to quell the anger of the Gods; and beautiful Briseis, captive and prize of Achilles, who must be transferred to Agamemnon so that he can save face after losing Chryses. Women are the spoils of war, thieved and traded like currency and godly favour. The violent desecration that Weil seeks to articulate is nonetheless introduced by the circling of a ritual space in which women's intrusion is forbidden. As a mirror to hold up to the brutality of WWII, the *Iliad* provides a unique exemplar for Weil because its mythic metamorphoses are so thoroughly infused with an essentializing politics that demarcates gendered bodies with corresponding roles and spaces. Although Homer has frequently been read as glorifying masculine power and courage, Weil's iconoclastic reading shifts the focus to the debasement of human nature. The explicit marginalization of women from this violent community of men is not merely a symptom of the dehumanization that Weil locates, but rather, the inevitable result of a war that erupts into the destabilization of the domestic sphere. The clearest symbol for this disruption is the autonomous decision of Helen to follow Paris subsequently reconfigured as proprietary theft.

In Weil's writing on the *Iliad*, she reveals three possible centres: a woman (Helen), a man (Patroclus), and a nonhuman/abstract entity (force and its violent transformations). In a 1937 essay, "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie,"[14] Weil professes an adoration of the *Iliad* due to Helen's role as the central hinge upon which its narrative conflation of heaven and earth unfolds (36). Victimized and blamed for the actions of men, Helen's visibility has been

suppressed for the valorization of militaristic grandeur. Accordingly, in "L'*Iliade*," Helen becomes the absent centre of a violent hyper-masculinity masquerading as political theodicy. Helen's influence can be felt most notably in her absence, as though she is not just in flight from Greece, but from the myth's very centre. As the child of Zeus and Leda, this is the removal of a figure who embodies the (violent and patriarchal) co-existence of the divine and the earthly and thus the hierophantic possibility that the Spartans venerate. Homer writes of a war begun to avenge the loss of a body in which two forms of the sacred coalesce: the divine, and the othered femininity which has escaped at least one (Greek) patriarchal system of power that considered its control over the mobility of women to be immutable.[15] Symbolically, Helen's abandonment of her husband constitutes the destruction of Greece's ideological grounding. Helen is displaced partially due to her love of Paris, but mostly by claiming her own autonomy and a bodily desire that exceeds the boundaries imposed on her by the Achaeans. Susan Guettel Cole argues that "[l]ack of respect for the boundaries of another community was expressed in myth by lack of respect for the integrity of its women" (28).[16] As the progeny of Zeus's rape of Leda, Helen represents the monstrous interaction between God and flesh, sacred and profane, and also the horrifying justification of gendered violence that results through myth's narration of patriarchal divinities—whether Homeric or Judeo-Christian.

I consider this point to register the dangerous quality of myth, especially of a Barthesian form of myth operating in the service of a nationalism whose power derives from the implicit, but no less systematic oppression of women. For Barthes, myth is predominantly semiotic; that is to say, "a type of speech chosen by history" that attempts to naturalize its phallogocentrism (110). As a founding text of the Western imagination, the *Iliad* reveals an inherent disequilibrium at its core. Weil's reading suggests that new myths are needed—myths that give

voice to the silenced figures used as puppets in the transformation of the mythical to the political. This is why the Homeric myth is so intensely political: it is the battle to re-inscribe Helen back into the symbolic order that has been destabilized through her escape. To call her departure a "theft" is a refusal to recognize that her challenge to the rule of men has revealed the perilous and precarious replicability of the sovereign leader. For men to become objectified through the brutal unleashing of divine force is, at least partially, a retributive equilibrium in which men become the victims of an objectification they have thrust upon others.

Like Weil's "L'*Iliade*," the influence of Homer on McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is evident in a similar approach to retribution, even if it sometimes appears as a justice deferred or displaced from the myth of patriarchal virility by which America's settler colonialism justifies itself. Gone are the Olympian Gods who might rescue the weary and the faithful. As McCarthy declares elsewhere, "[t]here is no God and we are his prophets" (*The Road* 170). The catastrophic violence engendered by the Greeks refuses to grant Helen any desire that exceeds the state. Moreover, Agamemnon is not punished because he steals Briseis from Achilles but because he cannot recognize her humanity, her power to consent. The violence of *Blood Meridian* belongs to the inheritors of the *Iliad*'s brutal legacy who have refused to learn its lessons. The centre of *Blood Meridian* is both a violent Weilian force and a character known only as *the kid*—a boy whose emergence into the world comes about after the death of his mother in childbirth. The mere fact of his being alive is configured in the novel as complicity with a murder from which he can never be absolved. Like the *Iliad*, one's entry-point into this world of violence is marked by displacement: the displacement of women, of Indigenous peoples, of Gods to which one might decreate, of "bains chauds" and "un autre monde, le mode

lointain, précaire et touchant de la paix, de la famille, ce monde où chaque homme est pour ceux qui l'entourent ce qui compte le plus" (*IP* 12).

Part II: *Blood Meridian* and the evening redness of the West

The dangers of Iliadic force being construed as something divine or metaphysical are no more apparent than in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, a novel that investigates America's nation-building violence as belonging to a paradigm descended from the patriarchal militarism of Homer's poetry. As a founding document of Western culture, the *Iliad* instantiates a historical trajectory from soldiers fighting alongside Gods to the "lumière chrétienne" (*AD* 38) of Weil to colonial powers legitimizing the genocide of peoples and the theft of land as part of a divinely-authorized Manifest Destiny. Although the influence of Homer on McCarthy has not gone unnoticed,[17] Peter Josyph is the only critic who has explicitly made the connection between McCarthy's novel and Weil's "L'*Iliade*." Even Josyph, however, has never elaborated the parallels beyond a sparse paragraph in "Blood Music" (2010).[18] In this latter half of the chapter, I will therefore offer the first systematic analysis of *Blood Meridian* through a Weilian lens. More specifically, I would like to suggest that the novel might best be understood as a re-writing of Weil's "L'*Iliade*" and the construction of a national mythos that disregards the victims of force for the revised historicity of political gain and imperialistic conquest. Weil's soldiers and McCarthy's white settlers naturalize the use of such violence as a kind of divinely ordained cultural heritage. As a return to myth whose publication coincides with the emergence of neoliberalism's global dominance, the scope of *Blood Meridian* is precise in its geography but ideologically sweeping, as it highlights the manner in which racial violence, capitalism, and colonialism are inherently co-constitutive, especially throughout American history and its

treatment of Indigenous and other racialized peoples.[19] McCarthy also illustrates the problematic nature by which a kind of Weilian force can act as a metaxic intermediary that breaks open the human to what lies beyond the profane and corporeal self—even if there is no deity but a chaotic void to greet the decreated subject on the other side. The problematic link between violence and sacrality is exposed in *Blood Meridian*, and, if Weil understands the relation of the *Iliad* and the gospels to be typological, McCarthy represents a critique of the historical consequences of this enduring violence, especially as it is constructed in mythical and religious terms.

My analysis of *Blood Meridian* will be divided into 5 subsections. The first will examine the novel's relationship to Weilian force. As a re-writing of the *Iliad* for the New World, *Blood Meridian* reveals the harm in continuing with myths that foreground any kind of violent force without appropriately attributing it to its human perpetrators. Weil's essay suggests the meeting of an older tradition of divine forces coming up against a more recent tradition of personifying those forces as individual deities. In stretching this force across continents from one empire to the next, McCarthy demonstrates how both nations and peoples can absolve themselves of ethical responsibility by rooting their violent ideologies in mythical and religious principles. The second subsection of my reading will examine *Blood Meridian* as a novel in which Weilian force becomes the only form of divinity left after the very existence of God is called into question. What might happen to metaxu's transcendental bridges on stolen foreign land where God is dead or men go "to hide from God" (*BM* 44)? This novel's "howling wilderness" (*BM* 42) and the bodies that inhabit it are intermediaries between an embattled immanence and a terrifying noumenal force that looks far different than the one espoused in Weil's most kataphatic passages. The movement from a noumenal force to an metaxic body has implications that cast doubt upon that which is codified as sacred or divine. By uncovering what Sara Spurgeon calls

the "anti-myth, the dark shadow" (100) embedded within all nationalistic mythmaking, *Blood Meridian* exploits the tenability of an American myth of Western expansion that is founded through a religious teleology meant to serve a white supremacist nationalistic destiny. McCarthy's America is founded not only through gruesome attacks on Indigenous populations, but through the cultivation of foreign divinities on Indigenous soil. Whether through death or a diasporic displacement of their own God, these colonialists assert a racial theocracy as the method by which a new God might take root.[20] The third subsection complicates this reading by examining the gnostic elements within the text and the haunting of a certain sacrality that is codified against a profane immanence. By reading Weil and McCarthy together, I wish to examine the role religious mythology plays in helping to keep a Judeo-Christian God on life support by transferring the crucified body into a political body. To reverse my hermeneutic and analyze Weil's "L'*Iliade*" through *Blood Meridian* is thus to critique any potential elision of colonial violence through assigning a wholly metaphysical character to Iliadic force.

Just as Weil believed the *Iliad* to revolve around three characters (Helen, Patroclus, and force), the final two subsections offer a closer glimpse at *Blood Meridian*'s two central characters, the judge and the kid. McCarthy's novel follows the episodic events of the kid as he wanders along the Mexico-Texas border in the middle of the nineteenth century. With a conscience that is simultaneously unnurtured and corrupt, he falls in with the mercenary troop of the aptly-named Captain White and then Glanton's gang of scalp hunters—their hostilities directed to Indigenous and Mexicans alike in spite of recently signed treaties with the U.S. government. The movements of Glanton's gang are equally led by the enigmatic Judge Holden (the judge), a giant-like man who preaches the divination of war and authorizes the use of a Weilian force with ambiguous ties to the judicial system. Just as Weil warned, the commitment

to an Iliadic force consumes the Glanton gang; their marauding violence exceeds the purview of the imperialistic regimes on both sides of the border, as well as the rogue commanders of state militaries who offer a hundred dollars for each scalp. This overstepping of the legalistic sphere that governs the rules of murder introduces an anthropic violence that seeks to replace the divine but nevertheless marks them with a similar abjection. If the realm of the profane can be defined as the world of immanence that can still be contained (at least in theory) in linguistic, political, and ontological structures, McCarthy's critique of myth unfolds through the delirious attempt to wrench a sacred violence into the body and onto the land. McCarthy's America, however, is a country that relies upon the murder of those excluded by law or sacrifice, and the novel's setting mirrors Agamben's contention that the "world—insofar as it is absolutely, irreparably profane—is God" (*Coming Community* 90). The American colonial project, corrupt from the beginning, is also beset by an uncontainable force that disrupts the religious and political spheres it seeks to establish.

American Imperialism through Iliadic Force

Suspicious of honour and glory, *Blood Meridian* replaces Homer's soldiers with remnants of the Mexican-American War. After the war, they remain consumed by a force that that cannot be quelled, and so they turn their energies to eradicating the Indigenous people from newly-acquired territories. Unassimilable to the disciplinary structures of the military, but still useful to the consolidation of empire, these men recruit other mercenaries based on a simple qualification: the ability to confuse a lust for violence with a natural law.[21] After leaving home at the age of fourteen, the kid is immediately drawn into a world where subjugation to violence is all that unites "[a]ll races, all breeds" (*BM* 4). Standing over beaten men who lay defeated in the

mud, he "feels mankind itself vindicated (*BM* 4). Such is the ease through which a directionless rage becomes obedience to some obscure authority. Such is the ease through which the belief in a boy's or a nation's innocence is corrupted. Both the kid and the wayward nation that he symbolizes are eager to discover "whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man's will or whether his own heart is not another kind of clay" (*BM* 5). The kid will join a gang of men who each feel excluded from ordinary society but emboldened by the prospect of acting as the mediums through which violence and law become indistinct. This violence is unruly, excessive, ostensibly connected to the lawmaking landgrabbers, but also symbolic of the violent destruction necessary to the formation of this empire. In Weilian decreation, one turns an excess of violence inwards, mimicking a divine violence in order to sever one's attachment to the ego. No such mystical pursuit is attempted here, as the Glanton gang projects this violent excess in every direction, even against each other, seemingly cut off from their own interiority.

Though representative of the juridical order in name, at times the judge resembles the monstrous incarnation of sovereign authority, defined by Agamben (and earlier by Carl Schmitt) as the figure who is at once outside and inside the juridical order (*HS* 15).[22] The judge murders with impunity, but nevertheless clarifies that there is nothing outside the law since all law is merely an effort to contain a Weilian force that dominates the life of all humans. Shaped by such violence from birth, Glanton's men become "[e]xtra-juridical elements and personnel" willingly used by the judge as an auxiliary force of the law (Foucault, *Discipline* 22). The purpose of this juridical arm is not the rehabilitation of the criminal, but the imposition of a new social order brought about by the theft of land and its natural resources, as well as the erasure of an entire people who have been deemed morally and politically incapable of ever joining the social pact (Foucault, *Discipline* 256). If the judge makes use of Glanton's gang for the dispersal of

sovereign power[23] and the removal of Indigenous people who (even symbolically) threaten the authority of settler colonies, he also underlies how the shift from sovereign to disciplinary societies (whether theorized by Foucault or Deleuze) are rooted in genocide through the disciplinary taxonomy of bodies without souls. From a colonial perspective, these bodies cannot be rehabilitated or incorporated into the political systems that have claimed governance of the land. Or rather, they are deemed soulless so that no efforts of incorporation are necessary.

As such, the judge recognizes a juridical law descended from cosmic violence,[24] and thereby preaches of a harrowing world order in which violence functions as a divine decree. Through such a decree, white settlers build America on stolen land that is categorically foreign to Eurocentric definitions of the human and the religious, offering the ideal setting to map out the confrontation between a Judeo-Christian religiosity and a state of war in which every law might be suspended despite the pretense of treaty or boundary. Settler colonialism regards this "New World" as a kind of "state of nature in which everything is possible" (*HS* 36). The link that binds violence and law together for the creation of a new political system is grounded in an Old-World theodicy that may no longer be tenable. The men of *Blood Meridian* are not Iliadic soldiers, calling upon deities who have aided their lineage for centuries, but "alien hearts beating in the sand like pilgrims exhausted upon the face of the planet Anareta, clutched to a namelessness wheeling in the night" (*BM* 46).

Spurgeon suggests that "McCarthy has recast the lens of myth through which American history and identity is viewed, thus challenging the mythic language by which the American nation understands itself, its beliefs, and its role in the world" (105). The particular nationalistic mythopoesis involved reveals a new political order founded upon the principles of individual liberty yet dependent upon the systematic erasure of entire communities. The shocking

physicality of this violence is counter-balanced through a confrontation with a sublime immanence that is often codified as sacred. At the same time, *Blood Meridian* demonstrates how the haunting of the numinous can be read from the perspective of the warring, Iliadic, and nomadic mercenaries of the desert who are "confronted with a residual and irreducible bare life, which must be excluded and exposed to a death that no rite and no sacrifice can redeem" (*HS* 100). Ultimately, the novel chronicles the impossibility of colonialism as a redemptive narrative as well as the danger of appealing to a Weilian God of force for the legitimation of the political tactics of genocide. *Blood Meridian* provides a critique of nation-building through the deluded employment of a divine force that inevitably renders law and violence indistinct.

The continual appearance and disappearance of the judge points to the curious way that the Glanton gang operates both outside and inside the juridical order, even as the grotesque characteristics of the judge call into question whether any acts of barbarity are too excessive for this juridical sphere. Nevertheless, as subjects removed from the juridico-ontological categories of so-called civilized communality, it is possible to align the Glanton gang with Kristeva's notion of the abject. The novel's gory violence is only the outward excrescence of an abjection that is far more profound in that it is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not represent borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar […] the killer who claims he is a saviour" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). If their proximity to Kristevan abjection threatens to redeem them, it is only insofar as the gang casts light on the true nature of the imperialistic system from which they are engendered and subsequently disowned. The judge is equally authoritarian and fascistic, exposing the corruption at the heart of a system of power that is parasitically propped up by that which *should* constitute its destruction, but is in actuality the secret devil's bargain

that constitutes its very authority. The judge, then, resembles a domesticated monster, an abject sovereign for an imperialist fantasy that requires one. Hairless like a baby, he is also ageless, a kind of demi-God whose closest parallel in the *Iliad* is Achilles; the victor of every battle and stratagem, his motives are as much his own as the military regime to which he is tenuously connected. He revels in the Iliadic counter-zone of battle that the juridical order must employ for its own stability. Within this sphere, different modalities of being are both inevitable and tolerated, even when they impinge upon the community at large. Within this space, paradoxically both outside and inside political jurisdiction (like theodically-codified sin and evil), the judge constructs alternate systems of belief, logic, science, and language to which the kid stands as pupil.

When the judge issues his famous speech on the nature of God as war, he concludes his sermon with the pronouncement that "War is God" (*BM* 249) as though everything that came before it can be summed up by this single claim. Yet, the judge also specifies that "war is the truest form of divination … War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence" (*BM* 249). War is thus not only God, but also game and divination. More specifically, it is the *truest* form, an addition that is suspicious of those who would wrestle this Heraclitan *logos* to serve theologies of love or justice. This is "a land of some other order … whose true geology [is] not stone but fear" (*BM* 47). The judge offers his followers the sermon that Weil thought was unspoken in the *Iliad*. In a certain sense, the judge can be seen speaking directly to Weil, removing the consolation that is implicit within a critique of force that believes there might be a different form that the divine could take or that there could ever be a different form of divination. Weil warns that in a world ruled by force, "aucune fiction réconfortante vienne l'altérer, aucune immortalité consolatrice" (*IP* 12). In the *Iliad*, divine possession is

fleeting, and only temporarily can one wield force before succumbing to death. McCarthy's judge, however, appears as either the figure who is ignorant of the damage he does or the man who refuses to be reduced to Weil's prophecies, challenging the consoling fiction of any human justice that would see Weil's warnings carried out.

The judge's view recalls Thomas J. J. Altizer's belief that "[o]nce the transcendent realm has lost every sign of its original redemptive power, then it must become manifest as a negative or demonic transcendence" (121). Similarly, in the same interview in which Josyph and Harold Bloom discuss Weilian force, Bloom admits that the judge is "a negative theologian of violence" ("Tragic Ecstasy" 88). If the metaxic spaces of home and community provide transcendental bridges in a theology that understands God as love and light, the Indigenous territories usurped by violent settlers operate as a kind of "negative or demonic" metaxu. The boundaries of such a battlefield are never so clearly demarcated, however, and its violence seeps into every town and village, something Homer's spatial order never fully permits. To the judge, commitment to divine violence and to putting oneself "at hazard" (*BM* 249) in the name of this force, is the only form of decreation available. In Weil's "L'*Iliade*," force threads its way through the terrestrial, the Olympian, and the chthonic, carrying with it an unruly residue of the supernatural while mortal men attempt to wield it with futility. Towards the end of McCarthy's novel, the kid, no stranger to violence and death, tells his life story to a mummified old woman, "dead in that place for years" (*BM* 315). The divide between life and death has become so blurred as to be unrecognizable. The soldiers of the *Iliad* similarly communicate with their dead and, like Hector communicating with the corpse of Patroclus, the kid has been reduced to such abjection over the course of his journey that he speaks to this old woman as though to a peer.

Re-historicized as a hybrid of Iliadic myth and Weil's "lumière chrétienne" (*AD* 38), colonial America also usurps the role of a fallen or absent God through the manipulation of a Weilian force. Consequently, a new relationship is formed between the political and the sacred that McCarthy confronts by pushing the human to its very conceptual limit. Spurgeon helpfully reflects on this deviant sacrality created for the imperialist cause:

> Once the prey of the sacred hunter becomes human, imperialism itself becomes a sacred act, mythically justified by the very narrative on which it depends […T]he judge will turn the old myth on its head, pervert it and cannibalize it. He leads the scalphunters in acts that violate the relationship contained within the sacred hunter myth while still seeming to follow its internal rules, in the same way the Black Mass was seen as an inversion of a sacred ritual and indeed depended on the sacred nature of the original for its own symbolic power. (93)

Imperialist forces configure murder and displacement as sacred ritual. The Mennonite warns Captain White's militia against believing themselves to be sacred hunters, and thus not to travel as renegades through Mexico because the "wrath of God lies sleeping. It was hid a millin years before men and only men have power to wake it. Hell aint half full. Hear me! Ye carry war of a madman's making onto a foreign land. Ye'll wake more than the dogs" (*BM* 40). To this man who believes in a sleeping rather than absent God, what lies buried is a divine "wrath" that will be awoken by the violence of imperialist expansionism. As Mark Taylor reflects, "one identifies with the God through which one hopes to transcend the very animal instincts that issue in sacrificial violence. As eros and thanatos mingle in spilt blood, agent and victim become one" (*Mystic Bones* 20). As such, a Weilian God of force or war is the divinity implicated in these

killings as the only God that could unite “agent and victim” by making victims of all who cross its path.

If war is God, however, Glanton’s gang members are adherents to a demonic sacrality that makes all those they encounter the victims of “a violence that exceeds the sphere both of law and sacrifice” (*HS* 86). As if by prophetic warning for those who dabble in the dark arts, the judge is the only devotee who survives Weil’s geometry of retribution (*IP* 22). When the judge appears in the novel for the second time, he rides “foremost among” (*BM* 79) a group of wild men who resemble the same riders that decimated the renegade band of soldiers led by Captain White. This militia brandish the kind of oversized weapons that ogres would carry had they invented gunpowder:

> [T]he trappings of their horses fashioned out of human skin and their bridles woven up from human hair and decorated with human teeth and the riders wearing … necklaces of dried and blackened human ears and the horses rawlooking and wild in the eye and their teeth bared like feral dogs and riding also in the company a number of halfnaked savages reeling in the saddle, dangerous, filthy, brutal, the whole like a visitation from some heathen land where they and others like them fed on human flesh. (*BM* 78)

McCarthy introduces Glanton’s gang with the same blend of racialized horror and Dantean imagery that he has previously used to describe the desert’s Indigenous tribes, as though these terrifying costumes are markers of place rather than culture. The contract for scalps boasted by this horde legitimizes their purpose while forcing colonial powers to claim this hell-on-hooves as its own. By association, McCarthy reveals an economy that is an honest amalgam of industrial capitalism and agrarian slavery in that it is based on the very flesh of humans—more

specifically, on dehumanized bodies which serve as the culmination and symbolic emblem of the indistinction of human and beast at the moment of violent death.

It is one thing for Weil to claim that force has victims on both sides, but the fate of the objectified white soldier who embraces this force is not analogous to the victims of their genocidal acts. McCarthy depicts what it might look like if an army of racialized natives were to mirror its white counterpart. Agents of a vengeful fury, they are treated as abject beings that exist outside of the legislated normality of colonial existence: “All the horsemen’s faces gaudy and grotesque with daubings like a company of mounted clowns, death hilarious, all howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of Christian reckoning” (*BM* 53). The only verbal response from any of the forty-three Americans who witness the approach of this great fleet of death is “[o]h my God” (*BM* 53)—an empty rhetorical gesture or an appeal to a God that has little authority here. Perhaps in a heavy-handedness that satirizes the semiotic sign, the words come from Captain White. Unlike the gods of Olympus, chthonic forces erupt from the boundaries that should ordinarily contain them. This is not a battle where gods fight on the sides of men, but a battle where white men depict others as demonic and are confused why their racism is not justified by divine salvation.

Blood Meridian is a novel in which intense racism is codified as ontological taxonomy, and where the Indigenous people of the Americas are thrust into the sphere of the animal and the demonic in order for settler colonialists to assert their own onto-political structures. Subsequently, the divisions between animal and the human are so fluid that this taxonomical project becomes possible. This environment, however, also contains a fluidity that opens up these bodies to noumenal and demonic forces. Although McCarthy’s representations are racial distortions, he also refuses to override completely Weil’s theological underpinnings, viewing

them as inseparable to colonial epistemologies and the construction of racialized otherness. The bodies of *Blood Meridian* disrupt the divisions between Indigenous, black, white, and animal. The Comanche tribe that massacres Captain White and his men is racialized in the trappings of hell, but it is a hell with specific markers of European nightmares. Otherness is inscribed with a hybridity that terrorizes the monological, monotheistic imagination: “A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform … and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground” (*BM* 52). The descriptions of the Comanche are horrifically surreal in their hyperbole, as though centuries of violent codification imposed upon Indigenous peoples were condensed into a single grotesque army that appropriated racist symbolism as their very uniform in order to rise up against a colonial imaginary.

In McCarthy’s representations of Indigenous bodies, especially those engaged in retributive battle, the influence of Fanon looms large. As Fanon remarks at the outset of *Wretched*, “decolonization is always a violent event” (1) and must always involve a decolonial commitment to violence that is at least equal to that of colonial oppression. Fanon explains that “the violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity.… Violence among the colonized will spread in proportion to the violence exerted by the colonial regime” (*Wretched* 46). In *Blood Meridian*, the reciprocal decolonial violence is illustrated by the Comanche who wear “pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets … one in the armor of a spanish conquistador” (*BM* 52), reducing the imperialist fantasy to a monstrous delusion. Like Weilian force that goes

unchecked, European uniforms return in rags, stretched over the bodies of enemy warriors like carnival costumes to reveal an indiscriminate force that has breached its container. As though in answer to the divine justification for colonial violence, they leave Captain White's men "tonsured to the bone" like "monks in the bloodslaked dust" (*BM* 54).

Towards the end of the novel, remnants of Glanton's gang are saved by the Diegueño tribe whose ancestral land has been bifurcated by the Mexican-American border.

> [They] eked a desperate living from that land and they knew that nothing excepting some savage pursuit could drive men to such plight and they watched each day for that thing to gather itself out of its terrible incubation in the house of the sun and muster along the edge of the eastern world and whether it be armies or plague or pestilence or something altogether unspeakable they waited with a strange equanimity. (*BM* 301)

Although labeled as "savages" and painted spirits, they receive less description than all the other tribes that are mentioned before them, as though the imperialistic white gaze refuses to demean them with exoticized representations. What replaces the objectification of these bodies is instead a description of their salvific actions. They "wait," not in the manner of decreative mystics who wish to be rescued from affliction, but as instruments of grace, offering the mercy of which the settlers seem incapable, and suggesting a kind of intermediary role between white settlers and Indigenous communities. Metaxic intermediation between beings is always the formation of a relationship set against the one imposed upon it. It is constituted by a breaking away, a liberation in Fanon's parlance, and a metaxic relationality in Weil's. This relationality constitutes the formation of an exchange—culturally, ethically, even, perhaps, spiritually—but a salvation offered to the settlers from the Diegueño, rather than a decolonial reconciliation won by the

Diegueño. The nature of this exchange is a testament to how a metaxic intermediation is never an idyllic or apolitical escape from the power relations to which it is bound.

When God rides off into the sunset

Within Weil's "L'*Iliade*," a concerted effort is presented to demarcate the sacred and the profane by a clear topographical and taxonomical barrier. All those who enter the battlefield can be killed with impunity when they open themselves to the machinations of force. Their bodies transfigure, become hybrid, even potentially another species—"un compromis entre l'homme et le cadavre" (*BM* 16) as argued by Weil (and later Fanon). Their bodies, and the space of battle itself, become the metaxic conduits through which an abstract force becomes immanent. By contrast, *Blood Meridian* is replete with turbulent and shifting boundaries, both of land and the bodies of its inhabitants. The drawing of these boundaries is presented as the explicit project of Manifest Destiny. If McCarthy's novel is a revision of the *Iliad's* mythopoesis, of the founding of a nation through the conquering of a foreign land and its people through Iliadic force, it is a version of Manifest Destiny that is inscribed with a radical Christianity for which the true meaning of the Fall is the banishment from any world where the sacred could exist apart from the profane. If the judge is to be understood as the dark priest of such a religion, it is partly through a reverence for the power and mystery of the desert. To approach the landscape of a desert with attentive respect, proclaims Mark Taylor, "is to discover that the sacred is not elsewhere but is always in our midst" (*Mystic Bones* 36).

The power of the desert in *Blood Meridian*, however, is apocalyptic; the etymological roots of the term apocalypse define it as a *revelation* and it is in this sense that the violence of the novel builds to its revelatory crescendo, revealing the immanence of that which is sacred, other,

and heterogenous. The novel can be read as a post-lapsarian colonial myth after the death of God and the expulsion from a paradisal Eden that can no longer be salvaged. Although emerging out of loss, death, and trauma, the settlers are swindled by a narrative of potential hope in that it "points the way to a new epiphany of the Word—a Word that has died in its original and sacred form, and is now manifest only at the center of the radical profane" (Altizer 51).[25] Put another way, *Blood Meridian* depicts a fallen world, or rather, the migration of a fallen Christianity. The sacred is a constant metamorphosis into the profane as organized by death. In this sense, it is also the reversal of the movement of metaxu, that is, the constant metamorphosis of the profane into the sacred as organized by decreation.

Towards the end of the novel, the judge and his mute and mentally ill partner stalk the kid and his companion, Tobin. As the men in Glanton's posse fade from the narrative, the kid and judge face off as mirrored adversaries. If this confrontation is expected, a symmetry throughout the desert also establishes the judge's companion as the counterpart of Tobin, the ex-priest. The slobbering man, whose cage was burned and who was once reduced to a freakshow attraction by his brother, undergoes a symbolic baptism upon his release. The cage that burns in the flames becomes symmetrically linked to the church that no longer houses the priest. The church can no longer be a source of sanctity, and so the ex-priest leaves to follow God on his descent into the sinful world of the profane. As an obsolete fool's cage, the novel's churches are mostly depicted in scenes of burnt out and derelict chapels inhabited by predatory animals.

The narrator recounts the events of a certain day during which "[m]any of the people had been running toward the church where they knelt clutching the altar and from this refuge they were dragged howling one by one and one by one they were slain and scalped in the chancel floor" (*BM* 181). The church offers no safe haven from the merciless murder of women and

children and the "false promises of organized religion are exposed through the repeated motif of desecrated religious symbols" (Mundik 86). One church, for example, contains the desecration of a *pietà,* its "carved stone Virgin [holding] in her arms a headless child" (*BM* 27). As if to reverse the image, the praying old corpse to which the kid confesses enacts a spiritual conversion as the kid becomes the Weilian suppliant who seeks to return from the clutches of violence to a more righteous path. As Manuel Broncano emphasizes, this *pietà*, shrouded in the symbols of the Virgin of Guadalupe, is "nothing more than an empty shell, a signifier devoid of a signified" (*BM* 42). These empty signifiers appear throughout *Blood Meridian*, but a haunted loss clings to these figures as they become part of an iconography that radiates "the void beyond life [that] seemed to swallow up … soul[s]" (*BM* 65). The Virgin of the *pietà* cries for the loss of her child, but also for God's second death.[26] Although the masochistic masculinity of McCarthy's novel rejects a feminine sacrality, the *pietà* also presents an awareness that the proliferation of the sacred after Christ's death renders the mother's body open to this tragic responsibility. The tears of McCarthy's *pietà* are shed in prophetic fear for what America has become.

Through the appropriation of a violent religiosity and esoteric materialism, the judge propagates a patriarchal militarism that, like the Iliadic myth that it mirrors, is also a narrative of displaced women. For all the racial violence subjected to nonwhite male bodies, women hardly enter the narrative at all, beginning with the deceased mother of the kid on the novel's first page. The kid's sister has long since abandoned her family; there is no indication as to where she is, only the implication that she will never return. Also set on the U.S.-Mexico border, McCarthy published *No Country for Old Men* in 2005, but *Blood Meridian* begins like a *No Country for Women* and what ensues is the story of a nation predicated on "mindless violence" (*BM* 3), mirrored through the rootless detachment of the young kid and the removal of women from any

generative role. The becoming-divine professed by the judge is accordingly presented as a monstrous becoming because it cannot include women. This is not to exclude them from the game of war; indeed, for Weil, women are often its greatest victims. The most unfortunate fate in "L'*Iliade*" is reserved for those women—"[l]a vierge, fille d'un prêtre, … [l]a jeune femme, la jeune mère, épouse du prince" (*IP* 16)—who are born into an intersectional combination of patriarchy and force that grants "aucun jeu, aucun vide, aucun champ libre pour rien qui vienne d'eux-mêmes" (*IP* 15-16). In Weil's account, this objectification is deeply problematic, as she describes a life of enslavement in some of the same language that, elsewhere in her writing, is used to metaphorically situate one's proper orientation to God.[27] Even if such a metaphor was not abhorrent, what kind of deity rests atop such a hierarchical structure?

It is no coincidence that the judge first appears in the novel to judge Reverend Green, passing sentence on a man of God without any real knowledge of him. In this sense, the first adjudication of the judge concerns the divine and its place in the human world. He fabricates the lie that the reverend has engaged in "congress with a goat" (*BM* 7), painting the image of a vile form of bestiality in the minds of the congregation. The subtext of the crime, of course, is a representative of God who fornicates with an incarnation of Satan. As such, the scene depicts a revival ceremony that is torn apart by the enraged intermingling of the heavenly, the earthly, and the damned. The moment captures a monstrous inversion of the message that all revivalist preachers rely on—the interpenetration of these three domains by love. The reverend's purported carnal act also provides a perverse symmetry to Christian theology; a subverted inversion that will mobilize the devout more viscerally than its loving counterpart.

Texas became a part of the United States a year before Reverend Green's denouncement, which situates the historical moment as a crisis of religiosity into which the nation is born. The

reverend must be denounced because he attempts to translate an esoteric mystery into an exoteric truth. Almost paradoxically, the thick canvas walls of his tent raise a barrier against the sacred immanence the judge finds in the desert. The judge brings mob violence into the revival, unleashing rebellion against the Christian God and his servant by converting the congregation into instruments of a dark form of Weilian force. Soon, the judge will issue his own sermons,

> but it was no such sermon as any man of us had ever heard before … and he pointed to that stark and solitary mountain and delivered himself of an oration to what end I know not, then or now, and he concluded with the tellin us that our mother the earth as he said was round like an egg and contained all good things within her. Then he turned and led the horse he had been ridin … and us behind him like the disciples of a new faith. (*BM* 130)

The judge overthrows the preacher as the pawn of Weil's *gros animal* in order to prepare the way for a new kind of priest, a new kind of disciple, and a new relation to the natural world and the landscape of the American frontier. Somewhat later, one of the disciples of the judge will draw his pistols and "lurch … into the street vowing to Shoot the ass off Jesus Christ, the longlegged white son of a bitch" (*BM* 171). Nick Monk has rightfully identified the judge as the avatar of European Enlightenment (83) whose "Eurocentric philosophy is alien in the landscape and anathema to it and to its peoples" (86). The judge, however, is a character that is altogether more complex in that he discloses a kind of Iliadic force that Weil believes to stretch from antiquity to the Enlightenment's ultimate culmination in WWII. In *Blood Meridian*, this larger war looming on the horizon will facilitate the judge's America becoming the ultimate victor of the post-war reorganization of power and the reconsolidation of capital. Although firmly embedded in Judeo-Christian roots, this version of the Enlightenment no longer subscribes to

notions of a transcendent God that is set apart from the profane world. The judge is an avatar of a post-lapsarian emancipation that marks the becoming-God of men.[28]

Altizer reworks a famous passage from Nietzsche's *The Antichrist* (1895) that applies to one of the crucial aspects of Weil's Christianity—an aspect that McCarthy indirectly critiques in his depiction of the judge:

> The Christian conception of God … is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the *contradiction* of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal Yes! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! God—the formula for every slander against 'this world,' for every lie about the 'beyond'! God—the deification of nothingness, the will to nothingness pronounced holy! (21-22)

Whether archon or dark priest, McCarthy's judge is a grotesque exaggeration of Weil's obsessional agony and the possessed host of the kind of divine force that she finds in the *Iliad*. The judge seems to parody a Weilian form of Christianity that has divested itself from all attachment to the bible and kept only the sadism of its suffering flesh. "Books lie" (*BM* 116), remarks the judge, when challenged by a man professing biblical authority. Many of *Blood Meridian*'s characters illustrate the gnostic perspective that Weil shared—a perspective of the world being inherently evil due to kenosis or god's absence. If taking up the cross was Weil's Christly mission, the judge's mission is to take up the divine violence that would torture such a body. To say that *Blood Meridian* provides an example of what metaxu might look like in a world without God is only partially accurate, for the Iliadic force worshipped by the judge seemingly gains its power from the ability to overthrow all gods who would dare stand against it.

Gnostic Deserts and the Haunting of the Sacred

McCarthy's texts abound in gnostic symbolism, but none with such gravity as *Blood Meridian*. The judge, I would suggest, is a kind of Weilian archon that critiques all forms of Christianity that valorize death and abjection. At the core of Christianity is a transformation of death and evil into the beatific. The judge seeks to become the priest of a new religion that understands evil as a productive agent in the world. As the thirteenth member of the Glanton gang, the judge stands "naked atop the walls, immense and pale in the revelation of lightning, striding the perimeter up there and declaiming in the old epic mode" (*BM* 118). Petra Mundik describes this as "a dark parody of Jesus and the twelve apostles" (80). This monstrous priest of Weilian force sermonizes that a "ritual includes the letting of blood. Rituals which fail in this requirement are but mock rituals" (*BM* 329). The judge positions himself as ritualistic diviner of war and urges his apostles to become the same, "not to propitiate alien Gods and not to ward off distant calamities, but to confirm our own complicities with the forces that crush and annihilate us" (Shaviro 19).

McCarthy continually refers to the judge's posse as Glanton's men rather than the judge's, and indeed they never fully commit to his dark über-mensch theology; it is masculinist self-aggrandizement masquerading as a metaxic openness to one's own divinity. The other men follow no such logic or reason and are thus less terrifying than the judge whose brutality resembles a divine commission. Several of the men still hold allegiances to the biblical God of whom the judge is the rightful heir. McCarthy's text reads like a gnostic gospel of American evil and the judge communes with the American landscape as though it harbours secret gnosis to decipher and master. In *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Žižek argues that both Christianity and Gnosticism:

> share the notion of the Fall—for Gnosticism however, we are dealing with the Fall from the pure spiritual dimension into the inert material world, with the notion that we strive to return to our lost home; while for Christianity, the Fall is not really a Fall at all, but 'in itself' its very opposite, the emergence of freedom.… The problem with the Fall is thus not that it is in itself a Fall, but, precisely, that, *in itself*, it is *already a Salvation which we misrecognize as a Fall*. Consequently, Salvation consists not in our reversing the direction of the Fall, but in recognizing Salvation in the Fall itself. (86-7)

The judge defines his liberty in terms of a similar post-lapsarian salvation. He urges men to convert their transcendental abandonment to an immanent violence. No divine power, for him, has ever been more visible. The judge asks of Glanton's men, "why, [i]f God meant to interfere in the degeneracy of mankind would he not have done so by now?" (*BM* 146).

The judge also instructs that while no God interferes, the force behind all this creation and destruction deposits tangible signs upon which to mediate: rocks to weigh in hands, fallen leaves to trace along their veins, and artifacts to draw in notebooks. Kraus explains that gnostic signs are "founded on a technology of resurrection. At death, the spirit engrams itself into a code that travels back into the world as *information*" (134). Through the judge, McCarthy queries what becomes of the word of God after the death of God.[29] The judge reads the divine word in all things; that is to say, his becoming-divine is a way of reading the world as purely immanent after the Fall of a transcendental other that would split itself off from the profane. The difference in this binary structure is the equivalent to the differences between literacy and illiteracy, killer and pacifist, dancer and wallflower. The excessive violence of the judge acts as a kind of inner dialogue with the divine essence of things that is located in their decreative vibrancy.[30]

The five trees of Paradise is a notable passage from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas[31] in which Christ explains that stones will minister to those disciples who are truly attentive. Holding "up a chunk of rock" to prove that God "speaks in stones and trees, the bones of things," the judge proselytizes a similar gospel for anyone who will listen (*BM* 116).[32] In "L'*Iliade*," Weil registers horror at the uncompromising manner with which force turns people into things—stones, trees, and bones. For the judge, these objects carry the significance of metaxic artifacts; they are not necessarily the traces of long-ago transformations of human bodies, but are nevertheless objects of transformation through which one might read the violent flux of a natural order. In "L'*Iliade*," a personified force has a particular purpose in store for humans and their anthropomorphic deities. In *Blood Meridian*, force permeates a world that extends far beyond the petty squabbles of mortals. Worshipping a God of force beyond Weil's anthropocentrism, however, the judge still finds within these rocks the gnosis of Prometheus's punishment. If God's immanent interference is primarily linguistic—that is, in words that must be deciphered from the landscape—then many of his disciples remain illiterate.

McCarthy's narrator deprives the kid of any patronymic or matronymic signification and assigns him an ambiguous *nom de guerre* in the tradition of the American Everyman. The names of the kid and the judge become mythic, but like Weilian force, the mythic never fully capitulates to the narrative propaganda that would employ it. Their names evoke Mary McCarthy's translation of Iliadic force as "that *x* that turns everybody subjected to it into a *thing*" (3). In a novel that luxuriates in descriptions of horror, the kid and the judge mostly resist the ensnarement of names.[33] They are Xs. Their labels as judge and kid are merely placeholders for the X that Weil identifies as force. On rare occasions, Glanton's men will invoke Holden's name as though in an effort to return him to the human world or to fearfully conjure the human

part that may yet lie dormant in the judge. When Glanton's sellswords take brief respite in the ruins of the Anasazi, the judge remarks that "[a]ll progressions from a higher to a lower order are marked by ruins and mystery and a residue of nameless rage" (*BM* 146). In Mundik 's study of Gnosticism in *Blood Meridian*, she identifies this "nameless rage" as "human nature allowed to run rampant and unchecked" (77). This reading comes very close to Weil's defining of force, especially through the metamorphoses it sets into motion. In "L'*Iliade*," one finds an inescapable representation of humans as something gnostically composed of that which is ecstatic to the human and thus cannot be named. They are, I would argue, metaxic subjects, concatenations of the human and the nonhuman (objects, divine forces) within the same body.

Borges, in his story "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (1952), suggests that taxonomy is an attempt to find "the words, the definitions, the etymologies, the synonyms, from the secret dictionary of God" (432). Humans often find themselves or wish to find themselves in a world infused with essences, yet these essences are nameless, requiring humans to play Adam and name all that they see. The naming of something becomes the process by which an essence is opened to human knowledge through a kind of linguistic incantation. In "Literature and the Right to Death" (1949), Blanchot argues that through the act of naming, beings are made accessible, but they are made accessible "deprived of being. The word is the absence of that being, its nothingness, what is left of it when it has lost being" (42). To name something is to attempt to capture its essence, and if all names fall short of that goal, one is left in a world without essences. Similarly, Nietzsche warns that by the act of naming, "[t]he impression is petrified […]; it is captured and stamped by means of concepts. Then it is killed, skinned, mummified, and preserved as a concept" ("The Philosopher" 50). Language labels a kind of non-being out of which meaning is created and truth is formed.

In *Blood Meridian*, naming becomes synonymous with a kind of erasure through cultural appropriation. When the kid is asked where he was robbed, he replies, "[t]hey wasn't no name to it. It was just a wilderness" (*BM* 32); that is to say, a wilderness both in its violent danger and in its semiotic lacuna. To name it is also to possess it and domesticate it with a European grammar. The reader is never privy to the scene of the kid's robbing; although the kid is likely concealing his misdeeds with a narrative of false victimhood, it aligns him with a space that lies beyond linguistic appropriation. In this imaginary space of Indigenous territory, the kid is divested of his colonialist trappings, his weaponry, and reduced to nothing but his own bare life. Weil argues that battles are not decided by soldiers armed with great strength or cunning strategy, "mais entre hommes dépouillés de ces facultés, transformés, tombés au rang soit de la matière inerte … soit des forces aveugles" (*IP* 32). The loss and divestment of the instruments of war equates with victimhood in *Blood Meridian*. Although one is never sure whether this divestment is a ruse, the kid's very interiority as a human being often appears divested and transformed into a passive and inert type of matter.[34]

McCarthy's desert is a place where the promise of "As long as grass grows or water runs"[35] is broken by more than geographical demarcation. Skeptical readers may be tempted to ask whether the sacrality that haunts this desert landscape is itself a ruse. The novel's division between the sacred and the profane is articulated through the tension between Indigenous and European perspectives of land. In the five years following the Mexican-American war, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the 1853 Gadsden Purchase permanently carved up the traditional lands of at least thirty-six tribes, especially along the borders of Sonora and Chihuahua—two states notorious for their scalping bounties. The spiritual life of these tribes cannot be extricated from the land they regard as sacred, regenerating the lives of their ancestors

in other forms.[36] Sacrality is presented critically in *Blood Meridian*, but the novel also questions whether this skepticism commits a participatory displacement of an Indigenous worldview from the land (i.e. this land is not sacred because it is not sacred *for me*). It is also critical of the mechanisms by which communities and their spiritual practices must be forced to accommodate a Judeo-Christian sacrality migrated from colonial territories and imposed onto their land. The judge's Gnosticism can equally be read as an awareness of a pre-colonial sacrality that the European gaze of the novel's characters can neither define nor understand. Similar to Weil's "L'*Iliade*," the novel's division between the sacred and the profane is marked with blood and violence.

The kid's most prominent encounter with something that might be codified as sacred occurs when he bears witness to the novel's most incendiary symbol, a reconfiguration of Isaiah 11.[37]

> It was a lone tree burning on the desert. A heraldic tree that the passing storm had left afire. The solitary pilgrim drawn up before it had traveled far to be here and he knelt in the hot sand and held his numbed hands out while all about in that circle attended companies of lesser auxiliaries routed forth into the inordinate day, small owls that crouched silently and stood foot to foot and tarantulas and solpugas and vinegrooms and the vicious mygale spiders and beaded lizards with mouths black as a chowdog's, deadly to man, and the little desert basilisks that jet blood from their eyes and the small sandvipers like seemly Gods, silent and the same, in Jeda, in Babylon. A constellation of ignited eyes that edged the ring of light all bound in a precarious truce before this torch whose brightness had set back the stars in their sockets. (*BM* 215)

The beasts of the desert congregate around this flame as though it was haunted by a Promethean heritage, beckoning peace from the hundred eyes trained upon it as they briefly share a single illuminated perspective.[38] Under the white flag of a truce that, like Benjamin's divine force, breaks the law of this feverish desert, the kid is able to temporarily withdraw from both law and existential terror. The flame itself is not sacred, but the simultaneous apprehension of the flame—as seen from the eyes of the viper, the spider, the lizard, and the kid—performs a sensible ecstasis from the psyche that protects itself from such porosity through an externalization of all violence. The multispecies communion witnessed by the kid enacts a caesural interlude to the novel's dissolution of community and family.

In *Blood Meridian*, a power infiltrates the anthropic world through the intersection of the material and the fallen divine. Symbolized through the burning tree, this power is not a call to violence, but a "constellation" of violent species that live in the desert, species who congregate at the altar of a flame that both subdues and nourishes, even in its luminescent destruction (215).[39] The burning tree calls all creatures to bear witness in a Weilian manner, but dismantles the hierarchy of species that she strives to present in her critique of the *Iliad*. Through Pick's assessment of Weil's ethics of vulnerability, the sacred rupture of the profane occurs in the unravelling of these barriers between the human and the animal. The species of the desert cast aside their dangerous qualities and submit to a brief peace before its incendiary power as their need for warmth supersedes their murderous tendencies. This land is no *terra nullius*, but a remarkable space of polyvalent perspectives; it is a land of old teachings and liquid boundaries.

If read as a sign of the judge's God of war, the burning tree imparts no commandment but a temporary surrender and armistice. After the Glanton gang returns from one of the judge's

sacred slaughters, they undergo a decreative cleansing where their flesh is infused by this holy flame:

> Then one by one they began to divest themselves of their outer clothes, the hide slickers and raw wool serapes and vests, and one by one they propagated about themselves a great crackling of sparks and each man was seen to wear a shroud of palest fire. Their arms aloft pulling at their clothes were luminous and each obscure soul was enveloped in audible shapes of light as if it had always been so. The mare at the far end of the stable snorted and shied at this luminosity in beings so endarkened and the little horse turned and hid his face in the web of his dam's flank. (*BM* 222)

McCarthy later describes all fire as sacred in that it illuminates an otherwise forsaken darkness, as Glanton's men "watched the fire which does contain within it something of men themselves as they are less without it and are divided from their origins and are exiles. For each fire is all fires, the first fire and the last ever to be" (*BM* 244). Here, fire is that which reconnects the transient and the exiled to a larger community. Fire offers the ability to "[p]render le setiment d'être chez soi dans l'exil. Etre enraciné dands l'absence de lieu" (*PG* 91). Glanton's men cling to fire as though it offers a glimmer of comfort amid exile, far away from "bains chauds" (*IP* 12).[40] Mark Taylor describes the desert like a place of perpetual decreation and exile from the self—a place where a person does not seek to find individuation, "but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. You make yourself void" (*Mystic Bones* 8).[41] These men orbit the fire as a last vestige of community and also as a possible return to themselves because fire "contain[s] within it something of men themselves" (*BM* 244), a welcome hope in this exilic space where all other truths seem to have bottomed out.

Blood Meridian espouses a view that kenosis is a kind of Fall from transcendence to immanence that becomes a historical process of continual exile.[42] The spirit-incarnated flesh of kenosis is necessarily bound up in various dynamics of earthly power, and McCarthy's novel sets this kenotic movement against its bastardized historical mirror in Manifest Destiny. In Weilian terms, the religiously-codified Manifest Destiny is a perfect representation of the *gros animal* in that it is an imperialistic empire that authorizes its power from mimetic association with a transcendental power. In every instance, the *gros animal* fails to realize that the power it seeks to emulate—in this case the kenotic movement from spirit into flesh—is, paradoxically, one of renunciation and sacrifice. The parallels between historical kenosis and Manifest Destiny are further illuminated by the complicated paradox of a *terra nullius* to be colonized through genocidal violence. There is a rhetorical and physical erasure of what existed before. Zbigniew Bialas helps to explicate this paradox by proposing that drawing "a colonial map acquires a symbolic function similar to that of an act of creation" (25). For Bialas, the theft and exploitation of lands requires a repetition of the cosmogonic act, specifically a creation *ex nihilo*.[43] Belief in a cosmic nothing justifies the view of a terrestrial nothing that, in turn, justifies both its conquest and the destruction of any peoples whose dwelling on that land threatens to contradict its ontological status as *terra nullius*. By this same racist logic, the Indigenous communities of the Americas cannot create a nation from their terrestrial nothing in repetition of the cosmogonic act because they are not seen in the image of the Christian God.

It is not just colonial conquest that requires a repetition of the cosmogonic act, but as Eliade relates, eschatology as well; an ending must be ritually invited so that one may begin anew (*Myth and Reality* 52). This is depicted in *Blood Meridian* through the eschatological *telos* of Manifest Destiny and the expansionist enforcement of *terra nullius* by the perpetuation of

something akin to an apocalypse of indigeneity.[44] What sets the judge apart from other men is his conscious manipulation of these methods, manipulating "myth, ritual, and religion and direct[ing] it toward his own ends. His goal is to harness the unconscious response to mythic heroes, invoke it with the rituals of the sacred hunter and the eucharist of the wilderness" (Spurgeon 89). It would not be unfair to equate the horrors committed by the judge's disciples with the untold atrocities of the *Iliad*. If McCarthy's prose seems obsessed with this horror, it is only to expose what has been sanitized and silenced in Homeric myth. Indeed, Spurgeon explains that "McCarthy is interested in myths, not morals.… The characters are not explored … because, as actors in myth, their individualities are less important than the roles they are playing" (90-91). The judge uses mythopoesis as a weapon, preying on the dangerous need to follow a nihilistic ideology in which the human species becomes a victim of its own bloodthirsty quest. He becomes a storyteller, both of American history and its corrupt idealism, by embodying the Weilian force that is embedded in Westernized myths of colonial pursuit.

The judge

The representation of metaxic spaces is always political; who gets to enter and how inevitably determines what sorts of relationships are mediated and what types of otherness can be confronted. The borders of metaxic bridges can be heavily policed, with certain ideologies and power structures determining which bodies and subjectivities might gain admittance. *Who* enters determines *what* new forms of being arise. The judge's unchecked authority represents a corruption of metaxic access and a reversal of the Altizerian movement back into the localization of the divine in a single masculine body. The judge interprets the kenotic act as an inherently violent one, and thus seeks knowledge of this divine violence in the immanent world around him.

He devises a clever subterfuge in which he seeks this knowledge by epistemologically swallowing the world within the ever-expanding confines of his own ego. Each character in the novel reports to have met the judge before, as though his presence haunts every corner of the wild and burgeoning American empire. His curiously supernatural qualities result from what Carl Jung and R.C. Zaehner might call the "megalomania of positive inflation" as the judge's body becomes the abject embodiment of a consciousness that seeks to inflate to the point of erasing all others. His is a peripatetic wandering for the sake of absolute mastery and knowledge.

The judge preaches that rather than opening oneself to grace, one should open oneself to force, the only God that matters. As a critique of the ecstatic body that might open itself to such a God, McCarthy's novel is not entirely successful; again, it is only he who survives. At times, he appears as an Iliadic God walking beside the men on the battlefield. Following him brings no transcendence or sagacity, however, and no participation in any sacred ritual save that of the judge's. One of the most explicit passages hinting at the judge's semi-divine aspect is the lotus pose of meditative waiting in which he is found on the solitary rock in the desert. In fact, this is how Glanton's gang first finds him and they wonder, in this great expanse of nothingness, how he and this rock ever got there. "Irving said he'd brung it with him.… Brown thought him a mirage.… He didn't even have a canteen" (*BM* 124-125). This is no Buddha, but a nomadic apocalyptic prophet of the desert, a Promethean figure whose rock is seemingly appendaged to his titanic body. As a place of origin, the rock is tauntingly enigmatic because the judge is the only one for whom rocks reveal a secret and decidedly gnostic truth. The novel seems to have come upon the judge after he has, like Prometheus, emerged from the rock as though escaping the retribution of the Gods. "[D]e toutes façons" Weil's force "change l'homme en pierre" (*IP* 13) and yet Weil also teaches that a stone cannot be killed (*PF* 5). The judge is the one character

who survives the Iliadic transformation into objectified thing, thereby converting the thanatos of Weilian force into a life force.

When comparing "L'*Iliade*" to *Blood Meridian*, Josyph poses a revealing question: how does the judge fit into a world in which force destroys all those who make use of it? Josyph suggests that the judge might be equated with fate from whom force is borrowed ("Blood Music" 63). Certainly, such a reading might be supported with recourse to the judge's seemingly ageless and invincible character, but to cast the judge as the personification of fate is to align him with a temporality that corresponds to a futurity rather than a primordial past rooted in force, war, and animosity. Indeed, his very origins as a human being are obscured by the cloak of violence in his wake. The ex-priest informs the kid that,

> [w]hoever would seek out his history through what unraveling of loins and ledgerbooks must stand at last darkened and dumb at the shore of a void without terminus or origin and whatever science he might bring to bear upon the dusty primal matter blowing down out of the millennia will discover no trace of ultimate atavistic egg by which to reckon his commencing. (*BM* 309-310)

The ex-priest's insights hold true, for the judge's personal history ultimately reaches an apophatic impasse, trailing off into the oubliette of force, beyond even the keen tracking of the Delawares. The judge instructs his disciples that "[w]ar was always here. Before man was, war waited for him … That is the way it was and will be" (*BM* 249).[45] In this desert landscape of the quick and the dead, the only thing quick is the sand. The judge is not fate, but a priest of Weilian force reimagined in the role of Achilles—a demi-God that fights among men. If the judge is to be aligned with fate, it is only because the novel refuses to present any possible futurity for the American project that is not chained to war.

In one notable exchange, the judge tells Toadvine that "[t]he freedom of birds is an insult to" him (*BM* 199), and so he desires the imprisonment of all birds for having the audacity to claim a form of being that escapes his control. He is a seer who believes in no vision but his own. If birds can operate as the warning symbols of a metaxic crisis in the *Iliad*,[46] in *Blood Meridian*, they represent a form of being that threatens the judge's control. The judge declares that "[w]hatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent.… In order for it to be mine nothing must be permitted to occur … save by my dispensation" (*BM* 198-199). He wants to be the zookeeper or jailor of all life in order to make it a prisoner of his own command. "That would be a hell of a zoo" (*BM* 199), Toadvine remarks and indeed such a zoo would resemble a gnostic hell on earth in which the judge would act as one whose juridical powers extended to demonic levels, becoming an "authority [that] countermands local judgements" (*BM* 198). In *The Open* (2002), Agamben remarks that humans tend to define themselves in opposition to the animal as one "can be human only to the degree that [they] transcend and transform the anthropophorous animal which supports him" (12).[47] The judge seeks a new, but no less Adamic naming ceremony all over again so that the animal might no longer challenge his dominance—either soaring in the sky or in the ontological formation of the human species itself.

If the God of war can abide no other Gods, the judge can abide no other metaxic or liminal figure but himself. Throughout the novel, it is impossible to discern whether the judge is aware of his own madness or whether his self-divinization is validated by the absence of any divinity that could curb the inflation of his mystical ego. The sketchbook that he perpetually carries does not contain recreations of Platonic mimesis, but rather the hyperreal etchings of a Baudrillardian copy that replaces any correlate outside or beyond his system. The judge admits

that the "truth about the world […is] a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having neither analogue nor precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tentshow whose ultimate destination after many a pitch in many a muddled field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning" (*BM* 245).[48]

Yet it is precisely this process of ungrounding that permits the judge's abyssal power, recreating reality in order to appropriate it as part of his own legislated world order. Webster refuses to allow the judge to paint his picture for this very reason. When his companions protest, the judge assures them of his rationale: he relates a story of when he drew the portrait of an old Hueco man "and unwittingly chained the man to his own likeness. For he could not sleep for fear an enemy might take it and deface it and so like the portrait that he would not suffer it creased nor anything to touch it" (*BM* 141). If the hyperreal possesses no originary form, then the Hueco native becomes tethered to his portrait through a belief in its ontological supremacy. He buries the portrait not only to protect it against defacement, but also in an attempt to reverse the hyperreal effect of his own aesthetic decreation and dissolution. The judge's artistry is an extension of his ontological colonialism, demonstrating to the Hueco man that to represent is to efface and also to create anew; to know is to possess and even to baptize. Monk has alluded to the parallels between the judge's transfiguration of reality into a zoo and the zoo that Baudrillard describes as an ideal exemplar of the hyperreal. Monk explains that "[t]he zoo becomes transferred to its place of confinement into the world at large" (98). What is left unsaid in Monk's comparison is that the judge creates the hyperreal zoo in response to the threat of an unmastered reality that threatens the colonial project—a project that he serves as its hyperreal shadow.

The judge rails against various religious figures (in particular, the ex-priest and Reverend Green), but he is still the most fervently religious figure of the book. He regards everything as a gnostic symbol for a divine order; he considers every rock and stone a puzzle piece to the sacral immanence of the natural world. According to the judge, the world is entirely metaxic: every rock speaks to him with an ecstatic voice; every bird is a mystery that can be contained and communed with once it is brought into the textual metaxu that he carries within him. *Blood Meridian*, Steven Shaviro argues,

> refuses to acknowledge any gap or opposition between words and things. It insists that there can be no fissure or discontinuity in the real.… But the more that is drawn or written and that hence becomes known, the more that is thereby subjected, not to human agency … but to "war, whose stake is at once the game and the authority and the justification" ([*BM*] 249). The writing of *Blood Meridian* is a catastrophic act of witness, embracing the real by tracing it in gore. (18)

The judge's appropriation of violence to produce this closure echoes Nietzsche's questioning of who initially drew the link between the signification of language and the sharper defenses of the animal kingdom: "As a means for the preservation of the individual, the intellect shows its greatest strengths in dissimulation, since this is the means to preserve those weaker, less robust individuals who, by nature, are denied horns or the sharp fangs of a beast of prey with which to wage the struggle for existence" ("On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" 875). The intellect is thus only a claw or tooth or horned substitute that is used to preserve the otherwise frail human animal against the onslaught of being. The judge recognizes that the chasm between being and signification can only be crossed by a Weilian version of force.

The kid

The reader of *Blood Meridian* spends almost three hundred and fifty pages trying to decipher the secrets of the kid's murderous poise. His participation in the novel's violence meets with no absolution or ethical conversion. There is, however, a certain withdrawnness buried in the consciousness of the kid that both escapes and threatens the judge. In a godless world overflowing with gnostic signposts and astrological iconography, who is this young man who refuses to claim any agency that would offer a glimmer of narrative purpose? Who is this kid who might claim the same use of Weilian force as Glanton's men (indeed he is the best shot among them) and yet retain some incorruptible inner sanctuary for himself? The reader is unfortunately aligned with the judge in one's obsessive desire to peer into the interiority of this character. The kid's consciousness is decentered, adrift in an elsewhere even while it is engaged in the gang's crimes. In its critique of myths of progress, *Blood Meridian* refuses to perpetuate any sort of *bildungsroman* pattern. As Monk articulates, the "kid disrupts the unity that modernity requires in order to fulfill its project" (88). When the novel concludes with its protagonist in his 40s, he is still named the kid, deprived of a maturity that might make his drives more transparent. Notably, the missing years between the kid's involvement with the Glanton gang and his reunion with the judge equal the missing years of Christ in the New Testament. Joseph Campbell's famous monomyth is shown to be an absurd fairy tale that is unfit for the modernity that America partly ushers into being. Although McCarthy provides a few stations of the hero's cross—the call to adventure germinating from the absence of the father, for example—there can be no atonement and no heroic telos, but only a gruesome murder in an outhouse, a final tableau whose sight is forbidden to the reader even in a novel saturated with death. McCarthy writes violent moments in a Faustian fashion, reveling in its shocking

exhilaration to the point of desensitized boredom, but implicates the reader who wishes for murderous closure.

Many critics have speculated on the fate of the kid, locked within the embrace of the naked judge inside the shit-smeared outhouse of "the biggest town for sin in all Texas" (*BM* 319) but it is uncertain whether his death would serve an inescapable destiny or the martyrdom of the defiantly unconverted. The kid never fully submits to the corrupt metaxic porosity that the judge employs as an esoteric instrument of colonial violence. Among the white settlers of *Blood Meridian*, however, there is no hierarchy of guilt, only of conquest. The judge reserves special curiosity for the kid because, like the birds that exist without his permission, the rationale for the kid joining Glanton's gang is unclear. The kid is not lured by wealth or conquest; nor is he bloodthirsty and energized by battle. In fact, re-readings of the novel do little to clarify whether or not the kid actually murders anyone. If the judge and Achilles are impervious to fate, it is likewise possible that the kid might be a continual participant in the distribution of Weilian force without ever lifting a finger. Faced with this indecipherable gnostic signifier, the judge seeks to convert the kid while also infiltrating the clandestine reserve that remains barred even to the reader, as though its silence might offer some prized piece of knowledge.

Shaviro suggests that *Blood Meridian* describes various scenes that are grounded in the judge's violence against continuity, but if the text can abide "no fissure … in the real" (Shaviro 18), then perhaps the role of the kid can be understood as a foil to the judge; that is, a pariah to the judge's system of metaxic communality in which every stone, flower, and person is transpierced by Weilian force. Indeed, the kid is drawn rather flatly, and readers must cling to either the tiny ripples of affect that rise to the surface or attempt to see the kid's lack of interiority as a passive receptor of the energies of force that flow unimpeded through the desert.

Shaviro warns that "[t]here is no interiority, no intentionality, and no transcendence" to be found (14). The dissatisfying manner in which the kid resembles an unfinished, if enigmatic, sketch suggests the inadequacy of the homogenous everyman or innocent pilgrim of religious allegory. Broncano describes the kid in terms that define Weil's notion of a force-produced "chose": "He is a mere carcass devoid of transcendence or soul and forced to find its way in the ruins of a bygone world until dust returns to dust" (40). Even the pronounal decay from "he" to "it" is apt. As a pupil and a disciple of war, the kid should be the very representation of the Judge's philosophical system; instead, the kid is precisely he who escapes systematization, even in the seemingly perfect representation of the judge's values. Although they continually mirror each other and are complicit in the same crimes, the kid is in some ways freer than the judge because, for him, ideology does not become misrecognized as subjectivity.

Weil expresses both the pursuit and purpose of collective life as metaxic—the union of individuals who act as mediators for Christ's love. This is a community that recognizes all earthly power as abhorrent obstructions to Christly mediation. The judge's philosophy advocates for an apostolic community of Weilian force that illuminates a strain of Weil's thought that can be twisted and contorted to resemble a discourse that has no respect for life except in its connection to that which is sacred. When the judge chastises the kid for breaking "with the body of which [he has] pledged a part and poison[ing] it in all its enterprise" (*BM* 307), he condemns the kid for his refusal to decreate—his refusal to release the clutches of individuality that corrupt the communal body's mission to become an organism of violent force. As the judge tries one final time to convert the kid during their final desert showdown, he instructs him that their "animosities were formed and waiting before ever we two met" (*BM* 307). Not only are war and battle the things that bind these two figures, but their mutual animosity establishes a destiny

whose temporality precedes them. The judge condemns the kid for his abuse of this sacred destiny: "If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay […I]t was required of no man to give more than he possessed.… Only each was called upon to empty his heart into the common and one did not" (*BM* 307). The kid is this traitorous one who does not understand the contradiction of individual existence and a decreative commitment to the gang's sacred body of community.

Leo Daugherty proposes that the kid's refusal to submit or open himself to the judge's power is because he "feels the 'spark of the alien divine' within him through the call of what seems to be conscience" (164). While Daugherty interprets this "alien divine" as a clear allusion to the transcendent God of Gnosticism, a God who exceeds the evil confines of the material world and the demiurge's claims to divinity, the point is nonetheless useful. Upon seeing Captain White's head floating in a jar of mescal, the kid remarks, "[s]omebody ought to have pickled it a long time ago. By rights they ought to pickle mine. For ever takin up with such a fool" (*BM* 70). The kid brings a sense of morality and justice to a land where such concepts are tenuous and arbitrary—a land of bare life where so many have the *right to murder* because so many *deserve to be murdered*.

Never fully integrated into the community of murderers to which he bears witness, the kid possesses some small recess that is yet uncolonized, a spark of being that has not been sacrificed to the judge's sacred force. The kid joins this "negative community … the community of those who have no community" (Blanchot, *Unavowable* 50), but refuses to submit to the judge's mission to divinize himself in the absence of a just God who might rise up in defense of the oppressed and subjugated. John Sepich has shown that when the judge informs the kid that "[t]his night thy soul may be required of thee" (*BM* 327), he is purposely revising "[b]ut God said unto him, Thou fool this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20). The judge

appropriates these biblical words and uses them against a kid who is presumably ignorant of their source. However, does the judge borrow these words in order to efface a biblical God who no longer has any claim to the land? Or is this seemingly immortal archon awkwardly unoriginal, more plagiarist than prophet?

Like the split heart of the four of cups—the card drawn by the kid during his tarot reading—the novel has two endings. In the first, the novel gives way to the judge's dance as if to affirm his supremacy. Anything that follows this moment comes in the form of an epilogue, parabolically rich yet mostly forgotten—the paratextual remainder that trails off as an echo of the revelers' dance. While the judge's book functions like a Borgesian prison that collapses the divide between signifier and being, his approach to the artistry of dance is one of submission to the play and game of war. As a dancer, the judge is always participating in a fluid movement through time and space;[49] his dance is an event that reveals itself as the final collapse of art and violence into each other.[50] Clément likewise argues that music is "the medium of the sacred" and she explicitly links music to violence and a Weilian type of force (*The Feminine* 162). To this effect, and foreshadowing my concerns in the next chapter, Clément expresses her admiration for the remarkable relation between violence and myths retelling the origins of music:

> The invention of the lyre by Apollo was the result of the sacrilegious massacre of divine herds.… Orpheus, who, in return for pacifying wild animals with music, has his head cut off by the bacchantes. There's the imagery of Shiva, God of life, death, music, and dance, marking out the expiration of the soul with his miniscule tambourine, and dancing on the exquisite corpses.… Despite the excesses that it may elicit, it remains the best, most sublime, cradle for journeying through the salubrious nostalgia for the sacred. (*The Feminine* 162)

While the gore of *Blood Meridian* expresses political and external violence, the judge's dance is the symptomatic effect of an internal violence; his inner being is attuned to the vibrations of Iliadic force that claim the vacant seat of the divine. Every song for the judge is a potential Siren song and an opportunity to straddle the divide of being and non-being.

At key moments in the text, the kid is shown to mimic the peripatetic wandering of the judge's sacred dance, but the kid has no recourse to the judge's purported gnostic enlightenment, which means that the kid moves without harmony, without order, and without the grace or purpose of the judge. The judge instructs the kid that "only that man who has offered up himself entire to the blood of war, who has been to the floor of the pit and seen horror in the round and learned at last that it speaks to his inmost heart, only that man can dance" (*BM* 331). As such, the kid's very existence is an affront to the judge as it threatens to unveil the abyssal partner of the judge's savage waltz.

The novel's epilogue follows the faux-finality of "THE END" as if to affirm the equivalency of Eliadic eschatology and cosmology, and thereby refute the temporality that McCarthy had fought so hard to make convincing. Again, in Eliadic fashion, McCarthy's choice here can be understood as an argument by which art might serve as the transcendence of material time—an argument that situates modernity as teleological. Eliade likens the experience of reading a novel to mythological behaviour in that it is an experience of '"strange' time, whether ecstatic or imaginary" (*Myth and Reality* 192). To turn the epic poem of the *Iliad* into the medium of the novel—which is itself the epic of Lukács's modernity cotemporaneous with the rise of capitalism—challenges the emergence of neoliberal modernity with its own novelistic form. McCarthy revises the cyclical and sacred temporality of myth to juxtapose it with a historical present that will struggle to continue beyond an e/scatological ending.

As Bloom has astutely observed, the epilogue's brief paragraph introduces a new character into the novel, "a new Prometheus," or second Prometheus, who "may be rising to go up against" the judge (Josyph, "Tragic Ecstasy" 80). This mysterious figure walks across the land "striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there" (Josyph, "Tragic Ecstasy" 80) as though reawakening the sacrality of this disenchanted, though still vibrant matter. Given that the kid witnesses the sacred flame of the burning tree in the absence of the Promethean judge, the Promethean figure found in the epilogue can be considered the true (though displaced) hero of the text, a text in which the trope of the hero cannot be announced but only cryptically and embryonically suggested. From Weil's poem to McCarthy's novel, the Promethean figure also suggests a kind of leitmotif operating throughout my project. In the following chapter, I will argue that the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice—or the iteration of the myth that *should have been*—presents a more accurate depiction of the radical possibilities offered by a literary theory of metaxu. The figure of Prometheus, mythic symbol of rebellion, labour, and divine punishment, will serve as an important counterpart to the historical depictions of Orpheus that I investigate.

Endnotes

[1] In "Zeus et Prométhée," Weil translates a telling insight from Aeschylus: "De la part des dieux, c'est une grâce violente, / eux qui sont assis au governail celeste" (43).

[2] Holoka translates this as, "Force is that which makes a thing of whoever submits to it" (45). Although the verb "submit" has a direct correlation to Weil's attentiveness, it does not cast as wide a net as McCarthy's subjection. Force is also that which subjects those whom it deprives of consent.

[3] Indeed, their motivations are often difficult to quantify. In *Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l'oppression sociale*, Weil explains that few of the soldiers "sait pourquoi chacun se sacrifie, et sacrifie tous les siens, à une guerre meurtrière et sans objet, et c'est pourquoi, tout au long du poème, c'est aux dieux qu'est attribuée l'influence mystérieuse qui fait échec aux pourparlers de paix, rallume sans cesse les hostilités, ramène les combattants qu'un éclair de raison pousse à abandonner la lutte (40).

[4] Although Weil does not appear in the pages of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben finally admitted to this debt in 2017 during an interview with Antonio Gnolio for *The Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory*. In fact, Agamben confesses that *Homo Sacer*'s debt to Weil is part of a long history of working through her political philosophy that extends as far back as his dissertation on Weil in the 1960s.

[5] When quoting the *Iliad,* I use Robert Fagles's translation for the sake of consistency with most of Weil's English commentators. Fagles's is also the translation used in the *New York Review* publication of *War and the Iliad* which contains the most popular edition of "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force." Weil, of course, read the *Iliad* in Greek. Any French translations that appear in her essay are her own.

[6] Weil was horrified at the inevitable dehumanization of violence, but was no pacifist either. She travelled to Spain and even learned how to shoot a machine gun in the hopes of fighting for the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. Later, she would write letters to Charles de Gaul proposing plans to take a regiment of women to the frontlines in order to nurse the wounded French soldiers—despite having no medical training whatsoever. Her letters were either unanswered or rejected.

[7] Peter Winch argues that the central focus of Weil's *Iliad* essay "is *justice*, which is conceived as an equilibrium between human beings: indeed, as *the* form that equilibrium takes in the relations between human beings" (78).

[8] Never is an analysis offered, for example, as to what it might mean for a human to be transformed into a river, bird, or flame; i.e., as a Promethean gift stolen from the Gods and delivered to humankind.
[9] Homer offers a useful representation of Hannah Arendt's contention that all violence happens outside the political realm.

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[10] Wargus (wolf-man) is an old Germanic and Anglo-Saxon term for the beast-adjacent bandit or outlaw. Agamben is fascinated by its inscription into the laws of many European countries.

[11] It is essential, therefore, to return Weilian mysticism to its forgotten dialogue with myth, especially in terms of mythical instances of metamorphosis. This will constitute one of the primary goals of my final chapter on Octavia Butler.

[12] Winch, commenting on the essay, notes that what is distinctly human about an individual is their power to consent or refuse (146).

[13] One could compare this to H.D.'s poem "Helen" in which the poet investigates the dehumanization of Leda's daughter through the gradual transformation of an objectified woman into an immobilized statue. Helen literally becomes artifice, a corporeal extension of the symbolic nature thrust upon her from birth, as she increasingly becomes a receptacle for the Greeks' hatred and revulsion. The gaze that fixes such hatred upon Helen roots her in place, echoing a reading of the Homeric myth which interprets the loss of Helen as symptomatic of an inability to contain her desire and turn her into a captive of the state.

[14] Although a sharp critique of the nature of war, this essay is in fact not about the *Iliad*.

[15] Rachel Bespaloff is more astute than Weil, however, in describing the fate of escaping one form of captivity for another. See her essay "On The Iliad" (1947).

[16] Cole claims that these "stories were told to justify retaliation" and uses Helen as a key example: "One story tells how Theseus abducted Helen from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia on the Euratos when she was still a young girl, before she reached the age of marriage. An invasion of Attika by the Spartan Tyndaridai was the result" (29).

[17] The connection is even proclaimed by Jonathan Banville on the cover of the Vintage edition of *Blood Meridian*.

[18] Josyph also mentions Weil during an interview with Harold Bloom in which he reads a few select passages from "L'*Iliade*" and asks Bloom to comment on their relation to McCarthy's novel. Bloom agrees that there is a connection, specifically in the passages that reveal the descent into uncontrollable madness exhibited by abuse of this force ("Tragic Ecstasy" 88).

[19] Discussions of racial capitalism have surged in recent years. Compare Cedric Robinson's "Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition" (2000); Jodi Melamed's "Racial capitalism" (2015); Nancy Fraser's "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism" (2016); and Alyosha Goldstein's "On the Reproduction of Race, Capitalism, and Settler Colonialism" (2017); and Siddhant Issar's "Theorising 'Racial/Colonial Primitive Accumulation': Settler Colonialism, Slavery and Racial Capitalism" (2021).

[20] I do not mean to suggest that this theocratic hierarchy is dominated by a priestly class, but that the hierarchy of American imperialism is structured by colonial rulers and institutions whose

authority is justified by a modern form of divine right over lands and peoples deemed ignorant of the Christian God.

[21] Although they operate outside the official body of the military, they are the inevitable result of a war whose justifications could never be adequately rationalized. In *A People's History of the United States* (1980), Howard Zinn relates the arguments of an anonymous letter written to the Cambridge *Chronicle* at the time of the war: "Human butchery has had his day…. And the time is rapidly approaching when the professional soldier will be placed on the same level as the bandit, the Bedouin, and the Thug" (158).

[22] Agamben imagines the sovereign to declare: "I, the sovereign, who am outside the law, declare that there is nothing outside the law" (*HS* 15).

[23] Although I allude to both Agamben and Foucault during this provisional sketch of the judge, Agamben's notion of sovereignty differs from Foucault's separation of sovereign power and the modern invention of biopower. For Agamben, sovereign power is always-already biopolitical in its implicit construction of bare life. One of the ways in which Weil's work resonates with Agamben's is that the institutional practices and rituals of religion, too, have been biopolitical from the beginning. Agamben's sovereignty exposes certain bodies and individuals to an exclusionary violence that defines the limits of the political and legal sphere. The boundaries of these spheres are thus constituted by the bodies and peoples it excludes. In *Blood Meridian*, the biopolitical exclusion, violence, and reduction to bare life is enforced by all those who follow the judge and Glanton's persecution of peoples for the white settler state. Agamben's *The Use of Bodies* (2014) and his forthcoming book on the administration of bodies through political responses to the Coronavirus offer further accounts of the dispersal of biopower throughout neoliberal society.

[24] By cosmic, I refer to a conflation of two symmetrical meanings: the natural order that exceeds the limits of the physical world, but also to Homer's use of the term to describe the order of soldiers assembled on the battlefield (12. 225). I am grateful to Rubenstein for this observation.

[25] Similarly, in *The Coming Community* (1990), Agamben describes revelation not as unveiling "the sacredness of the world, but only revelation of its irreparably profane character" (90). Weilian metaxu, as the sacred intermediaries of the profane world, might be regarded as Weil's attempt to refuse this "irreparably profane character."

[26] In contrast, lamenting humanity's first death, Cioran understands tears to be the trace of a saintliness that cries "for a lost paradise" (*Tears* 3).

[27] Weil does not offer a metaphysical consolation to slavery but her frequent use of "slave" as a metaphor for humility towards one's divine master undermines her treatment of women and slaves in "L'*Iliade*." Here, and elsewhere, Weil's arguments are often more powerful when they use myth to decry historical politics rather than transferring it to religious philosophy.

[28] A secular version of this is no less true. Consider Byung-Chul Han's estimation that modernity has dispensed with any appeals to a transcendent order, but this secular evacuation has meant

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that capital has been able to replace itself as "a *new transcendency*—a *new master*" (*Psychopolitics* 8).

[29] For comparison, Altizer explains that the "incarnate Word that truly and actually enters the profane reality of history must not only appear in a fallen form, but must itself pass through the reality of Fall and death, thereby emptying itself of its original purity and power" (53-54).

[30] Blanchot attempts to align Weilian grace with this same inner drive for self-renunciation. Blanchot defines decreation as something "in us … that must be called divine, something by which we already dwell close to God: it is the movement by which we efface ourselves" (*Infinite* 115).

[31] Composed anywhere from 60 to 250 CE, the gospel of Thomas contains more than a hundred sayings attributed to Christ; most of these are consistent with orthodox literature but a few dozen are considered later additions from gnostic authors. Its discovery in 1945 as part of the Nag Hammadi library has furthered its reception as a gnostic gospel.

[32] Charles Taylor translates a similar teaching of Meister Eckhart as "Stone is God but doesn't know it" (32).

[33] While he is called the judge more than one hundred times throughout the novel, the name Holden appears fewer than ten. The human name hiding his identity as avatar is gradually stripped away.

[34] *Blood Meridian* would make an excellent addition to Pick's study of inhumanity in literature. The vacuity of the kid's interiority presents a startling example "of the flight from interiority toward an exteriority that renders the human as commonly understood unintelligible" (7).

[35] Andrew Jackson promised members of the Choctaw and Cherokee that they could remain on their ancestral lands "as long as the grass grows or water runs." The phrase has survived up to the present day in recognition of America's continued betrayal of Indigenous peoples.

[36] The judge distinguishes between two distinct forms of dwelling: "For whoever makes a shelter of reed and hides has joined his spirit to the common destiny of creatures and he will subside back into the primal mud with scarcely a cry. But who builds in stone seeks to alter the structure of the universe" (*BM* 146).

[37] "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11: 6-9).

[38] In "On Truth and Lying in a Non-moral Sense" (1896) Nietzsche speculates that "if we ... could only perceive things as, variously, a bird, a worm, or a plant does ... nobody would ever

speak of nature as something conforming to laws, rather, they would take it to be nothing other than a highly subjective formation" (881).

[39] In his preface to Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* (1984), Pierre Joris refers to trees struck by lightning as the "point … of intersection between the lower chthonian forces and falling higher forces" (xix). The kid's submission to the flame illustrates a passive acceptance of Joris's fallen noumenal rather than the active appropriation to which the judge subscribes. The image of the burning tree is also akin to what Irigaray calls "dazzling glare" writ large, "which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed [but finally, in efflorescent coupling, we witness] 'subject' and 'Other' flowing out into an embrace of fire that mingles one term into another" ("La Mystérique" 191).

[40] As if to highlight its importance in a text that is so frequently read as nihilistic, Manuel Brancano has counted no fewer than 290 instances of the word *fire* (40). By comparison, *God*, both upper and lower-case, is found 83 times.

[41] It is no coincidence that the Greek words for desert and wilderness are the same (έρημος).

[42] In this sense, McCarthy is aligned with writers like Altizer, for whom Christianity's historicity can be located "not simply … in a sacred past, but more deeply [in its…] celebrat[ion of] the human reality of history as an epiphany.… When the Incarnation is known as a dynamic process of forward movement, then it must be conceived as a progressive movement of Spirit into flesh" (45-46). The horrors of colonialism that continue to the present day should make one pause and question the idleness of God, but Altizer's reading of kenosis as historical process requires any transcendental other to merge with the tortures of the historical and the political. The question that a kenotic faith asks is not "where is God?" but "why do we continue to wage war against the sacrality of life?" The kenotic God demands that a religious view of the world be synonymous with a fall to immanence, where ecstasy is a falling into the world, rather than outside of it.

[43] In "Ambition and Distortion: An Ontological Dimension in Colonial Cartography" (1999), Bialas establishes this theory based on Eliade's belief that sociopolitical acts all entail a certain repetition of the cosmogonic act. For example, in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1959), Eliade specifies that "rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first *cosmicised*, then inhabited" (10).

[44] Implied in McCarthy's harrowing account is also a question as to whether these same tactics continue to be employed through the racial capitalism of neoliberalism—a contemporary necromancy of Manifest Destiny.

[45] McCarthy may be echoing the famous passage from William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959): "America is not a young land: it is old and dirty and evil before the settlers, before the Indians. The evil is there waiting" (11).

[46] In the first book of the *Iliad*, Calchas is described as "the clearest by far of all the seers [because he is able to] scan the flight of birds" (1:80-81). Later, as Diomedes and Odysseus slip

into the Trojan camp, a bird registers the divine sign that shows that they are not abandoned by the gods:

> Athena winged a heron close to their path
> and veering right. Neither man could see it,
> scanning the dark night, they only heard its cry.
> Glad for the lucky sign, Odysseus prayed to Pallas. (10. 322-325)

[47] This is one of the many instances in which Agamben reveals his overt debt to Weil: he describes this "anthropophorous animal … irreducibly drawn and divided between animality and humanity" (12) in a similar fashion to the theriomorphic bodies of "L'*Iliade*" that comprise a new species, being neither human nor corpse (16).

[48] Ultimately, the judge reveals the disturbing link between the project of American expansionism and scenes like the man who exhibits his caged brother for twenty-five cents, the infamous Reverend Green, and the migratory juggler with his tarot-reading wife. Each of these figures—judge, reverend, tarot reader—plays a different role within a "migratory tentshow" (*BM* 245) that casts metaxic chimeras like a magic lantern. The judge admits to the kid that he knows the truth of his own nothingness, humbly accepting the kid's admonishment.

[49] Although less forgiving readers might question whether she ever danced, Weil declares that "[l]a danse est le retour du movement droit au movement circulaire.… C'est un movement non dirigé, sans intention, et qui pourtant ne se produit pas au hazard, mais est soumis à une nécessité plus rigoureuse qu'un movement qui procède d'une intention" (*Cahiers II* 402).

[50] Dennis Sansom draws the parallel between the dancing judge and the dance of the God-killing Zarathustra. In contrast, Deleuze muses that he "know[s] not what the spirit of a philosopher would like better than to be a good dancer. For the dance is his ideal, and also his art, in the end likewise his sole piety" (*The Gay Science* 346).

CHAPTER 3

"Losing the Flowers of the Earth":

Orpheus, Eurydice, and the Lost Future of Myth

> The gods honor zeal and heroic excellence towards love. But Orpheus … they sent back unfulfilled from Hades, showing him a phantom of the woman … because he seemed to them a coward … [who] didn't venture to die for the sake of love … but rather devised a means of entering Hades while still alive. Orpheus, the despised citharode … the trickster who uses his music and wiles to cross boundaries, between Apollo and Dionysus, man and nature, truth and illusion, reality and the imagination, even between life and death, was evidently not to austere Plato's taste. Plato, who preferred martyrdom to mourning, Plato the ayatollah of love.
>
> Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

> He is only Orpheus in his song, he could have no relationship with Eurydice except within the hymn, he has life and actuality only after the poem and through the poem, and Eurydice represents nothing more than that magical dependence which makes him into a shade when he is not singing and only allows him to be free, alive, and powerful within the space of the Orphic measure.... [O]nly in the song does Orpheus have power over Eurydice, but in the song Eurydice is also already lost and Orpheus himself is the scattered Orpheus, the 'infinitely dead' Orpheus into which the power of the song transforms him from then on. He loses Eurydice because he desires her beyond the measured limits of the song, and he loses himself too, but this desire, and Eurydice lost, and Orpheus scattered are necessary to the song.
>
> Maurice Blanchot, "The Gaze of Orpheus"

Despite the misreading practiced by many of her critics, Weil's aesthetics are consistently developed through a dialogic relationship between Christian and Greek myth. The previous two chapters have argued for a renewed interpretation of the myth of Prometheus and Homer's *Iliad* as taproot texts for Weil's understanding of Christianity, especially in terms of her approaches to suffering, sacrality, decreation and metaxu. This chapter pursues a reading of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in order to examine the consequences of the metaxic struggle embedded within the very structure of myth. By situating Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* as the culmination of a patriarchal genealogy that extends as far back as Plato, I contend that this struggle represents an essential problematic in the viability of theorizing myth in twentieth and

twenty first-century literature. More specifically, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice discloses the crisis of metaxu at the core of Weil's kenotic ontology by functioning as a meta-myth—a myth about metaxic crisis, but also myth *as* metaxic crisis.

Through the deployment of a Weilian hermeneutic, I wish to discern the limits of a metaxic poetics rooted in myth through a critique of what I call a *compensatory* Orphism or an aesthetics that sacrifices a certain metaxic liminality for the seductive lure of representation. Although Weil views Prometheus as a poetic figure whose symbolic crucifixion depicts the embodiment (and embodying) of decreative art, one might locate a metaxic poetics as the hinge between a Weilian Prometheus and a Weilian Orpheus in which metaxic decreation can be read as an inner, chthonic, erotic katabasis with a much different relationship to processes of embodiment. In "Zeus et Prométhée," Weil mentions Orphism several times and even describes her beloved line from Aeschylus—"[p]ar la souffrance la connaissance" (43)—as an essential truth for initiates into mysteries "et qui est sanse doute l'orphisme" (44).[1] This chapter, however, will forego a discussion of Orphism and its esoteric history in order to trace the operative symbolic mode of the Orphic myth in literary and theoretical revisions as an exemplar for art as a response to loss, death, and alienation. Through the death of Eurydice, and Orpheus's failed mission into Hades to retrieve her, the myth further complicates the metaxic/decreative dyad that my project strives to unpack.

Comparing the katabasis of Orpheus to the mystic's descent into a mysterious and transcendental beyond is part of an old tradition.[2] In these readings, however, Eurydice is little more than the fleeting, phantomic vision of the beloved that Orpheus can neither behold nor retrieve. The homecoming of such an Orpheus resembles the soul's fall back into a body that is forever haunted by the lost ecstatic vision. A metaxic poetics is equally formed through a desire

to transgress borders, but also an aesthetic that emerges from the subject's fall back into a body that harbors the potential of a future becoming. The original katabasis, however, is in fact the descent of Eurydice. Similarly, Weil's account of her own mystical experience—her ascent to the head of the chapel and her subsequent descent back to the streets—can be read as a retelling of the Orphic myth in which she assumes the katabatic role of Eurydice. Moreover, this repositions Eurydice as the one who follows a mystical path leading to a fall—a fall that reveals the weakness of her male counterpart and the power relations that bind them together.

Central to this line of argumentation is a critique of Rushdie's *Ground*, a novel that combines multicultural pluralism with a neoliberal project of controlling such pluralism for its own gains. *Ground* brings into sharp focus Fisher's elucidation of neoliberalism as "a project aimed at destroying, to the point of making them unthinkable, the experiments in democratic socialism and libertarian communism, that were efflorescing at the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s" (*AC* 777). Rushdie's text bridges the musical culture of these decades and the cultural forms of neoliberal globalism that arose once the subversive elements of rock and roll and the exoticism of world music could be coopted by capitalist apparatuses. Myth and the romantic belief in music's transgressive capabilities play an unfortunate participatory role in this process. The novel's narrator, the Promethean Rai, tells the story of Ormus (Orpheus) and Vina (Eurydice), famous lovers who also form the world's most popular musical duo, VTO. Rushdie reimagines the myth as a love triangle between these three Indian artists and suggests, often by the novel's own limitations, how the myth allows for productive theorizations of otherness, hybridity, and the nature of metaxic art once the binary of (male) subject and inaccessible, transcendent (female) other is finally overthrown. The text also demonstrates how easily a metaxic poetics rooted in myth threatens to collapse back into the familiar embodiments of a

particular type of gender politics that is often endemic to the structure of patriarchal myth. In different ways, each of Homer, McCarthy, and Rushdie engage in performances of the same patriarchal ideologies that underpin the *gros animal* that Weil so ardently feared. In this capacity, a metaxic poetics activates within an environment of metaxic crisis in order to demonstrate its value as a force of resistance against the *gros animal* that, during the neoliberal period at the end of the last century, had only gained in strength and scope since the days of Weil's dire warning. This chapter will extend a theory of metaxu beyond Weil's primary texts and their critics in order to bring it into a discussion of Rushdie's globalist *gros animal* and the particular ways that myths are revitalized through its cultural forms.

In the previous chapter, I argued that *Blood Meridian* demonstrates the dangers of metaxu's relationship with violence through its representation of colonial dehumanization. In contrast, this chapter proposes that *Ground* reveals some of the remarkable possibilities for a theory of metaxu by virtue of the novel's missteps, specifically its neutralization and incorporation of those same possibilities for the sake of global capitalist culture. In addition to a postcolonial narrative of cultural globalism, it inadvertently functions as a textual exemplar of what Fisher assiduously describes as capitalist realism, the power of which "derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history" (*CR* 4). It may seem curious that my reader must wait until the final chapter on Octavia Butler to be presented with a text that is ideologically commensurate with a progressive representation of metaxu. This trajectory is deliberate, however, in order to stress that a metaxic poetics must not easily devolve into a utopian or apolitical aesthetic that would otherwise counter decreation or Weil's condemnation of authoritarian capitalism; rather, a metaxic poetics is necessarily a poetics of

resistance against the socio-political forces that would suppress or, in *Ground*'s case, subsume radical forms of community and art for the preservation and proliferation of the *gros animal*.

Such a feat is accomplished through capital's usurpation of a transcendent God and its appropriation of decreative strategies. A similar self-emptying is ritualized for the sake of this secular master, as interiorities become conduits for the unimpeded flow of capital and one's flesh is surrendered to product placement and advertising.[3] Weil's *gros animal* did not disappear by virtue of Fordist magic, only to be replaced with something new in a globalist world-order; it pervades, mutates, and metamorphoses. If neoliberalism is defined by, for example, the disastrous effects of privatization, deregulation, precarity, and the erasure of social services reproduced on a global scale, the neoliberal *gros animal* is positioned as the uncanny foil or antagonist to metaxu in that it exploits the very same tactics of plasticity, fluidity, and boundary-dissolution in order to achieve the aims of capital rather than community.

A crucial dimension of Weil's use of Greek and Christian myth is that her work often expresses reverence for an imaginal past that continues to haunt the present. Using Rushdie's novel, I will sketch the parameters of a hauntology of myth and how it works to both challenge and solidify the incumbency of a patriarchal and Western-centric form of global culture. One of the questions I wish to probe is what it might look like for myth to decreate, or for the subject of myth to de-center and make way for another.[4] Weil suggests that one must "renoncer à être en imagination le centre du monde" and "discerner tous les points du monde comme étant des centres au même titre et le véritable centre comme étant hors du monde" (*AD* 108-109). Like Helen in "L'*Iliade*," to reclaim Eurydice as the displaced centre of the myth—literally "hors du monde" if not quite the resident of some celestial transcendent space—is to reclaim the possibilities for a metaxic poetics by overturning the gender dynamics it might otherwise serve

to naturalize. A metaxic reading of the myth is vigilant to the interplay of subjectivity within a movement that simultaneously promotes a theory of harmony *and* a theory of difference. Put simply, such a union might be defined as metaxic relationality. Therefore, this chapter will seek to determine the viability of myth for a metaxic hermeneutic or whether metaxu operates as a kind of decreative event within the structure of myth itself, opening necessary fissures and slippages through which it can evolve into new forms.

Revisioning Eurydice as an exemplar of metaxic decreation, I want to challenge the view that Weil's philosophy inherently subscribes to an obvious identity politics. Only by returning a subjectivity to the silenced Eurydice (as many twentieth-century poets have done) does she regain a distinctly human voice, neither psychopomp spectre, nor bride obsessing over a lost patriarch's love. Empowered through a post-Orphic identity, Eurydice suggests a line of flight that Weil's unfortunate fatalism (obsessing over a lost patriarch's love) could not allow. If the analogy drawn between Eurydice and Weil's own mystical vision cannot avoid positioning Orpheus in the role of lost deity, it nevertheless expresses a flawed, violent, and overreaching masculinity at the heart of Weil's structural paradigm of transcendence. The literary return of Eurydice's subjectivity must not, therefore, negate her possible metamorphosis into something that has moved beyond the symbolic order of which Orpheus is both representative and hieratic missionary. The following analysis of Rushdie's novel will involve precisely this problematic. It is for this reason that Orphic poetry—and we can add Rushdie to this literary genealogy—continues to be a predominantly male aesthetic while female writers have increasingly re-claimed Eurydice as the displaced centre of the myth. Much has been made about the Orphic gaze as the objectifying gaze of the artist whose subject recedes at the precise moment when it threatens to become visible.[5] A compassionate Persephone (whose Eleusinian myth arguably

prefigures Eurydice's katabasis) is willing to let Eurydice walk back towards the light so long as Orpheus does not steal a look back at her on their journey out of Hades. Orpheus, however, cannot help but look, transgressing against the underworld's gift and condemning Eurydice to a second death. Such a reading implies that all art is a kind of second death, but one in which the artist is also implicated.

Despite its unwavering popularity,[6] the question might yet remain: why the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice? To be sure, it is a myth with persistent historical influence on the purpose of art in a disenchanted and desacralized world. It ungrounds some of the most entrenched dualisms remaining with its representation of the porous divisions between immanence and transcendence or life and death.[7] As beasts, trees, and rivers join together to hear the music of Orpheus, it is also one of the first Western myths to envision an interspecies community, disrupting the boundary between human and nonhuman through the power of art. Moreover, it is a myth that is frequently tied to the origin of homosexuality,[8] while still demanding a proper re-examination of its inscription of gender difference. All of these themes will feature prominently in my efforts to devise an enchanted materialism of metaxu through a critique of Rushdie's novel.

Prometheus contra Orpheus

If Prometheus provides Weil with a myth through which to understand decreative suffering, how might the figures of Orpheus and Eurydice complicate a decreative katabasis with an appeal to the artistic eros of metaxu? For Weil, Prometheus serves the archetypal role of sacrificial rebel, racked with eternal pain in order to produce the incendiary conditions through which culture can emerge. Following the dichotomy proposed by Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and*

Civilization (1955), Orpheus emerges as the antithesis to Prometheus in terms of their symbolic orientations to capitalist culture and its discursive modes of labour. Marcuse extends Weil's view that Prometheus represents the "predominant culture-hero" of twentieth-century modernity—the "trickster and (suffering) rebel against the gods, who creates culture at the price of perpetual pain" (*EC* 161). As part of an anti-capitalist critique of labour that Weil might have appreciated, Marcuse's Prometheus stands at the opposite end of the Orphic ideals of harmony with nature and the cosmos. Instead, Orpheus symbolizes a "revolt against [a] culture based on toil, domination, and renunciation" in seeking to "reconcile Eros and Thanatos" (*EC* 165). For this reason, Orpheus might be ideally positioned as an equally radical figure of rebellion, especially for a neoliberal period of globalization (exemplified by Rushdie) in which the economics of toil and domination have been circumscribed by the same effects of colonialism prophesied in *Blood Meridian*. The Marcusian Orpheus exists in opposition to the Promethean judge of domination and "recall[s] the experience of a world that is not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated – a freedom that will release the powers of Eros now bound in the repressed and petrified forms of [hu]man and nature. These powers are conceived not as destruction but as peace, not as terror but as beauty" (*EC* 164).[9]

As a poet and musician, Orpheus's labour is not one of ceaseless physical agony, but of mourning for the loss of Eurydice and the creation of a community that exists in harmony with death through the ritual of elegy. The naturalist harmony of Marcuse's Orpheus is an artistic reconciliation between life and death, eros and thanatos. This coexistence is necessarily forbidden to the suffering, solitary, and continually-regenerating Prometheus. Orpheus' task is to "transform the visible, phenomenal world into an 'invisible' spiritual intensity, fullness, and meaningfulness" (Segal 118). The work of mourning is an exhaustive labour, as is the

dissolution of boundaries and binaries, and it is pivotal in this assessment that Eurydice also be recuperated as an agential subject, and thus not reducible to commodity or object of consumption for the artist's gaze. Priscila Uppal explains that the "work of mourning is thus an ongoing project, an epic voyage of descent and return where Orpheus brings Eurydice back to help build a future community" (131). Contrary to Marcuse, this commitment to art as sacred labour is actually a very Promethean outlook. The loss of the beloved does not constitute a finality but the beginning of work or praxis, of ritual and quest for the sacred, of re-constitution of the subject as compensatory project of metaxic dwelling. The Orphic elegy does not simply re-present the lost beloved in song, but is a work of decreative art in order to follow the beloved on their metamorphosis from flesh to spirit. The work of elegy, therefore, is the katabasis of an Orpheus who traces the faint path of Eurydice's initial descent. Pierre Hadot argues that "[w]hereas the Promethean attitude is inspired by audacity, boundless curiosity, the will to power, [and] the search for utility, the Orphic attitude, by contrast, is inspired by respect in the face of mystery … Orpheus thus penetrates the secrets of nature not through violence but through melody, rhythm, and harmony" (96). Nevertheless, Orpheus' descent into Hades cannot be said to occur in absence of audacity, curiosity, or even a kind of violence.

In *Acid Communism*, Fisher suggests that Marcuse's notion of art's power as a "Great Refusal" comes from an aesthetic dimension "radically incompatible with everyday life under capitalism" (*AC* 778).[10] Rushdie's *Ground* provides a significant touchstone in this debate, as it not only demonstrates a crisis of metaxic intermediation within neoliberal culture, but also positions Orpheus and Eurydice, Greek meta-myth of artistic creation, within a similar crisis. Fundamentally, *Ground* bestows Orpheus with all of the decreative power and fails to elevate Eurydice beyond the role of metaxic muse. Nevertheless, it offers a compelling question to its

readers: can art be used to counter the dominant modes of reality disseminated through capitalism, or will it ultimately be made to serve the demands of capital? To put this in Weilian terms, can art be used to decreate from the gravity of the *gros animal*, especially through the formation of collectives as opposed to just the isolated male/Orphic artist? As a postcolonial rewriting of the myth, hybridizing the Greek story with smatterings of Hindu mythology,[11] Rushdie's novel demands that the same questions be asked about myth itself; that is, can myth be used to counter the demands of capital or must it inevitably succumb to the ideological pathologies the proliferate through the global marketplace? As Marcuse asks, can myth "recall and preserve in memory" something that "belongs to the future: images of a gratification that would destroy the society that suppresses it" (*One Dimensional Man* 63)?

It is arguably the novel's representation of music that most effectively illustrates "the absorption of art into the administered spaces of capitalist commerce" (Fisher, *AC* 779). Suggestively, although Ormus assumes the role of Orphic rock god, his record label, Colchis, is named after the place where Prometheus suffers his eternal torment. In *Generation of Narcissus* (1971), Henry Malcolm romanticizes Marcuse to illustrate the emancipatory potential of rock music and the hedonistic counter-culture that the rock musician seeks to express. "It is no wonder," Malcolm affirms,

> that the bard Orpheus should become a culture hero, resembling the endless array of rock musicians. With electric guitar in hand and the primitive beat of the drum, singing the erotic music of the natural realm, the musicians arouse and tame the animal within. As such, they represent in most vivid fashion the post-Promethean world of narcissistic pleasure. Theirs is not the beat of the drum that calls men into lockstep obedience, nor the

> music of the pied piper leading the blind masses to some unknown destiny, but the music of the body, uniting the physical with the emotional, the soul with the flesh. (45)

Ground offers a fitting tribute to this Orphic poet-turned-hedonistic pop star and the ways in which even a postcolonial subversion of Malcolm's Anglo-centric counter culture can reproduce the same sexist nostalgia. It is partly this celebration of the male artist's gaze that undermines Rushdie's efforts to craft a progressive and future-oriented postcolonial myth.

When *Ground* succeeds, it does so by portraying the Eurydicean Vina as the singer of the body electric, "uniting the … soul with the flesh" (Malcolm 45) through the transformative power of song. The novel even begins with an epigraph from Rilke's "Sonnets to Orpheus" that concludes with the famous line "it's Orpheus when there's singing" (1.5.6). In making Vina the singer of VTO, Rushdie seems intent on queering the myth, or at least playing with the fluidity through which each character can embody various roles. Unfortunately, Vina's potential is frequently undermined by the libidinous voice of the narrator, Rai, whose occasional misogyny tarnishes his use as Promethean foil to Ormus,[12] as well as his incarnation of the spurned and predatory lover Aristaeus. Especially in Virgil's account, Eurydice dies after fleeing from the advances of Aristaeus (interestingly, another of Apollo's sons). Through Ormus and Rai, the gaze of Orpheus and Aristaeus are revealed to be one and the same, implicating Orpheus in the same predacious crime. The failed gaze of Orpheus also marks his failed transition into a Promethean figure. Rai's obsessive pursuit of Vina suggests a retelling of the myth in which Prometheus is the guilty thief and Eurydice the sacred flame that illuminates the chthonic darkness of the world. Vina must fight against the historical positioning of Eurydice as silent, lost object of masculine art, as well as persistent objectification by Ormus (Orpheus) and Rai (Prometheus/Aristaeus), two male artists for whom Vina serves as sexualized muse. Vina's

objectification fits squarely within a Eurydicean tradition ranging from Virgil and Ovid to Rilke and Blanchot, who describes Eurydice as "the limit of what art can attain; concealed behind a name and covered by a veil, she is the profoundly dark point towards which art, desire, death, and the night all seem to lead" ("Gaze" 99).

Early in the novel, Vina reads aloud to Ormus from a book of mythology and the passages which interest him most are those which concern humanity's "twofold nature … both Titanic and Dionysiac, both earthly and divine" (*GF* 146). This "twofold nature" is represented by the Titan Prometheus and the Dionysian Orpheus.[13] The book instructs that "[b]y purification, asceticism and ritual, we may purge the Titanic element, we may cleanse ourselves of what is earthly, physical. The flesh is weak, evil, contaminated and corrupt. We must strip ourselves of it. We must prepare for becoming divine" (*GF* 146). Vina, for her part, murmurs in agreement that "the living flesh" (*GF* 146) is an undeniable element to our higher nature, while still recognizing "another side, not only to her nature, but to his. For she is—will be—Dionysiac, divine" (*GF* 146). Ormus is appalled by such a Weilian sentiment and sides with "the Titanic element" against Vina's affinity with the Dionysian Orpheus. He finds the latter's decreative gospel to be both dehumanizing and suicidal: "It is the opposite that is true. We must purge ourselves of the divine and prepare to enter fully into the flesh. We must purge ourselves of the natural and prepare to enter fully into what we ourselves have built, the man-made, the artificial, the artifice, the construct, the trick, the joke, the song…. What is apparent is what is there. The hidden world is a lie. (*GF* 146) Ormus's valorization of "man-made" artifice will intensify to reveal overt complicity with a phallocentric hedonism that masquerades as rebellious and the idolatry of patriarchal power that defines Weil's *gros animal*. *Ground*'s dalliance in the eroticism of rock and roll merely empowers what Preciado might call the masculinist war-porn

engine of modern capitalism. The tempestuous power of Vina ("The Voice") ostensibly renders her every bit Ormus's equal, but their age difference betrays the apparent innocence of their courtship. Moreover, when Vina dies, Ormus inevitably chooses an even younger replacement. Vina's death is the occasion for the (once again, male) hero's rebirth.

The Apollonian Ormus also wins out over the Dionysian Vina in the way Rai structures his narrative. This is no more evident than in the curious decision to remove nearly all evidence of anything counter-cultural. Vina smokes pot and experiments with drugs but whatever psychedelic experiences may arise are kept a mystery to the reader. The only time Ormus experiments with drugs, he drinks tea laced with LSD, gets into a car crash, and slips into a coma for more than three years; one of his closest friends is killed instantly, while the other suffers irreparable brain damage. The swift ease with which the incriminating thermos disappears through a clandestine collaboration between Ormus's handlers and the police incapsulates Ormus's integration in systems of power rather than the counter-culture. The consciousness-expansion or political alterity that a substance like LSD might represent, as well as any possibility that the psychedelic counter-culture might offer (especially for a novel set in the 1960s and 1970s), is secondary to a Reaganite didacticism against the dangers of drug use. In the world of the novel, there is no such thing, for example, as Acid Communism; psychedelic consciousness and class politics are rendered ineffectual and incommensurate with a narrative about celebrity. For all its nostalgic interest in the era, *Ground* objects to any alternative modes of consciousness that might threaten its neoliberal screed and the efficiency by which Ormus and VTO catapult to stardom. The Dionysian allure of the exotic and hypersexualized Vina is something Ormus's music attempts to manipulate and control for its own purposes. Like

lightning captured in an Apollonian bottle, Ormus wields her power in order to transform VTO into a multinational industry with its own managerial and PR firm.

Although the Apollonian aspects of Ormus are compared to the earthly nature of the Titans, the Promethean Rai is not without certain insights into the nature of metaxu. He describes something like a decreative metaxu through confrontation with "the Immense," the rapturous and rupturous event privy only to the poets and sages, through which one "can occasionally mutate into another, final form, *a form beyond metamorphosis*. A new fixed thing" (*GF* 461). While Vina and Ormus seek life's fullest metaxic potential through their art, Rai shares Weil's conservative seriousness to metaxic possibility:

> [O]nly under extreme pressure can we change into that which it is in our most profound nature to become. Lichas, hurled into the waters by Herakles, drained of life by fear, turned into a rock. Turned *for ever* into a rock.… This is what people get wrong about transformation. We're not all shallow proteans, forever shifting shape. We're not science fiction. It's like when coal becomes diamond. It doesn't afterwards retain the possibility of change. Squeeze it as hard as you like, it won't turn into a rubber ball, or a Quattro Stagione pizza, or a self-portrait by Rembrandt.[14] It's *done*.… Metamorphosis isn't whimsy. It's revelation. (*GF* 462)

Rai views the world through a teleological lens in which metaxic hybridity is only a means to a final decreative end, a transformation into a form that will stop the movement of becoming and promise a stable resolution to the dissolution of barriers and identities. He professes the salvific function of a metaxic fatalism that would close off each entity and make it impervious to change. It is significant that his example is a rock in that, for Prometheus, there is no greater constant to mock his daily process of decreation and regeneration.

Rai and Weil each contemplate metaxic metamorphosis as the bridge to a transcendent becoming (of god or rock), but one that should conclude with a teleological decreation through which there can be no return to the self, no fall back to the body (or any other body for that matter). Ormus and Vina are unafraid of Rai's fantastical "science-fiction," nor of the radical politics of *deep*, rather than "shallow proteans" (*GF* 462). Metaxu is not whimsy, but perhaps whimsy is merely pejorative for what happens to ontological *play* after what Rai refers to as a revelatory plerosis. How might metaxu be rethought if it rejects any teleology that defines one's destiny through the exclusion of all other forms of life? A truly metaxic teleology is, instead, one that resists the consolation of Rai's (or Weil's) salvific temporality, one in which Rai's diamond can experience the being of "a rubber ball, or a Quattro Stagione pizza, or a self-portrait by Rembrandt" (462). Rai, however, is one for whom metamorphosis lacks all boundary, whether between ontologies or temporalities, and so must inevitably fade into a final resolution. By his formula, the movement between eros and thanatos (or plerosis and kenosis) is teleological rather than dialectical.

At the outset of the novel, Rai explains Vina's passage into myth as a process of "becoming a vessel into which any moron could pour his stupidities, or let us say a mirror of the culture, and we can best understand the nature of this culture if we say that it found its truest mirror in a corpse" (*GF* 6). Reminiscent of the vocabulary of the khoric metaxu, Rai describes Vina as a symbolic vessel into which stupidities are poured, as well as a cultural mirror. VTO's eventual replacement for Vina, a woman Ormus believes to be her very reincarnation, is aptly named Mira.[15] For Rai, myth is a threat to plerosis in that, rather than filling the decreated vessel—of culture, aesthetics, politics, time—with a "new beginning characterized by a time of superabundant power, of wild, fruitful excess" (*GF* 113), it attempts to fill hollowed cultural

forms with the simulacra of a lost sacrality. If myth is a corpse, however, this undermines the biological and ecological processes of transformation that continue after death and the strange appearances of Vina after her demise. This, along with the manner in which different cultures transpose the myths of other religious traditions to breathe new life into their own,[16] represents the novel's main defense of myth. Ormus's pursuit of Vina mirrors the stratagem for the pursuit of myth itself—not the revivification of a corpse, as Rai and Camus suggest, but the aesthetics of a diasporic transference. Myth, in this case, is the original aesthetic form of plasticity. Blumenberg has something similar in mind when he designates metamorphosis as the "principle" or "fundamental form" of myth (352). Despite its faults, *Ground* captures this same metamorphic principle through the fluidity and instability of cultural narratives—especially those that probe the real, the unconscious, and the relation of the aesthetic to the mystical. Like myth itself, Vina is a metaxic, chameleonic, and protean figure who underscores an ever-present danger: "once we've learned how to change our skins, we Proteans, sometimes we can't stop, we career between selves, lane-hopping wildly, trying not to run off the road and crash. [… Vina is] a shape shifter, [one] who knows what it's like to wake up a giant bug" (*GF* 265-266).

Earthquake Capitalism and the Hauntology of Myth

At their peak, VTO release the celebrated *Quakershaker* to awaken the world to a temporal and world-ecological moment described as a kind of kenotic emptying in order to make way for a rejuvenating plerosis. Rai explains this process in terms of a "poisonous, degrading, defiling" (*GF* 113) atmosphere that must be cleansed. Geological fault-lines produce massive earthquakes—including the one that will eventually swallow Vina in Mexico. India is continuously hit by tremors while America possess a stability so conspicuous that conspiracies

develop concerning whether the geological precarity of the global south is not merely a consequence of capitalist exploitation by the global north, but a covert tactic of destabilization. The novel's focus on earthquakes suggests a reshaping of geopolitical forces and the possibility for imagining new social and artistic relations during annihilation. There are serious doubts, however, as to whether VTO's music represents a challenge to predatory capitalism through an emergent plerosis or whether VTO capitalizes on a heightened period of global consumption and multicultural marketability to harness its power in a form reminiscent of Naomi Klein's disaster capitalism.[17] *Ground* seems to prophesize an impending disaster, possibly even an extinction event, but it is unclear whether this will manifest as a shock doctrine through which neoliberal globalization will extend its reach or whether it might finally mark the apocalyptic consequence of its tenure. Whatever happens, Vina will die and Ormus will emerge the victor, his music able to thrive seamlessly from one geopolitical crisis to the next.

The cyclical process of kenosis and plerosis thus becomes one of pure economics, as disasters empty a region of its people, its resources, its stability, and capitalism swiftly reasserts itself under the guise of a plerosis of stability and economic opportunity. Disaster capitalism thereby functions through a similar equation to Weilian force: violence begets violence; in fact, violence looks for violence in order to beget itself. Correspondingly, *Ground* situates both myth and modernity within a continuous cycle of kenosis and plerosis. This process highlights the myriad ways in which metaxic spaces are deployed as conduits of exchange and migration, thus unleashing the transformative potential of death, love, and music. The cyclical dialectic of an ecological purging followed by a cultural plerosis is further linked to a metaxology in that the event of rebirth is situated within the creaturely realm rather than the post-world promise of salvific transcendence. Klein is justifiably skeptical of those who advocate for this dialectical

process through apocalyptic narratives of cosmogonic renewal and "purist invention. Rooted in biblical fantasies of great floods and great fires, it is a logic that leads ineluctably toward violence. The ideologies that long for that impossible clean slate, which can be reached only through some kind of cataclysm, are the dangerous ones" (*Shock Doctrine* 19). This is why metaxu must be privileged over decreative annihilation, whether individual or on the macro-scale of accelerationism. In the pursuit of decreation and its subsequent plerosis, especially on a social level, one must take into consideration the sacrificial victims of an interconnected biosphere where the purging of "poisonous, degrading [and] defiling" (*GF* 113) elements cannot be controlled with anything approximating selective justice. If it could, who or what institution is tasked with the responsibility of differentiating between what is poisonous and what remains to be salvaged? In *Ground*, political, economic, and cultural leaders of the *gros animal* are equally "caught up in the gnaw and churning of the western world's spiritual hunger" (*GF* 337).

Somewhat tellingly, Vina is a casualty of the collective ungrounding of geological upheaval, while Ormus is the casualty a more individual ungrounding. While in his coma, Ormus's psyche develops fault-lines such that he gains access to an alternate dimension beyond the spatio-temporal boundaries of the current world. Just as Rubenstein playfully begins *Worlds Without End* with the declaration that a multiverse offers one way to avoid the G-word, Rushdie employs the *deus ex machina* of the multiverse in order to avoid inscribing a katabatic mysticism to the otherworldly talents of Ormus. As the Orpheus figure, Ormus is liminal from birth, branded with a sigil-like birthmark that allows him to communicate with his still-born, yet no less musical twin, Gayomart. As a psychopomp for his brother's transmissions, Ormus is the beneficiary of a multiverse *deus ex machina* that prophetically gifts him with the melodies of famous songs even before they are be written by other, ostensibly historical songwriters. Clever

as this might appear on the surface, the conceit also appears as an attempt to redeem the failure of the mother's womb as a khoric receptacle. The problematic fusion of metaxu and a gendered khora is demonstrative of some of the ways in which Rushdie's experimentation goes astray, as well as the difficulty in forging a new theory of metaxu beyond the philosophical models to which it is indebted.

Ormus, in preaching to Vina that there is no alternative to "the man-made, the artificial, the artifice" (*GF* 146), promulgates a worldview aligned with a materialism impressed upon the world through a Platonic khora, while yet seen through the "bastard reasoning" of Timaeus. If capitalism is what determines the social and political reality of Ormus's materialism, then he also aligns himself with the belief that there is no alternative to capitalism. As the poet laureate of capitalist realism, readers may inevitably ponder why Ormus is the one who communes with his dead brother, plucking out the chords of the infectious earworms that literal ghost-writer Gayomart sends to him from the chthonic channels of "the hidden world (*GF* 146). In believing only in the material and the visible, Ormus rejects his own metaxic nature and his ability to act as a musical medium for the otherworld that cannot be seen. At most, it can be argued that he refuses to allow the invisible otherworld, like the phantomic Eurydice in the ancient myth, to remain invisible, eschewing Dionysian mystery for Apollonian tangibility. He cannot accept "the hidden world (*GF* 146) in its phantomic spectrality but must transform it into the symbolic order of capitalist spectacle.

Rushdie goes to great lengths to explore the spaces of transcendental alterity through innovative themes of multiverse liminality, but does so for somewhat predictable ends. While in his coma, Ormus is increasingly visited by a woman named Maria once another branch of the multiverse seeps through the fissures of "the real" (*GF* 327). Like all the women of Ormus's

universe,[18] Maria's role is one of unconditionally-loving mistress, but unique in that she traverses the intergalactic limens of space and time in order to seduce him and, with equal enthusiasm, warn him of the impending collision between their worlds. "A crack seems to open in the air itself" out of which she can materialize and disappear, and no amount of vigilant guard or top-of-the-line security systems can keep her away from Ormus's bedside (*GF* 317). Just as in the case of Gayomart, one might ask why Maria chooses to bring her interdimensional caution to Ormus, enemy of both the transcendent and the natural.[19] Maria exploits the metaxicity that arises out of the dissolution of borders, and thereby complicates Vina's role in the myth, for she is the one who passes, the true liminal figure for whom a singularity of the world is a terror to be escaped.

As a Cassandra from the otherworld, Maria preaches a "hot gospel" (*GF* 327) for a time of global warming, attempting to prophesy the (meta)physical destruction on the horizon through inter-dimensional convergence. *Ground* misses the opportunity to explore the ways that Maria might disrupt Western epistemologies of history and time, as well as the parallels between cultural decreation and forced diasporic migration. Maria's presence does not portend the rupture of all centres through a utopic or anarchic "heterogeneity of decolonized space" (Spivak 310) and she fails to become the prophet of an emergent space of decolonized being. Instead, her metaxic slippage is appropriated by an authorial Orphic gaze that reduces her to the rather blasé erotic fantasy of nursemaid. Contrary to any fear that it may now be easier to imagine the end of the world than an end to capitalism, Maria's warning of an interdimensional collision can never quite herald an immanent apocalypse. Within the late-capitalist logic of the novel, annihilation is something that one lives through; for all its religiously codified doom, even an apocalypse is powerless to unseat the ideologies of economic and patriarchal oppression exemplified by Ormus

and Rai. As such, Maria's character falls victim to the same fort-da game the novel plays with myth—exploring its potential for creative alterity and metaxic subjectivity, only to recoil back into the hands of sexual difference defined by hetero-male libido.

Ground does not turn its readers into accelerationists, yearning for an interdimensional apocalypse that never quite arrives, but one can certainly lament the lost futures of which Vina and Maria are deprived. These two Eurydices emerge with the (unrealized) potential to shape and transform the cultural, political, even cosmological structuring of the world, but are ultimately reinscribed into the all-too-familiar patriarchal dynamics of power. Vina is first introduced as a wild and frenzied bacchant, armed with "the ferocity of her appetites" (*GF* 4) and "feast[ing]" upon men as though they were a "take home meal" (*GF* 4) but her vitality is ceaselessly suppressed by the objectifying representations of Rai and Ormus. Her death is the nexus of meaning in the privileged plot of Ormus, and despite her world-conquering voice, she is killed in an earthquake on page three, lost before the novel really begins. As the most captivating character in the novel, Vina demonstrates that it is not "anguish … grief and … tears" (Ovid 10.74) to which the enchanted animals and trees respond, but Eurydice singing through the voice of the poet. Orpheus sings his grief but communicates the presence of an absent and lost voice, of the face of his beloved that could not successfully materialize. Morton helps clarify this grief by illustrating that "[g]rief is the photograph of an object buried deep inside you: every so often it releases some of its photons into the bloodstream. Grief is the footprint of something that isn't you, archaeological evidence of an object" (*Realist Magic* 18). In grief, Eurydice remains with Orpheus as an affective haunting. In turn, his music and poetry become the ritualistic practice of this haunting.

The elegiac tradition, as Uppal suggests, regards Orpheus as a successful poet because he has managed to construct the very linguistic ritual through which the dead can be returned. Uppal points to Anne Michaels's dictum in response to the Holocaust that "Language is how ghosts enter the world" (*Miner's Pond* 59) and refers to the "Orphic elegist" as one whose "voice is the successful, singular creation of the mourning process" (44). Uppal also claims that Orpheus, or at least the conventional Orphic elegist, "keeps the dead alive through memorializing verse" (166). Consequently, when Rilke (and Rushdie) suggests that "it's Orpheus when there's singing" ("Sonnets to Orpheus" 1.5.6), what of Eurydice is expressed (if not quite entombed) in that song? If there is also Eurydice whenever there's singing, it is because this is a song that expresses both presence and absence, and it is this simultaneity that defines the sacred in a metaxic reading of the myth. Blanchot proposes that "the depth does not surrender itself face to face; it only reveals itself by concealing itself in the work" ("Gaze" 99). Eurydice subsequently becomes the prosopopeiatic figure with which Orphic art will henceforth concern itself: the concatenation of life and death and the representation and the ineffable. If Eurydice is the *eidolic* presence of the withdrawn within the Orphic song,[20] she is also the unsung presence that yet remains audible. She is the subterranean root of the song that blossoms in the diurnal.

Vina is described in terms that explicitly echo Blanchot: "what Vina wanted was a glimpse of the unknowable. The music offered the tantalizing possibility of being borne on the waves of sound through the curtain of *Maya* that supposedly limits our knowing, through the gates of perception to the divine melody beyond" (*GF* 123). As the singer of VTO, she counters an Orphic myth traditionally mired in sexual difference and the erasure of female subjectivity for the creation of male elegy. Just as Vina can only be narrated posthumously, the elegiac Eurydice can only be present for Orpheus in song. She is, therefore, a kind of hauntological figure and

Orpheus's elegiac music the first hauntological music. It is a music that is always struggling to conjure a Eurydice that never was (the idealized version constructed by Orpheus/Ormus/Rai) and never will be (the potential of Eurydice/Vina lost to the future). These lost futures provide a glimpse into radical forms of community based in hauntological art, in queer love, even in interspecies solidarity. Below, I suggest what such a community might look like; here, Rushdie's commitment to the heterosexist caricature of rock music obstructs a wider spectrum of gender identities. This is not, therefore, a reclamation of the lost voice of Eurydice, but the hauntological transfiguration from death to immortalized aesthetic symbol through the metaxic intermediary of Orphic music, or the mouthpiece of patriarchal civilization in Rushdie's text. As Marcuse warns, "[c]ivilization has to protect itself against the spectre of a world which could be free" (*EC* 93) [21] and in *Ground*, this spectre is a world in which Eurydice might escapes her role of elegiac symbol or failed pursuit of masculine individuation. At times, *Ground* seems to blend the mythical roles of its protagonists such that Vina rescues Ormus from the underworld of his coma, but ultimately, repeats the lost possibilities of an empowered Eurydice as closed horizons.

As with Fisher, there is an inescapable co-mingling of hauntology and nostalgia in Rushdie's novel. "Haunting," Fisher explains, "happens when a space is invaded or otherwise disrupted by a time that is out-of-joint, a dyschronia" ("You Have Always Been the Caretaker" 163). *Ground*, as well as the other mythic revisions in my study, operates in a similar fashion. If one entertains Eliade's definition of myth as the oral or written literature of a sacred history, perhaps the hauntology of myth acts as a kind of temporality that is primal and imaginal—a space of dream, of the unconscious, of embryonic culture from a time that was mythical from its very conception. Similar to Fisher's reworking of Derrida's term, hauntological myth is the return of a myth "without ever being present.… [T]he revenant repeats without being present *in*

the first place—where "place" is equivalent in meaning to "time." Nothing occupies the point of origin, and that which haunts *insists* without ever *existing*" ("You Have Always Been the Caretaker" 163). The return of myth, in this sense, is always somewhat hauntological. In *Blood Meridian*, the ancient values of colonial expansion stem from a literary and mythical past (the *Iliad*) that insists without ever actually existing. What Butler revives in *Dawn*, as I hope to argue in the following chapter, are the feminist, queer, and even interspecies possibilities promised by myth that history has foreclosed. Rushdie, appropriating the masculinist genealogy of British imperialism, perpetuates these lost futures.

If *Ground* demonstrates how myth is a dangerous carrier for patriarchal or racist ideologies, it also illuminates how myth can be a container with atemporal roots deracinated from any single cultural tradition. As such, the structure of myth is inherently fallible, but nevertheless metaxic in that it is capable of bridging one culture to another and yoking asynchronous temporalities together. Despite this fallibility, Fisher contends that "myth doesn't repeat so much as it abducts individuals out of linear time and into its 'own' time, in which each iteration of the myth is in some sense always the first time (*Weird* 95)." Myth might, therefore, rescue a text (even a people) from a modern temporality defined, at best, by the arrested temporality of nostalgia, and at worst, by the impending apocalyptic temporality suggested by Maria and the current ecological crisis. Nostalgia's etymological roots in the home or place of *ache* can thus conflate these two polarities. Myth is revised in each new era, but to examine it through the literature of the 1980s and 1990s is to examine its complicity with (or acquiescence to) the foreclosed horizons of neoliberalism, or rather, myth's activation of the remaining modes of enchantment and metamorphosis for a praxis of imagination.[22]

The hauntology of myth offers a "return of history," and specifically a mythic and imaginal history, precisely "in the midst of the prognosis of the demise of historical telos" (Jameson xi). Hauntological myth does not smuggle an atemporality into the present; nor does it inevitably induce a paralytic return to the past, but the intervention of, for example, Fisher's *dyschronia* or Eliade's cyclical, sacred, or eschatological temporality—an eschatology that is fundamentally different than the Hegelian or Fukuyaman end of history through liberal democratic capitalism. I want to challenge, however, Fisher's declaration that hauntology is only a symptom of late capitalism rather than a strategy. The polyphonic spiritual traditions that weave throughout Weil's writings are just such a strategy, and even Rushdie strives to dismantle a kind of apartheid separating various cultural mythologies. Strategies can be born of symptoms, and unlike Rushdie's nostalgic pilfering of classic rock or the relentless pilfering of the 1980s in popular culture that continues unabated since Fisher's first complaints, myth can yet offer an aesthetic and (a)temporal form to unground the contemporary imagination, especially as it is formed by capitalist culture. To re-write myth is to install a deliberate out-of-jointness resistant to the seamless integration into the narrativization of contemporary forms of power. As much as it may offer a future politics of utopian sociality, it is always a response to a particular and historical trauma. *Blood Meridian*, *Ground*, and *Dawn* each narrate this trauma in terms of a cultural or planetary apocalypse that is past (*Blood Meridian*), present (*Ground*), or promised (*Dawn*).

The hauntology of myth provides a narrative strategy through which all three temporalities become co-extensive. It suggests ways to reimagine the future through symbolic structures that, even when manipulated by certain apparatuses of power, remains partly obscured in an esoteric and imaginary past. As Fisher himself explains of myth and the temples built in

honour of its gods, "the symbolic structures which made sense of the monuments have rotted away, and in a sense what we witness here is the unintelligibility and the inscrutability of the Real itself" (*Weird* 63). Rather than a mark of cultural sterility and of futures that can no longer be adequately imagined, hauntological myth can become an act of political resistance, especially by the feminists, Afrofuturists, and Indigenous storytellers featured in the following chapter—many of whom return to myth for reasons far different than the ones lurking behind Rushdie's efforts to incorporate cultural diversity into hegemonic globalization.

In *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), Fisher reflects on the work of Alan Garner, observing that myth cannot be reduced to either fiction or the fantastic:

> [T]he mythic is part of the virtual infrastructure which makes human life as such possible. It is not the case that first of all there are human beings, and the mythic arrives afterwards, as a kind of cultural carapace added to a biological core. Humans are from the start—or from before the start, before the birth of the individual—enmeshed in mythic structures. Needless to say, the family itself is just such a mythic structure (97).

It is no coincidence that Weil includes family in her catalogue of metaxic structures. One is enmeshed in a world of metaxu from birth and the individual is formed through an entanglement with otherness and relationality. Since myth is a structure that precedes the birth of the individual, it is also a structure into which the metaxic subject can flow once unmoored from the egoistic gravity of individualism. When writers suggest a return to the mythic world as an antidote to the various ailments of culture (Nietzsche), spirituality (Scholem), or even embodiment (Haraway, Roberto Calasso), they gesture towards the return to certain kinds of sacralities, embodiments, and reciprocities that have never *actually* been lived. The return to myth is hauntological in this important sense: it is a longing for a lost future of radical alterity in

which incalculable destinies were available to human becoming. It is an affective mourning for a metaxic past only experienced through myth and the imagination.

Rushdie, Weil, and (Under)World Literature

The hauntology of myth and the rewriting of lost futures bear striking parallels to the mythic heteroglossia in Weil's notebooks. Her methodology, pejoratively described by Levinas as "World Literature" ("Simone Weil" 136),[23] is an intertextual frenzy of cross-cultural mythology—Judeo-Christian, Greek, Hindu, Egyptian. The notebooks reveal the mind of a thinker who attempts to imagine a polydoxic Christianity that has historically been elided for the sake of monologic theorizations.[24] She envisions a polyvalent and transcultural spirituality (mythic, by another name) that cannot be reductively synthesized through a specifically Christianized reading. To Christianize the notebooks of Weil is to prevent her writings from opening up to other forms of religious experience, or rather, to prevent Christianity from being a porous world-system that is perpetually open to other subjectivities without the need to colonialize, appropriate, or erase. The practices of reading and translation that comprised world literature in the time of Weil, the Russian Formalists, and even Levinas, are somewhat different than what has emerged since the turn of the millennium, but in Weil's notebooks, arguments for the power of translation (represented by David Damrosch) and the untranslatability of texts (represented by Emily Apter) exist side by side. The untranslatability of metaxu is merely one example of this, although it is the only Greek that survives in *Pesanteur*. Weil wished that she could become metaxic, a diaphanous intermediary so that her God's love could seamlessly pass through her to others. It seems clear that this desire influences her approach to translation as

well; she quotes from myriad sources, some in her own translation and some in their original languages in the hopes of being as unobtrusive an intermediary as possible.

When considering the nature of a given text's literary value, Damrosch privileges the language(s) of socialization (circulation) over the language of production as a way of countering the potential for nationalism with the heterogeneous globalism of the text's existence.[25] As framed by Damrosch, the ideal social space of circulation for a given text would be global, a possibility that arguably could not arise until around the time of *Ground*'s publication and the developments in e-commerce, online databases, piracy, and communications technology. The multicultural globalism of Rushdie's story, however, actually exposes the cracks in such an ideal by demonstrating the facility with which the socialization of language can drift into the cultural charybdis of America's Global English. Rushdie's text begins with Hindu and Greek mythology, various Indian dialects used concurrently, several musical traditions from the non-English world, and quickly stirs them up in the supersized slurry of America's melting pot. Levinas criticizes Weil for her world literature approach, yet her notebooks provide a sprawling vision of how a diffusion of multicultural and multilingual texts and authors can coexist without becoming homogenized for the sake of narrative synthesis. Commentators may do well to adopt a similar approach to Weil's own writing, especially to concepts like metaxu which may suggest a kind of network of intermediation for any project of *worlding*. Tihanov, following Damrosch, argues for the value of studying texts "across languages, in an act of continuous estrangement from the language of the original" (219). Even etymologically, *meta*-xu suggests a crossing over or between languages, spaces, times, even worlds. To expand metaxu beyond its original language—not just French (by way of Greek) but also Weil's Neoplatonist metaphysics—is to

follow the path of this intermediary bridge to encounter the strange places of literary socialization to which it may lead.

Sharae Deckard and Stephen Shapiro's elucidation of the two sides of world literature is instrumental in highlighting the complex ways it can refer to world-cultural forms and texts in order to "critique or inflect capitalism's development" or it can simply use the category world literature to connote a certain "humanist appreciation" that ultimately "presents no threat to neoliberal consensus as such" (21).[26] Although this division is meant to describe its current incarnation, one can still observe its applicability to world literature's (or *weltliteratur's*) initial period, especially its theorization by Goethe while studying a French translation of a Chinese novel from his provincial German home. The fact that Goethe never travelled outside Germany no doubt influenced the nature of his "humanist appreciation," while Weil's comparative use of ancient Greek, Sanskrit and Latin to explore the foundations of European culture and comparative religion might seem a fragmented and paratactic version of Goethe's vision. Her approach, however, especially as someone who was translating texts in ancient Greek as a young child and teaching Plato to factory and farm workers, is actually a composite of both possibilities suggested by Deckard and Shapiro, and perhaps even a practice suggesting how a humanist appreciation *demands* a threat to capitalist or neoliberal consensus (21). Weil's effort to teach Plato to farmers is also a testament to her belief in translatability, not just carrying ideas from one language to another, but across barriers of class as well. The inability for a field-hand to understand the intricacies of Platonic philosophy, Weil believed, was not simply due to a disparity in education, but to a failure of translation and an unwillingness to circulate systems of knowledge across the traditional demarcations of labour. To Weil, Plato was education for the soul, and such education must be democratized and accessible to all.

Whether discourse or practice, world literature traces various circuits of textual production and proliferation, having much in common with Weil's methodology. While confrontations with radical alterity might form the core of mystical literature, literary critics might gain insight from texts detailing the loss of individual subjectivity following the absorption into a centralized power. Decreation teaches that one does not necessarily occupy the marginalized position of one who must join the centralized power or discourse; rather, it is often bound up in a centralized power from which one must decreate. Any cultural exchange between literary centres, peripheries, and semi-peripheries is always mediated in terms of power and privilege. Through advancements in communications technology and more equitable business practices, it is possible to elevate the voices of marginalized communities and their authors and to achieve a level of socialization or circulation that may encompass the globe; the worthy aim of stretching the geographical boundaries of marginal communities underscores the difficulty of enacting such processes without further inscribing authors and their communities into a capitalist market-economy whose very foundation is built upon the subjugation of such voices of alterity, even within the boundaries of America and its shared linguistic partners in the global north. A more equitable representation of identities and their political demands is no doubt essential. Yet, if the globalization of a neoliberal *gros animal* is to dictate the ways in which texts circulate throughout the world, it is imperative to imagine alternatives to the current systems of production and distribution in which access is often based on the economic viability of particular representations of cultural difference.

Ground displays a similar approach to the world literature methodology of Weil, as Indian and Greek mythology converge in a bricolage of historical influence such that "Odysseus became a monkey god and Paris a demon king" (*GF* 42). The novel presents the ancient myths

of Indo-European cultures as the same story retold in different cultural guises with the original source lost to the oubliette of history. Such stories are a kind of currency that Rushdie deploys liberally throughout the novel; one imagines a newly-minted coin for a pan-continental marketplace, with one side featuring the engraved narrative of the "abduction of Helen of Troy by Paris and that of Sita of Ayodha by the demon king Ravana" and another depicting "the relationship between Hanuman, the wily monkey god, and the devious Odysseus" (*GF* 41). Rushdie provides a model for a borderless mythology, especially for a literary period in which the "[d]issolution of genres and transgression of borders has become the rule, rather than the exception" (Forslid and Ohlsson 431). The cross-cultural hybridity that Levinas finds in Weil's writing is actually a metaxic practice of reading that bridges cultures, religions, and disparate historical periods. When comparing this metaxic practice of reading to Rushdie, one is forced to question if the ideologies of a text like *Ground* are as magical as its dabbling in the fantastic. Put another way, to what degree are the globalist politics embedded within the text complicated by the caricatured exoticism and efficient marketability of the magic realism label in the final decades of the last century?

Vina provides readers with somewhat of a response, as she finds the pantheism of ancient Greece to be disenchanted, co-opted, and made unrecognizable by Western capitalism. Once arriving in North America, she remarks that "Apollo's just a theater, Poseidon's an adventure, Hermes is a fucking silk scarf" (456). Grace Jantzen has observed a pervasive fear of pantheism because it "bespeaks a perceived, if unconscious, threat to the masculinist symbolic of the West" ("Feminism and Pantheism" 272). Playful as Vina's connections might seem on the surface, the subtext is a "threat to the masculinist symbolic" (272) that has been pacified through corporate deterritorialization and a redeployment of the same tactics that allowed Christianity to flourish

by appropriating pagan symbols and practices for its own rituals. As one of the most influential writers for the theorization of world literature in the twenty-first century, Rushdie's *Ground* is quick to suppress its own representation of a cross-cultural and multilingual Bombay, as Rai's positionality as narrator shares in Ormus's youthful desire to escape India. Geethe Ganapathy-Dore has described the novel in terms of "Rushdie's passage to America by way of Britain" (17) and *Ground* intricately blurs the distinction between Western and Eastern myth, art, and culture to demonstrate (even through unconscious performance) that the machine of imperialism that it seeks to oppose is often rooted in the very same spiritual, cultural, and political systems.

As allegory, Ormus's story parallels Plato's disparaged Orpheus who employs "music and wiles to cross boundaries, between Apollo and Dionysus, man and nature, truth and illusion, reality and imagination, even between life and death" (*GF* 498). Regardless of *Ground*'s treatment of diasporic journeys from postcolonial peripheries to centre-stage America, Rushdie's approach is not so much unthreatening or provincial like Goethe's, but the vehicle through which humanist appreciation can become a deceptive vehicle for globalism's flattening of difference, especially as it is disseminated through the ritual practices of musical culture. Ormus, who "within moments of his birth began making the strange, rapid finger movements with both hands which any guitarist could have identified as chord progressions" (*GF* 23), claims *sui generis* expertise in the musical traditions of seemingly every culture simply because he can speak the universal language of music. This is a fantasy of multicultural globalism to serve the cosmopolitan desires of the contemporary world—metaxu without decreation, intermediation without sacrifice. There is a crossing of trans-national and trans-spatial dimensions conveyed in Weil's experience with music as well. While not subject to the same cosmopolitan fantasy, one might yet choose to employ such terms as fantastical or magical for the direct conduit she

perceives stretching from the plaintive song of Portuguese fisherwomen to the ears of her God. For Weil, as in Rushdie, the local and the global are parallel to the microcosm and macrocosm.[27] The translation and circulation of texts outside their localized creation is a necessary flight embedded in all literary or artistic creation. The respective methods of Weil and Rushdie to incorporate ancient myths and stories into the symbolic and spiritual contexts of twentieth-century cultures is evidence of how many temporal borders they believe stories might cross.

In a way, *Ground* provides a cautionary tale for the discourses of world literature in that it allows Western readers to gaze into India's past and see their own Western culture reflected back at them. The diasporic movement from India to Britain and America is a common one, but Rai presents this journey as a kind of artistic Manifest Destiny towards the cultural mecca of New York City. Musically (as I hope to argue in the following section) this does not quite mobilize the reverse colonization that the narrative might portend. Instead, it is more commensurate with Fanon's lamentation that one is "obliged to keep the economic channels established by the colonial regime. [One] can, of course, export to other currency zones, but the basis of [these] exports remains basically unchanged. The colonial regime has hammered its channels into place and the risk of not maintaining them would be catastrophic" (*Wretched* 56). *Ground* is an homage to the interwoven cultures of India and Euro-America, but for all its enchanted wordplay and riotous romanticism, it cannot disguise its own imperialistic victimization, or rather, its "disorientation: loss of the East" (*GF* 5). The cross-pollination and shared mythic roots of Eastern and Western cultures create an exotic, neoliberal bildungsroman through which the Indianness of the old Bombay is progressively shed until Ormus can ascend to the heroic avatar of Western popular culture.

The figure of Maria causes similar problems for postcolonial framings. Like many subaltern voices who wish to be heard in the hegemonic cultural systems of the West, those who have found a way to slip into the world of Ormus are those who can pass, those whose alienness is not so shocking as to cause alarm. In response, for example, to Spivak's call to "consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center)" (*Critique* 269), Maria is the voice from the otherworld, hermetically silent for so long, elbowing her way through to the receptive ear of Ormus in order to gain legitimacy. She illustrates the importance of an *otherworld* literature or an *underworld* literature to be a part of world literature's inclusive discourses. Despite the drug-fueled car accident that brings her into the story, it is not the use of psychedelics that opens Ormus to such metaxic exchanges, but injury and utter immobilization. Moreover, Maria "looks back to a utopian golden age in which there were no quakes, for the world was at peace, there were no conflicting versions, the earth lacked its present tragic quality of irreconcilability" (*GF* 327). Like Orpheus, her tectonic gospel is elegiac and mournful for the halcyon days before their worlds intermingled. Nevertheless, the ease through which the other/underworld gains value from its integration into the metaxic channels of intermediation—as represented by Ormus or the Anglocentric modes of commerce and distribution—limits the potential for what metaxic intermediation might look like in Rushdie's text. Maria offers an interesting story of entropic interdimensional flux, even of something like decreation as forced-migration. While it is important not to undermine the significance of diasporic experience narrated in *Ground*, the acquiescence of the Maria storyline to that of Ormus privileges a particular linearity in the project of *worlding* as it traces a movement from home to exile, from past to future, and from crisis to salvation.[28] She is the prophetic destabilizer of another, alternate

dimension, but her willing submission to the seductive power of Ormus serves to naturalize this subjugation as part of an inescapable law of human nature that transcends worlds.

Ormus's father, Sir Darius Xerxes Cama, is an iconoclastic scholar of myth whose controversial theories are deeply aligned with the destinies of Maria and Vina, but also the meaningful possibilities of world literature itself. Darius opposes Georges Dumézil's tripartite structure (religious sovereignty, physical force, fertility) because it fails to consider the fourth function: otherness, outcasts, marginal figures, "[t]he only people who see the whole picture" because only they "step outside the frame" (*GF* 43). Instead, Darius argues that myth's structure operates like Moretti's waves, destabilizing all branchings, binaries, triangles through an amorphous system attentive to the fourth function. As Blumenberg clarifies in *Work on Myth*, myth can be usefully contrasted to religious dogma in that it possesses no outsiders, and therefore, "requires no decisions and no conversions, knows no apostates and no repentance. It permits identity even when it is deformed to the point of unrecognizability, indeed even in the effort to bring it to an end" (242). Ormus's father seeks to dismantle Dumézil's structure and its reliance on a system that cannot adequately represent the otherness that lies at the centre of all systems of knowledge. A mythic structure inclusive of the fourth function compels an inquiry into whether or not, if the outside of the frame is contained within the frame, there is ever an outside of the frame. Herein lies one of the fundamental concerns of a Weilian or metaxic approach to myth: does the deconstruction of myth and its decreation from the calcified frame of a particular ideology or national language produce a new articulation of the myth, or is the myth's esoteric symbolism so inseparably tethered to hegemonic culture that transgression, rather than complete transcendence, remains the only possibility?

Darius's model of the fourth function, emblematic of a properly metaxic system of exchange and circulation, is a reconstitution of frames as relevant only if they stretch out towards otherness. As such, *Ground*'s treatment of myth is metaxic in that it is directed towards the margins of its inner-worlds and towards the fissures that mark the moments of connection between one cultural tradition and another, between the gaze and the fleeting image that escapes it, between life and the death that constitutes its unravelling. The models to which Darius objects are totalizing, assimilating, and colonialist in their pursuit of unification. In some sense, his problem with the trinitarian structures of Christianity and Dumézil are that they do not fully take metaxic otherness into consideration. Nothing is metaxic if it does not open itself to that which is "beyond the pale, above the fray, beneath notice" (*GF* 42). Metaxu is the liminal, the in-between, the space of possibility wherein the material is not eaten up by the noumenal and the mystic inevitably falls back into her body. Metaxu is the space, the event, the mediating vibrational bridge across which non-assimilative powers converge to produce something which had heretofore been only potentiality. Despite the aspersions cast by Levinas, this is also what Weil gains from her world literature method of "cross[ing] distant worlds like the Moon" (Levinas, "Simone Weil" 136).

Subterranean Homesick Blues

In traversing national borders, cultures, and even temporalities, the music in Rushdie's novel has commonly been read a postcolonial ideal of inclusivity. Cameron Fae Bushnell, for example, believes that "the novel demonstrates the impact of British imperialism on Indian (musical) subjects and on the narrative itself" (149).[29] As the world's biggest band, VTO becomes a potential carrier for counter-imperialism, but their music is often a kind of

cosmopolitan assemblage representative of pop's global reach. *Ground* provides an inventive twist on how racialized and non-Western cultural forms are appropriated by white Euro-American culture, however, something altogether more nefarious is also at work, especially in the intricate ways that culture is entangled in the apparatuses of capital. Exchanges between disparate cultures and musical forms resemble Žižek's description of "liberal multiculturalism as an experience of [an] Other deprived of its Otherness. The idealized Other" ("Only a Radicalised Left"). In *Ground*, the idealized other is an American pop star, one whose otherness is so permeable that he becomes the definition of American capital culture (Ormus) and another who can act as a repository for sexual and colonial desire (Vina)—two sides of a patriarchal coin that render Ormus and Rai fabulously wealthy.

Early in her career, and uncertain of an Indian's place in Western music, Vina doubtfully suggests that nothing "can … be the edge as well as the centre" to which her manager Yul Singh replies, "[s]ure it can.… Take a look around you" (*GF* 378). The surrounding party of eccentrics at Pleasure Island—Sun Ra, Ziggy Stardust, the Thin White Duke,[30] a female Lou Reed and her male partner Laurie Anderson, a pseudo-alien Neil Young, even lesbian vampires[31]—immediately overturn Vina's suspicions. Each of these characters supposedly represents a successful figure of the fourth function, a marginal or outside figure who is simultaneously able to dwell at the centre through their music. Vina, and especially Ormus, feel like pariahs at this party, but soon they will become the node of otherness around which the world will orbit. "The U.S. Army (and its rock songs) went into one East and came out with a bloody nose. Now Ormus's music has arrived like an affirmation from another East to enter the musical heart of Americanness, to flow into the river of dreams.… America is no longer the sole owner of rock

'n' roll" (*GF* 378). The popularity of VTO outstrips even Beatlemania and their songs reverberate throughout the world, echoing the world back to itself.

In contrast to Bushnell, Christopher Rollason is critical of the "textual descriptions and the sources and analogies named," arguing that VTO is "clearly a textbook case of mainstream Anglo-American 60s/70s stadium rock, bereft of an 'Asian' input other than the two stars' national origins and the piece of trickery that is the Gayomart conceit" (144). Rollason's critique remains the most astute account of the novel's fidelity to mainstream rock music, however, while VTO firmly holds court in "the musical heart of Americanness" (*GF* 378), there are important differences between their music and the Anglo-American sounds of the party's other famous guests. If not the performative alienness of Sun Ra or Bowie, what might the fourth function of Darius sound like if it were translated into musical form? The artists at Pleasure Island are employed as purposeful juxtaposition and the reader is given an answer in the pages that immediately follow: Ormus, songwriter of the fourth function, of the alien and outcast, of the diasporic subaltern, brings to the music of VTO "the sexiness of the Cuban horns, the mind-bending patterns of the Brazilian drums, the Chilean woodwinds moaning like the winds of oppression, the African male voice choruses like trees swaying in freedom's breeze, the grand old ladies of Algerian music with their yearning squawks and ululations, the holy passion of the Pakistani *qawwals*" (*GF* 379). Ormus's song-writing synthesizes a global vibratory unconscious and a seemingly utopian realization of the orientalist designation world music.[32] Rollason argues that VTO's music is devoid of interest in global sounds (143),[33] but it seems clear that Ormus is meant to represent the lofty promises of world literature embodied in world music. The dilemma, however, is that the African singers are narratively *dis*embodied and never to be named in the text. The "Chilean woodwinds moan[…] like the winds of oppression" (*GF* 379) but VTO's

aspiration is to become an American band, unwittingly providing the soundtrack for the installation of Augusto Pinochet and his neoliberal authoritarianism.

Writing of trumpeter and ethnomusicologist Jon Hassell, David Toop explains that Hassell's borderless, migratory, pan-ethnic method of composition is successful because despite "its free use of source material … this was not untutored montage" (163). Ormus, by contrast, is a guitarist who has never studied the diverse musical traditions he brings into his music. In fact, unlike Hassell, who studied with both Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pandit Pran Nath, much of Ormus's incomparable talent is precisely due to his having no need of a teacher. Through the help of Gayomart and his own innate Orphic ability, he is able to tap into the wellspring of a collective musical unconscious that grants him both access and mastery of seemingly every musical tradition. This unfettered access, however, is also due to the tentacular reach of America's stranglehold on global culture. VTO is the most visible symbol of this dominance—a name that makes sense in no language and so remains, paradoxically, operable in every language that shares its alphabet. If music can be metaxic through the bridging of one cultural, geographic, or temporal space with another, then VTO's globalized music offers an unconvincing response to cultural imperialism.

For contemporary readers, VTO serves the role of musical Cassandra, as Ormus's "untutored montage" (Toop 163) and voracious cosmopolitanism is prescient of the state of music in post-internet culture.[34] Just as Lévi-Strauss argues that myth lacks a definitive origin or centre, Toop predicts that "[m]usic in the future will almost certainly hybridise hybrids to such an extent that the idea of a traceable source will become an anachronism" (14). Ormus performs the function of YouTube—an intermediary of a kind, though its obscure hybridity relies upon an algorithmic programming that prevents it from becoming the model for a progressively metaxic

intermediary between artist and listener. In fact, one of the strange things missing from *Ground* are accounts of Ormus listening and admiring the work of other artists.[35] Ormus's hybrid music is ostensibly an artistic intermediary between the subaltern fourth function and mainstream Western culture, but the songs are more akin to metaxic artefacts of assimilation and dilution. In the world of the novel, Toop's field recordings of isolated Amazonian tribes need not exist; the pinnacle of their chants and sonic practices are realized through Ormus's transmutation of tribalism into globalist arena-rock. As Reynolds observes, for "ethnological or subcultural tribes … [c]losure is strength, and exposure to the outside (anthropological, economic, media) is generally cataclysmic" (41). Perhaps the cataclysm depicted in the novel, a cataclysm for which Ormus is supposed to act as saviour, is one for which he is also complicit if not symbolically responsible.

Again, the reader must ask: what might the music of the fourth function sound like? And what might something like metaxic music sound like in the age of neoliberal capitalism? I would like to suggest that the answer might lie in Hassell's notion of Fourth World music, a hybrid of global cultural traditions and digital production techniques—even, I would argue, a metaxic form of music that brings disparate communities, cultures, and temporalities together within the same song. In an interview with Toop, Hassell explains that Fourth World music constitutes "[p]ossible musics, possible cultures, possible architecture, possible lifestyles" (Toop 168). Possible, but not yet actualized, this Fourth World is released from a definitive localization or temporality, similar to the diasporic travels of Vina and Ormus. Fourth World music combines a "range of possible relations between individual, tribe and nation in the mass electronic age" (Toop 168). Hassell has provided various examples of these possible relations over his career, and while it might seem strange to compare him (a white American) to the fourth function music

suggested in *Ground*, he created the idea of Fourth World music by translating the ragas of Pandit Pran Nath to the trumpet and has admitted to being inspired by Rushdie's early writings.[36] Moreover, there is some evidence that Hassell's work actually provides an unacknowledged inspiration for *Ground*[37] and a hidden key that might offer a counter-narrative to its representation of diasporic-turned-globetrotting music.

Hassell admits that the "balance between the native identity and the global identity via various electronic extensions is not one that can be dictated or necessarily predicted" (Toop 168). This balance is difficult to achieve (even causing a famous rift between Hassell and Eno), and VTO's music epitomizes this unpredictability—certainly in sound, but especially in its seamless incorporation into the American mainstream. As porously global as its aspirations are, the novel's interests concern primarily pop music, as VTO's intensions become world domination through populist success. The radical possibilities that Hassel saw in Fourth World music are transformed through capitulation to corporatization and economic viability. It is no coincidence, for example, that the Pleasure Island party at which Lou Reed and Laurie Anderson perform is hosted primarily for billionaire financiers. Alien art becomes cultural capital in *Ground* and the metaxic art of Orpheus, bridging the chthonic and the diurnal, the Apollonian and Dionysian, becomes a conduit through which the subaltern and the subculture alike shed their cultural richness.[38] This would also mirror a cultural form of decreation were it not for the diffusion of cultural identity in the narcissistic theft or appropriation of Ormus's compositional practices.[39]

Instead, Ormus's music mirrors the forces of globalization, which, as Stuart Hall explains, have "destroyed the identities of specific places [and] absorbed them into a postmodern flux of diversity" ("The Local and the Global" 184). Ormus provides little commentary on this

postmodern flux, whether positive or negative. Hassell, ever the optimist, prophesies a cyclical backlash:

> Perhaps, in some unforeseen way, the corporate musical imperialism which irons out regionalisms in its drive toward worldwide musical hits in Western pop style (Coca-Cola everywhere!) will also ultimately exceed public tolerance levels. Perhaps the result will be a return to a multiplicity of musics arising from tribes of like-minded people once again living within boundaries formed by hills and river beds, (like the Tuareg nomads …), linked worldwide by satellites. (“Artificial Boundaries”)

In *Ground*, the backlash of culture that Hassell imagines never fully arrives, for Rushdie’s novel fails to present any possible future outside the neoliberal globalization that VTO’s music helps to create. In the final pages of the novel, Eno (Barber) returns as sonic prophet, teaching how “sequencers … synthesizers … [and] sampling devices” (*GF* 542) can be used to create “the swirls and twirls, the technological sound-mattresses [fans wi]ll be bouncing on” (*GF* 543). Ormus briefly improvises some “loops … tabla rhythms and sitar and yes vina riffs pushed through his sequencers along with pure synthesized sound” (*GF* 546) but immediately embarks on yet another stadium where he will play guitar, Mira will sing as the new Vina, and the awkwardly-named Patti LaBeef will play drums.

Anshuman A. Mondal has diagnosed the novel’s permeation with American culture as evidence of a homogenizing cosmopolitanism,[40] yet it is more accurate to argue that VTO is actively complicit in a form of cosmopolitan imperialism. While Rai may narrate the diasporic art of traversed borders and cultures, Ormus’s career is handled by the ruthless and savvy Mayflower Management. The strategies of cultural imperialism depicted in the novel are not new, of course, and Ormus’s Americanization is a common experience expressed by many non-

Western musicians. For example, the Japanese musician and producer Haruomi Hosono has been quite open about his post-war childhood, admitting that he "was thoroughly Americanized. I even regretted that I wasn't American" ("Red Bull Music Academy Interview").[41] Hosono also created a kind of Fourth World music imagined as kitschy ethnographic exoticism, and perceptive readers may recognize a similarity between VTO and YMO (Hosono's band, Yellow Magic Orchestra). There is a similar use of music-as-crucible in the roughly-contemporaneous records of Hosono, VTO, and Hassell. On Hosono's early records, Japanese electronic music, Hawaiian exotica, and even Bollywood disco merge in a playful harmony of intercultural entanglement. Rushdie's text follows a similar performance in its treatment of myth, but musically, Ormus lacks Hosono's whimsy, as well as the devotional studiousness shared by both Hosono and Hassell.

In order to depict a form of music capable of crossing and dissolving borders, there is a valid argument for the value of the hybrid and globalized pop of VTO, as well as the populist allusions in which the novel traffics.[42] Together, Ormus and Gayomart are the uncredited authors of some of the greatest hits of American boomer nostalgia, including Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" and Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" (*GF* 90).[43] On one level, Rushdie is making an important statement about how art is consistently stolen from non-Western cultures; on another, the alternate universe of the novel has the curious effect of effacing both Elvis *and* the rich history of Black musical traditions from which American rock and roll arose. *Ground* suggests that much of Western culture, whether artistic or mythological, originates from its periphery, but oddly substitutes one racialized people for another as though the imperialistic tactics of cultural appropriation render their differences arbitrary. Moreover, the examples of cosmopolitan harmony are narrated through allusions that suggest assimilation. For example, the

bands that VTO most closely resemble, The Beatles, Fleetwood Mac, and U2, are not just juggernauts of Western pop, but also some of the whitest bands around.[44] The decades of Ormus's career run parallel to rock's dominance from the 1960s to the 1990s. One of the common refrains from Fisher is how the music from the 1960s to the 1980s is so temporally specific that the sounds, for example, of 1966, 1973, 1978, and 1985 are so radically different that they constitute massive and revolutionary developments in music.[45] Fisher believes that "there is something very specific about this moment, something that means it could only have happened then … [G]enuinely new music—music that wasn't imaginable a few months never mind a few years before—could crystallize and intensify this scene, imbue it with a sense of casual but not complacent optimism, a sense that the world was improving" (*AC* 783). With Ormus finding much of his inspiration from Gayomart, trapped like Eurydice in an atemporal and ahistorical space, the historicity of the period covered in *Ground* is considerably undertheorized.

Rai narrates the story of what happens to metaxic intermediation in a capitalist culture so pervasive that it has stolen the presents, the futures, and even corrupted the histories of marginalized cultures. Nostalgia for an ostensibly non-Western history (whether Ormus's in Bombay or Hosono's in Japan) involves the perception of a past in which the roots of a future globalization had already been planted. Perhaps, like Eurydice, nostalgia involves a looking back at a phantasm that perpetually disappears. The similarities between such a gaze and hauntology therefore become obvious. Hassell describes the Fourth World as "a returning to, and a stepping forward at the same time" ("Artificial Boundaries"). If Fourth World music, hauntology, and metaxu are all intermediaries linking one modality of culture, temporality, or selfhood with another, *Ground* demonstrates the dangers that arise when such mediation is dependent upon the

complex networks of neoliberal globalization. The history of music presented in the novel blurs the lines between nostalgia and alternative universe, and thereby avoids the need to incorporate specific historical events, musical trends, and their political significance. Since VTO *is* the zeitgeist, they have little need to respond to it. Ormus, therefore, as the rock god of Malcolm's musings, does not represent the hedonic plerosis of a utopian vision of political rejuvenation, but the narcissistic spectacle of a music that is emptied of its revolutionary zeal. VTO is the melodramatic music for a global audience as seen by FIFA or the Olympic Games, three letters easily tattooed on the biceps of well-traveled investment bankers.

In his Introduction to *Acid Communism*, entitled "The spectre of a world which could be free," Fisher meditates on the importance of returning to historical narratives:

> The past has to be continually re-narrated, and the political point of reactionary narratives is to suppress the potentials which still await, ready to be re-awakened, in older moments. The Sixties counterculture is now inseparable from its own simulation, and the reduction of the decade to 'iconic' images, to 'classic' music and to nostalgic reminiscences has neutralized the real promises that exploded then. (780)

Following from Fisher's Jamesonian understanding of nostalgia, the return to myth can best be understood as nostalgic of form rather than a specific historical marker, since its imaginal temporality—whether ahistorical or cyclical—is evidence of a nostalgia for something out of joint with the contemporary world. This *dyschronia* suggests a link between the hybridic knowledge traditions of Weil and the lost future of Fisher, for whom nostalgia subordinates the contemporary setting to the refurbishment of anachronistic forms (*Ghost of My Life* 15). Rushdie is not always successful at letting his readers *hear* how great Ormus's music is, and so the myth of Orpheus works as a shorthand signifier and a reliance on anachronistic forms in lieu of a fully

realized fourth function/world music. The narrative tactic works as a kind of hauntological vinyl crackle, “mak[ing] us aware that we are listening to a time that is out of joint; it won’t allow us to fall into the illusion of presence” (*Ghosts of My Life* 19).

Earthquake Songs

The power of Ormus’s music is illustrated through figural proximity to the mythical Orpheus, but what constitutes power in the realm of *Ground* is quantified by different means. Heir to the music of Apollo and Calliope, Orpheus carries his lyre into Hades like a veritable Trojan Horse. He is not simply going to win Eurydice back; he is going to make the gods weep for his pain. Music, as metaxic bridge between worlds, operates as both sacrificial offering and sonic warfare. Reading Pindar, Virgil, or Ovid, the music of Orpheus is consistently described as possessing the power to bring animals to communion. Trees are released from their roots and dance; rivers reverse their flow to follow his song, as “singing Orpheus … moves with the secret life of things. His lyre carries the music of universal harmony and eternal response” (Hassan 5).[46] Charles Segal argues that Orpheus’s music is not meant to serve culture in the same manner as Prometheus but to serve “a realm deliberately apart from the civic world and … even in deliberate opposition to it. Orpheus’ especial hearers are trees and wild animals, not citizens” (175). An important preoccupation in Rushdie’s novel is whether the music of VTO exists apart from the civic world or whether it can reconstitute who (or what) a civic commons might include. Segal’s anthropocentrism is challenged by possibilities suggested by Orpheus (and arguably VTO) through the creation of a de-anthropocentric citizenry, a community that both acknowledges and serves non-human subjects. Thus, rather than an un-civic community, one can imagine a new form of civic life organized by the fourth function or fourth world that privileges

the relationality and reciprocity of myriad life forms. This is the unrealized possibility of VTO's music.

At the height of their fame, VTO tour the "earthquake songs" (*GF* 390) of the *Quakershaker* album. Whether musical connective tissue for an apocalyptic event, or populist soundtrack of disaster, the album's songs are "about the collapse of all walls, boundaries, restraints. They describe worlds in collision, two universes tearing into each other, striving to become one, destroying each other in the effort" (*GF* 390). In other words, they describe the vulnerability of a metaxu that welcomes the collapse of boundaries but bends under the strain of the gravitational pull of the star-crossed universes. What are the consequences of metaxic exchange when one party is interested in union and the other is interested in dominance? When VTO performs the earthquake songs live, their frenzied fans are ensorcelled and subjected to animalistic metamorphoses. As the most mainstream band on earth, VTO still triumphs as a conduit for radical transformation, even species transgression:

> There is a loud howling as of wolves.… Young women's arms snake upwards, entwined, their hands moving like wings.… When the crowd roars it is like a lion and beneath the roar there is sometimes heard a hissing, as of serpents.
>
> There are disappearances. Young people fail to return home and are eventually marked down as runaways. There is loose talk of bestial metamorphoses: snakes in the urban gutters, wild pigs in the city parks, strange birds with fabulous plumages perching on skyscrapers like gargoyles, or angels.
>
> The laws of the universe may be changing. Such transformations may—incredibly, horrifyingly—become normal.

> We may be losing our grip on humanity. When we finally let go, what's to stop us from turning into dinosaurs, saber-toothed tigers, jackals, hyenas, wolves? (*GF* 391)

The rabid fans are freed from the constraints of their human forms. Dinosaurs may be invoked, yet these theriomorphic transformations do not suggest an evolutionary regression, but rather the mobilizing of a latent modality capable of subverting the colonial epistemologies that Rushdie wishes to critique. Vina sings with a confident jouissance that can push her listeners into sensual experiences of the avian, reptilian, mammalian, and mythical. But to what end?

As Paul Gilroy suggests, music can provide liberation from the representational concerns of a postcolonial identity based equally on discourses of essentialism and domination. He professes that "music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers" (102). The fans of VTO exemplify the first half of Gilroy's statement, but it is unclear if VTO gives the agency of reinvention back to their followers or if the subversive fluidity engendered by their music is free from subliminal exploitation. The metamorphosis from human into animal is one of the most important examples where a ritualistic listening becomes an openness to radical alterity by which a youthful multitude can escape the cultural stagnancy of the adult world. Nevertheless, this is also a novel of mirrors and doubles, and so the obverse reality of this communal transformation is one of sacrificial conversions to the consuming maw of the world's most mainstream band. The apparent fourth function music of VTO converts the Quakershaker fans into members of the fourth function, but theirs is not an identifiable subculture that resists the mainstream, nor is it one whose subversive semiotics and fashion is appropriated by mainstream culture. The paradox here is that VTO is both the definition of the mainstream while also expelling its fans from

hegemonic social systems that might require change by the outsiders of the fourth function. Failing to uphold the ideals set forth by Darius, the runaways and strange animals that now wander through urban environments are hereafter excised from the narrative, never to pose any threat or coalesce into a new alternative community.

Hassell describes magic realism by the ability to recognize literal things whose combinations connote surrealism or nonexistent places, something liminal and in-between existence and the imaginary ("Interview with John Hockenberry" 7:43-8:03). Along with the role of Gayomart, the metamorphoses induced by the earthquake songs arguably constitute the most magical events in the novel. The songs are also metaxic in that they are sonic intermediaries between ecstatic bodies and previously-imaginary modalities of being, but they are diluted to the point of offering no actual political resistance. The hip quakershaking youth resemble the exoticized *je ne sais quoi* of cool that Klein parodies in *No Logo*: "Despite the embrace of polyethnic imagery," she explains, "market-driven globalization doesn't want diversity; quite the opposite" (129). The animal, having no place in this anthropocentric narrative, represents mindless conformity and the cooption of the accoutrements of a pagan, animalistic bacchanal to serve the corporate stakeholders of a media empire. Even nonhuman peoples are subject to the same all-consuming forces of global capitalism. Rai actually refers to Thomas Nagel's essay "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" (1974), but in the alternate universe of *Ground*, Nagel is an ancient philosopher whose ideas are still relevant: "consider the humble bat […W]e should try to experience reality as a bat might. The purpose of the exercise being to explore the idea of otherness, of a radical alienness with which we can have no true contact, let alone rapport" (*GF* 506). Rushdie re-orients metamorphosis as a kind of metaxic transformation as if to suggest that music possesses the power to make people more theriomorphic, rather than making the bat an

experiential entity for human consciousness. Neither Ormus nor Vina have any real interest in exploring the otherness of the world and neither acknowledge the transformations they cause in their fans. Rather than embracing otherness, their own uniqueness deceives them into justifying narcissism.

If Orpheus is to be redrawn as an antagonistic figure to colonial order then he must not subdue the beasts and vegetal life of the forest; rather, his music must facilitate the harmony of interspecies coexistence. Segal adopts a similar view, arguing that "[t]he sympathy [Orpheus] creates between himself and the beasts, trees, and stones that he moves by his song reflects not an attitude of control but a resonant harmony between poet and nature" (10). His music's power comes not by way of the domestication or submission of the animals, but through a vibrational and harmonious communion that allows "the things of nature [to] become free to be what they are" (Marcuse, *EC* 166). Rushdie's Ormus is performative of a potential danger that arises when such a community requires a priest or patriarch to bestow this kind of liberty onto nature—a role that is easily incorporated into the apparatuses of globalized culture and capital. Moreover, it also fails to acknowledge the fact that Eurydice might actually be the source and wellspring of this resonant harmony or vibrational communion.

Segal is representative of a view that Orphic shamanism crosses "the boundaries between inert matter and living consciousness … [and] brings life and sensitivity where before there was only inert matter" (27). He traces an ascendant movement of Orphic poetry that raises the unsophisticated matter of "lifeless stone[s and] tree[s] to human sensitivity" (Segal 28). A metaxic reading of the myth, or even a recreation of the myth in which Eurydice can sing like Vina, illuminates the hidden role that Eurydice plays in the myth's esoteric history of metamorphosis and interspecies community. As subterranean spirit or Platonic phantasm, she

also destabilizes the hierarchy of inert matter and human sensitivity in order to expose the vitality within nonhuman (or once-human) lifeforms. Pliny the Elder recounts that Orpheus was the first botanist and the first to write a treatise on plants, however, one should not forget that Eurydice herself was a dryad or oak nymph, and thus the probable source of Orpheus's botanical knowledge. As a dryad, she is already a woman with an identity rooted in a rhizomatic hybridity that dissolves the barriers between human, plant, and spirit. She is the dryadic influence behind his community's assemblage of human and nonhuman life forms. A metaxic, Eurydicean re-interpretation of the myth is thus forced to conclude that the Orphic power to move trees (whether physically or spiritually) is in fact the enigmatic power of Eurydice falsely attributed to the male poet/priest who thereby assumes the role of gatekeeper. To revision the myth adequately, one must consider the possibility that Eurydice sang all along—perhaps just as loudly, just as beautifully—although unrecorded because she sung in a different language, removed from the symbolic realm of the terrestrial. After all, she was a dryad, an oak nymph, and it is conceivable that her voice simply could not penetrate the Orphic discourse around which the myth has typically been constructed. Animals from "aardvark to zebra, / flocked to [Orpheus's] side when he sang" (Duffy 94), but he was never so open to the voices of others.

Vina's role in the Quakershaker transformations attempts to rectify the historical tradition of envisioning an interspecies community that arises only in the absence of Eurydice. In such readings, Eurydice is synonymous with death and present only as an abyssal lack at the centre of this ritualized community. The Orphic community becomes the mythical exemplar of something Weil found throughout "le moyen âge chrétien, mais [aussi] toutes les civilisations vraiment créatrices, on s'aperçoit que chacune, au moins pendant un temps, a eu au centre même une place vide réservée au surnaturel pur, à la réalité située hors de ce monde. Tout le reste était orienté

vers ce vide (*Oppression et liberté* 219). The Orphic community orients itself towards Eurydice as the supernatural centre, and Ormus's obsession with Vina is fetishistic in its libidinous materiality but sacralizing in a way that effaces her humanity. Like Eurydice before her, Vina is the sacrificial victim of Orphic art. In the myth, the Orphic community could only be constructed through the preservation of female alterity, welcoming birds and bees into the fold while inviting women in only their essentialist and aesthetic dimensions. The murderous frenzy of the Bacchae can thus be seen as the necessary destruction of any system of community built upon women's exclusion. The transcendent space that Weil locates at the centre of all creative societies is, in this instance, a feminized space that cannot become immanent without first returning a voice to the silenced Eurydice.

At least in the earthquake songs, the musical powers of the mythical Orpheus are split between Ormus and Vina such that an alchemical magic is generated by collaboration. The music acts as a kind of metaxically sonic space in which the two lovers meet. Rai explains that "[a]t once conqueror and celebrant, Ormus storms the citadels of rock, and Vina's voice […] is his weapon. Her voice is the servant of his melodies; his singing the servant of her voice" (*GF* 378). When VTO is at its best, Ormus's voice cannot be heard without Vina "because … she's spitting out of her mouth—the words he needs to say to her" (*GF* 390).[47] Singing the words of Ormus/Orpheus, Vina recalls Judith Butler's uncertainty in regard to the voice of Irigaray whose rhetorical mimicry re-enacts the phallogocentric voice of philosophical discourse.[48] A discerning reader might ask the same of Vina, but the frequent sexism of the novel often erases any ambiguity. Butler's reflection is relevant to Rushdie's postcolonial strategy but also the inherent difficulty of a Weilian metaxu, for Weil describes the metaxic individual as a diaphanous vessel through which the works of Christ (and the philosophical father) can be performed. She admits

that "[q]uand je suis quleque part, je souille le silence du ciel et de la terre par ma respiration et le battement de mon coeur" (*PG* 95). This fear of obstructing the fluid movement of grace has been interpreted as an attack on her own creatureliness, even her own gendered body.[49] Against the first accusation, it is helpful to remember that the creaturely body of Christ provides the paradigm for this fluidity. The second attack is more complex and continues to divide critics.[50] At least part of this divisiveness arises from a distinction between a decreative Weil, or one who argues for a genderless movement into the uncreated, and a metaxic Weil, or one who argues for the liminal fluidity of the created. A body becomes metaxic when it achieves this same fluidity, unmoored from fixed constructions of identity without necessarily effacing the realities of a particular gendered embodiment.

Charity K.M. Hamilton argues that "the female body which is constructed by patriarchy cannot be decreated through the hope that it will become a truly female body and thus *metaxu*" (94). Weil's adherence to a religious tradition that inscribes both "socialization and patriarchy" (Hamilton 94) upon women's bodies renders any theorization of a decreative soul through the erasure of gender impossible. A metaxic decreation is not a violent negation of sex and gender but a negation of the identities inscribed onto the body as an instrument of patriarchal control. A metaxic decreation would, therefore, suggest a *return* to the body in order to advocate for its own autonomous fluidity. In a very real sense, an embodied metaxu provides a necessary queering of the decreative Weil and its reliance on patriarchal religious structurings. The voice of Eurydice/Vina dismantles the hierarchy implicit within Weil's writing and, somewhat paradoxically, Rushdie's. She is no longer the formless receptacle of the khora, the site of inscription or "specular surface which receives the marks of a masculine signifying act" (J. Butler, *Bodies* 39).[51] Symbolically, Vina's voice is Ormus's own decreative individuation, not as

a woman whose purpose is to complete the man, but the man who lets the woman speak for (and as) him. Although betrayed by its larger schematic, certain passages within *Ground* are nevertheless attuned to the moment when the human voice lifts itself in song as the manifestation of some universal sacrality or the unveiling of the real "when the bolts of the universe fly open and we are given a glimpse of what is hidden [through…] the radiance of Vina's singing" (*GF* 20). Vina represents the symbiotic reciprocity of eros and thanatos, the voice whose ungrounding promises rebirth. At times, Vina powerfully claims her own sexuality, but her story is entirely narrated through Rai's Orphic gaze. As such, this story is not so much a retelling of the fateful moment when Eurydice is lost forever, but a continuous repetition of Vina's presence and absence, of Eurydice flitting between the bedsheets of Ormus, Rai, and several other suitors.

Metaxu and Mourning

In Plato's *Symposium*, Phaedrus's famous criticism of Orpheus is due to his refusal to put himself at risk; he will journey into the underworld to rescue Eurydice but refuses to die in order to join her. The gods foil the hubristic plans of the cowardly Orpheus, releasing only a phantom Eurydice "because they thought he was soft (he was, after all, a cithara-player) and did not dare to die like Alcestis for Love's sake, but contrived to enter living into Hades. So they punished him for that and made him die at the hands of women" (179d). Phaedrus recognizes the inescapable possibility that art and metamorphosis are merely conciliatory substitutes for a failed myth of transcendence. Reading Orpheus through Plato, and by extension Weil and Rushdie (who refers to Plato beyond the epigraph that begins this chapter), a dual purpose for art suggests itself: a surrender to the safety of consolation or, conversely, a ritualistic or elegiac representation of this failure. In this sense, one might well ask, is Weil's unflinching belief in

decreation and metaxu simply an inability to mourn—not just the loss of her God but the dwindling promise of metaxic existence in contemporary society? Weil's commitment to decreation and her inability to accept the fleeting impermanence of her own mystical visions, suggests a strange affinity with Phaedrus's criticisms of Orpheus's non-committal cowardice.[52] As Kathy Acker concludes, Orpheus "wanted to love without having to die" (Part 9). Weil believes that it is not death that is the real issue, but decreation, or the death of the individual self so that one might be open to the alterity of the other. This space of this rupture and encounter—the metaxu—yet retains some the khora's capacity for (re)birth. The failure of Orpheus is not that he refuses to die, but that he refuses to decreate. In other words, he refuses to love.

In terms of Rushdie's novel, Phaedrus's comments are instructive for two key reasons; firstly, they suggest that Orpheus is given a mere phantom Eurydice because the gods cannot be entirely persuaded by the powers of his art. The implicit argument Phaedrus makes is that aesthetics cannot replace the highest love, of which only Orpheus's willing death would adequately demonstrate. Segal explains that the "wraith (*phasma*) that the gods show Orpheus indicates Plato's view of the inadequacy of poetry and rhetoric to represent reality" (17).[53] Secondly, Phaedrus's misogyny (the "soft" man who "die[s] at the hands of women" (179d)) is complicated by the comparison to Alcestis, a princess who dies for her husband and the embodiment of the courage that Orpheus lacks (179d). Phaedrus suggests a definition for something like decreative courage that is to be found in Alcestis, and only possible for Orpheus through the openness to a feminine becoming, a becoming-Eurydice that necessarily queers the myth's classical gender difference. Conversely, the gaze that vanquishes the plot to secure her release represents the re-instantiation of a masculine authority against the rules imposed by Persephone. Consequently, safe passage through liminal spaces is forfeit and Orphic art must

settle for a compensatory and ritualized atonement. This is precisely what *Ground* demonstrates through Ormus's inability to properly mourn Vina's death, and it is precisely what a metaxic reading of the myth aims to avoid by turning Eurydice's katabasis into metamorphic possibility. Were this to happen, the ritualized katabasis of Orphic art would cease to mimic her descent, "claiming to find jouissance as 'she does" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 192), but commit to a decreative pursuit following *her* lead.

The elegiac Orpheus seeks to conjure the phantomic Eurydice back into existence through the composition of music from spectral notes. Predictably, Ormus will become obsessed with the industry of Vina impersonators that reaches a fever pitch after she is swallowed up by an earthquake. Vina's hauntological trace proliferates throughout the world as though belief in a singular entity named Vina was always a misreading of her metaxic pluralism. Thus, rather than being the shamanic medium through which her wisdom is disseminated, Ormus becomes a lecherous hermit, unable to make music after her death, starving himself like some Weilian decreator with one foot in the grave, seeking the rare replicant who might replace Vina in band, bed, and heart. Rai rationalizes Ormus's predatory observance as though Vina's death is an inevitable breach of their romantic covenant, and so Ormus commits to searching for her in her next form. He does not search for Vina in the underworld, but in the bodies of other women, seeking to extract some small sliver of resemblance, some tiny piece of Vina's auratic shrapnel that he might use to turn an anguished absence into the fleeting illusion of presence, using the bodies of these women as conduits to the lost Vina. Benjamin's mechanical reproduction fuses with Eastern reincarnation, and the de-auratic replication of Vina impersonation becomes Ormus's sole obsession. The gift of music leaves him and impersonation becomes a more efficient substitute for metamorphosis. The exploitative male gaze of Orpheus is hereby recast as

panopticon; as though Bowie's character from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* were some hypervigilant necromancer, Ormus holds court in a room with dozens of TV screens, spying on various impersonators in the hopes of witnessing a miracle—the moment when performative replication becomes haunted presence.

The Eurydice myth transmutes into Barthesian commodity, and an entire industry of Vina impersonators erupts in refutation of her death. In Barthes's *Mythologies*, myth acts as the aesthetic tentacle of social power and is always under the domain of its hegemonic ideology. Rushdie's novel is the unwitting model for how myth, as instrument of ideology, cannot escape the pharmacopornographic dimension outlined by Preciado in *Testo Junkie*. Ormus becomes the exemplar of Preciado's pharmacopornographic addict, an insatiable voyeur of capitalist pornographic reproduction. Han diagnoses this as a fundamental crisis of eros characteristic of neoliberal capitalism. "Neoliberalism," accuses Han, is continuously "replacing eros with sexuality and pornography" (*Agony of Eros* 44), specifically in the ways in which it "eliminat[es] otherness wholesale in order to subordinate everything to consumption" (*Agony of Eros* 16). Ormus looks everywhere for the otherness of Vina, consuming such otherness with ravenous intent. When he finds Mira, the woman who most suitably mirrors Vina, he immediately raises her to the role of muse, lover, collaborator, even mother. Something like love or eros arises for Ormus as soon as he encounters a pornographic reproduction that cannot be completely consumed. Nowhere in *Ground* does Ormus consider a proper space of alterity for women. The katabasis of Eurydice and the (un)grounding beneath her feet is the "poetic space of indeterminacy" (Preciado 249) beyond the text, a space into which the novel cannot venture because it is overly obsessed with Vina in a carnal and specular way. Vina's performance of the Orphic role in bringing Ormus back from his coma is not so much a reversal of gender roles but

a temporary place-holding for the male Orphic figure who brings the narrative into the only transcendent space of alterity that the book allows.

As a participant in the same Orphic gaze of objectification, Rai underestimates the role that Vina (and myth) play in their own proliferation, as she is "dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways" (Haraway, *CM* 163). Narrated through this problematic gaze, *Ground* can never fully empower Vina whose "entire life and sexuality are being transformed, by devices of extreme surveillance, into work—into digital images that are transferable worldwide" (Preciado 280).[54] Rai's narrative gaze and Ormus's panoptic surveillance demand that Vina become a kind of "high-tech pharmacopornographic sex worker" and their efforts continually undermine Vina's attempts to "triumph[antly …] recover her body and her sexuality as ultimate values on the global-exchange market of pharmacopornographic capitalism" (Preciado 280). Nevertheless, the women, men, and non-binary artists impersonating Vina are all willing performers who see them themselves as active agents in the continued metamorphic phenomenon inspired by her music. Vina impersonation is more than cosplay; it is simulated decreation by those who seek to embody the subjectivity of a mythical woman.

After replacing Vina in VTO, Mira and Ormus embark on a worldwide revival tour entitled "Into the Underworld" which, of course, re-creates the famous love story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Mira, however, sings with a voice all her own, as if to declare:

> I'll show you what this unintelligible receptacle can do to your system; I will not be a poor copy in your system, but I will resemble you nevertheless by *miming* the textual passages through which you construct your system and show that what cannot enter it is already inside it (as its necessary outside), and I will mime and repeat the gestures of

> your operation until this emergence of the outside within the system calls into question its systematic closure and its pretension to be self-grounding. (J. Butler, *Bodies* 45)

Mira, in her movement *through* Vina and *with* Vina, becomes more herself than she otherwise would have were she resistant to transformation. What she inherits from Vina can neither be codified or coopted by Ormus, regardless of his desperate search for Vina's next incarnation. Vina undergoes the katabasis of the traditional myth, but through the industry of impersonators she also undergoes a kind of reverse or ascendant kenosis—a movement from a singular body into multiplicity. In this sense, a hauntological Vina poses a threat to Ormus's efforts to contain her metamorphosis in the body of a single woman.[55]

The Lost Futures of Eurydice

After the failures of Plato's Orpheus, Virgil imagines a sympathetic Eurydice, while Ovid describes a forgiving wife who can complain of nothing save that her husband loved her too much.[56] Rilke, Blanchot, and Rushdie are each representative of the long tradition that survived until (at least) the last century of representing Eurydice as a (failed) object of conquest for the male poet. Such readings reduce Eurydice to serving the masculine individuation of her husband; her journey must therefore be recaptured due to the fundamental lack within Orpheus's world. For this reason, Uppal echoes Blanchot when she notes that "Eurydice was lost before she was known" (186), because her role of being-for-Orpheus makes an autonomous identity inaccessible even before her death. This failure has coincided with a subterranean loss of speech and subjectivity for Eurydice, but also a kind of lost future for the possibilities of her character and for myth itself. Robert Browning, whose "Eurydice to Orpheus" (1864) is one of the first English poems to return a voice to Eurydice, has her exclaim: "no past is mine, no future: look at me!"

(xiii). Rushdie's Vina also seems aware of this lost future, reflecting that "[m]y heart broke open and history fell in. That, and the future too. I go back a century to ugly Ma Rainey preaching Trust No Man, and forward a century to some space kitty floating weightless round the moon and singing to a stadium in the sky … I was a woman when I was sixteen … Now I'm old as love" (*GF* 336). These lost futures of Eurydice are the inevitable result of dwelling within the patriarchal structure of a myth that has often failed to contain the radical alterity represented by Eurydice's chthonic power.

Helen Palmer argues that by "rewriting" and "refleshing" figures like Eurydice, this patriarchal structure can be deconstructed such that "gender imbalances are redressed, silenced female voices are unsilenced, and the result is a fictive public consisting of a plurality of rewritten female figures who may go by the same name but matter differently" (509). As accounts of Eurydice's underworld began to appear over the last century, such redress took the form of a remarkable plurality in both senses of the term "matter."[57] Through this plurality of Eurydices, a new future for the myth has become visible, one in which the katabatic figure is no longer content to wait in the shadows for her male saviour and no longer content to be merely a prosopopeiatic or hauntological voice that will become myth's broken future. The power of such a Eurydice threatens to displace the terrestrial Orpheus from his position of centrality. And yet, this Eurydice has mostly remained in subterranean imprisonment.

H.D.'s "Eurydice" is arguably the most successful representation of the rage of the imprisoned and the consequent chastisement of the male poet whose greed and hubris were prioritized over obedience to the conditions by which Eurydice might have been saved. The poem's speaker rejects the patriarchal conventions inherited from the Ovidian tradition[58] in order to cast blame on Orpheus's hubristic recklessness:

> So for your arrogance
>
> and your ruthlessness
>
> I have lost the earth
>
> and the flowers of the earth[.] (H.D., "Eurydice" 53)

With the emergence of an accusatory Eurydice, one is finally able to hear her carve out a new identity for herself, liberated from the control of an Orphic gaze that only wanted to behold the reflection of its own triumph.[59] After that slow march towards the light, Orpheus tries to witness the moment when death slips back into life—a transformation illuminated with "the light of [Orpheus's] own face, / the fire of [his] own presence" (H.D., "Eurydice" 53). Orpheus, shaman of metamorphosis, tries to enact one final transformation—to change Eurydice back into something that he can use, something with which he can interact, something *for him*, a returning of Eurydice to the marital economy through which his love might reassert its old power. Eurydice, however, remains ghostly, ethereal, and unable to be captured. The empathic vision of seeing oneself in the face of the other is replaced here by the erasure of the other in the myopic vision of the narcissist who sees in the face of Eurydice his own potential triumph over death. To become symbolic for the Orphic poet, she must lack substance for herself. The poem's Eurydice is denied the liminal movement of passing from life to death to life, a liminality reserved only for Orpheus and his manipulation of music as an affective and metaxic technology. Nevertheless, Eurydice discovers, death possesses its own unique vitality, and herein lies the source of much of Orpheus's esoteric knowledge.

Neither Vina nor the Eurydice of H.D.'s poem provide perfect models for Weilian decreation, but it is unlikely that such an ideal could truly exist. Vina is buried in an earthquake while H.D.'s Eurydice lays the blame for her second death at the feet of Orpheus: "So for your

arrogance / and your ruthlessness / I have lost the earth" (H.D., "Eurydice" 53). They do not choose their deaths, decreating willingly to gain knowledge of what lies beyond mortality. In some sense, they refuse death, especially a death that would symbolically serve the individuated quest of Orpheus. Vina returns as revenant or haunting trace within the bodies and voices of impersonators. H.D.'s Eurydice, "swept back / where dead lichens drip / dead cinders upon moss of ash" (51) affirms her own "presence" and "spirit" (53) beyond the space where Orpheus's elegiac poetry is willing to venture. Palmer argues that the poem's speaker acknowledges that "the contingency of her own existence rests solely upon the gaze of Orpheus, [yet] she does not seize the opportunity to reverse her position and become the subject rather than the object of the gaze" (512). Eurydice, however, speaks the "I" of her own subjectivity no fewer than twenty times and repeats phrases such as "your arrogance" and "your ruthlessness" as though they were refrains of a very different poet. In this dark and disorienting space, she discovers a world of newfound insight, one of poetic creation and subject formation, even of flowers so beautiful that Orpheus would return to hell should he learn of them.

Rather than Orpheus, it is the loss of the diurnal flowers that Eurydice resents most. The efflorescence of floral imagery in the poem can be read as an invocation of the story's origins as a fertility myth, thereby bringing Eurydice into a kinship with Persephone not unlike the one that H.D. creates in *Trilogy*. The poem combines the fertility and wisdom myths without a parallel a movement from the female body to the male mind. Moreover, this merging is accomplished from a Eurydicean perspective that prefigures something like Preciado's call to arms:

> Not a revelation, an unveiling of being by some precise inspiration, or making the real emerge in spotlit clarity. That isn't what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a tactile perception, occurring in darkness, about thumping the bottom with your stomach,

> crawling on a viscous mass. No illumination, but feeling around in the dark. I'm talking about discovering the surface of an interiority with your skin. It's a matter of returning to cyberreptilian life, a regression, tasting the electrically viscous truth of being, with small strokes of your tongue. No more long inhalations, because you haven't arrived at the state where being is given to us in its ethereal form. (Preciado 254)

Preciado redeems the "darkness," "bottom," and "viscous mass" of a Eurydice who turns H.D.'s "swept back" (53) into a return or "regression" in order to taste "the electrically viscous truth of being" (254). Rai ponders a similar return when considering Vina, asking if Eurydice "is actually an avatar of the Queen of Darkness herself, hunting for love in the illuminated world above? And therefore, in being swallowed by the earth, was she merely going home? (*GF* 499)." The purpose of his questioning, however, is actually to inquire whether Eurydice herself is to blame for "bubbl[ing] up from the Underworld to capture Orpheus's heart" (*GF* 499). Rai attempts to reverse the blame and accusations conjured by H.D.'s Eurydice, but his hypothesis also conflates the character of Eurydice with Persephone and thereby increases the significance of the wisdom tradition and the esoteric knowledge Orpheus/Ormus is in danger of not learning.

This katabasis engenders the blossoming of Eurydice's own sage subjectivity, but like Vina, her descent is not freely chosen. The question might therefore persist: what can be gained by comparing this myth to one of metaxic decreation? Although accusatory and unwilling to redeem an unfaithful Orpheus, H.D.'s Eurydice provides an important transitional moment in the history of the myth; it is the descent rather than the ascent that is generative of meaning, especially an ascent commensurate with an escape from the shadowy realm of Eleusis and all it might represent when divorced from the metaphysical geography of myth. As a decreative figure, Orpheus's failure lies partly in his focus on ascendency as the ultimate purpose of

katabasis. As a chthonic figure, Eurydice participates in the problematic verticality of transcendence, while her power subverts and threatens the hierarchical framing of transcendental ascendancy. The recognition that all is not lost, that a new future awaits to be (re)claimed, still glimmers in the shadows of the underworld following H.D.'s intervention in the myth.

If the myth symbolically narrates the descent into knowledge, then the Orpheus of Rushdie and H.D. is one who is unable to learn. As symbolic narrative of decreation, his failure is located in the effort to transform the gnosis of the chthonic interior into visible luminescent truth. To build a mystical system of ascendency based on this esoteric knowledge is impossible so long as Eurydice is trapped beneath its altars and sacred groves. Orpheus fails to risk decreation without the promise of a return. The metaxic descent into liminal space is a suitably terrifying one, yet if metaxu is also modeled after the liminal Eros of Plato, the knowledge that it imparts must be registered discursively, beyond the egoistic markers of artistic success. As Han defines it, "Eros is a relationship to the Other situated beyond achievement, performance, and ability. *Being able not to be able*" (*Agony of Eros* 11). Following this logic, the decreation of Orpheus would involve choosing to remain with Eurydice rather than smuggling her back up to his diurnal world. To love metaxically means to remain in that space of mysterious uncertainty, to behold the beloved other in a space of ungrounding and be subject to whatever metamorphosis arises. For Han, "Eros pulls the subject out of itself, towards the Other" (*Agony of Eros* 3). For Vina and Ormus, "love, earthly love, is a truce between metamorphs, a temporary agreement not to shape-shift while kissing or holding hands. Love is a beach towel spread over shifting sands" (*GF* 354). They seek peace, cessation, and especially control over the restless ungrounding of Han's decreative love: "[T]orn out of himself, and emptied … into an atopic Outside, dissolved

and drained. The … invasion of the Exterior and wholly Other—unfolds as dispossession … an annulment and voiding of the Own; that is, it unfolds as death" (*Agony of Eros* 8).

Irigaray describes a similar space to this Eurydicean underworld in which "consciousness is no longer master, where, to its extreme confusion, it sinks into a dark night that is also fire and flames. This is the place where 'she'—and in some cases he, if he follows 'her' lead—speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed" (*Speculum* 191). Without fully decreating from his subject position, Ormus manipulates the metaxic power of music to follow the lead of Eurydice, but can only be a tourist of these flames, seeking to return Vina to a world in which his voice still dominates. Irigaray reflects that "it is for/by woman that man dares to enter the place, to descend into it, condescend to it, even if he gets burned in the attempt.… That he has given up his knowledge in order to attend to woman's madnesses.… To this point where he can no longer find himself as 'subject' anymore and goes where he had no wish to follow" (*Speculum* 192).[60] The patriarchal Orpheus as represented by Rushdie and H.D. still pursues Eurydice as the aesthetic other, refusing to submit to the "madnesses" of the shadow world in which an autonomous subject position might be claimed beyond his gaze. Orpheus chases knowledge beyond his epistemological realm; madness, in other words, or Eurydice's newly acquired insight beyond the liminal space Orpheus has only ventured into with song. By breaking the covenant and looking back, Orpheus privileges his own desire to see over the possibility of Eurydice's return, thereby remaining at an irretrievable distance from the dark night in which Eurydice remains. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Judith Butler offers a helpful definition of metaxic bodies that could have equally come from the lost future of Eurydice: "Not only do bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appear[s] to be quite

central to what bodies 'are'" (16). To imagine Eurydice as a metaxic figure is to see her choosing the decreative katabasis in order appropriate the underworld as a space of empowerment and emancipation from a shattered Orphic centre.

Carol Ann Duffy imagines something similar in her poem, "Eurydice" (2001): her heroine not only overcomes the "place where language stopped" (92) but tempts Orpheus to look back so that she can remain in "Eternal Repose, / in the one place you'd think a girl would be / safe" (92). Eurydice's katabasis refutes a symmetrical ascension of Orpheus into the position of godhead within Weil's dualistic paradigm of decreation. The loss of the diurnal world against which H.D.'s Eurydice rages is here revealed to be strategic, orchestrated, and most importantly, emancipatory. In this sense, even though a metaxic understanding of the myth repositions Eurydice at the forefront of any analysis, "Orpheus has not been displaced by Eurydice […]; both figures are necessary for dialogue to occur between the living and the dead" (Uppal 13). Again, one can envision this dialogue between the living and the dead in similar terms to Weil's description of the diaphanous wall between two prisoners. The question remains how much of Orpheus's posture towards Eurydice is open to dialogue after the gaze closes the diaphanous passage that his music had opened. Duffy's poem can be read as a revision, or even an overthrowing, of Browning's Eurydice who begs for Orpheus to look at her and begs him to give her "the mouth, the eyes, the brow" (i) as though to compensate for the features she has lost. The Eurydice in Browning's poem is desperate to fall back *into* the body, as she tries to shore up her own embodiment through the appropriation of Orpheus's body. The gift of a new face, however, (to reverse the defacing) can only return in a fractious series of suspended body parts, never quite coalescing into a holistic person. Browning's Eurydice seeks a restringing that is still rooted in

the symbolic power of the ancient Orphic gaze. Her demand for the male poet's physical features can be seen as a demand for the power they synecdochally represent.

Although unintentional on the part of both Browning and Duffy, the desire to be reconfigured by the bodily features of the beloved also precipitates a further queering of the myth that can be attributed to Eurydice. Traditionally, the only queer reading of the myth has been the association of Orpheus with the emergence of homosexuality. One of the only surviving fragments from the ancient Greek Phanocles explains that Orpheus was murdered for spurning women after the death of Eurydice and turning to the love of his male friend, Calais.[61] Ovid writes that Orpheus "set the example for the people of Thrace of giving his love to tender boys, and enjoying the springtime and first flower of their youth" (10.83-85). Orpheus's homosexuality has been a persistent theme in the myth ever since.

The inability of Ormus to accept the loss of Vina, coupled with Rushdie's unwavering commitment to heteronormativity, limits the kinds of sexual identities that might arise in a progressive modernization of the myth. Historically, the myth has never quite been able to escape from the problematic notion that homosexuality arose in Greece as compensation for the loss of a feminine sacrality. In this reading, as opposed to the narcissistic hedonism of Malcolm and Rushdie, Orpheus turns to homosexuality almost in protest or reluctant acceptance that if he cannot be with his wife, he will take no other woman to his bed. Instead of a romantic gesture to affirm Orpheus's legacy as a famous lover, this reading reaffirms an insurmountable binary of sexual difference in a myth synonymous with the erasing of boundaries and the crossing of liminal spaces. Rushdie neglects to address this tension altogether, as though any queering of the Orphic body provides yet another unspeakable dimension beyond the scope of the novel's territory, and its odd positioning of Orpheus as the celebrated deity of heterosexual virility. The

renunciation of all women who are not Eurydice might first appear as monogamous loyalty, but Rushdie envisions a crisis of celibacy that Ormus solves by finding the uncanniest of all Vina impersonators. Rather than subverting Orpheus's choice to exclude other women from his community, this perpetuates another form of sexism that does little to critique the gynophobia occasionally associated with Orpheus's homosexuality.

To counter the political apparatuses of myth with its own metaxic structure allows one to speculate on the unseen transformations that might occur in that moment of the gaze. To reconfigure this gaze as metaxic is to consider the possibility that Orpheus might be transfixed by an equally powerful Eurydicean gaze—a gaze in which each counterpart submits to each other rather than trying to ensnare or consume the other's respective alterity. Gender and sexuality might thus become fluid and dynamic in the transference of this gaze. Distracted by the patriarchal command to police the movements of the female body, one's attention is diverted from Orpheus's own transformation and the transmigration of flesh from the fading corporeality of Eurydice into the shifting, porous body of Orpheus. The metaxic Orpheus becomes a network of liminal orifices, heterogeneous modalities, nerve responses, firing synapses, and affective re-wirings. This is not a Christly incarnation so that the phalloplastic Forms can materialize in the gendered body of a man, but the incarnation of a metaxic body that becomes the site of gender's rupture through multiplicity and heterogenous embodiment. The body of Eurydice is thus split between Orpheus and phantom, her consciousness diffused among all those who hear their new song.

Therefore, any queering of Orpheus must involve a reconfiguration of how masculinity is performed. Perhaps Eurydice has fooled everyone, and part of that performative subject position is the emergence of new erotic potential that is either controlled by Eurydice, or at least opened

up by her in order to cast aside a rigid heterosexuality for a fuller experience of the sensual world. Together, Orpheus and Eurydice become the progenitor(s) of a radical form of metaxic embodiment understood as "an array of heterogeneous organs … gathered under the same skin … moving into a new semiotechnical system and … the proliferation of new organs; in other words, they'll cease to be the bodies that they were before" (Preciado 116). The difficulty is that this reading of the myth might appear to situate the origin of Greek homosexuality in a binary structure in which all homosexuals are implicitly feminized, if not quite transgendered. While this is far from the intent of my speculative theory, the blurring of the heterosexist binary is nevertheless a necessary step to its dismantling. The gender-bending of Rushdie's novel, having Ormus and Vina enact the roles of both Orpheus and Eurydice simultaneously, is a far more successful contribution to the myth than the postcolonial porosity of myth and culture.

An even more successful representation of the gender fluidity of the two characters can be found in Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire.* One of the most celebrated queer films of the last decade, *Portrait* is a recreation of the myth in which women play both Orpheus (this time a painter) and Eurydice (destined for the symbolic death of forced heteronormative marriage). In the first scene in which the myth's influence is revealed, the Eurydice character reads Ovid's account of the myth to two other women. A debate ensues regarding Orpheus's decision to look back, opening the myth to multiple interpretations, until they finally decide that it was Eurydice, not wishing to rejoin a world in which she must belong to her husband, who commands Orpheus to turn around. The suggestion here is that despite Orpheus's fame as one who rejects the company of women, it is instead Eurydice whose queer desire is first expressed in the myth. While H.D.'s Eurydice resents her loss of agency, the women of *Portrait* return it, queering the world of safety desired by the speaker in Duffy's poem. In their reading of Ovid,

Orpheus has descended into Hades to rescue his bride, only to be told that she wishes to remain beneath the earth. Rather than the betrayal of Eurydice, Orpheus must sacrifice his own stratagem for the sake of his lover's wishes.

Sciamma's Eurydice character is given the choice between symbolic death or decreation. Here, death means submitting to marriage, specifically to a man she does not know and certainly does not love. In the film, love is a courageous decreation from an entire socio-economic system of controlling bodies and desires. Decreation involves submitting to love and rejecting a marital economy that seeks to entrap and suppress love for the sake of heteronormativity. Love, in a strangely metaxic way, is an escape or release, and an openness to the other previously foreclosed by the social constraints of homosociality. The attention the women pay to one another cultivates a new way of seeing and a new way of understanding materiality and sensuality in terms of care rather than containment. Ultimately, *Portrait* is a tragedy in the sense that decreation can only offer a temporary respite from symbolic death. If this is symbolized by the remoteness of the film's setting, its remoteness indicates a proximity to aesthetic pleasure, sensuality, and the body, and its necessary distance from the political sphere of the *gros animal*. Decreation, katabasis, and even death may seem like violent metaphors for self-extraction and detachment, but their severity is required in order to match the intensity of the socio-political forces that control the body, the mind, and the desires with which one wrestles in the interstice between them.

Can something like Weil's decreation be articulated outside a model of submission and dominance? Perhaps the space of mediation that metaxu affords is one that can only be accessed with reciprocal openness rather than submission. *Portrait* gestures towards such a possibility but is equally concerned with how this space of openness can simultaneously close itself off or

protect itself from outside threats to its existence. One of the ways in which the film resonates with the neoliberal themes of Rushdie's text is that women's pleasure is always bound up with the need to transform it into power. In this equation, pleasure without power is a paradox. It can exist in the idyllic, yet temporary space provided by the island, but in order for it to become actual, for it to assert itself as permanent cultural possibility, it must attain a level of power commensurate with its need to defend itself against the impositions of patriarchal society. Similarly, Vina is a connoisseur of pleasure, attaining it in ways unavailable to most other women. And yet, the Dionysian eros that Vina claims cannot exist within the strictures of organized society unless they are mediated by the desires of Ormus. It is therefore inevitable that Vina will die, while the heroines of Sciamma's film will live the rest of their lives without love.

Although *Portrait* is set in 1770, it is not anachronistic to Fisher's diagnosis of contemporary politico-economic arrangements in which the master or king has been rendered invisible and thus cannot be fought against. The unseen husband assumes the role of Aristaeus, the one who wishes to take Eurydice away regardless of her own desires. The husband is an unseen, yet pervasive threat awaiting his new bride on the Italian mainland while she and her lover inhabit a temporary autonomous zone of art, long walks by the sea, and bacchanals attended by herbalists and midwives.[62] In short, it is a remote island upon which women care for each other, conspicuously removed from the presence of men who play no little role in the film besides an impending threat of presence, and a name that both women must ultimately adopt; even the Orphic painter, heartbroken by Eurydice's inability to permanently abandon the oppressive duties of gender, exhibits her artwork (a classical depiction of the Orphic gaze and Eurydice's return beneath the earth) by employing the name of her father as pseudonym.

Tellingly, the discussion of Ovid occurs in the scene immediately preceding the pivotal scene of pseudo-bacchant community from which the film takes its name. It is here where the two lovers first communicate their feelings for each other through a Eurydicean gaze of mutual affection, an overturning of the myth whose significance is highlighted by the titular character's dress catching fire. The male gaze in this film demands a portrait of its future bride; the first portrait, obeying such a gaze fails to capture its subject. The second portrait, painted by a female Orpheus through a Eurydicean gaze, captures its subject through love, reciprocity, and attention. To gaze, Sciamma suggests, is never to behold. *Portrait*'s Eurydicean gaze is one that can never truly express the likeness of the other unless both submit to it. Eurydice, sitting patiently for her portrait, asks her counterpart "If you look at me, who do I look at?" (1:05:44-1:05:47) and then proceeds to catalogue various features and gestures that only the most attentive observer could notice. Their gazes, effectively rendering them equally Orpheus and Eurydice, are entirely mutual, an exchange of love rather than possession.

In privileging the subjectivity of Ormus and Rai, Rushdie concentrates on the continuation of male desire and the perpetuation of Vina/Eurydice as sexualized object even after her physical body is lost to the world. Ormus's objectification is so strong that he projects it onto the bodies of several other women after her death. Conversely, the speaker of H.D.'s poem discovers a new subject position through passion and purpose that survives katabasis, even in the apophatic negativity of loss, or perhaps especially in a self-generating negativity that counters the ascendant apotheosis of the ruthless male poet. Preciado and Sciamma find a new materiality in the unexplored sensuality of spaces of detachment, something that might also be considered the lost future of Weil. In the lost future of metaxic decreation, a new flesh or new sensuality becomes possible, beyond the inscription of the body's ontological status as determined by the

gros animal or the patriarchal Orphic gaze. Again, this sensuality is self-generated as a counter-desire to the objectifying male desire. What Sciamma, Preciado, and even Octavia Butler in the following chapter bring to the myth of decreative metaxu is the liberation or creation of a new counter-desire achievable through decreation and the katabatic metamorphosis of the materiality of the body. A Weilian reading of the Eurydicean myth might initially suggest a metaphysical consolation whereby elegiac loss is the impetus for the creation of community. Such a reading, however, resembles the form through which Weil narrates her own mystical experience; it is a powerful union that ends in alienation, abandonment, and the re-instantiation of a problematic submission to patriarchal authority. This negative reading frames success in terms of a transcendental ascent back to the diurnal realm of the rapacious sun god.

The Orphic genealogy has traditionally positioned Eurydice as the unattainable object of desire and a mystery that must be passed through or captured in order to enter the ritualized space of masculine art. Especially for the Romantics, the katabasis of Orpheus was a quest for spiritual and poetic continuity. Only in the elegiac song was the incompatibility between flesh and spirit overcome. Eurydice represents the fracturing of an esoteric fraternity structured around the chthonic displacement of the other. She exposes art to its decreative ability to engage with death, loss, and spiritual exhaustion. The loss of Eurydice also signifies the impossibility of totality. Subsequently, a kind of praxis is formed for learning how to deal with death through a proliferation of metaxic relations in order to confront the failure of the initial decreative journey. Prefiguring some of my concerns in the following chapter on Butler, the myth advocates for the value of metamorphosis, interspecies solidarity, and radical pluralism in the wake of dualism's seductive yet unattainable consummation.

Like Haraway's cyborg myth with which it has clear affinities, a metaxic hermeneutic aims to challenge myths that ground sexual difference with "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities … as one part of needed political work" (*CM* 154). Historically, Orpheus is presented as the reconciler of opposites (love and death, presence and absence), but the juxtaposition of Eurydice with the alienated Lilith of Butler's *Dawn*, will hopefully complicate the ways that reconciliation can be fraught with the dangerous fictions of salvific narratives. *Dawn* also raises the interesting question of what might happen if Medusa, rather than Orpheus, was to rescue Eurydice instead. Such a wild speculation is only possible if myth asserts its truths outside the traditional power relations of its symbolic order. Its most decisive image is the dismembered Orpheus, neck outstretched, singing with the rediscovered song of Eurydice.

Endnotes

[1] Although it is generally accepted that Weil is a Platonist, it is also well-known that Plato was initiated into the Orphic mysteries and the mimetic structure of the Forms is inherited from Orphism. The late Neoplatonist philosophers Olympodorus and Proclus both argued that "Plato imitated Orpheus's teachings 'in every respect' [and] … all Greek theology flowed from Orpheus's mystic symbols and suggestions" (Wroe 38-39). Ann Wroe further suggests that "[f]ew minds could claim to understand all [that Orpheus taught, while] Plato, of course, followed it completely, but … had chosen to reveal it only in careful asides" (54). Plato is thus the most important genealogical link between Orpheus and the Christian mysticism with which Weil frequently engages. If Weil's mission was not to become an initiate into esoteric traditions, she nevertheless explored the role of philosopher as a "[c]reature of silence" (Rilke, "Sonnets to Orpheus" 1.1.5) whose attentive silence is both an intense listening, but also a stillness through which the transcendent can be summoned into reality.

[2] This tradition, beginning roughly with Virgil, initiates the shift from a fertility myth to one belonging to a wisdom tradition. As Charles Segal explains, in "the fertility tradition the descent restores a lost vitality to the earth, renewing a failed vegetative life, as in the myth of Kore (Persephone).… In the wisdom tradition the descent does not necessarily result in a victory of life over death but provides the underworld traveler with knowledge about the afterlife" (157). Subsequent to this shift, connections between Christ and Orpheus have also been fairly common. Depictions of the lyre in the shape of the cross date back to at least the third century. Calderón de la Barca's seventeenth-century drama, *The Divine Orpheus* (1634), shapes the lyre like a cross and the Orpheus figure is not dismembered but crucified.

[3] Compare this to Byung-Chul Han's theorization of digital communication technology: "Communication goes faster when it is smoothed out—that is, when thresholds, walls and gaps are removed. This also means stripping people of interiority, which blocks and slows down communication. However, such emptying out of persons does not occur by violent means. Instead, it occurs as voluntary self-exposure" (*Psychopolitics* 10).

[4] If one is to believe Lévi-Strauss, for whom there is "no unity or absolute source of the myth … [because] the a-centric structure that myth itself is, cannot itself have an absolute center" (*The Raw and the Cooked* 5), then this is the already-metaxic movement latent within myth.

[5] Blanchot's "The Gaze of Orpheus" (1955) is certainly the most notable in this regard. In his discussion of Eurydice as a symbol for the artist's work, I recognize its relation to Bataille's contention that all "poetry describes nothing that doesn't slip toward the unknowable" (*Theory of Religion* 21). My interest in the figure of Eurydice is partly her ability to pressure this belief in a decreated and gendered object of art.

[6] One can already make the case that such synthesizing texts as Judith E. Bernstock's *Under the Spell of Orpheus: The Persistence of a Myth in Twentieth-century Art* (1991) and Walter Strauss's *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (1971) would benefit from a revision that includes the last few decades.

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[7] If the myth Orpheus has become a meta-myth of art, it positions the myth as the aesthetic over-turning of an earlier cosmological order in which the divide between life and death are not only secure but form the basis through which mortals define their very being. I designate this a kind of metaxic art in that it transgresses the boundaries said to divide the sacred from the profane and the transcendent from the immanent. As opposed to a decreative resignation to a divine that can only be transcendent, Weil's insistence on metaxu postulates a world in which "the least bit of matter can enclose the divine presence" (Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* 110).

[8] The ancient Greek poet Phanocles, as well as Ovid, write of Orpheus's turn to homosexuality after the loss of Eurydice. Angelo Poliziano's play *Orfeo* (1480) rendered this a popular reading during the Renaissance. See also John F. Makowski "Bisexual Orpheus: Pederasty and Parody in Ovid." (1996); Merrill Cole's The Other Orpheus: A Poetics of Modern Homosexuality (2003); Jennifer Ingleheart's "The Invention of (Thracian) Homosexuality: The Ovidian Orpheus in the English Renaissance" (2015); Matthew Fox's "The Bisexuality of Orpheus" (2015); and Helmut Puff's "Orpheus after Eurydice" (2018).

[9] While Marcuse aligns Orpheus with Narcissus, one might describe a metaxic Narcissus as one who gazes into the reflection in the water until the self dissolves and becomes other. Such a reading reveals the secret that most retellings have missed: only after one's reflection becomes the face of the other does the god's voice appear. This is the true meaning of the name Echo: the extension of the self that returns as divine otherness.

[10] For Fisher, Cobain epitomizes Marcuse's rebellious rock god, but his "death confirmed the defeat and incorporation of rock's utopian and promethean ambitions" (*CR* 10).

[11] The names Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama were inspired by Vera Ouckama Knoop, the muse of Rilke to which he dedicated his "Sonnets to Orpheus," while Cama also comes from the name Kama or Kāmadeva, the god of love in Hindu mythology, and the counterpart to Eros and Cupid. D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke reveals that Vina is also the name of an Indian classical instrument and Apsara is "a heavenly nymph seductive to hermits in Eastern mythology. Vina incorporates submerged allusions to Venus, the goddess of love, and 'Vine' – Dionysiac intoxication" (156).

[12] As a photographer, Rai describes his occupation as Promethean, thieving "the gods' gift of permanent vision, of the transformation of sight into memory, of the actual into the eternal—that is, the gift of immortality" (*GF* 210). As a carrier of the Promethean flame, transforming the ephemeral into the transgressive permanence of memory, the male gaze is one of Rai's defining features.

[13] The historical origins of Orpheus are contentious at best. Scholars remain divided: some cling to the accounts that declare him to be the son of Apollo, god of music and poetry and master of Hermes' lyre. As the son of Apollo, Orpheus learns "the giving of oracles, the taming of eagles, the luring of wild beasts, and how to heal" (Wroe 16). Others suggest that this was only a later development and that he was initially the mortal son of the Thracian King Oeagrus. As son to a human father, Orpheus is typically portrayed first as a Dionysian priest who descends into the underworld, and only later as convert to Apollo's teachings. In retribution for this betrayal, Orpheus is torn limb from limb by the Bacchae of Dionysus. Orpheus's mother, the Muse

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Calliope, benefits from a great deal more consensus. For an individual synonymous with crossing between worlds—and torn between the mysteries of Dionysus and the reverence for Apollo—it is this maternal figure who compensates for the lack of permanence to his identity.

[14] Rai's polemic attacks the protean strains within the Orpheus myth, such as those relating how, after the dismemberment of Orpheus, his "resonance lingered in lions and rocks / and in trees and birds. There [he is] singing still" (Rilke, "Sonnets" 1.26)

[15] It seems likely that Rushdie is alluding to Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950) and its pervasive use of symbolic mirrors.

[16] In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus suggests that "Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them" (116).

[17] Klein's exhaustive reporting details how neoliberal theorists like Milton Friedman advocated for the opportunistic use of geopolitical crises and natural disasters (Pinochet's coup; the War on Terror; Hurricane Katrina) to impose unpopular economic policies. See Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) and *This Changes Everything* (2014).

[18] Edith Hamilton's research has shown that while no classical source survives detailing how Orpheus and Eurydice first met and fell in love, "it is clear that no maiden [Orpheus] wanted could have resisted the power of his song" (139). Besides Maria, this dominant coercion is retained between Ormus and Vina as well. Rai depicts a relationship ostensibly between equals whose age difference betrays the apparent innocence of their courtship. Ormus is determined not to touch Vina out of gentlemanly grace for her age, but of course, the deferral of their physical union is the charge that keeps their passion ignited. When Vina escapes to some unknown locale in the US, Ormus wants to follow her into the unknown, to chase after her even to "the ends of the earth" (*GF* 178). Rai, at least, has the sense to wonder: "but what if she doesn't want you?… What if you're her past, and at the end of your long quest you locate her in a penthouse or trailer park and she slams the door in your face? [Are you] ready to plunge even into this inferno, the underworld of doubt?" (178).

[19] Although he has the ear of the people as it were, this plays out in a similar fashion to an alien race trying to save humanity by visiting the likes of Elon Musk or Bill Gates. Such is the fate of what constitutes salvation in the neoliberal period, an era in which billionaires and multinational corporations are expected to fix the energy crisis through philanthropy and entrepreneurial competition. What would Ormus's call to action look like? A radical form of decreative love that would work in lockstep to planetary unrest? As the work of Han so vociferously addresses, the emergent world of globalized capitalism is one that actively impedes decreation or, as Badiou puts it, the "self-negation for the sake of discovering the Other" upon which true love depends is impossible through the material conditions of predatory capitalism (viii).

[20] The Orphic poet affirms the belief that there is a withdrawn element to all things. Orphic art is a direct appeal to this withdrawnness, but an admission that access to such an enigmatic space is an impossible achievement, a possibility closed with the vicious murder of Orpheus. Metaxic art experiments with this lost Orphic power in order to access the withdrawn.

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[21] By engaging with Marcuse's work, Fisher reads the history of neoliberalism as an era of capitalism that actively aims to exorcise this spectre of freedom. He is especially worried about the possibility that the future might harbour little more than "reiteration and re-permutation" (*GL* 3). Deeply influenced by Jameson's work on postmodern culture, Fisher finds a dystopian pastiche to be the dominant mode of imagining the future, such that Western culture has never really moved past the dystopian *Blade Runner* in its ability to imagine a possible future for capitalism. It must be noted, however, that *Blade Runner* itself is already postmodern pastiche insofar as it recreates both film noir and *Frankenstein* (itself a permutation of *Paradise Lost* and the myth of Prometheus).

[22] I have in mind Maxine Greene's dictum: "Where people cannot name alternatives or imagine a better state of things, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged" ("Discovering a Pedagogy" 52).

[23] I have previously made note of this in the Introduction, but for a helpful reminder, Levinas criticizes Weil's "World Literature" approach to the Bible. He takes issue with her juxtaposition of passages from the Old Testament with fragments of "civilizations foreign to Europe" and the "disconcerting generosity" with which she enters "into ecstasies over the slightest trace of the Divine, which crosses distant worlds like the Moon" (136).

[24] In this sense, her writing is far more in line with such recent authors as Rubenstein, Grace Jantzen, and Catherine Keller.

[25] This thesis has been a cornerstone of Damrosch's approach to world literature ever since *What is World Literature?* (2003). Although I recognize that world literature constitutes a series of practices rather than a cohesive entity, Damrosch has been as successful as anyone at reifying these practices into a cogent academic discipline with, interestingly enough, Harvard University as its *de facto* headquarters. Galin Tihanov is certainly not alone in his suspicions regarding this coalescence, or at least the manner in which a discursive set of practices can shift towards "a particular liberal Anglo-Saxon discourse grounded in assumptions of mobility, transparency, and re-contextualizing (but also de-contextualizing) circulation that supports free consumption and unrestricted comparison of literary artefacts" (210). In order to privilege the set of practices over the cohesive discipline, I have opted to remove the capitalization that is so prevalent in world literature discourses.

[26] Deckard and Shapiro have also astutely observed that while Moretti's "Conjectures on World Literature" (published only a year after Rushdie's novel) sought to return world literature to academic prominence, its influence was altogether more pervasive once world literature as discipline began to consolidate within the departments of neoliberal universities following the 2008 financial crisis and its subsequent restructuring of higher learning. Like Klein's shock doctrine, this more pessimistic lineage of world literature's resurgence can be seen as either symptomatic or prescriptive.

[27] In "Time-Maps: A Field Guide to the Decolonial Imaginary," Vilashini Cooppan makes the case that "postcolonial approaches to world literature have necessarily to blow up that sense of time as (someone's) property" (405). In *Ground*, the whole world recognizes that this property

belongs to Ormus (and Vina when she's with him). For Weil, I would argue, this microcosmic capacity belongs less to the individual (the poet, the fisherwoman) and more to the ontological fabric of the world, and thus, to everyone.

[28] This temporal paradigm threatens to re-inscribe a linearity bound up in the Enlightenment ideals of progress, capitalism, labour, and a rejection of cyclical, seasonal, khoric temporality. Patricia Murphy offers a valuable discussion of this paradigm through readings of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous in *Time is of the Essence: Temporality, Gender, and the New Woman* (2001).

[29] Bushnell's *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature: Turning the Empire on its Ear* 2013) provides an excellent discussion of Rushdie's use of music, especially as it relates to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Its focus on classical musical and opera, however, paints a rather different picture of the cultural commentary found in Rushdie's text. I wish to provide a necessary counter to Bushnell by demonstrating how the lines between critique and performance of cultural imperialism are uncomfortably blurred by the novel's representation of a globalized form of pop music.

[30] David Bowie, here, goes by the name Limey, a reference to his plastic soul period. Bowie defines plastic soul as "the squashed remains of ethnic music as it survives in the age of Muzak, written and sung by a white limey" (7). What eventually happens to Ormus and VTO is something like the transition from borderless assemblage of various global musical traditions to the "squashed remains of ethnic music as it survives" (7) the incorporation into globalized pop music.

[31] Beginning with Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), the lesbian vampire rejects the belief that her existence in the underworld and the absence of the male lover is somehow a loss or depravation of a woman's sexual purpose. The female vampire rebels against this, claiming Orpheus's homosexual turn for her own empowerment, or revealing Orpheus's own homosexual turn to be mimetic of her own.

[32] The term world music was a mostly academic term used in ethnomusicology until the neoliberal period of the 1980s and 1990s when companies like Coca-Cola, the Body Shop, and Sony figured out how to market the term as an easy signifier for something pure or primitive, natural or exotic. The uncredited use of Indigenous music from popular artists such as Deep Forest and Enigma are two of the most famous examples of how this music is coopted by mass consumer culture.

[33] Rollason expresses his disappointment arguing that readers "could have had an Indian Buena Vista Social Club; what we get is VTO, playing born-in-the-USA rock'n'roll while laying claim to an Asian "authenticity" that derives from literary sleight-of-hand alone" (146).

[34] This is a culture, Simon Reynolds declares, in which "[w]e are all David Toop now" and "today's xenomania is entwined with globalization and the distance-abolishing effects of the internet" (40-41).

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[35] Vina, by contrast, is an avid listener of music, even of Indian music: "The music of India, from northern sitar ragas to southern Carnatic melodies, always created in her a mood of inexpressible longing. She could listen to recordings of ghazals for hours at a stretch, and was entranced, too, by the complex devotional music of the leading *qawwals*" (*GF* 122-123). Tellingly, when she attempts to perform her own songs on a solo tour, she will be met with an impatient fanbase waiting to hear the back catalogue of VTO.

[36] See, for example, his interview with John Hockenberry (1990).

[37] The Pleasure Island chapter in which VTO's fourth function music is described (as above) precedes the Earthquake chapter. One of Hassell's earliest records is titled *Earthquake Island* and its opening song, "Voodoo Wind," provides an obvious blueprint for Brian Eno and David Byrne's *My Life in The Bush of Ghosts*. Byrne and Eno (frequent collaborator and producer of Hassell) are both friends of Rushdie and each appears in the novel under different guises (Eno Barber, producer wizard, is a recurring character). Hassell's record, *Aka/Darbari/Java: Magic Realism* famously uses a sample of Yma Sumac, Peruvian singer and "repository of colonial myths" (Toop 163); Vina likens herself to Sumac and Rai describes Vina as just such a repository.

Along with Hassell, there is also some evidence that Rushdie is familiar with Toop's book *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound, and Imaginary Worlds* (1995). As a British music fan writing in the 1990s, this might not seem remarkable, but both books share a similar cast of characters from Eno and Sun Ra to Stockhausen, former teacher of Hassell. Toop's enchanted descriptions of Sun Ra's music are eerily similar to the imagery used by Rai to describe Ormus's music. Toop also references Stockhausen's notes on *Telemusik*, "an electronic transformation of recorded music from Africa, the Amazon, Hungary, China, Spain, Vietnam, Bali and Japan … I wanted to come closer to an old, an ever-recurring dream: to go a step forward towards writing, not 'my' music, but a music of the whole world, of all lands and races" (Toop 101). The similarities between Stockhausen's project and those of Hassell and Ormus are clear. While Hassell is honest about his influences, the myth of Orpheus provides a suitably obscure allegory in which Ormus's might be hidden.

[38] For a sharp elucidation of how mainstream culture appropriates the transgressive elements of subcultures for its own style and politics, see Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello also discuss the cooption of anti-capitalist artistic rebellion in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999).

[39] I employ the adjective *narcissistic* in reference to Malcolm but also Han, for whom "[m]eaning can exist for the narcissistic self only when it somehow catches sight of itself. It wallows in its own shadow everywhere until it drowns—in itself" (Han, *Agony of Eros* 2).

[40] See "The Ground beneath Her Feet and Fury: The Reinvention of Location" (2007). Bushnell also acknowledges that Euro-American music often participates in cultural imperialism but declares that VTO subverts this by re-colonizing the Western colonizer.

[41] While Hosono discusses this subject in many interviews with Western journalists, these comments can be found in his Red Bull Music Academy interview with Todd L. Burns (2017).

Hosono, of course, went so far as to use the name Harry (instead of Haruomi) as a tongue-in-cheek Americanization of his own name.

[42] Elisabeth Bronfen, in "Celebrating Catastrophe" (2002), recognizes the figures of Freddie Mercury, John Lennon, and Elvis Presley in Ormus, while Rollason makes elaborate comparisons between Ormus and Bob Dylan. In "An Orphic Journey to the Disorient: Salman Rushdie's *The Ground beneath Her Feet*" (2000), Ganapathy-Dore compares Vina to Tina Turner, Madonna, and even the tabloid celebrity of Princess Diana; in an interview for Salon, Rushdie has hinted that Grace Slick provides one of the many inspirations for Vina.

[43] In the novel, Elvis goes by the name Jesse Garon Parker, the real name of Elvis's own still-born twin with whom he claimed to communicate. In a similar fashion, Kurt Vonnegut is replaced in the novel with Kilgore Trout; *Don Quixote* is written by Pierre Menard, the "real" author of the novel from a Borges story; *A Clockwork Orange* is written by its protagonist Alex instead of Anthony Burgess; Rushdie's novel presents a world in which still-born and fictional twin take the place of their "real" counterparts. In *Ground*, everyone has an uncanny twin that fractures and tears the subject's unicity (Ormus-Gayomart; Vina-Mira). It is a clever conceit that blurs the lines between art and reality, creation and creator. It is also serves to invoke the historical world of the reader, while simultaneously avoiding the political consequences of certain narrative choices by an appeal to a *slightly* alternate universe.

[44] Yet even the Beatles had their predilection for consciousness-expanding psychedelics and their experiments with musique concrete and tape loops. Even Fleetwood Mac had their drug-fueled romantic chaos. Even U2 (who in 2000 would release the song "The Ground Beneath Her Feet" using mediocre lyrics from Rushdie's novel) had their "Sunday, Bloody Sunday." How might this book be read differently if Ormus was less George Harrison and more Ravi Shankar? What if, consistent with Gayomart's ability to beat America to pop classics, he had invented acid house like Charanjit Singh? Stuart Hall concedes that "alterity must be contained within certain forms of popular music" (5:54), but at least for him, popular music included Miles Davis.

[45] Although Fisher speaks of this in several essays and a great many lectures, it is best illustrated in *Acid Communism*. In his estimation, the music from the mid-1990s to the last decade developed at a comparatively stagnant pace. Although my objections to this assessment exceed the scope of the present arguments, Fisher's exaggeration is also difficult to refute considering trends in popular music.

[46] Elsewhere, Edith Hamilton relates that "[e]verything animate and inanimate followed him. He moved the rocks on the hillside and turned the courses of the rivers" (103).

[47] This resembles the final line of Margaret Atwood's first Orpheus poem (1976): "You could not believe I was more than your echo" (107).

[48] Butler questions if "the voice of the philosophical father echo[es] in her, or has she occupied that voice, insinuated herself into the voice of the father?… How does the difference from the philosophical father resound in the mime which appears to replicate his strategy so faithfully?" (*Bodies* 36).

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[49] Such critiques have generally focused on the androgyny of Weil who (much to the chagrin of de Beauvoir) used the names Simone and Simon with equal measure. See Simone Pétrement's *Simone Weil: A Life* (1976).

[50] In *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000), Kraus expresses solidarity with Weil, demanding why "women [should] settle to think and talk about just femaleness when men [a]re constantly transcending gender" (103).

[51] Metaxu is a kind of khora more suited to the intermediation through which music is created. Rather than the abstract Forms mixing in the crucible of the liminal khora to be generated into physical forms, music retains the liminality of vibrational non-materiality. Pyramus can shout "Be My Baby" through a metaxic wall of sound and Thisbe, as well as the whole world, can respond in kind.

[52] Nevertheless, the spectral vision of Christ was never enough for Weil. Recalling Levinas's distinctions from chapter 1, Orpheus also plays the role of saint in opposition to Weil's isolated mystic in that he builds a community in order to teach others the esoteric knowledge of sacrality and death.

[53] Plato is a follower of Orpheus's esoteric knowledge and the explicitly male community through which this knowledge is disseminated. Moreover, although Plato is cautious of the power of poetry to sway the hearts of the polis, his criteria is anthropocentric, avoiding the power of Orpheus's art to sway the hearts of birds, beasts, stones and rivers.

[54] The Orphic gaze as authorial voice functions as an example of what Preciado diagnoses as "the contemporary tendency of all forms of work and production of value to transform themselves into pharmacopornographic production, thus indicating a 'porn future' for the production of worth in contemporary capitalism as a whole" (281).

[55] The fear of a multiplicity of Vinas is akin to the fear of pantheism that Jantzen describes in her work. In Jantzen's estimation, it is only pantheism that disrupts the dualism through which an oppressive monotheism is enforced. Monotheism is even supported by an atheism that does little to challenge the actual *concept of god*; to say that something does not exist is far less powerful than demonstrating how it might exist *another way*. See especially *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1999) and "Feminism and Pantheism" (1997).

[56] And now, as she died for the second time, she never
complained
that her husband had failed her – what could she complain
of, except that he'd loved her? (10.60-61)

[57] Compare, for example, the various Eurydices of H.D., Acker, Duffy, and Sarah Ruhl.

[58] At least Virgil's Eurydice had called Orpheus mad and overreaching, thinking he could override the laws of nature.

[59] Edith Sitwell's poem "Eurydice" (1945) is less successful in this regard: although she describes the gaze of Eurydice rather than Orpheus, this reversal does not supplant Orpheus as the focal point of the narrative but reconsolidates him as both lover and deity. Eurydice is blessed to catch one final glimmer of his divine spark, an incandescent power that disarms the authority of Death, for "[a]ll the weight of Death in all the world / Yet does not equal [the] Love" of which Orpheus is the avatar (Sitwell 77).

[60] Much of *Speculum*'s "La Mystérique" chapter reads like a commentary on the myth of the lost Eurydice: "And the road she will have to take in order to flee the logic that has framed her thus is not nothing. Moreover, she doesn't know where she is going, and will have to wander randomly and in darkness. And her eye has become accustomed to obvious 'truths' that actually hide what she is seeking. It is *the very shadow of her gaze* that must be explored.… And if man once thought that … vision could allow him to escape the opaque barrier that every body presents to the light, now, in his impetuous desire, he is plunged into the darkness that a supposedly enlightened gaze had projected in its very rings and reversals" (193).

[61] See Neil Hopkinson's *A Hellenistic Anthology* (1988) for a further discussion of this extant fragment.

[62] In a film that depicts queer metaxu instead of heterosexist khora, the occupation of the midwife is not reduced to bringing the children of men into the world, but also to prevent traumatic pregnancies from continuing, thereby allowing young women to reclaim agency over their own body. The herbalists and midwives who appear in the film are precisely the kinds of women who might be labelled as witches, and consequently executed for a more efficient installation of patriarchal capitalism. See Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (2004).

CHAPTER 4

"Some Dawns Wait": White Gods, Black Aliens, and Lost Gardens

> The myth transmits itself making changes in accordance with historical and cultural evolution. It varies, changes feathers, but it only dies with the people who express it and whose contradictions it serves to resolve. If women begin to want their turn at telling this history, if they take the relay from men by putting myths into words (since that is how historical and cultural evolution will take place … it will be from other points of view. It will be a history read differently … a history, taken from what is lost within us of oral tradition, of legends and myths—a history arranged the way tale-telling women tell it.
> Catherine Clément, *The Feminine and the Sacred*

> Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it's loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell and you have to watch out for the stories you are told.
> Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*

The previous chapters have developed a theory of metaxu by examining the dialogic relationship between Christian and Greek myth in Weil's writing. From Promethean sacrifice, to Iliadic heroism, to Orphic art, metaxu has been used to critique the masculine subjectivities underpinning these myths. A dynamic leitmotif can be seen throughout: the danger of myth to naturalize certain productions of difference and the need to revise traditional stories by those who have historically been kept out of cultural enframings. A perceptive critic of Weil must be equally attuned to her allegiance with the former as well as the pursuit of mythic revisionism to rewrite naturalized difference. Shared among the *Iliad* (Chapter 2), the myth of Orpheus (Chapter 3), and the biblical myth of Lilith (Chapter 4) is the figure of a woman who has been banished, expelled, stolen, or lost. This final chapter will continue a theorization of metaxu through a reading of Octavia Butler's *Dawn*, the first novel in her *Xenogenesis* trilogy, and a text in which the need to destroy old myths is balanced with a desire to return to myth for the purpose of rescuing lost voices, lost subject positions, and lost futures. This will bring Weil into dialogue

with contemporary debates in science fiction,[1] to which she seemingly stands quite alien, in order to highlight some of the key intersections of metaxu with other theoretical constructions of fluidity, hybridity, and alterity.

By reading Butler alongside Weil, I hope to demonstrate metaxu's implicit rejection of the religious hierarchies in which it is encoded. Since my project concerns the revision of myth in late twentieth-century literature, *Dawn*'s reimagined figures of Lilith and the Medusa-like Oankali are most relevant to this chapter's purview. Nevertheless, the subsequent novels about Lilith's hybrid children narrate evolutions of gendered and morphological diversity that further complicate its philosophical complexity. This chapter turns toward a consideration established in the dissertation's opening, namely, metaxu's movement away from decreation's dualisms to open up possibilities for a metamorphosis that reconfigures the subject's relation to an otherworldly otherness—intimately sensible and immanent rather than transcendent. To be precise, the only transcendence that Butler is concerned with is transcendence of Weil's *gros animal*, the corrupt simulacrum of divine power through which dominant social institutions assert control over a human species incapable of metaxic coexistence. Butler is far more interested in the forms of coexistence that emerge from geopolitical rupture, but also the forms of coexistence that might be mobilized as part of a necessary resistance. Ultimately, *Dawn* demonstrates how metaxu aligns itself with subject positions that directly challenge hegemonic order: Black, female, Indigenous, queer, cyborg, alien, mutant, animal.

I begin this chapter by analyzing Butler's use of Christian and Greek myth and how it works to establish the cultural environment in which one's connection to sacrality, transcendence, and otherness must be deconstructed and recontextualized. Butler revises Christian mythology in a number of her works, from the *Parable* novels and the *Patternist* series

to the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, a collection of post-apocalyptic novels that were reissued in 2000 under the title *Lilith's Brood* as if to highlight its themes of demonic motherhood and religious iconoclasm. By naming her character Lilith, Butler proposes a challenge to Judeo-Christian mythology in order to critique the same dynamics of power that a metaxic hermeneutic likewise challenges. Critics of the trilogy most often treat religion as an afterthought, for although its titular character redresses the misogyny of the Edenic myth, it is not until *Dawn*'s sequel that the humans attempt to re-establish a religious legacy or path forward. Such is the world of Butler's narratives, however, when the primacy of mythic storytelling survives even the gods themselves, as if to suggest that religion is the result of the unholy combination of myth and politics.

Paradoxically, myth is no longer hallowed ground, but an oral tradition of storytelling eroded through imperialist manipulations that have coopted it to naturalize patriarchal and white supremacist traditions as a way of ordering an irrational world. The aversion to myth as tool of Western Enlightenment occasionally ignores the profound role that myth plays in non-Western modes of storytelling that do not use it for the purpose of dominating an irrational non-human world but to foster an epistemology of interdependent coexistence. If a Western critique of myth advocates for the disenchantment or banishment of all myth (or alternatively promotes the essentialisms of a comparative mythology practiced by the likes of Joseph Campbell), what then of the non-Western mythic traditions that continue to be a rich source of knowledge for the communities that hold them sacred?[2] It is vital to challenge (and extend) critiques of myth by considering their relation to nonhuman peoples, for whom such stories are not solely the purview of humans, Western or Eastern, but also creatures of "other-than-human languages" who "play havoc with the simple notion that 'nature is silent,' an un-storied landscape awaiting human inscription of meaning" (Dooren 78-79). Through a consideration of Butler's use of myth, it

becomes possible to argue that mythic hybridity (and hybridity in general) can be employed as a tool of decolonization and a critique of human exceptionalism (a latent pessimism in Weil's own thinking that is shared by Butler).

Metaxu's relationship to the metamorphic body underscores a movement through which the divide between the human and non-human is collapsed or effaced. Through her transformation, Lilith defies the illusion of stable identities and continually transgresses the boundaries between human and its nonhuman kin—distinctions that increasingly lose relevance after the collapse of Earth's *gros animal* (presented opaquely here through apocalyptic militarization). Bringing metaxu to bear on Octavia Butler will allow us to probe two key questions: can there be a metaxic exchange between the female body (Lilith and biblical myth) and the alien body (Medusa-like Oankali and Greek myth) that would overturn historical identities rooted in heteronormative patriarchy?[3] And secondly, how might metaxu operate in a world in which the religious hierarchy of Weil's system has collapsed? If metaxu is all about bridges and flows and elastic stretching over the abyssal cracks between various subjects, then it allies itself with narratives in which the grandfatherly dualisms of human and animal, man and woman, mind and body, organism and machine are no longer tenable (Haraway, *CM* 163). Haraway suggests that if god and goddess are no longer dead, it is only because they have been "revived in the worlds charged with microelectronic and biotechnological politics" (CM 162). Butler's *Dawn* advocates for something like a metaxic metamorphosis as a way of evolving the human species out of the shadow of a necromanced divinity. Thus, the hierarchical structure of Weil's mystic decreation is not only deconstructed, but in Butler's fiction, *negotiated*.

Dawn begins with Lilith's awakening. What at first appears to describe the denuded cage of the decreated subject, bereft of all social attachment, quickly unfolds into metaxic bridges

built across space, time, and alien(ated) bodies. Lilith is the first human chosen by the Oankali to settle and repopulate the Earth after it has been left for 250 years, recovering from the war that wiped out most of the planet's species. Devoid of people, Earth is regenerating to become another Eden, one to which Lilith will be granted stewardship. She and several hundred other humans have been rescued by the Oankali, an alien species that needs to trade its genetic material with other species in order to survive. The Oankali are comprised of three sexes, male, female, and the nonbinary ooloi.[4] The trilogy's final novel, *Imago*, remarks on the difficulty of translating the word ooloi into English, but suggests '"Bridge.' 'Life Trader.' 'Weaver"' or even '"Treasured stranger"' as approximations (526). Throughout each novel, the ooloi are described in metaxic terms as the mediating bridge between male and female partners, but also between humans and "the unbridgeable alienness of [the Oankali]" (*Dawn* 97). To the Oankali, humans have a special allure due to the metamorphic potential hidden in their cancer cells; moreover, they are paradoxically fascinating for being the only species encountered by the Oankali to be both highly intelligent and hierarchical. By contrast, the Oankali's social organization is decentralized, making decisions as a true collective (although the knowledge of elders plays an important role in the ability to persuade the community to make any decision.)

Lilith is tasked to be the new mother of the human race, awakening a collection of rescued humans dormant since the war. She also undergoes slight genetic mutations that allow her to manipulate her new world (an organic ship existing in perfect symbiosis with the Oankali) and give birth to a new race of human-Oankali constructs that will ensure the survival of the species. The ooloi Nikanj, with whom Lilith will mate, informs her that "[o]ur children will be better than either of us … We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lesson our physical limitations" (247). The trilogy's conclusion, *Imago* (1989), is named after the final stage

of metamorphosis but *Dawn* is really where the metaxic play between self and other intersects with a deconstructed myth of hybridity to redefine what human subjectivity and corporeality might be. The Weilian dyad of decreation and metaxu reflect the genres of both myth and science fiction in that they are each concerned with demarcating and expanding the boundaries of the human. Decreation tries to erase the self in order to dissolve into the salvation of a transcendent otherness. In this sense, it is more closely aligned with "law-making" of Benjamin's mythic violence in that it is religiously structured by debt and payment.

By contrast, the metaxic encounter transports the self into new modes of being, both human and nonhuman. Alongside the term nonhuman that has become so commonplace in Butler criticism (and contemporary philosophy more generally), one might also append Thom Van Dooren's conception of "more-than-human practices of meaning and place-making in a disappearing world" (78). *Dawn*'s post-apocalyptic concerns certainly represent those of a disappearing world, but her focus on learning "more than human practices of meaning" also distresses the extant binary at the core of the term *non*-human while also retaining the more-than-self vitalism of the metaxic interrelation that Weil privileges. Butler incorporates a kind of speculative metaxu within her narratives in order to experiment with intimate connections that disrupt the traditional mystical ecstasis of the patriarchal/Christian framework, opening up new possibilities for metamorphoses through which the subject can experience itself as other, but also for purposes of social and biological healing. Anyanwu, spiritual sister to Lilith and heroine of *Wild Seed* (1980), is a sorceress who can synthesize medicine for her husband, Isaac. Although possibly immortal, she ages herself and "her own organs to study the effects of age. It had been dangerous work. A miscalculation could have killed her before she understood it enough to counter it" (Butler, *Wild Seed* 175). Decreation is an abyssal finality that inevitably threatens

with the riskiness of metaxic care. Anyanwu risks death. Lilith risks both herself and her entire species. In Butler's "Bloodchild" (1995), Gan risks the terms of servitude under which humans can either become empowered negotiating partners or helpless slaves. To fulfill one's utmost decreative potential does not require death but the intimacy of interrelated survival. Throughout *Xenogenesis*, the Oankali and Lilith act as metaxic beings bridging old worlds with new horizons, and human flesh with non-human biomes by challenging the biopolitical apparatuses that ever allowed such a binary to exist.

Of Myth and Monstrous Women

Butler's *Dawn* reframes an important question that my early chapters gesture towards: what survives of myth after a post-historical society? Agamben has defined the human as that which survives the human,[5] and one might apply the same paradoxical taxonomy to myth. Something of myth survives after obsolescence, that is, after all the power structures naturalized through myth have progressed to their inevitable apocalyptic conclusion. By juxtaposing specific Judeo-Christian and Greek myths, *Dawn* returns to a classical Western tradition of demarcating the space of otherness through the body of a monstrous woman. While they have long engaged in a battle of assimilation and erasure for cultural dominance, the novel effectively crossbreeds these competing mythic traditions to dismantle the hierarchical systems they engender. Nothing less than biopolitical emancipation is at stake. A Weilian metaxu intersects with Butler's "shifting subjectivities and changing cultural identities" (Melzer 66) to demonstrate how each writer re-appropriates myth as a technique of resistance against the discourses to which they seem bound.[6] In the name Lilith Iyapo, the Judaic tradition is met with an African transformation and a return to Eden's probable geographical roots. The myth of Adamic naming has no truck

here; Butler's re-christening does not kill but works simultaneously to reclaim the lost voice of the first mother as well as the bodies of colour that have been historically disenfranchised from Christian ideology and its relationship to colonial powers. By focusing on the figures of Lilith and Medusa, my discussion of *Dawn*'s use of myth will mirror the Eurocentric dialectic of Weil's own writing.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler asserts that "fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible [… and] to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy" (28-29). Butler is obviously not referring to the subgenre of fantastic literature colloquially termed fantasy fiction, but rather the processes of imagination and speculation through which *new* configurations of "the possible" might emerge. Where certain forms of fantastic literature may fail to escape hegemonic "articulation[s] of the possible" (29), science fiction is uniquely positioned to deal with the collapse of ideological structures, especially as a result of rewriting myths in which humans become demonic through diasporic alienation or transformation. Patricia Melzer believes that science fiction is unique in this regard and that "[o]nly within genres of the fantastic is it possible to imagine completely new social orders and ways of being radically different from human existence as we know it" (2). If subgenres of the fantastic like high fantasy all too often abuse the patriarchal tropes of myth as laid out in the work of Campbell and others, a Weilian reading of *Dawn* shows Butler's commitment to deconstruct, rewrite, alienate, and transform Western archetypes of myth. As a metaxic subject, Lilith offers new figurations of being opposed to the centralized systems of power destroyed in Earth's great War. While this chapter focuses on the archetypes of two monstrous mythical women, Lilith and Medusa, it will also track these revisions as crucial projects for an intersectional approach to gender and race.

With the publication of *Frankenstein* (1818), the feminist revisioning of Greek

(Prometheus) and Christian myth (Lucifer/Adam) already occupies an important place at the inception of modern science fiction. Mary Shelley situated the anxiety of motherhood and childbirth at the very heart of its themes[7] and the novel's prescient account of technological overreaching have arguably solidified its distinction as the first myth of the post-Industrial West. *Dawn*'s narrator, recounting Lilith's capital-A "Awakening" (5) from some unknown future, might indeed be inscribing the first myth of the new post-Terran world.[8] It is therefore fitting that my project should end with Lilith since, in Judeo-Christian myth, she is the first human to engage with the nonhuman, to become nonhuman, and to be mother to creatures whose nonhuman characteristics ostracize them from an orthodox taxonomy of species. Lilith's metamorphosis from first daughter to demonic woman occurs as a result of a metaxic initiation into a space of otherness that runs counter to the divine. The profane world outside the garden welcomes Lilith with radical exchanges between non-human and non-divine figures; indeed, it is a space where survival is permanently marked and transformed by these exchanges, such that Lilith's very nature is altered so drastically as to be disowned by her Creator. This first break from a human-divine relationship is thus a proprietary one, or more specifically, a departure from a world in which earthly metaxu is the sole property of a monotheistic Creator. Reading metaxu through Butler's mythopoesis helps demonstrate the degree to which a metaxic materialism is always bound up in issues of coloniality and can even highlight a hermeneutic of decolonizing Weil's own writing. Therefore, it is through Lilith that one might envision a new potential of metaxic futurity heretofore closed.

The recreation of myths is perhaps always an admission that Western ideologies must be overthrown through a revaluation of its representation of sexual difference and its compensatory promise of salvation. Butler's use of the Lilith figure also corresponds to Susan Gubar's

assertion that the "mother-goddess myth [is] compensatory … unless freed from any biological imperative" (262). As an author deeply aligned with Afrofuturism and postmodern science fiction, Butler makes needed interventions into what Gubar decries as outdated "efforts to sanctify the female through symbols of female divinity, myths of female origin, metaphors of female creativity, and rituals of female power" (262). Such a tactic is endemic to Butler's fiction, as she "surveys her inherited mythological and historical pasts, recognizes them as influential in female development, and attempts to improve that development by recreating and revising women's history" (Osherow 79). Butler theorizes strategies of resistance through the crossing and intersection of boundaries, whether it be of the body, the species, or the culture they engender.

Megan Obourn argues that Butler recognizes the inescapability of one's historical and cultural narratives:

> It reminds us that women have to use others' texts for their 'wounded identities' to exist as identities at all. A sense of oneself as freer in relation to one's social identity in the future relies on an understanding of one's social identity through the texts that have constructed it. … Butler's choice of Lilith as her model for the wounded history of nonpure, nonwhite, nonpassive, nonideal womanhood is a reappropriation of another's text and a reliance on that text … to make a space for the future. (135)[9]

While cyberpunk dominated the science fiction landscape during much of Butler's career, many theorists-inherited the long-standing relegation of religious (especially Christian) myth to a less-enlightened era. Coinciding with science fiction's increased popularity in the neoliberal era was also a prevailing skepticism that productive recontextualizations of religious narratives were possible, despite the fact that many women of colour have continued to write their own stories

within such disciplines.[10] While male philosophers since at least the Frankfurt school have labelled such cultural texts as dangerous, many women have explored new expressions of subjectivity within such cultural traditions. While myth was a dominant cultural mode, women were prevented from taking part in its theorization and storytelling. Now that women have sought to claim the untapped possibilities that remain within it, men have effectively disbarred it from serious intellectual circles. Michelle Osherow suggests that for feminist revisionism, there is actually "little distinction between history and myth" (78), with ideological motivations behind each. When critiquing myth, one likes to forget the wisdom of historical critics and their emphasis that history champions certain voices at the exclusion of women, minorities, the poor, and the conquered. Myth, Butler implies in *Dawn*, must be subject to the same kind of historical criticism.

The only mention of Lilith in Weil's writing occurs when she speculates as to whether the Arabic name for Aphrodite, Alilat, bears any connection to the name Lilith (*Cahiers III* 241). While overshadowed by the seemingly limitless fragments buried in her notebooks, this query is indicative of Weil's approach to biblical myth as hybrid construction assembled from other linguistic and religious traditions. With etymological curiosity, Weil also questions whether there was not some unique erotic possibility smuggled into Eden through Lilith's association with Aphrodite by way of North Africa. In Judeo-Christian lore, this is an erotic transmigration that was banished and left to flourish in nonhuman worlds beyond the manicured hedgerows of the Edenic garden. The gardens of Octavia Butler have always boasted forking paths, and her Lilith character might be read as one hypothesis for what this lost and forbidden erotic possibility might look like. The repackaging of *Dawn* and the *Xenogenesis* series as part of the *Lilith's Brood* trilogy calls immediate attention to the revisioning of the myth of Lilith, but also the way

in which the trilogy as a whole can be read as the myth of an original (though displaced) mother who, while human, must transgress the decayed boundaries of the human as part of her legacy.

From *Dawn*'s outset, Lilith awakens with a scar across her abdomen, the same place where a scar might have formed on Adam's body after Lilith was expelled from the garden and God agreed to provide him with a new, more subservient wife. The scar serves to foreshadow the brood or family that will arise in the following novels. Osherow defines Lilith's anxiety about motherhood and her ambivalence about her brood as something that renders her impossible to idealize, and thus, resistant to the cultural archetypes of motherhood (77). Butler is able to have it both ways: she at once positions Lilith as a source of feminine resistance that must be reclaimed, while also suggesting that perhaps humanity was always the result of a demonic rather than Edenic progeny. To be sure, only a demonic race genetically disposed to a violent dominator culture could have found itself annihilated, left to be restored through the salvific interference of non-human powers. For imagining herself the equal of men, Lilith is made into a demon and cast out of both the garden and the entire human race. Her role as new mother aims to rectify the damage of this initial exile—the error of a gthat sided with a man, or the error of men who invented a god to naturalize their domination.

Butler could have written this story about a woman with any other name, but the choice of the apocryphal Lilith acts as a way of subverting and challenging the problematics of myth while also engaging in what Adrienne Rich describes as "feminist revisioning" (35). This approach is necessary to reclaim a history that belongs to women even as the historical transmission of myths evolved to limit women's participation. Lilith represents an important myth of the archetypal woman expelled for her rejection of patriarchal oppression. Refusing to be the submissive wife of a male to whom she stood equal, her story has become both demonic

and apocryphal. Rather than simply beginning again, or refusing the patriarchal violence that clings to myth, poets have seemed to understand that this violence is not necessarily inherent to myth itself, but inextricable from the discourses of power that appropriate myth to naturalize their own desire for Adamic superiority. For this reason, Rich suggests that mythic revisionism is an important act of "re-vision," not to abandon mistreated women to the oubliette of history, but an "act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (35).

Dawn questions whether the very theological problem of sin is actually dependent upon a misreading of the Edenic myth, and with the arrival of Eve, a refusal to look back to the presence that haunts both the myth and the civilizations that develop from it. Lilith's expulsion, rather than Adam's transgressive digestion, is the original sin that has plagued humankind. How might the last three thousand years have evolved differently if the Judeo-Christian empires had perceived the banishment of the first human woman to be the first great sin, and understood this punishment to be the fault of the first human male?[11] Butler's initial interest in Lilith stems from her forgotten role as the original wife of Adam who an entire religious tradition has deemed "unsatisfactory because she would not obey him" (McCaffery 21). By disobeying God and succumbing to the whispers of a serpentine Satan, Eve and her daughters are punished with the pain of childbirth. While still on Earth, Butler's Lilith has her son without painkillers, outside a hospital, in a birthing centre for "pregnant women who don't like the idea of being treated as though they were sick" (*Dawn* 91). In essence, this is a birth free from the punishment inflicted upon Eve. Butler's Lilith is not a new Eve, but a new dawning for a whole species, the new mother of a human race attempting to rebuild itself with the assistance of a non-human power more reviled than revered.

Most of the awakened humans are resentful of Lilith's authority as new mother and attempt to form a community of resisters through her ostracization. Just as in Eden, "the price of Lilith's empowerment is her estrangement" (Osherow 76). The other humans fear her attachment to the Oankali and are repulsed when it is discovered that the Oankali have made the humans unable to procreate without them, thereby ushering the inevitability of human-Oankali hybrids into the world.[12] Lilith resembles the archetypal "Sapphire" figure emergent from Christian mythology, described by bell hooks as "evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful" (*ain't i a woman* 164). Lilith becomes both monstrous and mother, harkening back to the Edenic myth in somewhat obvious parallels: both Liliths are perceived to be threats to the power of men; they are each exiled from their ancestral homelands; they are both women who embrace the alien, bearing strange offspring to non-human partners. Lilith is the perfect figure for revisionism because she returns the transgression of human and non-human boundaries to the heart of the Christian myth. Echoing Sandra Gilbert, it might be said that Lilith is the newborn archaic—born of the old world and the new, from both human mother and alien planet (ix).

The same might be hoped for myth. It is dangerous to be sure, but it is also the narrative that discloses the creation of patriarchy through the alienation and becoming-monstrous of numerous women throughout history. This archaic double movement has reverberated throughout many mythical traditions and *Dawn* heralds its demise by transposing it to an alien space where such patriarchal hierarchies have perished from their own apocalyptic designs. One is reminded here that revelation and apocalypse are isomorphic in more than just etymology and that every apocalypse conceals the desire for a new beginning.[13] Rather than end in the apocalypse, however, Butler begins with what remains after the apocalypse, as though the whole telos of the original myth is the paratextual ghost of a new myth to overwrite the old. In this

myth, Lilith will become mother to a race of humans, while Adam and Eve are mere fictions of an annihilated past.

While the myth of Lilith is foregrounded, the concept of the divine is not fully articulated until subsequent novels when the human resisters are more acclimatized to their new Earth. In a species for which religious believers comprise a majority of the Earth's population, one might anticipate one of the dozens of awakened individuals to struggle with their faith or seek comfort in religious consolation in the face of extraterrestrials. *Dawn* undermines such expectations, for while Christian myth survives—as does the Greek and a vague mythic Indigeneity—all notions of divinity seem to disappear once Butler's characters are removed from their ancestral lands. It is as though the trauma of confronting an alien intelligence is so severe as to wipe the notion of divinity from memory. The novel does not question whether the loss of the ability to conceptualize divinity might already shift the human species into something posthuman, but rather suggests that an inability to embrace an alien otherness might thwart humanity's sacred duty to survive.[14] Equally strange is the frequency with which Judas is named, as though the great traitor of the New Testament has survived while Christ's rebirth was far more terrestrial than originally thought, and so perished along with much of his planet.[15] The same can be said of the Oankali, repeatedly described as Medusa figures without recourse to a recollected Perseus. In the absence of a Christ or a Perseus, Butler presents an absent transcendental signifier that would otherwise define the outcast or monstrous figure, thus freeing it from its tragic end by displacing the existence of the patriarch who stands in opposition to it.

While Lilith is not presented with an Adam *per se*, she is introduced to another human (Paul Titus) before she awakens the group that will accompany her back to Earth. Similar to the Edenic challenge for autonomy, Lilith refuses to submit to the man's sexual aggression. This

time, it is the man who is punished, put back to sleep, and forbidden from rejoining the Earth. Because Lilith has been apocryphally annexed within biblical myth, it is she who has been able to survive the fall of both the human race and the Adamic, Christly, or divine patriarch. Through a Weilian lens, this liberates Lilith, welcoming her to metaxic exchanges with other forms of being. This metaxic possibility is only made available to those who, like Lilith, dwell on the margins of the awakened human community that seeks to return to its violent, hierarchical ways. By returning to the myth of the first woman, the banished mother, "the alien, the uncomprehending outsider" (*Dawn* 107), Butler reflects on how this apocalyptic fate of Earth is symbolic of its ideological myths and narratives rather than its peoples. No longer content to define mythical women exclusively through relation to their male counterparts, *Dawn* envisions a heroic Lilith free from what Osherow defines as the "'good girl/bad' girl binary in which 'good' symbolizes women's service to the patriarchy, and 'bad' announces them a threat to patriarchy" (69). Butler narrativizes the assertion made by Clément that "myth transmits itself by making changes in accordance with ... cultural evolution" ("Guilty" 6) and Lilith Iyapo's character reflects evolving attitudes toward women's place within a patriarchal culture.

Written in dialogue with Hélène Cixous, Clément's contributions to *The Newly Born Woman* (1975) offer surprising similarities to a Weilian reading of Butler as Clément inadvertently evokes Butler's Lilith in numerous places. With respect to the ventriloquism that Clément herself advocates, Lilith is the "feminine figure who crystallizes around herself the swirling gazes of a threatened culture. And not far away — revolutionary myths, the figure of liberty" ("Guilty" 26). She is the figure of "romantic myth … situated at the fissure where norms hang in the balance, where values overturn" ("Guilty" 32). Lilith occupies the place and repeats "the moment at which the woman crosses a dangerous line, the cultural demarcation beyond

which she will find herself excluded" ("Guilty" 33). Reborn centuries after the demise of her planet, Lilith is the re-incarnated archetype of the sorceress, wielder of strange powers that emanate from a reciprocity with the natural world in seemingly unnatural ways. Like the sorceress of old, the awakened rebels regard her womb as a demonic thing, wishing her to remain barren so as not to overturn obsolete laws of nature that are long since buried beneath the crumbled civilizations that created and policed them. The vestiges of anachronistic systems of surveillance still haunt the resisters for whom Lilith's womb can be a passage of egress for nothing that is not monstrous ("Guilty" 54). Butler's Lilith is the mythological woman whose liberating power comes in her ability to "reread the past … awakened only to throw off [her] shackles" ("Guilty" 56).

Although awakened by an alien race interested in her latent genetic potential, Lilith's parallels with Clément's sorceress enfold her within powers that re-establish her position within a genealogy of mythical and monstrous women. She also inherits the subsequent marginalization and exile of this particular kinship. This is, however, as much a fault of the Oankali as it is the misogynistic fear of a woman's ability to forge new modalities of being once emancipated from the confines of the new herd, quick to proclaim the most aggressive male as their new shepherd. Musing on Milton's Edenic parable, Morton is skeptical of human growth precipitating from "a powerful authority figure" rather than "a sense of the openness of space" (*Ecological Thought* 23). The resisters share this same skepticism, and in their defense, the Oankali do force Lilith to become the spokesperson for an almost authoritarian-openness, marking her as a *homo sacer* protected by an alien law that cannot be accepted without admitting the failure of a hierarchical epistemology privileging humans over all other organisms. This failure, and Lilith's subsequent victimization, stands at the intersection of a post-patriarchal mythology and a posthuman,

metaxic future.

Although her prose differs greatly from Clément's, Cixous's "Sorties" in *The Newly Born Woman* also describes an illuminating connection to Butler's novel and casts Lilith as a kind of metaxic or bridging figure between the two philosophers' critical feminism. What Lilith engenders with her awakening is an opportunity to re-read myth, history, culture and the body through a new sight unencumbered by his-torical representations ("Sorties" 65). Lilith is the ancestor of Clément's sorceress and hysteric but also of Cixous's sleeping beauty, awaiting the kiss of an alien prince so that she might become "god the mother … the one who gives the second birth" (66). Unlike Eve, of course, Lilith is the woman created in God's image, and as "god the mother," Butler's Lilith is neither fully human nor fully alien, but myth's uncanny double. Butler imagines the female body as its own speculative fiction, a trans-species and interplanetary "voyage: as a *body*" ("Sorties" 66). Lilith, and her body's promise of nurturing a new human species "destroys laws" and "the 'natural' order. She lifts the bar separating the present from the future … [and with] the privilege of divinatory, magical forces … her metamorphoses … make another way of knowing circulate" ("Sorties" 96). Cixous, of course, is far more commonly aligned with the figure of Medusa, assuring her reader elsewhere that "[a]ll you have to do to see the Medusa is look her in the face: and she isn't deadly" ("Laugh" 69). It is strange how almost none of the scholarship on Butler has invited comparison to Cixous's Medusa, for it can be said that Lilith is one of the first characters to truly take up this challenge. In doing so, she finds that the only deadly thing is in closing one's eyes and refusing to join the Gorgon sisterhood.

The first appeal to myth in Butler's novel arrives immediately after Lilith first meets Jdahya, one of her Oankali captors. Horrified at the way its "'hair' writhed independently, a nest

of snakes startled, driven in all directions" (13), Lilith calls upon the figure of Medusa to scaffold her ungrounding. This scaffolding reveals an implicit reliance on myth as a process of narrative rationalization for the mysteries of the world in order to carve out one's own space within it. The Oankali's monstrosity is understood through myth, narratively domesticated and cultivated. Not for nothing does the use of myth and the necromancy of the Medusa figure from beyond the Earth's grave queer the male Oankali that stands before her. In this way, she transforms her alien counterpart into an old myth of female monstrosity, an abject response that both rejects the Oankali and binds them together in similar narratives of threatening difference. Lilith, staring at this alien Medusa, creates a tableau where two mythical women, terrorizers of masculine power, demonic monsters of patriarchal myth, meet for the first time to exchange the secrets of their alienness. Myth, in this instance, is mobilized as an aesthetic strategy through which alienness can shift from threat to dialogue, and ultimately shared community.

Once Jdahya explains that the two species will share genetic material and evolve through this trade into something closer to one another, Lilith imagines "grotesque, Medusa children.… Snakes for hair. Nests of nightcrawlers for eyes and ears" (42). Such hybridity will only be possible through metaxic exchange (what the Oankali simply designate as *trade*), and the initial fear of such intimacy causes Lilith to return to the narrative consolation of myth as a kind of Perseus shield against the horror of her own metamorphic future. Moreover, it is the constant repetition of the Medusa myth that informs Lilith's negotiation of biological potential and provides the catalyst for imagining the body's transgression of the human/nonhuman divide. Lilith provides proof for Alphonso Lingis's assessment that the "transgression of one's own natural species, appears as old as culture itself; it is modern culture that is humanist, the ancient cultures were pursuits in the direction of the ultra-human, totemic metamorphoses or

divinization" (*Excesses* 55). As Lilith's metamorphic transgression gradually infuses her with ever more alienness, she becomes a kind of Lilith-Medusa hybrid. As Cixous previously declared, this transformation signals a "new history" beyond the humanist modernity diagnosed by Lingis, and a new dawn that, while not quite a "dream … does extend beyond man's imagination, and for good reason. It's going to deprive them of their conceptual orthopedics, beginning with the destruction of their enticement machine" ("Medusa" 883). Lilith's outlook remains pessimistic about a similar power of prophecy, describing herself as "Cassandra, warning and predicting to people who went deaf whenever she began to warn and predict" (*Dawn* 236). When viewed in a broader context, Butler's mythic allusion becomes simply one in a vast intertextual tapestry woven to revise cultural modes of expression as part of a feminist poetics of derivation and decolonization.[16]

By using the figure of Lilith to mediate between Christian and Greek traditions, Butler demonstrates the revisionist power arising from the shared cultural dialogue of myth, especially in the context of two archetypal figures whose legacy has influenced the representation of many women, equally abject and outcast, hauntological voices for myth's stolen futures. One can even recognize parallels between Butler's Lilith and Eurydice, another woman lost and displaced by storytellers who have not stretched their ears deep enough into the soil to hear a song every bit as mournful as those struck from Orpheus's plaintive lyre. Like Eurydice, Lilith is taken to a world beyond the grave and must carve out a new life for herself away from her husband, dead before the war. She does not die by the snake's fang, but while on the Oankali ship, must instead embrace the serpent-haired Medusa to be granted new life. H.D.'s Eurydice found a garden hidden in the shadows of her underworld, while the Edenic Lilith was cast out of the garden entirely. Eventual heir to a new Edenic South American jungle, revived with care by the Oankali,

Lilith Iyapo awakens surviving humans from strange plants that double as incubation pods—literally an alien tree of life—as though reimaging the lost garden as a maternity ward without the interference of an Adamic mate. Lilith has her rightful role as mother returned to her. Unlike many of the awakened, however, led by wayward men who reject the advice of the Oankali, Lilith refuses to look back once she crosses over into this other world. Instead, she attempts to lead humanity out of its apocalyptic darkness by returning to the diurnal forest and refusing to look behind at the old trappings of capitalist competition as something worth salvaging. One must not look back at the ghostly face of a forbidden human species hungry for an eschatological telos; better to return the gaze of the Medusa that mirror's one's own future.

Dawn directly inspired Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" and its proposition for creating a viable "socialist-feminist politics" by addressing "the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations" (*CM* 163). Haraway is one of the only commentators whose interest in Lilith focuses not just in her role as boundary creature, disrupting the policed divide between human and nonhuman, but also her role as mother—another monstrous woman endemic to myth. In Lilith's initial difficulty accepting this role, one hears the echo of Milton's Adam and Shelley's Promethean monster: "did I request thee maker to mold me from clay?" (Shelley 1). The Oankali, however, are not irresponsible fathers who abandon their creatures to the whims of a harsh universe, but gene traders dedicated to their metamorphic coexistence. Haraway suggests that as gene traders, the Oankali's "nature is always to be midwife to themselves as other" ("Biopolitics" 227), a revealing statement from a critic whose attention to Butler coincides with her aversion to essentialist categories like "nature". Butler leans into the notion of the khoric midwife as if to reclaim the inherent power of the metaphor for the gendered nuances of metaxic mediation. Lilith plays midwife to a new generation of humans who perpetuate the species in the

only way possible—by becoming other, alien, metaxic.

Jdahya compares the Oankali home world to a khoric space of emergence from which their consciousness can retain no memory. Lilith, in advance of *Parable*'s Lauren Olamina, compares this to the warmongering humans who believed that the Earth was a womb from which they needed to be birthed in order to meet their destiny amidst the stars. The impossibility of an easy return is crucial for Haraway's reading of *Dawn* as a text "about resistance to the imperative to recreate the sacred image of the same" ("Reprise" 226) through the birth of a child that will resemble neither parent, yet still extend the genetic lineage of the family beyond the confines of its traditional form. For Haraway, this rejection of homogeneity is necessary for a narrative built "[f]rom the perspective of an ontology based on mutation, metamorphosis, and the diaspora" ("Reprise" 226). In both instances, one observes a metaphorical movement beyond the mother, a troubling comparison that both the Oankali and Lilith correct as a metaxic figures who use their bodies as "living technologies to mediate their self-formations and reformations" ("Biopolitics" 228). By reading Weil alongside speculative fictions and feminisms, her unfinished sketching of metaxu might be recast as an important contribution to a theory of living technologies and subject (re)formation. Haraway's reading of Butler further differentiates a metaxic ontology from a decreative return in that it privileges a survival narrative of metamorphosis and miscegenation in response to catastrophe rather than the myth of a salvific "reproduction of the One" ("Reprise" 228).

Haraway, however, is too severe in her reading of Butler as one who deracinates humans from all recoverable origins, because her curiosity does not extend beyond the image of Medusa to African and Indigenous traditions or to the rewriting of biblical or khoric narratives. The *Malleus Mallefecarum* (1487) warns that "[n]o one is more harmful to the Catholic Faith than

midwives" (257). In bringing Weil into such proximity with Butler, a metaxic intervention into the appearance of a khoric midwife serves to rewire the Catholic tradition against its own patriarchal legacy. Following the musings of Clément, Lilith also resuscitates a lineage of witches and sorceresses (of which Anyanwu might be one). She is, as Gilbert synthesizes, the "wisewoman, destroyer and preserver of culture … the *mid*wife, the intermediary between life and death, the go-between whose occult yet necessary labors deliver souls and bodies across frightening boundaries" (xiii) whether they be biological, ethical or ontological. She partakes in an eroticism that privileges pleasure to disrupt heteronormativity with the introduction of a third, mediating, ooloi body, neither male nor female. This queering of the human copulate invigorates Lilith's body with an escape from heteronormative paradigms, but also positions her body and progeny beyond utopian and dystopian binaries. Her identification with the sorceress of old is merely the "mythic trace" (Clément 5) of a power never fully realized, for these positions are no longer tenable in a new world that does not marginalize women's systems of knowledge. Instead of being destroyed for the proliferation of conservative hegemony, Lilith is the sorceress who *lives*. She opens herself to the monstrous, the nonhuman, the alien, and becomes the vessel of a fearsome otherness not to spurn her species, but for its very survival.

The humans of this new world still attempt to displace and marginalize her, but they exile themselves instead, crawling back into a xenophobic primitivism whose inevitable destiny is symbolized through infertility and disease. The other awakened humans regard her as something uncanny, a midwife to her own monstrosity (and potentially theirs). In *Bodies of Tomorrow* (2007), Sherryl Vint argues that "Lilith's changed body and hybrid offspring" are treacherous acts in the eyes of "those humans who insist on some sort of purity of categories. Her very existence beyond the categories challenges the security of those who reside within them" (65).

Lilith is despised as traitorous for her nonhuman cooperation even before she becomes marked by a queer desire and the abject transgression of the boundaries between human and nonhuman. Her body, as cultural mirror, reflects the dissolution of traditional culture and its emergence into a new ontology—human yet alien, animalistic yet posthuman, bio-chemically engineered yet without recourse to any inorganic technology. She is both mother and marginalized pariah, as the other humans witness a disorienting reflection in her body's prowess and its embrace of an apocalyptic gyre evolving within an uncanny replica of terrestrial land. Lilith represents the metaxic bridge from mythical women to a newly emancipated future, but also the terror of cultural and individual decreation that the rest of the awakened humans are not yet prepared to begin.

Space is the Place: Terraforming Mothership Earth

In *Imago*, Lilith's hybrid, genderfluid child imagines their mother as a kind of black Medusa, marveling at how "[e]very strand" of her "black cloud of hair … seemed to go its own different way, bending twisting, spiraling, angling … all attached to the same head" (Butler, *Imago* 742). As a Black feminist writer of science fiction, Butler is no stranger to bringing traditionally marginalized characters into spaces where they can reshape the destinies of entire planets by using their alienness as a source of empowerment. An enormous body of Butler scholarship has focused on constellations of Afrofuturism,[17] critical race theory, and posthumanism with the *Xenogenesis* series particularly focused on Lilith's blackness and her ability to operate within spaces of abjection, marginalization, and alienation. Along with Osherow and Melzer, I am especially indebted to the nuanced work of Ytasha L. Womack, Susana M. Morris, and Hoda M. Zaki, all of whom have contributed to debates surrounding

Butler's treatment of racialized bodies. Lilith's blackness makes her an ideal candidate to transgress the antiquated values of a hierarchical species whose survival depends upon the embrace of a symbiotic cooperation with new figurations of otherness. She is singled out by the Oankali for her ability to find empathy with bodies that initially look abject and monstrous. To be sure, this ability is partially informed by her experience in a white supremacist world that has occasionally displaced her on the other side of such a gaze.

Butler has also been instrumental for the Afrofuturist tradition of manufacturing, migrating, and mutating Black histories to carve out a space for Black future, even (perhaps especially) within places and spaces of alienation (Eshun 301). *Dawn*'s mythmaking is addressed to a world that can no longer survive the antiquated systems of myth and consequently, queers its narratives in order to destabilize their hierarchies of white male normativity with bodies of other colours, contours, genders, and relations to the nonhuman animal. Butler's return to myth acts as an important technique for decolonizing cultural narratives from the colonial, misogynist, white supremacist lens through which they have been disseminated. Fanon argues that decolonization is the appropriation of violence by the colonized. As such, decolonization is a violent act, and is always destructive. Yet in a strange twist, it is actually the Oankali, perceived as a kind of colonizer, who are the species actively engaged in "demolishing the colonist's sector" and ensuring that it stays "bur[ied…] deep within the earth" (*Wretched* 6).

As a cultural phenomenon, mythmaking reflects the dominant ideologies of the culture from which it emerges, but also the cultural representations it wishes to escape or disrupt. It has been too easy to dismiss myth as a purely patriarchal construction that inevitably collapses back into the gender differences it seeks to politicize. Writers at the margins of cultural belonging have continued to revise older myths as a way of reclaiming the lost voices and subjectivities of

their culture. Marlon James's *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019) (its setting resembling the beginning of *Wild Seed*) is an excellent example of a text that queers Western narratological paradigms by returning to African mythology and folklore[18] as a way of reclaiming a lost cultural heritage. In contrast, Butler's fraught relationship to myth works to reclaim a *future* in which racialized bodies and marginalized voices can achieve an emancipation from the violent and apocalyptic Western paradigms that currently frame the kinds of Black liberation that might be possible. To evoke Adrienne Rich, Butler's Afrofuturist feminism[19] imagines a book of myths in which such names *do* appear. *Dawn* envisions Black liberation through a metaxic connection to an alien counterpart rather than a transcendent patriarch who mirrors an all-too human form of systemic oppression.

Lilith's metamorphosis, even if naked to the untrained eye, makes her wary that she might be mistaken for one of her captors when she wakes the sleeping humans who will claim the mantle of rebuilding human civilization. "The Oankali had given her information, increased physical strength, enhanced memory, and an ability to control the walls and the suspended animation plants. These were her tools. And every one of them would make her seem less human" (*Dawn* 120). These subtle powers have made her able to live more harmoniously with her environment, to use the raw material of the ship as tools for survival, and to create doors out of walls as the ship responds to her touch. Butler deploys the common science fiction theme of rebirth through becoming-other, but also augments the narrative with a deep anxiety of racial passing. Lilith is skeptical of what she may have lost in order to precipitate humanity's rebirth. She wants the other humans after their long recuperative slumber to see the human beneath her transformation (or the human in the posthuman), and to recognize that she is someone to trust even in her apparent otherness.

Lilith's demands are indicative of the complex ways in which Butler subverts the expectations of her readers, as well as the humans who must consider whether or not to join Lilith in her acceptance of those whom they perceive as alien colonizers. Fanon is explicit in the distinctions that he draws, arguing that "[t]he ruling species is first and foremost the outsider from elsewhere, different from the indigenous population, 'the others'" (Wretched 5). In *Dawn*, it is precisely the humans who are "different from the indigenous population" that dwells on the organic ship and trades genes with various planets and species. The Oankali terraform a simulacrum of a South American rainforest so that the humans can return to their ancestral lands after they have all but destroyed them. Butler creates a kind of thought experiment for all her readers who might otherwise side with the leftist politics of Fanon, Haraway, or Weil. What Lilith asks of the other remaining humans is not to fear the dehumanization of the colonized, but to embrace it. Thousands of years of colonial oppression have trained the Terrans to recognize the Oankali as occupying the role of colonizer, even while Lilith tries to convince them of their role as partners, even potentially saviours. There is a dangerous conservatism inherent to any request involving acquiescence to colonization, and the surviving humans are asked to reject their former humanity in order to survive. The dehumanizing result of war that Weil and Fanon both recognized has rendered Earth uninhabitable and nearly eliminated their entire species. Following Fanon, the new Terrans must respond with a violence that is equal to or greater than that of their old Terran oppressors. The Oankali do not simply offer the chance at a new future for the human species but offer this rebirth through an equal or greater process of dehumanization. The prescription is not an easy one. Decreation from what formerly counted as individuality is a necessity, but the human species itself must be sacrificed to the greater will of a more-than-human network of interspecies relationality. A daunting proposition, this is the cause

of the vitriol so pervasive among the resistance.

Haraway reads Lilith's otherness in terms of a cybernetic integration with her newly acquired tools and proselytizes evangelically about the emancipatory politics of the cyborg within military-industrial late capitalism—a new incarnation of Weil's *gros animal*. Butler critiques the inherent racism of just such a society and begins both *Dawn* and "Bloodchild" after its apocalyptic collapse. In this way, Butler's cyborg feminism is far more attuned to Sandoval's description of "the muscles and sinews of workers who grow tired in the required repetitions, in the warehouses, assembly lines, administrative cells, and computer networks.… These workers know the pain of the union of machine and body tissue, the robotic conditions … under which the notion of human agency must take on new meanings" (374-375). Butler's hybrid characters use their racialized bodies to inscribe the obituary of a *gros animal*, a dominator society that offers political emancipation only through the downfall of a white supremacist patriarchy for whom belonging has only applied to a powerful and authoritarian minority. The earthly decreation of the cybernetic organism, through which organic parts give way to machine interface, also provides a unique way of reassessing Weil. Here, decreative bodies appear holistic (and thus must sacrifice their entirety) while metaxic bodies are organisms comprised of parts, symbiotic coalitions and assemblages. Some of these parts may empty for interfacing with a wider network or system (*mesh* is Morton's superior term), but decreative transcendence in Butler's fiction is impossible without the destruction of the *gros animal* that polices such conduits and the bodies that might use them. *Dawn*'s Afrofuturism offers an important addendum to Haraway by demonstrating solidarity and metaxic interfacing with nonhuman peoples and bodies without abandoning an empowered and embodied Blackness as Lilith claims her Afrodiasporic heritage on a world other than Earth.

While I hope to make the case for Butler's use of a kind of metaxu in *Dawn*, it may seem rather bizarre to bring Weil into discussions of Black emancipation and empowerment. It is equally strange, however, that Weil's relationship to Black culture should be limited to biographical anecdotes that critics have repeatedly relegated to extraneous footnotes. In fact, there is a fruitful basis for such a comparison given Weil's experience as a Jew writing during WWII and the Black prophetic tradition that has commonly seen itself reflected in the plight of the Jewish people. As such, it is perhaps fitting that my exploration of Weil should conclude with a Black woman who understands the love and sacrifice involved with negotiating evolutionary, even erotic, exchanges with powerful alien races to overcome the threat of enslavement and create communities of love and empathy. One of Butler's unique contributions to Afrofuturism is in the mobilization of a metaxic metamorphosis as a technique for unrooting from the *gros animal* and its perpetuation of normative ideologies and practices. For this, Weil may have found Butler's literary aesthetic inspiring, prone though she was to the classics. Although commonly associated with posthumanist philosophy, Butler's variation is not singularly new, but rather ancient, a becoming-other that is essential to empower oppositional identities and sexualities against the dehumanizing forces of white supremacy and capitalism.

If Butler highlights a simultaneous becoming-alien involved in becoming-other, she does so as the inheritance of a liberating escape from the embodied essentialisms of traditional definitions of the human without throwing away the body. Identity is not given or performed but negotiated. Moreover, blackness is something to be embraced and empowered rather than discarded or effaced.[20] Lilith's racial difference also accounts for a predisposition to patience and care in response to bodies whose otherness initially appears threatening. The same might be said for Weil, who attended weekly service at a Black Baptist church in Harlem in 1942 and was so

moved by the passion she observed there, that she did not care that she was the only white individual in the congregation. She wrote to her friend that "the faithful explode into dances like the Charleston, shouts and spirituals.… Authentic faith, it seems to me" (Meaney 310). Besides offering an interesting commonality with Butler (who, like Lauren Olamina, also grew up Baptist in her youth), this small part of Weil's history may have untold value to contextualizing some of her core writings, especially given the fact that *La Connnaissance surnaturelle* is comprised of much of the notebooks Weil kept during this time.

I do not wish to suggest that the disregard for Weil's experience at the Black Baptist church has been the result of a racial bias within Weilian scholarship, but it certainly demands more attention that it has been given. Before hastily returning to England in the hopes of somehow getting to the front lines of the war, Weil had planned on travelling south to work with marginalized Black communities during her time overseas. Her friend, Louis Bercher, thought her involvement in the church was of such great influence that she suggested that Weil may have even become black had she stayed in America longer (Pétrement 432). Bercher's comment may have passed for flippant hyperbole eighty years ago, but its problematic disregard for cultural assimilation regretably undermines Weil's experience and has made it difficult to adequately address her time there. Weil first felt called to Christianity as she met the wives of poor Portuguese fishermen, listened to their sad hymns, and came to believe that Christianity was the religion of slaves, and thus, she could not help but belong to it in some way.[21] If a critic were to suggest that Weil recognized this same spirit in the worship of an all-Black congregation, it would be considered base speculation or, worse, a fetishization of the Black struggle. It can be argued, however, that Weil harboured a certain fetishization of the purity of the slave and the oppressed. If a critic were to suggest that Weil discovered empathy, not just from biblical stories

of perseverance in the face of exile and diasporic persecution, but in a church community still living under various forms of enslavement and subjugation, it might also be considered unacademic speculation. And yet, it is difficult to overlook that neither before nor after had Weil admitted to being more inspired by a group of peers than when praying and singing in her Harlem church.

Along with studying the history of fairy tales—another distant connection to literature of the fantastic—Weil spent much of her time while in Harlem researching the stories of Indigenous American communities and their resilience against an even longer campaign of genocidal oppression. This is an additional biographical footnote that has gone almost completely unexplored. Similarly, although much has been written on Butler's importance within Afrodiasporic literature, especially through the way her characters negotiate experiences of colonial power—both on Earth and in defamiliarized off-world environments—little has been written about the way Butler employs Indigenous perspectives to advocate for a broader decolonized worldview. This is especially true for the *Xenogenesis* series; its terraforming of a South American jungle is directly inspired by Butler's research trip to the Peruvian Amazon, undertaken for the writing of *Dawn*. In the Afterword to "Bloodchild"—the short story she wrote immediately preceding *Dawn* as a way to exorcise her fear of botflies during her trip to Peru—Butler registers surprise that so many readers have (mis)interpreted "Bloodchild" as a story of slavery, perhaps due to her own blackness.[22]

By no means do I wish to diminish the ways in which *Dawn's* representations of power and bodily abjection intersect with issues of race, but attention must also be given to how bodies of colour operate within this Amazonian environment. The setting of Butler's post-apocalyptic story must be read counter to the world it replaces. Just as Morton clarifies capitalism's

appropriation of externalities such as Indigenous lands, female bodies, and nonhuman people,[23] so too must these be included in any examination of a metaxic sphere bound up in the cultures and traditions of living beings searching for solidarity and coexistence within a multispecies world. Therefore, Indigenous storytelling must also be present in any analysis of Butler's narrative practice of decolonization. While the dismantling of myth is often necessary to combat certain vices of Western epistemology, Indigenous scholars, knowledge-keepers, and storytellers have long decried the deleterious effects of being displaced from the traditional myths and folklore associated with one's ancestral lands. To keep these stories alive and transmit them to new generations is an important method of decolonization. This is not to suggest that one must protect the misogynistic or racist elements of myth, but rather that the retelling of myths is part of the important work necessary to decolonize and Indigenize cultural narratives and symbols.

Instead of terraforming outer space (a colonial fantasy that is increasingly merging with the capitalist realities of billionaire megalomania), Butler questions whether it is Earth that will need to be terraformed after all. Although *Dawn*'s setting is inspired by Peru's landscapes, Butler widens the scope of her narrative by eschewing specific Incan or Amazonian myths; nor does she attempt to colonize an Indigenous Peru with myths of European colonialism. Instead her intent is to displace Western myth by transforming it into something alien and foreign, something that must decreate from its former colonial abuses.[24] Butler's approach to issues of land and Indigeneity reveals a critical tension between the local and the interstellar in science fiction that conveys similarities between mysticism's tension of material immanence and transcendent otherness. She challenges the myopic view of outer space and extraterrestrial organisms as necessarily dwelling *out there* in some futuristic version of a transcendent beyond. Suvin's take on estrangement also relies upon an initial bias that recognizes the setting of an Oankali ship or

Mars colony as an *out there*, a *not here*, a departure from what Morton describes as an earthbound ecology. This ecological perspective also grants insight into a potentially latent mysticism in Butler's writing. As he suggests,

> You want religious language? Look up at the Milky Way. Imagine *n*-thousand habitable worlds, filled with sentient beings wondering just how vast the ecological thought is. Could we have a progressive ecology that was big, not small; spacious, not place-ist; global, not local (if not universal); not embodied but displaced, spaced, outerspaced? (*Ecological* 27-28)[25]

Displacement is a common technique of Butler's particular brand of estrangement. Gilbert's introduction to *The Newly Born Woman* helps shed light on its purpose: "We must be displaced to be re-placed … We must fly away to be regenerated … To be immune to the hierarchal 'principles' of culture. To be newborn" (xviii). The same ontic entities that Weil provides in her discussion of metaxu (community, family, culture) are the exact ones that Lilith's new world must carry on without, or at least, learn to renegotiate from a new post-historical social identity. The post-war earth, extinct of all humans, now resembles the vast ecosystems of South America: "Wild. Forests, mountains, deserts, plains, great oceans. It's a rich world, clean of dangerous radiation in most places. The greatest diversity of animal life is in the seas, but there are a number of small animals thriving on land: insects, worms, amphibians, reptiles, small animals" (*Dawn* 32). The novel's setting operates as a crucial suggestion for how to read myth's purpose of sustaining Indigenous cultures. Tomson Highway of the Cree Nation, for example, defends the traditional importance of myth, asserting that if one erases traditional archetypes like the figure of the Trickster, "the core of Indian culture would be gone forever" (xii). Butler advocates for survival as a form of resistance, and this also applies to certain cultural discourses

after they are subject to decolonial, feminist, and queer processes of revision. Lilith's resistance to assimilation requires learning how to co-exist in a heightened reciprocity with her environment and the gift of knowledge bestowed upon her by the Oankali is rooted in Indigenous stewardship without reproducing racialized tropes of the primitive native born into perfect harmony with the untamed forest.

Butler does not advocate for a return to Earth in order to fulfill a compensatory modernist homecoming that could offer a fractured human species the possibility of being made whole. Just as the biblical Lilith is the first to bridge the human and the nonhuman, she is also the first to inaugurate the presence of an *outside*, establishing her reign in a world outside Eden, outside Law, outside the panoptic patriarchy of the Word. She earns her apocryphal heresy through apostatic freedom. Jeannette Armstrong informs us that her "elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher.… It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings – to its language – and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generations" (178). This is why the return to Earth is so pivotal for what remains of the Earth's fledgling human race. Lilith even harbours a belief that the most natural response may be to escape the Oankali once they are returned to their native soil. Paradoxically, it is the alien race that tries to teach the humans how to recognize the land as teacher. In a text where the tenability of an essentialist soil seems implausible, the Oankali wish the humans to practice a *turning of the soil* as it were. *Dawn* offers an argument for how important ancestral land is to the stories that shape one's identity, but also a cautionary tale for what teachings might be lost through increased military aggression and environmental exploitation.

Indigenous narratology employs the term *mythic* to describe an ecological view in which

places are *storied*, that is, sentient and layered, a terrestrial palimpsest in which ancestral stories survive as the etching of the land (Styres et al. 45). Lilith, her world destroyed by geopolitical strife so near-inevitable that Butler foregoes describing cause, is resituated in the mythic or storied history of her land. This activates a lost feminine sacrality as a mode of resistance against the colonial powers who have used it as an essentializing part of their arsenal. Melzer compares Butler with Spivak in her demand for "a reading strategy that will uncover the silenced subject—the non-elite, subaltern woman, muted by both colonial ideologies and local patriarchal rule" (52). Butler seems well-attuned to the question of whether the subaltern can speak through the forgotten and banished voices of history's most oppressed women. To take up the myths or stories of the dominant (and dominator) culture is an affirmation that this land and its cultural discourses belong equally to the forgotten and displaced. Indeed, Butler gives certain myths newfound relevance by bringing the whole of the human race under the umbrella of the apocalyptically diasporic. What does it mean for myth to be projected into the future rather than backwards as a more unified version of a now-fragmented world? *Dawn* is a persistent investigation into myth for a people who have lost access to their history and the land from which their myths arise.

As Lilith's body grows into greater reciprocity and balance with the land, her body begins to share this layered, storied, or mythic modality. Despite becoming increasingly alien, her embodiment impresses a metaxic quality upon Weil's decreative return, playing a key role in the story's thematic focus of return and renewal. Ursula K. Le Guin, with whom Butler shares more than a little resemblance, has admitted that "the parts of me that are stone, or star, or dust … want to go back. They want to go back and be what they are. What came together to make me.… One is almost an accidental concatenation of a lot of stuff getting together and becoming an

entity." ("Panel Discussion" 29:55-30:30).[26] Le Guin describes a kind of decreative energy within the human that pulls it towards the nonhuman elements of its own origin. Interestingly, she reveals this fascinating non-human turn during a panel discussion with Haraway, for whom the figure of the "cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed" (*CM* 152). To view this myth as storied also highlights Lilith's cyborg modality as pre-human as much as it is posthuman. When Nikanj alters Lilith's body chemistry to make her stronger, it assuages any skepticism by rationalizing that it "gave her more efficient use of what she already has. She should have been stronger. Her ancestors were stronger—her nonhuman ancestors in particular. [Nikanj] helped her fulfill her potential" (*Dawn* 155-156), as though one's potential for full corporeal capability requires a return to a nonhuman past. The body's history is not confined to the individual self but includes the history of all its genetic mutations and its interdependency with the land in its myriad forms.

In contrast to Lilith's brood, the Oankali have no original homeland to which they are connected by a mythic narrative of diaspora. They are a species that left their ancestral land long ago and Jdahya explains that the past is "the one direction that's closed to" (36) them. Jdahya teaches Lilith that its species is composed of three groups: the Dinso who will stay with Earth and help the humans rebuild their civilization while learning from their genetic material; the Toaht who will leave in the current ship; and the Akjia who will leave in a new ship. In some distant future, their descendants may meet again. Lilith presumes that they will "remember this division as mythology if they remember it at all" (36). She exhibits an understanding of mythology in the same light as Scholem, defining it as the narrative of a union before a traumatic separation, the narrative history of a community that remains part of a collective consciousness. Jdahya explains that rather than through mythology, "[m]emory of a division is passed on

biologically" (36). Myth, in this sense, is the oral, written, or biochemical text that keeps the diasporic community rooted even during an uprooting. And yet, the Oankali's initial split has been relatively forgotten, as though there is something about myth that is linked to ancestral territory. They seem to have no mythic stories, even though their evolution as a species follows a familiar trajectory from unity to separation, forestalling the traditional reunification that one sees conceptualized by Scholem and Eliade. Although Haraway uses Lilith in her articulation of the cyborg figure, it is the Oankali who "would not recognize the Garden of Eden; [they are] not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (*CM* 151). Jdahya, however, has some understanding of myth without Lilith having to define it. He interprets it as something separate from the biological, likely as a kind of memorial appendage when biology fails. As a biophilic species, what cannot be inherited biologically is of little use value.

The Oankali are a species with a wondrous sense of *techné*, but they appear to have nothing one might describe as art, literature, or music. Jdahya confesses that the Oankali have destroyed all the ruins they have found so that humanity might begin again. Indeed, Jdahya admits that the destruction of the past is a necessary component for the production of a new species. Lilith chastises the Oankali for this, declaring it "an insane act" (34). Myth, like ruins, contains important vestiges of historical and cultural hauntings, connections to a past that cannot be forgotten without humanity becoming something entirely "different" (34). Nikanj offers Lilith companionship that no other Oankali can provide, but even it refuses to provide Lilith with a pen or written material, preferring oral to written story-telling (61-62). In contrast to the Medusas of Cixous, the Oankali initially prohibit the act of writing, seemingly for safety purposes. This infuriates Lilith who wishes for a kind of "cyborg writing," a survival writing "not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as

other" (*CM* 175). In a new world, situated through myth but freed of its elaborate systems of domination, Lilith desires to begin writing a new experience, marking her new world and new self with, perhaps, a new language and grammar.

The Oankali possess a different kind of nonhuman writing. Communicating through biochemical inscription and sensorial responses, theirs is a language of tentacular entanglement, using their serpentine appendages to converse with one another. Unlike the hierarchical tendencies that handcuff human physiology in its ability to successfully communicate (and thus co-exist) with its biome, the bodies of the Oankali interact with all the organic material around them, responding to it, manipulating its natural tendencies through reciprocity, and thereby inscribing themselves into a network of entities participating in the same multitude. Human writing, they seem to suggest, is a kind of defect of biology, while myth is a memorial substitute for the lack of a biochemical unconscious which the Oankali hope to correct. Obsessed with the cancerous cells of humans, emblematic of a fascinating death drive, Nikanj's refusal implies that thanatotic genes necessitate writing because they harbour within them a troubling absence and a physiology that requires a semiotic appendage to substitute that which the human body cannot yet grow itself.

An Afrofuturist or Indigenous approach to a metaxic ecology demands a commitment to a similar kind of growth. The Oankali are demonstrative of a more progressive relationship to one's biome and seem to thrive amidst the verdant flora and fauna of the Amazonian basin. They are attuned to the language of trees. They have unseen conduits of ingress and egress hidden among the dense foliage. The genetic histories of the animate and inanimate can be unlocked through the touch of a tentacle or tongue.[27] As ooloi, Nikanj embodies what Michael Taussig describes as the shaman's "solidity and caring" with a "strategic zone of vacuity" (444)—a kind

of decreative pocket of metaxic subjectivity in which other beings, both human and nonhuman, might take up residence as part of a body that is porous and vibratory rather than hermetic and unitary. Nevertheless, while *Dawn*'s return to the jungle is preceded by "splintering and decomposing structures and cracking open meanings" (Taussig 441), this is a terrain burgeoning with yams rather than yagé, and Butler does well to avoid the "unconscious colonial creation" of an untamed wilderness as well as the equally problematic "magic of the Indian" (Taussig 445). Ultimately, as much as Butler is championed as one of the grand dames of Afrofuturism, her approach to race also complicates discussions of blackness by considering what may happen to the social construction of race for a species that collapses the human-nonhuman divide. *Dawn* envisions an Afrodiasporic and Indigenous futurity in which great potential lies in a revitalization of the biosphere through a metaxic metamorphosis that recalibrates inter-species community to address the potential fate of an ecological apocalypse.

Metaxic Erotics: "What's Love Got to Do with It?"

There is a clear link between the hierarchical structuring that the Oankali perceive as central to the human organism and the lethal decreative potential which they find so troubling.[28] The close unity that the Oankali share with their symbiotic partners requires little of the self-dissolution that Weil's decreation requires. The self is maintained (heterogenic difference is necessary), passed between organisms as something sacred to be shared. In *Adulthood Rites*, the second book of the *Xenogenesis* myth cycle, Lilith's first hybrid child finds it remarkable that through a metaxic-like blending of organisms, none of the Oankali suffer the terror of decreation:

> And just for an instant, they showed him, brought him into that incredible unity … How did they not lose themselves? How was it possible to break apart again? It was as though

> two containers of water had been poured together, then separated—each molecule returned to its original container…No matter how closely he was joined to the two ooloi, he was aware of himself. He was equally aware of them and their bodies and their sensations. But, somehow, they were still themselves, and he was still himself. He felt as though he were a floating, disembodied mind, like the souls some resisters spoke of in churches, as though he looked from some impossible angle and saw everything, including his own body as it leaned against the [ooloi]. He tried to move his left hand and saw it move. He tried to move one of the [ooloi's] limbs, and once he understood the nerves and musculature, the limb moved. (*Adulthood Rites* 454-456)

This is as close to a description of a metaxic encounter as Butler provides in the *Xenogenesis* series, but similar descriptions appear throughout her work, usually with hybrid characters directly involved or hybrid characters produced by such metaxic unions. They are nearly always productive (metaxic) rather than destructive (decreative). This dynamic is represented quite well, for example, in *Wild Seed*, as the metaxic metamorphoses of Anyanwu provide a distinct contrast to the decreative "transmigrations" of Doro who completely "consume[s]" the bodies he "inhabits" (84). Lilith's ooloi child in *Imago*—the first in the trilogy to narrate their story in the first-person, as if to ground their subjectivity against third-person assimilation—presents decreation as the tragic result of a metaxic energy that receives no reciprocation from another. He and his brother experience varying degrees of decreation when separated from one another. Consequently, they slip into a process of gradual dissolution, moving from human-Oankali hybrid to troglodyte, and from there, nearly collapsing into a single-cell organism and finally death (682).

Interestingly, Kraus's *Aliens and Anorexia* is not only inspired by Weilian decreation but

implicitly positions aliens and Weil (metaxu and decreation) as a thematic copula. Kraus's decreative take on the reality principle is that in "order to become a group, each person must give up little pieces of themselves. The pieces amplify within a magnet-pool. Cavities in each person's body left by pieces of surrendered ego become receptors for group energy, for Aliens" (40). In Butler's fiction, this cavity is never created out of some blind hope for an extraterrestrial Grace. It is rather an emergent movement and property within the self that allows the alien to merge with it in a complicated process of negotiation. Moreover, every egoistic piece is intimately connected with every other in a vast genetic assemblage. Weil requires something like a metaxu because her conception of the individual is more holistic. Metaxic metamorphosis prevents the self's ephemeral, ever-becoming totality from being sacrificed to an all-consuming transcendental decreation. In this way, the self is constructed through otherness and through the body's metamorphic potential to disrupt the self/other dualism.

Elizabeth Grosz has articulated the excellent insight that Cartesianism betrays a certain misogyny, because it is only men who might hope to transcend the human body while women are shackled to their physicality.[29] N. Katherine Hayles has brought this observation to bear on science fiction, evoking Grosz's belief that "the character immersed in her physicality is a woman and the character who can escape it is a man" (118). Weil's articulation of a materialist and immanent metaxu elicits a kind of diaphanous trapdoor, not *out* but *through* the body, and most importantly, through the mythical spaces passed from discourse to discourse in which men look to ecstatic transcendence as a way out. Metaxu does not replace decreation, either in Weil's work or in the radical forms of embodiment imagined by Butler. Metaxu does, however, provide decreative practices with a creative, rather than destructive purpose; that is, the telos of decreation need no longer be restricted to the transcendental or uncreated void, but also the realm

of the created as well as the not-yet-created.

Butler's reconstitution of mythic spaces through metamorphosis seeks to unshackle the body from the corporeal fixity that would necessitate its ecstatic transcendence. Therefore, were a mystical experience to be valid, it would have to be biological and embodied. Furthermore, Lilith exemplifies Clément's division between "masculine transcendence and the feminine supernatural" in which one operates "within the order and the other within the counterorder" (*Feminine* 113). Kristeva and Clément counter a modern, masculine, technological world with a feminine metamorphosis that prefigures Lilith's.[30] They each discuss modalities of metamorphosis, transsexuality, and bisexuality as necessary disruptions of masculine frameworks of the body. Importantly, this recontextualizes the themes of Butler's fiction, in which such transgressions of corporeal essentialism have historically been the purview of rebellious women. Both Kristeva and Clément occasionally traffic in another form of essentialism, gifting women with a natural sacredness and a "porousness of the body" (Clément 9) of which they have been robbed through impositions of gender and class. Nevertheless, Lilith's porousness repositions the myriad readings of her posthuman body as distinctly human, regardless of its associations with the alien, the hybrid, or the animal. Weil's work on fairy tales demonstrates a belief that that the marriage between human and animal is often a metaphor for God's union with human beings. Although *Xenogenesis* is not traditionally read as a variation of mystical literature or experience, it imagines the transcendence of an earlier human epistemology through the metaxic initiation of human consciousness into the mystery of an alien, otherworldly intelligence. As Clément suggests "[l]et's not leave the word *mysticism* to the fringe elements of religions, and let's use the connotations that word has in its very etymology: mystery and initiation" (154).

As intersectional as Lilith's identity becomes, it also threatens the stability of every category of gender, race, and sexuality upon which humans had previously depended for their own self-categorization. Through a comparison of Weil and Butler, one begins to recognize a queering of metaxu through and against misogynistic narratives of patriarchal transcendence. Myth, like the cyborg myth preaches, "can be both a patriarchal fantasy of dominating technologies and a feminist tool of resistance" (Melzer 25). A metaxic decreation rather than a disembodied transcendence "is not about being bodiless but about an empowered boundary transgression that enables bodies to resist exploitative power relations" (Melzer 26). Through decreation arises the threat of absorption or assimilation. Through metaxu arises the potential for a radical hybridity or adaptation. In *Dawn*, this hybridity marks a crossing of boundaries that challenges both a religious ideology and the cultural imperialism that so often acts as its political instantiation.

A common criticism of Butler's fiction, especially in the 1990s, included her predilection for sociobiology. Zaki's influential essay, "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler" (1990), chastises Butler for a "retrogressive view of politics" that demanded "abandoning the human body [a]s a necessary prerequisite for human alteration" (242). Never once does Lilith abandon the human body, however, despite efforts from the resisters to ostracize her from their community because her body may not be human enough. What Butler advocates through Lilith is a body that is neither alien nor wholly posthuman, but a new figuration of human that includes the powers, perspectives, and openness to another species. In *Wild Seed*, this is the same openness by which Anyanwu contrasts herself with the destructiveness of Doro whose metamorphoses into other bodies never afford him the use of the powers that his stolen body once possessed. In *Dawn*, Lilith works towards the sustainability of the human race

through a metamorphosis of the human body such that the nominal definition of human becomes articulated in a dismantling of the human-other hierarchy.

The *Xenogenesis* cycle begins with Lilith awakening in a world stripped of the ontic entities described by Weil in her discussion of metaxu. Deprived of family, culture, and country, she is left alone with nothing but a shelf on which to sleep and occasionally clothes and a toilet. Butler's narrator describes the oldest of her activities as "a search for some crack, some sound of hollowness, some indication of a way out of her prison" (*Dawn* 7). While on the surface, this seems like the mundane inevitability of captivity, the intertext of the Lilith myth recalls an earlier Edenic first-movement that mirrors this desperate search for an outside, a transcendence, or movement beyond. What Lilith seeks in her captivity is not an outside for the body, but an escape from the confines of various forms of imprisonment which define what it means to be human.[31] Upon discovering that no violence will be successful against her surroundings, Lilith first turns to art, not as mere compensation but as empowerment against abandonment. "She sang songs and remembered books she had read, movies and television shows she had seen, family stories she had heard" (*Dawn* 9). The turn to narrative is essential here, for as Judith Butler warns, no one can survive a non-narratable life (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 59). Lilith's turn from decreative poverty to aesthetic creation is the first metaxic move of the story and initiates an acceptance of a world in which survival involves renegotiating a new identity rooted in metaxic deracination. This marks a fundamental break from the unchanging materiality of form, the boundaries of which will no longer be policed by old cultural modes of labour, capital, and sexual difference. Even the Oankali, travelling the stars as gene traders, are yet unaware what potential forms might arise through an emergent hybridity.

The alien nature of Lilith's new world proves to be the perfect terrain for metaxic

encounters between the self and a sensible, non-transcendental (albeit extraterrestrial) other. On the Oankali ship, everything is inherently metaxic, and this power is vitally active in all bodies, walls, trees, and soil. Nearly everything besides the Oankali is a by-product of the ship, itself a living organism that shares something like a metaxic symbiosis with the Oankali. Jdahya explains that between them and the ship, there is an intimate relationship that humans would describe as "love … There is an affinity, but it's biological—a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship's needs and it serves ours. It would die without us" (*Dawn* 35) and the Oankali without it. Through metaxic union with the Oankali, Lilith will eventually evolve to share the same symbiotic relationship of reciprocity with the ship and the organisms that call it home. Indeed, it is this reciprocity that defines the metaxic character of Lilith's transformative subjectivity. As Melzer identifies, this is a new form of embodiment that "does not take form apart from its desire, and its lack of a coherent self outside of relations with others is threatening to our notion of identity" (239). J. Adam Johns offers an astute critique of Melzer's work in light of Wilson's *biophilia*, clarifying that this fluid identity of the Oankali is no more "natural" than it is to the humans, and is purely "a product of the merger between the two, and in particular of the Oankali attempt to survive/absorb the human contradiction" (394). Fluidity, although perhaps latent, is a potential open to all organisms if the correct merger can be freely adopted. A metaxic species thus necessitates an ontology of reciprocity and exchange, and crucially, depends upon the eradication of the hierarchy that defines both the human contradiction as well as the historically unchallenged theory of Weilian decreation.

The manner in which Lilith mates with the Oankali is arguably the most obvious (and controversial) example of a metaxic relationship in *Dawn*. It also has the distinction of being the most overtly erotic metaxu of the three novels that I have thus far investigated. Although Weil

never lived to elaborate her theory of metaxu by way of the sensual, sensuous materiality to which it is conceptually bound, the metaxic eroticism of the Oankali might well compensate for the comparatively decreative thanatos of a Weilian mysticism in which the flesh is excluded from jouissance. Nikanj would possibly describe the eros-thanatos binary as one of affirmation and negation. The first time Butler describes this erotic metaxu, it not only involves both Lilith and Nikanj, but also Lilith's first human ship-mate, Joseph. In her queering of monogamous and heteronormative paradigms, Butler disrupts Weil's original metaxic paradigm by blurring lines of sex (male-female-nonbinary) and human/nonhuman, as well as emphasizing that metaxu can be used to forge deeper connections between and across human bodies and subjectivities.[32]

Nikanj, represented as a kind of sentient metaxu, plugs into the nervous systems of both humans to help them feel one another as intimate parts of themselves without the colonial assimilation tethered to Weil's decreative metaxu, Doro's body theft from *Wild Seed*, or Johns's misreading of Oankali absorption. Lilith quickly realizes that she is "not controlled [and…] could lift a free hand across Nikanj to take Joseph's … hand" (*Dawn* 162). Nikanj also adheres to Weil's description of metaxic intermediacy, as Lilith notes that "it seemed … to vanish. She sensed only Joseph, felt that he was aware only of her" (*Dawn* 162). Yet through Nikanj's intermediacy, Lilith and Joseph "moved together, sustaining an impossible intensity, both of them tireless, perfectly matched, ablaze in sensation, lost in one another. They seemed to rush upward. A long time later, they seemed to drift down slowly, gradually, savoring a few more moments wholly together" (*Dawn* 162). Lilith remarks that in this metaxic moment of becoming, time itself drifts into an eternal pause, feeling as though Joseph "had always been there, part of her, essential" (*Dawn* 162). The movement Lilith describes is another key difference between erotic metaxu and paralytic decreation. Through the mediating space of Nikanj's body—itself

enraptured in biochemical jouissance rather than cupidinous altruism—Lilith and Joseph are able to meet in a horizontal metaxic exchange of pure movement, pure flight into one another.

Weilian metaxu is an embodied transcendence rooted in the cultural fixtures of the material realm. By radically altering the kinds of exchanges available to such bodies, Butler represents one potential imagining for what an erotics of metaxu might look (or feel) like. This is an erotics without ego, without centre, described by Lingis as "subjectivities [that] are multiple, unpredictable, ephemeral" (*Excesses* 30). The eroticism of the metaxic ooloi extends the limits of the body—not through the phallic Freudian terms that Lingis deconstructs, and though the Oankali may possess biophilic tendencies (as Johns contends), theirs is not the eroticism of the tongue, the hands, or the genital. Rather, it stretches the surface of the biome into the alien, the depth of difference into which the self can experience the erotic pleasure of one's partner(s). After Lilith and Joseph share such a moment, the once-terrifying Oankali resembles "a slender, hairless, sexless human" (*Dawn* 164) despite its sensory tentacles. The abject skin that was once so difficult to approach becomes an erogenous zone. As Sara Ahmed explains:

> [if] the skin is a border, then it is *a border that feels*.… So while the skin appears to be the matter which separates the body, it rather allows us to think of how the materialization of bodies involves, not containment, but an affective opening out of bodies to other bodies, in the sense that the skin registers how bodies are touched by others. (*Strange Encounters* 45)

Similarly, Melzer describes Oankali sexuality as "physically decentralized" (86) or concerning the entire surface of the body rather than focused on the limited normativity of genital contact.

The ooloi are a third sex who, after a highly ritualized and near-sacred metamorphosis akin to puberty, contain within their bodies no trace of the sexual binary that structures

traditional epistemologies of the human body. Ooloi sexuality is a dismantling of the heteropatriarchal binary—a tri-sexuality, a metaxic sexuality that does not efface sexual difference with what Cixous condemns as "a fantasy of unity" ("Sorties" 84), but rather with the pluralistic flow of energies between bodies that retain their difference even as they undergo physiological transformations. Nikanj is not merely relegated to an intermediary between Lilith and another human partner but can also share such intimate experiences when alone with Lilith. More than simply an intermediary third-space, this suggests a transformational eroticism shared by all the entities within a metaxic copulate. Once again, this is not the erotics of a metaphorical bride awaiting her divine lover, nor the katabasis of a transcendent being swooning across the abyss to meet a decreated subject. As Lingis muses, "one neither descends, when one makes love with animals and trees, nor ascends, when one makes love with the moon, the rivers, the stars; one travels aimlessly or circularly about a universe eroticized" (*Excesses* 62). By reading *Dawn* within a metaxic framework, one is better able to recognize the radical eroticism of an encounter between two organisms within the same biosphere, devoted to one another in solidarity and the mutual risk-taking of genuine care.

A metaxic reading of *Dawn* stands in agreement with Melzer's reframing of the politics of gender fluidity by locating a queer ooloi desire that "enables us to conceptualize reproduction—and family—outside a heterosexual context and within genderqueer constellations" (241). Such constellations helpfully flesh out a rather blurry sketch provided by Weil for what happens when partners meet within a metaxic union. It is not an absorption into a self-dissolving hierarchy but a metamorphosis of the political structuring of the ontic world in which such union takes place. Since Weil locates metaxu within the familial and the social, it is inescapably bound up in the gender roles and sexual identities that arise from such cultural

organization. Lilith's transformation destabilizes the very essentialism through which such terms are formed. Weil could not articulate a queer theory or identity within the confines of her heteronormative religiosity, even if the biographical treatments of her own complex approach to gender would seem to demand it. The erotics of metaxu certainly have not gained full (or any) articulation within scholarship on Weil, but nevertheless offers the most fruitful method through which to queer the patriarchal structuring of her religious discourse.

Beginning with the Platonic analogy of a midwife khora, metaxu have historically been represented as gendered spaces. *Dawn* envisions a kind of metaxu that can be free of gender while also empowering the uniquely fluid experiences of gendered identity. The eroticism of the ooloi is purely metaxic; neither male nor female, its penetrating tentacles belong to a gender that escapes human legislation.[33] Cixous comes close to describing a similar metaxic eroticism by emphasizing a "libido that is cosmic … spacious singing Flesh.… Her rising: is not erection. But diffusion. Not the shaft. The vessel" ("Sorties" 88). As singing rather than silent flesh, as diffusion rather than dissolution, and as vessel rather than vertical shaft, Butler's metaxu resists physiological mapping and escapes the telos of Weil's decreative path. Haraway conceptualizes Butler's hybrids or cyborgs as conducive of a politics that unlocks "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries" (*CM* 150). Their "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (*CM* 154) are made available through a metaxic politics propelled by what Haraway describes as *boundary* creatures but what are more accurately *metaxic* creatures—creatures who do not just break boundaries or thrive in the liminal space between them but eschew all resemblance to a militarized techno-capitalist transfiguration. In Butler's fiction, such liminality and boundary transgression are the latent but innate conditions of a metaxic, multispecies world.

To view the human-Oankali relationship as metaxic also helps to contextualize the most controversial event in the whole trilogy—Lilith's pregnancy and the issue of consent. In "Bloodchild," the T'Lics use unfertilized eggs and gentle narcotic stings to pacify the abject terror with which humans respond to alien bodies. In the *Xenogenesis* series, a similar sting is used to pacify human fear and to initiate a bond that Butler would describe as cooperative, utilitarian, or "paying the rent" ("Afterword" 21).[34] One of the men Lilith awakens, a rebellious anti-Oankali resister named Peter, cannot accept that his own consent might be removed for the propagation of Oankali-human hybrids. He reacts as though "he had been humiliated and enslaved. The drug seemed to him to be not a less painful way of getting used to frightening nonhumans, but a way of turning him against himself, causing him to demean himself in alien perversions. His humanity was profaned. His manhood was taken away" (*Dawn* 192). Can humans consent to hybridity with nonhumans if they are essentially drugged to help them get over their fear of the abject? What if, in their transgression of an abject eroticism, they are unable to live without their new alien mate, as is the case for Lilith (or the symbionts of Butler's *Fledgling*)? What would happen if humans were coerced or forced into metaxic bonds? Butler's technique of defamiliarization[35] has always involved highlighting the lack of justice and solidarity that systems of power give to those they dominate. The Oankali, however (as well as the T'Lic of "Bloodchild"), are also represented as saviour species, rescuing humans from extinction and nursing them back to health. The moral ambiguity with which Butler often treats her Oankali and T'Lic species can seem both confusing and horrifying to certain readers, and the cultural determinism of Lilith's education as an anthropologist also prevents her from ascribing sexual violence to the Oankali. As if to emphasize this difficulty, Peter, the man who finds consensual contact with aliens abhorrent and dehumanizing, had previously asserted his will over

a woman in an attempt to rape her.

In order to create Oankali-human hybrids, Nikanj impregnates Lilith with Joseph's seed after his murder. Although she began to love Joseph, Nikanj did not give Lilith the opportunity to verbally consent. Nikanj informs Lilith that despite her lack of verbal consent, her biochemical signals nevertheless communicate a readiness for motherhood. "Nothing about you but your words reject this child" (*Dawn* 247), Nikanj assures her. The Oankali believe that human words might be employed to deceive and circumvent the desires of the body, a contradiction that might prove quite dangerous for the survival of the human race. Human consent is based on verbal affirmations, whereas Oankali converse primarily through biochemical responses. Repeating this tension between oral and biochemical literacy, Butler seems to defamiliarize the mind/body split as a way of inquiring how submission and consent operate in a species without hierarchy or a species in which individualism cannot exist in isolation from its communal role in the collective of a species. The Oankali fit Haraway's definition of cyborg collectivity in that their desires are those of an entire community rather than an individual. *E pluribus Unum* has it backwards, as it were. Throughout her oeuvre, Butler thrusts her human characters into similar situations in which sexual autonomy must be negotiated and weighed against the survival of a species.

Critics of Butler have certainly differed in their responses to Lilith's impregnation. Osherow recognizes that "Butler's Lilith is violated so thoroughly that human sex is no longer a possibility for her" (79) yet does not expand the interpretive problem of Lilith's non-consensual intercourse and her potential becoming into something beyond or more than human. Such a reading reduces Lilith's body to an imperialist threat to which the humans must submit; if the human species is to survive, it must become similarly intertwined with the nonhuman. Following Jim Miller, the forced reproduction experienced by Lilith might be understood as a result of her

confrontation with a species of "biologistic Oankali" (342). Miller identifies the Oankali (rather than Butler) as representing a viewpoint of biological essentialism. Lilith is thus a woman marked by a resilient confrontation with a violent biological essentialism and the new body (and people) from which it emerges. In a similar vein, Vint argues that "Butler refuses to endorse the eugenics perspective that it is a kindness to curtail the reproduction" (68) of prejudicial, hierarchical humans. Lilith's metamorphosis into a new figuration of human plays with the idea of biological determinism by subjecting human biology to alien transformations. Vint also attends to the difficulties in demarcating bodily desire from verbal consent (69). Somewhat less apologetic is Frances Bonner who is unable to understand Butler's (and Lilith's) acceptance of an erotic union with the Oankali, classifying the act as rape and a coercive production of physical consent by way of chemical stimulation. And indeed, it is difficult not to see the patient attention the Oankali bestow on humans as an alien form of sexual grooming in a purely genetic economy. Amanda Boulter further clarifies the nature of this economy by comparing Lilith's ambivalence with the historically tenuous autonomy of black bodies in master/slave dialects.

The differing reactions to Lilith's erotic exchange with the Oankali mirror the difficulty of interpreting the sexual violence at the core of many allegedly mystical texts. I do not wish to dismiss those who interpret Lilith's experience as rape, but merely to complicate that particular interpretation by highlighting the strange parallels with a kind of mystical experience in which a deity is replaced by an alien. Despite their disagreements, there are merits to the readings of each of these critics. In the case of Boulter, for example, it is clear that Butler interrogates whether the loss of bodily autonomy might be punishment for an apocalyptic species whose prosperity has historically been built upon the enslavement and subjugation of marginalized bodies. This defamiliarization refuses to sacrifice the body of Lilith for the sake of narrative experimentation.

bell hooks has called attention to the problematic sexual availability in representations of the black female body, even in the work of prominent black writers and performers.[36] Butler's eroticism refuses such objectification, either through Lilith or the alien that might otherwise signify the subject position of the racialized other. Each limb responds orgasmically, but without the erogenous fetishization that typically demarcates which parts of the body are reserved for pleasure, and without the romanticized ecstasy that typically burdens the erotic representation of mystical unions. There is transformative beauty in the (consensual) exchanges because of, not despite, the release from the bondage of repressive anthropocentric paradigms governing erotic porosity. It is a radical exploration of the erotic potential of bodies once liberated from patriarchal and racialized modes of representation.

Reading Butler through a metaxic lens allows for a recontextualized interpretation of *Dawn*'s most controversial episode. Such a view is aptly expressed by Melzer, who suggests that rape or coercive sex is impossible since the Oankali would also feel the pain of forced intercourse. "During sexual contact," she observes "there is no separation between self and other(s); pain as well as pleasure is felt by everyone" (*Dawn* 86). As Lilith explains to her partner, Joseph, "[o]n a physical level, Nikanj feels what we feel.… It can't get away with hurting us—unless it's willing to suffer the same pain" (*Dawn* 168). It is also clear, however, that the question of consent has little to do with *physical* pain. Joseph is adamant that "[t]hat thing will never touch me again if I have anything to say about it," (*Dawn* 169) but in the same breath, also admits that if a pleasure like the one shared between humans and ooloi "could be bottled, it would have outsold any illegal drug on the market" (*Dawn* 169).[37] Ooloi, the third gender Oankali who are drawn to human touch so as to heal them from sickness and disease, even use the term "share sex" (*Dawn* 98) to refer to coitus. In *Imago*, Lilith's ooloi child narrates the

unique way in which every touch and sensation is felt by both parties: "she discovered that if she touched me now with her hand, she felt the touch as though on her own skin, felt pleasure or discomfort just as she made me feel" (634). Before Lilith mates with Nikanj, there are two scenes of humans attempting rape which portray it as an evil that will not be allowed to survive in this new world. Neither scene suggests an uncritical stance towards sexual violence as neither of these violent men will survive to join the humans returning to Earth.

In *Dawn*, the biochemical manipulation of human desire is further complicated in that it lacks the easy allegorical reading of "Bloodchild" in which men are impregnated by giant insects as a way to turn patriarchal oppression on its head. While understanding of critics who take issue with Butler's use of sexual coercion for thematic purpose, Obourn characterizes this complaint as a misreading of the disability and queer discourses at play within the novel (117).[38] A queer (defined by Obourn as "transgendered and nonnormative" (130)) interpretation of *Dawn* offers a reading whereby Lilith can physically and emotionally consent to this encounter while the cultural vestiges of an older semiotic system still root her to expressions of heteronormative desire. Because of this, Lilith is not yet able to claim the subject position, within language, that corresponds to her body's unspoken (yet readable) desire. Nikanj's interpretation of Lilith's body as "ready" is revealed to be a problem of literacy or lacking the proper hermeneutic through which to understand consent and desire.[39] Haraway takes this even further, questioning whether or not humans have propriety over the self and whether this claim of the most private of property forms "the ground of 'human' individuality and selfhood" ("Biopolitics" 226)—a ground which no longer applies to the metaxic and cyborg Lilith. For Haraway, Obourn, and Melzer, Butler's refusal to force judgement against the Oankali mutually situates her readers *and* Lilith in a state of ungrounding where consent is based on notions of subjectivity and species rooted in a former

world whose politics have led to its destruction. For her part, Lilith's judgement depends upon her ability to consent to something neither male nor female, to something sexual and not sexual, to something that both attracts and repels, to something that escapes all categories of reason. This is a jouissance that erupts on unexplored thresholds and overturns the body's subordination to the rational mind by embracing all that humanity might become through a rejection of everything humanity has been. The becoming-alien (for Butler) or the becoming-metaxic (for Weil) can ultimately do little to expunge power and violence from the human condition, even if such a condition evolves out of its hierarchical weaknesses. What a metaxic futurity might offer, however, is the articulation of new subject positions from which certain dynamics of power can be renegotiated.

Your Queen Is A Reptile

Rescued by the Oankali and brought to their ship for regeneration, the displaced and diasporic humans (rather than the Oankali) are the already-othered inhabitants of an alien space. While Butler employs this same strategy in "Bloodchild," Lilith (and her trilogy) is in a perpetual state of becoming-alien and ultimately gives birth to the hybrid human-Oankali children who will become the focus of the final two novels. Lilith is a metaxic woman whose hybridity crosses the gap between alien and human. Weil's idea to make exile one's home is another way of saying that one's identity must be formed through a becoming-alien.[40] In *Aliens and Others* (1993), Jenny Wolmark approaches Butler's use of aliens as a metaphor for how "the deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of dominance and subordination'' (27). The process of becoming-alien or the queering of hegemonic identities cannot be reduced to the movement towards the post/non-human but

must also include the legislation of the very categories of the human.

Critical of suggestions that Butler merely redefines the human, Johns believes that Lilith's metamorphosis marks "the troubled birth of a new species" (395) as though the existence of the species is tied to its ontology of hierarchical violence. Johns incorrectly privileges the decreative rather than the metaxic elements of Butler, finding "a kind of suicide" that is a prerequisite for survival and a "solution to hierarchical violence" (397) without granting the metamorphic or metaxic potential inherent to the interspecies biosphere of Butler's novel. Compelling as the argument is, Johns's biophillic reading makes Lilith guilty of the same discourses of power that would racialize and marginalize her. The narrative disorients the hermeneutics that would claim authority over Lilith's transformation. I also contend that a metaxic rather than a decreative hermeneutics can precipitate a similar disorientation or challenge to reading Butler. Lilith's transformation appears purposely unmapped, with each undulating movement propelling it away from a body that science can carve up and itemize to fit its binary frameworks, policing its movements, openings, and fluctuations for the sake of recalibration back into the folds of human corporeality.

Butler puts great stress on the antiquated distinctions between human, alien, and animal corporeality. Despite Zaki's emphasis on sociobiology and Johns's reading of Butler's biophilia, any biological essentialism observed in Butler's fiction must be addressed with the caveat that the flimsy category of human nature already contains within it the alien and the animal. Furthermore, discussions of Weilian mysticism (and Christian mysticism more generally) too frequently involve the absorption of the individual into the One. This is certainly the path that has been taken by the strictly decreative readings of Weil's mysticism. If a departure from this path suggests a reframing of the individual self as an assemblage of parts both human and

nonhuman, how might one arrive at a mystical encounter with the All rather than the One appearing in the guise of a fatherly deity defined by unitary exclusion? Morton's *Ecological Thought* reminds its readers that "[s]ome parasites and symbionts are so intimate you can't tell where one starts and its habitat stops, all the way down to the DNA level. There is no way of knowing which bits of our DNA are actually 'ours' and which are plasmid insertions" (35). To put it simply, the insides of our bodies "teem with aliens" (36) and microscopic images of our very skin resemble extraterrestrial landscapes. Lingis brings this into startling perceptive, clarifying that "the number of microbes that colonize our bodies exceeds the number of cells in our bodies by up to a hundredfold" (*Dangerous Emotions* 27). Such insights have enormous implications for demarcating the borders of human and nonhuman that lie at the heart of any discussion of mysticism. The transformations of Butler's characters are therianthropic precisely because humans are therianthropic organisms. The Oankali, as gene-traders, as metaxic bridges between species, exemplify this perfectly. A reading of Lilith as a symbiotic and metaxic figure situates this power within the human species as well—*species* being a term that must already be destabilized by its identity as construct.

If humans, and indeed every species, are already-alien, that is, already an assemblage of myriad different organisms and species, then this presents another challenge in reading the problem of consent as presented in *Dawn*. Butler's texts revel in the dissolution of the human-animal boundary, and the inevitable squeamishness produced by interspecies sex may be a sublimated discomfort at the consequences of this boundary-transgression. Haraway and Lingis each suggest that bestiality will develop a new status through the dissolution of human/animal boundaries, while Butler stresses the master/slave hierarchy that structures this taboo. As an organism foreign to hierarchical thinking, Nikanj can only read the body's desire for coupling,

and not the underlying tension between the human who gets to speak and the myriad other creatures who constitute the same body but lack a human language through which to speak their needs. A metaxic body is a multispecies corporeality. Lingis alludes to this point altogether more poetically: "The form and the substance of our bodies are not clay shaped by Jehovah and then driven by his breath; they are coral reefs full of polyps, sponges, gorgonians, and free-swimming macrophages continually stirred by monsoon climates of moist air, blood, and biles" (*Dangerous Emotions* 28).

Alien, animal, hybrid, cyborg—these are all figurations of otherness that a metaxic being experiences as part of a self-transformation that posits a fluid boundary between the historic categories of sacred and profane. As suggested by the title of *Dawn*'s sequel, *Adulthood Rites*, the radical potential of these bodily and psychic transitions might depend, in part, on the extent to which they are celebrated as ritual and ceremony rather than suppressed and subjugated as something aberrant to human subjectivity. Lilith's transformation is not a departure from the human body but a manifestation of an alien or animalistic otherness that is always latent within it, though perhaps unseen through a decreative framework that fails to incorporate a metaxic remapping of what a subject's limit experience might entail. Why, one might finally ask, is a theory of metaxu necessary to discuss the metamorphosis into the nonhuman or more-than-human? It may no doubt appear that this chapter's investigation has strayed from an initial focus on Weil's mysticism. Yet perhaps the appeal to the alien or the animal presents a hypothesis as to what a mysticism of the dolphin or daffodil might entail. If Weil's metaxic bridges are primarily phenomenological and thus located in the realm of the familial and cultural, a metaxic theory must extend beyond an individual and anthropocentric mysticism to include a multispecies, global, even interplanetary biome. What, then, might happen to metaxu or the kinds of symbiotic

modalities one might classify as mystical if the metaxic world was diffuse enough to comprise the silky bridges constructed by the arachnid, the conduits dug by the subterranean earthworm, or the vast mycelia that stretch like vibrating waves between the humble mushroom?

Endnotes

[1] *Dawn* arguably merits the liberally-used acronym SF in that it can be classified under Haraway's hydratic umbrella of "Science Fact. Science Fiction. Speculative Fabulation. Speculative Feminism" ("Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble" 00:05:32 – 00:5:37). As subgenres of fantastic literature, science fiction and speculative fiction are, of course, not identical. *Dawn*, however, employs Darko Suvin's technique of *cognitive estrangement*, or the representation of the familiar in unfamiliar settings in order to see the world anew. See especially "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre" (1972). Butler's novel reconfigures the laws of science, specifically human biology, in order to understand and navigate the environment of a new world. It also functions as speculative literature in that it asks the questions: what might happen if an alien race was to save some of humanity from apocalyptic destruction? What kinds of compromises, obligations, or conditions would be expected in return? How might this alter traditional (ontological, anthropological, biological) understandings of what human beings are? Not all science fiction asks such philosophical (speculative) questions and not all speculative fiction is interested in scientific explanations. The first chapter of Allan Weiss's *The Routledge Introduction to Canadian Fantastic Literature* (2021) offers a helpful contrast between speculative fiction, science fiction, and other subgenres of fantastic literature.

[2] Many traditions could be called upon to address this question, but this chapter will approach it in the context of the Afrodiasporic and Indigenous cultures of Butler's North America.

[3] I do not mean to suggest that a transformation of the feminine without a reciprocal transformation of the masculine can overturn patriarchy *tout court*. What I do mean to suggest is that *Dawn* imagines a world in which the inscription and subjection of sexual difference is productively disrupted through exchanges with discursive embodiments of alterity in the interest of forming relationships of solidarity and reciprocity.

[4] Butler has them self-identify with the nongendered pronoun "it." My descriptions of the ooloi will reflect this.

[5] "The human being can survive the human being, the human being is what remains after the destruction of the human being, not because somewhere there is a human essence to be destroyed or saved, but because the place of the human is divided" (*Remnants of Auschwitz* 134).

[6] Irigaray frequently chooses to speak within the semiotic system of the oppressor in order to overturn it. Homi Bhabha uses the term "mimicry" for the disruption of colonial hegemony by the colonized subjects who employ the use of myths and other cultural texts as a means of articulating their own identities. See especially *The Location of Culture* (1994).

[7] In its turn, the recent sequel, *Blade Runner 2049* (2018), continues this genealogy by revisioning a Promethean myth that fuses with a Lilith-like mother (more human than human) to imagine a posthuman or cyborg future for the species. Promethean/ Frankenstein undertones have also been noted elsewhere in Butler's work, especially in *Wild Seed*, the first

(chronologically) novel of the *Patternist* Series (now *Seed to Harvest*). See Elizabeth A. Lynn's "Vampires, Aliens, and Dodos" (1980) for more similarities.

[8] The chapters' progression from "Womb" to "Family" to "Nursery" to "The Training Floor" mirrors the trajectory of an intimate cosmology and offers a slightly different framework by which to critique Judeo-Christian myth than the one suggested by the similarly-themed *Wild Seed*, whose trinitarian structure moves from "Covenant," to "Lot's Children," to "Canaan."

[9] Obourn's work situates Butler within a progressive disability narrative and praises her consideration of "monstrous kinship through a queer lens" in order to contrast the stereotypical approach to SF with "a form of nonnormative kinship … [that is] more accepting of bodily difference, more flexible, and more humane" (126). This is something Butler does successfully in "Bloodchild" as well. For more on Butler and disability studies, see Obourn's 's "Octavia Butler's Disabled Futures" (2013); Claire P. Curtis's "Utopian Possibilities" (2015); and Sami Schalk's "Interpreting Disability Metaphor and Race in Octavia Butler's 'The Evening and the Morning and the Night'" (2017).

[10] In recent years, this has also coincided with the increasing popularity of African and Black Diasporic spiritual communities, such as those of the Yoruba, Lucumí, and Santería traditions.

[11] A *midrash* of Ben Sira featuring Lilith has been traced back to 1000 BCE.

[12] *Dawn* begins with Lilith and the third book, *Imago*, tells the story of her hybrid ooloi descendent mating with humans, Jesusa and Jodahs—as if to complete the biblical parable.

[13] See especially Eliade's *Myth and Reality* for a discussion of eschatology as the prefiguration of a new cosmogony.

[14] This sacred duty could be synonymous with E. O. Wilson's concept of *biophilia*, for which a species lives for its genes and not its individuated self. J. Adam Johns structures his entire interpretation of *Dawn* as depicting the archaic human battle between destructiveness and biophilia enacted by two different species, the destructive humans and the biophilic Oankali.

[15] Lilith often refers to herself as a "Judas goat" (*Dawn* 67), an allusion that heightens the collapse of the human/non-human divide.

[16] Chela Sandoval defines this resistance in terms of "appropriating ideological forms and using them whole in order to transform their meanings into a new, imposed, and revolutionary concept" (410). Melzer takes a similar view in *Alien Constructions* (2006), noting that myths are to be reclaimed for the creation of cultural semiotics and progressive politics (28).

[17] Butler's influence in Afrofuturism and Afrofuturist feminism is unquestioned. For further reading, see Mark Dery's founding "Black to the Future" (1994); Kodwo Eshun's *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (1998) and "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" (2003); and Ytasha L. Womack's *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*

(2013), which couples an overview of the movement with a succinct discussion of Butler's influence.

[18] Embedded deep in Weil's notebooks is the isolated, italicized, and parenthetical fragment: "(*Faire un ouvrage sure le folklore*) (*Cahiers* 213), as though scribbling a reminder for some future project. Although it exceeds my scope here, this comment suggests a further path through which to examine Weil's literary aesthetics through symbolic narratives of death, abandonment, and dis-enchantment, often with a salvific dénouement.

[19] Susana M. Morris is particularly insightful on Butler's Afrofuturist feminism as an epistemological shift for speculative fiction. See her essay, "Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's "*Fledgling*" (2012).

[20] This theme is prevalent throughout Butler's oeuvre, from the time-travelling *Kindred* (1979) to her last novel, *Fledgling* (2005), in which a young Black vampire is able to walk under the sun, thus exposing her to racial violence at the jealous hands of an enraged segment of her melanin-challenged species.

[21] This story can be found in *Attente de Dieu*. It should be said that as a Marxist, Weil's definition of a slave was broader than most and not reducible to the transatlantic slave trade.

[22] Butler categorizes the story in three different ways: as a "love story," a "coming-of age story," and finally, as a "pregnant man" story in which the main character, Gan, is raised to bear children for his alien mate, T'Gatoi ("Bloodchild" 20). A metaxic erotics is just as prevalent here as in *Dawn*.

[23] See especially *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2017).

[24] Thus Medusa and not the serpent-skirted Cōātlīcue of the Aztecs or even the Western but diffuse and comparatively obscure Potnia Theron and Potnia Melissa, serpentine chthonic deities whose faces resemble those of the tentacular Oankali.

[25] In *The Ecological Thought* (2010), Morton considers the ecological thought of Tibetans as being uniquely focused on outer space, in part due to their incredible proximity to the earth's atmosphere (dwelling more than 16,000 feet above sea level), in part due to their belief in other extraterrestrial universes, but also due to a spiritual concentration on *inner* space. Morton stresses that this culture does not belong in some primitivist view of the past or a fetishist's museum, but in the future (26-27).

[26] Morton expresses something similar: "We're actually so much more like each other than we'd like to think because we're actually so much more like daffodils and elephants than we'd like to think. And that means … that we can actually share each other's world" ("Timothy Morton in Conversation with Verso books" 41:26-41:38). Le Guin and Morton share an idealism that counters the likes of Allen Ginsberg's tragic-comic "Sunflower Sutra" and its pairing of bodily modality and the industrialization of Indigenous land:

"Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you look at your

skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive? the ghost of a locomotive?
the specter and shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?
You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower! (Ginsberg 74).

[27] The ooloi correct what Weil discerns as the great affliction of humankind, namely that looking and eating comprise two different experiences. In *Wild Seed*, the shapeshifting sorceress Anyanwu will also demonstrate such power, becoming a dolphin after gaining insight into its being through a small taste of its flesh.

[28] Jdahya compares the hierarchal characteristic of humans to a cancer that creates a genetic paradox when observed alongside the advanced intelligence possessed by the species. "It's a terrestrial characteristic. When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all … That was like ignoring a cancer" (*Dawn* 39).

[29] See especially *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (1994).

[30] Haraway's writings on Butler can thus be seen as a way of combining this feminine metamorphosis with a postmodern biotech that does not displace the feminine from the world of modern technology but uses it to carve out a space of empowered alterity.

[31] Like the captivity of a Pyramus or Thisbe, the proof of a meaningful otherness is revealed in the cracks, the apertures, and the hollow absence that glitter with the promises of the beyond. The metaxic captivity of Thisbe's wall becomes an obstacle shared by Lilith as the walls biochemically respond only to the touch of her alien captors. Lilith must first be given the power of the Oankali before she can make the wall open to her will.

[32] Throughout these scenes, a reader might hear the echoes of Kristeva's confounding question to Clément: "What if the sacred were the unconscious perception the human being has of its untenable eroticism: always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the nameable?" (*Feminine* 26-7).

[33] Butler experiments with something similar in the contemporaneous "Bloodchild." The penetrative and inseminating limbs of the T'Lic are the property of the matriarchal females of that species.

[34] The *Xenogenesis* series can be read as a trilogy that fulfills Butler's inspiration for "Bloodchild": "I tried to write a story about paying the rent—a story about an isolated colony of human beings on an inhabited, extrasolar world. At best, they would be a lifetime away from reinforcements. It wouldn't be the British Empire in space, and it wouldn't be Star Trek. Sooner or later, the humans would have to make some kind of accommodation with their um . . . their hosts. Chances are this would be an unusual accommodation. Who knows what we humans have that others might be willing to take in trade for a livable space on a world not our own?" ("Afterword" 21).

[35] The common SF technique of defamiliarization, or the act of making the familiar seem strange in order to see it anew, is first developed by Viktor Shklovsky in *Art as Technique* (1917).
[36] The most prominent example of this likely occurs in her critique of *12 Years a Slave* (by way of a prelude to her now-infamous argument that Beyoncé is a terrorist). See hooks's lecture "Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body" (2014).

[37] Joseph, but especially the resisters, echo Morton's reflections on ecological praxis: "Humans must act not because a powerful authority figure has told them to but via a sense of the openness and space" (*Ecological Thought* 23). Butler emphasizes the degree to which such openness requires a radical commitment to otherness.

[38] Obourn weighs the "willingness to accept difference, otherness, fluidity, and change" with the Oankali's "potentially genocidal drive to eliminate those with mental or physical impairments" (Obourn 124). This ableist discourse is suggested by Nikanj's explanation that the hybrid "children" he will share with Lilith "will be better than either of us.... We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations' (*Dawn* 247).

[39] According to Obourn, *Dawn* "takes communal support and decision making seriously but also demonstrates how communal versus individual choice can injure people who experience it as racial oppression, lack of reproductive choice, and rape" (126). Her reading promotes an interpretation centred on adaptability rather than assimilation or xenophobia (something Butler also echoes in her "Afterward" to "Bloodchild") and this adaptability serves to "mitigate the potentially violent effects of ideologies of … ability/ disability, human/other, and future/past" (126).

[40] "Prendre le sentiment d'être chez soi dans l'exil. Etre enraciné dans l'absence de lieu. … S'exiler de toute partie terrestre" (*PG* 45).

CONCLUSION

> Good-bye, I wish you all possible good things except the cross; for I do not love my neighbor as myself, you particularly, as you have noticed. But Christ granted to his well-beloved disciple, and probably to all that disciple's spiritual lineage, to come to him not through degradation, defilement, and distress, but in uninterrupted joy, purity, and sweetness.
>
> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*

This project began with the intention of mapping Weil's search for a transcendent being and shifted its attention to the ways in which the transcendent resides within an immanent field through a sacred haunting. That it should conclude through a strange tethering of the animal and the extraterrestrial is surprising even to this writer, yet perhaps inevitable. Weil, after all, was teased as a student with the nickname Martian. Anat Pick discerns how Weil's articulations of a certain sacred vulnerability extend beyond the limited scope of the human to certain nonhuman neighbours. I argue that a properly metaxic theory does not merely extend to other forms of life but brings whatever might be thought of as human outside its own carefully constructed epistemological prison. If Weil's transcendental nostalgia is primarily interested in a regained holism by suturing being and non-being, created and uncreated back together, this is "la métaphore réelle" (*CS* 163) for a kind of interspecies interconnectivity that might have important parallels to non-theological paradigms, and thereby transform those same theological paradigms by association.

Since Weil locates the transcendental bridges of metaxu in the domains of human culture and community, my analysis questions what might happen if the division between culture and nature is collapsed. Do nonhuman organisms and inert objects have access to metaxu and what might that look like? Certainly, Weil's essay on the *Iliad* reveals that nonhumans are intricately

entangled in her ideas about metamorphosis, otherness, and power. Might it be possible that metaxu is not something that begins in an anthropocentric theology and is then carried over to the "natural" world once the division is collapsed, but that collapsing the division allows one to see that metaxic interrelation was something inherent to the natural world all along? If the Levinasian other is always a human-other, this is as a limitation of the human rather than the nonhuman. Perhaps the fall back to the body does not produce a renewed form of embodiment, consciously attuned to the nonhuman organisms that comprise its being in some strange but necessary way. Such fantastical speculation is only tenable in the world of fiction or poetry. And yet…

I am not advocating for some apolitical, protean, lava lamp materialism (as Morton might call it); nor am I imagining an enchanted world of metaxic bodies in which humans can transform into animals with mere decreative attention in order to flee from political responsibility. This is certainly never what Weil proposed, even if metaxu may evoke animist sympathies. Metaxic intermediacy is inherently political and its channeling of aesthetic or mystical energies does not avoid the systems of power it aims to critique. This is why much of my literary analysis has examined metaxu within narrative structures of colonialism, militarism, and domination. Nevertheless, a leitmotif inspired by the nonhuman turn has become progressively more apparent with each chapter, as though a network of *petite animals* was attempting to counter Weil's *gros animal*, occasionally with the metaxic erotics of *petites morts* rather than the thanatotic *grand morts* of decreation. Whether metaxu are framed as transcendental bridges to a divine world of patriarchal dominance or the interconnected ecological networks of human and nonhuman peoples, it is necessary to theorize metaxic spaces and bodies operating within multiple iterations of the *gros animal*. These bodies and the kinds of

metamorphoses to which they are subjected are inextricably linked to the systems of power that both define and legislate what potential modalities of being exist on the *other side* of their liminal thresholds. Weil's theory of metaxu is a theory of the communitary spaces in which life occurs—culture, family, the hot baths of the *Iliad*. Thus, to examine the ways that metaxu might form part of a larger political resistance requires an emancipation and even decolonization of these spaces from the late-capitalist *gros animal* that exerts ever-more control over the spaces, networks, and assemblages that constitute the most basic forms of community.

Incidentally, metaxu and *gros animal* are just about the only terms in Weil's notebooks that remain untranslated in English. More importantly, while the term metaxu appears in her notebooks more than a hundred different times, it appears only six times in *Pesanteur*—all on the same page. This veritable lacuna is mirrored by its marginalized status in scholarship on Weil, partly as a result of its own ambiguity, and partly due to a liminal status between Greek myth, Neo-Platonism, and Christian mysticism that makes metaxu difficult to assimilate into a coherent hermeneutic. Her writing often fails to escape traditional conceptions of hegemonic power, yet she is too nomadic to be reduced to a religious interpretation or a specific form of identity politics. The traditional hierarchical divisions between the inner and the outer or the flesh and the spiritual are supported by decreation and importantly complicated by metaxu. As such, the political consequences of such a theory derive from the fact that it is not, like decreation, a retreat from the world or the subject that might form important relationships within it. As Weil remarks in the epigraph, written just before her death, it is better than one should remain in the world as an intermediary for whatever one might call god or grace or love.

What I have termed a metaxic crisis is fundamentally a question of access dictated and policed by the institutional forces of the *gros animal*. If nature is not falsely articulated at some

remove from the cultural constructions of human organization, then metaxu must serve or include all entities within this space. This means that it also includes god, even if god is only imaginary, insofar as the realm of the imaginary is essential for the kinds of metaxic exchanges available within a given society. While decreation is mimetic of god's kenosis, a radical metaxology has more in line with a simulacrum in that it is a possibility that emerges when the decreative mimesis harbours no responsibility to a transcendent original. Unlike the simulacra of Baudrillard or Jameson, however, a metaxic decreation subverts that other mimetic structure of Weil, the *gros animal*, out from which a capitalist exchange would arise to mimic the ubiquitous diffusion of the transcendent. Foucault rejects the idea that power and knowledge are dissimilar, arguing instead that power determines all knowledge (*Discipline* 27). By contrast, Weil wants to attack the authority of such knowledge in the hopes of acquiring an ecstatic knowledge, even a non-knowledge, divorced from corrupt power structures. To the extent that her whole mystical project involves a submission to the other, it requires a submission to that other who is outside the *gros animal* and the power relations that it enforces. As such, the institutional Christianity employed by Weil is one of hybridity, with Greek myth being only the most metaxic of her pluralistic intertextuality.

Rather than Christian arborescence, it is by way of a rhizomatic and nondual metaxu that something like a metaxic poetics might be formed. A metaxically rhizomatic space refuses a transcendental gateway which seeks to undo or annihilate the material plane for the sake of being consumed or enveloped by a spiritual or higher plane. A metaxu without such binary restrictions allows for it to accommodate a form of transcendental movement without ever effacing the movements of the accompanying body. Bataille believed that "[t]he spirit is so closely linked to the body as a thing that the body never ceases to be haunted.… The divinity of the good cannot

be maintained at [a] degree of purity that would exclude the sensuous world" (*Theory of Religion* 40, 80). Thus, if a theory of metaxic decreation must trace the transformations of the soul, it must also sketch the metamorphic contours of the flesh. It is empirically valid that "an object doesn't consist of some gooey substrate of becoming that shifts like Proteus from plastic bottle to backpack" (Morton, *Realist Magic* 42). And yet, what of Daphne who flees from the clutches of Apollo by becoming a laurel tree? What of Gregor Samsa who awakens in his own bed in the body of a horrifying insect? After their metamorphoses, they remain Daphne and Gregor—phenomenologically different, yet ontologically similar. Kristeva and Clément are skeptical of the Western world and its association of metamorphosis with anything that rejects rational, masculine, technological modernity. I am therefore indebted to the speculative fictions and philosophies of writers like Butler, Haraway, Preciado, and Le Guin for whom a counter-rational, feminist, queer, technological futurity might provide the blueprints for a more fitting exemplar of metaxic metamorphosis—even if, or especially if, they avoid the mystical subjugation in which Weil traffics.

I contend that a metaxic hermeneutic is most useful for speculative fiction and theory, especially those that seek to reexamine traditional myths—not for the pursuit of some nostalgic return but for a future world that includes the voices of the symbolic or imaginary past with a sense of justice, reconciliation, and reclaimed knowledge. To be mythic in the Indigenous sense means to be storied. To rip out one's myth means to rip one's culture out at the root. Colonial narratives have historically portrayed "occupied territories as terra nullius" (Styres et al. 55) and have thus subjugated myth as a tactic of cultural genocide and erasure. McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* depicts this quite well, while one of the difficulties the Terrans have in Butler's fictions is that they are uprooted from the lands in which their cultural narratives proliferate and ground

them. Fundamentally, myths are stories in which a given community lives. One of the central theses of my project is that Weil has something important to teach her readers about how to inherit stories, especially in a world where monuments dedicated to slave owners, confederate generals, and the architectures of residential schools are finally being torn down. While my focus in this dissertation has been on Western myths, I have done so with the intention of employing a decolonial practice of reading against the stories that have been used to weaponize certain ideological constructions of the body, the land, political institutions, and the strange confrontations and exchanges that are possible within them. I have attempted to ascertain what might happen to Weil's mystical notion of metaxic interconnectivity if it is subjected to a similar decolonial, even decreative, practice of reading.

Still the question might be asked: why does a theory of metaxu demand a literary hermeneutic of mythic revisionism? One final reason might be found in the ways that certain writers have continued to return to myth as a lost history of metamorphosis. Calasso's interests in myth seem to involve a veil of epiphany behind which metamorphosis is still operative within the human condition. Daphne's transformation into a laurel tree is not a matter of Daphne becoming other, or something non-Daphne, but the epiphanic conjuring of a natural state in which metamorphosis is still open to mortals. Fleeing in fervent prayer, "the breath that unites contraries" (Hadot 8) opens up a kind of vibrational conduit by which Daphne is able to escape. As Hazrat Inayat Khan contends, the "whole manifestation is made of vibrations, and vibrations contain all its secret. The vibrations of music free the soul and take from a person all the heaviness which keeps him bound" (55).[1] One might read Khan's "heaviness" in the same register as Weil's *pesanteur* or gravity. Once again, in the vibrational music of Khan, rather than

the unstudied globalism of Ormus, one finds a transformative aesthetics operating in the metaxic position of transcendental bridge.

Metaxu embraces a metaphysics of entanglement that can be politically conscious and intellectually rigorous without being threatened by the demands of any truth claims about a transcendent figure necessary for a strictly decreative project. Moreover, although one might apply several of Morton's criticisms of lava lamp materialism to any metaxic materialism, Weil would likely agree with the final insight Morton reveals at the end of his lengthy dismantling of an ontology of porous flow: "what is called the 'between' such as 'environment' is really *another object*. Thinking should be suspicious of approaches that claim to solve the subject–object dualism by positing a special adhesive that exists 'between' them" (*Realist Magic* 174). On the one hand, Weil might substitute Morton's "environment" for things like politics or culture. But more importantly, she specifically argues that what obstructs or separates one object from another is not a void of betweenness, but precisely the objects themselves. The transcendental bridge or liminal wall of imprisonment is not so much an adhesive as an extension of the metaxic bodies themselves. Weil explains that "[l]es choses créées ont pour essence d'être des intermédiaires. Elles sont des intermédiaires les unes vers les autres, et cela n'a pas de fin" (*PG* 229). If there is no end, metaxic intermediation resists the decreative teleology through which Morton's "subject-object dualism" (*Realist Magic* 174) could be collapsed in salvific synthesis. Weil's metaxic theory keeps the particularity of each entity within a unit, while arguing for the metaxic 'betweenness' of everything.

In Weilean terms, this resembles a withdrawnness of each object. To be sure, there is an enormous difficulty in postulating with any certitude what constitutes the withdrawnness of the object or codifying it with the sacred symbology of a specific religious belief. In order for the

metaxic withdrawnness to manifest as the unconcealed intensity of an object, the object itself decreatively withdraws, as if folding itself inside out. Another way of saying this, is that in a Weilian schema, the metaxic is the trace of an object that withdraws every part of itself except its intermediacy. Weil is far too concerned with a deep *innermining* to be truly conversant with Speculative Realism or Object Oriented Ontology; nevertheless, the metaxic crisis that she viewed as so harmful is one in which the world is made up of aloof entities, separated from any sort of relationality. The "molten inner core of [withdrawn] objects" (Harman 133) is, in a Weilean sense, their metaxic potentiality, the epiphanic bridge to the beyond-object rather than the hidden, inaccessible reserve of the object. The withdrawn reserve of the object is precisely the potential to be other-than-itself through the transformation of the esoteric inner core into exoteric relationality. Only through an aesthetic, mystical, metamorphic approach to metaxu can one see what Weil was hypothesizing all along: the withdrawn of the object is precisely the hidden externality of the object.

Ultimately, any accurate depiction of metaxu must grapple with the slipperiness of paradox. It is at once an abstract, transcendental bridge to another reality, but also a tangible, socio-cultural space of community and care. That all bodies might be imbued with metaxic energy is thus a powerful place from which to theorize solidarity, justice, and care for the other. Much of Weil's writing focuses on two primary directions, ascent and descent, but her late fascination with the Indigenous history and story-telling of North America suggests possible ways in which metaxu might have embraced the Four Directions to become more holistic and more concerned with radical confrontations with otherness and communion in *this* world. I recognize such an admission in the epigraph I have chosen to conclude this project. Along with the inspiration she gained from Black spirituality and folklore, more work remains to be done on

Weil's late-period interest in Indigenous traditions of knowledge. Sadly, due to her premature death, the fruits of her research into these three domains will never be known. It is hoped that my investigation into her work on metaxu might suggest one possible way to bridge her reliance on traditional Hellenic and Christian narratives with other discourses not commonly discussed in Weil scholarship. Given Weil's search for a metaxic union that could bring her closer to god, how might metaxu be rethought if one recognizes the land as "simultaneously … an animate and spiritual being constantly in flux" (Styres et al. 37)? Such a view is not inconsistent with Weil's metaxu, the Platonic roots of which conflate the khoric liminality of Timaeus with the betweenness of Diotima's conception of love. Likewise, Weil's articulation of a metaxic love "is between mortal and immortal.… Everything spiritual … is in between god and mortal" (*Symposium* 202e).

That a mystical erotics (or more simply, love) should be the key to a metaxic existence is thus unsurprising. Moreover, an analysis of metaxu that does not consider everything that might be considered spiritual is somehow incomplete. Although she lived at a time when ecological thought (at least from a Eurocentric perspective) was still in its nascence, Weil does not seem too far afield when she equates metaxu with ontic, familial, cultural spheres and the political and spiritual bodies that circulate within them. Admittedly, my analysis of metaxu might occasionally seem too reliant upon the heretical reasoning or dream logic of Timaeus, but I maintain that if metaxu belongs to the realm of the between, and to the loving intersection between disparate modes of being, then no single religious dogma should determine the possibilities of its theorization—even Weil's. I have thus attempted to show how metaxu might variously appear to bodies of multiple genders, races, even species, moving from the underworld to the New World, and from the inner space of subjectivity to the speculative future of an *outer*

space. Only with such an intersectional method of reading, I believe, might one approach the kind of perspective needed to create a literary hermeneutic for metaxu. A new literary and theological language is needed—even, perhaps, a language that "allow[s] for talking to trees and rocks, an allowance not accorded in English. If everything is animate, then everything has spirit and knowledge. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations" (Little Bear 78).

Endnote

[1] This same strategy is employed in Ruhl's play, *Eurydice*; Orpheus is able to descend into hell by tuning his lyre to the precise vibration of the raindrops that seep through the soil into the underworld.

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