

Virginia Woolf / Friedrich Nietzsche: Life or the Innocence of Becoming in *Mrs Dalloway*

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1. In “Schopenhauer as Educator”, Nietzsche writes: “The study of quarter-philosophers is enticing only so as to recognize that they make at one for the places in the edifices of great philosophies where scholarly for and against, where brooding, doubting, contradicting are permitted, and that they thereby elude the challenge of every great philosophy, which as a whole always says only: this is the picture of all life, and learn from it the meaning of your own life. And the reverse; only read your own life and comprehend from it the hieroglyphics of universal life.”¹
2. Following Nietzsche’s definition, *Mrs Dalloway* can be read as philosophy, if not as a book of philosophy: Clarissa’s day in London is the picture of all life, being the picture of her own life, a life experienced and traversed hour after hour, a trajectory in a set space and time span regularly scanned by the striking of Big Ben’s bell, or the ticking of domestic clocks. I shall thus confine myself to *Mrs Dalloway* for the book reads within the framework of life and echoes the sense of life worked out throughout Nietzsche’s writings.
3. Life pervades *Mrs Dalloway* without ever being turned into a master word. The word “life” is found on every other page of the novel, often embedded in a metaphor. But the meaning of life, its full expression can hardly be conveyed through a word whose meaning is constantly questioned and elaborated grammatically and metaphorically: “But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgments, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer” (134).
4. Page 2 of *Mrs Dalloway* reads:

There! Out it boomed! First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolve in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing

1 F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 141.

Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected miseries of sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive by Acts of Parliament for that reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. (6)

5. The novel opens on a statement which sets its tone and inaugurates its crucial problem. Life which precludes conceptualization is not a mere theme, nor is it an indifferent signifier. It engages a poetic experience which touches on language and affects the narrative voice. As it turns out, Clarissa's love for life is inseparable from its performative statement, a declaration of principle in the form of a love declaration. The narrator's love for life cannot be ruled, interpreted, accounted for, can hardly be syntactically articulated. The use of pronouns can prove problematic, undecidable: "For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one". Initially standing for Big Ben striking, the antecedent of the pronoun seems to gradually dissolve in the sentence to eventually refer to life.
6. The next paragraph makes it even clearer: "and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party" (7). The "it" explicitly reads as an expletive, i.e. an "it" without an antecedent, at least without an antecedent which one could positively ascribe or point to. Syntactic expletives are words that perform a syntactic role but contribute nothing to meaning. Or so we think. Life hardly constitutes itself as concept for reasons which grammar does not question but simply registers. Interestingly enough, "it" oscillates between what linguistics calls "syntactical expletive" and "expletive attributive" where an adjective or an adverb (or adjectival or adverbial phrase) that is meaningless is merely used to intensify. *Expletive* comes from the Latin verb *explere*, meaning "to fill", via *expletivus*, "filling out". The word was introduced into English in the seventeenth century for various kinds of padding—the padding out of a book with peripheral material, the addition of syllables to a line of poetry for metrical purposes. *Expletive* is a linguistic operation where a supposedly meaningless word fills out a syntactic vacancy, or as we shall see further reading Woolf in the light of Nietzsche, possibly a metaphysical and conceptual void.
7. The love for life and the knowledge of death may turn out to be two sides of the same coin. In Book Four of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche links up his conception of life with "the thought of death", intimately connecting the experience and expressions of life with an underlying and hardly repressible knowledge:

The Thought of Death — Living in the midst of this jumble of little lanes, needs, and voices gives me a melancholy happiness: how much enjoyment, impatience, and desire, how much thirsty life and drunkenness of life comes to light at every moment! And yet silence will soon descend on all these noisy, living, life thirsty people. How his shadow stands even now behind everyone, as his dark fellow traveler! It is always like the last moment before the departure of an emigrant's ship: people have more to say to each other than ever, the hour is late, and the ocean and its desolate silence are waiting impatiently behind all this noise—so covetous and certain of their prey. And all and everyone of them suppose that the heretofore was little or nothing while the near future is everything; and is the reason for all of this haste, this clamor, this outshouting and overreaching each other. Everyone wants to be first in this future—and yet death and deathly silence alone are certain and common to all in this future. How strange it is that this sole certainty and common element makes almost no impression on people, and that nothing is further from their minds than the feeling that they form a brotherhood of death. It makes me happy that men do not want at all to think the thought of death. I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them.²

8. In what could at first glance be construed as a melancholy aphorism, Nietzsche conceives of life as an always already too late, always already past experience. The fabric of life is woven together with our knowledge of mortality. Against all odds, in the last two sentences, far from blaming mankind for their pathetic and foolish love for life, their absurd and childish repression of the thought of death, Nietzsche declares his genuine understanding of such deliberate and vital ignorance. In *The Gay Science*, the philosopher strives to render the idea of life even worthier and more enjoyable. So does *Mrs Dalloway* in its own narrative and narratological way. Clarissa's tentative suicide does not contradict the voice's attempt to picture and witness life as worth living, intense and blissful. To that extent, Nietzsche and Woolf might not behave as moralists yet both serve a deliberate ethical goal. As Nietzsche sees it, life needs to be cured: art (literature) and philosophy in his conception provide us with "a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life".³
9. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the first acknowledgement of Clarissa's love for life comes right after the evocation of the lives claimed on the battle front during World War I: "For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for someone like Mrs Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favorite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over. It was June"(7). Life is not merely tainted with the thought of death; the love for life, however irrational, immoral, is man's response to this fatal knowledge. What is most musical, joyful and light about life is derived from the certainty of silence and death to come.
10. Life cannot be seized except expletively; it can only be conveyed imperfectly by what it fails to encapsulate, by what it misses. "Life is no

² F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §278, 224-225

³ *Ibid.*, §370, 328.

argument” as Nietzsche argues in *The Gay Science*, barely a concept. “We have fixed up a world for ourselves in which we can live—assuming bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith, nobody now would endure life. But that does not mean that life has been proved. Life is no argument; the conditions of life could include error”.⁴

11. Life *per se* would be unbearable unless poetic evocations, exaltations, re-creations, all departures from the thought of death make it worth living. Poetics of life are no mere decoration: they supplement life with its very possibility which would otherwise be lacking. What Nietzsche calls “error” is thus indispensable to living. In *Human, All Too Human*, he further investigates the complicity between life and error. In aphorism 33, “Error about life necessary for life”, he writes: “Every belief in the value and worth of life is based on impure thinking and is only possible because the individual’s sympathy for life in general, and for the suffering of mankind, is very weakly developed”.⁵ Whether life is the result of “thinking impurely” or “the impurity of thought” as the philosopher suggests here, life is by definition impure.

12. Life is secretly and insistently connected with error. In the opening section of “The Free Spirit”, Nietzsche writes:

Even if *language*, here as elsewhere, will not get over its awkwardness, and will continue to talk of opposites where there are only degrees and many subtleties of gradation; even if the inveterate Tartuffery of morals, which now belongs to unconquerable “flesh and blood”, infects the words even of those of us who know better—here and there we understand it and laugh at the way in which precisely science at its best seeks most to keep us in this *simplified*, thoroughly artificial, suitably constructed and suitably falsified word—at the way which, willy-nilly, it loves error, because, being alive, it loves life.⁶

13. Literature can be defined as this other use of language, this linguistic mode which thwarts its grammatical and indissociable ontological tendency criticized by Nietzsche. Error is loved for its lively resource, for its missing predicate. Isn’t literature by definition unreliable, if not wrong, fictitious and artificial? Metaphysics has been justly distrustful of literature over the centuries because of the elective affinities uniting it with error. This scandalous and secret alliance is pregnant with an infinity of possibilities of life, of modalities of escape from the thought of death. Woolf’s grammar of life in *Mrs Dalloway* is a grammar based “only [on] degrees and many subtleties of gradation”, a grammar of intensity made of self-explanatory expletives and autotelic deictics. Life is conveyed in the novel through a paratactic and eventful syntax, an unsettling grammar of enunciation.

4 *Ibid.*, § 121, 177.

5 F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, §33, 36.

6 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 225.

14. The reasons why life is not a concept are manifold. Life by definition, if not by nature, resists conceptualization. Concepts do not go all by themselves, are not of an independent kind: they implicitly belong to a cluster, a system which they contribute to form up. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche argues:

That individual philosophical concepts are not anything capricious and autonomously evolving, but grow up in connection and relationship with each other; that, however suddenly and arbitrarily they seem to appear in the history of thought, they belong nevertheless just as much to a system as all the members of the fauna of a continent – is betrayed in the end also by the fact that the most diverse philosophers keep filling in a definite fundamental scheme of *possible* philosophies. Under an invisible spell, they always revolve once more in the same orbit; however independent of each other they may feel themselves with their critical or systematic wills, something within them leads them, something impels them in a definite order, one after the other—to wit, the innate systematic structure and relationship of their concepts.⁷

15. Nietzsche’s negative definition of individual concepts aptly applies to life: life being capricious, unstable, contradictory escapes conceptualization. It undermines the possibility of the system. If philosophical systems look so much alike, it is because they heavily rely on similar grammatical orders, what Nietzsche describes as “the common philosophy of grammar” and its “unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions”⁸. In the novel, life resists thematisation mainly through parataxis. Although Woolf writes in English, and even though English belongs to the domain of “Indo-germanic” grammars, she develops a syntax where “the subject is least developed”⁹ to take up Nietzsche’s own words, namely a paratax. In the invention of a paratactic order or disorder, the grammatical and metaphysical subject is suspended if not suppressed. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the concern for life ends up as a factor of agrammaticality.

16. Life does not belong: it escapes understanding, dismisses categories, undermines the possibility of Being with a capital B and even exposes grammatical and psychic subjects:

Like trees we grow, —this is hard to understand, as is all of life— not in one place only but everywhere, not in one direction but equally upward and outward and inward and downward; our energy is at work simultaneously in the trunk, branches and roots; we are no longer free to do only one particular thing, to *be* only one particular thing. This is our fate, as I have said; we grow in *height*; and even if this should be our fatality—for we dwell ever closer to the lightning—well, we do not on that account honor it less; it remains that which we do not wish to share, to make public—the fatality of the heights, *our* fatality.¹⁰

17. And indeed in *Mrs Dalloway*, growth is a constant concern with respect to life. Ageing is particularly risky an experience where the subject cannot help being faced with the question of his/her desire. In an interior

7 *Ibid.*, § 20, 217.

8 *Ibid.*, § 20, 217.

9 *Ibid.*, § 20, 218.

10 *The Gay Science*, § 371, 332.

monologue, Peter Walsh is faced with what he calls “a terrible confession” to himself:

A terrible confession it was (he put his hat on again), but now, at the age of fifty-three, one scarcely needed people any more. Life itself, every moment of it, every drop of it, here, the instant, now, in the sun, in Regent’s Park, was enough. Too much, indeed. A whole lifetime was too short to bring out, now that one had acquired the power, the full flavor; to extract every ounce of pleasure, every shade of meaning, which both were so much more solid than they used to be, so much less personal. (88)

18. Yet if life precludes conceptualization, the living lends itself to categorization. Final causes serve to address the how and why: “No, life is something fully obscure which we cannot elucidate even resorting to final causes. All we try to elucidate are forms of life. To say ‘the dog is alive’ and to ask ‘why is the dog alive?’”, the question is not pertinent for we have mistaken “alive” for “existing”. The question “why is there something rather than nothing?” pertains to external teleology and totally misses the point (childish anthropomorphic examples even in Kant).¹¹ The teleological issue fails to capture the enigma of life whose modalities are not reducible to the mere question of taxonomy consisting in identifying and naming species of life. As it turns out, life is not the essence of the living, cannot be derived, reduced to the living; it existentially, contingently exceeds it.
19. Resisting conceptualisation, life is not prone to speculation either: “The whole of life would be possible without, as it were, seeing itself in a mirror. Even now, for that matter, by far the greatest portion of our life actually takes place without this mirror effect; and this is true even of our thinking, feeling, and willing life, however offensive this may sound to older philosophers.”¹²
20. In *Mrs Dalloway*, life is mirrored but yet not in a metaphysical sense. It is rendered as a succession of instants which can neither be summoned, nor synthesized, nor subsumed. Section 586 of *Human, All Too Human* reads in terms that are very consistent with Clarissa’s inaugural experience of her day in London in the middle of June: “Life consists of rare, isolated moments of the greatest significance, and of innumerable many intervals, during which at best the silhouettes of those moments hover about us. Love, springtime, every beautiful melody, mountains, the moon, the sea—all these speak completely to the heart but once, if in fact they ever do get a chance to speak completely”¹³. And indeed, the condition of possibility for life conceived as a succession of instants is forgetfulness: “Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic”¹⁴.

11 F. Nietzsche, *Écrits de jeunesse*, *Œuvres* I, 814, translation mine.

12 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, *op. cit.*, 297.

13 F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*. § 586, 247.

14 F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 62.

21. In his *Second Untimely Meditation*, Nietzsche praises forgetfulness and the powers of oblivion. It is crucial that an individual in order to live on, i.e., to survive, should be oblivious of history, be it his/her own or that of others. The knowledge of mortality is ingrained in every one. Hence the following prosopopeia which Nietzsche lends his voice to and which must be resisted by all means:

It is not justice which here sits in judgment; it is even less mercy which pronounces the verdict: it is life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself. Its sentence is always unmerciful, always unjust, because it has never proceeded out of a pure well of knowledge; but in most cases the sentence would be the same even if it were pronounced by justice itself: "For all that exists is *worthy* of perishing. So it would be better if nothing existed." It requires a great deal of strength to live and to forget to the extent to which to live and to be unjust is one and the same thing.¹⁵

22. This very strength might have failed Clarissa when she learns about Septimus's death and is unable to repress it as would be appropriate in the mundane environment of her party. Nietzsche's diagnosis is that life is ill and needs to be cured by art and philosophy practiced as art:

But it is sick, this unchained life, and needs to be cured. It is sick with many illnesses and not only with the memory of its chains – what chiefly concerns us here is that it is suffering from the *malady of history*. Excess of history has attacked life's plastic powers.¹⁶

23. In Nietzsche as well as in Woolf, life and death are yet not mutually exclusive. To cure life does not mean to avoid death at any cost. Clarissa's contemplation and temptation of suicide in the middle of her own party, in the crowd of her relatives, friends and guests strangely resonates with Zarathustra's recommendation in the section entitled "Voluntary Death":

The consummating death I show unto you, which becometh a stimulus and promise to the living.

His death, dieth the consummating one triumphantly, surrounded by hoping and promising ones.

Thus should one learn to die; and there should be no festival at which such a dying one doth not consecrate the oaths of the living!¹⁷

24. Clarissa's day in *Mrs Dalloway* reads as a lesson in living as much as a lesson in dying, where dying no longer opposes living but eventually converges, and intersects with it. In her tentative act, Clarissa's life makes one with itself and is achieved in the pure experience of the instant whereby the dialectics of life and death is finally abolished. Nietzsche calls it "Voluntary Death", "libre mort" as the French translation goes: "My death, praise I unto you, the voluntary death, which cometh unto me because *I* want it". In voluntary death, death comes to the self by the free-willed self as pure affirmation: "Free for death, and free in death" as Zarathustra

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 46.

would call it. “Nay” in this specific occurrence is deprived of its negative value, its metaphysical negativity: “a holy Naysayer, when there is no longer time for Yea: thus understandeth he about death and life”¹⁸.

25. The passage which precedes Clarissa’s tentative suicide deserves close attention and I would like to retrace the sequence of its different narrative steps. Clarissa is filled with ambivalent feelings about death, a signifier which has been traumatically enough introduced by Lady Bradshaw in the tone of mundane conversation:

Sinking her voice, drawing Mrs Dalloway into the shelter of a common femininity, a common pride in the illustrious qualities of husbands and their sad tendency to overwork, Lady Bradshaw (poor goose—one didn’t dislike her) murmured how, “just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army.” Oh! Thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here’s death, she thought. (201)

26. To Clarissa’s ears, the news of Septimus’s death has a devastating effect in more than one sense. At first, she seems incapable of receiving the news, at least of welcoming it. The parenthesis here syntactically defers the moment of discursive disclosure. The neutrality of the verb (“she thought”) makes it difficult to decipher Clarissa’s immediate reaction. She seems to first acknowledge death (“here’s death”), or even to recognize it among her guests —“in the middle of my party” reads both as a temporal and a spatial indication. Immediately after learning the news, she looks for someone in the adjoining room but in vain: “Perhaps there was someone there. But there was nobody” (201-202). Clarissa seems to resent the Bradshaws for spoiling her party with “the talk of death” but cannot resist the call Septimus’s death represents:

A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it, when she was told, first, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party. (202)

27. For Clarissa, the news of Septimus’s death is not mere talk, but prompts an imaginary identification to the actual experience of Septimus encountering death. By doing herself in, she will/would fully welcome the news; by dying, she will/would literally respond. Clarissa’s contemplation of death is thus no mere imitation of Septimus, but a full welcoming and hosting of the event, a full response to its call. Dying as she sees it happens to be an experience in hospitality. *There* (and the adverb of place is of major importance since the novel ends on a sentence beginning with “there” and referring to Clarissa’s displaced presence and unapproachable site after her tentative suicidal gesture), she is really invited to rejoin the other, and to

18 *Ibid.*, 46-47.

encounter herself. It is as if Clarissa could welcome death innocently: just as if, by the gift of death in all but Derridean sense, she could achieve her own destiny in the experience of the instant, an instant which could presumably be indefinitely repeated. The gift of death to the self would be a gift of the self to others, an ethical gift:

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre, which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (202)

28. Not surprisingly, the expletive reappears to precisely refer to life made unnamable, unpronounceable: “He had flung it away”. Clarissa’s decision is performed syntactically or rather paratactically by the partition the repeated pronouns entail: “They”. By resorting to the third person plural in this specific instance, she seems no longer to belong to the community of the living. The deictic “this” in the sentence “This he had preserved” means life, the possibility of life, the possibility to name it through a grammar of enunciation and intensity, a grammar whose possibility is “preserved” by the contemplation of the fatal act.

29. The space thereby created (“There she was”) is a space within, an intimate space where the self experiences itself not so much untimely as extimely to take up Lacan’s neological notion of “extimity”. As Lacan defines it in *Seminar XVI* “D’un autre à l’Autre”, the extimate is what is nearest and exterior at the same time. Dealing with the Freudian concept of *Das Ding*, he argues:

Who is this neighbor in the maxim from the Scriptures? love thy neighbor as thyself? Where is this neighbor to be found? Where outside this centre in me which I cannot love, can there be something which might be closer? Freud cannot but characterize it as something primary which he calls a cry. In an ejaculatory exteriority this something is identified, whereby what is most intimate is precisely that which I am constrained to be able to recognize only as something outside.¹⁹

30. Clarissa’s tentative dying can be assimilated to the Freudian cry, “an attempt to communicate”. The intransitive construction of the verb leaves the interpretation open: in her dying, Clarissa would and somehow does attempt at communicating with others as well as with herself. The embrace death achieves is the embrace of the self by the self, an attempt at capturing the receding and vacant centre which Woolf echoing Freud points to. An impersonal as well as intertextual hypothesis is proffered by Clarissa immediately after envisaging the possibility of her reunion with herself: “If it were now to die, ‘twere now to be most happy,” she had said to herself

19 *Le Séminaire : livre XVI : D’un Autre à l’autre*, 225, translation mine.

once, coming down in white” (203). In this scene which repeats a scene at Bourton where these same lines from *Othello* (Act 2, scene 1) were quoted while “she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!” (39), and where the shrouded self seems to have already lost its personal features, its subjective enunciative markers, the expletive reappears in order to be typographically deleted as a sheer trace of orality: “’twere”.

31. “Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one’s parents giving it into one’s hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear” (203). This sentence pronounced in *articulo mortis* does syntactically reunite and articulate two grammatical modalities of life carried along throughout the novel — that of the expletive and of the deictic. In this final occurrence, the deictic does eventually make sense of the expletive. In what may be called Clarissa’s future anterior death, instead of fulfilling her destiny, the destiny of her being, the fate induced by her birth, she seems to impersonally effectuate what the text calls “the process of living” (204). Woolf might have eventually decided against the option of Clarissa’s actual suicide in the final version of the novel: yet the possibility of Clarissa’s death is left open by the narrative suspense surrounding the moment of her reappearance and the enunciative conditions of the last mention of her name. After the window scene, where Clarissa contemplates the possibility of dying while watching an old lady “going to bed, in the room opposite” (204), a scene which structurally repeats Septimus’s final tragic scene where an old man coming down the staircase “stopped and stared at him” (164), the question of Clarissa’s presence, i.e., the possibility of her absence, is immediately raised by Peter Walsh after a non-descript typographical blank: “But where is Clarissa?” The same Peter Walsh is the one who in a final interior monologue questions and eventually acknowledges Clarissa’s presence: “What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was” (213). The novel’s final sentence is striking, multi-layered enough to be interpreted in several diverging ways, to make sense in irreconcilable contexts and thus to leave the possibility of indeterminacy open.

32. In *Mrs Dalloway* life is existence; being coincides with existing (“Lolling on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still, to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed”, 191), with the sheer experience of the instant, an experience of an undecidable intensity. Although Clarissa is repeatedly said to enjoy life, however emphatically, if not concedingly (“And of course she enjoyed life immensely. It was her nature to enjoy” 87), the gnomic mode yet does not apply to her experience. Her passion for life has to be constantly renegotiated; the experience of the instant to come is unpredictable. Clarissa is not the only character to undergo life’s contradictory motions and violent oscillations: Septimus himself acknowledges a moment of literal revival (“I

went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged (he was talking to himself again—it was awful, awful!); and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder, and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen”, 77). Life is a series of blissful or dangerous instants, moments of grace followed by moments of doom to be traversed, where the subject is constantly exposed to himself/ herself on an immanent plane. These instants cannot be subsumed or transcended, they are what they are, tautologically. Clarissa can make sense of what she experiences as “a sense of [their] existence” (134), but the act of bringing the instants together is only achieved through an operation of mental recollection (“And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?” 135). Clarissa’s near fatal end cannot be read outside the framework of the decision/indecision of the instant, the irresistible and irrational urge to welcome the present, what Nietzsche precisely calls “the innocence of becoming”.

33. The first chapter of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* ends with the metamorphosis of the lion into a child: in the child, the spirit undergoes its final metamorphosis; the principle of innocence is finally affirmed along with the principle of contingency and sheer chance freed from necessity.

But tell me, my brethren, what the child can do, which even the lion could not do? Why hath the preying lion still to become a child?

Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea.

Aye, for the game of creating, my brethren, there is needed a holy Yea unto life: ITS OWN will, willeth now the spirit; HIS OWN world winneth the world’s outcast.²⁰

34. In Clarissa’s unpredictable and arbitrary act, the total innocence of becoming as Nietzsche phrases it is finally restored:

Three metamorphoses of the spirit have I designated to you: how the spirit became a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.—

Thus spake Zarathustra. And at that time he abode in the town which is called The Pied Cow.²¹

²⁰ F. Nietzsche. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

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