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**The Other as Law: Eros and Being in the Masochian reading of
Levinas**

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The Other as Law:
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Masochean reading of
Levinas*

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Introduction

Only the Other could write my love story, my love. (Barthes 2002, p.93)

Loving Intentions

Applying an indulgently romantic literary analysis to the legalistic interpretation of Levinasian subjectivity, this text challenges the limits of Levinas's ethical and erotic subjectivity. This intent is centred upon the desire to address the plight of the subject, the horrors of subjectivity, in the most material of terms whilst maintaining throughout the primacy of the metaphysical which is the foundation of the Levinasian doctrine. Explicitly, imbuing the subject of Levinas with the unencumbered ardour of literary, romantic protagonists, articulates the need to expand the scope of subjectivity within Levinasian discourse as in so doing we can fully comprehend the narrowness of a being which is necessarily, ontologically oriented toward ethical servitude. Similarly, the confined conception of a wondrously ambiguous yet steadfastly ethical portrayal of the erotic presents as inconsistent when viewed with such a lens. Bestowing the subject with the sensibility of literature, they are seen to cry out in dire need of excedence, not afforded the scope by Levinas to other than be that which is ordained ontologically; unable to fail in either their ethical or erotic endeavours, entombed within placid plasticity. Evidently, while many commentators, aptly, reference and seek to conceive of plenty of fascinating ethical and legal applications for the universal hardship of the subject, this text is to be distinguished by its desire to expressly extend and reimagine the boundaries of Levinasian subjectivity, pulling at their horizons in an attempt to articulate the all too recognisable capacity for a subject in ethics, love or their very being itself, to fail. And, consequently, offering them in acknowledgement a most welcome reprieve. Such a movement beyond, and perhaps against, the defined boundaries of Levinasian subjectivity is endowed with necessity by virtue of the flawed, 'human', articulation of subjectivity it offers. Within such terms, realised through the literary dalliances of impassioned and hapless protagonists, a reading of Levinas emerges throughout this text which maintains its ethical ideal, the metaphysical is never to be diminished, and yet is better placed by its celebration of conceptual and human ambiguity, to engage with a more modern, cynical iteration of subjectivity.

This refutation of the confines of the Levinasian topography is not approached from an ethical or even ontological position, it is one derived entirely from a fascination and commitment to the erotic. Plainly, this project is contextualised most intuitively as the culmination of both a

conceptual and personal narrative. As such, to fully convey the emotive impetus of the text, that which will begrudgingly remain evident yet may delicately drift beneath the waves of philosophical discourse and literary analysis, I thought it appropriate to briefly detail those formative steps into love which have led to this text. Firstly, considering the more palatable guise of the academic, as I am sure will become painstakingly apparent, though I have approached the subject from legal and philosophical angles in my prior studies, I have always been, dotingly so, a student of Love. Compelled by numerous adolescent infatuations, I was enamoured in my youth by the dramatic, earnest prose of Byron, Blake and latterly Yeats, and their capacity to not merely celebrate the euphoric embrace of love, but also their ability to invite the reader to share in the hardships of its absence. To feel what it is to be without and after love. Fittingly, having been warned to steer clear of the beguiling offers of Literature, Philosophy or Art, where else could one turn other than to Law if one yearns to speak upon and recognise the pains of intersubjectivity.

Thankfully though, in my final year of undergraduate study I was introduced to just the text I needed, 'Suspension of Suspension: Settling for the Improbable', (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2009). Within this literary analysis, the contest between Love and Law was explicated, expressing love's capacity to act as an interruption, if not a refutation, of the normative constraints of a legal or ethical subjectivity. Gifted with the realisation of the conceptual space of Love, this came to dominate my focus and subsequent academic pursuits. The first expression of this fascination was contained within my undergraduate dissertation, which upon reflection presents as a crude and simplistic effort to reorient a loving relationship with the divine within the realm of the legal/ethical. With the benefit of hindsight, I can now appreciate that this stands as an amateurish attempt to conceive what had already been, yet unbeknownst to me, achieved in terrifying complexity within Levinas's own works. Though I do suppose there is some pleasure to be found in the serendipity of their thematic consistency.

This initial foray was then furthered within the more explicitly erotic purviews of my postgraduate study in Philosophy. Here, I was afforded the opportunity to refine my understanding of Love and the various contentions as to its conception and nature. During this time, I engaged heavily with discussions on love as it pertains to identity (Solomon 2004; Nozick 1991), as a project between the lovers (Badiou 2012) and sought to respond to the overly rationalistic and equable formulations which had dominated the discourse in this area (Soble 2000; Frankfurt 2006). Within this dissertation, which closed in arguing for love as action, I

attempted to recognise the majesty of Eros in a manner which did not willingly dismiss its capacity to corrupt and injure. Inspired by the unfeigned candour of Rose (2011) and the scepticism of Leopardi (2017), it was an attempt at a love which escapes the shackles of the necessarily ethical and nonetheless allows for the fated reverie of delicate reciprocity. As is explicated thoroughly throughout this text, I still ardently adhere to this ambition, yet this formative effort was incomplete. A superficial argument only engaging with love from the critical perspective as a response to that which had already been said, avowing to espouse the flaws of the established discourse and consequently unable to more assertively speak to and of Love itself. The scholastic expectations of the academic inhibiting the capacity to engage directly with Love beyond the weary history of debate.

Additionally, a fatal flaw within this previous liaison is that, in its manic intent to engage Love, it foolishly sought to approach its object in isolation, to speak to and only of love and the subject thereof. Nevertheless, this is a farcical notion. Love, for all its potency, is never found within such a conveniently defined vacuum. It is the highest and most tempestuous expression of subjectivity and consequently can only be adequately courted within this broader context. To speak of Love, you must be willing to speak of being itself, that which Love refutes. Or you will fail to fully discern the corpulence of being and the excedence which Love teasingly offers.

Candidly, it is not subjectivity alone which must be addressed when tangling with Love, as to merely engage with it in a distanced, academic manner would be to commit a similarly grievous omission. It is necessary when approaching Love, to offer one's Self. To, even if only for the most transitory instant, confess with reluctant earnestness why Love matters to you, why you feel you have an unresolved dialogue to be struck up with Love. In this accord, I will, oh so briefly, speak to that which lingers beneath and punctuates this text. Of the Love to which I am addressing herein, that which thematizes and fills the spaces between the pages of the discourse to come.

Any personal reflection upon Love will always fail to communicate the infinite refulgence it holds for its subject; however each is as befitting as the other, voicing the inarticulable euphoria each convulsion inflicts upon their subjectivity. Assuming an unintended parallel with the conceptual formation of this project, the same day I was introduced to the capacity for love to offer reprieve from law and normativity - how could it have been any other day? - I also clumsily happened upon someone with whom I would fall hopelessly in love. Devoid of social charms,

the mere inquisition as to whether the only spare chair which remained in a bleak, crowded room was ‘taken’, that which was afforded the enviable position next to so beguiling a being, thankfully was seen as an assuredly alluring introduction. To be near her was to be mesmerized. Speaking to her, I discovered the most divine of individuals. I had never met someone so beautiful, who could ensnare me with a smile, who could ensnare us all with that smile. Is there a more literal expression of Love’s refutation of Law than that of one’s beloved interrupting the monotony of legal studies?

Over the subsequent months and then years, revealing ourselves to each other as similarly estranged, uncertain individuals, both longing to liberate ourselves from the imperious histories which had forged us, in the arms of each other we found love. The recognition, appreciation and love, given freely which we had both so desperately longed for. Unsurprisingly, perhaps foretelling the manner of the Love and literary characters to be explicated throughout this text, we descended ignorantly, rapidly into the depths of love. Unable to escape our own narratives, merely able to repeat that from which we both ran, the most noble of intentions became contorted by our own incapacity to love the other, to know and understand the other. Persevering stubbornly in childish nescience, our convictions became deformed, the love tempestuous, tumultuous, agonizing and joyous. Violently, we careened from rapturous laughter to the desolation of heartbreak. From the promise and delight of engagement to the agony of infidelity, from the pleasure and warmth of cohabiting in love to the cold absence of isolation. It was furiously impassioned, tireless and exhausting all the same. Doting and cruel, obsessive and kind, Love, nonetheless.

This Love which we shared and lost, articulated so palpably the antithesis of those obscurant ethical loves I had become so tired of hearing about within the composed pages of philosophy. Furthermore, in discussions I held with lecturers and supervisors about the need to voice and define such an ambiguous, inconsistent Love, is the blasphemous charge that perhaps this, perhaps the Love which had consumed my being, perhaps the adoration which had founded every decision I had made, was not Love at all. The accusation presented to me was that this volatile deviancy of which I spoke, was in its parochial, intemperate manner merely a further iteration of adolescent infatuation. That which could be quelled and satiated by maturity, in time. This is a charge I will never understand, nor seek to fully comprehend. How dare anyone else, other than the subject, or the beloved, purport to intuit the sincerity of their sentiment. It is without hesitation that all lovers will avow the sincerity of their Love. They may wish to

exculpate themselves from this in its aftermath, yet to engage them there is not to approach them as a lover anymore. One must be willing to accept the veracity of the lover's assessment. Herein lies the solipsism, the epistemic fallacy at least which rests within love. That it is not externally appreciable. To speak of Love one must be a lover of Love if nothing else. And, if they are, they are in the most certain and profound of terms.

Fittingly, this is what I remain to this day. A lover of Love. A lover outside of love, longing for the grace and purpose it once instilled within me. With anguish and relief, I must confess that the love outlined above expired in the weeks preceding the commencement of this text's scholastic project. I doubt I would have had the requisite capacity to give myself to both. Yet, this affection endures, persevering as the impulse of this text. It remains part of me, my most violent foray into the erotic, and as such rears itself repeatedly throughout what follows. My inability to rid myself of its hold over me has served to strain my capacity to write, making it a painful, arduous and personal process. Each chapter, every analysis of subjectivity and Love/Eros serving as a flagrant reminder of the affliction I wilfully surrendered my own subjectivity to. And the Eros/Other that was lost in so doing.

A Levinasian Framework

Having detailed the emotive fervour which inspires the text, we can now turn to address the conceptual framework which is adopted within its form and the space it occupies therein. Determining the appropriate means to engage with subjectivity in its legal and erotic modalities, I deemed it necessary to ensure whichever theoretical interlocutor was assumed, to give structure and body to this resolve, it was vital that within their parlance the onerous weight of legal subjectivity and the mystical reprieve of love could be fully conveyed. Though I tentatively considered the ethical dialogues of Buber (2013) and the fascinating depths of Lacanian (2007) psychoanalysis as possible ventures, it was conspicuous that within Levinas's texts I found a welcome and natural accord. In many ways, his work itself can be seen as a bridge between the alternatives, offering a subjectivity adhering to the strict ethical binarism of Buber whilst also affording the subject the space to escape within Erotic jouissance and the personality afforded within a Lacanian analysis. It is within the earlier, more dramatic formulations of subjectivity within Levinas (1969; 1987; 2003) that I found the means and language to explore the world

through the earnest narrative of a subject besieged by the Other and their own being, longing for Eros's reprieve.

To appreciate the dichotomy presented within the perspective the text furthers, expressly within what is to become an-other-than Levinasian framework, we must first outline against what the erotic is to be thrust. Though a tremendous deal has been written on Levinas's ethical doctrine from numerous perspectives, what is outlined presently is no more than is necessary for the ethical position which is adopted to be considered earnestly. As is well stated and to be revisited further, Levinas's ethical formulation derives from his presentation of the metaphysical relation between that of the Subject and the Other, driven by the subject's insatiable desire for alterity which resides within the Other (Levinas 1969, p.34). This desire is purely metaphysical, it offers no alleviation. It is a 'desire without satisfaction', born of the 'remoteness', and 'exteriority of the other' (Levinas 1969, p.34). It is as much a desire as it is a movement toward alterity, the welcoming of alterity into one's horizon and embracing, openly, the ramifications which await. The locus of desire, the Other, is revealed in proximity with alterity. Within the other, the absolutely Other is promised. This relation to wondrous alterity compels the subject to forgo their egoistic living, that of a mere conatus persisting for the pleasure of survival, and to confront and frantically atone for the violence of one's very existence. For when one is presented with the mystery of alterity, the subject is overwhelmed by the bellicose brutality of their being; every act is 'violence', everything the subject has dared to do has been an impudence against the Other. Each object they selfishly enjoy deprives another, each space they occupy is forcefully usurping that which could be for the Other (Levinas 1969, p.27; 2017, p.8). To be as a simplistic ego, is to be an unforgivable fiend upon the earth. This is the arduous, ethical impetus of the Levinasian subject, as ethical subjugation is offered tirelessly in the naive hope that one may expiate their malfeasance.

This metaphysical relation though, is not purely the torment extolled upon the subject through their endless ethical plight. The subject in their servitude is liberated from their narrow existence. The relation with the Other opens the subject to the presence of the world beyond their Darwinian lusts. In the presence of the Other, language is born, and the subject is spoken into existence as something 'other than being'. It is only through language that the 'impossibility of approaching the other' (Levinas 2017, p.6), may dare be contemplated as it is only within the inter-human framework of language that the mystery of alterity and duality may be expressed. The world is now presented to the subject, 'offered in the language of the Other' (Levinas 1969,

p.92), 'thematized' by the Other. Awake to alterity, there is now nothing outside of the relation to the Other, only that of the Other may be perceived: a landscape contoured by the wonders of alterity and revealed in the debt still to be paid. Through the binds of language, the metaphysical relation is expressed ethically as the interhuman. Sociality is the ethical manifest. Human alterity, because of the metaphysical Other to which they allude, is offered only within the confines of the ethical. Within the Levinasian doctrine, sociality is the ethical relation. And the human, the ethical being. From this formulation of ethical subjectivity, Levinas's foundational ethical conception, theorists have engaged with his work from a number of compelling and diverging perspectives, hoping to further, apply or reimagine the central components of his thought. Though the most pertinent of these are referenced throughout the text, given the narrative which is to be adopted, it is appropriate to briefly consider the variety of perspectives which maintain and further modern Levinasian discourse, to which this text contributes. And, to state how these are either at odds with the resolve of the text or have been a vital component of its inspiration.

Of these numerous approaches, let us first consider that which stands most ardently in opposition to the emotive ambiguity this text adopts, namely that of the legal and political applications of Levinas. Undoubtedly inspired by the tragedy of Levinas's life, a Jewish prisoner of war who lost many of his family to the industrial genocide of the Holocaust, and how this and his legalistic faith seeps irrefutably into his work, particularly *Otherwise than Being* (2019), notable scholars such as Alford (2004; 2007) and M. Stone (2016) focus their approaches upon the broader extrapolations of the metaphysical relation. Levinas in his own writings, perhaps wishing to abate the intimacy of his subjectivity, extended the ethical relation expressly to incorporate the other other, the Third who stands spectating upon the relation of the subject and the other, and ensures that the ethical relation is maintained in a manner which is not detrimental to other parties (2017, p.16). This in turn affords Levinas and those that follow in his stead, the scope to conceive of the role of Law and the State as either the perpetuation of the ethical relation, or its interruption (2017, p.20, 93). Here, within the political and legal offshoots of Levinas, there is much debate as to whether and how the ethical relation can be successfully realised within the bureaucratic chambers of the political or its laws. Alford, focusing on the merits of ethical substitution and revering the political potential of Levinas, (2004, p.161), assumes Levinas's ethical subjectivity as the ideal which should be embodied by the political, advocating that the 'impossible demands' of his theory, it's very apolitical nature, is what makes it so compelling a political lens (p.166). In a not dissimilar manner, M. Stone (2016) addresses the limits and failings of law by holding them up to the standards of Levinasian ethics, imagining

how they could be rectified to better accord with this lofty etalon. While there is profound merit to such noble application and extension of Levinasian ethics, I will vociferously contend throughout this text that any movement which serves to dampen and generalise the potency of the metaphysical, any effort to dull the shrill summons of the subject and the pangs of their being, regardless of its merits, is as an act against the Primacy of the Other and the foundationally metaphysical and as such is to be avoided. Even when undertaken by Levinas himself.

Resolving similarly, at least at times within their writings, to establish legal and political applications from the Levinasian, Diamantides, Stauffer and Wolcher are united in their approach to Levinas from the suffering of the subject. Diamantides, a much lauded and engaging scholar of Levinas, approaches this from a variety of angles, at times perceiving the suffering of the Levinasian subject as a necessary component of human subjectivity, labelling it a ‘sentimental pity’ (2003), and at others asserting that, within the context of medical ethics, it is neither natural nor inevitable and must be met with action (2000a). This minor discrepancy itself evidences the distance within Levinasian discourse from the conceptual and the materially applicable. While the focus of his orientation of the Levinasian subject about suffering is hugely engaging and has invariably influenced the narrative I assume, by explicating the extent to which this defines the subject, the distance he maintains between himself and the subject, a forgiving and gracious gap, inhibits his capacity to address the subject directly. The image of suffering he maintains, consequently, is sedate, ‘disassociated’ from the plight of the subject themselves (2000b, p.149). While Diamantides wishes to gently lessen the subject’s plight, even to the point where it does not ‘hurt’, (2003, p.1295), I believe there is truth to be found in the pain. That only in welcoming the suffering of ethical being, can we truly discern its nature. Only when we are willing to confront how painful it is to be, can we comprehend any other being. As a result, though his writings remain as authoritative, and are referenced within the text, they lack the willingness to engage with the dolour of subjectivity this text seeks to address.

Stauffer, despite the lack of explicit reference, persists correspondingly throughout the text as hugely influential. Her stunningly bleak writing on ‘ethical loneliness’, remains one of the most powerful texts on Levinas produced and undoubtedly moved my hand toward assuming the Levinasian framework for this text (2015). However, as with those theorists outlined thus, the political machinations of her text limit its capacity to abide within the interioristic domain of subjectivity and Eros which is yet to come. Stauffer’s exploration of the experience of harm, and

what it means to be forgotten politically do not align with the focus of the text. While I can only applaud, commend and draw from the raw emotion this text embodies, this collective, political approach, as with M. Stone and Alford's, is hindered by its extrapolation from the subject themselves. As a result, it does not accord with the merits of this text which does not purport to remedy the ills of the world nor abate the bureaucratic behemoths which maintain it, it is a simple dialogue with the subject on their being and love. As such, the applications of such a politically oriented text, regardless of its conspicuous character, are begrudgingly limited.

In contrast, it is in the work of Wolcher, which this text began to discern its thematic tenor. Though he likewise considers the legal applications of Levinas's ethics, detailing how they may be adopted as the foundation for the establishment of a truly universal iteration of Human Rights (2006), an endeavour Burggraeve too has pursued (2002). He stands apart from the prior Levinasians as a consequence of his willingness to address the pain of the subject as it stands before them (2003) and equally by his capacity to challenge the allure of transcendence, a gentle if direct affront to Levinas (2005). Plainly, Wolcher's assessment of Levinas as 'the philosopher of suffering', (2003, p.93), and of subjectivity as the 'Realm of suffering', (2006, p.531) left a profound impression, heavily informing the approach I adopt throughout this text which seeks to replicate this capacity to challenge the boundaries and limits of the Levinasian whilst remaining ever, dotingly cognisant of the afflicted subject upon which this ethical/legal/political notion is built. Indeed, it was in the aftermath of these texts, where I found the allure of literary analysis as a methodology as it offered a means to articulate this plight in the most visceral of terms. Philosophical discourse invariably fails to recognise the acuity of the subject's dolour, dimming or dismissing them, reducing them to the metaphorical or engaging with them only in the metaphysical. Yet, it is only through literature that the tremendous, inane suffering of subjectivity may be portrayed. Giving voice to the anguish which befalls the subject and their most human capacity to fail. While Wolcher and I deviate in our approaches to Levinas, as his willingness to assume the metaphorical veil in defence of Levinas and his subject (2005) stands directly at odds with the critique and reading I offer, it is through the candour of his assessments which I was able to perceive of the tone and pain of my own dalliance with Levinas.

Supplementing Wolcher's own uncompromising assessment, several further commentators, who are similarly well-revered and referenced throughout, offered the means to develop the arduity of the Levinasian subject. Writers such as Edelglass (2006), Rajiva (2013), Ricoeur (2004) and Pollefeyt (2022), all convey similarly brutal readings of subjectivity, or existing, which approach

the successful utterance of their insurmountable burden. As with Wolcher, within this text, they serve as both a theoretical and thematic means to allow my reading to address the subject in the most honest manner. Their willingness to articulate, in the most certain of terms, the desperation of ethical subjectivity bestows this text with the space to resolve to embody this affliction. To determine to present not simply an idea of suffering, but to earnestly convey what it is to feel, live and struggle under the stifling summons of alterity.

As is evident, those theorists who most naturally accord with the intent of the text are those who engage with the psychosis of being in any of its various iterations or are willing to playfully critique and revisit the boundaries of Levinas's ethical topography. This is seen most overtly within the varied feminist critiques of Levinas and his subject which consider the fatal consequences of the subject's masculinity. Of particular note, though far from exhaustive, the works of Irigaray (2001), Chanter (2001; 2007), Katz (2001a; 2001b; 2007), Perpich (2001; 2005) and Oliver (2001; 2012), engage with Levinas and his subject, in the ethical and the erotic, on a heart-wrenchingly intimate level. Such efforts are generally furthered by their reluctance to assign that which imposes such violence upon the feminine to the domain of the metaphorical. Hence, said feminist interpretations of Levinas, which come to dominate parts of the text, do not merely challenge Levinas's clumsily masculine impression of the subject, they too challenge the subject itself. Inviting critique of them and the relationship they hold and embody with alterity.

There are, of course, numerous others within and without this text, who have made notable contributions or challenges to Levinasian discourse. This cursory overview is not intended to rigorously map the vast domain of Levinasian scholarship as to address the debates which span hugely from disparate, fascinating viewpoints would require a text and effort far exceeding that which is presented. Of those to be referenced, who in addition to the previously outlined, most clearly warrant explicit addressing due to their thematic importance are Boothroyd (1995) and Podolsky (2016). Boothroyd, in some way mirroring the impact of Wolcher's concise assessments, in his forthright reading of the erotic, instilled some of most central arguments throughout the text an atmospheric license to conceive of the erotic in terms as stern as the ethical. Contrastingly, Podolsky's work, though only engaged explicitly within the most overtly relevant discussions, is perhaps one to which the text is most indebted as within her playful challenging of the necessary masculinity of the Levinasian subject. Asking the question as to why they cannot be queer and in so doing toys with the established parameters of Levinasian subjectivity in an earnest, though necessary way, she resolves to revisit and refine Levinas's work

without undermining the central elements of his ethical or erotic relations. Laying the groundwork for similar efforts, such as this text, to follow in earnest refutation of the Levinasian, offering something other-than-Levinasian, though irrefutably Levinasian, nonetheless.

Of those most notable absences which are not contained within the text, this is largely a consequence either of the nature of the narrative form the text adopts or of its explicit focus. This does not serve to lessen the esteem with which they are held, or the merit of their analyses. Otherwise, as is the case with the more ardently political or legal applications of Levinas, they are simply situated beyond the parameters of this text. For example, the famed critiques of Deleuze (2014) and Derrida (2001), the lengthy scholastic tradition of Levinas's writings on the Talmud and Judaism more broadly (1990a), his own attempts to expand through the Third to the political (1999), whilst undoubtedly holding tremendous importance as aspects, influences and responses to his work, are beyond and other-than that which follows. To reiterate what will become most evident, this text is not an assessment or analysis of the Levinasian. It is not a sincerely academic attempt to, through the application to the bureaucratic or the metaphysical, intuit new elements of Levinas's foundational aspirations. Conversely, it is most brazenly an application of and movement from the Levinasian. Assuming an emotive interpretation of Levinas which is drenched in the emotiveness of literature. It stands as an affront to the traditionally Levinasian, whilst maintaining its piety. Reconceiving of the subject, their ethical burden, the excedence of the erotic, the insult of their masculinity and their meagre desire to be free of the Other through the lens of literary analysis, the subject is portrayed in terms which maintain the metaphysical and yet reject the form of its original conception. As such, the reading offered is a narrative through fiction and the subject which does not possess the scope, nor desire, to ruminate more broadly upon these grand arguments. Embodying the subject itself, it is obsessed, consumed by its focus, all too willing to forget these others so that the suffering of the subject and the magnificence of alterity may not be undercut or eroded by such diversions.

Turning now, to tentatively tease of the reading which is detailed explicitly within the formative chapters of the text and zealously assumed throughout, it is most serenely addressed as the Masochean reading of Levinas, that which assumes and emphatically augment Kantor's (1998;1999) legalistic reading of Levinasian ethical subjectivity. This interpretation of Levinas, outlined most explicitly within his essay, *'Levinas's Law'*, considers the 'fortuitous' affinities that masochism shares with Levinasian discourse and approaches this as a means to truly comprehend the primacy of pain within the relation. The pleasure of the pain is found both in

the foundational literary protagonist of masochism and the metaphysical seen in their liberation from the confines of egoism and standing as the cornerstones of both the masochistic and Levinasian doctrines. This initial assessment is only furthered by Kantor's legalistic reading of Levinas, no doubt heavily inspired by the legalism which abounds in the tortured contracts of Masochistic fealty. This culminates compellingly in the production of a profound turn within the articulation of the Levinasian subject, as Kantor posits that the relationship with the Other, is best expressed through perceiving the Other as Law. Within this reading, the subject's metaphysical relation with alterity is not simply folded into their ontology but persists in a sensible fashion. The Other's presence is discerned to the subject as a weight upon their chest, the weight of guilt and debt which drives and dictates their being. Accordingly, the subject 'feels', the Other constantly, as the 'horror of limitation'. The Other is not simply alterity, they are the subjugation imposed therein, the Other is Law.

Presenting the Other as Law in no way lessens the metaphysical desire which underpins it. Kantor's interpretation affords the reader a new, emotive appreciation for ethical subjectivity as it is presented through the visceral volatility of the Masochistic. The absolute Other is not sullied by their descent into literature, as within the confused, lovestruck words of Masoch's protagonists, and any such emotive iteration of subjectivity, the relation with absolute alterity, beyond comprehension, is laid bare: "Her head was magnificent in spite of the stony, lifeless eyes, but this was not the only part of her that I was able to see, for the sublime creature had wrapped her marble body in a great fur [although] it [was] no longer cold" (Sacher-Masoch 1991, 143). Is this not how Levinas depicts the Other? We think that perhaps there is no more beautiful description of the Law. (Kantor 1999, p.372)

Through such a reading, the Other is revealed. They are Law, as they compel subjugation absolutely. But they are also Other, as they exist beyond comprehension, one may hope to approach them through the immodest propositions of language, though they will never be attained.

Within such an interpretation, sociality as the inescapable consequence of the metaphysical, is not the expression of the ethical, it is 'Law'. The Other as Law is felt in all sociality as the extrapolation of the marvellously potent metaphysical relation. Wondrous and asphyxiating, alterity as Law is laced with Masochistic traces of eroticism. Pleasure and pain are spoken into even the most monotonous of interhuman dialogues as they allude to the absolute Other. Every relation bears the traces of *the* relation to alterity. As though in every face the enamoured subject

is reminded of the incomparable beauty found in their beloved's. Furthermore, assuming this reading of Levinas affords a profound insight into the nature of the subject's identity. The Other as Law, their *Venus*, defines them. Their being is surrendered so that they may be born anew in the image of their Master. Or as Kantor expresses this point himself, 'His identity, a non-identity - if one can still call it identity - lies no longer in his for-itself but in for-the-other' (1999, p.378). This non-identity is the consequence of the Other disrupting the egoistic simplicity of the subject's being, dismissing any semblance of selfish intent, affirming their singular purpose through their new moniker. The pain of subjugation, affording the pleasure of affirmation, the Masochean, not merely masochistic, relation, bestowed by the Other. Their identity, their being, is now servitude. And they are so very grateful for it:

'You shall renounce your identity completely. You shall submit totally to my will. In my hands you are a blind instrument that carries out all my orders without discussion. If ever you should forget that you are my slave and do not obey me implicitly in all matters, I shall have the right to punish and correct you as I please, without your daring to complain. Anything pleasant and enjoyable that I shall grant you will be a favour on my part which you must acknowledge with gratitude.' (Sacher-Masoch 2000, p.122 - contained within a contract drafted between Leopold and his wife Wanda).

Truly, reading Levinas in this Masochean manner which I develop and broaden, not necessarily exclusively within the literary catalogue of Sacher-Masoch, allows the reader to present the ethical in so uncomfortably intuitive a light, echoing the agonising evangelism of the romantic disciple. In this manner, which elucidates the seductive allure of ambiguity and accentuates the severity of subjectivity, Levinas approached intimately. As alluded to, within the proximity of such a reading, there is not the distance required to analytically dismember and speculate upon Levinasian discourse and the minutiae of each and every development therein. The rational scope to do so is not found within the poignance of this approach. Decidedly, when lying with the Levinasian through Literature, one must wrestle with the Levinasian, accusing the subject and their author of their failings, asking them pointed questions of Love, Law and Being. And discerning in the sweaty aftermath of such exchanges the truth of their character. It is admittedly a reading of Levinas which does not wish to compare or contrast, like a lover it lacks the wherewithal to do so. It is as they are an embodiment of the sentimentality within them, only capable of expressing that which wholly possesses their being. Though it is not a commentary upon Levinas and instead an application/manifestation, through this reading significant questions are asked of the parameters of Levinasian subjectivity which explicate the obsessive relation to the Other, which rebuke the ethical fabrication of the Erotic and consider the dire

ramifications of such a love, which dismiss the crude reduction of the Other or the erotic to the sexual and which finally, allows for the subject to fail, as we all do, in their being. Expanding the Levinasian into the Other-than-Levinasian/Post-Levinasian space which grows ever broader, yet unable to forget the Other, the metaphysical heart of Levinas which beats throughout.

The merits of such an approach I hope, if not already evident, will convince throughout the text. As I avouch that Levinas, more than most philosophers, is one who comes to life when visited through the literary lens. Adopting the dynamic, sensitive formulations of subjectivity and the interhuman which abound plentifully within literature, there are countless opportunities to engage with the Levinasian subject in a more novel, approachable and human manner. The complexities of the interhuman relation, the ethical weight which pounds the boardwalks of sociality, the rampant corruption of Love are all so beautifully present within any number of literary texts. All serving, in a feast of different ways to materialise subjectivity. This capacity itself perhaps speaks to the supplementary ambition of the text, beyond my own revisiting, critiquing and liaising with the Levinasian, the perversion for which I advocate, that others seek to similarly liberate Levinas through literature. Telling their own tale of *their* Levinasian subject and how they stumble through the mire of their being.

Writing in, and of, Law and Literature and Love

Building upon the heavy-handed indications which have preceded thus, it is necessary to detail the methodological orientation the text assumes to achieve its thematic and theoretic intent. Within the modern discourse which abounds between Law and Literature and the discipline which has sprung forth therefrom, it is a text which overtly lends itself more to the purviews of Law *in* Literature than that of Law *as* Literature. Engaging exclusively with only the ontological and metaphysical expressions of Law which are accessed through alterity, the text does not address Law in its textual, statutory or practiced form. Contrarily, it can be seen to adhere more strictly to the parameters of 'Law in Literature', in its frequent adoption of literary texts to tell the story of the Law as Other, and its firm grasp upon the subject's being. Though it does not adhere to the jurisprudential debates of Kafka or Camus, which populate this discipline (Ward 2004, p.3), it remains a further adherent to this methodological perspective, nonetheless, relying constantly upon the structure and importance of language as that which bestows the subjects relations with an undeniable tinge of legality (Dolin 2007, p.11).

The allure of this methodology lies within its recognition of literature's capacity to reveal. Whilst the dense tabulations of legal statute or philosophical formulations may lose sight of the subject whose being and acts, they purport to understand and contort, it is in literature that the human, flawed, emotional, wondrous and volatile, is laid bare. In the indiscretions of protagonists, their earnest irrationality and their author's gift of fallibility, we may truly understand what it is to be human. Texts which appropriately relish their own humanity, may speak not only of what it is to be, but also of those aspects of being which go unspoken. The madness of love, the despair of modernity, the violence of being all writ large across the strained expressions of life the characters exhibit. Of course, literature is not necessarily liberatory, as language itself can have the power to oppress and exclude (Dworkin, 1991). And therefore, each writer who assumes the literary lens must be willing to justify not simply the methodological necessity or merits of the approach, they must also ensure that they do so in a manner which does not further the violence which may reside in the works they adopt. Yet, this need itself speaks to the potency of the literary as it possesses the capacity to allow the reader to go beyond understanding, to 'feel' the text and experience it for themselves (White 1981, p.420). To step outside of themselves and be confronted by the 'radical Otherness of literature', and the accusations of their own perspective and subjectivity which await (Anker & Meyler 2017, p.12).

As the potential violence of literature suggests, assuming such a methodology is not a passive act as in each interpretation, and analysis, the writer imparts something of themselves upon the text. As M.J Stone asserts, each interpreter of a text always brings their own questions, their history and prejudices, and introduces them into their analysis thereof, corrupting and staining whatever they touch (2017, p.73). Consequently, there is no such thing as passively interpreting a text (2017, p.79), as through their interpretation, they create something else entirely. For this reason, literary analysis is in truth not simply a means to understand the humanity therein, it is a tool adopted so that the writer may construct and address their own notions of what it is 'to be human' (Fish 1990, p.43). The meaning then of the literature lies as much within the choice of the text itself as it does in the text's capacity to answer the questions its interpreter is asking (Stone, M.J. 2017, p.88). This stands as a more apt enunciation of this text as it is, through literature, asking questions of Love, Being, Levinas and myself, and tainting all with its creative aftermath. Unphased by the ardent legality of the 'jurisprudes' who cannot abide literature's sentimental embrace of the Law (Gurnham 2009, p.7).

Nonetheless, it is not simply through literature alone that this text engages with the Other as Law, it is equally contingent upon Love for its approach to the questions it longs to address. Expressing the very Otherness literature conveys, Love, in its refutation of Law, presents as the most abrasive of interruptions. Breaking and transgressing the subject's legal being. The Law which permeates within them, finding itself within every pore of their person, getting 'under the skin' (Goodrich 1996, *preface vii*), of the subject, is powerless before Love. Law's 'antiromantic' nature cannot contain the boundaryless etherealism of Love (Posner 2009, p.209). Therefore, to address this 'fundamental' element of humanity (Posner 2009, p. 200), one cannot simply hope to happen upon love within the domain of Law and Literature. One must recognise it as an equally potent component of the relation. Law and Literature, even Law in Literature, do not adequately bestow the romantic the reverence which is required given the focus which is maintained upon the legal questions which can be discerned and addressed. Hence, this text cannot be contained within the legal/literature dichotomy as its line of inquisition extends beyond the order of Law. It is of Love. It is belligerent, volatile, unyielding and divine. It is consequently of Law *and* Literature *and* Love, demonstrating their capacity to stifle, liberate, wound and ensnare each other as they do the subjects who seek the comfort of their gaze.

The literary texts which are adopted to interrupt and create within the Levinasian discourse are selected by virtue of the thematic consistencies which persist throughout them and how this allows the narrative of the larger text to be seen within each incursion into literature. Each novel and their varied, devolving relations with Love, Law and the Other, presenting that which is unfolding throughout the narrative itself. Explicitly, the works which are offered in this manner are: Leopold Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, and *Don Juan of Kolomea*, Abbe Prevost's *Manon Lescaut*, Wanda Sacher-Masoch's *The Confessions of Wanda Von Sacher-Masoch*, and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Throughout all of these texts, the Romantic obsession with Love is loudly demonstrated within the hypersensitivity of the forlorn protagonists/antagonists. Extending from Kantor's initial reading of *Venus in Furs*, delving further into Masoch's work presented as a logical means to extend and broaden the scope of the reading which had formerly been provided. However, to latterly approach the subject, the Law of their being and their Love in different, necessary fashions, it was apparent that this could not be achieved within Masoch's own catalogue of work. Consequently, the literary choices which followed were determined by their capacity to replicate or respond to the maniacal romanticism of Masoch's protagonists whilst conveying more diverse aspects of their subjectivity. Having addressed the Other as Law and the less-than-ethical parameters of the Erotic within Levinas through Masoch's texts, *Manon*

Lescaut, offers a narrative, as with Masoch's, purportedly of love, yet which is rife with the subject's and love's incapacity to recognise the enthused way it may pervert itself and become an affliction to the beloved. Similarly, the autobiographical confessions of Masoch's own wife, *The Confessions of Wanda Von Sacher-Masoch*, allow the formerly muted object of love, the beloved, and the conceptions thereof, to be given a voice. Within Wanda's reflections upon the cruelty of Leopold's love, we can similarly discern those of Levinas, and of the narrative's own, which demand acknowledgement. Charging us, lovers and Levinasians alike, to do better. Finally, the most honest aspect of the text required an equally candid literary companion. And when one is intent upon addressing the illusory reprieve love may offer a lost being, where else could one turn than other to the tragic demise of *Werther*? Each a text of love, which allows the frenzied sentimentality of the narrative to perpetuate and build throughout.

These choices are not without their failings and limitations. It takes only the most fleeting of research to appreciate the many heteronormative and chauvinistic charges which may be levied against many of the texts adopted. However, their significance lies not in their capacity to please modern appetites or to stand the test of time as seminal contributions to literature. It lies instead in their potency and their irrationality. Within the indulgent machinations of the characters these texts provide, we perceive a brazen, unashamed fidelity to Love which refutes the protestations and rational indignations of Law. There are undoubtedly plenty of other texts which could serve such ambitions to a similar extent, for example Amelie Nothomb's *Stupeur et Tremblements* which is adopted within the previously referenced *Suspension of Suspension* (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2009). Yet, modern, post-romantic approaches to the Erotic lack the same desperation to be consumed and possessed by their Love. A flawed if stunningly poetic trait which is exhibited indelicately throughout all the literary excursions provided, is this *need* to feel Love's hold over the subject. Honestly, it may simply be that it is within these texts more than any others, I, myself, found an expression of my own such need, as it is in these texts I was allowed to once again *feel*, and experience the imperious hold Love retains upon my own being. Modern texts may have allowed for the more seamless adoption of an ambiguous post-heteronormative, post-racial subjectivity albeit any text which could convey such self-awareness would be lacking the indulgent, narrow-minded, egoism of the Romantic subject which I recognise far too easily. It is in their frenzied, tear stained beings I find myself and, in so doing, the most artless articulation of Levinasian subjectivity. The subject oriented about and yearning for suffering.

The form the text adopts in engaging with these narratives is itself an utterance of this fervent desire to replicate the subject's psychosis. As I have noted, and is at this point probably painfully apparent, it does not adhere to the structure and format of a conventional philosophical or legal dissertation. Pugnaciously, it presents more as a dynamic, evolving narrative which through each chapter, each literary interruption, and each perspective which is applied, develops. Gaining more awareness and appreciation for the nuances of that which it speaks. Whilst maintaining its obsession, nonetheless. A lover ruminating over time upon a lost love, appreciating the nuances and facets of the relationship which was, remaining inescapably a lover. The positions adopted change, they are developed, critiqued and withdrawn throughout as the text discerns more about the nature and complexities of the conceptions it engages with and, so doing, itself. Perspectives on love, Law, being, the subject and the Other never remain static. They are constantly revisited, accused and examined from different angles, replicating the volatility and tempestuousness of the characters who are celebrated for conveying them and then swiftly condemned for doing so. Within this emotive approach to writing, I have attempted to replicate the narrative pull of the texts I adopt, asking the reader to join me, even if they only wish to spectate, as I descend into the depths of Love, Law and Levinas. As Masoch, Goethe and Prevost do through their creations. This emotive narrative device is exhibited through each chapter and the text, as within each chapter love is addressed in a different guise, eulogised in some, reviled in others, so that beneath and through the turns and developments of the text, my own confessions on Law and Love may permeate. Leaving at its close, in the pained discussions of *Werther*, a subject without Love or Law, left bereft by their absence.

The Other as Law: Being and Love in the Masochian Reading of Levinas

The desire of the text is to challenge and expand upon the boundaries and binarism of Levinasian subjectivity and being, by engaging with the subject and their struggles at a more personal, emotive, literary level. Each chapter serves to contribute in its own manner to the expansion of the Levinasian as the narrative unfurls, discerning the immersive atmosphere of exteriority which surrounds and haunts the subject, their ethereal Eros and its capacity to tragically find an adversary in its beloved, the violence of forgetting the Feminine so that a masculine mode of subjectivity may flourish and, finally, the subject's capacity to fail to be ethical and lose itself in its own need for reprieve from the ethical. Maintained thematically by the tenor of the text and the literary analysis which ensures it maintains its emotive, impassioned prose,

each chapter is inextricably linked to the overarching narrative of the text, as each is a perceptible step away from the intimacy of the Other, toward the Subject and their Self. A study in being which cannot forget the Other, and endeavours to maintain the primacy of the metaphysical throughout, its Levinasian heart.

Breaking up the chapters are a series of brief interludes which offer further insight into my own confessions on Love and being therein which undoubtedly have dictated the text's course. Varying from the poetic ravings of my own diaries to recollections of conversations which will always feel unfinished, they serve to reiterate the potency of that which is at play throughout the text. Speaking in overt transparency, to my own unwavering fealty to Eros and therefore the honesty which is felt in all aspects of the text. The frantic, zealous proselytising of Love and the beloved, the desire to vilify and recognise the rancour with which the lover may assail their beloved other, are all communications of my own attempts to understand myself as a subject, as much as they are directed toward and through Levinas. Hoping that through literature and the emotive, indulgent style of writing presented, I may, at least attempt, to convey this in a manner which maintains some distance, at least until its closure. Hiding behind the failings of Levinas, *Severin* and *Werther* alike, though they are my own, until I am able to confront the Other and in so doing my Self.

The first chapter, *Exteriority as Law: The Masochian turn within Levinas*, building on the work Kantor presents the reading of the Other as Law which will be assumed throughout the text. This extends beyond simply the recognition of the legalistic relation the subject maintains with alterity and is seen, by virtue of Masoch's flourishes, in a relation with the Other which is bathed within the subject's emotion. As has been alluded to in the cursory outlines above, this relationship is Masochian, not masochistic as it is noted for its capacity to express within Levinas's subject the affirmation of their being which is awarded by their willed subjugation to the Other.

Consequently, supplementary discussions on the masochistic themselves are not addressed herein as they approach the relation from the sexual, and the dynamics of desire and power which stoke the erotic flames, (Deleuze 1991), which is beyond the purely ethical purviews of this initial discussion. Alternatively, this chapter furthers the Masochian reading, seeking to intuit the Levinasian subject and their manic ethical character. Maintaining its thematic accord with Kantor's initial reading, revisiting *Venus in Furs*, it details the plight of Levinasian subjectivity perceived through *Severin*, as in his fealty to his Other, he surrenders his identity and reason. Descending rapturously into the depths of servitude, until he is *Severin* no more, only *Gregor*.

Within this development of the foundational reading of Levinas with Masoch, beyond merely dramatizing the metaphysical relation, this analysis most notably provides a reading of subjectivity which expands, infinitely, the parameters of the subject's relation to alterity. Extending it beyond the face of the Other, beyond the 'human' other, to all of exteriority. As through *Severin's* inability to escape the presence of the Other, I contend we may perceive of the subject's perception and relation of alterity, as residing in all of exteriority. Each space and moment of their being irrefutably speaking to the presence of the Other, A haunting spectre which dominates their paltry being.

The second chapter, *Eros against Law: Levinas and Erotic Interiority in Don Juan of Kolomea*, expands the focus of the Masochian reading from the explicitly ethical aspects of the subject's being and applies its emotive gaze now, fittingly, to Levinas's conception of Eros itself. Considering the central aspects of Levinasian Eros which are offered in the illusory caress, the delicate synchronicity of voluptuosity and the futural, virginal character Levinas adorns the beloved with this chapter rebukes the necessarily ethical nature of such an Eros. Asserting the need to provide Eros the space to remain, even if tragically so, other than ethical. Within this discussion, Eros is approached through the literary guise of *Demetrius*, the protagonist of Masoch's *Don Juan of Kolomea* and in his desire to Love, an Eros which abounds beyond language and reason, is presented. An Eros which, by virtue of its liberation from such constraints, may thrive as the expression of the most unencumbered fantasy, and may also invert itself. As without the binds of sociality, the lover may forgo their beloved, seduced by the allure of their own Eros. This culminates in the portrayal of a subject who cannot be redeemed through the ethical beckons of fecundity, who sees in both their beloved and their child obtrusive impositions which only long to impede the majesty of his Eros. A subject who willingly pursues fantasy, losing his beloved so he may maintain his Eros, *Don Juan of Kolomea*. Through this analysis, the chapter offers an other-than-ethical Eros which allows love the scope to fail and incur the ramifications of its wondrously ethereal nature, providing a reading of Levinasian Eros which may fall apart, which may be 'bad', befitting all of those loves which are lost but remain loves, nonetheless.

Recognising the violence such an Eros which lies beyond the ethical may afflict upon the being of the object of love, the third chapter *The Beloved's Burden: The Cruelty of Man's Eros in Manon Lescaut*, seeks to explicate the insidious expressions such an Eros may display. Taking a step back from the perspective of the romantic protagonists considered in the preceding chapters, this chapter explores how this other than ethical Eros may exist outside of and against the beloved

other, and may, in ignorance, afflict the beloved themselves. The burden of the erotic object is explored through the plight and demise of *Manon Lescaut*. Within Prevost's vaunted text, and in the obsession of *Chevalier des Grieux*, a subject of Eros is presented who yearns to possess and imprison his beloved within the confines of his affection. Adamant, all the while, that he is the most doting, faithful and loving of Eros's disciples. Examining how this may besiege the beloved and deny their own magnificent subjectivity, the harmful faculties of Eros, and the masculine visage of subjectivity which they have thus assumed, possess a seemingly exculpatory means to brutalise the subjectivity of their feminine beloved other. This itself is suggestive perhaps not merely of the burden which is to be beloved when Eros may conspire so voraciously against its subject and object, but also that of what it is to be feminine. To be other than this masculine subject, or that which does not adhere within the borders of his legalistic order.

Appreciating the severity of the preceding chapter, and wishing to finally give a voice to the feminine Other of the text, the Other and beloved which have been resigned to silently spectate upon the machinations of the masculine subject and authors, this, the fourth chapter, *Facing the Feminine: Traversing the 'no woman's land' of Levinas* critically engages with the Levinasian portrayal of the Feminine. Addressing within the imagery of his writings, which assumes such indelicate tropes as the necessary presence of the feminine within the home, and the language he adopts within both the ethical and the erotic, his own capacity to undo harm to the Feminine/Other. Appropriately, this text, accompanied welcomingly by the feminist critiques hereof, revisits many of the preceding conceptions which had been formerly exalted as embodying the efficacy of the ethical and the interioristic irrationality of the erotic, assuming a more critical lens intent upon extricating a formulation of the Levinasian which does not bear these anachronistic and violent traits. Leaning upon the thematic references of Sacher-Masoch's own Wanda, within the ethical we find a feminine facilitator upon whom the masculine subject may attain the metaphysical. Within the erotic, a relation which is at once both ambiguous, teasing of an indiscernible lover/beloved who may flit flirtatiously between the masculine and feminine, and, as a consequence of the sexualised language adopted, a flagrant exhibition of the crudest of masculine conventions as a desire to profane the nude, virginal other. This chapter considers this failing of the feminine to be most explicit within the construction of the erotic achieving the return to the ethical through fecundity. As with the erotic relation itself, the language adopted pieces together an agonising image of a beloved m(Other), having offered their body and child to the subject, left abject and alone. Resigned to only serve as a means for the masculine to attain and revere their own subjectivity, never to be afforded the same status. Within these unforgiving

assessments the chapter considers, as the reader must, whether or not the Levinasian and Levinas himself, may be redeemed from his linguistic indiscretions and advocates for the merits of the metaphysical and the ambiguity which defines the Levinasian. This is conveyed through the presentation of a Levinasian Eros which is free from the mar of his masculine indiscretions which had so apparently seeped into theory. An Eros free from gender which refutes reduction to the real or sexual and can abide beyond the ethical as a truly unfettered reading of Levinasian Eros and of a fecundity which, no longer the carnal product of the vain desire to procreate, is expounded as the lovers' challenge to unite in the future, to maintain the dual promises of their Eros within the social. To persist in love amongst the noise of the legal/ethical.

In the aftermath of the critique found within the fourth chapter, the fifth, *Levinasian Subsistence: The Law, Love and Self of a Lost Being*, presents as the realisation of the need to challenge not merely Eros, nor to explicate the arduous relation with legalistic alterity, but of that to recognise within these subjects, and my own, the capacity to fail. The capacity to fail her, the Other, Law and in so doing lose oneself. A reflective movement away from the intimacy which founds the first chapters, within this portion of the text I challenge Levinas's rigid, legalistic ontology manifest in the suffering of subjectivity. Asseverating the need to find a space beyond the ethical confines of being, I detail a subsistent mode of being which is manifested through a subject who can no longer abide within the ethical relation of the Other as Law and consequently loses both the Other and themselves. Conceptually this is mapped within Levinas's writings more expressly on the ontological, providing a more tangible and therefore sinister iteration of the *il y a*. Within the subsistent subject, the chapter explicates the need for Self, a stable, ethical Self, which must be possessed by the subject in order that they may participate in the achievement of subjectivity, be that within the ethical remits of sociality or the ethical. Speaking of the need to be before one may love. This final study is expressed through the pages of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as within his pained suffering, I explicate a subject who is fated to abide in the misery of failure, who retreated from alterity, unwilling to carry with him the history of atrocities which is his being, and thrusts himself desperately upon the purported excedence of love through Eros. The melodrama of *Werther's* diary, demonstrating the human capacity to fail which is not adequately addressed by the traditionally Levinasian subject. To fail to be for the Other, to fail the Law of their own being. To fail as a lover and fail the arduity of their own subjectivity. This concludes in an analysis of suicide which challenges Levinas's noble, if insincere, ethical conception thereof. As through subsistence and as with Eros earlier, I assert the need for the Levinasian to be willing to understand the capacity to other than be, and begrudgingly to

perceive the absurd allure of suicide to a subsistent, lost being. A final perversion of Levinasian doctrine which remains, as ever, devoted to the primacy of the Other confessing of a Self willing to surrender to subsistence decorated by their romanticism. Unable to let the Other go.

1. Exteriority as Law: The Masochian turn within Levinas

'You are necessary to my very existence, you and all that emanates from you.' (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.171)

'I exist through the other and for the other' (Levinas 1999, p.114)

The earnest brutality of Levinas's ethics is laid bare even in the most cursory of glances upon his work. Expressed in the perspiration and blood which decorates the tired flesh of his subject, Levinas's philosophical writings present ethics in the most uncompromisingly beautiful and violent of language befitting of poetry. The ethical subject, the poor devil that they are, is to exist purely within the bonds of servitude. This portrays ethical subjectivity in the most austere of terms. Levinas's ethics, concealed by the density of his text, belies an unceremoniously torturous plight for the ethical subject. An extension of the metaphysical relation of the Same to the Other, ethics is grounded in the subject's arduous exposure to the wondrous idea of the infinite. It is this idea of the infinite or 'absolute Other', which is manifest in human alterity, the human 'other' and which demands the ethical. Presented with the idea of alterity Levinas's subject is thus thrown into a state of dire, ethical subjugation derived from the innate Desire for the Infinite. Beholden to the Other through whom they exist, they are both of and for the Other, a servant and product of this metaphysical relation which chains and liberates them. The ethical position of the subject, because of its metaphysical formulation, is accordingly a predicate for its dire ontological manifestation. To be human, an ethical subject proximate and open to human alterity, is then necessarily to be ethical in the most violently sacrificial and remorselessly indulgent of terms.

To truly understand these ethical terms which demand the blood and bread of the Subject, this chapter develops the work of Kantor (1999) arguing for the necessity of exploring Levinas's work within the literary space, in particular within that of Sacher-Masoch. Within the pages of Masoch's seminal work, *Venus in Furs*, life is breathed forcefully into the Levinasian subject as this foolish selflessness to the point of sacrifice, this need to suffer, the desire to endure all those perverse paradoxes which abound within Levinas's ethics are found incarnate in the tired, fixated eyes of Masoch's most famed protagonist 'Severin'. This foray into the literary landscape brings to flesh the unrelenting burden of subservience which underlies Levinas's ethics and in so doing invites discussions and understandings as to the benefaction which is felt because of the relation. Within this manically induced suffering, the subject is bestowed with the gift of affirmation,

made anew by their Other, ‘through’ their Other, and thrown into a role which demands constancy in penance. Revisiting and expanding upon this reading of Masoch with Levinas further, a new perspective is gleaned of the subject’s plight, one which speaks not only to the onerous terms incumbent upon them, but of the fascinating back and forth of power, servitude and affirmation which forms the unique dynamics between the parties at play. It is in this discussion, I argue, that we may discern that the relation present in both cases descends from the ethical into the absolute remits of legal: an unequivocal indictment of debt which can never be paid and affirmation which cannot be refuted. Most poignantly though, presenting the often-abstract discussions of Levinas’s metaphysical relations within the tear-stained pages of Masoch’s infamous work, I invite readers to engage with the metaphysical in the most unashamedly emotional of terms. Within the doting, weary eyes of *Severin*, the relation is there to be felt: the ecstasy of affirmation, the insatiable lust for servitude, the cancer of subjugation. With Masoch, the metaphysical is no longer merely so. It *is* physical, and it *is* painful. But it is here, in the exhausted cries and euphoric declarations of Severin, that (a) Levinas can be found anew.

Not naive to the approach presented, this text is sincerely a Neo-Levinasian foray into the Masochian turn. To this end, appropriate steps are taken to course the route of this discourse’s detour. Accordingly, the initial section of the chapter focuses purely on Levinas’s ethics itself, briskly detailing the formulation of his tortuous ethical relation. For whilst this chapter does extend beyond and explore the space outside of Levinas and Kantor’s initial forays, it does so with the primary intent of maintaining the integrity of Levinas’s relation, particularly the singular primacy of the Other, as the cornerstone and crux of his ethics. Following this introductory discussion, the chapter then moves more expressly to the Neo-Levinasian extension of Kantor expanded upon herein. Detailing Kantor’s initial reading of Levinas with Masoch, I extend this perspective further, detailing the insights which can be attained through adorning the Levinasian subject with the garbs of Masoch’s *Severin*. This exploration affords the text the space to interact with Levinas’s original doctrine on a novel, emotive level as it presents the ethical plight in an uncomfortably tangible light. This perspective lays bare the brutish terms of Levinas’s ethics beyond the abstract realms of philosophical hypothesis. Imbuing the subject with a mortal character of body and blood, driven blindly by their wonderment of the Other, the Masochian Levinas warrants attention if not salvation. Finally, concluding the chapter, I consider how the Masochian reading of Levinas can re-present the oft contentious relation between the subject and their exteriority. Considering the extension of the relationship with the Other beyond the mere presence of the face, the relation emerges as one which is inescapable for the subject. They

are bound by reason, by the language of the Other, which thematizes the materiality of their existence and speaks to them, in chorus, of the Other as Law.

1.1. The Other as Ethics

Abstractly, the ethical arises seamlessly as a benevolent by-product of the metaphysical, the relation between the Same and the Other. It is this metaphysical transcendence which Levinas presents as pre-eminent, preceding the ontological and accordingly presenting it as the necessary state of being for the Levinasian subject. As briefly mentioned, metaphysics for Levinas (1969, p.33) is the movement of the subject toward the “otherwise” and the “other”, which is a necessary component of the human condition. To be human, one cannot be blind to the presence and wonder of the infinite which is harboured in alterity, such ignorance is the reserve of the non-human animal and their primal ontological status. This idea of the infinite, which is presented in the Other, is manifest in the face (*visage*) of the Other. The face being the mode by which the Other presents themselves. This presentation ‘exceeding’, any idea of alterity which was held within the self, whispering of the infinite (Levinas 1969, p.50). To elucidate this point further, this Other before the *I*, this ‘preconscious’ apparition (Alford 2004, p.162) is not recognised: there is no familiarity, no familial blood or sentiment guiding this union, the colour and truth of the eyes are not comprehended, the warmth of their smile is yet to be appreciated, this Other is ‘a being beyond all attributes, which would have the effect of qualifying him, that is of reducing him to what he has in common with other beings, of making a concept of him’, (Levinas 2017, pp.28-29) it is the Other of all human alterity, the idea of the Infinite in the human.

In this exposure to what lies beyond the self-interested remits of *conatus* interiority, the face calls forth to the *I*, tearing them from the masturbatory pleasures of their indulgent living-for-themselves and demands attention and immediate placation. Found in this shrill call to arms along with the ethical which will be detailed, is an affirmation for the *I*. In proximity with the face of the Other, the *I* is thrust violently into the ethical plight of humanity. It is the face of the Other, ‘the face that looks at me which affirms me’ (Levinas 2017, p.30), establishing a new relation for the subject with the world, a relationship with exteriority and of presence. Through this affirmation, the newfound awareness of Self and Other, manifest in the metaphysical relation, Levinas achieves his presupposition of the metaphysical within the ontological. For

once exposed to the idea of the infinite, the Other and the majesty of the intersubjective experience, along with all the laborious impositions it thrusts upon the subject, cannot be forgotten (Levinas 1969, pp.172-173). It is this inescapability, the *I*'s inability to unsee the face of Otherness, which endows it with meaning and attains its metaphysical plane, the mystery of their being already resolved.

The face of the Other does not merely endow the *I* with this blessing of transcendence in exteriority, it demands action from the *I*, demands a response of ethics. In so doing, Levinas makes the ethical, one's duty to act and care for another, a precondition of the interhuman relation. Through the metaphysical relation, the exposure to the face of the Other, the *I* is called unceremoniously to answer, as if Cain before God, for their complete wellbeing. This amounts to a responsibility never spoken by the Other, nor is it ever heard or reasoned by the *I*. Conversely, it instantaneously materialises in the most onerous of terms 'inscribed in the face of an Other' (Levinas 2017, p.52). The proximity of the *I* to the face of the Other, this grand revelation of exteriority, places the *I* in a newfound state of obsessive 'guilt', they *are* 'their brother's keeper', they *must* be their keeper. For Levinas, this relation 'undoes' the *I*, fracturing their primitive egoism before them and indicting them to act reverentially for the Other. The *I*, for the Self, before the Other is lost, all that remains is the *I-for-the-Other*. It is now the foundation of the social *I* to answer the call before it is heard, to act before it is needed. In positioning the *subject* so, Levinas inverts the nature of the human condition from that of the *conatus* to the social, ethical human. It is the condition of the *I*'s very being, that they are for the Other, 'hostage' to the needs of the Other, existing 'through and for the other' (Levinas 2017, p.52).

Evidently, this ethics is not a deontological call to protect and comfort the Other in times of need, predicated upon an economic arrangement, contingent upon the knowledge that this relation is to be reciprocated: such a description would fail to give the harsh reality of the relation justice. The ethics arising from the metaphysical relation are not reasoned, nor economical, nor humane even. It extends beyond sentiment and is grounded in enthusiastic self-deprivation, 'It is not a gift of the heart, but of the bread from one's mouth, of one's mouthful of bread' (Levinas 1999, p.74). To placate this demand, one *must* be willing to suffer, to offer up oneself and all that one may enjoy for the satisfaction of the Other (Perpich 2005, p.302). This is the only possible means to remedy the metaphysical as this exposure to alterity also inculcates an apologetic lucidity in reference to the violence of the *I*'s existence. In every action there is an innate violence bludgeoning the Other (Levinas 1969, p.27). Every place I call my own, is a 'usurpation of

places which belong to the others already oppressed or starved by me' (Levinas 2017, p.129). Thus, ethics is an obsessive imposition, a rapacious summons to contrition. There is not the security of legalistic symmetry in a relationship of subjugation. The metaphysical relation to alterity is distinctly 'asymmetrical' (Levinas 2017, p.151), one is slave, the other 'Master' (Levinas 1969, p.72). The reward for this burden is not in symmetry but in the affirmation of one's existence, whether or not the other deems it fit to care for the *I* in the slightest most superficial of manners is not pertinent, 'that is [their] own business' (Levinas 2017, p.92). Regardless, the Other is the *I's everything*. They are their reason for being, their end in absolute. Though patently abstract in formulation, this duty is not an abstract relation to the other in action. Everything about the other, every aspect and all the minutiae of their existence is the *I's* concern, as Levinas puts it eloquently, 'everything that in the other does not regard me, regards me' (Levinas 2017, pp.150-151), there is no facet to the other which escapes the remits of the *I's* responsibility, all of the *I*, must be for all that is the Other. This ethical duty extends to biblically sacrificial, 'extraordinarily saintly' (Wolcher 2005, p.138) terms, culminating in the *I's* liability for the Other's life itself. If faced with the mortality of the Other, the *I* must 'answer for this death' (Levinas 2017, p.15), if needs be with the benefaction of their own life. The metaphysical thus instils a votive ethic within the subject, which may cost but also brings meaning to their life. The Other is hence presented as the source and remedy to the pain of existence, a 'lovely devil' (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991).

Plainly, the ethical consequence of the metaphysical relation amounts to the 'curse of being human' (Wolcher 2003, p.106). Whence the *I* peers beyond the realms of egoism and the frivolous enjoyment of the self, daring to brazenly contemplate that which exists beyond the horizon of their being, it is instantaneously stripped and bound, beaten and shackled in perpetuity. Forced to submit nakedly before the face of the Other for aeternum. Held 'hostage' (Levinas 1999, p.117; 2017, pp.52, 53, 150-151) to the idea of infinity before them. As Ricoeur (2004, p.92) and Rajiva (2013, p.144) have noted, this, quite rightly, can be perceived as a punishing, almost 'inhuman condition' from which the ethical injunction springs forth. The Levinasian ethical doctrine outlined is not a tepid canon of suggestions and gentle nudges toward the hallowed ideal of virtue built upon mazing layers of oughts and shoulds. It is decidedly grievous in nature, it is necessarily 'painful' (Edelglass 2006, p.24). It reads as a coarse, cumbersome chain cradling the neck of the ethical subject, binding them gleefully to the Other. A singular bind of an unmistakable, leaden absolute, a willing and dutiful subjugation to be revelled joyously in. Surprisingly so few theorists engage with this dramatic if not atrocious state

at length. Perhaps, as to consider the 'lived', plight of the ethical subject is to move away from the metaphysical foundation of the relation and toward the dirty, fleshy reality of actual existence, in essence a move away from Levinas. Conversely, I argue it is this move, which will be considered in detail in the succeeding sections, that brings life to the Levinasian subject. As will be seen in our engagement with Kantor's masochistic Neo-Levinasian subject, it is only when we begin to engage with the plight of the subject and accept the reality of their 'ethical insomnia' (Oliver 2012, p.119), that we can not only come to appreciate and understand the ethical relation between the Self and the Other in new, visceral and fascinating terms. Only in doing so may we truly bring life to the relation which exists beyond the human Other, within the shared world of alterity and the obligations which are to be found and *felt* therein, discerning the tragic subject of Levinas.

1.2. The Other as Law

Having introduced in brief detail a few of the most pertinent, and indeed poignant, aspects of Levinas's ethical theory, the task incumbent upon the present section is to step away from the abstract theorising of the metaphysical and to instead step toward and engage with the dire reality of ethical subjectivity. This section asks that we resolve to understand and discern the irrefutable plight of the ethical subject, humanising the subject made human by the ethical. For while it is the burden/privilege of the Self made human to gaze in unfettered wonder upon the grace of the Infinite found in the face of the Other, the Self as a subject separate from its unbridled responsibility is seldom a source of discussion. There is no reason why we cannot desire to greet, understand and relate to the plight of the Self, a desire founded in movement just as that of the Self to the Other. Pursuant to this amenable endeavour, the discussion will move away from our introductory glancings at Levinas to the detailing and extending of Kantor's (1998; 1999) Neo-Levinasian conceptualising of the Self and their relation to the Other.

While many commentaries and discussions upon the Levinasian subject focus their attention on the ethical applications of the metaphysical relation, or as will be seen in later sections debate who the relation may extend to, Kantor's Legalistic Masochean reading of Levinas places the discussion at a profoundly personal level. The metaphysical is abandoned for the allure of the physical and sensual interwoven with the heavy weight of Law. Many writers when considering the relation of Levinas to Law often endeavour to incorporate the ethical relation into

applications of Law itself, largely in ecological, human rights or refugee circumstances (Stone, M. 2016). For all these endeavours, seldom seek to engage with the ethical relation or exhibit it in legal terms, as every step from Levinasian doctrine invites critique and arguments of misinterpretation or misappropriation (Lest we be charged with having fallen prey to the dreaded Levinas effect (Alford 2004)). And, while there is undeniably a tremendous deal of merit present in the intent to stay, 'true', to the page of Levinas, particularly in such circumstances as the present where he himself penned many discussions on Law as distinct from the ethical (Some notable examples include: 1969, p.245, p.253; 2017, p.20, p.89) in daring to brazenly re-conceptualise and re-position the relation, we allow for a greater understanding and engagement with the original text. In particular, the legal turn Kantor takes within Levinas, and in whose stead we follow, invites the reader to challenge the idealised martyrdom of the ethical relation and presents it as something else entirely. A relation not of abstract ethics, but which is felt, experienced and endured by a doting, sycophantic subject. This re-orientation of focus demands that when we approach and engage with Levinas we dare to reflect upon the piously asymmetrical position of servitude as not merely an ethical theory, but as a lived encumbrance of contrition. Donning the subject of the relation with flesh, Kantor incorporates Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, and the beleaguered, lovestruck protagonist of *Severin von Kusiemski* as a candidate for the embodiment of the subject. As will be made apparent, the linguistic and thematic similarities which emerge between Levinas and Sacher-Masoch, make them compelling theoretical bedfellows. Assuming and developing Kantor's Masochian position, I will further discuss what it *means* and *feels* to be for this Neo-Levinasian subject. I argue it is this turn which allows the novel and entertaining contemplation of the suffering incumbent within the relation to alterity. A relation which I theorise extends beyond the limits of the interhuman and engages with the world as alterity. A relation of affirmation and affliction, the masochistic medley of pleasure and pain.

Kantor's reading of Levinas and his subsequent adorning of the Subject with Masochian characteristics are both predicated upon a legalising of the ethical relation.

As detailed, the ethical relation is often presented within Levinas's texts as the expression of a complete and arduous, 'responsibility', felt toward the Other (Levinas 1969, pp.174, 247; 2017, pp.16,100, 150). This is in practice an unattainable responsibility amounting to the willing offering of the subject for the benefit and placation of the Other. In parts, Levinas himself reduces the ethical relation to legalistic parlance, stating that the relation is derivative of the original interhuman ethical edict, that 'Thou shalt not commit murder' (Levinas 2017, p.133).

And yet such formalising or reductions of the ethical relation have failed to instigate much intrigue among commentators. For Kantor though, this notion of responsibility, coupled with its absolute terminology, beckons the Legal suitor at our gates. Diverging from traditional readings of Levinas, Kantor (1999, p. 366) presents responsibility as something *greater* than that which is ethical, something which aspires to be more than an abstract, metaphysically conceived obligation, more than the ‘curse’ of existence: a ‘felt’, debt that is to be paid. This debt accrues exponentially, as though an entity of its own, growing ceaselessly with each act which is inescapably marred by the violence which necessitates one’s being. Conscious of this tangible guilt, the subject is compelled to feverishly act in moralistic recompense. It is in this exchange of debt and act, or more appropriately put in the synonymous, in this context, terms of adherence and punishment that the subject begins to become entangled in Law.

This Law is not of contract nor statutory obligations, it is an ontological Law, a Law of necessary being for the Levinasian subject. Any derivation or failure to act in this, the *only* permissible way to be as a human (and therefore as ethical), is punishable. The ethical necessity imposed upon human ontology by Levinas acts as the Law of the subject, it defines their human subjectivity and is the arm against which they are held culpable. This Law, as the ethical duty imposed upon the subject, is a Law of the most onerous and Levinasian of terms. It is a Law which can only be transgressed, a Law which can never fully be adhered to, a Law which demands and compels the suffering of the Self for the Other. And, as with the metaphysical relation, it is a Law which exists before one is aware of it, a ‘pre-conscious’ (Alford 2004, p.162) Law which demarcates the ontological terms of the subject’s being, as to *be* in ethical subjectivity, is now to be bound by and in *Law*. Kantor elucidates this quite beautifully, and in the most dramatically Levinasian of manners:

‘Before the Law one is always already guilty. That is, one does not need the Law in order to be guilty. One is guilty, as such. [...] One cannot but know the Law in terms of pain and suffering; there is nothing but pain, even physical pain, when one faces the Law’ (1999, p.368)

The passage, appearing at first glance to offer a cynical reading of the Levinasian ethics, eloquently portrays the plight of the ethical subject: to be confronted with the bellicose brutality of their being and to want, need and *revel* in the suffering which offers atonement. This is the Law of ethical subjectivity.

In the legalising of the ethical relation, even within these most ethereal of terms, the relation is now positioned within the horizon of the Self, it is a Law which is found and felt by the subject.

Law, as with its ethical forbear, is found in and derived from the face of the Other. In this metamorphosis from the metaphysical to the legal, the ‘face is the Law’ (Kantor 1998, p.508). The position of the Other, once the transcendental harbinger of the ‘infinite’ (Levinas 1969, p.49) is now presented more transparently in more direct and brutalist terms. The Other *is* Law. A sublime, magnificent deity of normativity before whom all one can feel is guilt and the dirty, flawed nature of their own existence. In this reading of the Other, all interhuman subjectivity amounts to Law - a relation of ethical imposition and crippling existential compunction. And while, for some readers, this may appear as the immodest descent of Levinasian doctrine into the emotive, speculative gutter, it presents the ethical relation in a sensorial, palpable fashion. Unlike the original pre-ontological formulation of the relation, this presents the relation as something which is experienced, which follows and pulls upon the subject, tethered to them forevermore, inescapably. One does not know this Law, but one ‘feels’ it as a pressure, a weight upon one’s chest (Kantor 1999, p.509). It delineates subjectivity. It is the Law, the Other, which defines and asserts the limits of one’s being, which confronts the Self and its egoistic perspective of the world as possibility as a firm rebuttal. In feeling this Law of/as Other one experiences the ‘horror of limitation’ (Kantor 1998, p.508) that is the legalistic asphyxiation of alterity. Or, to return to Levinas’s own parlance, ‘To be in relation with the other face to face - is to be unable to [x]’ (Levinas 2017, p.9). The Law/Other, for they are one and the same, affirms and limits the subject, it defines and discharges. Confronted with Law, the Self finds meaning in its bondage, and in doing so is liberated from egoism. Liberated by a voluptuous, harrowing menace whose embrace is felt on the flesh as cast iron and without whom the Self is lost.

Presenting the Other as Law, the vessel of alterity through which one is condemned and liberated, the relation reads now on a sensorial level as it is founded upon the excruciating duality of the Other. A relation of and contingent upon pleasure and pain bound by Law. Truly an ‘unmistakably masochistic’ (Bazzano 2016, p.29) relation. The Other is *needed*, desired, adored not merely in the purely metaphysical sense, as the subject lusts after the liberty found in accordance with the Law, the salvation which is promised but never attained. As Kantor notes, this clash of the ontological with the metaphysical, of ethics and Law creates a state where the Law, the punishing shackles of alterity, is desired by the subject. It is Law itself which incites this desire and without this Law, ‘there is no desire’ (Kantor 1998, p.509). Desire being expressed as the necessary movement toward the Infinite (Alterity), an alterity which is presented as Law, transcribed in the face of the Other. In truly Masochistic terms, the movement toward the Other, is a movement into Law: willing subjugation met with implacable punishment. Law and

desire for our Neo-Levinasian martyr are cruelly interwoven into the fibres of their being. If to be is expressed as the metaphysical pleasure of the human burden, and to accordingly be is to engage in the plight of ethical subjectivity, then to be is the pleasure of the Law manifest in the anguish of adherence. The curse of existence reduced to the desire for the Other, a 'Desire of the Law' (Kantor 1999, p.374). A Desire for Law which sees adherence in action, a Law which is not bound by the bureaucratic machinations of the state, a Law which is 'better than politics' (Ville 2007, p.232), a Levinasian Law. Thus, the character of the subject whose plight we are resolved to expound upon is one imbued with a distinctly Masochistic personality. The subject, the Self we flesh and clothe with discussions of alterity and legality, through their relationality and their traumatic subjectivity is unmistakably that of Masoch's *Severin*.

Severin's existence, as with that of the Levinasian subject is that of an 'otherwise than Being' (Kantor 1999), his servitude emerges rapturously as an antagonist to an egoistic being. In the pain and suffering of servitude, the masochistic ontology, *Severin* is liberated from being. He suffers willingly, necessarily and revels in this despair desperately in the naively foolish hope that it may please, placate or even amuse his Other, *Wanda*, who looks on dispassionately as though the embodiment of Law itself. For Kantor, the parallels that run between the protagonist of Masoch's masterpiece and that of Levinas's ethics are inseparable to a point of synchrony whereby, 'there is no other way to read Levinas than with Sacher-Masoch' (1999, p.372). This dramatic parallel serves to humanise and develop the unfortunate ethical subject of Levinas, putting face (for lack of a more appropriate term), to their plight whilst also maintaining the reverence befitting of the Infinite in the Other. The ethical when spoken by *Severin* unearths the torturously asymmetrical legalistic reality, if not simply the mania of the subject's condition.

1.3. The Self as *Severin*

Where Levinas in cold abstraction asserts that the subject exists 'through and for the Other' (Levinas 1999, p.114), our corporealized *Severin* offers the realised expression of this sentiment in his declaration:

'I love you more than myself, I am utterly devoted to you. In all seriousness you do what you wish with me, whatever your whims dictate' (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.186).

It is here, in the spoken declarations of the masochistic archetype that life is given to the words of Levinas. In this outpour of overwhelming sentiment, *Severin* presents a masochism which

engages with Law on two distinct, tormenting levels. In practical terms, the above declaration is the articulation of the contract which he signs, offering himself in servitude to his beloved other, in this light it is the oral affirmation of the contract. More profoundly though, this declaration speaks to an ontological Law, the Law which Eros has thrust upon him. Before it is manifest in the legal document, this Law is already in action, *Severin* exists as her doting servant long before this relation is formalised, he is obedient pre-consciously, ‘preceding the hearing of the order’ (Levinas 2017, p.135). This is the true law of the Masochist, and that of the Levinasian subject, not of contract but of uncompromising, sacrificially altruistic sentiment. *Severin* is bound by his very being as *for Wanda* from the moment he first succumbs to the wonders of alterity she embodies, it is the Other of *Wanda* which induces this ‘other than being’ (Levinas 2017, p.101). *Wanda*/Other induces a state of subjugation for the subject, it is not words which compel them, but this Law of necessity, alterity and Otherness, a Law which is not seen, it is felt, as an ‘urgent call which I am powerless to resist’ (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.156). This powerlessness itself mirrors the ethical “freedom” of Levinas’s subject as they ‘may not abandon the Other, but [...] *can* do so’ (Burggraeve 2006, pp.640-641). Freedom means nothing to our subject who is bound by the Other as Law, the trivial fact that they *can* depart is meaningless when the harsh reality is that they *must* not leave, they *will* not leave. And consequently, it is here with this poor subject as/of *Severin*, that I develop Kantor’s insights hoping to explore this subject’s plight in greater depth. By further delving and integrating the Levinasian ethics in Masoch’s text, as I do within this section, I argue we can, as Kantor has initially evidenced so eloquently, reveal further palpable truths of the Levinasian subject/*Severin*’s dire circumstances.

Moving beyond the potency of the compulsion felt toward the Other as Law, reading Levinas alongside Sacher-Masoch develops the Neo-Levinasian subject in several sympathetic and corporal ways. Some of these invite fleeting, yet still profoundly personal insights, and others, as will be outlined in the succeeding section of the chapter, warrant a great deal more attention. An often-overlooked aspect of the Subject’s plight within ethical subjectivity is that of the forfeiture of their identity. When one’s existence is both contingent upon and necessarily in service to the Other, the notion of identity is evidently fraught and problematic. While the reward of affirmation, this gift of purpose and direction, is bestowed upon the subject limiting their being to that of servitude, in the extreme this is more than a merely physical sacrifice of sweat, food and blood, but a metaphysical surrendering of identity to Law. The benefaction of both *what* and *who* they are (Levinas 1969, p.183). This is not manifest as a reduction of the Self to the Same by the Other, an inversion of the cardinal sin of Levinasian metaphysics, as the subject maintains

their irreducible faculties. Instead, it arises as the loss of the Self to their 'duty'. Prima facie this assessment is a non-event in accord with that outlined by Levinas, as the ethical duty is detailed as one which is 'imposed beyond the limits of being and its annihilation, beyond death' (Levinas 2005, p.7). However, such a faithful interpretation inspires no sympathy. Conversely, in embracing the Masochian turn with and from Levinas we may adorn this abstract event with corpus. In this instance, it is not *Severin's* consignment to the Romantic which we shall reference, but instead the demise of his identity and body to Law.

Throughout Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, *Severin* descends further and further, enthusiastically so, into the 'abyss' of his love, to the tragically comedic point of self-awareness whence he notes that 'nothing can save me now' (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.169). This descent is marked poignantly throughout the text, building in severity as his Other punishes him and in so doing erodes his former egoistic identity, casting and sculpting his new facade. This takes place, as with Levinas's plight on a profoundly metaphysical and mercilessly physical medium. The latter expressed in the increased severity of the floggings he willingly subjects himself to. Each strike and thrust of the whip inflicted upon him embodies the forthright exertion of Law. As Kantor puts it succinctly, 'the whip is the Law' (1999, p.372). The pleasure of servitude undercut by each strike which serves to test the resolve of the servant's will, mercilessly condemning passivity. The crack of the whip against the flesh is heard as the ethical call; a summons to be for the Other which is inflicted until its intent is achieved, namely that the Other, Law, is all. This graphically delineates the simultaneous expression of 'horror and joy' (Kantor 1998, p.509), which the Subject feels when with Law.

These pleasure laden exercises of resolve are accompanied by a metaphysical assault upon his person. Having articulated in words, body and his signature the solemnity of his devotion to the Other, more still is asked of our subject. The Other demands that they lose themselves in servitude. This is expressed plainly when *Wanda* declares to our subject, 'From now on your name is no longer *Severin*, but *Gregor*' (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p.205). This assertion denotes the formal dismantling of the subject of egoism, and the subsequent 'birth' of the ethical subject (Levinas 1969, p.245). The relationship between *Severin* and the Other incurs a heavy toll. Ethical subjectivity as servitude necessitates the forgoing of the ego, *Severin*. All that can remain is that which emerges after the exposure, a subject of subjugation, a subject of Law. Fittingly, this transformation is expressed by the change in title as the new subject 'Gregor', must be willing to endure and suffer in ways *Severin* could never have comprehended, let alone endured. And *Gregor*

will. This iteration of the subject is materially manifest ‘through the other and for the other’ (Levinas 1999, p.114). There is no scope for interiority nor egoism, no space for the individual’s preconceived notions of ethics nor politics. The noise that is the cacophony of wants, desires, hope and dreams which formulate the complex romantic personality of *Severin*, of the ethical subject, would merely linger inconveniently as obstacles to this singular mission. They must all be forgotten, purged until nothing remains other than purpose, the desire for Other as Law. *Severin* himself articulates this movement concisely when in reference to his affection he states, ‘Worshipping you made me forget two thousand years of history’ (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.144). This is the affirmation of the Other as Law in action. The only ‘reason’, logic or science which is permitted to persist is that of the Other. All else must be forgotten so that Law can be held in ultimate revelry.

Through the relation with Law the subject is formally defined, made ‘human’. By the grace of their Master, the subject is bestowed with not only orientation, they are also gifted with a name, an identity befitting of their fatal compulsion. And yet, in this exchange, which is an ascension to humanity in Levinasian terms, there is undeniably a loss which is suffered. *Severin* is lost so that *Gregor* may take his stead. This is a necessary transition, for the relation with the Other to persevere. For as *Severin*, he is but a man, fallible and weak, an ungainly assemblage of flesh and lusts. But, as *Gregor*, he is no longer a servant of his own egoism. He transcends such a fickle form, he is a triumphantly ethical ‘spirit’ (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.192). This itself presents a quandary which warrants reference for the Levinasian or, in this instance Neo-Levinasian convert as it expresses the remorseless idealism of such ethics. Outside of the romantic fantasy this portrays a more tangible expression of both love and ethics as a suffering (Wolcher 2003) which is to be endured. The loss of egoism is in many ways a loss of sanity, as one is overcome by the madness of the relation. One cannot help but fleetingly consider if the salvation of the subject lies furtively in the egoistic maintenance of the Self, that if either were ‘less virtuous [they] would be perfectly sane’ (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.188). Yet even this notion of sanity is a perfidious sanctuary, visible only to that absent hypothetical soul which is not enchanted by the Other. It offers only an insincere amnesty, inaccessible to those it would offer salvation. As to speak of reason beyond that which calls the subject to the Other, in both instances is to adopt a foreign tongue. Whilst those outside of the relation may look stoically on, aghast at the absurdity of their lascivious acts, it is in the Other, the Law found therein, that our dear subject feasts on the ‘reason’ found regardless of the suffering it incurs. All that is conceivable, and material is filtered chauvinistically through the lens of their ‘fatal passion’ (Prevost 2008, p.43).

The asymmetry present within such movements of extreme passion is overtly apparent. Be it that of the lover and their beloved, or that of the Self and their Other, in romance and ethics the asymmetrical imbalance of the relation is what demands the doting, diligent subservience of the subject. In both instances, it is the lofty 'height', of the Other which compels the sacrificial relation (Levinas 1969, p.75). Levinas's Other exhibits the divine grace of the 'Infinite'. They transcend all that is knowable, they are the very allure of foreignness, a presentation of difference which calls into question the being of the subject (Levinas 1969, pp.171, 194). In the presence of such absolute alterity, notions of reciprocity are farcical. Alterity is a gift to the subject, wresting them from their egoistic being. Similarly, for *Severin*, his Other embodies an unknowable alterity. *Wanda* is not merely *another* for *Severin*. Even to address her by this name which could be seen to brazenly denote a mutual recognition of parity is offensive. She is not 'Wanda', she *is* 'Isis', a 'goddess', 'Venus' (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991). She *is* divine, infinite. And, in this recognition of untouchable, unknowable divinity there is the simultaneous concession as to the egoism of his former existence and the hope that by her grace he may aspire to something other than such being.

Surreptitiously, this masochistic relation of asymmetry belies an uncomfortable inconsistency found within the power dynamic therein. Echoing the recognition which underlines the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, the power dichotomy of the metaphysical relation when dissected on a corporal, personal level upsets the serenity of the asymmetrical relation. There is an unspoken need for each party of the relation to play their assigned role with evangelical conviction. The earnest masochism of *Severin* is not thrust upon him in his willingness to endure the violent flurries of passion exacted upon him, but it is his own doing. The relation of asymmetry which facilitates such a grotesque imbalance is the exercise of his power upon the Other of his being. Petrified by the uncertainty and unknowable mannerisms of his Other, his sordid relation is established not by love, rather by his pusillanimous desire to manipulate his fate. The true orientation of the relation is expressed plainly when *Severin* presses his wants upon his Other, 'You may do as you will with me, only never send me away' (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p.182). This conveys the truth of the masochistic dynamic, that the power is never truly divested from the Subject, it is simply bestowed in the most arduous of terms upon the Other. The Other as Law, is the desire of the Subject. In many ways this casts the Other in a sympathetic light, as the Subject's reverence for the Other as Law, liberates and fascinates them. Read as such, the subject profits from and indulges in the titillating privilege of 'unfreedom' (Gray 2003): autonomy

foregone in exchange for the foreign pleasure of an ‘otherwise than being’ (Levinas 2017, p.101). Conversely, the Other is thrust unto a pedestal from which they can only descend. From on high, *she* may only fall.

Such adoptions and developments of Kantor’s Masochean turn as I have articulated, exploring the foundations and ipseity of the Subject, will inevitably invite critique from the ardently traditional reader of Levinas. Each step away from that which is steadfastly metaphysical in conception is easily recognised as a movement away from doctrine. Such a contention should in no way deprive the allure of this formative voyage. Though, what is presented herein, is itself a reading of a patently Neo-Levinasian theory, and openly susceptible to critique. This criticism is not unfairly levelled at this reading for its divergence from its ancestral text, just as it does from its more immediate inspiration. For each reading is in itself a movement away from what precedes it, as Stone notes, ‘*Every reading of a text is an interpretation*’ (Stone, M.J 2017, p.84), a creative and accordingly blasphemous act. The merit of this approach, and that from which it draws so much inspiration is the comprehension and engagement it invites. Levinas’s theory, though fascinatingly compelling and ruthlessly uncompromising, is to many presented in text which is ‘too abstract’ (Saldukaityte 2019), and often ‘downright obtuse’ (Manderson 2005, p.295). Conversely, this grounding of the metaphysical within the physical, the literary personality which the Masochean turn affords invites a lucid understanding and engagement with the formerly ‘mystical’ (Levinas 2017, p.42). With the novel experience of the Other as Law, which is the lynchpin of this thematic amalgamation.

Building on and from this perspective, this discussion has served to explicate this union plainly by wantonly exploring a few of the many different aspects that may lend passion to Levinas’s ethical subjectivity. These analyses of the Neo-Levinasian Masochean subject as *Severin* forge a path, theoretically and thematically, form the crux of this foundational chapter. Namely, the Masochean extrapolation of Kantor’s conceptualisation of the Other as Law. Rising from these discussions of Levinas within Masoch, the requisite scope emerges to conceive of the Other as Law beyond the immediate proximity of the face. To this end, within the remainder of this chapter, I present a spatio-linguistic reading of Levinasian ethical subjectivity which is supplemented by the Masochean turn. Through further reference to *Severin*’s plight, I contend that the Law of the Other is not merely found in the ‘gaze’ of the Other (Levinas 1969, p.86), but is to be found in all of exteriority. Law is spoken to the subject in the cooling of the breeze, felt in the warmth of the sun, inscribed boldly in the cracks and wrinkles of the earth. All exteriority

abounds with reference to the Other. All is Law. The relation with the Other is of such profound severity that the subject engages not merely with a world of the Other, it is through the Other. A world in which the Other is felt (Kantor 1998, 508) in all exteriority, and all exteriority is felt as Law.

1.4. Exteriority as Law

The Masochian turn adopted, manifest most clearly in the presentation of the Other as Law, presents a deeply personal conception of the ethical discourse. Exploring the plight of the Subject as analogous to that of *Severin*, both bound fantastically by the Other as Law, offers a compelling re-telling of the ethical relation. This analogous reading of the relation, however, extends far beyond the dramatic decaying of the subject's identity and being before the Other. The ramifications rebound across the horizons of their existence, impacting the subject profoundly beyond the immediacy of their ethical/romantic discourse. The 'presence' of the Other is not simply felt in their sublime gaze (Levinas 1969, p.43), but is internalised by the subject, taken with them, corrupting them. Ontologically re-directed, the subject always feels the Other as Law, there is no 'outside' of the relation for the subject. The Other is always found, the foundation of reason, the purpose and vessel of language, the Other dominates their existence. Reason and Language, extend in their application beyond the Other, they are the tools through which the subject engages all exteriority. Without these gifts of service, the world is lost to the subject as they are reduced to the simplistically egoistic pleasures of conatus. What the subject knows through such existential implements is accordingly framed by the relation with the Other - a suitably romantic notion. Consequently, the subject presents once more as distinctly Masochian, existing in a servitude beyond the face, a servitude which is found in the world as it beckons and summons the return of the subject to the Other. This reading presents all entities and objects as united ominously in chorus, speaking the 'debt' that is owed to the Other (Wolcher 2006, p.540). In the world experienced through the Other, exteriority itself, in all its guises, is felt as Law. There is no *without*, the Other is always present, 'shown in its absence' (Kantor 1999, p.501).

Similar such conceptualisations of the ethical duty beyond the remit of a distinctly human face have drawn a great deal of attention in recent years as ethical and ecological scholars alike have endeavoured to overcome the chauvinistic, 'unapologetic anthropocentrism' (Herzog 2013, p.360) of Levinas's ethics. Overtly interhuman, and socially oriented, for many modern

‘posthumanist’ commentators, the crudely Darwinian humanism of which his text is rife is ‘unfashionable’, if not ‘deeply problematic’ (Calarco 2019, p.71). Restricting the ethical in conception and application to the purely human, though well-reasoned given the times and life of the author, reads now as anachronistic within modern ethical discourse. Surprisingly, what invites such fervent debate and intrigues so many who wish to overcome this limiting of his theory, is the ambiguity which Levinas himself conspiratorially presents. When pressed in an interview, Levinas, somewhat unexpectedly, states that ‘the ethical extends to all living things, and that ‘one cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal’ (Levinas 1990b, p.153). This, coupled with the poignant tale of Bobby the Dog who brought joy and saw humanity within Levinas and his fellow Jewish prisoners of Nazi Germany, detailed in the essay “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights”, has been read as an invitation to take up arms and conceptualise the extension of the ethical relation beyond the out-dated limits of the interhuman relation to Bobby and other similarly befitting non-humans warranting ethical consideration.

Endeavouring to present an ecocentric iteration of Levinas’s ethics, and faced with the incontrovertible anthropocentrism of his text, many theorists are often forcibly positioned at an impasse where they must either forgo the primacy of the metaphysical relation or completely reinterpret the grounds and applications therein. This often results in the ethical being re-presented, reconceived in a myriad of diverging Neo-Levinasian or Post-Levinasian forms. Each approach united in its resolve to reconcile the perceived vulgarity of Levinas’s anthropocentrism with the allure of his eloquent, enthused ethics. In recent years this has taken a number of different guises, varying from Atterton’s (2018) reconceptualising of the ‘the face’, as generalisable to all which exhibit a capacity to suffer and express said suffering; Davy’s (2007) reading of Levinas as a metaphor which intriguingly allows the relation to extend beyond the human indiscriminately to ‘plants, rocks and other entities’; to Antadaze’s (2019) presentation of the Other as an ‘Unknown Other’, whereby the anonymity of the Other affords the extension of the relation to non-humans and to the ethical consideration of the non-human world. All such duets with Levinas make undeniably fascinating reading for all a Levinasian persuasion and serve to intrigue and inspire through the novel engagement with and extension of the ethical relation.

Despite this, such perspectives stand in stark opposition to the distinctly human personality of the Masochian turn I advocate herein. As detailed, it is this turn which engages and unashamedly furthers the *human* personality and embraces the perceived narrowness of the relation. In so doing, the turn celebrates the primacy of the relation and the necessary humanity of the Other

from which the metaphysical relation expressly originates in the idea of the Infinite. However, this narrowness in conception need not necessitate a narrowness in the application of the ethical relation. Instead, I contend that the solution presented through the Masochian turn, in the embracing of the indulgent anthropocentrism of Masoch and Levinas's texts, found most explicitly in the latter's discussions of reason and language, offers the means to extend the relation with the Other as Law beyond the face without making concessions as to the primacy and terms of the relation. Exploring the relation of the subject with the world manifested through the Other, instead of attempting to make another Other of the world or a select number of its inhabitants, offers an intriguing if 'unfashionable', means to broaden the limits of the ethical. Extending the ethical through the Other, I conceive of a distinct ethical relation felt by the subject with exteriority. A relation which presents exteriority to the subject as the Law of the Other.

Foundationally, exteriority is discovered by the subject through the utilisation of language. For the Levinasian subject, language is founded in the aftermath of the face-to-face relation with the Other. The face of the Other brings forth the 'first signification, establishes signification itself in being' (Levinas 1969, p.207). For the subject, language is then imbued with the alterity of the Other. All things the subject designates within language are accordingly designated to the Other. To speak itself is to open oneself up, expose oneself in naked vulnerability and to 'make the world common' (Levinas 1969, p. 76). The relation the subject maintains with the objects of its existence is limited by the Law of the Other. Enjoyment and possession may only be exercised with reference to the Other and the duty that is owed. One cannot speak of egoism and selfish wants and pleasures, as every expression uttered by the coarse, dry lips of the subject must be in servitude of the Other (Levinas 1969, p.183). As Davy (2007, p.53) notes, this is a necessary step for the ethical discourse as it 'forces', the subject to see the world beyond the sanctity of one's own vision. One must not be naive to the violence of their being, to which the world through the language of the Other demands penance.

Deriving language from the relation to the Other, Levinas can be seen to once again interweave the metaphysical relation into the logical, corporal existence of his subject. Doing so in a violently masochistic manner. Through language the world beyond is thematized, by the presence of the Other. This act of thematizing under the language of the Other is often interpreted by theorists to portend to the 'reduction' of all nonhuman Others (Davy 2007, pp. 54, 56). Such readings contend that that which is thematized, namely the nonhuman, is reduced

to a mere possession, something which may be enjoyed, exchanged and discarded beyond the remits of the ethical or legal. This position is itself made apparent by Levinas when he writes of 'Things', in a rather curt manner:

'Things have no face; convertible, "realizable," they have a price. They represent money because they are of elemental nature, are wealth. Their rootedness, their accessibility to physics, and their signification as tools are thus confirmed.' (Levinas 1969, p.140)

It is in excerpts of this nature that the accusation of Cartesian dualism laid against Levinas (Kendall-Morwick 2013, p.101) is most apparent as it clearly distances the nonhuman from the ethical relation. However, to those of a Masochean disposition, such as myself, I consider this reading to be decidedly reductive and flawed as it fails to articulate the weighty relationship the subject maintains with exteriority. For the Masochean subject, 'Things', are never rooted elementally, their physical properties are inconsequential. 'Things' are rooted, as the subject is, in servitude to the Other. To the Masochean reader of Levinas, 'All' that *is*, in the aftermath of the face-to-face relation, is by virtue of the Other. Everything is perceived indiscriminately by the subject through, 'the fanatical, burning eyes of a martyr' (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.148).

Blessed with meaning to the subject through language, 'Things' are not afforded the privilege nor ethical consideration of she who reveals a face. This, though, does not absolve them of being privy to the relation, for they are the embodiment of it. They emanate from the relation, constructing the material environment upon which this tragic affair is to be played out. They do not speak the Law of the Other, but they are inescapably legal instruments, vessels through which the Law is experienced. Every instantiation of the nonhuman is an illusory reduction of the irreducible, a reference to she who rejects thematization. In so doing, each nonhuman articulation of exteriority speaks to the subject of the violence of its existence. Every which object or creature who may have incited enjoyment through possession or consumption instead presents an opportunity for service, an opportunity for sacrifice. Exteriority is accordingly not reduced by its proximity to the relation, rather it is raised through it. Thematized by the relation, exteriority acts upon the subject like 'music, like poetry' (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p.236), compelling the subject to feel the presence of the Other, to feel she who is experienced as 'guilt', as Law. Accordingly, exteriority once more confronts the subject with the unsalvageable brutality of its being. In the world of the Other, Levinas's subject is drowned, submersed in exteriority speaking the burden of the Other. Every 'Thing', is a means of servitude, a tool to be wielded, cherished or offered in the name of the Other. There is no opportunity for egoism, no pleasures of the Self, no *Severin*. *Only Gregor, only servitude, only the Other*. The world offers not reprieve

but a rope. So that the subject may remind themselves of their subjugation, so they may *feel, suffer* and *celebrate* the asphyxiating affirmation of alterity beyond the Other.

Patently, this ‘world offered [...] in the language of the Other’ (Levinas 1969, p.92), is not for the subject a utopia of romantic idealisation, it is a bleakly masochistic, Levinasian ‘Landscape’ (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013). Offered in language, draped in the summons of the Other, the world is experienced claustrophobically as the utterings of a debt, the forceful shove of ethical normativity. The world is a space of Law. The subject is exhaustively inundated with the forthright accusations of the ethical injunction found carpeting the world it endures. The subject cannot escape the relation, *Gregor* cannot deny his love. They are charged with the unenviable condition of ‘hostage’, servant and victim to the Other’s whims wherever they dare to stray. All exteriority contorts the subject back to the Other. There is no solace to be found. The dirty concrete which paves the tracks of the city, the dimly lit back rooms of sordid bars, the tranquil rivers which scythe through countryside, all their ignorant inhabitants cry of the Other’s need for service. A need the subject can never placate, a need the subject *must* placate. In all exteriority, the Other is found persecuting the subject’s titillated being incessantly. For the subject, the Other has forever altered the atmosphere of their world. The air itself is heavy, warmed by the heat the Other’s breath bequeaths, a breath the subject revels in. Through language, which simultaneously defines and accuses the subject, the Other as Law seeps into all the cracks and crevices of his world, positioning the subject assertively within a space which exercises the ethical duty. Exteriority is thus adorned with a distinctly legal character. The Other as Law is felt in all space, all that is, is the Other and the Legality by which the subject is bound to them.

The subject bound by the Other as Law, the law of its masochistic being, cannot forget the Other and so, in the fleeting moments within which it is punished by the absence of the proximate face qua face relation to their beloved deity, is left projecting this presence into the world through the language of the Other. Language does not only serve to clothe alterity in the mask of the Other, presenting exteriority as Law, it so in this expression dictates reason for the subject. Inundated by the burdensome swathes of alterity laid forth in language, the subject is not permitted to speculate of a logic nor rationale which challenges the call of the martyr he finds beyond the confines of himself. This language of subjugation ‘is reason’ for our subject (Levinas 1969, p.207). Commonality before alterity is merely the opportunity for sacrifice. The Other extends far beyond the reaches of the ethical, or the ontological and penetrates deep into the

epistemological sanctity of the Subject. All that is known is the Other as Law, - Exteriority as Law. Reason, being, everything inevitably returns the subject to the Other. This, as Burggraeve succinctly defines it, is the ‘mystery’, of the subject’s being, that its ill-fated destiny has been played out before them, and they are left slack-jawed and penitent, standing ‘irreversibly [...] turned toward the Other’, inescapably facing Law (2006, p.648). Indeed, it is this very reason, the reason of the martyr, which is brazenly devoid of economic sensibility. Levinas was not wrong in his astute observation that ‘Man is an unreasonable animal’ (Wright 1988, p.172), for he is not his own. His life, his actions, his being and his reasoning, all are offered in worship to his Other. Our dear subject is no longer a man in any narcissistic or economic sense, he persists, painfully, as ‘a romantic spirit’ (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.192).

Explicating this position of reason and language within the bounds of the Masochian subject adorns the abstract with an uncomfortably human disposition. This paltry being, formerly the egoistic *Severin*, now the constant *Gregor*, reaches an undesired point of utter fatigue. Having forgone himself to servitude and been rewarded in the exercise of the most ardent and treacherous emotional and physical punishment, the subject reaches a point of existential despair. A wounded, beaten babe, they are lost. To ensure their own existence they desire escape, yet they cannot for this defies the direction and foundation of their being. Here, the Other is seen most lucidly by our diligent fellow, no longer protected by the lofty pedestal upon which they were once placed, they are seen in truth, as she who the subject feels an equal desire to ‘abominate and adore’ (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.256). The only escape, the only reprieve for the Subject lies in the false solace of death. And yet, theirs is a duty which is imposed ‘beyond the limits of being and its annihilation, beyond death’ (Levinas 2005, p.7). Allowing himself to slide into the ‘yellow waves’, of the Arno, the subject longing to be saved from his ‘sorry affair’, with Law finds no liberation, only the call of the Other. Alone, cradled by the waves, it is in this moment that the Other is seen in the world, hovering above him, kissed by the sun. She smiles and, in this image, the subject once again is called back to his beloved. The river, the sun, the muddy waters all reaffirm the duty of the subject. The Law of the Other is to not only serve, it is to endure in servitude. The alleviation of pain found in escaping the ethical bind of Law is trivial when compared to that which is lost in abandoning the Other. In a world thematized by the Other, a world adorned with meaning and purpose by the Other, the question of departing such an existence seems cruel. Law chastises and mocks the subject for entertaining these comical notions:

“So you do not want to go?”

"I cannot." (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.257, own emphasis)

The subject must persist, smothered by Law.

1.5. Conclusion

Fantastically abstract and indulgently personal, the Neo-Levinasian perspective of exteriority as Law I have outlined within this formative chapter embodies the paradoxical nature of Levinas's ethics. Conceived of in a literary fashion, the theory is most found at home in application within the ecological discussions of Levinas's work. It is here that the question of the extension of the ethical beyond the face of the Other has been most contentious, as to successfully open the subject to greater alterity would exhibit substantive ethical ramifications, positioning the formerly humanistic subject as an ecological entity. One which appreciates the 'complex network of relations with other beings, both human and more-than-human' (Calarco 2019, p.77). Whilst the position presented does not express this intention, harbouring no desire to remedy the disproportionate esteem of the human figure, the reading of exteriority as Law does invite such discussions. Read from an ecological perspective, the subject's exposure to exteriority as Law could be presented as the human 'guilt', felt before the crumbling inferno of the anthropocene. The insatiable desire to remedy the violence of the human subject's act so that the Other may endure. For while this reading maintains a distinctly human character, relishing in this to a tremendous degree, I willingly concede that how this ethical need is to be interpreted and acted upon itself remains unclear and open to interpretation, as seen in the various ecological readings of the Other mentioned above and elsewhere.

Conversely, maintaining the primacy of the Other, as this reading does, necessitates the primacy of the 'Human'. As a result, this reading does not engage with the environmentally inclined question of 'who or what can be included in the face-to-face' (Boothroyd 2018, p.774), as the only Other is the beloved Other of our Masochian inclination. However, this need not remove such a reading from discussion, as the maintenance of the Cartesian duality to many is still a necessity. The posthuman is '*not* post-power' (Braidotti 2016, p.21), and what is made clear in this theory above all is the power of the ethical relation. The responsibility felt as legal impetus by the subject regardless of where it is to be found. An ethical theory predicated upon language and the interhuman relation will always maintain a power dynamic with the non-human which may be distasteful to the modern ethical palette, as it presents the human as 'outside' (Atterton

2018, p.724) the natural order, this distance though is perhaps misread. The distinction of the human-nonhuman expresses not the lofty altitude of transcendent human ontology, but the depths of the insatiable pit of despair which is to be human. The human subject gazes upon the *conatus* with ideas of envy, the master of its own being, as they are cursed to live devoid of reason, devoid of egoism, as little more than a 'pitiful amateur', a 'fool', a 'miserable slave' (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p.206), bound by Law.

Interlude 1: The Absence of the Other

I turn, restlessly to face the shame which is her side of the bed.
 Which was her side of the bed.
 The coldness of her absence confirms my failings.

I reach out to where she used to lay,
 where I would hold and embrace her,
 where she would kiss me gently,
 Playfully,
 Joyfully,
 where we would make love and talk of the future,
 of the family that we would make,
 of the life that we would share,
 where I would end each day tenderly saying to her;
 'Sleep well, for you are loved'.

The sharpness of this emptiness shocks my wasted warmth.

Extending my gaze to the room,
 shadows permeate through me,
 reminding me of the home that is lost.

Her piles of clothes,
 ever infuriatingly impeding any efforts to move about the space,
 sprawling about your ankles whenever you opened the door;
 her absurd collection of shoes clumsily toppling over any spare patch of carpet;
 her childish books occupying pride of place;
 are all felt in their absence.

The barren patches littering *my* room,
 spectres which appear to open up endlessly,
 assaulting me with what once was there;
 who once was there;
 each naked inch expressing the chasmous depths of my mind and heart which desperately yearn
 to be beset by these trivial matters once more;
 Wishing to wake from this horrible dream;
 Desperate for one more chance;
 All it takes is one more chance;
 I promise.
 I promise this time will be different.

The silence continues.

Dragging myself from the darkness,
 I climb pitifully from the prison of our bed and resolve to escape the symphony of memories
 and pain which reverberates around this space.

Even in *my* wardrobe I can find the traces of her and her affection.
 My clothes are tainted angelically by her scent;
 Clinging desperately to her, unable to let go;
 Memories flash of euphoric delight,
 times spent together, photos - perhaps the cruellest invention - conveying a plastic dream,
 distorting the indelicate truth of the past;
 Items she bought,
 items she wore,
 items she hated;
 suddenly tokens of the relationship,
 haunting me in their newfound monotony.

I stumble down the dim stairs;
 the light doesn't work anymore;
 I stop and scan the still, living room;
 Everything that was hers she took;
 Everything she wanted she took;
 I remain;
 in the dark.

I find myself in the courtyard;
 Pacing manically down the backstreets of *her* city;
 I cannot escape her;
 I cannot find her.

She is everywhere;
 Whispering to me in every alleyway;
 Leaping out at me in every corner;
 The desolate streets sing of her;
 Of our love;
 Of what was;
 Of what could have been;
 Of what no longer is;
 Of what will never be.

I don't know where to go;
 I don't know how to be free of this;
 I don't want to be free of this.

In the agony of each empty street;
 accompanying the sobering silence I find;

there is a foolish rush of hope striking at my soul;
 Daring me to believe;
 Perhaps;
 Maybe?

Only love could overcome this.
 Only love could endure this.
 Only *you* would abide in this.

A lost fool, I know not what I want;
 Praying for solace, for the absence of this torment;
 Yet unwilling to let go of my love;
 Pleading at fate to redeem me and give meaning to my suffering;
 Begging for her hand to find its way delicately back into mine.

I find myself at the docks;
 I always find myself here.
 The gentle waves of the waters seem to beckon me;
 The still;
 The peace;
 The quiet;
 The water opens itself to me;
 But I am unable;
 Unwilling to surrender.

I have nothing to surrender;
 Who I am is by virtue of what she made me;
 I was hers;
 She saw me;
 She found me.

She was my reason;
 She brought me here;
 She made life make sense;
 She made life colourful and musical;
 She was the best part of me.

I don't know how to be without her.
 I don't know who to be.

I fear this is me now,
 A discarded shell of a person,
 Waiting to be found,
 Waiting for love to breathe life into me,
 Waiting for her to come back to me.

2. Eros against Law: Levinas and Erotic Interiority in *Don Juan of Kolomea*

“Because of an excess of love I turned away from her, and she yearned for revenge because of her passionate, rejected love.” (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.58)

“But nature has given us a sorrow that’s more horrifying than life - love.” (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.43)

Romantic love or, more appropriately Eros, occupies a fascinating space within Levinas’s texts. Given that the ethical doctrine of Levinas is presented in the most extreme, absolute and poetic prose, one could easily mistake that which is patently ethical for that which details that madness of the romantic or the agony of Eros. Levinas’s ethics, though metaphysical in its foundation, culminates in a potently fantastical phenomenological theory which inverts the ethical into the ontological. The wonder of alterity, the allure of the Other, beguiles and contorts the ethical subject into a state of unrivalled subjugation. To be, is by definition, to be ‘for the other’ (Levinas 1999, p.114), the self is lost to their ethical ‘insomnia’ (Oliver 2012, p.119), they embody and revel in the torment of utter devotion, uncompromising ‘asymmetry’ (Levinas 1969, p.53), and maniacal servitude. It is a theory befitting of martyrs. A call to alterity which consumes absolutely and does not relent, which persists ‘beyond death’ (Levinas 2005, p.7). Upon reflection, is such a theory not more comfortable adorning the pages of *Werther’s* troubled diary entries, or any other indulgently romantic protagonist than the often coldly rationalistic ledgers of ethical formulations? If to *be* is to be overwhelmed by the guilt which compels ethical actions, what then is it to be *in* love, what then is *Eros*?

It is this question of what Eros is when juxtaposed with the ethical which will be addressed presently. For while Levinas does explicitly detail a theory of Eros in conjunction with his ethical work, as will be considered, the tension which underlies the two is perhaps not appropriately addressed within his forays into the erotic in *Time and the Other*, and more famously in *Totality and Infinity*. The theories presented explicate the distance which stands between the ethical and the erotic and do so often in varying and intriguing ways. This itself is indicative of the manner in which Levinas’s views on the subject of the erotic evolved over time. Culminating in love descending from the transcendent expression of possibility manifest in Eros, to the more ethical, Abrahamic variant which he espoused in his later works. It was in these latter writings, *Entre Nous*, *Otherwise than Being*, that the focus is drawn away from the conflict between ethics and eros, to the more palatable expression of ‘love without Eros’ (Levinas 2017, p.91), which is how he

came to ultimately express his ethics. Even in this most placid expression of the ethical, the erotic is distinguished, divulging the ever-present tension which exists throughout Levinas's work in the sordid spectre of Eros. For if it is ethics which surpasses ontology, which goes 'beyond' being, it is Eros, which goes 'beyond' ethics (Levinas 1969, p.264).

The potent enigma which Eros presents is most candidly expressed by Levinas, not in the theoretical texts which espouse it in detail and will to a large degree frame this chapter, but in the fascinatingly fleeting foray into literature he made in the privacy of his study. Unpublished, Levinas's text, aptly titled *Eros*, or at least the textbook within which it is contained is, speaks loudly to the friction which Levinas only alludes to elsewhere. Most powerfully portrayed in the indelicate scene where the ever-evolving protagonist feels the raw surge of erotic desire overcome them in a shelter they share with a young woman. Though they do not act on this potent impulse, in this visceral moment, ethics, reason, language are all lost momentarily. All that persists is Eros. And, within Eros, as the text expresses plainly: 'everything is permitted' (Cohen-Levinas & Nancy 2020, p.40). This unsettlingly powerful passage articulates clearly not only the clash between ethics and Eros within the heart of Levinas, as Hand (2019, p.532) observes, it also speaks of that between literature and philosophy itself. Constrained by the pedantic, laws of ethical and phenomenological philosophy, Eros is only ever presented in the most diluted and savoury of iterations. Against millennia of ethical hegemony, Eros in modern discourse is often, by necessity, presented as a variant of the ethical. Or else it risks being condemned, rejected and vilified for daring to be something outside of ethics, something which cannot be reduced to the hedonic sums of ethical reasoning nor logical orders of language. Eros as 'beyond' ethics, outside of the smothering constraints of normativity, stands vigilant in its opposition to Law, the imposing assemblage of language and reason. Law, its affiliates and precursors are of exteriority, the metaphysical and rational offspring of sociality. Eros, conversely, rests in the dark, feral cavities of the mind. It is the unconsidered, unreasonable, inconvenient grasp of interiority and must therefore be considered in such abstract terms. To do so successfully, one must abandon one's allegiances to the philosophical and be willing to embrace the liberty found in literature, where love, Eros and subjectivity all blur into the messy expressions of existence; *oughts* and *is* lost to what is experienced and felt.

In Literature, love is afforded the grace to be many things. Its individuality granted the scope for unencumbered articulation outside of the fields and purviews of cold morality and prejudicial judgment. Love may even be 'bad', or 'wrong', heaven forbid we entertain such notions (Fuchs

2008). Yet, Levinas himself so seldom embraces the freedom afforded by fiction within his texts. He stays dotingly loyal to the bleak existentialism conveyed in Dostoevsky and as a result, such departures from the steadfastly theoretical are often ‘uninspiring and unradical’ (Hand 2019, p.530). To liberate Eros from ethics, we must similarly liberate Levinas from the confines of philosophy and afford the visceral and emotive language which decorates his pages, providing a stage upon which they are reasoned, felt and performed. Pursuant to expressing such failings, various authors of note preceding this text have attained fascinating insights within the engagement of Levinas through literature, though not expressly driven by this ambition. This has particularly served to elucidate the potency of insatiable desire (Ellis 2013), which drives both his ethical and erotic theories, though such commentary may be a consequence of my own narrow scope of interest. It is in returning to the example of one such theorist, Kantor, as mentioned in the previous chapter which I believe serves as the most fruitful avenue from which to explore, and imbue with the requisite sensibility, Levinas’s Eros. As it is Kantor, who asserts boldly, that ‘there is no other way to read Levinas than with Sacher-Masoch’ (Kantor 1999, p. 371). Indeed, in assuming this position, of Levinas through Sacher-Masoch, Levinas’s subject and Eros emerge drenched in the emotive perspiration of corporality. The erotic tendencies of the ethical relation of dotting asymmetry are manifest in the anxiety ridden, bated breaths of the Masochian protagonist. Abstraction is brought to life, the metaphysical made primal.

As detailed formerly, adopting Kantor’s Masochian turn culminates with sociality as the inescapable consequence of the metaphysical, not merely the expression of the ethical but as ‘Law’ (Kantor 1999). The Other as Law is felt in all sociality as the extrapolation of the marvellously potent metaphysical relation. Wondrous and asphyxiating alterity, as ethics, as Law is laced with Masochistic traces of eroticism. Pleasure and pain are spoken into even the most trite of interhuman dialogues as they allude to the absolute Other. As this chapter reiterates, reading Levinas with Sacher-Masoch presents the ethical in such an uncomfortably intuitive light, echoing the agonizing evangelism of the Masochistic lover. However, for present purposes this framework invites an intriguingly sincere discourse with the Erotic. As the first sections of the chapter detail, approaching Levinas’s ethics from this Masochian perspective we reveal the tepid eroticism which lingers in the ethics of Levinas, revisiting and furthering Kantor’s reading infuses the purely Erotic, as opposed to the erotically ethical which he elucidates, with the seductive allure of ambiguity. This perspective offers a compelling narrative against which I latterly challenge the ethical impulses which reverberate through Levinas’s work on the Erotic, conceptualising a theory of Eros which refutes the beckons of the ethical. And culminates in my

critique of his claim that the erotic necessarily reverts to the ethical once the relation is accomplished in the problematic achievement of fecundity. As we will see through the analysis of Masoch's text, not every erotic soul may be salvaged in the ethical or fecundity. Some are irretrievably lost to their intoxicating interiority, to Eros.

2.1. 'Not-yet' Eros

Against the primacy of the Other as Law, the ethical impetus harboured within sociality, Eros arises cloaked in ambiguity, interrupting ethical subjectivity's pilgrimage to the Other. This Levinas concedes openly with the title of one of his essays on the topic, 'The Ambiguity of Love' (1969), overtly signalling the unique position Love/Eros is to hold against the ethical. This unclear position is presented by Levinas as a consequence of Eros's unique duality. Eros presents as both a relation with the Other and a relation which goes beyond the Other; ethical and other than ethical. In the beloved other the transcendent exteriority which founds and instils the metaphysical relation with alterity is still present. However, the relation is not consistent with a purely ethical relation to alterity, as the erotic relation does not present a new iteration of ethical subjugation. The relation with the Other evolves from this primary position of penitence in Eros, turning into that of an insatiable 'need' (Levinas 1969, pp.254-255) oriented toward and by the Other. This 'need' does not speak of a primal lust or primitive hunger to revel in the sexual ravaging of the beloved's flesh, it is of the satisfaction which is constantly, hopelessly to be sought in Eros. The insatiety of the ethical has been momentarily usurped by the more incumbent insatiety of the Erotic.

The need which founds Eros does not find placation, as the Other is positioned tantalisingly beyond the reach of satisfaction. This locus of the Erotic parties, the lover and the beloved is expressed beautifully in Levinas's conception of the 'caress' (1969, p.257). The caress is presented as the abstraction of the noble act of the lover endeavouring to embrace their beloved; to hold them and in so doing bring them into purviews of their reality, making them their own, a facet within the totality of their being. However, in the caress, it is not the Other which is seized, though the subject searches frantically for them, as they are in truth not *there* to be held. The Other evades this sweet suffocation. All the lover may clasp is '*nothing*' (Levinas 1969, p.257, own emphasis). Within the embrace of the caress, the Other 'ceaselessly escapes', slipping away constantly beyond the desperate grasps of the lover (Levinas 1969, p.257). Levinas attributes the

failings of the caress to the misidentification of its target. As ‘the caress aims at neither a person nor a thing’, but in truth is a naive effort to embrace ‘a future’ (1969, pp.257-258). Within this abstract dream of possibility which the caress swats at, the Other dissipates before them, lost. As even they in their majesty, cannot be depicted yet within the mists of possibility. Love, Eros, cannot be satisfied because it cannot be. It lingers diplomatically atop the boundaries of being and ‘not-yet-being’, within this unfathomable ‘no man’s land’ (Levinas 1969, p.259), outside of signification. Eros persists as a seductive ‘futural’ spectre (Katz 2001a, p.128), beyond concept, beyond form, beyond ‘the possible’ (Levinas 1969, p.261).

Levinas’s conception of Eros as toward an incessantly escaping future is furthered by his creative conceptualisation of the beloved Other as perpetually virginal (1969, p.258). This portrayal of the beloved as virginal, though undoubtedly a contributing aspect of his often-critiqued portrayal of the feminine, which will be critiqued thoroughly in subsequent chapters, is not intended to explicitly reference that which is crudely carnal. In accord with the expression of the incapacity of the caress expressed, this conception of the Other as virginal is not a depraved means by which to facilitate the profanely arcane ideal of the chaste beloved, it is offered as a profane, flirtatious metaphor. Consequently, the Other as virginal is an expression of the incorruptible infinite possibility which Eros expresses. This position is most clearly elucidated when coupled with Levinas’s discussions of voluptuosity within Eros. Within voluptuosity, the carnal enjoyment of the Other, the Other is not possessed and used. Alternatively, they are present within the voluptuosity of the subject themselves. The relation with the Other is revealed as that of a ‘self-seduction’ (Boothroyd 1995, p.351), as the subject may only ever assume possession of the Other to the extent that they too are possessed. One must surrender themselves to the Other to attain enjoyment of the Other within voluptuosity. This dynamic, loudly echoes that of the masochistic tendencies of the erotic, as in voluptuosity, the subject is both ‘slave and master’ (Levinas 1969, p.265). Voluptuosity consequently is not aimed at the Other but at the subject’s own voluptuosity instead, ‘it is voluptuosity of voluptuosity, love of the love of the other’ (Levinas 1969, p. 265). Voluptuosity is thus entrenched in mutuality and reciprocity as an expression of the duality and synchrony felt within the Erotic relation. At no point does Eros approach possession in voluptuosity, in enjoying the Other, as the subject is in fact enjoying themselves. The erotic other enjoyed is simultaneously both them and separate from them, an alterity encountered through the corpus of the Self (Levinas 1969, p.265). Accordingly, within voluptuosity, the beloved escapes their salacious grasps once more, dissipating into an entity of pure possibility. Consequently, the ungraspable beloved, remains intact, unblemished by

voluptuosity. They endure as 'virginal', beyond the enjoyment of an object nor the ethical compulsion of the face, they abide 'in virginity', withdrawing beyond comprehension into a future beyond anticipation, beyond the 'beloved' themselves (Levinas 1969, p.254-255).

Contravening the absolute terms of the ethical relation, the smothering burden imposed upon the subject through sociality, Eros emerges as a welcome reprieve which escapes the burden of signification. Yet, the Other as ethical signification, as Law, has not disappeared within Eros, it is merely 'concealed in the erotic' (Katz 2001a, p.127). The irrepressible intimacy of the relation kindly averts the subject's gaze from the history of atrocities which haunts and condemns each bated breath they expire, toward the solace borne in the irrational mysticism of the future. This overt juxtaposition with the ethical, though, is not for Levinas a cause for concern as the erotic is underpinned by the moralistic reciprocity which maintains the relationship. Within the mutuality of 'pleasure and dual egoism', (Levinas 1969, p.266) within Eros, whereby both parties simultaneously enjoy the roles of slave and master, Levinas presents the subject's love as contingent upon the love of the Other. Eros thus conveniently operates in a delicate contractual synchrony between the lover and the beloved: 'I love fully only if the Other loves me, not because I need the recognition of the Other, but because my voluptuosity delights in his voluptuosity' (Levinas 1969, p.265). By asserting that Eros is by necessity achieved in reciprocity, Levinas hopes to marry the oft competing dualities of love - the fantastical compulsion of the romantic, with the moralistic tendencies of a 'good', Abrahamic love, sealed in the accomplishment of fecundity. No matter how great the distance beyond the beloved the lover is lured by Eros, it is always to be remedied by the knowledge that the beloved is thrust by a similar, if indiscernible, movement and that their paths should unite in the shared love which they will inevitably hold for their offspring. Fecundity acting as the uniting product of their stray loves.

The apparent unicity of the lovers, however, stands defiantly at odds with the inexpressible interiority of Eros Levinas coyly alludes to. Plainly, the desire of Levinas to present Eros as simultaneously beyond and with the beloved is a troubling notion which appears to expose inconsistencies within this conception of the Erotic. Even the most fleeting perusal of the above passage begins to portray the erotic subject as a narcissistic lover who entertains reciprocity on fairly selfish, legalistic and economic terms. What could be less romantic? The love of the beloved sought only to the extent that it serves to further their own erotic jouissance, hardly the most sincere of relations: *Love me so that I may better love myself?* It is this initial discrepancy, which

I further within the succeeding sections of this chapter in challenging the idealistic ethical locus of Levinas's Eros upon reciprocity. Within this and similar such explorations of the interiority of Eros, one can start to explicate Eros as no longer contingent upon the beloved, no longer an ambiguous companion to the ethical and normative constraints of sociality, but instead as a solipsistic vessel for fantastical possibility which may persist beyond regard for the received affection of the beloved. This is the inverted tragedy of Eros, that for all the lover's endeavours, their beloved is beyond them. Returning to Masoch's texts to flesh out the experience of the Levinasian subject I argue we may reveal a dire situation. As it is my contention, which I offer below, that we must present a theory of Eros capable of conceiving of the subject lost to their passion, not merely the moralistic parties of reciprocity. We must similarly give a voice to the indulgent idolising's of the archetypal romantic soul, of the lover that is always, inescapably alone, toying with the fantasies which abound within their unrelenting interiority. The subject who loses themselves to their love.

2.2. Erotic Interiority in Kolomea

"A woman that I love scares me. I tremble when she suddenly walks through the room and her clothing rustles. A movement that surprises me scares me." (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.43)

It is only through arguing for the solitude and interiority of the subject within Eros, I believe we can truly appreciate both the potency of the erotic and importance of the ethical as the competing forces which tear at our beleaguered subject's being. Separating Eros from the ethical, the lover from their beloved, the juxtaposition which presents details the truly torturous nature of Eros. An Eros which subjugates the lover into a labyrinth of constant self-flagellation. Outside of the rationality, reason and structure which dictates sociality, Eros takes hold, dragging the doting subject into the fantastically dark depths of interiority. This descent, though, is not charted within the confines of the disinterestedly philosophical parlance. As with Kantor's emotive portrayal of the Other as Law, this discussion is to be supplemented by reference to the unrivalled sentimentality of Sacher-Masoch's texts. Reading Levinas through Masoch, in this instance facilitates our resolve to better intuit the reality of the subject's plight and in so doing understand the toxicity which coats the Erotic fantasy. Within literature, the subject is similarly removed from the 'Law', of rationality imposed upon them by the suffocating rigidity of their theoretical discourse, and may breathe, copulate and expire in earnest irrationality. Unlike

Kantor's reading of Levinas with Masoch (1999), which does so explicitly through his most famed text, '*Venus in Furs*', within this chapter I will instead reference the less discussed, equally powerful and more tragic tale of, '*Don Juan of Kolomea*', exploring within this section how approaching Levinasian subjectivity through Masoch's text invigorates and challenges any necessarily moralistic conception of Eros.

Similarly emotive and chauvinistic in its commitment to espousing the singular narrative of its protagonist, this text serves as a more appropriate accompaniment for present purposes than the intense brevity of discourse contained within *Venus in Furs*. First published in 1866, four years prior to that of *Venus in Furs* in 1870, *Don Juan of Kolomea* presents an at times uncomfortably honest articulation of Sacher-Masoch's discontent tangles with the Erotic. What we now know of the man himself serves to instil a depth of sincerity within a text which may otherwise have been dismissed as adolescent in its formulations of love and relationships purportedly thereof. For it was Leopold himself who was to one day marry and have a family with she who engaged with his theatrical fantasies. Angelika Aurora Rumelin, Wanda Von Sacher-Masoch through marriage, having piqued his interest by penning letters to him adopting the pseudonym of his most famed and fantastical expression of erotic alterity, *Wanda* (Venus). Though, as is foretold ominously in *Kolomea*, this was not enough to satiate Leopold. As in time, neither his marriage nor children were enough to placate his fervent lust for erotic alterity. Taking mistress after mistress, chasing the supersensualist dream of his creation, his Pygmalion *Wanda*, he lost the love(s) he once had. Furthermore, the bestowing of his own child with the name of *Kolomea's* protagonist, whilst possessing full knowledge of the commentary the text provides on a father's relation to children as adversarial to love is hard to read as something more than the plain articulation of a resent he held for his own progeny and the innocent imposition they made upon his own obsessive pursuit of Eros.

Kolomea, as a text exhibits all the emotive dramatism one would expect of a Masochean text, relishing in the well-versed themes of Erotic subjugation and Masochistic pleasure, it goes one step further than its precursor. Unlike *Venus in Furs*, the relationship of its protagonists, *Demetrius* and *Nikolaya*, is not afforded the welcome reprieve of demise. Instead, Eros and the text's author decrees that the once enamoured lovers must persist, bound by the sociality of marriage and their own affections. They must endure the conflict which slowly materialises against and through the tortured fallacy of Erotic intersubjectivity. Presented entirely from the sincerely narcissistic perspective of *Demetrius*, we follow his descent into the helpless depths of Eros,

which, bastardised by its incapacity to accommodate the normative strains of sociality, its inability to attain and understand the beloved, descends into a debased exercise in extramarital vanity. Unable to reach his beloved, he repeatedly searches for the wonders of Erotic alterity in every being which alludes to the majesty of the love he cannot satisfy in her. His commitment to Eros serves only to corrupt and reduce him to an egoistic servant of his own twisted interiority, the *Don Juan of Kolomea*. Consequently, *Don Juan of Kolomea's* tale extends beyond the foundationally Masochean and Levinasian, detailed in Kantor's adoption of the Other as Law, and can be read as detailing the fatal ramifications of interiority as Eros. Within this cursory accompaniment, we may elucidate the isolating and adversarial qualities of Eros as it flagrantly clashes against the normative confines of sociality, distancing the lover from the bonds of the Other as Law until, inevitably, the lover's Eros clashes violently against exteriority, ethics and most poignantly the beloved themselves.

The first, most tentative step Eros takes towards utter interiority is in the isolation of the Erotic parties from sociality. Against the convulsing mass of exteriority, the lovers 'withdraw' into seemingly serene solitude. In search of a quiet alcove in which the lovers may freely exchange tokens of affection, the erotic relation distances itself from the general noise of the masses expressing a unique, intimate society, 'a society of two' (Levinas 2017, p.18). Withdrawing from society, the Erotic asserts primacy over the ethical. Eros presents the lover with a fantastical world populated only by their beloved. Within this erotic space the echoes of the beloved's voice and the warmth of their touch hang in the air and whistle gaily on the wind. In a similar vein to Merleau-Ponty's (2013) conceptions of Eros, the world presented to the lover is mediated by the beloved, denoting once more the potent asymmetry of the ever-present metaphysical relation to alterity. However, unlike the universalizability of the social relation, the intimate refutes any notions of extrapolation, it is not to be replicated. Unlike Law, there is no universality to be found in this conception of Love.

Mesmerised by the individualistic character of Eros, the lovers exist as though they were truly 'alone in the world' (Levinas 1969, p.17). This retirement of the Erotic subjects toward intimate isolation is reflected broadly in *Kolomea* by the protagonists cohabiting in their marital home. Articulated so innocuously in this act of domesticity, the intimate society of the lovers expresses their 'dual solitude' (Levinas 1969, p.264), for they have removed themselves from the noisy exertion of the Other as Law: the prying eyes and shrill whispers of the public and family alike who resolve to interfere and impede Eros' flourishing. Consequently, the movement toward

erotic isolation, stands as the defiant ‘negation’ of the social relation (Levinas 2017, p.17). The intimate society marks a withdrawal from exteriority and more broadly the value system imposed therein. The ethical is refuted by the society of two so that in its stead the Erotic may thrive unencumbered. Here, the lunacy of Eros, erotic asymmetry, anti-ethical subjugation, is free to dramatically manifest. Alone with their beloved, the lover faces alterity in a new, similarly absolute light. The absence of exteriority, denoting the intimate proximity of the beloved.

The intimate society which exhibits the formal unity of lovers is, however, fraught with challenges which undermine this formulation and allude to its illusory nature. Yet, for this intimate society to earnestly express the erotic sincerity of the lovers which it binds, the lovers must have the capacity to articulate their erotic intersubjectivity. There must be a voice to each lover to ensure that the reciprocity of the relation is safeguarded by the mutual, dual erotic desires of the society’s participants. Within the ethical, the capacity to speak, is a foundational aspect of the societal relation. As it is in language, the Other is approached, to speak to the Other is ‘to understand’ them, to comprehend the wonders of their alterity and to intuitively take this into account. Language awakens in the subject what they and the other ‘have in common’, whilst also affording the scope for alterity and duality to arise (Levinas 2017, p.5). As a result, speech marks the constant refutation of a simplistic, egoistic existence. It arises as the ‘condition’, of existing in ethical subjectivity, ‘beyond’, the reductive being of conatus (Levinas 2017, pp.5-6). Furthermore, the capacity to speak is ‘inseparable from expression’, (Levinas 2017, p.6) it affords the subject the means by which to assert themselves, in ethical subjugation, upon the world - the character of the subject is accordingly born in language. And it is the condition of this character that it exists within a world abounding in language, in which language exists as the manifestation of the ethical ‘reason’ (Levinas 2017, p.22). The connection the subject holds to the Other, their expression of Self, and the world within which they act rests solely upon the foundation of language. Plainly, as is oft quoted and unavoidably repeated, language and speech are central to Levinasian intersubjectivity (e.g. Petrilli 2022; Crowe 2022), nevertheless, Eros is not Ethics and we must confront that which is *‘more horrifying than life - love’* (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.43). Beyond the ethical life, the importance of language which has been made evident, is swiftly abandoned.

Intriguingly, within the intimate society of Eros, Levinas asserts that there is no language. Existing, persisting beyond the ‘face’, the erotic relation cannot be ground within the realm of language. The Erotic Other expressed, somewhat problematically, from Levinas’s own ‘honest’

heteronormative position (Sandford 1998, p.12) as that of ‘the feminine’, is presented ‘without signification and thus without language, the source of all signification’ (Levinas 1969, p.257). Though this may initially seem alarming, given the tremendous weight, which is placed upon the importance of language, by existing outside of the confines of signification, Eros is permitted the freedom to play beyond ethics. It is not bound by the ethical order of the Other which is heard in every utterance of language and found in the world it offers; it may brazenly *be Other than ethical*. Free from the cast-iron shackles of linguistic, ethical subjectivity, Eros is uninhibited as it must be. Eros revels in such inarticulate, absurd abstraction. It *must* be beyond language - for how could one allow themselves to fall into the maddening abyss of Eros if one possessed the wherewithal to intuit their descent. Even within the confines of romantic poetry, it persists as a performative metaphor. That which verse after verse, poet after poet, will still slip beyond complete expression. Appropriately, it is not best defined as sentiment, nor a desire. It is an experience. And this, for the moment at least, is not necessarily a critique of Eros, but instead the only means for appreciating its magnificent capacity to enthrall, enchant and corrupt any poor soul lucky enough to feel the overflowing surge of Eros within them.

This sentiment is neatly contained within *Kolomea* by a salacious, laconic note left for *Demetrius*, educating him on the many failings of love which states:

‘if you wrote your love down on paper, you weren’t in love.’ (Sacher-Masoch 2003, p.42)

This summarises the unique position of Eros with regards to language in convenient brevity by patently distancing the world of language and the ‘sensible’ experience of Eros (Cohen-Levinas & Nancy 2020, p.40). An Eros not contained to paper, is bestowed with the reverence requisite to maintain its irrational form. Any foray into language necessitates the incorporation of ethical considerations and the rigidity of reason which speaks them into being and in so doing is a departure from Eros. One cannot understate the emphasis upon this and the distance which it alludes to from the ethical to the Erotic. As for Eros to be this wondrous, formless deity, this ‘Venus’ which when gazed upon collapses us all into pitiful servitude, it *must* be without hindrance, without limits, ‘without reason’ (Levinas 1987, pp.88-89). Here, outside of signification, Love as in Literature is free to exist without reproach, allowing us to entertain the unsavoury reality of that love which fails to be ‘good’, of the ‘bad’ loves which take hold just as sincerely only to reveal themselves in the cold solemn rationality of hindsight. Here love can ‘invade’ and ‘wound us’, (Levinas 1987, pp.88-89) irreparably, and the lover will do nothing other than express gratitude for their gaping afflictions. No matter how ‘impoverished’ the love is (Fuchs 2008, p.50), it will only ever present itself to the dear lover as pure, chaste and beyond

reproach. A 'virginal' vessel of wonder, untainted by the smothering exchanges of sociality, refusing normative signification. So beautiful, so majestic, and so bloody terrifying.

The explicated marvels of Eros as beyond language, serve to both reveal its unrivalled potency and, in so doing, undermine the serene premise of the intimate society it purports to establish. For beyond language, beyond the beloved who longs faithfully to share in the intimate society, the intimate society shatters dramatically. There can be no such notions of equality, mutuality or reciprocity within Eros, as Prabhu similarly asserts, because 'the nature of the encounter there lies outside and beyond the protocols that can be assessed as mutual or equal' (2012, p.143). Accordingly, within the intimate society, there can be no 'exchange' of affection capable of amounting to reciprocity. The ideal of reciprocity which Levinas formerly asserted maintains the nobility of Eros, thus falls away, allowing for the temperamental solitude of Erotic subjectivity to be laid bare. Eros reveals itself as not the formalism of romantic unicity which Levinas had aspired to, conversely it is now recognisable as the singular interior narrative of the lover.

Without the means to express themselves the beloved's love is not articulated or spoken into being by them. It is instead revealed within the interiority of the lover's Erotic subjectivity. Lacking the capacity to communicate with their beloved, as that would plunge them once more into the vigilant waves of the ethical, the lover alternatively claims the beloved's affection as the appropriate vindication for their own love. It is an intuited means to justify their own irrational beliefs in Eros. This faith plays out as though the lover were a pious servant, seeing in all the mediums of the earth the divinity of their deity. Whether it be present or not is beyond concern. This is a troubling, recurrent theme within *Kolomea*, and frequently found in similar texts of the age which are visited throughout this thesis such as Prevost's *Manon Lescaut* and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Given that the singular narrative presented to the reader is that of the protagonist, the lover, in these instances, we would expect to be seduced ourselves by the love they receive and chase them with envy into the chasmous depths of which they all descend. Yet invariably this is not the case. We as readers are instead presented with the flagrant failings of Eros to account for its beloved. The 'beyond' of Eros refuting language, ethics and reason, enthusiastically facilitates the perversion that is romantic solipsism. The beloved, having been established as that being which is without rival and to whom the lover owes their whole world, is seldom noted as speaking of their own love. Consider this example from *Kolomea*, where *Demetrius*, still faithfully smitten with his beloved, discusses the affection she holds for him: "Nikolaya - loved me. With all her heart, believe me! I believed it at least" (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.35)

Neither *Nikolaya's* words, nor her actions are referenced when *Demetrius* desires to affirm the affection within which he is held. Instead, the interioristic fallacy of Eros is made most apparent within this short piece of dialogue. Without the means for expression, the beloved is mute within the intimate society.

All the lover, *Demetrius*, discerns is that which their Eros seeks out, the echoes of their own affection reverberating back at them with a sincerity not found in the beloved's arms. Painfully, throughout the text, *Demetrius* makes this fatal misrecognition of his own Eros for that of his beloved's. Retelling the tale of his fallen love, to his drinking partner of an evening and us the reader, repeatedly he smothers us with details of his unparalleled love for *Nikolaya* as measures for the affection he too received:

"A Goddess of a woman!" (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.35)

"I tell you I'm your slave, my soul belongs to you, I fall at your feet, I kiss your footprints" (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.31)

"I'm yours, your thing, your creature, do with me what you will, I'm yours, go ahead and laugh!" I really didn't think that she could wish for anything more." (Sacher-Masoch 2003, p.31)

These excerpts, the declarations which *Demetrius* wishfully believes are expressions of the wonders of his and *Nikolaya's* divine love, read more as barrages of emotional assault laid upon his voiceless beloved. Throughout *Demetrius's* narrative, *Nikolaya's* voice is hushed, drowned out by his evangelical preachings made in reverence to her. What *Nikolaya* as a character of her own merits wants, what she desires, what she needs from her beloved to satiate her, to allow her to stand as a person of her own worth beyond his affection, to love her, do not approach the horizons of *Demetrius's* narcissistic erotic concern and so entirely escape the narrative presented. All that is, is the wonder of his love for her, the majesty of his Eros. Yet, as Eros exists beyond language he cannot articulate the visceral experience of love, he is only capable of expressing the 'height', with which he holds his beloved over himself. Non-conformist, Eros is incapable of articulation beyond *Demetrius's* lust for subjugation. And this alone is the purview of his narrow perspective. Once more, Eros repeats the Masochian and Levinasian pattern of chasing itself, as the love sought, the love of the beloved, is nothing more than the re-imagining of the lover's own frantic affections. Returning to Levinas's writings on this matter, 'If to love is to love the Beloved bears me, to love is also to love oneself in love, and thus to return to oneself' (Levinas 1969, p.266). However, as has now been made clear, there is no departure from the Self within Eros. Love exhibits only the extension and return of the lover's own love. The lover and their

love lie together, alone. Within Eros, there is no scope for knowledge nor interpersonal understanding, only the fanatical commitment to the Erotic ideal. The hollow belief in romantic reciprocation only serves to ensure that the epistemic fallacy of Eros is not revealed to its host. The lover, as with naive *Demetrius*, is cursed to blissfully believe they share in the ‘society of love’ (Levinas 2017, p.18), when in reality, this is no ‘society of two’, only a bleak society of singular solitude, of the lover bound to their futural deity, Eros. A fatal ‘self-seduction’ (Boothroyd 1995, p.355).

Continuing this masturbatory incursion into the interiority of the lover, we arrive awash with expectation at the open eyes of the beloved. That famed port of romantic corruption. As discussed, abiding in virginity, the beloved is manifest as ‘beyond object and face and thus beyond the existent’ (Levinas 1969, p.258). The spectral bodiless vessel of possibility, which is the virginal Other, voiceless and chaste, exhibits the fluid ambiguity necessary to incite and tease every possible fantastical dream of Eros the lover could conjure. The beloved though, exists. Assuredly not as an existent, but invariably their presence is not to be refuted. The beloved before the lover is not an object, though they are voiceless, nor are they a Pygmalion work by the lover’s hand. Envisioned as a distant futural entity of incomprehensible possibility, the beloved exhibits the interioristic fallacy of Erotic alterity and is revered for it. They are ambiguity. The beloved is simultaneously present and absent, incapable of residing in the present, the realm and time of ethical acts and the shrill summons of sociality, they must abide in the future, where the idea of the ‘*not yet*’ (Levinas 1969, p.271), calls out to be grasped upon by the lover as they feverishly long for that which ‘*will be*’. Evidently, there is a paradoxical inconsistency within the temporality of the erotic relation: the lover is cursed to remain in the present whilst their ethereal beloved seductively waits for them in the time to come. Searching for consolation, it is in the eyes of their dear beloved that the lover finds a false solace.

Gazing dotingly upon their beloved, the lover longs desperately to discover and intuit the person before them. The lover naively hungers to comprehend the incomprehensible, to assume and engulf the magnificent alterity of their adored through knowledge. As such, against Erotic alterity, to look upon the lover is an act of ‘violation’ (Levinas 1969, p.260), it serves only to undermine and reveal the falsity of their beloved deity. Consequently, the lover is overcome, consumed by the ‘shame’ (Levinas 1969, p.260), of this blasphemous act and does not persist to gaze upon the inexpressible erotic nudity of the beloved. Ashamed, the lover still craves satisfaction for their insatiable Eros. It is in this moment of depraved hunger, that the lover turns

to the vast eyes of their beloved. The eyes serve to reveal no secrets, the nudity of the beloved persists as concealed, untainted by the lover. Reprieve for the lover is found as the eyes of the beloved provide means for the subject to once more spring forth from themselves and find 'itself the self of an other' (Levinas 1969, p.271). Painfully, this Masochian fallacy of Eros is once more present throughout *Demetrius'* clumsy dance with love in *Kolomea*. Given the text is presented detailing the wonders and woes of the erotic, and the already considered absence of *Nikolaya's* articulations of affection for *Demetrius*, it is all the more surprising that the description of *Demetrius'* antagonistic beloved is so fleeting. Her erotic alterity is never violated, she is inviolable, lying beyond description. However, what *Demetrius* cannot escape repeating to his interlocutor is the resplendence of his beloved's eyes:

"She made the best curtesy and when I raised my hand, she was all red and had eyes - what eyes!" (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.27)

"Her eyes were so big, so wide open - the whole world didn't seem as big to me - and so deep! They just pulled you in, and she asked me, with her eyes she asked me, her lips were trembling-" (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, pp.28-29)

'Pulled in' to the eyes of *Nikolaya*, *Demetrius* avoids the blasphemous act of profanation and is seduced nonetheless by what he finds. Searching for Eros, he finds it staring back at him. Hubristically mistaking his own reflection for that of a gaze of love. This is by no means to discard the sincere romantic affection that *Nikolaya* does hold for *Demetrius*, but this is not what he longs for nor finds. It is once more, his own Eros, that stares back at him, affirming his solitary machinations of the future, confirming the loneliness of his intimate society. Consequently, *Demetrius* does not approach understanding his isolated beloved, he persists beyond his gaze, an idea in the future, whilst *Nikolaya*, the poor soul upon which this idea was born persists in silenced solitude. The eyes of the beloved, cruelly facilitate the interioristic depths of Eros, once more smothering the romantic counterpart. It is this, the primacy of the solipsistic narcissism of the lover over their beloved which Masoch expresses like few others when he writes of love:

"You'd like to marry for eternity, for this world and the other. You'd like to flow into each other. You submerge your soul in the soul of another, you descend into the depths of a strange, inimical nature and receive your baptism. It's absurd, quite absurd that the two of you haven't always been together. You tremble every second with the fear of losing each other. You are scared when the other's eyes close or voice changes. You'd like to be just one creature. You'd like to tear all the characteristics, ideas, and sacred beliefs out of your very being in order to merge completely with the other. You surrender yourself - like a thing - like a substance. Make of me what you are!"

(Sacher-Masoch 2003 pp.43-44)

This poignant excerpt details the insecurity of Eros perniciously finding solace within the secure embrace of solipsism. Again, it is the eyes of the beloved which reveal the fallacy within. When the eyes of the beloved are closed, they cannot reflect back the Eros which gazes intensely upon them. Instead, the lover is left in that fleeting moment, with the insecurity which haunts the seconds without Eros' interioristic affirmation. It is in those brief failings of erotic self-seduction, that the lover is made abruptly aware of their erotic isolation. For as much as they long for Aristophanes' dream of erotic unity (Plato 2003), whence they cannot spring forth and find their love in the beloved, the Levinasian erotic departure, they are truly and desperately alone. The Levinasian sentiment of self-seduction expressed perfectly in Masoch's variation, 'Make of me what you are!' - *dominate me, abuse me, enslave me*, so that *I may be yours*, so that we may be 'one creature', and in so doing that my love for you may reveal yours for me. Unsurprisingly, this is precisely what Eros does to the doting, deaf lover; subjugates them and reduces them to little more than a fantastically romantic, solipsistic 'substance' of erotic intrasubjectivity.

It is here that the fallacy of Eros becomes undeniably apparent. As detailed thus by my analysis of Levinas within *Kolomea*, the lover is unknowingly torn, oscillating constantly between the nobility of their intent and the unconscionable narcissism which it manifests as. Eros as interiority, charts the corruption and descent of the lover until the act completely turns against itself. This is the destined 'tragedy' (Levinas 2017, p.3), the lover is charged with invariably fulfilling. Like Oedipus, they work towards their own inevitable misfortune, 'like an animal fleeing in a straight line across the snow before the sound of the hunters, thus leaving the very traces that will to its death' (Levinas 2017, p.3). Similarly, we have watched on in dread as the Levinasian lover plunges into the depths of interiority, incorrigibly pursuing their beloved, hoping and praying that in this unsignifiable space beyond ethics and Law, beyond even language, that they may find the appropriate means to worship and love their *Venus*. And yet, in so doing, all the lover does is descend ever more violently into the depths of their own Erotic subjectivity, as they are enthralled by their own love, seduced by their own passion. The lover searches ardently for Eros but lacks the wherewithal to discern the true source of that which they clumsily collapse in subjugation before. Put plainly by Kantz, the fallacy of love is that 'love cannot help but extend beyond itself' (Katz 2001a, p.128). The lover will always be reticent in ignorance before the beloved that incited this tragic course.

Eros in its belligerent departure from the self as a social, ethical human into the abstract realm of interiority, correspondingly distances the lover from their angelic, neglected beloved.

Voiceless they are not heard. Sublime, they are not seen, understood nor ever held in the kind embrace of intersubjectivity. Within interiority, the beloved only persists as an idea of that which may yet come into being, a diaphanous vessel of possibility. Though the Eros of the lover is given sincerely, that is of little consolation to their partner as this relation is not played out within the surreptitious falsity of the intimate society, but purely within the lonely crevasse of the lover's intrasubjectivity. Hence, the lover is cursed to always be alone in their forays with Eros. Living as an adored King, a romantic hero, a champion of love in the playground of their interiority; whilst in truth they are puerile, splashing about nude in the dirt, muddying and insulting the exasperated other whom they zealously profess to love. Contra the Other as beloved and the Other as Law. Without the means to communicate, nor co-ordinate their potent erotic impulses, the lovers are calamitously doomed. Destined only to become forsaken adversaries as each competing Eros, for the abstract idea of the future may never be shared, demands complete piety. Neither deity may be denied and so the lovers must endure in desolate servitude. Even if this incurs the demise of their farcical intimate society. This brutal confrontation of fealty to Eros against the beloved is exhibited in uncomfortable simplicity by *Demetrius*' following concise reflections upon his failing relationship with *Nikolaya* and their competing loves. Exhausted by her inability to reciprocate his unique Eros, aware of his incapacity to serve hers, he defeatedly observes:

"Because of an excess of love I turned away from her, and she yearned for revenge because of her passionate, rejected love." (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.58)

Regrettably, erotic interiority paves a singular, solemn path. The ineffable sublimity of Eros unsympathetically, ritualistically corrupting its unwavering congregants until they must surrender the Other, the beloved, so that their own rapacious Eros may persevere. Explicated throughout this discussion of the lover's uncompromising intrasubjectivity, the primacy of Eros issues an affront to the ethical doctrine of Levinas in its indulgent idolatry. So as not to undermine the potency of Eros, the subject's necessary return to the domain of ethical signification is presented by Levinas as the fruition of the erotic. As mentioned in passing in the preceding section, Eros is portrayed, rather arcanelly, as culminating in fecundity. With the birth of the child, the product of love, impelling the lover to resume the burden of ethical existence and open themselves up once more to the unpleasant, cacophonous chorus of exteriority as Law. We must therefore finally consider whether fecundity succeeds, as Levinas contends, in bridging the lovers return to ethical servitude, perhaps even to the successful resumption of the 'intimate society', with their beloved,

or if conversely, and catastrophically, they, *Demetrius*, are condemned to soar alone in the heavens of their intrasubjectivity. A forlorn, frayed kite lost, swept away in the indomitable force of Eros.

2.3. Fecundity: The Child as Law

“Well, Sir, what makes marriage so unhappy,” he asked and laid his hands on my shoulders as if he wanted to press me against his heart. “Just think, sir, it’s children.” (Sacher-Masoch 2003, p.26)

As noted, Levinas resolves to remedy the erotic dilemma through the child. Within his theory of Eros, that which profanation discovers beyond the face, is not the nudity of the beloved other, it is the child (Levinas 1969, p.267). Put plainly, the futural aspect of Eros is fecundity, the ‘future is the child’ (Katz 2007, p.38). The relation the lover holds with the child is distinct from that of their relations in sociality or love. The relation with the child is predicated upon fecundity, and through this relation the subject ‘establishes a relationship with the absolute future’ (Levinas 1969, p.268), that which was so enchanting within Eros. Though, unlike the erotic relationship which was demarcated by the lover’s solo voyage into interiority, the paternal relation beckons a return to the ethical domain through the child. The paternal relation, denoting the apparently innate masculinity of the Levinasian subject, is one which is held with a ‘stranger who while being Other [...] *is* me, a relation of the I with a self which yet is not me’ (Levinas 1969, p.277). Or, as Levinas declares concisely, the lover does not have a child; they are their child (Levinas 1969, p.277). The child manifests as the materialisation of the lover’s relation with the erotic intentionality, that which lay beyond the beloved, the possible, the ‘not-yet’, allowing the lover to return to themselves.

Eros culminating in the child, facilitates the erotic subject’s return to themselves, salvaging them from the descent into interiority. As the subject maintains a relationship with themselves through/as the child, they are now afforded the scope to return to the intimate society the lovers had resolved to construct. No longer indulging in the narcissistic realms of solipsism, the lover may now enjoy the erotic intentionality in unity with their beloved. The relationship between the lovers, through fecundity, is bestowed with the grace of Eros, as it maintains the futural ‘dimension’, through the child (Kaplan 1999, p.11). The child is a mass of futurity, extending and opening a relation for the erotic subject with the ‘not yet’, in the now. Kaplan surmises this new relation for the lovers arriving through the child, as one which ‘endlessly draws them together, a

relationship that has a future' (1999, p.12). The child, for Levinas at least, is the panacea to the ills of erotic interiority, re-structuring and re-uniting the disparate lovers through a shared focality found in fecundity. The incommunicable adversarial character of Eros is undone, 'resolved' (Mensch 2014, p.102), by the material corpus of the child which endeavours to align the lovers' paths in serene unicity once more.

More than simply a return to the beloved's embrace, fecundity too denotes the return to the ethical burden of sociality. The return to the ethical is imposed upon the subject through their shared identity with the child. Existing as an exterior iteration of the paternal lover, the child exposes the lover, through themselves, to alterity (Levinas 1969, p.279). The love of the erotic subject for their spawn forges the unique, distinct character of the child as such a relation can only be born in alterity. The alterity of the child is engendered through the paternal love they receive. Yet, in extending beyond the self of the lover, this instils in them a sense of fraternity, as in the child who is them, they recognise both an other and an equal, a relation which can be extended from the familial to the fraternal as all fathers and sons, all those who exhibit and exercise in fecundity bear similar traces. All are 'unique and non-unique', idiosyncratic products of love which must co-exist in the ethical world as 'brother among brothers' (Levinas 1969, p.279). The 'stranger', that is the child, reawakens the subject to the signification awaiting in alterity beyond the erotic society.

Adopting the Masochian reading of Levinas, this then presents the child as a tangible body of Law. Through the paternal embrace of the child, the lover is seen to be shed of their immature notions of indulgent interiority. The child as Law binds them to their beloved and, through the child, to the social relation beyond whence the child must exist. Fecundity, as Levinas presents it, is salvation from the dire straits of Eros, forcing the erotic fantasy to collapse against itself as in its action, the voluptuous, signification awaits. The child exhibits all the proud traits of the erotic, an apparition of the self beyond the self, a self which can access a future the subject can only dream of. The love of the self which impelled Eros is that which conspiratorially enacts its downfall, as to the love the self of the child tears the subject from the interiority. Rudely thrusting them back into the noisy grips of sociality, the unending tinnitus of the Other as Law. This reading of Eros limits its potency to that of a lover's misguided discursion. The foray into the erotic, limited by the inevitable return to the ethical which awaits in the accomplishment of voluptuousness. This does afford Levinas the scope to write as poetically as he does on the sordid, damp cavities of interiority. These flamboyantly permissive excursions into Eros are limited,

constrained, destined to always be conveniently resolved by the lover's potency in fecundity. Would that it were so simple. To claim with confidence, that the depths of Eros may be resolved inevitably and peacefully by this masculine conception of fecundity, does ensure that Levinas's ethical doctrine maintains its primacy in the face of a feral assault, it nevertheless fails to recognise the potency and irrepressible call of Eros upon the lover. Eros may indeed meet its own fated end in its product, but this is something which cannot and must not be taken for granted. One must not underestimate the mercurial charm which abounds within the lover's intrasubjectivity. It would be a compelling point of serendipitous fortune were fecundity to similarly instigate the return to the ethical for our astray lover *Demetrius*. Heartrendingly, his fatal fall into Eros brazenly challenges the inevitability of fecundity's ethical summons as he lingers, desolate on the periphery. Conclusively turning to *Kolomea* for one final glimpse upon the gut-wrench convulsions of literary romance, we find our blindly naive protagonist alone with Eros, against both his beloved and the manifestation of their love, their child.

Demetrius' relation with Eros prior to the birth of his child had succeeded in distancing him from both his beloved and the legalistic confines of sociality. Existing beyond such concerns, he revels in the mysticism of his erotic interiority. The lovers together, allowing their diverging paths of Eros to maintain their distinct yet mutual besottment. Before the child arrives, both are secure in the sincerity of their own affections for the other and of that which they are in receipt of, found in the smitten eyes of the lover who reflects back at them their own intense sentiments. Though they embody an adversarial stance, defiantly contesting that their deity is the only true future, that their own Eros must succeed, the conflicting Eros' do not draw blood. They maintain a state of passivity, bound by the promise of fecundity, the shared future these two idols may forge, uniting the lovers. Indeed, even within the oft melodramatic narrative of *Demetrius*, initially the arrival of the child weds the lovers in unicity. *Demetrius* accepts the invitation to form the intimate society in earnest, to return once more from the cavernous spaces of his mind to sociality, presented to him by *Nikolaya*:

I rode into Kolomea for the doctor, and when I returned, she was holding the child out toward me. (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.42)

The formalism of the departure from Eros is explicit in the offering of the child. *Demetrius* must embrace the paternal call, hold his child, and see his wife as more than just the beloved icon of his heart, she is now a mother also. He too is a father, cradling an extension of himself which will unite and reintegrate the lovers back into the ethical world beyond the philosophy of the

bedroom. The child is Law, the irrepressible absolute call of alterity. The demand that the subject return from their sordid reprieve to answer the ethical call of subjugation. And, initially at least, the child succeeds as Law, uniting the lovers in mind and action as they freely offer themselves to the demands found in fecundity:

“That gave us things to think about, to worry about, and every difficult hour just bound us more closely to one another.

But it didn’t stay that way.” (Sacher-Masoch 2003, p.42)

The Levinasian dream of the ethical return through fecundity appears initially to have asserted its firm grasp upon our darling lovers. However, Eros’ hold has not been relinquished over *Demetrius* and inevitably for him this return to the ethical was only ever a momentary relapse. The role of the father, the weight of sociality, the constant imposition of normativity, burdens and altruistic anguish, the Levinasian ontology, does not offer the salacious enticement of Eros. *Demetrius* finds himself unable to be placated by fecundity, it simply does not confer the incommunicable majesty felt within the self-centred escape of Erotic pursuit. Once more, he resolves repeatedly, foolishly, to find his deity within the gaze of his wife:

“I take my wife in my arms, kiss her, her hand strokes the worries away from my forehead. I rub up against her like a cat, she laughs - and the pledge of love next to her starts screaming - that’s the end of that story. You can start again at the foreword if you want. That’s the end of that, I’m telling you.” (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.45)

“All well and good. You kiss your little wife until she has red spots on her cheeks, neck, breasts. You let your hands run down her full hips - and the pledge of love screams.” (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.45)

Ah yes, the ‘pledge of love’, that which was promised to break forth and transcend the erotic hallucination, that which should, according to Levinas’ sanitised writing, be held by *Demetrius* as the father, in incomparable reverence is simply another imposition, a threat to his designs. This proffers a rather contentious argument against the ethical formulation of fecundity as the child need not necessarily manifest the shared ambitions of Eros. The child is undeniably a product of the romantic union, yet as we have considered, this union is itself not predicated upon shared wants and desires, it is a muted self-seduction. Beyond signification, the lovers share only in their narcissistic lust to appease their respective numina. The child born of voluptuousness is born out of signification. In its birth, through its cries, the parents may indeed hear and recognise the ethical summons of alterity in this familiar stranger, this however cannot be taken for granted. The child is not as portrayed by Levinas and subsequent commentators (e.g. Mensch 2014), the necessary

fulfilment of the erotic intentionality. The child does indeed fulfil an erotic intentionality, exhibiting the future through an extension of the self. Whether or not this may eternally placate the futural lust of Eros is an entirely different matter. As shown through *Demetrius*' reception of his child, fecundity may occasionally fail to instil ethical permanence within a subject who has lost themselves to their eroticism. His erotic intentionality does not find satiation or a new course once he is given himself to cradle. Conversely, his erotic intentionality re-emerges as a violent antagonist to the ethical alternative which has befallen his beloved. He still lusts feverishly for the spectral alterity of Eros; he refuses to forfeit his goddess. Recognising in the child, his union brought into being, a challenge to his machinations, he prays that he may be relieved of this adversary, so that he may freely love *Nikolaya* once more as he desires:

"The devil take the pledge of love! God forgive me my sin." (Sacher-Masoch 2003, p.48)

Few such unsavoury words spoken by a father could convey such a horrifying refutation of the ethical purportedly imposed in fecundity. Similarly, this unpleasant honesty articulates his unwavering commitment to Eros which has clearly reasserted its primacy over his injudicious being. Outside of the social relation, *Demetrius* pursues his Eros in only the most profane means. Chasing in the voluptuousity of his beloved, the erotic alterity which dictated his being cruelly before the 'pledge of love' interceded. These crude acts, intended to further the potency of Eros and reunite the lovers once more in the discovery of themselves through each other's bodies, only serve to distance the already estranged parties. She, bound by maternal love has returned to signification, her being dictated by the ethical call found in every whimper of their child. At odds with the ethical reasoning of sociality, *Demetrius*' actions are perceived as devoid of love. They are merely the crude lustings of a gentleman calling upon a brothel. To her mind she is abandoned and neglected, utilised through her body as a tool so that *Demetrius* may entertain whatever foreign, intrasubjective joys he feasts upon therein:

"What's the matter?" -- "You only come to me at night," she begins shouting. "People at least court their mistresses, and I -- I want love!"

"Love? Don't I love you?" -- "No!"

"She saddles her horse and gallops off."

"I look for her the whole night, the whole day."

"When I come home, her bed is in the children's room, and I sleep alone." (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.54)

In resolving to love his beloved, *Demetrius* abandons her. He is excommunicated from the union of the 'intimate society' (Levinas 1969, p.265). Cast out of the lover's embrace and the familial

bonds. She sleeps with the children, open to the sociality and Law they embody. He sleeps alone, distraught at how, to his belligerent mind, his lover has abandoned him for their children. The ethical and the erotic, adversaries to the end within this tale of Masoch. *Demetrius* not only loses his beloved and, to a certain degree, the affections of his family, in Eros he loses himself. Beyond signification and language, beyond reason, he collapses into his love, finding solace within the most toxic of interiorities. Beyond the structures of Law which uphold alterity, his ultimate casualty is himself. The noble being that was *Demetrius*, that first fell sincerely in love with a young girl is no more. The love that tormented and confused his being, which left him aghast and stupid before his beloved, has become bastardised through its lengthy abiding within his interiority. The necessary ethical standards to attain Levinasian personhood, too, are forgone, irrelevant when the subject refuses to depart from their narcissistic affairs. The man, *Demetrius*, is lost through the course of the novel's exploration of Eros. What endures, is 'substance', a non-entity with a singular impulse, hungering for that vessel which may once more tease and induce the love of alterity he desperately craves. The *Demetrius* who is first introduced dissipates, lost to a lust for love. In his sweet stead, the misguided servant of Eros, 'Don Juan of Kolomea', surfaces. Forever existing as a cautionary tale of the potent fallacy of an Eros which refuses to be reconciled with the ethical, which ignores the pull of fecundity. *Demetrius'* plight is patently tragic in its refutation of Levinasian principles, forever searching for a love he cannot accomplish within. Forever insatiable. Forever alone in Eros.

2.4. Conclusion

Reading Levinas with Masoch's *Don Juan of Kolomea* lays bare the tragic tale of ruinous love which Eros may inspire. The lover, lost to Eros, exists as a 'castrated soul' (Levinas 1969, p.115), devoid of satisfaction, unable to attain satiety nor recognise their descent beyond reason into earnest erotic lunacy. Eros is a potent and imperious adversary to the ethical and legal structures of sociality. Indeed, few authors allow for a theory which portrays Eros so vividly as Levinas does. However, exploring the return to the ethical which fecundity is supposed to impose upon the subject, I have argued forthrightly that this is perhaps too convenient a route for all of Eros' mystical paths. Challenging the ethical demise of Eros, it is liberated from the confines of reason or language, flourishing as an anti-legal, anti-ethical, anti-reasonable experience. In these refutations, Eros' majesty is manifest. It ensnares and beguiles over not only *Demetrius*, but at certain points in our lives, all of us, because it teases of an alterity found within. The '*no man's*

land of erotic interiority. Here, we are all *Demetrius*, all *Severin*, all *Werther* or the *Chevalier des Grieux*, just another iteration of the well-meaning, ethical being which is corrupted in the ecstasy of Eros.

Similarly, our discussions of Levinas within Masoch have not shied away from the ‘sweet deception’ (Sacher-Masoch 2003, p.36), which is at play during the erotic discourse. Contra Law, where desire can fly without limitation, it does, as explicated in the actions of *Demetrius*, have the capacity to manifest in a harmful counterintuitive manner. Turning away from sociality, Eros inevitably pulls itself from its beloved, moving ‘beyond’ the beloved. Here though, I have stated that there is nothing to be found. A fantasy which will never materialise, a dream which one will always wake from. Love which refuses to ground itself in fecundity is therefore an act of contrition against the self, an exercise in self-flagellation as the lover denies not only the social being of the beloved but similarly moves ‘away from oneself’. In the depths of Eros, where Levinas meets Scheler, love reveals itself as an act of ‘denial’ (1992, p.150). An indulgent descent into interiority, masking the impetuous refusal to recognise the ethical call, to hear the beloved who has been smothered by layer upon layer of romantic pretence. The lover is lost, and this is both the wonder and fallacy of Eros. In the denial of being and reason, the lover is placed upon a pedestal of infinite height. Love is not only denial but is violence too. A violence against the Other, and most palpably against the Self. It is the Self who is sacrificed in homage to the lover’s deity, Eros.

“You feel the shudder of losing yourself completely. You feel something like hatred toward the power of the other. You think yourself dead. You want to rise up against the tyranny of the other’s life and find your way back to your self.” (Sacher-Masoch, L 2003, p.44)

Alas, you cannot.

Within this chapter which has centred upon my detailing of a Levinasian theory of Eros which abounds playfully beyond the confines of the ethical and in blissful ignorance to the summons of fecundity, certain aspects of this emotive iteration of Levinasian doctrine have tentatively presented themselves as intriguing, if not problematic, and consequently warranting further exploration. Firstly, and as will be addressed in the subsequent chapter, it is insufficient and unjust to provide a concept of indulgent Eros which so wilfully fails to address and recognise the plight of the beloved, or more broadly the anguish which can afflict us all of being loved by those who cannot recognise us through the dense fog of their affections. Accordingly, it is incumbent to now consider how the applications of an Eros beyond ethics may injure its divine

vessel. More explicitly, to conceive of a theory of Eros is other than ethical necessitates the willingness to realise how malevolent such a conception may in earnest be. Furthermore, the chauvinism which populates the romantic narratives presented thusly is seemingly echoed by the language which punctuates Levinas's own, purportedly ethical, theory. Thus, this has been most overtly exhibited in the rather masculine tenor which adopts his portrayal of subjectivity, inevitably exaggerated through the literary lens applied, and presents most egregiously in the paternalistic formulation of fecundity discussed above. In order to fully discern whether or not this is simply by product of the Masochean reading or that which extends, insidiously to very heart of Levinas's theory, the chapter which follows the discussion of the beloved's plight will explore in a more transparently theoretical manner, the extent to which Levinas's conceptualisation of the subject as masculine, and the corresponding articulation of the feminine this incurs, require the Neo-Levinasian, even those which adhere dotingly to the Masochean gospel, to extricate the heteronormativity of Levinas's work from the theory. Redeeming a doctrine of ambiguity from its binaristic, paternal garbs. Perhaps then we may finally confront the horrors of Levinasian subjectivity and existence, in and outside of the ethical and Eros which ordain being with purpose, that which is manifest proudly by the Masochean reading of Levinas.

Interlude 2: The End of Eros

'I love you, but it's not enough'

She says, resigned. Already certain of the fate of their love. Bewildered, he looks on, gormless, lost in this moment. How can she say that? How can she mean that? It makes no sense! How can love not be enough? Love is everything, love is the reason for enduring the arguments, for triumphing against all expectations and the insufferable commentaries of friends and family.

Love overflows, it is always too much, never not enough!

All he can muster in this moment is a statement of his confusion, unable to fathom such a blasphemous decree. *'What do you mean?'*, he asks. Almost inviting the next wounding blow and collision with reality which he must on some level know is about to be wrought upon him. Hoping he has misheard her, hoping he has misunderstood the overt intent of her declaration, hoping all the while that the sunken feeling of inevitability which roots him to the spot is mistaken. In the uncertainty he can feel the swell of fear within him, the panic lodging itself in his throat, as even he has begun to lose the conviction of his ways. *'Please tell me, what do you mean?'*

I don't understand.' He implores her.

'I haven't said I love you in a month and you never even noticed'. She too is upset by this miserable discourse, but evidently she has seen the path to this stage, cognisant of each step the former lovers have taken in their descent and departure from one another, knowing the final throes were upon them. Against this revelation, he is stunned. Again, how could this be the case? How could someone conceive of such a notion? Racking his brain, he recollects selectively, how else could he, upon their final month. The laughter which warmed his soul, the passing smiles which punctuated and brought levity to everyday they shared, the times they laid coiled together, relishing the afterglow of sex cradled in each other's arms. How could this be true, that nothing changed to him when everything clearly has. Tragically, the blissful ignorance which he seemed to cherish as the markings of a contented relationship has evidently inverted itself against him.

'What do you mean you've not said you love me? We're engaged! Isn't that supposed to say it? What kind of person intentionally stops saying that to their fiancé without saying anything!? That's fucking ridiculous!' His voice begins to rise, panic and confusion have evolved into anger. He is lost, blinded by his own affection and his devotion thereof. To him, he who loves her still, violently, there is no anguish great enough to avert his fidelity. In his simplistic mind, oriented about his fantastical affectation, his being is a celebration of their love. How could he have missed the death of reciprocity; how could his own love have ambled on so haplessly naive to its isolation? Bookmarking every day with a declaration of his constant affection, the lack of hers never even bothered him. He was preoccupied, consumed by his own notions, distracted by his own dreams of family and marriage, seduced by the future he had carved out for himself with love.

'I'm sorry, I do love you. It's just not enough anymore. It shouldn't be this hard. It should be easy'. She states, exhaustedly. Even her fatigue is alien to him. Speaking volumes to the epistemic fallacy of his departing love. For her, this is not a sudden conclusion, not the statement of rage or jealousy

intended to hurt and provoke a response. It is a reluctant, defeated resignation. An acceptance of a fact she has fought repeatedly, bravely. What should sting him is not the words but the tenor. The rings under the watery eyes, the dropped weary shoulders, all telling a tale of a battle long fought. A battle, she cannot fight anymore.

'What do you mean!? We love each other! This makes no fucking sense! You're going to end things because it's not enough!? Either you don't love me or it's something else! This is ridiculous! Stupid! How can you love someone, and it not be enough? What kind of person says that!?' His voice oscillates frantically, rage cracking into heartbreak. Unsure where he should reside. He considers every facet of their relationship in moments, trying to find something to bring her back, trying to find a memory which can reinvigorate their love. He knows with such certainty that he loves her; it is all he knows, and still, he cannot remedy this.

Not this time.

He's tried so many times to bring her back from the precipice, to convince her of the merits of their love and their relationship. He's confined her, imprisoned her with his promises of happiness, of a joyous celebratory union. Every disappointment, every argument, compounding her resolution, perverting his love into a claustrophobic, smothering impediment upon her.

Now, he's got nothing left to say. Promises to change lose their sincerity in each repetition. Sinking to his knees, he can no longer fight the tears. He embraces her and lets her go. Freeing her of the assault of his love.

'I love you', they say to each other. One last time, then she's gone forever. Leaving him and her captor, his love, alone.

3. The Beloved's Burden: The Cruelty of Man's Eros in *Manon Lescaut*

'Love is not a possibility, is not due to our initiative, is without reason; it invades and wounds us'

(Levinas 1987, pp.88-9)

Love is an innocent passion; how has it been transformed for me into a source of wretchedness and error?

(Prevost 2008, p.50)

The uniquely ambiguous nature of Eros within Levinas's texts cannot be satisfactorily considered from the perspective of the fanatical lover alone. As has been noted, the Levinasian doctrine is predicated upon and extends from the primacy of the Other, the metaphysical articulation of alterity. Through the Other the subject is brought into ethical being, defined and made human (Levinas 1969, p.173). Prior to the revelation of alterity, the subject is portrayed as merely possessing the capacities required to fulfil only the most egoistic of existences, that of a mere *conatus*. And yet, when presented with the wonders of alterity the subject is thrust into being, torn from the indulgences of a narrow, self-absorbed and self-defined ontology. Accordingly, through the Other, the world before the subject is revealed, 'offered in the language of the Other' (Levinas 1969, p.92). This world is not for them to pillage and enjoy, it is a world of abrasive compromise, sacrifice and unrelenting subjugation. As recompense for the revelations of language, signification and meaning which are founded in the face of the Other, the subject is seduced into a position of inescapable servitude. With their being predicated upon the Other, they are necessarily 'for the Other' (Levinas 1999, p.114).

Conversely, through the Masochian reading of Levinas established in Kantor's works (1998, 1999) which I have furthered, when coupled with the frustratingly solipsistic narrative of *Don Juan of Kolomea*, the relation with the Other when masked by the subject's erotic pursuit emerges as unsettlingly distant from this purportedly of earnest ethical servitude. Eros, the ethereal spectre which beckons the subject into the darkest remits of their intrasubjectivity enchants the subject, masking the ethical relation (Levinas 1969, p. 264). Because of such a reading, the erotic pursuit marks a significant and indulgent departure from the smothering legalistic constraints of exteriority. Extending 'beyond', the ethical, 'beyond' the Other (Levinas 1969, p. 264), the subject's relationship with the beloved, though fantastical, escapes the clutches of reason, language and ethics, those components which assemble to form the imperious body of ethical

normativity articulated within this reading as Law. In this ineffable realm of Eros, the subject's relation with their beloved other, though sincere in its expressions of affection and fidelity, may unfortunately descend into the realms of masturbatory voluptuosity. The necessary idolising of the beloved, the recognition and reverence held for the beloved, that which deifies the subject's uniquely experienced manifestation of Eros, by necessity is a refutation of the universalisation upon which the ethical is predicated (Levinas 1969, p. 264). The erotic, as such emerges brazenly as 'the very contrary of the social relation' (Levinas 1969, pp. 264-5).

It is this compelling, yet dangerous, juxtaposition of the Legal and the Erotic which allows us to embrace the majesty of Eros. Outside of the primacy of the metaphysical relation, beyond the shrill chorus of the ever-present, unrelenting ethical summons which plagues the subject's existence, there is a pestilential serenity found in the delusional cradling of the erotic spectre. Escaping the confines of signification, the cumbersome imposition of normativity, the ethical 'insomnia' (Diamantides 2007, p.12) of the Levinasian subject, Eros presents a most beguiling and corrupting suitor. The subject, though potentially salvaged through the shared embrace of a future with their beloved, expressed chauvinistically as fecundity by Levinas (Levinas 1969, p.267), may with similar expedience descend into the abyss of their intrasubjectivity, the naive pitfall of wholly surrendering one's being to Eros, losing oneself to love. Here, the subject may tragically suffer the repercussions of such an endeavour as their Eros extends beyond not merely the ethical, abounding in that unique space which affords its transcendent grace, as it may also extend beyond their poor beloved.

Without ethics, without reprieve, Eros may zealously invert itself against the former vessel of its project. Extending beyond the being which is beloved, pursuing merely that futural fantasy which Eros presents. This, as previously considered, may cast the subject, the doting romantic idealist who faithfully eulogises their erotic deity, aside from the social bounds of exteriority and the prospect of a material, social relationship with their beloved. The intrasubjective realm of their endeavour isolating them, stripping them and their being of reason and rationality, their very humanity. Until they emerge nude and aroused, 'lost' in a dreamscape of 'voluptuosity and carnality - lost in themselves' (Sandford 1998, pp.6-17), little more than a 'romantic spirit' (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p.192). Here, beyond signification, beyond the Other, the subject not only may corrupt and 'wound' (Levinas 1987, pp.88-9) themselves in the pursuit of love, more troublingly and most tragically they may also find themselves the violent antagonist to the darling idol whom they adore. Having previously embraced and explored the fraught indulgences of the

lover and their self-imposed descent into erotic solipsism, it is now imperative that the ineffable sublimity of the beloved is met with as rigorous attention. For severing the ties of the erotic and the ethical which was articulated forcefully descends the adopted conceptualisation of Eros within this theoretical framework into the amoral, invariably flawed and often cruel parameters of realised, torturous Erotic experience. In such an unpleasant yet irrefutably familiar setting, the lover's fealty to Eros, an Eros extricated from the confines of the ethical, may manifest itself as an uninvited, intemperate and tireless assault upon the majestic beloved's existence.

Expectedly, I contend that such a necessarily emotive exploration of the burdens of the erotic relation upon the beloved subject cannot be fully realised within the abstract and disingenuous dialogues of ethical doctrine alone. A critique of so flawed and recognisable a conception of Eros is as a result more appropriately explored once more within the unashamedly passionate and incontrovertibly *human* pages of literature. While the theoretical framework presented is founded within the indulgent sentimentality which defines the Masochian reading of Levinas, this text departs from the narrow confines of Masoch's own works. Distinguishing itself from the former discussions of Masochian Legalism through *Venus in Furs*, and the solipsistic naivete of eroticism found in *Don Juan of Kolomea*, this essay embraces the similarly sensorial and tragic text of Prevost's *Manon Lescaut*. Though an evident departure from the limited confines of expressly Masochian literature, this text accommodates a furthering of the Masochian reading of Levinas due to its poignant thematic resemblance to those texts previously considered. As with its forebears within this project, this text details a fraught and pained erotic relationship of the heteronormative protagonists. A tale of a love, and lovers, misunderstood by both their beloved other and the Law which acts as their malignant stage. However, whilst such a text may present some tropes which are at this point growing tiresome, that of the toxic simplicity of the lover and their banal incompetence, it allows us to develop our theoretical considerations of this Neo-Levinasian conception of Eros through the plight of the eponymous antagonist, *Manon*.

Distinguishing herself from the vilified and maligned beloved subjects of Masoch's works, *Manon*, a uniquely defiant if misunderstood being, dares to speak and overtly confront the flawed iteration of Eros with which her pursuer, an apt description of the lover in this instance, assaults her being and in so doing forces us to once more challenge and reconsider the formerly ethical conception of Eros as presented by Levinas. Within the body of her lover, des Grieux, the erotic endeavour is not merely a tragic failure of communication, that inevitable fallacy of two distinct Erotic conceptions endeavouring senselessly to reconcile with the other, it reveals itself as

dangerous. Uncompromising in its capacity for cruelty, tireless in its desire to attain her as the singular object of his ontology. *Manon*, though she is loved passionately (if that is of any consolation), is reduced, objectified, imprisoned and ultimately loses her life as a consequence, direct or otherwise, of the unbridled misfortune of simply being beloved. Once more, it is through these clumsy, calamitous struggles of the literary subject, their inability to rest within the binaristic compartmentalisations of the Levinasian doctrine, that I argue we may discern compelling new insights into the reality of this flawed, familiar character. Explicitly, here we must unsettlingly discern the burden of the beloved, a being at once deified and condemned, cursed by the grace/sin of their autonomy that their very existence represents the most abhorrent transgression against the enthused lover. Further, expanding beyond the narrow confines of the intimate relation which abounds in solipsism, I consider the sinister machinations of a masculine subject which permeates into the political within such a text. The oft critiqued Levinasian iteration of the State and Society arise in a masculine guise embodying their sincere chauvinism, as, through the torment and struggles of the dear *Manon*, we glimpse the violence not merely of Man's Eros, but that also of his State, his laws and his fickle plastic morality - the noisy assemblage of his subjectivity all of which celebrates his being. Accordingly through this chapter, I lay the beloved's burden bare as the initial discussions which confirm the ethical topography of Levinasian subjectivity give way to a rigorous and uncomfortable examination of an Eros which wounds and hurts its delicate beloved, enchaining her within the domain of their fervent fantasy, accompanied ominously by a virile mode of alterity which condemns and chastises her feminine mysticism and cannot be satiated, resting only in the aftermath of her demise.

3.1. The Levinasian Lawscape

Before explicitly considering the plight of the beloved *Manon*, it is necessary to more overtly map the topography of the Masoch-Levinasian subject we have addressed thus, establishing the broader parameters against which the presented literary interlude takes place. While this thesis has endeavoured to assert the juxtaposing antagonists of Eros and Law, and their capricious machinations upon the subject, it is now incumbent to consider the broader nature of the Masoch-Levinasian Lawscape. Unlike the unashamedly romantic, narrow characters of *Demetrius* or *Severin*, the Masochian archetypes, *Manon* is a character who refuses to be so seamlessly reduced to the Erotic/Legal binarism previously considered. She, fittingly for so beloved a being, refutes such reductions. Intriguingly, it is through her distinctly economic modality, her

admirable refutation of either engulfing system of value that we are to be shown the failings of the asserted binaristic ontology and must consider the calls to excedence which perpetuate within and against the realms of both Eros and Law.

Extending from the subject, the Masoch-Levinasian Lawscape is the legal articulation of the subject's ever-unanswerable summons to ethical subjugation. Founded in the writings of Kantor (1998,1999), this Neo-Levinasian perspective bestows upon the ethical the legal reverence with which it demands. The affirmative relation with alterity, which brings the subject into being, imposes upon the subject an 'impossibility of denying', (Levinas 2017, p.30) ensuring that the subject may never fail to confront the relentless violence of their being. Concisely, this is articulated by Levinas in the legalistic terms that the Other is inscribed with the simplistic and imperious edict that 'thou shalt not murder' (Levinas 2017, p.30). While this may initially appear legalistic in an overtly Abrahamic manner, this itself fails to fully encompass the pained nature of the subject's relation with alterity. For the Other does not merely impose upon the subject that they must not murder, but through the affirmative nature of the relation come to define and present the subject's world. Language, which affords the subject the means to approach and engage with their Other, itself encompasses all symbolism, serving to 'make the world common', (Levinas 1969, p.76) binding the subject inescapably to the Other.

And yet, even adopting this most indebted conception of subjectivity, one may offer contention, speculating of the subject's refutation of alterity, a life pursued in the silent masturbatory comforts of an egoistic conatus. It is here, quelling such thoughts, that the broad boundaries of the Masoch-Levinasian Lawscape imperiously arise, casting the subject into the darkness of their ontological penance. The affirmative nature of the subject's relation with alterity extends beyond the mere presence of the metaphysical Other. As it is through the Other that the subject 'accomplishes itself', (Levinas 1969, p.112) through language which welcomes the Other into the embrace of ethical discourse, the subject's world is irrefutably contingent upon the metaphysical relation. Exteriority itself, the unfathomable limitless domain of subjectivity, is adorned with the echoes of the metaphysical relation. Exteriority imposes an inescapable, legalistic sentence upon the subject. Not merely defining the subject, being 'is exteriority' (Levinas 1969, p.290), it 'is signifyingness itself' (Levinas 1969, p.262). The relation with alterity, the insatiable hunger to surrender oneself to the implacable needs of the Other, is by necessity the subject's very ontology. Or, to turn to the legalistic parlance of Kantor and Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013), this is the Lawscape of the Masoch-Levinasian subject. A Lawscape with an unending

term, dominating the ontological jurisdiction. A Lawscape in which one ‘feels’, and ‘knows’ (Kantor 1998, pp.508-9), but one can never hope to escape the horrors of the necessary ‘curse of being human’ (Wolcher, 2003 p.106).

Against this arduous affirmation which brings the subject into being, the allure of erotic excedence emerges. The relentless punishment of existence, the need to subjugate and self-flagellate should it contribute to the prosperity of the Other reads as an admirable, if unenviable existence. Conversely, the Erotic pursuit offers a toxic respite. Refuting the realm of exteriority, Eros affords the subject the means to indulge within the interiority of their subjectivity. Eros, as a futural deity, teases the subject from the history of violence and usurpation which define their ethical being. Beyond language, outside of reason, the erotic pursuit is a lonely means to escape the burdens of being. However, what is most problematic about the subject’s relation with Eros, is that in its departure from exteriority, the subject withdraws from the Law of their being and in so doing departs the Lawscape, the necessarily ethical space. The intimate society, ‘a society without language’ (Levinas 1969, p.264), must consequently be a society without Law, without understanding and without the means to engage with the Other. It is a descent into the subject’s intrasubjectivity, outside of signification. While this does afford Eros the scope to manifest as a transcendental, irresistibly seductive deity, accommodating the subject’s most unencumbered fantasies and projections upon the beloved, it too affords the scope for a love that is other than ethical. As will be explored in the succeeding sections of this essay and has been noted by Rorty, such a love without understanding, without communication may be not only impoverished, it may be dangerous (Rorty 2016, p.343).

While neither of the realms considered thusly, the Erotic and the Legal, may present as novel at this point in this Masoch-Levinasian project, as a consequence of the topic considered herein, the burden of the Beloved, it is necessary to introduce and briefly outline the as-yet neglected presence of the State, the political branch of Levinasian philosophy and whether or not it amounts to anything substantive beyond an extension of masculine, binaristic subjectivity which has been articulated. Within the pages of Prevost, and similarly those of Levinas, the discourse is not simply that of the adversarial cries of Eros against Law, there is a third presence grasping upon the cuffs of the subject, that of the State. Accordingly, it is necessary to both concisely outline the flaws with the conventional Levinasian articulation of the State and to detail the formulation of this enigmatic entity inspired by the Masochian reading of Levinas. The State, and politics more broadly, present a self-imposed challenge to the traditionalist reading of

Levinas. Foundationally, as with the Erotic, Levinas presents the political as contrary to the ethos of his moral doctrine, going so far as to state that 'Politics is opposed to morality' (Levinas 1969, p.21). This itself, is unsurprising given the heinously unethical forces of politics which plagued his own life, alongside the primacy of the intimate metaphysical relation upon which his ethics is established. More explicitly, it is the political ambition of equality which overtly places it at odds with his heavily imbalanced conception of ethics. It is this desire for recognition and equality to be established through a universal law, which Levinas identifies as compromising for 'the truth of [ethical] being' (Levinas 1969, p. 253).

For many political theorists, this is where Levinas's writings become contentious as the rigorous, ontological articulation of the ethical is presented without the necessary transition to the political realm of tedious bureaucracy; institutions, laws and customs (Bernasconi 1999, p.86). Indeed, this is a point articulated well by theorists such as Alford (2007, p.76), Chanter (2007, p.122) and Manderson (2007, p.158) as the discrepancy from the ethical to the political appears vast and without the appropriate means for reconciliation. We, those left in Levinas's stead, are presented with the quandary as to how this may be remedied? How can one willingly subjugate oneself in reverence to alterity whilst simultaneously becoming politically indoctrinated and protected within the political confines of the State? In response to this assessment, there have been insightful efforts to both successfully articulate a political model derived from Levinas's ethics, in particular that of Alford's 'inverted liberalism' (2007, p.122), and bring his ethics into the ardently legal as a foundation for universal rights (Wolcher 2006; Burggraef 2002) such endeavours seem, to varying degrees, willing to overtly contravene the foundational Levinasian position that the political is opposed to the moral. As such, I contend that one must be willing to embrace this distinction and refrain from conciliatory efforts, as any movement away from the primacy of the Other, is a marked departure from the sincerely Levinasian, particularly within the context of the Masochian reading which is centred upon the primacy of the metaphysical relation.

Following such rationale, verily that which has dictated the Masochian reading of Levinas, one must resign oneself to recognising the irredeemable 'tyranny' of the political State (Levinas 1969, p.300), a rational if violent construct. In its efforts to impose universal laws which contravene the legalistic summons of exteriority, the State emerges as an unexpectedly alluring compatriot. One cannot refute the appeal found in the fallacy of equality upon which the State deceptively professes to be founded. A less extreme mode of excedence than Eros, the State offers an

illusorily ethical being, one which does not seemingly demand the descent into interiority which marks the erotic. However, the State does not allow the futural intoxication of the subject, it is conversely necessitated upon the subject's willingness to neglect the ethical summons and in so doing, the Other. Within the State the subject is not numb to the sensorial presence of their ontological Law. The Lawscape which brings their being into existence is present, yet it is smothered, draped in idle bodies, submerged in the self-interested hum of egoism which negligently assembles the State. Accordingly, maintaining the cynical if intimate primacy of the metaphysical relation, the Masochian reading of Levinas perceives the State as little more than a sultry tune, a noise which the subject may willingly allow to orchestrate their being, comforted by the pseudo-ethical rationale upon which this exuberant mass of fickle ideology convulses. The false sincerity of the State portrays a far more sinister adversary to the Law than that of the overt exuberance of Eros. Any and every beguiling effort to lighten the broad shoulders of the ethical subject to refute the very essence of the one's ontology, through the collective endeavour and the malevolent incompetence of bureaucracies, is a violent contravention of the Levinasian ontology.

Evidently, the introduction of the State as an extension of the within/against the Masochian Lawscape offers a further imposition upon the subject. Another monstrous deity duelling for their subjectivity, perverting it from the arms of the Other. Emerging outside of the Legal/Erotic binarism, the State in its insincere distortion of the ethical presents a further inhibitor upon the strained subject. The State, willingly forgoing the grace of the metaphysical relation for the barbarity of the pseudo-ethical institutions of politics, affords the corrupt conception of ideology, most malevolently manifest in the falsity of egoistic ethics. It is this, the false mortality of a collective subjectivity, manifest within the State, which becomes most evident in the following discussion. As seeking refuge from the extremities of Eros and Ethics, the burdened *Manon*, is further tormented by the idealised machinations of the State and its masculine inhabitants which serve to ensure her life meets its tragic end. A life which refuses the confines of the Erotic or Ethical, but which cannot escape the forceful grip of the State, nor that of her lover.

3.2. Manon Lescaut: the Beloved's Burden

I love her with so violent a passion that it has made me the most unhappy of men.

(Prevost 2008, p.9)

It is love, as you know, love alone - fatal passion! - that has caused all my errors.

(Prevost 2008, p.117)

Outlining the violently oppressive realms of Eros and Law which compete and define the subject's very being, the perspectives considered, both Levinasian and Masochean and largely maintained by those who draw inspiration from their work, possess a fundamental failing which when explored from Erotic ontology, belies the unpleasant truth of the all-too-easily forgotten Other. The primacy of the metaphysical relational, the necessary deification in ethics and Law of the Other which founds the Levinasian tradition, that 'alterity is possible only starting from *me*', (Levinas 1969, p.40) perpetuates the solipsistic narrative which underlines such formulations. The Other in Love and Law is neglected, forgotten, smothered beneath the veil of deification. One cannot refute that the Other remains the central figure of the ethical and erotic ontologies, yet in each instance one does not wait for direction, there can be no hesitation in either pursuit. Conversely, the subject is compelled to act in service of their being. It is the godly Other they must appease, the earthly other, the material realisation of ethical/erotic alterity quickly descends from their fleeting sojourn atop the subject's pedestal. Once more we observe that such dialogues when contained to the purely theoretical, the unemotive parlance of ontology, subjectivity, ethics and Law fail to encompass the torturous sensitivity which such discussions ought to warrant.

Returning to literature once more, maintaining this necessary reference of the Masochean reading of Levinas, we afresh may liberate the subject, and the theory, from the confines of such disinterested analytic reasoning. Through the literary analysis of Prevost's *Manon Lescaut*, published originally in 1731 to much praise and moral condemnation, we find that in the splendour and magnificence of an Eros freed from the ethical constraints of Law that the beloved, that most divine and idolised of beings, may become the victim of her lover's unbridled affections. As a lover lost to the depths of interiority, the ardent servant of Eros, in losing their grounding in sociality, they too lose sight of their beloved, affording the scope for their actions of affection to manifest as narcissistic, cruel and possessive. This itself is the malediction of so sublime an Eros, that it 'cannot help but extend beyond itself', (Katz 2001a, p.128) inverting the nobility of its intentions with the senseless brutality of its pious acts.

Prevost's seminal text, though preceding the works of Masoch comfortably, adheres to the indulgently emotive chauvinism of its successors. However, it offers a stark distinction from the works of Masoch in that the feminine antagonist to the narrator is in this instance bestowed with a distinctly antagonistic personality interwoven into her femininity. The works of Masoch, largely portray the beloved characters, *Nikolaya* in *Don Juan of Kolomea* and *Wanda* in *Venus in Furs*, as similarly beholden to their passions as those of the protagonist lover, whilst also heralding from a similar social standing. It is in this regard that they so conveniently exhibit the flaws of an Eros without language, as they pursue their respective Eros' at the cost of their intimate relation. Juxtaposed with this is the unique character of the eponymous *Manon Lescaut*, who though she frequently professes to the sincerity of her love, refuses to allow it to dictate her being so indulgently. She does not descend into the interioristic depths of Eros within which the Masochian, and consequently masculine, archetype so willingly plunges. This imposes an intriguing dynamic upon the lovers as to her suitor the haphazard and well-born *Chevalier des Grieux*, who persists with the Masochian affirmative surrender to Eros, she emerges as adversarial to his narcissistic Erotic ethos. Of the characters thus considered, she truly embodies the most sympathetic mode of subjectivity as her powerless assignation to humble standing and economic egoism, her hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and life, do not align with the engulfing binarism of Levinasian ethical subjectivity. As a consequence of her insolent exhibition of flawed human character, *des Grieux's* affection, the false virtue of his Eros, and similarly of those other masculine subjectivities and would-be suitors who pester and punish her being, are no longer defined by sincere tokens of transcendental fidelity. Beyond ethics, in pursuit of his fantastical interiority, *des Grieux's* Eros portrays the violence which is incurred by the mere involuntary act of being beloved. Building on the former discussions of Eros against Law, the oppressive burden of being beloved is laid plain. Refuting the comforts which abound in the normative domain of Law, the lover is unshackled from the bonds of ethics, and the beloved is no longer secure within their confines. Revealed in the tragic pages of this seminal romantic tale, is the reality of Eros' true volatile nature. The madness of love does not restrict itself to the obsessive recesses of the lover's dreams. Eros may plague both the lover and the beloved, corrupting the former so as to justify their hostile assault of the latter.

The burden placed upon the beloved initially reveals itself when one considers the perilous nature of a relation outside of language. As noted, the Erotic pursuit is submerged beyond the social relation, evading the clutches of rationality, reason and ethical discourse upon which language is predicated. Withdrawing into the interiority of the subject, indulging in the ethereal

solitude which abounds in the realms of erotic fantasy, the lovers present in a 'dual society, an intimate society, a society without language' (Levinas 1969, p.264). In isolation, the abandonment of language and its ethical counterparts may appear untroubling, as in this space beyond signification the lovers' voluptuosity may flourish in any which manner pleases their respective Eros. This would be a suitable description if the Levinasian Erotic merely concerned the throes of passion, the lascivious carnival of carnality within which language serves only to distract from the primal pleasures to be found. Intriguingly, the Eros of Levinas more broadly extends to both the carnal and the romantic modes of love. Thus, this muted relation, whereby each subject pursues their beloved through their own voluptuosity, seduced by the 'love of the love of the other', (Levinas 1969, pp.265-6) an ambiguous concept affording the solipsistic indulgences of the romantic servant, appears upon reflection to become increasingly troubling. Each lover's Eros is insatiable in its frantic pursuits of its own end, 'fed by its own hungers' (Levinas 1969, p.264). While this may result in the passionate flourishing of a mutual relation found in respect and sincere reciprocity, this is far from assured.

Moreover, without language, Eros is blind to the discomfort and pain of the beloved, deaf to her cries for attention and affection. This is a trait which emerges throughout not merely Masoch's texts, nor that of Prevost who inspired such works; it persists throughout the tradition of Romantic literature, arising to similarly tragic consequences in the pages of Goethe and Constant among others. The need, the incensed compulsions of Eros to justify itself, to found itself in the interiority of the subject, to find a footing outside of signification, often manifests itself in the seemingly benign affirmation that the subject is loved. *Des Grieux* himself, in a tact which is replicated by Masoch's protagonists, tells the reader assuredly, '*Manon loves me*' (Prevost 2008, p.24). This though, is not a statement of contented appreciation, the besotted wonderment of the lovesick fool. It instead emerges as the epistemological foundation for his surrender to Eros. And, as we have mentioned, paves the road for the first step toward the intimate society, the first step in earnest away from the dear beloved. While this initial consideration is not explicitly an act against the beloved, it is that from which all later acts are contingent as the epistemological foundation, the rooting of his erotic ontology, the reason for his descent into irrationality, persists throughout Prevost's tale.

Returning to the muted narrative of the beloved, *Manon*, the captor of his affections, the wilful abandonment of language and reason serve to reduce her and deny her of her subjectivity. Not only does the erotic relation deprive her of the means to converse, to engage in ethical discourse

with her suitor, in so doing it blinds *des Grieux* to such concerns. Alone with his Eros, the purviews of his interioristic subjectivity are limited to the futural domain of his affair with this deity. As such, there is no explicit concern for his beleaguered beloved. *Manon*, as is reflected throughout the narrow focus of the text is often forgotten, never truly understood, never truly approached as being in possession of their own subjectivity. Des Grieux, as Donhoe notes in their commentary, concerns himself within the narrative of singularly articulating his own sufferings, failing to provide a sufficient account of *Manon's* plights (1972, p.137). Her love, her being, her suffering, is stifled beneath his obsession with his own Eros. The feminine unable to penetrate the cacophony of masculine Eros which praises her. The erotic subject is unable to peer over the precipice of their intrasubjectivity. So completely are they lost to their fantasy. This is evident when one considers the overtly Levinasian declaration of des Grieux's affection, which similarly encompasses the Erotic ontology, '*I, who lived only through and for her*' (Prevost 2008, p.19). The evangelical convictions of such sentiments stand in brazen opposition to the reality of the relation. As is evident within the text, the fraught ambitions and selfish schemes of the protagonists, the character of *des Grieux* cannot sincerely attest to the truth of such a statement, though his fundamental epistemological foundation may try. What is evident in Prevost's words, in *des Grieux's* constant confrontation with the needs and desires of *Manon* is that not only does he fail to live *for* her, tragically he fails to know, understand, or respect her. His love of Eros is what conspires to ensure that he fails her, his beloved.

Troublingly, the failure of des Grieux's Eros to liaise with his beloved's counterpart is of little to no consequence. This belies the ever-broadening toxicity of the erotic descent within such a reading. The self-fulfilling, self-affirming nature of Eros plunging the subject ever deeper into the depths of their interiority. Eros feeding itself on any delusional modicum of impersonal voluptuousity it may ascertain in the spectral projection of the beloved serves to further engulf the subjectivity of the doting partisan. Within the relation with the beloved this reveals itself in the lover's expectation of reciprocity. *Manon's* love is not perceived as something which is freely given or even as that which must be earned, it is not the natural fulfilment of the mutual participation in a loving relation. It is instead perceived by the entitled *des Grieux* as that which is owed to him by her for his sacrifice to the erotic, the reward for his piety to Eros (Gossman 1982, p.35). This imposes upon *Manon*, through his love, an unbearable expectation that she must somehow be capable, the flawed being that she is, of meeting such a demand. With the erotic persisting beyond the realms of discourse and therefore reciprocity, the beloved, already silenced and reduced, in their acts sincere or otherwise is susceptible to being perceived as

innately antagonistic. This is an unpleasant trend which persists throughout those tales of Masoch formerly considered and Prevost's text, seen as *Manon's* fleeting acts of autonomy are so deplorably vilified by *des Grieux*. Her attempts to exist, to assert her presence in the world and their relationship, to meet in mutuality as a subjectivity unto herself see her abruptly transition within the perspective of her suitor from a flawless being of 'sweet and enchanting modesty' (Prevost 2008, p.14), to that of 'the most fickle, the most perfidious creature in the world' (Prevost 2008, p.25). Evidently this is an unenviable position into which the beloved is unceremoniously cast. The world of the lover, this erotic domain of his masculine interiority is his only reality. All signification bears no imprint upon his being, 'outside of language, there is nothing' (Wellington 1994, p.30). The beloved, *Manon*, consequently, is forced to endure the silent fantasy of her suitor, a mute captive within the raucous indulgences of his intrasubjectivity.

To portray the beloved, *Manon*, as simply mute, would fail to adequately encapsulate the import with which she is held by *des Grieux*. To further explicate this relation for good and ill, we must also consider the consequences which the beloved incurs as a deified being, the idol of the lover's interiority. For not only does the beloved persist in a strained silence, she too must contend with the vertiginous transcendence instilled by the lover's Eros. Arising as a welcome outcome of the erotic relations retreat from language, the beloved may abound without restraint within the cavernous depths of the lover's interiority. As is the nature of the Levinasian Eros, it 'cannot help but extend beyond itself', (Katz 2001a, p.128) deserting the 'realm of suffering' (Wolcher 2006, p.531), Law and reason. In the frantic departure from the social, Eros extends the thoughts of the subject 'beyond objects and faces', (Levinas 1969, p.271) beyond the contemplation of the beloved. The descent into Eros, the withdrawal from the social, is by necessity a distancing between the lover and the beloved as the lover delves into the chasmous possibilities which abide in the 'not yet', (Levinas 1969, p.271) of the erotic.

It is only here in this toxic domain of fantasy that the mundanity of the flawed human other may, through the transfiguration afforded by the lover's Eros, emerge as any other but human, an ethereal specimen of perfection which transfixes the heart and soul of the lover, the endless vessel of possibility abounding in 'virginity', (Levinas 1969, pp.254-255) which is the beloved. Eros does not concern itself with the 'real', or indeed the possible, as Levinas himself writes explicitly, 'Love is not a possibility' (Levinas 1987, pp.88-9). This overt refutation of reason and reality adorn the pages of all but the most cynical of romantic texts. For there is an incumbent necessity within the subjectivity of every lover to endeavour to rationalise the irrationality of

Eros. To ground in the sublimity of the beloved, the uncharted heights of Eros. Therefore, to wrest the erotic subject from the shackles of intersubjectivity, to lure them from the firm clasps of Law, Eros must offer an appropriately beguiling avatar. One which appears veiled in the incomparable splendour of Eros' embrace, the erotic veil masking the ethical summons, the human compulsion to subjugate oneself forgone in exchange for the similarly affirming surrender to Eros. The height of the beloved is evident in the frequent erotic exultations of the lover, expressions of gratitude to their deity for bestowing upon them the pained pleasure of perceiving so potently resplendent a being. Prevost articulates this position sweetly within the recognisably innocent infatuation of *des Grioux* as he first begins to succumb to Eros: '*The more I came to know her, the more new and lovable qualities I discovered. Her mind and heart, her gentleness and beauty, these formed a chain so strong and so enchanting that I would have thought it perfect happiness to remain forever within its bounds*' (Prevost 2008, p.18). Even at this fledgling stage of the lover's descent, the limitless possibility which beckons within the beloved is evident. Each discovered aspect of her perceived being present as revelations of her apparent divinity. Each a further link in the chain of Eros upon him.

Expressed within this seemingly serene quote, portraying the early throes of love, lingers the sinister turn which it is to take upon the lover and inevitably upon the beloved. Prevost in presenting love as the most seductive of manacles, successfully establishes that *des Grioux's* love has ensnared his being, reducing him to an evangelical disciple of his newfound deity. This is plain throughout the tragic text as each development within the narrative sees *des Grioux's* articulations of reverence for Eros descend from such admirable praise for his beloved to corrupting, solipsistic utterances of self-serving fantastical falsities. The many failings and sins *des Grioux* commits throughout the novel are nonchalantly dismissed by the character as expressions of his fidelity to Eros. It is apparent that within the intrasubjectivity of Eros, beyond the ethical, Eros offers absolution, a necessary justification for the numerous acts of transgression he perpetrates. This is explicit within one such reflection by the character whence he states, '*Love has made me too tender, too passionate, too faithful, [...] these are my crimes*' (Prevost 2008, p.117). Within such a reading, each act contra the ethical edict of Law, is perceived by the lover as an act of faith, a necessary offering to the deity within whose clutches he forcefully establishes his being. As such, Eros presents not as a means to express affection, once more it is a perceptible 'self-seduction' (Boothroyd 1995, p.355), a means to perpetuate the abstract reverie of the subject's interiority. The 'inverted signification' (McDonald 1998, p.72), of the beloved results in this necessary self-revelatory relation with Eros. *Des Grioux's* words and acts belie the truth of his

relation with Eros as one which is egregiously self-interested. Presenting one's love as a justification for one's own misdemeanours serves to further the degree of contingency and reliance the subject maintains with their beloved. It is patent, and has been commented upon frequently (Thomas 1975, p.91; Ross 1983, p.200), that *des Grieux's* descent into the erotic presents overtly as a pursuit for 'his own self-justification' (Donohoe 1972, p.138), a desperate attempt to establish meaning and affirm his being within this fantasy, longing for a reprieve from being. As without the veil of Eros masking him from the ethical, he would be overcome by contrition and the insatiable summons of Law. Conveniently, Eros provides a welcome avenue through which the subject may bask in their interiority, a means to naively excuse and justify all he does (Thomas 1975, p.91). He may persist ignorantly as a romantic spirit, a passenger of Eros, resigning his fate and actions to that of his chimeric deity.

Instilling such a perverse paradigm within his subjectivity once more accommodates the lover's abhorrent neglect of his beloved. The pre-eminence of the self-imposed yet ever-alluring erotic narrative further reduces the standing of the beloved within the erotic relation. Muted, and now subservient to an irrational narrative of idolised being, *Manon* is forced further to the periphery of the lover's horizons. She is forced to spectate powerlessly upon *des Grieux's* relation with Eros, a relation taking place around her, in reverence to her, yet ever failing to approach and engage her. This is portrayed clearly when *des Grieux* considers how her acts have failed to accord with his erotic ideal and observes of his beloved, '*She sins, but without malice, I said to myself. She is frivolous and imprudent, but she is straightforward and sincere. Besides which, love alone was enough to make me close my eyes to all her faults*' (Prevost 2008, p.106). This absolving reflection upon the apparent transgressions of his beloved, when considered in this context further detail the prevalent reduction of the beloved's subjectivity within the lover's erotic interiority. These perceived acts of contrition inflicted upon *des Grieux* by his lover, the faults and failings are, in their misdiagnosis, dismissed. What *des Grieux* reluctantly accepts as the flawed traces of humanity upon the visage of his marble muse, are the dismissed means to establish a discourse with his beloved.

Each sin *Manon* commits against *des Grieux's* deity, is the rueful expression of her unique subjectivity, the articulation of her autonomy and character, that which one ought truly to love and not simply resolve to excuse. In so doing, the majestic feminine subjectivity of *Manon*, that which should truly grip his soul, is enthusiastically disregarded by her suitor. There is no room for alterity within the intrasubjective pursuit of his Eros. Every impudent act of autonomy, each

despairing cry to be heard, to find reason, to desperately assert her subjectivity is lost. Refuted and perverted by her lover's Eros. There may be no challenge to his demiurge, no meaning to her acts which does not conform. *Manon* is a prisoner of his Eros, each layer of his affections plastering over her being, burying her beneath the deepening clay of erotic pretence, yet another horrified, asphyxiated and static Pygmalion's bride. Enshrouded beneath the unfathomable depths of Eros, *Manon* is not only voiceless and immobile, she is condemned to repeatedly fail and in so doing incur the impetuous wrath of her lover. Against the infallible ideal she has been cast as, the lofty 'vertigo' of Eros (Levinas 1969, p.264), the beloved may only fall. Her actions, regardless of their sincerity, their truth and honesty, will always fail to amount to the ideal pitilessly pressed against her. The irrationality of Eros, that which serves to ensure it soars unencumbered, that the beloved may demand the lover's surrender to interiority, similarly condemns the beloved. The erotic ideal is 'beyond' the Other, beyond reason, and beyond reach (Levinas 1969, p.264). Every clumsy articulation of human vice, even the most innocent of manifestations, are sacrilegious as each serve to deface the porcelain idol of Eros. *Manon* is condemned by her lover, cast both as the motionless, implausible embodiment of his fascination, and as that conceited heretic who in her shameless endeavours to be understood, seen, found by her lover may excommunicate herself from his association with Eros.

This problematic dynamic between the lover and their beloved, is further convoluted when considering the spurious allure of erotic reciprocation. The necessity to self-deceive and perpetuate the validity of one's affections divulges the innermost desire that one's love is willingly reciprocated. Having considered Eros' capacity to self-seduce in founding itself in the 'love of the love of the other', (Levinas 1969, p.266) one would hope that such affection must itself be an expression of the beloved subject's autonomy, a recognition and appreciation of the grace of their subjectivity. Nonetheless, one would be pained to reconcile such an end with the preceding discussions which purport to deny the beloved of such standing within the relation. The lover ardently craves that their beloved too willingly submits to their Eros, that they *choose* to love the lover as they have their beloved. Is this not the accomplishment of Eros we all crave, that our maddening intoxication with Eros is met by its equal in our beloved? This, though, when considered in this Masoch-Levinasian perspective produces an uncomfortable challenge to the sincerity of such an ambition. For the beloved is divine, a peerless, statuesque materialisation of the erotic fantasy. An idol to be revered and worshipped accordingly.

Any such notion of reciprocity then may be seen as an affront to this positioning of the divine

beloved. To succumb to Eros is to submit, to surrender the humanity of one's being and retreat fanatically from the confines of the social relation, to withdraw from the gaze of exteriority/Law. Conversely, to be loved, is to be deified, idolized, lost to the erotic fantasy of one's suitor. This orients the beloved and the notion of reciprocity in the most adversarial of stances. How can the beloved, the '*mistress of my heart*', (Prevost 2008, p.14) she who the lover lives '*only through and for*' (Prevost 2008, 19), '*This bewitching creature [who] was so absolutely mistress of my soul*' (Prevost 2008, p.91), she who is beyond approach, without sin within the clasps of Eros, ever surrender to so defective a venture. For this noble pursuit is beneath even that of the ethical human, apt for only those stray romantic spirits. A beloved who dares to reciprocate will accordingly once more challenge the ideal of the lover, the masochistic dynamic manifest as each challenge to the erotic ideal plunges the lover further into fantasy, an arduous love necessitating the most devout of lovers.

Whether the beloved willingly reciprocates the affections bestowed upon her or, in her flagrant autonomy, does not conform to the ideal which entombs her, she is refuted nonetheless by the lover. Neither avenue offers an appropriate means for appeasing the voracious hunger of his Eros, neither approaches the arduous realisation of the visions which furnish his bewitching interiority. All that it is, is interiority, the delusions of the romantic spirit which will be pursued with indefatigable vigour. This ethereal ideal culminates not as one would fear in the possession of the motionless projection of the beloved, for 'Nothing is further from *Eros* than possession' (Levinas 1969, p.265). Instead, it is the fraught resolution to repossess oneself. Tumbling into Eros, tracing the beloved, each act of possession is one of surrender to Eros, the lover's torturous existence explicating the confliction within their interiority as they are 'both slave and master' (Levinas 1969, p.265), to and of Eros. Beneath this inelegant decline is harboured the belief that in attaining their Eros, embracing their ethereal chimera, they will finally find the fanciful rationality which has teased this miserable degradation of the loving subject. Nonetheless this is not their tragedy. It remains that of the beloved. She who is silenced, smothered and neglected by this doting dogmatism of the marauding lover. *Manon* is forced to bear the brunt of such a disservice. Her expressions of personality and character, a commendably economic and savvy personhood, are repeatedly rejected and justified as the foolish utterances of a mistaken child. Her autonomy itself is challenged, vilified and reduced to flagrant transgressions against *des Grioux* and his darling, Eros. Fundamentally, the beloved is the victim of his Eros, exposed to the violence of the lover's passions and the volatility that thrives within the other-than-ethical. This is the unenviable burden of the beloved and the reality of a love lost to its own depraved desire

to persist, in this instance even at the cost of the beloved's precious life, expressed fanatically by des Grieux: *'It is true I had lost everything that other men prize; but I ruled Manon's heart, which was the only prize I cared about'* (Prevost 2008, 130).

3.3. Manon's Death: The Cruelty of a Masculine Subjectivity

Love being entirely natural is innocent and never ceases to be so, but the world in which one lives is far more complicated. (Mead 1966, p.91)

Having outlined the impassioned volatility of Eros to which the beloved is non-consensually subjected, assaulted by the relentless barrages of mystic interiority, clothed behind veils of affection, one would wish that the beloved may find solace outside the confines of this delusory relation. In particular, one may hope that others, the Third and the State, the assemblage of law and society, may offer a welcome embrace of stability, certainty and ethics - an extrication from the erotic, returning once more to the real. Unfortunately, this is not how those spectators upon *des Grieux's* dalliance with Eros, populating and maintaining the State, intervenes in *Manon's* plight. Where she would so desperately long for salvation and rationality, these others which embody the State emerge as sinister, imperious masculine characters, an antagonistic scythe serving once more to reduce and ridicule *Manon's* already bruised subjectivity. For this articulation of the State is not merely the disinterested machinations of political institutions, it belies a distinctly human character. There is no wondrous utopia waiting over the horizon for *Manon* to exhaustedly stumble toward. The State, in *his* various guises, instead coerces, represses and condemns those who do not fit within the confines of its fickle, arcanelly heteronormative ideals. *Manon*, as a woman who is not imprisoned by her sexuality, who is not ashamed of her fondness of pleasure, who persists in the merits of her own being, who attests to the worth of her subjectivity is doomed to endure not merely the erotic assails of those men succumbing to Eros, she too must aspire to survive the inconsiderate vigour of man's subjectivity, and his State.

As established, the political, within Levinas's thought stands opposed to the moral (Levinas 1969, p.21). This by no means necessitates the political as immoral, it merely articulates the contrasting intentions of each respective strand. The Masochian compulsions of the ethical, the complete surrender of one's being to the erotic edict, the subject's affirmation founded in self-flagellation before an insatiable task, juxtaposes clearly with the political desire for blind equality, recognition and justice. Consequently, there is an overt tension between the ethical and the

political within Levinas's thought and any reading thereof concerning the state arises intriguingly as that space where collectively 'individuals, one by one, [must] become hostage to those of the greatest need' (Alford 2007, p.109). Provocatively, Levinas himself contends that any freedom one conceives of beyond the political space is merely 'an illusion', as all exercises of freedom are contingent upon 'a certain organisation [...] of society' (Levinas 1969, p.241). Indeed, this may signal as to the evident ethical failings which persist throughout the history of society, as the ethical must succumb to the calls of justice and confront the relation which loiters beyond the face of the Other. But, in such a movement from the ethical, surreptitiously one necessarily welcomes the other-than-ethical to guide the political and so begins all violence. Here, the Law in its most positivistic iteration arises imposing upon society with brutalistic simplicity the normative edict of how one is to be as 'Law takes precedence over charity' (Levinas 2017, p.20). These laws, that which structures and maintains the State, offer a freedom which is 'engraved on the stone of the tables on which laws are inscribed', it is a freedom which 'depends on a written text' (Levinas 1969, p. 241). The clash between the ontological Law of the subject's ethical being and that of the written law of the State arises, with the latter welcoming the abuse and agenda which the former refutes. A law penned by man is inescapably marred by *his* touch.

The State ensures that the ethical impulse guiding the subject is dimmed, the subject need no longer find within themselves the summons of their actions as the law is now their guide. As a result, the subject can no longer, 'find the law of his actions in the depths of his heart', (Levinas 2017, p.20) he must defer to the State and its pseudo-moral values to inspire and rationalise their being. Inverting the subject's relation with their own ontology, the active servitude of the ethical is displaced by the disoriented desire for direction which manifests in its absence. The subject now stares admiringly upon the State, as he 'awaits the meaning of his being from outside; he is no longer the man confessing his sins, but the one acquiescing to accusations' (Levinas 2017, p.20). Accordingly, man is not liberated by the State, they are stupefied by it, the imposition of law, culture, structure, serving to sedate the ethical summons which defines their very ontology and distort it beyond recognition. Within this anaesthetized mode, the subject is susceptible to the more baleful aspects of the State which serve to dismember the face of the Other. The pursuit of recognition and equality which present as the intentions of the State and its political movement are innately vulnerable to sinister misuse as they rest upon the words of law, the words of man. Society as a result, the community which resides within the parameters of the State, is not merely the benign 'presence of being', (Levinas 1969, p.181) the innocuous corporealization of alterity, it is the organisation of being within the State and as such may be

manipulated and contorted to articulate the forceful will of those who penned it. This, though not by necessity, inevitably culminates in the production and proliferation of an order which serves to recognise only those who its founders are willing to recognise, to designate status and autonomy to, only the actors who reflect the values, reasoning and culture of the State's clandestine authors. A fickle and arbitrary means to establish those which befit a face and those deemed unworthy of such grace.

This cynical reading of the Levinasian State itself alludes to one of the most uncomfortable criticisms of Levinas's political thought. Namely that he failed to acknowledge the political dynamics within his writings, ethical or otherwise, which brazenly were seen to 'relegate[...] femininity to the home, to the dwelling, to the carnal, to the maternal, to tropes that have historically contained and confined women to a marginal history', (Chanter 2007, p.76) without attempting to produce a framework/narrative of the political which may attempt to rationalise this egregious historic imbalance. Alongside this condensation his work is also critiqued for its similar reduction, at points of his life, of Palestinians as exemplifying those who 'do not quality as others' (Chanter 2007, p.76) and as the mode of alterity in which one may 'find an enemy' (Caygill 2008, p.90). Producing a conception of the State and the political is therefore a means of distancing these failings from the ethical writings of Levinas as under this conception of the State, this inability to perceive the wonders of alterity in certain others, is a failure not of the theorist nor by necessity the individual but instead rests at the feet of the State. The character of this flawed, human State expressed in the nonchalant inscription of laws. The laws and the State, the political in action, assert themselves upon the subject's being imposing where once there was ethical reason, only the singular values and ideals which serve the State. Allowing a State which injudiciously rewards those recognisable traits, which cradles the faces which are deemed worthy of the gifts of law, and punishes those it refuses to approach, forgetting the wonders of the metaphysical and the call of the Other. This culminates in a construction of a familiar State which affords a limited freedom, a freedom which is contingent upon the subject's class, gender, and status. A hegemonic State of homogenous masculine subjectivity, not ethics nor metaphysics, which unashamedly liberates some and oppresses many others. And, as is of particular relevance, refutes *Manon*, as it has so many iterations of alterity and femininity, condemning her immodest charms and shameless lack of status without regard for her belligerent declarations of subjectivity.

As with the portrayal of Eros presented with *Manon Lescaut*, that of the State is similarly

problematic, though perhaps more tolerably recognizable to the modern palate. The State found within the pages of Prevost's novel are rife with character, exuding the heteronormative patriarchal values of the author's day which remain prevalent. It is a society built upon and for the ideals of man, championing the false morality of the aristocracy and vilifying the all-too-human vices of pleasure and sexuality. Concisely, it is a State built to oppress and control those which may induce unrest as seen in the text's condemnation of gambling, dishonouring one's family, promiscuity and forsaking one's faith. Modesty, restraint and reason are all promoted to ensure stability, serving to perpetuate the control of both the masculine individual and his society. As discussed, the imposition of these values is felt as a punishing restriction upon the individual, by those others who invite the gaze of condemnation for daring to not conform to the accepted iteration of alterity. These others, especially the feminine and the hedonistic, are denigrated by the Prevost's State and as will be explored in the succeeding chapter, Levinas's language. Consequently, when characters embodying these values are portrayed, what one perceives in the text is a derisory mode of excedence, the failed attempt to escape the confines of their status/gender through the muddy waters of pleasure. Unrecognised by both the State and *des Grieux's* narrative, they are often diminished and loathed in equal measure. And unsurprisingly, it is here where one finds the darling *Manon*. Though *Manon* is the only female voice presented with any resonance, here we discern its profound lack of body as it is smothered by not only her suitor but also his society, and the assemblage of masculine subjectivities which are his State. Muted by both *des Grieux's* carnival of Eros and the masculine subjectivity's unwillingness to recognise her as an other, she was created to be manacled, drowned by the raucous refutation of her being. A victim of Man's love and his laws.

Manon is identified throughout the text by *des Grieux* as a being who is unique in that she is 'passionately fond of pleasure' (Prevost 2008, p.36). If not explored fully, one could glean from such an assessment that she is a depraved hedonist, seeking excedence in the fleeting relief of carnal relations and extravagant fineries. While such an assessment is often articulated within the text, by *des Grieux's* insincere narration, this fails to appropriately recognise the earnest merits of her machinations. For what is established in her frequent indulgences is her commendable refutation of the external constraints thrust upon her. In her defiant acts in pursuit of decadence, she disregards the masculine dictates of exteriority in its most potent ontological and political iterations. Unfazed by the ethical summons and the violent normativity imposed upon her by her lover and the State, *Manon* cuts a heroic figure of unashamed feminine individuality. The confines seemingly thrust upon her by the narrative and her gender are constantly fractured.

What it is to be a woman within this Masoch-Levinasian landscape, as expressed in the plight of *Manon*, is to be confined, utilised and condemned. Whether that be to the pious chambers of the convent, to the quietened domain of domesticity as a wife, to the moral restraints of the Hospital, or the fantastical burdens of a suitor's Eros, each avenue is a suppression of being, a reduction of the feminine to the less-than-other.

Even within her romantic relation with *des Grieux*, she is seen to value this most precious capacity for autonomy afforded by her economic being over the allure of her own Eros. She, until her untimely demise, persists defiantly as a subject who is unwilling to succumb to any values which are determined for her, she bravely wishes to assert her own subjectivity against the bellicose male brutality of the State and the various inflictions of Eros she receives. This, as commentators such as Gasster have noted (1985 p.107), is what makes *Manon's* tale so endearing and tragic, as the 'feminine qualities of great strength', she endeavours to personify are those which vilify her to the chorus of jailors/suitors within the text. This admirable yearning for excedence is evidenced within the first meeting of *Manon*, as the affair with *des Grieux*, that which dictates the tale, is founded upon his transactional offer to save her from her fate as she is enroute to a life of submission within the convent: '*she confessed that if I could see some way to procuring her freedom, she would consider herself indebted to me for something dearer than life itself.*' (Prevost 2008, pp.14-15) Unfortunately, the intoxicating descent into Eros of her lover ensures that this fleeting emancipation is lacking in sincerity, as once her fate is intertwined with his tumultuous resignation to Eros, her enchanting nature damns her to be pursued and denigrated by those individuals and institutions who wish to possess and immure her.

This illuminates the inescapable dynamics of power which the novel so emotively demonstrates as *Manon's* liberty is condemned to amount to little more than her own fantastical ambition. Though she continually attempts to liberate herself from the shackles of her preordained station, the limited remit afforded to those of her class and gender, her lover emerges as a tireless liberator and captor. Whenever their affair falls foul of the State and they are shown the ferocity of its true character, through their incarcerations and mis-dealings with society, *des Grieux*, emboldened by the naivete and arrogance bestowed upon him by the political, repeatedly disentrals her through his considerable capacity to manipulate the State by his means and heritage. Each instance of such unshackling, freeing her from the force of the State and the dull call of the ethical summons which adorns exteriority, is merely another act of tyrannical suppression as she is compelled by her grand suitor to realise his Eros. As his beloved she is

similarly victim to the potency of his intemperate disposition. The lover fails to embrace her, just as the State has. He persecutes her 'with tirades, verbal assaults, manipulations and emotional outbursts; while as her narrator he tells her story to his own advantage and scarcely allows her even to speak her own lines' (Prevost 2008, XIX). In the relation between the two, the unholy communion of Eros and the State combine to ensure that *Manon* is inescapably suppressed as he wields the advantages afforded him by the State to ensure his tireless pursuit is not in vain. In this regard, the insatiable greed of *des Grioux's* Eros ensures that man's hand is forever clasped tightly upon the delicate throat of the enigmatic *Manon* as she must resign either to the cold shackles of Law, through prison or piety, or to the incorrigible sequestration by her suitor.

This nefarious cocktail of the political and the Erotic attains its insidious end as *Manon's* plagued being is finally possessed and expires. Having been transferred from the arms of lovers to the embrace of institutions and back again, she is finally sentenced, along with a number of prostitutes, to live in the New World. While *des Grioux's* status ensures his fate is not obtruded upon him as hers is, he cannot forgo the caress of Eros and dotingly pursues her across the Atlantic. For a short time, this novel land appears as an oasis to the lovers and ever so briefly, they may share in the embrace of their weary affections: '*Anyone who wants to taste love in all its sweetness, I often said to Manon, should come to New Orleans. For only here can one love and be loved without self-interest or inconstancy. Our compatriots come looking for gold; they have no idea how much more precious are the treasures we have found here*' (Prevost 2008, p.135). Indeed, what presents is the realisation of *des Grioux's* absurd erotic vision as in this fledgling community, to which *Manon* was exiled, those which served to inhibit his ambitions are no longer present. The State which has served as the antagonistic adversary to his Eros alongside *Manon's* discourteous autonomy, initially at least, is no longer felt as forcefully. In the New World, the expectations and structures of society have yet to fully exert themselves and as such, here one appears free of the history and traditions which punish in accordance with their plastic morality. The summons masculine subjectivity healed through the beckons of *des Grioux's* father, societal expectation and his faith, are not to be heard nor seen in the simplicity which adorns their now humble existence.

What liberates for *des Grioux* ensnares his beloved as *Manon* is further confined within this bleak landscape. An enchanting, economic being of pleasure, she is devoid of that which has dictated her existence. The admirable defiance of her character necessarily dissipates as there is no avenue for pleasure nor autonomy now, she finds herself in this fledgling colony of *des Grioux's* Eros. Devoid of alternatives, the capacity for subjectivity erodes as she is willingly reduced to the

embodiment of her lover's ideals, inescapably chained to his unreplicable deity, the final prison of the beloved. This domination of *Manon* ultimately marks her demise as she 'becomes his character - unable to speak for herself, totally dependent on him for her existence' (Gossman 1982, p.36). Finally reduced to the placidity of plaster, she is another Pygmalion's Bride, a being of unheralded magnificence reduced to the motionless manifestation of an ideal. Indeed, it is not surprising that at this point of complete possession, whence *Manon* finally succumbs to 'the order of fidelity', (Ross 1983, p.200) her death awaits her. The death of her character, her belligerent subjectivity, is traced by that of her being. This, for many commentators, such as Donohoe (1982, p.129) and Thomas (1975, p.88), is the inescapable end of *des Grieux's* pursuit. The madness of his Eros only finding its ravenous salvation in the desolation of his beloved's demise. Nonetheless, even in this moment of excruciating loss, the pain he feels is for himself, not for his beloved who has suffered exhaustively throughout his courtship. Prevost articulates his lamentable solipsism concisely as the character in this destined moment simply states, '*I lost her*' (Prevost 2008, p.142).

The insincerity of Eros is revealed following this concession. Given that the tale and *Manon's* life has hinged upon his ardent surrender to Eros, the loss of she who he proclaimed fervently to live '*through and for*', one may anticipate a Shakespearean crescendo, whereby *des Grieux* finding himself alone in the crevasse of his interiority, isolated in the barren lawless landscape of the New World, may willingly consign himself to the same fate. To pursue her once more into the next life. However, here the distinction between the characters which has been evident to the reader, is revealed. Whilst *Manon* was inhibited by her gender, status and most potently by her adorer, *des Grieux's* subjectivity has been free to persist unencumbered. Consequently, he has remained throughout the text as exhibiting more autonomy than *Manon* could have ever dreamed of possessing. Decidedly, the demise of *Manon* does not herald his undoing, it is his remedy: '[...] *Heaven, after chastizing me so severely, intended that I should benefit from my punishments and misfortunes. It lightened my darkness, and reawakened in me ideas worthy of my birth and education. Since a certain calm had also been restored to my soul, this change led almost at once to my recovery*' (Prevost 2008, p.145). What is to be gleaned from this reflection, is that the descent into Eros, while necessarily fatal for *Manon*, was a mere interruption to his lofty existence. The State and the various iterations and institutions of his masculine subjectivity ensuring that someone of his standing, education and particularly gender, is too precious to be lost entirely. His lengthy ordeal with Eros is merely regarded as a fickle deviation from the norm as he is welcomed back redeemed and wiser. The death of *Manon* and Eros, serves its role in liberating this indomitable fool from his dalliances

with the ethereal. This belies the true tragedy of Prevost's tale: it is not of the love, which is lost, but the indifference which is afforded the insurmountable burdens of the beloved *Manon*, the pitiful victim of both his Eros and State. A subject afflicted by the dual suffering bestowed upon both the beloved other, and the less-than-other.

3.4. Conclusion

Having considered previously through the pages of Masoch's *Kolomea* an Eros which may inspire and ruin the mesmerised lover, through the emotive tale of *Manon*, I have outlined that which lingers beyond this solipsistic precipice and perceives the pained affliction of the beloved. The beloved, though not necessarily, may evidently become a victim of the lover's dalliance with Eros. The insatiability of their relation serves to ensure that this idol of their soul is too left profoundly unsatisfied. Forgotten, reduced, vilified and destined to fail, we have seen how the beloved's pedestal presents a lofty target of ire for the disgruntled servant of Eros as that which serves to deify her similarly ensures she is alone, powerless and muted. A subjectivity lost beneath plaster as layer upon layer of erotic pretence and projection, their warmth itself, is smothered by the ideal they are cast as in the dotting eyes of their captor. Once more, in this literary analysis of the Masoch-Levinasian reading, I contend we have revealed an Eros which stands in stark contrast to the ethical ideals which abound in modern discourse. A most perfidious and insincere conception of love upon which the tale of *Manon* is itself contingent. The tale of *des Grieux's* love also serves to portray the inability of *Manon* to free herself from the masculine clutches of her admirers, her inability to exist unencumbered, free from glares of possession, or words of condemnation.

Yet it is not merely the snares of would-be lovers which has voraciously pursued her, she has equally been the victim of their State and the politics which facilitate such unfettered forays into the erotic by her male stewards. Revisiting and furthering the cynical Masochian reading of Levinas, in particular that of his political ideology, or lack thereof, we reveal in the tragedy of *Manon* of a masculine means for oppression which, as with Eros, will violently condemn and harm those which are not afforded the grace of befitting the vertiginous standing of 'other'. A State built upon, by and for Man and *his* subjectivity which is inevitably disfigured and marred by the lamentable objective of his acts. *Manon* is doomed throughout, as many beloved's have been for the longest time, to be victimised for the wonders of her being. Valued and heralded only as

an object of affection which may be desired and possessed yet never approached. A deity without discourse, an adored if isolated being forced to suffer the indignity of being both beloved and denied, idolised and muted, deified and chained. The exhausting burden imposed by man, his affections and his politics, of being both the beloved other and the less-than-other.

Ruminating upon how an other-than-ethical Eros may inflict such injury upon the beloved, and the unmistakably chauvinistic tenor which accompanies such an analysis, necessitates further, broader consideration. First and most foremost, it is evident that within Levinasian scholarship, even that which is referenced herein which has no ambition of descending into a discussion of the political or tangibly legal, there is a profound cleavage between those advocates wishing to extoll and extend his writings into and of the political, desiring to fashion a means to materialise the metaphysical and in so doing, compel the wonders of alterity, and those which consider this effort as speculative, if not counter-intuitive as the metaphysical will ardently refute the materiality of law and bureaucracy. Within the Masochean reading which I am resolved to present and defend, that which has thusly relied exclusively upon the dramatic romanticism of texts which are plagued by the misogyny and belligerence of their protagonists, authors and ages, this stands apposite to the central edict of this perspective. Plainly, though my analysis has been founded by the indulgent sentimentality of such texts, what perhaps has not been thusly articulated overtly enough, is that in doing so, the perspective is intent upon discerning, corporealizing and celebrating the central relation of metaphysics, of ambiguity alterity, upon which the Levinasian doctrine rests. Accordingly, though the literary subjects hitherto referenced all assume a certain familiarity as masculine, privileged, romantic ideologues this is trivial beyond the scope of the literary sensitivity this affords. They are, at least to me, compelling obsessive slaves to their Other (personifying both the ethical and erotic). However, what has begun to encroach upon the exploration of this perspective is the gradual seeping of indelicate language and imagery from beyond the literary, and from Levinas and his kindly bestowed framework itself. As a consequence, it is necessary to now consider both my own relation, through the Masochean reading to Levinas and Eros.

Explicitly, as the next chapter addresses, we must assess the extent to which we are able, if at all, to extricate the merits of Levinas's ethical doctrine from the flawed language with which it is presented, addressing the problematic manner in which he engages with and conceptualises the feminine. Evidently, that erotic, sexual language which first inspired the fusion of Masoch and Levinas must be considered in its own terms to ensure that flawed chauvinism resides in the

literary tropes revisited, not within the theory itself. Further, and similarly compelled by the development of this thesis, and especially *des Grioux's* need for Eros, I must consider whether or not I too have been, or still am, merely longing for an ontological rooting, and if so, does that allow the space required to consider perhaps an alternative refutation of Levinas's binarism, of a being not lost to love, but one which craves the affirmation, certainty and promise it bestows. A being who cannot abide within the terms of the social and is not fortunate enough to be struck by Eros' divine blow, a lost, subsistent being.

Interlude 3: The illness of interiority

The belief, more often than not a false belief, that at the end of love you could have done things differently, been master of your fate, corrupts and drives the lover to madness. It is so much easier to constantly harass yourself with the incessant accusation of 'What if?', that you almost succumb to the illusion that you could have prevented the demise with which you must now face.

'What if I hadn't done that?',
 'What if I hadn't said that?',
 'What if I had done more?',
 'What if I had done less?'
 'What if you gave me another chance?'

All are indulgently solipsistic questions, reducing the Other to a pliable object of your desires, something you could manipulate to serve your every whim if you were but to tread carefully and cunningly. Yet, all fail to accuse in the appropriate manner, withholding the indelicate truth of a soured love, it is no longer a question of what you do or did, it is a question instead of what you are. What you have become to your beloved Other. And, of having the enviable capacity to recognise the violence of a romantic subjectivity which does not accord with its object.

When the beloved no longer abides in reciprocity, their lover assumes a new form. The charmer, seducer, partner though bearing the same face, is no longer seen in such esteemed regards. They are now the oppressor, the harasser, the abuser. Imposing their ideations of the relation upon the beloved, desperate that their perception may assert itself upon reality. Invariably, it fails to do so. It may stumble on, indelicately for a time. As the beloved slowly comes to realise that the veil of Eros has departed, and the cold sting of reason refutes their former dalliance. Eventually, the collision is felt. Stifling, uncomfortable, insufferable. They who still frantically cling to the dissipating atmosphere of love cannot fathom their partner's departure. Clawing within themselves, at their beloved, to remedy this malady.

When every question of themselves has been asked, when every moment has been poured over time and time again, when they reluctantly admit to the powerlessness of their feeble hands, of their resignation to madness, finally they may dare to confront themselves and ask their beloved,

'How did this happen?'
 'What have I become?'

It is perhaps the most painful aspect of a lost love, to not only discern that Eros has departed you, but to find out that it made a blind beast of you. That you, not love or the beloved, and whatever villain you in love became, are the very cause of their misery.

4. Facing the Feminine: Traversing the ‘no woman’s land’ of Levinas

I wrestled against my own nature and did much violence to myself in order to give him as much happiness as possible. And when I felt myself on the point of sinking under my burden, I had only to think of my children - fear for their future brought me to my feet and again I continued along my Via Dolorosa

(Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.43)

[...] Women have no character - only caprices. A woman could torture me to death and it would only make me happy ... but I do not allow myself to be bored. I simply dumped her.”

My heart tightened painfully. “This is how you too will be ‘dumped’ one day,” an inner voice whispered. (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.102)

There is an unspoken truth. An inconvenient and undeniable critique which arises formidably against the authors who have been presented through the Masochean reading, and consequently perhaps of the reading itself, that of the silent, objectified, abused, and most tragically forgotten feminine. Casting the most fleeting of surveys over the texts upon which the Masochean reading of Levinas is founded, one may discern a profoundly uncomfortable quandary as those rich, emotive writings, the language which affords such sentiment, is contingent upon a most violent and consistent oppression of ‘her’, the feminine other. The reading itself, which thrives upon and revels in the enthused embrace of indulgent, hyperbolic romanticism of such texts, cannot refute the subjugated position to which the feminine is confined. Thematically, the feminine other, the goddess of ethics, Eros or alterity itself; this divine unfathomable, unreachable being is consistently reduced, restricted and asphyxiated by the masculine subject. His language, his laws, his affections, his being, his hands, all of which are conceived as the exalting offertories of a fanatic evangelist present as a relentless barrage upon her.

Perpetuating consistently throughout the Masochean reading, and perversion, of Levinasian subjectivity, the most noble of intentions invert and conspire seditiously against themselves, achieving a Levinasian ‘tragedy’ (Levinas 2017, p.3). Ever present within the writings of Levinas and Masoch the perceived deification of the feminine other is undermined by the reality of their forceful oppression. To the masculine subject, they are simply an other-than-being, that which is all too easily reduced to a less-than-being. Though one may repeatedly contest that the Other, the abstract/exalted conception of the feminine is held aloft, upon a pedestal of revelry, servitude and fantasy: dependent upon which relation one is abstracting - the ethical or the

erotic. However, as this chapter will detail, it is with unsettling ease that the sincerity of such a notion may be crudely and abruptly contested. Gestures and proclamations of purported affection and reverence revealed as crude efforts to bely the distasteful truth of this dynamic, are not offered, they are imposed upon *her*, the feminine other.

For, if it is she who is held aloft, ascending upon the masculine chorus which celebrates her irreducible ambiguity, the wondrous mysticism of potentiality and alterity she embodies. It is he who holds her there. Firm in his grasp. The grip of his enthused embrace, though elevating, is stifling. Raised above the dirt of subjectivity, she is powerless, straining in discomfort. The imprints of his hands contort her flesh and bone, moulding her essence. Sculpting her, shaping her being with a playful carelessness. Contained, captured, he continues. As though her body is his to alter, as though she is his. Throughout, her groans of anguish may meet his words of exaltation, his ensnaring whispers delivered in delicate earnestness. Her pain accompanied by the softness of his expressions, all of which are testaments to her magnificence. Tender words of love justifying the unspeakable violence he inflicts. The cold, unwelcome touch upon her skin is now coarse, devoid of kindness. Idea, pretence and projection smother her, enveloping her, drowning her until she is reduced to an immobile artefact of his glutinous subjectivity. A facilitator, a lesser, a means. Unable to breathe under the weights of his affection. Held. So tightly. Unable to be heard over his raving gospel. She, who would be a deity, unceremoniously brutalised to an object of insincere flattery. A defiled reprieve from the strife of masculine ontology. The euphoria of these Pygmalion disciples, undercut by the density of the marble which imprisons their bride.

The unpleasant depiction of such an asymmetrical dynamic is regrettably consistent within the writings of both Sacher-Masoch and Levinas. Though, I still contend with conviction that there is substantial merit to be found within their romantic prose, which I have outlined previously and do so once more herein, one must be willing to confront the palpable discomfort which arises, like a sudden chill crawling uninvited down one's neck, when we forgo the masculine focus of such texts and consider *her*. Of the aforementioned writings, it is perhaps unsurprising to find this forceful complaint lodged against the uninhibited indulgences of Sacher-Masoch's literary works. For while his texts, most notably *Don Juan of Kolomea* and his opus *Venus in Furs*, ardently profess to the sincerity of their author, as is conveyed through his male protagonists, the masculine hero entrapped by their enthused pursuit of Eros, the candour of their endeavour is harshly undermined by the portrayal of the feminine other. All too often, the feminine subject

who endures their affection is cast binaristically as either that of the divine (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.144) or the monstrous (Sacher-Masoch, L 1991, p.237) a master manipulator of their emotions, toying with them cruelly, weaponizing their enamoured aspirations of Eros, slowly tearing the protagonist apart. A convenient exculpation for the rapacious violence which the protagonist, *Des Grieux* or otherwise, invariably inflicts upon her being.

And, while one dare not question the earnestness of the writer nor the protagonist's fidelity to Eros, once one is removed from the narrow, dramatic confines of the subject's prideful narrative, the portrayal, or indeed the failure to do so comprehensively, of the feminine other is crudely dismissive and wilfully ignorant. The feminine other, against whom the emotive crux of his texts are founded, is consistently a muted imposition upon the narrative of the protagonist. Their words, beliefs, values and very subjectivity presents as a silent affront to the false ideal of Eros which dominates the masculine subject's being. The true tragedy which thematizes Sacher-Masoch's texts, and arguably his own life, is that the steadfast commitment to Eros and the erotic fantasy, manifest in *Severin's* imposed self-subjugation, *Demeterius'* incapacity to love, and Sacher-Masoch's own tireless longing for his '*Wanda*', which saw him flit from affair to affair, engagement to engagement and marriage to marriage, persistently fails to embrace, love and perhaps most poignantly to know the feminine other as they are (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991). All which does not align serenely with their evangelical, romantic ideals is perceived as an insolent affront and assault upon both their divine Eros and their own being. Too often, the feminine other is ignored, rejected and forgotten because they fail to conform to that ideal which has been obtruded upon them with amorous ferocity.

This bellicose narcissism which plagues such masculine subjects, itself tentatively approaching upon solipsism, is perhaps most painfully evidenced in the sorrowful re-telling of one of Sacher-Masoch's own former loves. That upon which his famed text *The Divorcee*, was derived. To contextualise this, ever so briefly, throughout his romantic life, Sacher-Masoch was consumed by the dream that the most supreme expression of affection a lover could achieve for him was not merely the cruel eroticised beatings to which Kraft-Ebbing ensured his name would gain infamy, it would instead be for his beloved to engage in infidelious relations with someone resembling the imperious masculinity of '*The Greek*', from his *Venus in Furs*. Expectedly, as this extract reveals, the insatiety of the fantasy will always triumph and discourteously dismiss the reality of the affections and the feminine other before them. She must be forgotten so the fantasy may persist, unencumbered by the stain of her subjectivity:

‘The liaison with Mme. de K____ had lasted for some years when Sacher-Masoch made the acquaintance of a Polish count, whom he introduced to her. [...] The Polish count had few[...] scruples [...] and accepted what was *quasi*-offered to him. Besides that Mme de K____ had over the course of years become aware of Sacher-Masoch’s fantasy, and had resigned herself to it. One day, Sacher-Masoch found himself in his father’s office at the police station when an employee entered to read an arrest warrant concerning an assistant pharmacist who had fled to Lemberg after having committed a theft, and who had been traced to Graz. Under “identifying marks” the warrant listed certain symptoms of a horrible venereal disease. Sacher-Masoch recognised, feature for feature, his Polish count in the portrait of the criminal. Mme. de K____ had been under a doctor’s care for the past several weeks. [...] In this affair Mme. de K____ had compromised herself far too much, and then - the *disease*! In brief, the writer concluded that it was best for him to break off their relationship.’ (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.101)

This distorted, ultimate act of love, met only with the humiliating desolation of rejection. A pained theme which clandestinely punctuates Sacher-Masoch’s emotive, sincere, if ignorant, texts.

Rather inconveniently, the ethical doctrine of Levinas is far from beyond such reproach. For while the foundations of his philosophy present as dense, played out within the abstract domains which allow for the inversion of ethical being into the ontological through the metaphysical desire which is found within the Other, his varied and prolific writings often lean overtly upon his unsettling, visceral conceptualisation of the feminine. While his portrayal of the feminine varies substantially over the course of his writings, as is reasonable given the length of his esteemed career, throughout there persist a number of troubling conceptualisations of the feminine and of their relation to the subject in matters of the ethical and the erotic. In his formative years, particularly within *Time and the Other*, the feminine emerges as the central concept upon which the foundational ethical doctrine rests, as it is not abstract alterity but femininity which is adopted to represent the essential ‘quality of difference’ (Levinas 1987, p.36), towards which the ethical must strive. This initial conception is then developed further, with the adoption of alterity usurping femininity as the articulation of difference in later works. Even at this juncture, most explicitly articulated in *Totality and Infinity*, the role of the feminine is ambiguous at best, as it is portrayed repeatedly as a means through which the subject may discover the ethical. Of note is the conception of ethical community presented as ‘dwelling’, which itself is contingent upon its innate femininity as Levinas contends, flouting uncomfortable anachronism, that every ‘home in *in fact presupposes* a woman’ (1969, pp.157-158).

In addition, within *Totality and Infinity*, the feminine is also conceptualised as the necessary element of Eros. With the disconcerting celebration of the ‘mystery’ (1969, pp. 276-77), of the feminine, a most distasteful masculine trope which is only exacerbated by the unpalatable portrayal of the ‘virgin’ other (1969, p. 258). The ethereal, incomprehensible wonders of alterity found within Eros, dirtied by language which is recklessly sexual and fails to recognise the feminine as anything more than a beloved object. Not an equal, not even a ‘female lover’ (Irigaray 2001, p.126). Such themes are consistent through the text, within his gendered conception of fecundity which accomplishes the persistence of the ethical subject through the child. Similarly troubling, the subject is purported to endure through their ‘son’ (Levinas 1969, p.279), a relation with an unsettlingly egoistic iteration of alterity as the other, the son, ‘is me’ (1969, p.277). Once more, the subject’s relation with themselves, with alterity is contingent upon whilst not engaging with the feminine other, as this ‘paternal’ relation is reliant upon the feminine as the bearer of the child yet does not bring them into this relation (1969, p.278). Latterly, in *Otherwise than Being*, which will not be explored herein to ensure thematic and theoretical consistency, Levinas somewhat unexpectedly given the historical indiscretions of his language, conceives of maternity as the highest articulation of the ethical relation (Levinas 1999, p.79). This itself, though an attempt to celebrate the arduous sacrifice which is manifest within the horrors of birth and the maintained sacrifice of maternity, invites critique by overtly incorporating sexual/gendered difference, arguably unnecessarily, into a doctrine predicated upon the ambiguous, metaphysical and abstract (Rosato 2012). Even from this brisk and introductory summary, it is glaringly apparent why so many theorists struggle to forgo these heavy-handed linguistic tendencies which adorn his works, with a diverse and growing body of writers unable to reconcile the crudely ‘traditional’, ‘assumptions’ (Vasey 2005, p.388) of gender, nor his ‘gratingly patriarchal’ (Sandford 2006, p.147) language, with the wider merits of his philosophy.

While many writers are equally quick to defend Levinas and his work, and such rebuttals will be incorporated and considered throughout this chapter, it is apparent that the theorist who enthusiastically embraces Levinas must also confront the violence of the sexualised language which he wields so habitually. Within my own first conception of this chapter, I must confess to a certain reluctance to wilfully critique the writings which I found so compelling and would wholeheartedly laud as offering much to any would-be reader of Levinas. Intuitively, my own defensive reaction was perhaps an articulation of that which is best conveyed by Brody, that the

thematic tendencies of Levinas's writing, the abstraction of the erotic which interplays fervently with such crudely sexualised terminology is itself erotic (Brody 2001, p.57), incorporating into the abstraction the sensation which it portrays. It is this erotic language, which he adopts so haphazardly in his former years which often facilitates and furthers the poetics of his metaphysics. The abstract conceptions of a subjectivity which is bound to alterity, of a subject lost without the Other, who is completely for the Other, desperately longing and desiring them with all their being, are, as is the rationale which underpins the Masochian reading, intensified and emphasised through and by virtue of this vulgar eroticism. Despite this self-indulgent perspective, in order to further the merits of Levinasian philosophy, within and without the Masochian reading, the violence of such language and the offensive themes presented within his works cannot be ignored and must be addressed by any ardent disciple of his doctrine, who must be willing to determine for themselves the extent to which Levinas's philosophy requires redemption from his pen.

Explicitly, the intention of the Masochian reading, wherein this text resides, is to corporealize and engage with the fervour and sensibility of Levinas's theories of the ethical and erotic, the Law of the subject's being. Whilst there is no intent to perpetuate or promote a gendered or hierarchical conception of these aspects of his philosophy, one must address this inconvenient component of the framing ideology or else render it exposed, vulnerable to comparably vociferous animadversion. Consequently, this chapter is compelled, with the same enthusiasm and vigour which inspired this literary analysis of Levinas, to critically invert one's gaze. Within the subsequent discussions, critiquing, reflecting upon and assessing Levinas's varied iterations of the feminine and femininity, and the wealth of commentary therein, I endeavour to provide a conception of Levinas's philosophy which emerges unscathed, that which can be found in and through the Masochian reading retrospectively, a conception which celebrates the indiscernible wonders of ambiguity, and in so doing emancipates the feminine from her cage of utility, allowing her, and any being, to attain the grandiose endowments of Levinasian subjectivity.

Critically challenging Levinas's conceptions of the ethical, Eros and of fecundity, the following discussions intend to wrest an iteration of Levinas from the self-imposed confines of his distasteful language. Hoping to remedy his needlessly sexualised conceptions of subjectivity, the chapter ultimately culminates in the presentation of a reading of Levinas which celebrates alterity as difference, in both its ethical and erotic guises, returning to the foundational articulation of the metaphysical as that which is joyously, indiscriminately ambiguous. A formulation of the

metaphysical which cannot be so brutishly reduced to gendered difference, free of the history of atrocities which court such a relation. Central to this re-visiting is the contention that Eros, that which is predicated upon the mystical allure of difference, the ethereal mode of alterity manifest within the beloved other, is grossly diminished and injured by any conception which can be reduced in so coarse a manner to simply the binaristic interplay of arcane genders. As I will argue, the abstract interioristic reverie of Eros cannot be encaptured in this lazy dichotomy. Opposing its former construction, an Eros is detailed within which the lover, and beloved, may be masculine or feminine, they may be neither or both. Such trivial concerns are beneath the intrasubjective realm of the erotic. Such petty minutiae are of little solace to the lover, they who are enthralled, engrossed and ensnared by their idyllic fantasy, however this may arouse. In addition, I dispute the diminishing adoption of sexualised language in Levinas's portrayal of the abstractly ethical and its manifestation within the seemingly narcissistic confines of fecundity. Intending to fully extricate the primacy of the metaphysical relation, the heart of Levinasian philosophy, from the besmirchment of its original language.

Endeavouring throughout to maintain the central edicts of the Levinasian doctrine, whilst willingly surrendering those concepts which innately subjugate the feminine other, the resolve of the chapter is not explicitly to admonish Levinas for the terminology he adopted in a far less aware, critical time, it is instead to promote an enduring reading of Levinas. What prevails in its culmination is a revisiting or perversion, depending upon your persuasion, which is no longer susceptible to such loud, problematic criticism. A reading which no longer fails to perceive the feminine as a subject, and not merely the object of the masculine subject. A reading of Levinas which does not forget the feminine. How else then could such a reading be contextualised than through the heartbreaking reflections of one such forgotten woman. A woman who gave her life and her body to a masculine subject of Eros and was left, poverty stricken and grieving by her lover. The first forgotten feminine of the Masochian reading, Sacher-Masoch's own 'Wanda' (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991). Through thematic reference to her confessions, it will be ensured that the subsequent examining of the barbarity of the masculine subject is perceptible, even if she never was.

4.1. The Feminine Other: The Ethical Facilitator

"I am nothing, you are all ... I am at your feet; trample me and I will be happy, provided that your foot touches me." (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.17, *Leopold to Wanda*)

You know that you are my all in this world and that as long as I live, I will live for you. Be well and let me make you happy. (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.122, *Leopold to Wanda*)

The 'primacy' of the Other is the central edict upon which Levinas's writings are developed as it is by virtue of the metaphysical relation with alterity that the subject is thrust into a necessarily ethical ontology (1969, p.26). Through the 'preconscious' (Alford 2004, p.162) apparition of the Other, the subject is wrested from any possibility of engaging in the masturbatory, indulgent pursuits of idleness and are compelled to be human, affirming their being through their sacrifice (Levinas 2017, p.30). Inverting this desire with the legalistic, ethical indictment which it imposes upon the subject, to be is to enthusiastically offer all of oneself, and all one will ever be, to attempt to satiate the demands and pains of alterity. Formulated as such, this ethical impulse is not founded in sentiment, nor the cold calculus of economic relations or the application of a deontological maxim, it is a necessary, fervent compulsion to offer in surrender 'one's being' for the Other (Levinas 1969, p.183). Accordingly, the Law of the subject's being is to be entombed by the metaphysical relation into a grave of indefatigable servitude, forced to endure in a newfound state of obsessive 'guilt' (Levinas 2017, p.52), forever hoping that these tireless acts of contrition may atone for the unmitigated 'violence' of their being (Levinas 1969, p.27). Every space they occupy, even for the most fleeting of moments, every exhausted breathe they expire, every meagre crumble that they dare allow to grace the threshold of negligence which is their lips, is an insolent refutation of the Other's needs, a heedless 'usurpation of places which belong to the others already oppressed or starved' (Levinas 2017, p.129), by the ethical subject and ensures they continue, diligently in their sentence of service.

Given the poignant prose which Levinas adopts in articulating this central relation, it is perhaps unsurprising that for many commentators thereof, their focus is largely drawn to this gospel of joyfully miserable self-flagellation, and consequently do not engage in further analysis upon the dynamic or relations played out therein. Given the apparent ambiguity afforded an ethical relation derived from the metaphysical desire for difference, when engaging with Levinasian philosophy one can easily be seduced by the severity of the doctrine and how he masterfully constructs an ethical ontology which is simultaneously profoundly moving and compelling, whilst also being one which is inescapably 'painful' (Edelglass, 2006, p.24) for the subject, and

verges upon something 'inhuman' (Ricoeur 2004, p.92; Rajiva 2013, p.144), in his conception of human intersubjectivity. Resembling the solipsistic dramatics of Romantic literature, it is the cacophonous plight of the protagonist/subject which often dictates both the page and one's attention, neglecting the more problematic aspects of such characters which warrant critique. Not dissimilar to the arousing torment of the Romantic protagonist previously addressed, the subject perhaps perceives themselves as the chosen disciple of a cruel god, a victim of divine cruelty, a willing vessel through which their whims and desires may be manifest. Such a consideration is irrefutably furthered by the frequent references Levinas makes to the condition of the subject's being as that which is 'hostage' (Levinas 1999, p.117; 2017, p.52, 53, pp.150-151) to the Other, and whichever capricious wishes they thrust upon them. An existence of blissful bondage, an existence which is only realised 'through and for the other' (Levinas 2017, p.52). A being of, for and through Law.

Assuming that the subject's relation with alterity, in all its wondrously ambiguous guises, is truly that of this fervent hostage, it is difficult initially to rebuke the harsh terminology which has been attributed to this conception of an ethical, legalistic ontology. Perhaps the subject truly is the ill-fated victim of their being, condemned to serve in perpetuity in placation of this ethereal mode of alterity. For they are bound without prejudice, compelled without choice by the Other. It is the Other which escapes any contemplation, avoids the crudity of recognition, is beyond perception. There is no trace of familiarity, no cultural bond imposing duty, no sentiment guiding the subject towards this damned union. The truth of the face admonishes such profanity. There is no warmth, no smile to ensnare or soften their resolve, this Other is a 'being beyond all attributes, which would have the effect of qualifying him, that is of reducing him to what he has in common with other beings, of making a concept of him' (Levinas 2017, pp.28-29), is the Other of *all* human alterity, their echoes abounding colourfully throughout exteriority, the idea of the infinite which resides proudly within intersubjectivity, Law. However, the sincerity of this subjugation rests upon the palatability of its conception. As the success of an ethical theory which celebrates human ontology as that which is necessarily ethical, which is predicated upon frenzied servitude to the Other, *must* accommodate and welcome all modes of subjectivity. All must be capable of attaining human being, otherwise it is no longer deserving of this seemingly trivial moniker. To fail to conceive of a universal mode of subjectivity is to fail, not only to construct a full ethical theory, but in so doing to superciliously dismiss and inflict needless violence upon those which are deemed unworthy of their humanity, those not afforded the same ethical/human capacity. It is to condemn such beings discriminately to a *less-than-being*

Pulling inquisitively at the supposedly ambiguous thread of Levinasian ethics, one begins to discern that the figure of alterity, formerly shrouded beyond perception beneath the metaphysical, metaphorical veil, coyly begins to reveal an unmistakably feminine figure. A delicate, silent, fragile articulation of femininity maintaining alterity. And a most anachronistically heteronormative one at that. Lingering alongside the complex formulations of the abstract, enigmatic difference, lies a conception of the Other which in her muted ignominy beckons any would-be witness to her imprisonment, to challenge this asserted position. Most explicitly, within his formative conceptions of alterity, Levinas defines this not merely as difference, it is conversely, and overtly, 'the feminine' (Levinas 1969, pp.157-158). Although this labelling is swiftly self-contextualised as an expression of the 'very quality of difference' (Levinas 1987, p.36), as a 'difference contrasting strongly with other differences', and one which he astutely declares refutes the reduction 'between the sexes' (1987, p.36), to conceive of the metaphysical domain of difference in such an obtrusive manner invites, if not warrants, critique. Assigning alterity itself with the assignation of the 'feminine', destabilises the formerly commended innocuity of the metaphysical relation, corrupting the very root of Levinas's ethical ontology by besmirching difference. The Other, the indiscernible atmosphere of Law itself is now recognisable, barbarously bound by the imperfections of the corporeal. This bestowal of gender and form reorients the conceptualisation from that which is the speculative machinations of the metaphysical to that which is now laden with the lumber of indelicate connotations and beset by apparent linguistic aggression.

Abruptly, the metaphysical relation, that which compels and inspires servitude, constitutes a far more problematic dynamic with alterity/the feminine. Presenting the Other as feminine, intuitively establishes that the Same, that of the ethical subject themselves, must present correspondingly as the masculine (Sikka 2001, p.108). This foreseeably further perverts the portrayal of the metaphysical relation. As, if to be ethical, which is essentially to be human, is bestowed exclusively to the disconcertingly narrow purview of the masculine subject, the feminine is by definition incapable of attaining the ontological status of their own humanity, resigned to the spectate as they who mediate and facilitate such being (Katz 2001b, p.149). Conceiving of difference itself as feminine therefore serves, from this adopted perspective, to tragically ostracise the feminine from participating themselves with the metaphysical relation to alterity, from the ethical, and in so doing instils an exploitative binaristic relation between that which is masculine, the subject, and that which is condemned to be feminine, the Other. And

though one may forcibly contend that the relation with alterity is one of ardent servitude, of the relentless availing of oneself for the Other, the gendered character now tainting this dynamic defies so serene a conception of the ethical. Ascending through the feminine to plunder the metaphysical, the masculine subject's ethical becoming is one of implicit predation as they *use* the feminine to achieve their own ontological transcendence. The position of the feminine is now asserted as that which is, according to this troubling conception, the 'inferior of the masculine' (Sandford 2006, p.144), 'a less than full [...] being' (Perpich 2001, p.29). The Other which was formerly the imperious body of Law, now is stripped and reduced to simply that which is Lesser.

Explicating the clumsy barbarity, which is conveyed through this binaristic relation, perhaps what is most troubling is not simply that the feminine is presented so carelessly as difference, it is that so little thought is then given to the interplay of this newly rendered relationship. At its core, the binaristic relationship which is predicated upon a masculine subject exploiting a feminine other for their profit appears to overtly invert the supposedly ethical representation of the masculine subject. In a manner more becoming of a deranged, obsessed lover whose wild affections are not calmed by the delights of reciprocity, the sincerity of the act and the relation itself is grossly distorted. Just as the lover can present to their beloved as a maniacal harasser, we too, if we hope to liberate *her*, must consider the feminine perception of this masculine subject. If she, the feminine, is the foundation of the subject's being, if it is through the sacrificial proselytising of her wondrous alterity that the masculine subject reaps the ethical, the ethereal deity of difference, what then is the masculine subject to this feminine? A pitiful servant, begging to be smothered beneath the guilt of their existence? Or, perhaps a misogynistic abuser, which uses the feminine to attain their celebrated status? As an unknowable vessel of alterity, the feminine escapes comprehension. She cannot be known. Her needs, never spoken. Her wants are subdued by the masculine subject's raucous cries of contrition. All that he may discern is the shrill ethical summons of alterity, the metronomic toll of Law which frantically compels his being. Evidently, in approaching alterity, the masculine subject 'fails to recognise', the all-too-human, 'face of woman' (Sikka 2001, pp.109-110), before them. And, invariably, will fail her. Whilst it may appear premature to delineate such a violently ignorant dynamic, it is most apparent, and arguably irrefutable, that she, the feminine Other, is forgotten in this relation. Overlooked, neglected, discarded. And this sorry state of affairs is only to be exacerbated when one explores Levinas's, more explicit, supplementary discussions of the 'home', and of 'woman' herself (1969).

Supplementing this indelicate conception of the metaphysical relation, Levinas places profound ethical import on the notions of the 'home', and of 'dwelling' (1969, p.150). Given the violence of one's being within exteriority, these concepts are initially offered to corporealize the abstract ethical relation into that which actively welcomes, cares for and embraces alterity. Regrettably, it is in these rather cursory discussions that Levinas commits to his anachronistic idea of the feminine by consciously asserting that the domain of the feminine being, not merely the feminine as an articulation of the Other, is the 'home'. Writing plainly, Levinas states that every home, 'presupposes a woman' (1969, pp.157-158), adding that without a woman, which he here defines explicitly as 'the human being of the feminine sex', no longer flirting with metaphor and abstract analogy, the masculine subject's capacity to transcend their being, to hear the ethical summons, 'the very welcome of dwelling', will be affected (1969, pp.157-158). Through this more abrasive positioning of the feminine, their being is once more externalised, placing them on the periphery to spectate upon the ontology of the Herculean, masculine subject. This serves merely to further the notion that the role of the feminine is simply to facilitate the masculine's capacity to transcend their being. She is the 'welcome in itself' (Levinas 1969, pp.157-158), and consequently is never to be welcomed. Patently, she is not welcome. Evidently, the portrayal of the feminine within Levinas's philosophy is indisputably impaired, revealing a subordinate, lesser to the masculine, a less-than-being, 'whose presence is discreetly an absence' (1969, p.155), whose 'silent coming and goings [...] reverberate the secret depths of [*his*] being' (1969, p.156). She is an inscrutable, clichéd, feminine 'mystery' (1969, p.276). A complementary necessity whose existence, though never accomplished, is achieved through exploitation. A prostrating exhibition of alterity upon which the masculine subject may mindlessly ascend, ignorant to the affront of his servitude.

Such a vulgar interpretation of Levinas is only made possible by the misogynistic parlance of his writing. Be that as it may, many theorists are quick to defend this apparently pernicious idiolect, contending that his language is a sincere, and appropriate wielding of metaphor, suitable for their author. This position is perhaps best summarised by Sandford, who contextualises this indelicate tone, noting that 'this is a story told by a (heterosexual) man, alterity will be the feminine; the feminine - concretely - will be the other' (2006, p.150). This offers a compellingly coherent effort to remedy the offensive tenor of his texts. Indeed, it is a welcome remedy to argue that for Levinas writing as a heterosexual, cisgender man, alterity in its most conspicuous visage, is to be appropriately captured by the metaphorical assumption of the feminine. As Manning notes in support, 'how could it be otherwise?' (1991, p.137). Occupying this notional position, the reader

must then be willing to accept that, as with Levinas's formative presentation, the feminine is purely a denotation of difference abiding in the benign realm of the abstract, devoid of the inflammatorily sexist association explicated herein. Within such a reading, the feminine is celebrated as difference, returning to the primacy and ambiguity of the Other, and as such the portrayal is inverted, resuming its formerly 'privileged' status (Chanter 2001, p.5). A sublime 'principle of equivocation' (Perpich 2001, p.47), through which 'alterity is accomplished' (Chanter 2001, p.5). Through this more accommodating analysis, we are offered a feminine which is revered, not reviled. A metaphor assumed by Levinas to convey the exalted divinity of alterity as, for him at least, it seems only the feminine ever could.

Whilst I can happily accept that the feminine articulation presented by Levinas, within this context, is not intended to be read in the most offensively literal manner. I am nonetheless resigned to forcibly concur with many that this adoption of the feminine as difference cannot be resolved by such convenient assignation to the metaphorical (Katz 2001b, p.147). The language and imagery adopted so rashly unveil a perspective of the feminine which is at best crude, if not 'stereotypically sexist' (Perpich 2005, p.322), and at worst innately violent. By adopting so sexualised and grievously traditionalist a portrayal of the ethical, the metaphor is itself undercut, sullied by the tangible anachronism this representation exhibits. The feminine, though purportedly privileged, is repeatedly excluded from the ethical, though a necessary condition for it, and reduced to an increasingly condescending carousel of stereotypes. She, the feminine, is, 'weak', 'poor' (Levinas 1987, p.83), and 'gentle' (Levinas 1969, p.155), a lesser, a less-than-being. To repeatedly dress this central mode of alterity in such clumsily feminal garb erodes one's capacity to earnestly refute the harmful aspects of this relation's gendered dynamic. Even the simplistic assertion that this is the sincere portrayal of one heterosexual man's perception of alterity does not 'legitimize' (Sikka 2001, p.104) this perspective, nor remedy its conspicuous crudity and cruelty.

Returning to the formative conception of alterity, as Levinas himself establishes, it is beyond comprehension. The subject does not discern difference itself, they are exposed to it, proximate to it, driven to it by the metaphysical desire which graces them with the boundless horizons of exteriority. This is the very essence of the ethical edict, that it is a summons felt by all, universally, to act for all that is Other. To act and be for all others. And yet, when one is made familiar with his recurring linguistic indiscretions against the feminine within his texts, one cannot help to feel a profound discord with the 'violence' (Manning 1991, p.140), of the

language he wields so flippantly. As we depart from the confines of the merely ethical within our examination and turn to his writings on Eros and fecundity, we must ruminate upon the depths of this toxic conception. For while his ethical ontology endeavours to provide a compulsion for the necessarily sacrificial Law of ethical being, it is necessary to consider to what extent this is undermined by the misogynistic characterization of the feminine throughout his writings. As modern interpreters of Levinas it is vital to determine whether this may be reconciled through an extracted, wilfully ambiguous interpretation of alterity, which does not invite such critique as I will subsequently propose, or whether this, as some argue, unavoidably extends to the very 'heart of Levinas's work' (Katz 2001b, p.164), speaking fatally to an irredeemable reluctance to recognise, understand and embrace that which is feminine/Other.

4.2. The Feminine Beloved: The Object of Love

Sometimes I want to split your head open with an axe, just to see what is inside ... to know what is going on inside you when you stare fixedly in front of you like that ... to know all that does not belong to me in you. If you could know what torture it is for me to think that you have a past in which I do not exist; that you have memories that are not linked to me; that a whole world lives in you which is foreign to me and which will stay foreign to me ... If you could know this, you would pity me. But you cannot, because you do not know how much I love you, you do not know all that you are to me. How much this love makes me suffer! Sometimes, when I see you calm, I am calm. Then a shadow passes over your face; your eyes go far away - where? And always I think of you. I speak to others and I think of you, and when I am obsessed by you, despair seizes me, because I am not worthy of you - because you cannot love me!" (Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, pp.109-110)

My life was no longer my own. All that I had been freely willing to give was no longer a present, it was a duty.
(Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.23)

Distinct from the legalistic, votive relation with alterity which Levinas weaves into the subject's being, Eros offers the masculine figure with a sultry reprieve from their wearisome chauvinism. To the subject, Eros presents initially as beyond reduction, an ethereal, mystic contradiction challenging their ethical subjectivity. At once both ethical and other-than-ethical. A movement toward, yet beyond the Other, escaping the ontological domain of Law. A relation which surpasses alterity, reaching ever further, finding an other, finding a self. Contrasting the ethical, within Eros there is a more tangible 'need' (Levinas 1969, p.245), compelling the subject.

Though, this is not of the rudimentary vulgarity often associated with the erotic. It is a need which may never be satiated, an *idée fixe* which tyrannically suppresses the imperious, ethical ontology. Fleeing the unbearable guilt of their existence, the subject is afforded a false solace in the futural, ungraspable domain of the erotic. For the ethical is not truly usurped by this movement, merely ‘concealed in the erotic’ (Katz 2001a, p.127), as the irresistible seduction of an other-than-ethical relation. Offering a momentary salve to the catalogue of atrocities and calamities which define and accompany their triumphantly pitiful legalistic existence. A liberation which brazenly presents the duality of Levinas’s ethical doctrine: an enthralling, poetic tussle with the densely abstract which is, somewhat predictably, vulnerable to injury by virtue of the explicitly sexualised, unapologetically predatory language which accoutres alterity.

The expression of the erotic is articulated by Levinas through the delicate motion of the ‘caress’ (Levinas 1969, p.257). This intimate action represents the, now erotic, subject’s intent to approach and embosom the object of their affections, the beloved other. Yet, this attempted union is itself assuredly unsuccessful, as Levinas’s Eros is predicated upon and maintained by the superficiality of the subject’s undertakings. The caress is doomed to always lack the warmth of the Other’s touch, never knowing the beguiling rhythm of their chest beating upon them, as the Other cruelly, ‘ceaselessly escapes’ (1969, p.257), the confines of the subject’s amorous detention. This beloved, loved other, is as an articulation of alterity, similarly beyond discovery. They cannot be touched, cannot be corrupted by the embodiment of the ethical which the subject maintains. They are an ethereal, spectral, ‘futural’ (Katz 2001, p.128), vessel of potentiality. Beyond perception, rebuking comprehension. An erotic symbol of the subject’s weathered interiority, an illusory model of conspiracy. A dream of alterity which resides within the subject, forever teasing of an indulgent collapse within the recesses of their subjectivity. It is this very incapacity to cradle one’s beloved which perpetuates the erotic pursuit, as the ‘caress’, is more appropriately considered not as that which attempts to inelegantly envelop a ‘person’, or a ‘thing’ (Levinas 1969, p.259), it is instead an impassioned reaching toward an unknown, unfathomable future which abounds with the enticing whispers of the yet-to-be and beguiles with that ancient vice of hope as the subject can dream of a being which is other-than-being. An escape from the ethical and necessarily severe confines of ‘the possible’ (Levinas 1969, 261), a tantalising reprieve from the oppressive Law which gives weight to their being.

By adopting a conception of Eros which revels in its mysticism Levinas appears, initially at least, to recapture the fabled ambiguity of his philosophy. Through this formulation, the loved other,

veiled by Eros, evades the horizon of the erotic subject, and consequently there is no apparent need for this mode of alterity to be adorned with the sexualised thematic of his ethics or that which has characterised the preceding literary analyses of his ethics and Eros. Beyond the ethical, outside of the legalistic confines of rationality, guilty and suffering which define and affirm the subject's human ontology, 'beyond the face' (Levinas 1969, p.260) of the Other, the interioristic deity of Eros may assume an emancipated iteration of alterity. Providing the subject with a reprieve from the ethical, which as we have seen may be tainted by the heteronormative prejudice which reduces alterity to the feminine, Levinasian Eros arises as a theory of love which seemingly encapsulates the fatalistic obscurity of a loving relationship. The suffocating euphoria found solely in Eros - the never knowing and always knowing which is to be besieged by love. A love which truly provides for and accommodates an account of relationships which need not be reduced to an offensively inhibited binarism, appearing to provide a mercifully inclusive conception of Eros.

This joyous ambiguity within Eros, as Podolsky has previously addressed (2016), is itself evident within Levinas's phenomenology of the erotic as even within his own writing, the object of love oscillates coquettishly back and forth across Levinas's binaristic divide, transitioning in an effortlessly arousing interplay from the masculine, which 'Love aims at [...] in *his* frailty' (Levinas 1969, p.256), to the overtly feminine construction of the beloved. This delicate, fragile erotic metamorphosis which the subject undergoes, afforded by this specific inversion, invites a truly uninhibited conception of the erotic. A love which appropriately refutes any binaristic machinations to reduce its chimerical form. An irreducible relation uninterested by the sacrilegious constraints of gender or tradition. An Eros worthy of its divine potency, which cannot be comprehended, which cannot be held, and any attempt to speak of will necessarily fail. To speak of such a love is an act of unrivalled profanity. To seek it, blasphemy. The subject can ask only to endure it, that the descent toward the depths of interiority will be as gentle as possible, and trust that they will arrive, once more, into the realm of the ethical, with their beloved, unscathed.

Regrettably, this resplendent figure is not granted so unfettered an actuality as Levinas returns to his indulgences, adopting further coarse, sexualised poetics. As portrayed, the conception of Eros is *prima facie* a successful representation of the abstract ambiguity which compels such a relation, sufficiently detailing the beguiling allure of that which is beyond possible, the aspirations and reverie which inspire and corrupt each romantic soul. However, before one may advocate

for the merits of this conception, one cannot simply ignore the visceral terminology which drapes across his pages of Eros. Having previously established the ethical call of alterity as feminine, to varying degrees of defensibility, throughout his discussions of the erotic, his writing, though maintaining a similarly metaphorical posture, exhibits an excessively graphic tone. The sexually indistinguishable beloved, who teased of an unencumbered ambiguity, is envisaged in an egregiously licentious manner as abiding 'in virginity' (Levinas 1969, p.258). Although this 'virginal' quality, is adopted to articulate that the beloved throughout the erotic relation maintains their ethereal nature, and cannot be defiled by the lecherous intent of the subject, 'graspable but intact', 'dying without murder', 'withdrawing into her future' (1969, p.258), to evoke such a grossly predatory and overly sexualised image is both unnecessary and unforgivably clumsy given the potent allusion to such a distastefully anachronistic and patriarchal position. Conceptualising the beloved as the 'virgin' (1969, p.258) vessel of the ambiguous, irreducible possibility is, in modern discourse at the very least, an act of wilful, violent misogyny, perpetuating lamentable estimations which are most comfortable residing in the inelegant annals of history. This imagining defiles Eros as the beauty of the relation is found not in the attempted privation of virginity but in the inviolability of ambiguity. Consequently, any effort to unshroud, sexualise, reduce and castrate this divine other, any prejudicial effort to discern their being, is an act seeming contrary to the foundational essence of the conception itself.

In addition to the redundant assignation of the erotic other, the beloved, to virginity, Levinas further corrupts the relation by his incorporation of a violent, masculine imagery. The erotic movement toward the beloved other, purportedly exhibiting the subject's desire for excedence from the ethical, the noble movement beyond being, is framed in comparably egregious terms. The playful, hapless, endeavours of the erotic subject, they who long foolishly to cradle and understand the beloved who so absolutely enraptured their ontology, yet refutes comprehension; this naive, devout dance of love is submitted, unexpectedly, as the intent to 'violate', the beloved (Levinas 1969, p.260). Again, dangerously wielding metaphor, this is itself an expression of the adolescent impulse of the subject to discover the undiscoverable, that which is conveyed in the imperceptible 'nudity' (1969, p.260), of Eros, further explicating a relation bathed in the most sexualised, oppressive and harmful of imagery. Coupling the former reduction of potentiality to that which is 'virginal', the subject's erotic relation to the beloved now appears as the fervent intent to violate their virgin other. A relation seemingly devoid of seduction, courtship, affection, respect or any notion of the marvel which is reciprocity. A relation which appears to beckon the beloved to 'assume the position' (Podolsky 2016, p.60), so the subject of Eros may exercise their

sensual whims upon them. Through the repeated delineation of purported metaphor in this brazenly ignorant, maladroit manner, which does not simply allude to but plays upon the ever-expanding history of violent, sexual exploitation and violation of the feminine. The erotic theory which emerges is excruciatingly masculine and heteronormative, which is itself not simply beyond the ethical, in its dynamics and imagery, it is patently unethical. A brutal, carnal desecration of Eros' ambiguous ideal.

Against this sexualised backdrop, portraying a relation of erotic exploitation, Levinas's assertion that the relation is contingent upon and maintained by reciprocity challenges the asymmetrical dynamic the language and imagery evoked suggests. Inconsistent with the established temper of his conceptualisation, Levinas contends that the relation of the erotic hinges upon a delicate, playful synchronicity between the parties to the relation: 'I love fully only if the Other loves me, not because I need the recognition of the Other, but because my voluptuousness delights in his voluptuousness' (Levinas 1969, p.265). This cardinal imposition of reciprocity appears as a concerted effort to reconcile and resolve the more sordid abstraction of Eros which first arises. Ensuring that the ferocious carnal interplay of the relation is predicated by the mutuality of the romantic subjects, arriving in unison to flounder in their respective, harmonious caresses, appears to potentially dissipate the flagrant character of Eros. Nevertheless, such an effort to establish reciprocity as a necessary condition of Eros is fatally undermined by the narcissistic nature of the relationship which Levinas outlines and the epistemic fallaciousness of such a notion. For while he may contend that love may only be fully achieved in reciprocity, the discussions of the preceding chapters assert that there is no expectation or means to assure that this hallowed virtue will be attained.

Conversely, Levinas notes that the relationship, 'established between the lovers', that which is supposedly reliant upon its reciprocity, 'is the very contrary of the social', a relationship 'without language' (1969, pp.265-265). Therefore, the most satisfactory reading of this relation is of two damned lovers, who equally relish their individual, mirrored forays into the erotic. Charting a parallel, synchronous descent into the despair of the mystic. Whereas an equally feasible, if more cynical iteration, would be dissatisfied by this vapid liaison with reciprocity. An unattainable relation is no relation at all. Love without language, is a love without personality, a love without meaning, a love without the very human subject of love. It is absurd to contemplate the achievement of lovers coming together in mutuality, embracing a shared future, without language. Given the ardour of Levinasian Eros, this is particularly problematic. How could they

discern the individual, emotive reactions to their being when their beloved refutes comprehension? How could they intuit the violence of their fervent grasping, of their frantic, repeated attempts to violate, when the beloved other, without language, is condemned to a state of muted passivity? Without reciprocity founding the relationship, not merely fulfilling it, that object of affection which is the 'silent', 'virginal' beloved, is profaned, descending into the depths of an all too recognisable, depraved vampiric masculine fantasy of feminine exploitation. A beloved who may not speak, reduced to a spectator, nay 'object' (Irigaray 2001, p.126), for the masculine subject's Eros. A virginal, vaginal vessel devoid of subjectivity, to be defiled. Never to be known. An absence of being, a blank canvas unto which *he* may forcibly impose whichever ideals and values he desires, whatever serves to gratify *his* excedence.

Weighing up the various interpretations one may adopt of Levinas's Eros, at this stage, an inconvenient determination must be made. Expressly, whether one can consciously extricate the magnificent conception of boundless, interioristic, uninhibited Eros from the vices of its 'specifically heterosexual formulation' (Ainley 1988, p.78). In a manner which echoes the former contentions of metaphor and the sincerity of the author's masculine hand guiding his pen, arriving at either side of the debate one is not short of company as many commentators relish the opportunity to either condemn his 'misogynistic' and 'patriarchal' machinations or to staunchly advocate for the merits and bliss of embracing the absolutely metaphorical reading. It is most apparent that by wilfully undermining the ambiguity of his Eros with explicit, profane language, Levinas has invited such apt critique, particularly from modern readers. The initial conception of Eros detailed above, that which is adorned gloriously in ambiguity, abiding in potential, offers the foundations of a theory of Eros which truly encapsulates the divine mysticism and epistemic uncertainty which interplays at the heart of the relation. Resolving to shed Eros of its pre-ordained roles of gender, subject/object, masculine/feminine, predator/prey, a delightfully fluid conception materialises, one which I steadfastly contend better articulates the ever-changing dynamics of Eros.

To this end, I offer the following formulation of a delightfully ambiguous, flirtatious Eros. Conceptualising a reading of Eros free from such crude assignation, the subject of Eros, the lover is never merely the lover, never merely objectifying their beloved, for this is usurped by the reflexive nature of a relation without a hierarchical orientation. One is similarly never merely beloved, they are also a lover, interchanging seamlessly, playfully between each bated breath. The ambiguity of the Other, the erotic other, is itself dumbfounded by the ambiguity of the subject of

Eros. Such an Eros unashamedly cherishes the mysticism of the other and the relation itself. Though each subject may be respectively transfixed, lost to the abyss of the erotic fantasy, they gaze delicately past one another, constantly adapting to the movement of the other, a fervent performance of ambiguity. The beloved accordingly is not muted, not an oppressed spectator resigned to the Mediaeval confines of male projection which befit little more than the prison of an antiquated bedchamber, they are seen, known. They too are a subject; they too are a lover. Indeed, while the relation maintains a degree of antisociality, each subject possessing their own language, presenting as foreign to the alien subjectivity before them, their intent, tone, and affection serves to bridge the divide, moving them closer together, closer to the future they promise to each other (Oliver 2001, p.228). Here, shrouded in ethereal obscurity, the lovers are both simultaneously the caresser and the caressed, the lover and the beloved, the penetrator and the penetrated, bound in balletic synchronicity for as long as their corresponding loves endure. Such an articulation, free of the vilified masculine tenor, maintains the direction of the erotic subject into the abstract, as in each fluid movement they spring ‘forth without returning, find[ing] itself the self of another’ (Levinas 1969, p.271). This amorphous relation of Eros, that which celebrates the interchangeable roles of the subjects/lovers, is best conveyed not by Levinas and his invidious indiscretions, but in adopting a reimagining of Merleau-Ponty’s famed exploration of tactile ambiguity within this mutual, erotic context: ‘the two [...] are never touched and touching at the same time with respect to each other. [...] [I]t is not a matter of two sensations felt together [...] but of an ambiguous arrangement in which the two [...] can alternate in the role of “touching” and “touched” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p.93), lover and beloved.

Espousing a conception of Eros which abides exclusively within ambiguity, the reading of Levinasian Eros I adopt is free from the narrow, abrasive confines of heteronormativity. This, for some theorists who advocate similar readings, such as Podolsky, allows the theory the scope to accommodate the fluidity of queer relations, as it welcomes the vigorous duality of the erotic (Podolsky 2016). Liberated from the ridiculous machismo of the heterosexual, the femininity, delicacy and violability of the masculine may be lovingly celebrated alongside the power, strength and ferocity of the feminine, and all that which eludes such simplistic denomination. Indeed, it now seems that such binaristic categorisation is no longer necessary as Eros has triumphed, transcending such monikers. While this ascension from the depths of craven heterosexuality is undeniably to be cherished, I must contend that to adopt this sexualised portrayal of Eros is still an affront to its metaphysical founding and as such is no less misplaced than its rudimentary, formative iteration. Though this inclusive conception of Levinasian Eros is not marred by the

stains of the violence in which it is penned, it similarly undermines the conception by reducing the relation to that of discernible and tangible sexuality. This, I argue, is the ultimate misstep in interpreting and engaging with Eros as in so doing, one immediately disregards the essence of the relation. Although this Eros is to be commended as it may be realised in the most kaleidoscopic, interchangeable and uninhibited of sexual relations, to perceive of Eros in such terms misconstrues the intent of the concept. As, in so doing, this conceptualisation attempts to strip it of its ambiguity. The virtue of Eros in this ambiguous formulation I have outlined is that it refutes any such articulation of the explicitly sexual, it knows nothing of the real, remaining blissfully ignorant to the truth of the erotic other. It resides stubbornly within the enigmatic abyss of the subject's interiority, beyond the contemplations and comprehensions of the act itself, a futural dream of what may one day come to be. All one can ever hope to know of Eros is its malevolent presence, the impassioned fever which takes hold as it consumes the subject. It refutes reduction to any act, as only by abiding in the indulgently abstract is it capable of capturing the rapturous excedence of Eros. A truly 'ungraspable' (Levinas 1969, p.258), 'inexpressible' (p.260), Eros, which celebrates the wonders of ambiguity and difference which compel it.

The question then remains for the Neo/Post/Masoch/Other-than-Levinasian as to whether this salvaging of Eros is itself, in good conscience, permissible. Given the patriarchal, oppressive language which punctuates and frames Levinas's phenomenology of Eros, to assume an interpretation which does not attempt to challenge the abstract ambiguity of the relation, such as the reading offered herein of uninhibited ambiguity, cannot be done so passively. If one intends to liberate Levinas's writings from his misogynistic flourishes, one must be willing to recognise the indelible violence of his text. Extricating a theory of Eros devoid of sexualisation cannot be done painlessly. It requires the necessary vilification and rejection of the original form. This itself, a step toward reconciliation, is, mirroring those undertaken within the preceding literary analyses, a step away from Levinas himself. Yet, in this departure from the earnestly Levinasian we, somewhat counterintuitively, emerge with a conception of the relation, which is faithful to the essence of his doctrine, prioritising the centrality of the metaphysical which is at the very root of the subject's being. In so doing, we allow for the imagining of an Eros which is unblemished by its heterosexual, masculine foundation and which evades the clutches of any reduction to the real, or at least *his* real. Whether or not one is willing to make such a concerted effort and plunge knowingly into the perverse domain of the Neo/Post/Other-than-Levinasian, remains at the discretion of the reader. Regardless, the necessity to confront his bellicose diction endures as an

irrefutable and inescapable enigma that each contemporary theorist exploring his concept of Eros is obliged to address.

4.3. The Feminine of Fecundity: The Forgotten (m)Other

All the force of my soul was concentrated in the prayer that this child would in no way resemble his father, and while contemplating the passing landscape I resolved that the soul of my child should receive a small share of its beauty, purity and harmony.

(Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.30)

[...] he wanted, in this way, to do violence to my nature [...]

(Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.36)

The culmination of the subject's erotic union is offered by Levinas not in the establishment of a loving, mutual embrace founded upon the understanding and placation of beloved, it is conversely, found in fecundity and the birth of the child (Levinas 1969, p.267). In positioning fecundity as the moralistic end of Eros, Levinas is attempting to redeem the erotic subject from the depths of their reverie and return them to the social indictment of ethical being and exteriority. This transition from the erotic to the ethical is made possible by virtue of the child's unique duality. The child, the product of Eros, presents as a recognisable stranger, an extension or iteration of the self, which is beyond the self, other than self. The child exists as a mode of alterity which does not fully escape perception and does not blindly thrust the subject into ethical subjugation. Both Self and Other. Levinas articulates this synchronous duality thus: 'The fecundity of the I is neither a cause nor a domination. I do not have my child; I am my child. Paternity is a relation with a stranger who while being Other [...] is me, a relation of the I with a self which yet is not me' (Levinas 1969, p.277). Accordingly, the child embodies the metaphysical, the desire of the Same for the Other, as they corporealize this relation and in so doing endeavour to rouse the subject from their delusion. This is only feasible as the child captures both the futural allure of the erotic, establishing for the subject a relationship beyond themselves with 'the absolute future, or infinite time' (Levinas 1969, p.268), and the irrefutable recognition of alterity, which is manifest by this social relation, prying them from the confines of their erotic interiority. The child returns the subject to their metaphysical servitude, enticing them from the excedence of Eros to assume the torturous plight of ethical being.

Given the prominence of the child within the return to the ethical, the importance of fecundity cannot be understated within Levinas's ethics. Especially given that without this intervention, it appears that Levinas is willing to resign the subject of Eros to his vast, fatalistic exile. It is by virtue of the subject's virility, the child's fabrication, that the erotic is destined to inevitably dissipate, submitting to the potency of the metaphysical relation which founds the masculine subject's 'human' being (Levinas 1969, p.158).

Despite this recrudescence of the ethical residing once more in the metaphorical expression of the metaphysical, to even the paltriest glance it appears rife with negative connotations and beset with problematic imagery which strike an unsavoury accord with the preceding discussions contained within this chapter, indicative of a pervasive and disturbing motif. At this latter juncture of the discussion, it will no doubt be profoundly unsurprising to discover that the established distasteful rhetoric which has been examined through his ethics and Eros, persists within Levinas's conception of fecundity. Yet, as the relation of fecundity is distinct to that of the ethical and the erotic, though the product of the latter and the return to the former, it warrants a similarly discrete inquiry. Invariably, this analysis must parallel those of the many vociferous feminist writers such as Brody, Oliver and Sikka (2001) who dispute the seemingly ubiquitous dissemination by Levinas of overtly sexist imagery which abounds recklessly within his paternal fecundity. And, while I offer a similar, familiar contention to these noted critics, I posit in addition that the articulation of fecundity is uniquely vulnerable to critique of a more substantive nature as it casts the ethical subject as one which engages in a relation of immodest narcissism, standing demonstrably in contradiction to the very essence of Levinas's ethical doctrine, contravening the foundational ontology of the subject itself. As such, what is proffered in closing is an assessment of fecundity which, even without the injurious tarnish of misogyny and unnecessary sexualisation we have been reluctantly accustomed to, does not reside harmoniously within the ethical and consequently does not accord with the ambiguous iteration/perversion of the Levinasian doctrine which I am resolved to extricate.

Formatively, though, our discussion must turn once more to briefly appraise Levinas's portrayal of the masculine subject and, as is of particular importance, the feminine other of this relation. After all, it is she, and her ostracised being who this chapter longs to discern and welcome in a liberatory embrace. Acknowledging the masculine character which surreptitiously abides within Levinas's subject, the subject's return to the ethical through fecundity is awash with a now all-

too-familiar predatory paradigm. As commentators such as Manning identify, the insistent reference to explicitly patriarchal, paternal terminology, of the father begetting his self/son, we are once more witnessing the 'chauvinistic blindness' (1991, p.140), of Levinas as there is a dearth of sentiment toward the beloved other, the mother of their child. It appears her role is achieved in the voluptuousness of the erotic relation as she/they are no longer deemed a necessary participant within fecundity. This absence itself paints an image of egregious disregard and self-interest as evidently the subject 'needs woman to beget a son' (Oliver 2001, p.228). It is only through this fostered vessel of alterity that the subject may resolve to transcend from the depths of their erotic dalliance, to impart their being into a being which will triumphantly succeed them and in so doing ensure they and their masculine legacy will endure timelessly within the future. Through the birth of his child, his torturous ontology, his suffering and mortality is trivial. He is saved by his son. Though his insatiable guilt must still be paid, the bell of the Law and its ethical summons still tolls, always. This is no longer a cause for consternation as, in his son, he has created a proud future, an otherwise of being which extends beyond his transient corpus, so his masculine ontology may persist (Levinas 1969, pp.277-278).

Harboured inelegantly within this relation the paternal, masculine subject exudes an egoism which is distinctly estranged from their originary ethical ontology. The ethical relation which itself is the innocuous product of the metaphysical, offers a singular, absolute edict, that of the primacy of the Other. Inversely, the arrival of the child as the resolution to fecundity does not resound of a subject recognising the failings of their fatuous perversion by Eros. Alternatively, the resemblance of the child, a child that Levinas asserts the subject does not birth, they simply are, 'I do not have my child, I am in some way my child' (Levinas 1987, p.91), halts the ethical inertia of Eros by evoking a narcissistic sense of familiarity within the subject. The ethical turn of the subject is thus not founded upon a sympathetic desire to ensure the world, life and tribulations of the child are lessened by their ethical continuation, that they may sacrificially serve to benefit the child as they have the Other. It is, in contrast, the triumphantly prideful perception of the child as an extension of the subject's self, 'He is [...] my work, my creature' (Levinas 1969, p.267). An assuaging realisation which seems to serve the egoistic delusions of a subject reluctant to confront their own mortality and solely willing to submit to the ethical constitution of their being when, after Eros, it serves their own muscular ambitions. The vanity of such rationality is of course a thuggish refutation of the ethical ontology upon which Levinas's doctrine is established. As for the father to so relish the discovery of the self within alterity, the child,

paternity appears as a conceited act of blasphemy against the primacy of the metaphysical. An indulgence merely to be afforded by Levinas to his own masculine progeny, *his* subject.

Concurrently, as the paternal and filial subjects frolic with vainglorious insouciance, we are left to contemplate what became of the dear mother, the feminine other. She, whose bloodied entrails and cries of agony delivered the paternal gift of the child, is disregarded from this relation. Having bestowed the masculine subject, the lover and father, with the passionate excedence of Eros, having laboured and toiled to birth his ethical deliverance, she is forgotten. Dismissed by the father and his scion. No longer relishing the reprieve afforded by her voluptuosity, it appears to the subject as though she has simply dissipated, a passing ethereal vision, and returned tragically to the absence of being which defines the feminine, withdrawing tantalisingly into her 'mystery' (Levinas 1969, pp.276-277). Nevertheless, beyond his supercilious purviews and the narrow horizons of his masculine being, she resides. Abandoned. Wounded and alone, she mourns her child and her lover. Bathed in the blood and semen of his virile subjectivity. Clinging to the fallacious aspiration that one day she may be seen. That one fateful day she may be loved that one day she may *be*.

This most unenviable fate is what Levinas seemingly determines through his linguistic topography is befitting of the feminine, assigning them to a being defined by absence and facilitation. The other-than-being, less-than-being, through which the masculine subject is accomplished. By failing to explicitly bestow the feminine with the capacity to attain subjectivity, Levinas condemns them to a primitive state of passivity. Their being serving as the 'bridge', for the masculine subject, reuniting them with themselves, trampled under the foot of masculine ambition (Irigaray 2001, p.133). The appearance of the child serves to further this castigation as they bear no resemblance to, nor even recognise the weary silhouette of their despondent mother. They are lauded as the unapologetic manifestation of masculine subjectivity, renouncing the traces of their feminine origin. Confirming that she, who has fulfilled her function, has served her purpose, having beguiled, liberated, and birthed, is mercilessly condemned to persist in exile. The cruel, misogynistic exile of the forgotten, the feminine.

This callous refutation of the mother belies the inherently masculine nature of the child. It is only through the familiar masculinity which the subject masturbatorily locates within their child that they may discern the self as other and in so doing return to the social sphere of exteriority (Levinas 1969, p.267). Such a reading of Levinasian subjectivity does not merely serve to coldly

contribute to the severity of the feminine's plight, it unavoidably extends it, regrettably, to any iteration of the feminine. Even that unfortunate soul produced through fecundity. Therefore, the image of the daughter, which strikes an emotive chord with many writers (e.g. Brody; Oliver 2001), this innocent delightfully feminine expression of alterity, is destined for a similarly grievous fate. Adhering to the relentlessly patriarchal tone, one may intuit that the daughter of the masculine subject, a silent, absent being, cursed by her femininity, escapes the attentions of her father. As Brody observes of the daughter of Levinas's subject, 'she has no intrinsic bond to or "sameness" with the father; on the other hand, she is not "other than him either: she has no face' (2001, p.62). Nonetheless, she cannot be redeemed by offering herself in primal pragmatic utility as her mother was, she does not express unbridled difference, she is polluted by the remnants of her father which linger. Consequently, she eludes the masculine domain of subjectivity completely, residing in the populous void Levinas's indelicate language affords the feminine which does not benefit the masculine. A domain populated by the non-erotic other, they who dare persist for their own being and not in subservience of another's juvenile rendezvous with Eros, the lesbian, the queer, they who bravely defy the heteronormativity of loving relations and subjectivity, who celebrate the joyous fluidity of a love which knows no boundaries, the effeminate who dare to embrace their repressed femininity, the postpartum mother who is besieged by the pain of their extrication, lamenting the lover who abandoned them and ripped the infant from her breast. The radiant multitude of beings which are other-than-masculine and as such incapable of achieving subjectivity, cast to suffer the 'no woman's land' (Brody 2001, p.74), of Levinas's ontology, all the beautiful wretches he and his subject forgot.

Echoing the problematic depiction of the ethical and the erotic, Levinas's conception of fecundity, if one is persuaded by the import of his inelegant tenor, is evidently tainted by this needlessly patriarchal articulation of the metaphysical. For beyond the abundance of stifling, offensive imagery which this formulation evokes and plays immoderately upon, it is apparent that asserting fecundity as the sole end of Eros subverts the social/ethical foundation of the erotic. The poetic symmetry of two hapless lovers gleefully longing to abide in the reality of their beloved is visibly compromised if this is merely the fantastical arousal of the masculine means to procreate. The masculine subject as such is, again, more aptly identified within this reading as a potent defiler, a frenzied fornicator, a depraved animal intent on inseminating and furthering their meagre biological legacy. A ruinous descent from the visage of the charmed romantic Levinas initially delivers, he who formerly delighted in the noble reciprocated voluptuousness of

their beloved (Levinas 1969, p.264). So vulgar an assessment is undeniably permissible, if not inevitable, if one maintains fecundity as the necessary culmination of the erotic. I maintain it is therefore imperative to dispute this purported chronology of the erotic relation if one hopes to offer a construction of Eros which eludes this ruinous dole. Applying the ambiguous conception of Eros formerly outlined, a relation which is not contingent upon the desire to profane and violate the virginal other, fecundity is no longer an intuitive resolution to such a relation. Instead, the ambiguously erotic adopted herein, at least that conception which is not dependent upon the product of carnal desires, abides gleefully in the naive pursuit of the Other, they who embody an other-than-being. To the subject, the ungraspable beloved is irresistible, adorned by the future and potentiality which their sultry breaths whisper of. This mode of Eros maintains and is an extension of the subject's fervent yearning to 'discover' (Levinas 1969, p.260), their beloved, to intuit this wondrous deity of alterity before them which fans the fires of this heedless affair. Sustaining the foundational dynamics of Levinas's originary Eros, the lovers remain engaged in a relation which is 'the very contrary of the social', as they harmoniously revel within the 'dual solitude', of their respective loves (1969, p.264). A relation outside of the ethical, without language, held gracefully in indiscernible synchronicity.

Extending the application of this revised foundational relation of Eros I have outlined, the most appropriate culmination cannot be that which is expressed in the celebration of carnal profanity and the wilful abandonment and neglect of the beloved other. By contrast, a more fitting resolution to Eros, which is consistent with the esteemed significance of the beloved, is one which is centred upon the futural ambition of the relation, reflecting the mutual, enduring longing to unite with their lover and cohabit, together, within sociality. However, as the relation is inescapably 'fundamentally refractory' (Levinas 1969, p.264), ignorant to such ends, there is no, and there ought not to be, resolution to Eros. A fitting conclusion for a love which need not surrender its speculative fantasy to the strained calls of ethical labour. The end of Eros need not be found within its demise. Alternatively, the aspirations of the lovers Eros should reside exclusively within the successful incorporation of their intimacy within society. A love which saunters elegantly between the ethical and the erotic, between the dualities of subjects/lovers being. Such a conception encapsulates the contradiction that is love: an irreducible, 'unparalleled relation' (1969, p.264), which must withstand within the sea of ethical universalization which is exteriority. The dream of Eros then is presented by the indelicate balance the subject must take if they hope to persevere within the social whilst maintaining their liaison with the mystic. An ethical being committed to service of the Other in the present, sustained by the promise of Eros

and the anticipated future they seek to share, in love, with their beloved. Condemned to forever be torn between the pained ecstasy of Eros and the affirmative subjugation of Law, a subject always and only for and through the Other.

The enduring conceptualisation of the prior discussions is that of a moral zenith of Eros. A loving relation within which the subjects both find themselves ‘the self of [their beloved] other’ (Levinas 1969, p.271). The lover(s) within this iteration is accordingly a subject who enigmatically oscillates between the realms of the Same and the Other. A familiar figure who remains allusively veiled in ambiguity, a personal mystery who offers no utility, yet abounds in excedence, nonetheless. Within the actuality of such a relation fecundity may indeed materialise, though this is not a necessary nor perceptive outcome as the relation resides within its essential ambiguity, maintaining the primacy of the metaphysical. Within this ambiguous Eros, without a child, without profanity and the fleeting euphoria of carnal relations, the beloved (now both loved and loving other), is exalted, exuding potentiality, warranting the divine appreciation they find within the resonance of their lover’s chorus. Without the need of a child, without the conviction of a promise, without an enticing word to be spoken, they are *enough*. A subject deserving of the irresolvable duality they inflict upon and suffer themselves for the lover. A fitting resolution to the mysticism of Eros is just that which embraces the insoluble dichotomy of the subject’s being and welcomes the agonising discomfort which is to persist simultaneously within love and society, in Law and Eros. An Other-than-Levinasian resolution, and yet one that is so fundamentally Levinasian, which does not forget the other, nor the irreplaceable reverence they rightly command.

4.4. Conclusion

To love oneself is important. Life will be better if one loves oneself better. And the love must be free of all social shackles, of all constraints, so as to be able to develop itself in all its beauty, and produce that which it alone can produce: noble beings.

(Sacher-Masoch, W 1991, p.119)

True love does not want to be, but to make happy.

(Sacher-Masoch, W 1991 p.123)

Patently, as this chapter asserts, the language with which Levinas adorns his modes of alterity presents a forceful affront to the delightful ambiguity of his philosophical doctrine. Though many theorists are inclined to assume the defensive posture of the metaphorical reading, this positioning appears as an exhausting exercise in reverential ignorance. The beauty of Levinas's texts manifest in the wonders of alterity, is repeatedly and overtly undermined by the derogatory caricaturing of the feminine within his works. Though this sexualised tenor intuitively leans into the emotive merits of the Masochian reading, or any literary analysis coupled with Levinas, which serves to corporealize the dense fog of his prose, it is corrosive as it is marred not by the flawed dramatic figures of Masoch or Prevost, instead, the failings it portrays are of Levinas himself. And therefore are all the more poignant and unsettling. What his language offers, in subjugating and ostracising the feminine, is not a playful interlude with the metaphorical. It is a concerted, repeated act of violence upon the feminine being he offers/denies. An 'inferior' (Sandford 2006, p.144), 'less-than' (Perpich 2001, p.29) being, who is merely the 'object' (Sikka 2001, p.110) of *his* masculine subject. Perhaps it is as a consequence of this signatory patriarchal vice that many commentators have been reluctant to address this offensive theme which perpetuates throughout his work and is similarly present in his latter texts in various guises (1999; 2017, *discussions of Maternity*). However, as alluring as the metaphorical is, by offering the Levinasian reader an accessible means to remedy this disease, to redeem Levinas from his own words, there appears a point where this solution is a reconciliation of convenience, not of sincerity.

This noxious contamination cannot be so easily dismissed by the inelegant pretence of metaphorical abstraction nor that of masculine earnestness. It extends fervently, vitiating not merely his laboured dialogues with the explicitly feminine, it extends further, to the very root of his magnificent doctrine. As Katz and Irigaray have most expressly contended, the inadequacies of his portrayal of the feminine, reach the 'heart' of his writings (Katz 2001b; Irigaray 2001). The majesty of an insatiable relation to alterity, that which compels the subject's being and cloaks exteriority with the finery of Law, which indiscriminately demands the enthused subjugation as only Justitia could, is violated itself by the graceless masculinity of its language. By so willingly constructing an abstraction of ambiguity which adheres to the most offensively anachronistic of patriarchal tropes, Levinas is not guilty of a sympathetic ignorance, this is not a paltry symptom of 'chauvinistic blindness' (Manning 1991, p.140), it is far, far more severe. Each ignoble foray into the feminine, serves to advocate for an egregiously distasteful, heteronormative relation with feminine alterity. Each marvellous sentence, each delightfully distasteful conceptualisation of

Levinas is an act of unencumbered brutality. These lashings, though, lack accuracy. Violence is undoubtedly inflicted upon the feminine, Levinas's absent victim, unbefitting of being, through these pointed excerpts. Though one must note that this pained chorus is not heard in isolation, it is met by the anguishes of self-flagellation as Levinas's doctrine too demands justice.

To remedy these casualties of Levinas's language, within this chapter I have argued explicitly that we must then step, ardently, away from Levinas, into the Neo-Levinasian, or perhaps more aptly, the Other-than-Levinasian, in order to maintain the integrity of the Levinasian. Assuming an iteration of Levinas which is not tainted by the sexualised indelicacies of his work and is appropriate for an age with ethical, post-patriarchal aspirations. Such a movement, as this chapter has contended, can be achieved by moving to a reading of Levinas which refutes this crude articulation of ethics, Eros and fecundity which are contingent upon a sexual, feminine other and, conversely, embraces the incorruptible, metaphysical conception of a truly ambiguous alterity. As detailed in the preceding discussions, this is reliant upon the post-Levinasian's willingness to exalt the mysticism of alterity. That which is bestowed upon the feminine is thus redeemed through its attribution to indistinguishable alterity. The crude mysticism and allure of the feminine, resolved by the ambiguity of the indiscernible Other. What perseveres from this movement from Levinas, is thus a recognisably Levinasian conception of ethics and Eros, which maintains the central edict of his writings, namely the primacy of the Other, manifest through the metaphysical relation. An Other which is draped in delicious ambiguity, allowing for the feminine, and all non-masculine others alike, to find themselves as the abstract subject. No longer the facilitator barred from subjectivity, they are welcomed into the theatre of the metaphysical. This forgotten subject is no longer an absence, an object of masculine perversions. She is found, a being rediscovered, a lover free to suffer the rapacious snare of Eros. In this, the indiscriminate veil of post-Levinasian ambiguity, she *is*.

Interlude 4: A question of Love or the Lover?

‘*Cave amantem*’ (Merimee 2008, p.142, own emphasis).

Hesitantly, perhaps in a manner which has surprised its author, this project appears to have devolved, no longer one of Love, Eros, nor truly of the corrosive embrace of Law, it is more earnestly an investigation into the subjectivity of the lover themselves, the Romantic protagonist who invariably fails at love and indulges in the amorality of an existence beyond the normative boundaries of Law. Though the foundation of the text remains inescapably the product of contemplation upon the hapless subject’s assault by the behemoths of Law and Love, it is evident that each cunning dive into the Masochian reading of Levinas, each fictitious facade which has furthered and motivated this movement belies the subject which lingers beneath such convenient literary and philosophical tools. Hiding, weary-eyed and jaded, behind the flattering veil of anonymity the vices of the flawed archetypal Romantic protagonists offer, persists an enervated, recognisable character. Someone familiar to us all. Someone I used to know. Or, maybe, I was once. Someone who cannot abide the misfortune of being. The subject who flees from Law and finds, conveniently, Eros. Only to fail, only to be lost. The subject of a Self lost from the Other, submitting to Eros. A Self, lacking Self. One which cannot find themselves the self of another, they have no Self to offer. Which cannot be redeemed by fecundity, for there is no Eros without the Other, without Self. Nor can they be salvaged from their own ruinous interiority by Law and her affirmatory endowment of alterity. A subject who succumbs, oh so willingly, to a lesser being, that of subsistence.

Articulating an insincere, flawed subjectivity, this is the subject who does not discover the liberation of Eros as a transcendental remedy to the ills of their moralistic existence. It is, alternatively, that broken being who desperately seeks it out. They who *need* love to justify and affirm their astray being to contextualise and justify their rapacious irrationality. Arguably, this is the being of the historic Romantic archetype, he who desperately longs for amnesty from the perceived agony of their torturous being. This is *Des Grieux*, *Severin*, *Demetrius*, *Werther*, *Adolphe* etc., the plethora of supposed subjects of Eros who desire nothing more than to be exonerated from their burdensome being by love’s sultry cradle. Earnestly, these are metaphysical Levinasian Masochists, those who long for the anguish and torment of erotic escapades, and actively pursue them, so they may feel the admonishment of the Other, and in their abandonment the failings of themselves. Throughout their varied and yet markedly similar relations, they demonstrate the

ease with which one may experience the sincerity of alterity through the infliction of solipsistic savagery as they impose their erotic projections stiflingly upon their porcelain beloved.

Through this bruising ontological imposition, the subject's being is affirmed in isolation. They are not known, nor approached, the world is denied if it does not conform with their preordained triumph over tragedy. Consequently, they are never to be loved. Without a Self, lacking the metaphysical, they cannot engage in Eros. To be loved the subject must abide within the domain of Law, knowing the reciprocity of her caress. Such aspirations are beyond the capacity of the subsisting entity, this indulgent idealist cannot endure such exposure. The vulnerability of the flesh masks that of this subsistent. This subject is a deviant, for that is an accessible construction of being. A hollow, if discernible, ontology which abides in a lack of Self and refuses to engage in the necessary self-flagellation required to arduously return to the domain of humanity. The lashings, emotional or otherwise, will suffice to fan the flames of this ideology. There are no words to be spoken which can awaken this disciple from their own fever dream.

This succeeding final discussion is admittedly the most plainly authentic as it is an attempt to recognise not the loss of Love which I had formerly perceived as the foundation of this project, but the loss of Self, my own Self, any unfortunate Self, to love which has been an altogether more profound revelation. Though this may be of little surprise to any other, far more self-aware reader, it is most apparent through the literary divides referenced, indeed, even the apparently coincidental adoption of Levinas's philosophical framework, that what unifies myself and these writers most potently, through their protagonists and conceptualisations of ontology and subjectivity, is not a naively idyllic conception of Eros, though admittedly I have had and still relish within my dalliances. Instead, it is having to face and recognise in the farcical pursuits of these characters, my own willed, embraced surrender to Eros whence I too welcomed subsistence. And, in this movement, which is repeated by each protagonist, and invariably each author, there lies an impassioned desire to flee desperately from oneself. Or perhaps more overtly, to seek excedence from the malaise of a lack of Self. An ontological deprivation which makes Eros all the more alluring, all the more necessary. It is in this state of subsistence, of being a less-than-being, in which every potential beloved offers a fleeting, welcome taste of the fantasy which Eros beckons, of the Other which cannot be maintained.

Flirting with candour at this late, intimate hour, it was only in the absence, the pained aftermath of love, when I reluctantly recognised Eros was no longer offering her divine potentiality and that the escape of my own interiority had deserted me, that this project resolved to take her place. It sought to at the very least. However, as is apparent in both anecdote and fiction, without Self, there is no Other, no Eros, no subject. The being which *needs* Eros is anaesthetised by her absence, praying frantically that the pain of their affair with the sublime may return so that they know what it is to love once more. The ‘Agony of Eros’ is only ever usurped by the sting of its deprivation (Han 2017). The subject of subsistence is they who have lost themselves. Lost their beloved, lost their being, lost. I, and so many others, who may be unwilling to concede such potent fatigue to another’s absence, invariably succumb to the anguish wrought by the dearth of alterity. This project itself, this indulgent, expensive exercise in catharsis has culminated in this laughably apparent revelation. One inevitably is made all too aware when they have lost their beloved. Be it to time, the indelicacy of truth, or exposure. The void is tangible, palpable. Here, in the deprivation of Self, the being may stumble on. Ignorant, belligerent. Unaware of their affliction. Existing in absence, abiding in an ontological paralysis. A subsistent subject.

5. Levinasian Subsistence: The Law, Love and Self of a Lost Being

A central motivation which drives this thesis' narrative is the desire to challenge and broaden the uniformity of Levinas's rigid, legalistic ontology. Formerly this has been explored through detailing how a subject's relation with Eros may elude the reconciliation with sociality through fecundity. Subsequently, I have endeavoured to press the need and importance for a more diverse, flawed conceptualisation of human subjectivity within the Neo-Levinasian, or Post-Levinasian, framework adopted herein through literary analysis. And, while this initial foray into the lover who loses themselves and their beloved to love, the seduction of erotic interiority presenting a necessary stride within this thematic movement, it is undercut somewhat by the sympathetic nobility of such a being. The loss of oneself to love evokes profound sentiment and is a most pitiable plight which may incur tragedy for both the lover and their dear beloved. They appear as a pious, devout individual. Guilty only of allowing their love to blind them to their desperate beloved. Losing the Other to Eros in the indulgent euphoria their fantasy provides. As such, there is an admirable earnestness to the actions of this irrational subject. Their refutation of Law affording their Eros the grace to transcend and captivate in the most majestic and infantile of ways. However, not all self-proclaimed vassals of Eros can earnestly proclaim to have been consumed so completely by the metaphysical onslaught that is this celebration of intersubjectivity. There are others, infidelious Pharisaics who latch onto the idealism of the Erotic fantasy as a means to escape the monotony and ethics found in the Law of their being. To these heretics, the arduous gifts of Law, sociality and alterity are not lost, not immersed beneath the cavernous dissonance of wondrous projection which defines Eros, they are simply tiresome. Too much to bear. Whilst the Erotic leaps rabidly into the irrational depths of their numbing interiority, to this subject, the burdens of Law are simply deserved through wilful, pertinacious ignorance.

Challenging the established conception of Levinasian Eros through the development of the Masochian reading thereof, we perceive of a love which need not adhere to the ethical constraints formerly imposed. Such an eros need not be innately reciprocal, nor does it necessarily culminate triumphantly in serenity. Through this more insular, subjective articulation of the Erotic relation, we reveal a more unique, individualistic and cynical conception of Love more befitting of the messy, volatile human relations which forcefully punctuate our lives. Similarly, by marring Eros with this stain of intemperate humanity, the accomplishment of a successful erotic union, that which unites the lovers in the realm of sociality, returning them

from the abyss of their abrasive interiorities, is even more revelatory. The burden of Law seemingly undone by the celebration of an accomplished, mutual Eros. In addition, it is the intent of the present discussion, through the critique of this novel, familiar, fallible articulation of subjectivity to further explicate the nuances of Levinasian ontology. Namely that character of subjectivity which does not, which cannot abide either in Love or Law. They who retreat from the corrosive constraints of alterity and may, opportunistically, offer themselves to Eros. Attempting to miserably circumvent the horrible truth which torments their being, that they are a subject lacking in essence, devoid of personality. A subject without Self.

While the conception of this lack of subject may, at first instance, appear as a far more abstract, speculative character than that of the romantic soul who cannot resist the allure of Eros and submits willingly to their deity's machinations, when one reflects upon such a being, in their abstraction there arises an uncomfortable familiarity. Not lauded as such, these are often the much-vaunted protagonists of tragic, often masculine, rhetorics. The protagonists of the literary world who profess to be the most dutiful servants of Eros but in truth retreat into obscurity at the notion of any successful confrontation with their divine Other. These romantic subsistents plea for Eros so that they may be benumbed from themselves and their own plentiful shortcomings. So that they may be saved from their own ineptitude, absence of purpose, sensibility, and being. A lack which may be so easily offered to a false, illusory Eros. Such subsistents long for Eros to reconcile that irresolvable absence which persists within their chasmous being. They are terrified by the voracious severity of the Other. Desiring not to be known, unwilling to be seen, unable to be loved. For, without a Self, they are unsure of what they are, who they are. And one cannot love the Other without a Self. Devoid of subjectivity, they withdraw from sociality, resisting Law's summons and wield Eros clumsily as a dangerous, if opportune, means to perpetuate their fatuous self-deception. Of course, as this thesis has intended to exemplify, such pluralistic explorations which deviate from the established topography of Levinasian ontology are most accessible through the liberatory lens of literature, this tool once more utilised to ensure that any of the overly personal conversations or heavy-handed accusations of self-flagellation that an alternative methodology would invite are diverted. Alternatively, avert your critique, questions and condemnations to Goethe's famed, forlorn protagonist *Werther*, and the tale of his sorrows which will contextualise this examination of subsistent being and its demise.

Investigating the subsistent mode of being through the Levinasian ontological framework, I will portray a subject which lacks Self and discern the profundity of this plight and the bountiful consequences awaiting therein. The being who flinches in the face of the Other and fears the idea of divine which rests in their visage, unwilling to hear the call of the Other, unwilling to 'give' (Levinas 1969, p.75). While such an ontological perversion will present, initially, as markedly at odds with the traditionally Levinasian articulation of the human, ethical, being, it is necessary to recognise and act upon the accepted harshness of these terms. What are we if we are unable or unwilling to attain this lofty state of revered persecution? What mode of subjectivity can convey what it is to fail to be 'human' (Levinas 1969, p.112)? Revisiting the central relationship of the subject's Self with alterity, that which 'is possible only starting from [the subject]' (1969, p.40), this text contends that this foundational relation may only be maintained by a 'stable self' (Han 2018, p.21), one which can resist the anxiety-ridden compulsion to drown 'in the self' and in so doing progress toward the challenge of ethical sociality. To the subject who cannot sustain their Self, the relation with the beloved (or illusory beloved in this instance), offers not the narcissistic opportunity to violate and profane the virginal other (Levinas 1969, p.258), it is a means to divert from their lack of substance, as they contort their being around this fanciful relation, becoming an object of their own desire.

Within this more macabre revisiting of a purportedly erotic relation, as detailed within '*The Sorrows of Young Werther*', the subsistent subject's hapless incursions into alterity are revealed as futile endeavours to remedy themselves. A fatally flawed attempt to once more 'find itself the self of an other' (Levinas 1969, p.271). Yet, any resolution to do so, to break from their self-imposed exile are unsuccessful, damned by the subject's reluctance to be affirmed in alterity by the Law of the Other (Levinas 2017, p.30). Without the Other the subsistent is deprived of the gifts of alterity, struggling as a necessarily limited being destitute of language and reason. An incomprehensible assemblage of emotion that cannot be understood or known, unable to perceive the joys of alterity, the furious delights of exteriority, and is left, devastated by their imperious '*taedium vitae*' (Levinas 1969, p.146). Consequently, the subsistent's perceived desire for alterity is the pitiful expression of their yearning to discover their own Self, to *feel* once again the trauma of their second 'birth' (Levinas 1987, p.81), and *be*. And, be seen to be, be known as a human, ethical subject. In this regard, the pining for alterity is in many ways the subject's salvation, a corrosive foray into the solipsistic as it is not the horizon-shattering face of alterity, which is sought, it is their own subjectivity. A subjectivity, ironically, obviously, only realised through the Other and the destruction of each 'plastic image' and each vapid 'idea' (Levinas

1969, p.50), of a solitary, serene, selfish existence, they cling to. As with its literary characterisation of *Werther*, and his eventual expiration, such salvation may be beyond certain subjects. The vain pursuit of a hallucinatory, convenient, unattainable love may, for a time, afford this self-inebriated being the opportunity to withdraw into themselves and surrender to the ignoble abyss of their notional Eros. It, however, cannot sustain them and prevent them from falling into the nothingness which lingers beneath.

Ensuring that both the emotive and metaphysical nuances of the subsistent subject are given their due, this final chapter will progress thusly, descending from the realms of Levinas's abstract conceptualisation of subjectivity, existence and being to the panging conceptualisation of the subsistent's subjectivity, manifest in the tale of *Werther*. Formatively, the ontological domain of Levinasian being, the '*il y a*' (Levinas 1987, p.46), will be discussed within the chapter's initial section, as I detail an ontological ipseity which is as affirmative as it is desperate, outlining how the subject's characterisation and humanity persists within an infantile contingency with the Other. This foundationally demonstrates the burdensome state of being which is innate to the Levinasian subject and considers the strains this exerts upon the existential status of this being as they are not merely cursed to be (Wolcher 2003, p.106), they are similarly cursed to always be in dire, tireless, exhaustive servitude. Defined by subjugation, affirmed only through the Other, the subject is reflected and moulded by the very chains which bind them to alterity, any flirtation with being other than this is fallacious. Nevertheless, as I explicate within the succeeding aspects of the text, it is into this fallacy that such a subject may gropingly voyage, longing for the delusory reprieve of subsistence. As the subject founds their relation with alterity, the relations one feels through alterity present as the stifling extensions of the metaphysical desire. Law and Eros, the dichotomous topographies of the Other, offer little salvation. Despite this, they do endow the means to refine and forge the very ipseity of the subject, as we are all inevitably defined by our service to the Other (Wolcher 2006, p.541), in Law or Eros, the subsistent subject remains unable to escape the expectant glare of alterity, incapable of answering alterity's call. As I will argue, this belies the metaphysical separation which disrupts and corrupts the subsistent being as they cannot remedy the distance between the I and the Self as an other. This, as demonstrated through the toils of *Werther*, culminates in a subject simply struggling to be. A plight as relatable and common as the intoxicating embrace of Eros, though far less engaged with. Such a subject flees the demands of their own ontology, rejecting alterity in all her magnificent guises, rejecting exteriority. Through *Werther*, such a subject who cannot attain being, who cannot sustain themselves in the absence of the Other, is tragically realised. A subject who

cannot find affirmation, in Law or the Other, a subject who cannot abide with the violence of their being and petulantly admonishes the history of them which haunts them. Such a being must endure subsistence, frantically until they are found, until they are willing to assume the burden of sociality which welcomes them once more into the triumphant confines of intersubjectivity. A being unable to meet the demands of alterity, left, sequestered by their own volition, to endure the ennui of their own existence. A being without Self, without the Other and without any future. A being devoid of love or Law.

5.1. All that *there is*, is burden

Yes, I feel certain, Wilhelm, and every day become more certain, that the existence of any being whatever is of very little consequence. (Goethe 2019, 49)

In order to once more playful pervert Levinas's doctrine and dirty it a final time with the emotive brush of corporality, we must in this instance avert our deviant gaze from the mere confines of the intersubject/metaphysical relation which has been preeminent concern of this thesis, the hallowed ground upon which we found space to dance furiously with the illusory embrace of Eros, the cruelly oppressed domain of the feminine and the subject themselves, trapped in world of Law and subjugation. Forgoing, at least for a time, these most loquacious of conceptual interlocutors, in this final foray, it is necessary to explore the rather more dense, and admittedly less beguiling, context of Levinas's purely ontological thought. While, as has been discussed at length and will be touched upon briefly herein, the metaphysical desire for alterity is inverted into the ontological within Levinasian thought, introducing a subject who is defined by the ethical law of their nature, the yearning for a beyond being which alterity thrusts upon them, this does not outline the entire ontological trajectory of Levinas's subject. Indeed, while the subject's identity, purpose and very ipseity is contingent upon this relation, they exist 'through and for the other' (Levinas 1999, p.114), this profoundly existential event portrays only the apotheosis of the subject's struggle to transcendence and is reticent to address the ontological origin of the subject's existence, how the subject itself came to be. It is here, in the miry formation of the subject, where we must turn our attention and abound with impish curiosity, so that we may pull apart this antecedent domain of existence itself, that which precedes the subject, from whence they purport to spring forth (Levinas 1987, pp.45-46), and ask whether or not we may find ourselves, the emotive, flawed, human character of the Masochian reading there.

Consistent with the previous mischievous incursions into Levinas's works, the intent to do so is manifest in the necessity to further, and repeatedly, corporealize the Levinasian subject, to bathe that subject defined by unrivalled ambiguity in the maelstrom of humanity. In the absence of such familiarity, the ethical impetus of the doctrine is at risk of persisting merely as an academic exercise, a distant dossier of unrecognisable philosophical abstraction, reduced to the pithy musings of an all too pretentious discourse, devoid of the urgency which may inspire altruistic action. Though a familiar and often necessary aspect of any engagement with Levinasian doctrine, of particular concern in this dalliance is the attempt to adequately actualize the all-too-human, 'burden of being', which defines Levinasian subjectivity (Alford 2014, p.258). By revisiting the arduous plight the subject is portrayed to willingly and enthusiastically endure, especially when approached through the lens of one of literature's most emotive characters, the need to once more challenge this sadistically idealised subject becomes most apparent, as in so doing I avouch that we reveal an all-too-familiar character unable to sustain the searing shackles of subjectivity, one who may fail both themselves and the Other, stumbling hopelessly into subsistence.

More broadly, this is indicative of the need to contend with, if not refute, the uniform binarism of the ontological trajectory Levinas imposes upon the subject. Just as love must be given space to be unrequited, to be cruel, to fail and corrupt, so too the subject must be afforded the capacity to fail the Other, to be overwhelmed by the glory of alterity and unable to answer its deafening call. It is pursuant to this end, that within this chapter I advocate for the recognition of such a subsistent subject and in so doing hope to challenge the uncomfortable rigidity of Levinas's ontology once more. To provide some transparency as to the perversions/liberties taken with Levinas's doctrine, this section will serve as the conceptual context for the more adventurous latter discussions and as such will outline the key aspects/domains of Levinasian ontology which hitherto have not been explicitly addressed within this thesis which has been preoccupied within the interplay of subjectivity at the metaphysical level. Plainly, the concepts which are central to this final dramatic contorting of the Levinasian subject are that of the *il y a*, *hypostasis* and the temporal nature of the subject itself. It is only then, once we have considered the unsettlingly intimate flaws of literature's desolate youth, that we may truly recognise the Neo-Levinasian subject, that which fails, not only the Other but also themselves, just as I and you invariably have, who surrenders exhaustedly to the hypersensitivity of subsistence. They who are left adrift, cast aimlessly between being and nothingness, unable to face the Other, unable to find

themselves. A being devoid of alterity and consequently ipseity, a subject without a self.

As one of the more abstract, which is itself an achievement, aspects of Levinasian philosophy, it is perhaps unsurprising that commentators often approach the *il y a* in a manner which behoves their own Neo-Levinasian/Levinasian (contingent upon their earnestness) approach, spanning the ontological examinations of Morgan (2007) and Diamantides (2007), the ethical assessments of Anckaert (2020) and Saldukaityte (2021) and the stunningly poignant applications within the context of the holocaust (Pollefeyt 2022) and race (Laubscher 2022). Thankfully, there is a consensus as to the central elements of this concept which occupies a most intriguing position within Levinas's ontological topography. In the most concise of terms, the *il y a*, for Levinas is the representation of 'existing without existents', that which is perceived to persist when it no longer is, or before it ever was, and by virtue of existing's grace, is unable to descend into the entirety of nothingness (Levinas 1987, p.46). Even in this most fleeting of examinations, the positive and negative articulations of the *il y a* present the dynamic nature of existing itself and the horrors of nothingness (Pollefeyt 2022, p.89). Firstly, concerning the former aspect, by imbuing 'pure existing', that which presents in delightful juxtaposition as an 'atmospheric density, a plenitude of the void, or the murmur of silence', in so vigorous a manner, existing is expressed as a belligerent, incessant refutation of nothingness, the presence of absence (Levinas 1987, p.46). In addition, by asserting the 'impossibility of nothingness', the primacy of 'pure existing', is maintained, consequently the *il y a* provides a phenomenological entry-point to the subject's originary ontology (1987, p.47). Through the introduction of the *il y a*, the coquettish notion of an existence antecedent to the world, or at least to 'being-in-the-world', is revealed (Fagenblat 2002, p.584). Here, in this absent space, we may truly discern the foundational essence of Levinasian being beyond the purviews of the ethical summons, playing in this 'no subject's land', of ontology, which Fagenblat terms as the exterior limits of Levinasian experience, the 'contextless zone of existence' (2002, p.584). Yet, within this adjunct domain, and only ever presented in the characteristically compelling ambiguity of Levinas, he appears to maintain the much-vaunted primacy of the metaphysical relation at the core of his writing, and central to the Masochian reading thereof, allowing for a distinction between the domains of pure existence (existing) and that of social existence (existent) (Levinas 1987, p.46).

Though Levinas seemingly provides an articulation of pure existing which itself brims with vigilance, appearing as an ever-attentive ontological swaddle, cradling all were the bottom of everything to 'suddenly drop out' (1987, p.46), this perspective is markedly inconsistent with the

nature of the *il y a* as it is speculatively experienced by the subject yet-to-be. Given the non-corporeal essence of the *il y a*, even speaking of experiencing it may in itself be inappropriate as this ontological domain concerns that which is felt but not known, an indiscernible relationship between they who are neither ‘subject nor substantive’ (1987, pp.46-47), and this assertive clutch from oblivion. Expanding upon this further, the *il y a*, the state of mere existing, is one which is defined by the violent anonymity which abounds there, smothering all which tumble unfortunately into its embrace (1987, pp.47-48). Here, within the confines of the *il y a*, that which exists without being, incurs the consequences of this ‘impersonal existence’ (Guenther 2009, p.172). Devoid of personality, familiarity, symbolism, language, materiality itself, what persists in this realm ‘is neither anyone nor anything’ (Levinas 1987, p.47), all that lingers here is the irrepressible fact of existence and the threat of its absence, the ‘threat of meaninglessness’ (Anckaert 2020, p.68). In such terms, Levinas appears to suggest that what is to be found residing in the *il y a*, does so by virtue of its imposition, the irrepressibility of existence intervening upon its inhabitants. Consequently, it does not bestow them with being, it merely obtrudes a seemingly salvatory reprieve from nothingness upon them (Levinas 1987, p.48). This is in fact a condemnation, as within the *il y a*, they are forced to suffer the ignominy of their ‘absence of all self’, beset by the torment of their own ‘*without-self*’ (1987, p.49). Evidently, it appears that the *il y a* conforms to the all-too-familiar pattern of the Levinasian contradiction as, mirroring the ethical relation, that which offers a purported reprieve from the horrors of nothingness inflicts upon the subject the most potent of collapses, reducing them to the most primordial, simplistic articulation of existence, demanding that this hapless lack incurs the unfettered anguish of anonymity, whence they are devoid, master of nothing, hidden beneath the crude absurdity of mere existing (1987, pp.50-51).

This most pained conception of mere existing, which Levinas presents in the *il y a*, proudly awash with Levinasian irony, can be seen to elucidate the horrors of this ontological domain for all which descend to its depths. In the absence of alterity, the transcendent liaison with the metaphysical, the desperate burden of being is inescapable. Those who abide in anonymity are barraged by their proximity to nothingness, chastised for their courtship with the ultimate reprieve. Without any alternatives, without any body or thing, blinded by the anonymity of the *il y a*, such an entity’s gaze is inverted, isolated, lost, absent, they are saved from any idyllic aspirations of subjectivity as their own lack of self distorts their being. All that they may discern, all that they recognise and hear is both a promise and a threat, that material resolution of ‘meaninglessness’ (Anckaert 2020, p.68). Devoid of context, lacking material integrity, lacking

integrity in any guise, they are beset by their absence of being, all that they can espy in the darkness of the *il y a*, is their lack of self, a recognition only of the absence, of the hollowness with which they are haunted. Accordingly, it is only through the plight of the subject, that the character of the *il y a* is made evident. For Levinas the *il y a*, is to be felt as the very weight of existence (Fagenblat 2002, p.585) which incapacitates the lack of subject, it is the ‘sea of being in which man drowns’ (Anckaert 2020, p.64), and from where they long frantically to escape from.

The most welcome of reprieves is offered to the subject by Levinas, in a manner most brazenly exhibiting the unfettered speculative nature of his metaphysics, through the event of *hypostasis* (1987, p.43). Hypostasis is that presence which populates the absence, this non-substantive *lack* with which we have become familiar, contracts their own existing, and in so doing, ruptures themselves from within the depths of the anonymity with which they have been smothered (1987, p.51). This ontological sunder is established by virtue of the aspiring subject forming a relation with existing itself. Conceiving of the fact of existence, the subject is brought into possession of this relation, attaining an appreciation for that which bracketed their particular spaceless positioning within the *il y a*, a horizon emerging from beneath the waves of ‘anonymous vigilance’ (1987, p.51), which envelopes them. In seizing this relation, the imperceptible opacity of the *il y a* is irreversibly fractured, the abysmal profound which saturate them ontologically, reveal the formless silhouette of unmistakable familiarity, their own lack of being surfacing so that they may ‘grasp’, frantically at themselves. Recognising in the damp, calloused appendages the burden of their own being, the agony of their own existence (Guenther 2009, pp.173-174).

Within the discovery of their imperceptible being, the subject, though achieving contemplation of the possibilities beyond the misery of existing, remains steadfast in their ignorance of the metaphysical desire and the dream of ontological transcendence. Grasping only at themselves, perceiving only that absence of their presence which demarcates the heaving swarm of the *il y a*, the pores into which the hardship and tumult of existence will scar and wear, their gaze remains motionless, riveted upon their own ontological poverty. Claspng hopelessly, desperately, necessarily at themselves within the unilluminated, abstruse swamps of ambiguity, their anophthalmic survey is fixed in ignorant fidelity upon their pitiful frustration, ‘bogged down’ in their own insufficient being (Levinas 1987, p.63). All that is sensible to this nescient fury is that upon which the materiality of their fledgling subjectivity rests, their relationship with existing itself (1987, p.63), the separation between themselves and the deluge of toil which embowers

them. Nonetheless it is the possession of this relation which enables the subject to extricate themselves from the Gehenna of ambiguity. Through this fissure, the subject may distinguish the tedium of their own existence from that with which they are now master, their capacity to assert an individuated, if hollow ontology, their capacity to be (Guenther 2009, p.169). Through this assertion, the subject is individuated, their ontological singularity revealed, knowing the points at which their own fragmented being ends and where the inexorable *il y a* begins, ever vigilant (Guenther 2009, p.169). However, upon these anguished shores, they remain engrossed by the nebulousness of the *il y a*, achieving an identity which remains encased within the paltry ontological limitations of the subject, an identity that their 'spatial transcendence does not undo' (Levinas 1987, p.81). An identity without context or reference, a lost soul.

By virtue of this individuation, the existent now ruptured and astray, suffering the cognisance of their own existence and the shallow mastery thereof, attains their first 'birth' (1987, p.81), a breath interrupting the muted orchestra of the *il y a*, carrying with it the wonders of intersubjectivity, cradling the ontological possibility which beckons beyond its blurred borders. Singular, this entity has materialised *ex nihilo*, characterised only by their existential exile, absent of any ipseity (Guenther 2009, p.170). Remaining alone, loitering within the ineluctable tar of 'pure existing', there is a Sisyphean triumph found in their erection. Indeed, though they remain in desolate isolation, seizing ever hopefully at their ethereal, non-substantive non-self, longing that they may find that which escapes them, by standing they have taken their first pace towards the infinite wonders of alterity (Guenther 2009, p.172). Alone, there is no possibility, only existence, only aimless suffering and burden and anonymity. No promise of transcending the horrors of this realm, no alternative, no alterity. Nevertheless, this audacious act, the contumacious rising of the subject, tearing themselves from torrents of the *il y a*, invites the notion, the dream that one day they may feel the celebratory warmth of the Other's zephyr, feel the invigorating trauma of their embrace and know the unbridled joys of suffering/existence with purpose, a being beyond being. This forsaken solitude, the inescapable burden of being, is the aspirational subject's 'price of consciousness' (Guenther 2009, p.172), the cost of individuation presenting itself in the triumphant misery of actuality, the possibility of alterity manifest only in the appreciation of their loneliness. A loneliness from which they cannot escape but must be liberated.

The fissure, which is all the lack of self knows, denotes its ontological history, bestowing it with the anchorage of a beginning, thrusting it firmly into the domain of the present (Levinas 1987,

p.52). This temporal orientation of the subject further evidences the difference from Levinas's conceptualisation of the ethical relation through alterity and that of his primordial/originary relation within the *il y a*. Portraying the isolated subject as that which abides within their history, forming themselves in the present whilst possessing no relation with the future, the ontological foundation of the subject is seemingly contingent upon their temporality, not their metaphysical desire for alterity. However, the master of juxtapositions and metaphysical ironies resolves this distortion by providing an articulation of foundational alterity which is accomplished in a relationship with the future (Levinas 1987, p.79), and in so doing extricates the subject from the horrors of existence and the monotony of the past. This is perhaps most eloquently expressed by Oliver as Levinas portraying the relationship between the subject and the Other, as 'a promise [...] a promise that cannot be fulfilled, a paradoxical promise whose fulfilment would destroy the promise. And the promise is time' (2001, pp.228).

Packaged accordingly, embodying almost a choral echo of the language with which Levinas proffers the metaphysical relation, alterity is seen to illuminate the opacus chasms of the *il y a*, gracing the subject with the wondrous gift of possibility, whispering tentatively of a means to overcome the limitations of their desperate isolation (Saldukaityte 2021, p.877). Forgoing the binarism of the metaphysical desire for alterity, when considering the originary ontology of the subject, Levinas amalgamates intersubjectivity with the temporal inception of possibility, the future (1987, p.77). This novel, compelling conception of the subject's foundational strides into being, must culminate in the achievement of the ethical/human to maintain its place within the Levinasian ontological trajectory. The idle figure is revealed, overcome only by the transcendence of alterity. Accordingly, to escape nothingness, we must endure what it is to become human, this is the Levinasian 'law of being' (Wright 1988, p.175); that only through intersubjectivity, submitting to the Other, recognising and serving they who we must tirelessly welcome (Levinas 1969, p.157-158), may the subject escape the lamentable dolour of their own being. Separating themselves from their own suffering, assuming the burden of the Other despite the burden of their own existence, conceiving of a future outside of their own heretical history, the subject, within the futural embrace of the Other, may find themselves as they too become the 'self of another' (Levinas 1969, p.271). Here, separated yet present, giving to the present themselves so the Other may dance in the future, the subject is afforded thought, speech, reason and all the awards which abide in exteriority, finding an alternative from the enveloping depths of the *il y a*, an 'exotic world' (Levinas 2017, p.12), of alterity, being beyond being, being for, with and thanks to the Other.

Through this charting of the subject's ascent from the ambiguous to the transcendence of the substantive, Levinas provides a fascinating outline for the development of the subject's being which, while establishing a relationship with existence, maintains the primacy of the intersubjective relation. Extending his ontological doctrine from this central relation, which is at the heart of his writing, and establishing a necessary path which the subject must trudge along belies one of the more inconvenient aspects of his philosophy, the apparent lack of nuance or diversity within his work. While this critique is most frequently directed toward his indelicate and oft violent use of language, as has been addressed in the preceding chapters, in this instance, considering the ontological domain and the metaphysical orientation of the subject Levinas presents therein, it is most apparent that there is a dearth of pluralism within these emotionless, human-less conceptions of subjectivity. Given that Levinasian philosophy is centred upon the conception of an ethical, 'human' ontology (Wright 1988, p.175), peering beyond the much vaunted contortion of the subject around, upon and through altruistic acts in service of alterity, there is a swiftly apparent and unsettling absence of discernible familiarity to this subject, a distance between the flawed, narcissistic anxieties of the recognisably human and this alien/academic species which Levinas provides.

Explicating this critique, one could concede that Levinas merely *deals* with the subject. He maintains a distance from his ethical man which allows him to frame a modality of ontology which appears markedly at odds with the horrors he himself witnessed. It appears, if read sincerely, to provide only an aspirational ontology detailing what being human *should* entail. However, this detachment itself constrains Levinas's capacity to know his subject, to find in this subject a recognisable person. Decidedly, one can intuit why such an ambition may have lacked allure for Levinas during his life. Nevertheless, such concerns remain prevalent, and warrant addressing. Throughout his texts, being is dissected, magnificently, it must be stated. Its origins, its unique arduity, all mapped in the most compelling, joyously dense prose. Yet, what it is to actually *be*, remains an intimate secret, withheld from his texts, unspoken. Even within his fleeting excursions into the emotive tapestry of literature where he could abound within the most tragic, corruptible and romantic ideas of humanity, such references are undertaken at an anaesthetized distance, reducing Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare to academic points of reference and context (1987, p. 51; 1999, p.146). It is this disinterest with the volatility of the human which is ever at odds with the severity of his writings, the horrors of the *il y a*, the 'incessant wounding

of subjectivity' (Edelglass 2006, p.55), are all spoken of without feeling. Dismissed as the metaphysical necessities of the subject, nothing else.

Such critique as that which I proffer, itself perhaps succumbing to the indulgent sensibilities of literature and equally that of its own author, could be rebutted as an attempt to find a voice for the physical within the domain metaphysical. An unnecessary longing to discern and speak of the pain and torment of that being which persists in blissful abstraction. In truth, this perspective, which underlies the Masochian reading of Levinas and celebrates any literary analysis thereof, is a recognition of the limited purviews of Levinas's ontological doctrine (1987, p.39. *The capacity for which he was aware of*). In response to this, the subsequent sections of this chapter, adopting the literary context of Goethe's *'The Sorrows of Young Werther'*, expressly challenges the uniformity of Levinasian being and argues for the necessary space within this Neo-Levinasian/Less-than-Levinasian reading for the subject who is irreparably wounded, fatigable and broken, they who can no longer endure the burden of being. Through the subsequent literary analysis, I posit we unveil and cherish the subject that can no longer withstand the price of their humanity, who consequently plummets into the rapacious void of the *il y a* and is cast adrift within the seas of their own being. No longer able, nor willing, to hear the angelic call of alterity. Within this *subsistent* being, we forge a space within/alongside Levinas which allows for the subject to fail, as we all do at times, as sometimes we must, and details the metaphysical costs which are incurred therein. Forgoing the Other, the subsistent subject, neither subject nor insubstantive, is devoid of language, devoid of reason, devoid of their very own ipseity. Though outlined in appropriately grievous terms, the subsistent casts an uncomfortably familiar shadow over the Levinasian subject, offering the outline of those who invert their being and forget themselves, who become trapped within themselves, beset by the past, lost in their history - those who welcome a rupture from Levinas so those/we that fail so frequently may find themselves too, within the spaces between his words.

5.2. The Subsistence of *'Young Werther'*

The human race is but a monotonous affair. Most of them labour the greater part of their time for mere subsistence; and the scanty portion of freedom which remains to them so troubles them that they use every exertion to get rid of it. Oh, the destiny of man! (Goethe 2019, pp.3-4)

Wresting that wretch, which is the subject from Levinas's ontological tract, affording them the space to succumb to the barbarity of subjectivity and surrender to the ever vigilant tides of being, the fragility and inadequacy of the human subject is laid bare and embraced. By celebrating the paradoxical articulation of Levinas's ethics (Ricoeur 2004, p. 92), this conception of Levinasian subjectivity can be seen to reinvigorate the metaphysical relation through its pugnacious refutation thereof. The inhumanity of his ethics, the trauma and wounding seen repeatedly afflicted upon the ever dotting subject until they, brokenly, retreat. Every pore calloused; every breath stolen. Every beckon and sultry whisper from the Other's veracious lips, speaking only of their violence, the violence they have afflicted simply by being. The violence they are still yet to afflict by persisting dutifully in their being. The violence they will afflict upon themselves for the Other. In realising the hardship of the subject, not simply recognising it but allowing it to bleed auspiciously into consequence, the metaphysical is bestowed with new potency. For though the being of ontology may be accepted as the indefatigable automaton of ethics they are required to be, the subject is unable to so willingly forgo the shackles of their human mortality. They are cursed to be, and to be human. As such, the food, sweat, blood and life of the subject warrants some ramification, their deprivation and subjugation offered to placate the Other must incur a toll. The grazed, weary limbs of the prostrate servant, their desperate, flailing anguish must be appreciated. If they are accursed to forever descry the violence of their being, it is incumbent upon us, the reader of Levinas after Levinas, to recognise that to which they are victim. Failure to do so suggests an articulation of ethics which is not service at all, conversely it is perceptible as the heedless acts of blind exigency, absent of the estimable 'election' required of ethical transcendence (Levinas 2005, p.7).

It is this problematic antinomy at the root of Levinas's philosophy which overtly belies the fatal lack of heterogeneity therein. Allowing his metaphysical/ontological contortion to present as that which allows only for the ethical. A serene, if tautologous conception which, ironically, remains ignorant of that which is Other; that which is to be found in the all-too-human, all-too-philosophical capacity to fail (Cohen 1982 cited in Ainley 2001, p.219). It is this other, the flawed, failing, unwilling, unable other, which is evidenced so explicitly within the Levinasian abomination detailed herein, the subsistent being. Through this dismembering of the subject, the primacy of the Other is accentuated in their absence, whereby the former subject tragically crumbles, besieged by their lack of self and other, lost to the burden of being. Such torment cannot be afforded the indifference of abstraction and will be rendered subsequently through the forlorn musings of Goethe's, *"The Sorrows of Young Werther"* (2019).

Disclosing the volatile sentiment of the fraught protagonist, Goethe's text offers a rarely beheld insight into the tumult of subsistence, detailing the impassioned anguish of this descent into pure being/burden in a manner few other texts could. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published initially in 1774 before its revision in 1787, is awash with the unencumbered sensibilities of the *Romantic* age, and proudly portrays the ever more frantic, ever more desperate disconsolateness of the eponymous character and his unfruitful yearning for the remedying of his panging, unrequited love. Standing at odds with the others which have been considered within the Masochian reading, though maintaining the centrality of the romantic relation - the primacy of the Other must not be diminished - within this text we find a subject whose being and Eros is not accomplished. For all the many flaws of Masoch's supposedly sincere romantic protagonists, the maladroit malevolence of Prevost's *Des Grieux*, and even the various infidelious sins of Masoch himself, Goethe's *Werther* is the only text which ardently embraces the misery of failure and, in so doing, provides a magnificent elucidation of the interioristic odium which besieges they who yield to subsistence.

Through *Werther's* increasingly forsaken diary pages, the destitution which befalls the subject who cedes their relation to the Other and merely subsists is manifest. Seen clearly in his desperate unbecoming. Within the confessional disclosure of his reflections, the deteriorating of his subjectivity is detailed, outlining the agony of a subject which implodes. Retreating from the Other he plummets into the *il y a* as his denial of the metaphysical desire is realised in his ontological haemorrhaging, the gifts of alterity escaping his clutches until this aimless, speechless, thoughtless character is offered the reprieve of their demise. This interpretation of *Werther*, consequently does not engage with the text as a seminal piece of romantic fiction, though the subsistent subject's incapacity to participate in an erotic relationship is considered and is instead centred upon the work as one which espouses the dangers of the necessary subsistent who severs themselves from alterity. The subject who wishes to find respite from the ethical dictates of alterity, unable to find another no matter how desperately they hope to and succumbs instead to the burden of their own being, to their own lack of Self.

Revisiting "*The Sorrows of Young Werther*" through this application of the Levinasian lens, embracing the frantic sensitivity which the Masochian reading abounds in, the introductory passages of Goethe's famous epistolary novel introduce the reader to a subject already in retreat from alterity, unwilling to face the consequences of their arduous, affective subjectivity. This is

presented most explicitly within the opening paragraph whereby *Werther* apologises, both profusely and insincerely, to his beloved friend *Wilhelm*, for separating himself from he who he has always been ‘inseparable’ (Goethe 2019, p.1). Woven into this departure, *Werther* can be seen in this forgoing of his ‘Other’, to attain both a physical and metaphysical separation. The distance he has established between himself, and *Wilhelm* embodies his need for reprieve, internally and externally from the consequence of his harmful actions. Actualising the fatigable, jaded subject, *Werther* longs to be rid of his violent being, and to be liberated from the harm he has inflicted upon others, the history of himself from which there is no respite to be found, no quiet moment of ignorant solitude afforded whilst remaining with the Other.

Even within this laudable contemplation, his intent is abated by the confused manner in which he simultaneously begs for clemency and seems to welcome admonishment, oscillating in his words from stating assuredly, ‘I was not to blame’, to inviting the introspective accusation as to whether he was ‘wholly blameless?’ (Goethe 2019, p.1). Such internal inconsistencies present the subject at the precipice of their abandonment of alterity, the cliff atop which the subject stands in embrace with the Other, beneath which the *il y a* murmurs silently. Irrefutably, this profound descent which I will chart attentively, is clearly founded upon the most innocuously familiar of impulses, that most human dream to escape one’s history, to deny and be ignorant of the violence of one’s being and to tiredly succumb to the false allures of anonymous ambiguity. That is all that *Werther* longs for at this tentative stage, to no longer be beset by the guilt of his failings and to simply bask in their absence: ‘*I will enjoy the present, and the past shall be for me the past*’ (Goethe 2019, p.1). Unfortunately, such ambitions are exhibited as flagrant negations of alterity, and consequently, subjectivity. Straying tragically beyond the Other, as *Werther* and any subsistent is inevitably to realise, there is no salvation lying in wait. Only solitude, only the aftermath of alterity and the pitiful miscreant which lies alone.

Receding from their foundational relation to the Other, the subsisting subject hesitantly withdraws from sociality, seeking the solace which may lie beyond their summons. Yearning, exhaustedly, to find some momentary peace from the strident chorus of alterity, their denial presented in their longing for seclusion from the Other. Even here, at the boundaries of the intersubjective domain of exteriority, traces of alterity echo and bathe the subsisting’s person, appealing them to return to its fold and assume the arduity of their intersubjective being. Nevertheless, the subsisting subject persists upon this extremity, turning from the Other and themselves, torn between being and unbeing. Here, all that they may attain are illusory, trivially

flirtatious relationships which subside before the submission of Self required, before the subject must reveal themselves to the Other. Claiming numerous, hollow relations with these not-quite-Others, these iterations of alterity are dismissed before the violence of the subject may be etched upon their history, before the Other may speak them into existence with their call. This fledgling disconnect between the subsisting subject and exteriority is presented within the empty relations *Werther* seeks out in the absence of his Other, as he notes: '*I have made all sorts of acquaintances, but have as yet found no society. I know not what attraction I possess for the people, so many like me and attach themselves to me; and then I feel sorry when the road pursued together only goes a short distance*' (Goethe 2019, p.3). In this observation, we may perceive the metaphysical relation at the heart of the subject slowly beginning to fracture and be realised for the subsisting subject, *Werther*, as the social relation which founds them, through which they are expressed, is subdued by their metaphysical diffidence (Levinas 1969, p.109).

Exhibited in his incapacity for relations, his human nature itself is slowly beginning to escape him, seeping out from within him with each step he takes against the Other. This distorted defiance signals the subsisting subject's inversion of their 'metaphysical asymmetry' (Levinas 1969, p.53), as they strive in ignorant rationality to conserve their own being, even if it is only the most Pyrrhic of achievements. Still, in spite of this craving for comfort and self-preservation, alterity lingers steadfast within the subsisting subject's dissolving being. Ever present in the mind, ever welcoming its prodigal progeny back. Inconveniently, the taint of alterity is not bequeathed seamlessly. The subsisting subject must confront the 'impossibility of *forgetting*' (Levinas 1969, p.53), the Other while maintaining their being. In facing this paradoxical conundrum, the subsisting subject must face the absurdity of their undertaking, as they seek to escape that which has framed their social experience; a quest to cleave oneself from which they were made. For *Werther*, this is the source and perpetuator of his sorrows, his self-inflicted separation from his Other, and he who he loves most. He from whom he runs and with whom the torment of humanity, the accomplishment of being and the miserly enjoyment of existence eternally reside - the ever willing, yet never heard, interlocutor and vessel of *Werther's* intersubjectivity, *Wilhelm* (and subsequently every dear reader who must spectate powerlessly upon his downfall).

In benevolent obstinance, the Other always remains open (Capili 2011, p.691), forthcoming to their subsisting subject, hopeful that the allure of the metaphysical relation may resuscitate their ethical being and return them to being and the domain of Law. Alas, denying their history and all which was played out through the context of sociality, the subsisting subject, *Werther*, remains

vigilant. his perspective increasingly becoming eclipsed by his narcissistic inversion. As the letters of the text develop, dialogue descends quickly into self-absorbed rumination, expressing the atrophy of his perception. Difference stifled by the egoistic assertions of the same until nothing remains but the shattered vestiges of his dogmatic being. Even though the Other accommodatingly provides a context for his being, bestowing metaphysics and transcendence within their embrace (Levinas 1969, p.43), the accusation of alterity may only be heard by a subject, the Other contingent upon the subject's accomplishment of Self. Thus, the subsisting's denial of the Other is concurrently the most violent affliction upon their very own being. The Levinasian subject's prayer, articulated in Dostoevsky's declaration of peerless guilt, usurped by the subject's appreciation of their own, seemingly incomparable anguish: *'Oftentimes I say to myself, "Thou alone art wretched: all other mortals are happy, none are distressed like thee"'* (Goethe 2019, p.52). The excedence from suffering they long for remains unattainable whilst they, the subject perdures.

As the Levinasian subject's relationship to alterity originates within the subject, 'Alterity is only possible starting from *me*' (Levinas 1969, p.40), the subject is oriented inextricably about the Other. Underscoring once more, the profound dependence of the subject's ontology upon alterity, as the ethical being, 'human' being, subjectivity is only achieved in the expression of service, in the diligent 'offering [of] one's being' (Levinas 1969, p.183). The subject's very cognition of self is merely the reciprocity of the other's knowledge of the subject, they are the subject as other, their own 'alter ego' (Levinas 1987, pp.82-83). Consequently, the restless intent to liberate themselves from the generous, insatiable hands of alterity necessitates a brutal concomitant disentanglement of the subject from the Self. After such a unilaterally weighted relation, having owed their 'very existence [...] to the other' (Koshy 2022, p.13), it is evident that the subsisting subject may then only dissipate in their absence, left purely with that pitiful bounty which is 'in' them, discovering a world free from the condemnatory question and the glaring technicolour of the metaphysical. Abiding in isolation, presented with the monotony of their monochrome world, they are left to relate only to their broken Self. Attaining a relation with their forlorn existence which pugnaciously refutes any notion of exteriority. This relation, a tireless act of self-flagellation, must therefore in its contravention, mirror that which the subject had formerly maintained with and through alterity. This is reflected in the contortion of the subsistent's posture, as their reverential prostration before the Other has degenerated into one of introspection and lamentable self-loathing. Emancipated from their former subjugation, free of their implacable 'master' (Levinas 1969, p.75), the subsistent being is now 'lord', of their domain,

unbound by the constraints and concerns of the metaphysical. However, deprived of alterity, all that which remains is reduced to bare ontology. Bereft of the Other, the subsisting subject is little more than a deranged, isolated sovereign of their own suffering, sustaining the pained solitude of their fraught liberation. The subsistent's emancipation procured at the exorbitant cost of the dissolution of their own subjectivity: *'Must it ever be thus, - that the source of our happiness must also be the fountain of our misery?' (Goethe 2019, p.28).*

The repercussions which follow the subsistent's erosion of the Self-Other dialectic culminate patently in their attenuation of any identity and assumption of an aphonic state. The lack of Self which the subject has achieved through their impetuous refutation of the Other is itself symptomatic of the lack of separation which now presents between the subject and the Other, their distorted ontology amalgamating into a hideous, indiscernible mass of homogeneity. Lost within this proximity are any notions of identity, for within this space resided the articulation and recognition of difference. Deprived of the metaphysical, the subject is delivered from the 'enchainment' of their former identity (Levinas 1987, p.55). The originary occupation with the Self, the subject's 'heavy' beginning, from which the paradoxical liaison with intersubjectivity once beckoned with exalted promise, that upon which the subsistent's descent was predicated, must too be yielded so they may achieve their insidious exculpation. Unable to endure the incessant hostility of 'existing [...] *at home with oneself*' (Levinas 1969, p.37), desperate to be anywhere else, to be anyone else, they freely relinquish the claustrophobic parameters of identity. Who they were, the Levinasian subject defined by assiduous servitude (Petrilli 2022, p.43; Gschwandtner 2007, p.243; Guenther 2009, p. 176), must be expunged in its entirety. All that they were, as with *Werther*, must be abandoned, leaving the past and themselves where they lie.

Innominate, the subsistent being exhibited by *Werther*, begins to gradually attain definition in their obscurity. The oppressive proximity of their being, both masturbatory and masochistic, serves to extinguish their metaphysical context. Enshrouding them further into the isolation of pure existing, inducing a progressive convergence with the *il y a*. Nameless, the subsistent is also unintelligible, blinded by the absence of alterity. Their own vigilant being occludes their perception of those metaphysical marvels which once beckoned beyond. Every trace of their former being, the future they once dreamed of, those they had longed to share it with, all that they would be and do begins to flee from their frantic contemplation. The parameters of their former subjectivity attenuated by their subsistence. In alterity's stead, the subsistent subject is defenceless, engulfed by the 'nocturnal chaos' beyond signification (Burggraeve 2002, p.47).

Language, the 'essence [of] the relation with the Other' (Levinas 1969, p.98), now eludes them. The world formerly of the Other, shared with the Other, named in accordance with, framed through and worked for the Other; the very modality of symbolism in all its iterations, is no more. The exteriority of their subjective reality, that which adorned and gave life and meaning to every fibre of their being, is no longer extant. Their words, through which they once offered themselves, are stilled. Reduced to the indistinguishable, undecipherable mutterings of a being disconnected from alterity. They who, without a Self, cannot be known and, without language, may not be found. A state of subsistence which *Werther* details thus: *I am unable to express myself: my powers of execution are so weak, everything seems to swim and float before me, so I cannot make a clear, bold outline*' (Goethe 2019, p.21). Without a voice, lacking a Self, the fragmented incarnation of destitution which is the subsistent is left to reap the rewards of their misguided rejection of the metaphysical. Alone only with themselves, their existing, and the suffering and burden of their own being.

Amorphous, inarticulate and enthusiastically, foolishly so, relinquishing subjectivity, the subsistent sublimates into the illusory serenity of their exculpation. This insidious regression into the recesses of ambiguity serves only to corrode the remaining, disintegrated fragmentations of their subsistent being. Thought too, the forebearer for language (Levinas 1969, p.40), now escapes them, forsaking them in a manner analogous to their disavowal of the Other. Free from the burdens of thought, revelling foolishly within this abrogation, the subsistent may find a solace within the achievement of the interioristic totality of their existing (Levinas 2017, p.11). Without thought, the chasmous separation between the subject and exteriority is no longer perceptible. There is no relationship to be established, no possibility of recognising the metaphysical desire for difference, all that remains is the subsistent subject and their plight. Their pain, suffering and being. Destitute of thought, their sole relationship, that which perpetuates their being, is one which assumes and champions their interiority. And, in so doing, furiously silences any possible discourse with the Other (Levinas 2017, p.72). The illuminated exoticism of alterity forgone so the subsistent may cherish the undisturbed groans of their own existence, seeking refuge in the nebulous apparitions of their homogenous interiority: *I cannot think: I have no longer any feeling for the beauties of nature, and books are distasteful to me. Once we give ourselves up, we are totally lost*' (Goethe 2019, p.29). Found only within the confines of their own erroneous embrace, they are irrevocably adrift. Alone with their lack of Self, the subsistent is unable to even recall the foundational justification for their existence, the human capacity for self-reflection, self-knowledge, even self-awareness (Capili 2011, p.685), all which conjoined the subject to their

shared future with the Other through the cognisance of the nefarious ramifications of their actions, is gone. The subsistent abides now in the 'unfreedom' of their being (Gray 2003). Their mastery of existing, their firm, first 'grip' (Levinas 1987, p.54) upon exteriority, has wearily yielded: '*I know not why I rise, nor why I go to sleep*' (Goethe 2019, p.37).

Abdicating the endowments of the Other, the subsistent being must confide themselves to the illusory realm of their meagre interiority, their own island which is eroding slowly amidst the sea of existing. This chimerical construct, devoid of the metaphysical and any salvatory aspirations of transcendence offers no excedence. Finding only the most insincere satiety as the subsistent being can be seen to gnaw rabidly at their own subjectivity, consumed by the frantic desire for freedom, defined by their lack of freedom. They are trapped in a sadistic machine of their own design, a paradoxical state of ontological negation, fleeing from the Other and themselves, descending into the mania of penumbra. The panic-stricken schism they have cleaved between the Self and the Other only serving to further wound the pitiful subsistent. Surrendered with exteriority's vices are the joys of being, happiness, accomplishment, purpose all too have been severed. The appendages of subjectivity amputated so the infection of alterity may be subdued. The subsistent thus is a 'castrated soul' (Levinas 1969, p.115), mutilated by a wet blade which still resides in their own hands. This dire state of the subsistent's misery is exhibited within *Werther's* seemingly innocuous incapacity for artistic productivity. Trifling in poetry and painting (Goethe 2019, p.7), his much vaunted yet seemingly fantastical delusions of creative prowess (Landgraf 2004, p.39; Scheff and Mahlendorf 1988, p.65), fail to materialise. How could they ever hope to do so? Disconnected from alterity, without language nor reason, ignorant of the Other, his inability to satisfy the naked canvas or profane the page are manifestly indicative of his lack, expressions of his subsistence. Each empty space, which taunts any artist, each page which maintains its ignorance to the caress of the brush or the seduction of prose, perfectly embodies his being, expressing the vacuity of his abject subsistence. Plainly, evident in this incapacity and their sought isolation, echoing the lament of *Werther*, the detached subsistent does not live, they simply persist. The '*love of life*' (Levinas 1969, p.112), which spurs the subject toward their legalistic ontology has now devolved, beyond recognition, to that of a pathological aversion to alterity and life, to all which present beyond the Self. Subsistence is dictated conversely by a *fear of life*. The descent of the subsistent being, *Werther*, evidenced in his final reduction to a joyless absence, an unnerving shiver where once a person was, resembling 'the existence of the shades Ulysses visits in Hades, [he has dissolved] into [...] shadow' (Levinas 1969, p.112). Beset by darkness indistinguishable from the Stygian gloom which welcomes and swarms them, that of

the *il y a*: *My senses are bewildered, my recollection is confused, mine eyes are bathed in tears - I am ill; and yet I am well - I wish for nothing - I have no desires - it were better I were gone* (Goethe 2019, p.59).

Bathing blissfully, thoughtlessly, if just for the briefest and most intimate of moments, in the enervating waters of the *il y a*, their head cradled gently beneath the beckoning waves which envelop them, the roar of existing deafens them, leaving the subsistent impenetrable to the wails of exteriority which break upon the distant horizon. Manifest in this willed ignorance is the Levinasian conception of 'evil' (2017, p.101), pure being revealing its true character, presented in the determination of a subject to not 'awaken' to the Other (Diamantides 2003, p.1305 *inverted*), to abide instead in the apathy of their own being. Nevertheless, what can this paltry being, the subsistent, amount to in their alienation? Desolate, they are reduced to the most foundational, yet solipsistic vestiges of their subjectivity. The flesh of their humanity torn from them by their own, desperate hands. Stripping themselves bare until they are nothing other than a 'windowless' monad[...] totally self-enclosed' (Capili 2011, p.686), lacking any 'contextual identity', maintaining only a meagre 'material integrity' (Fagenblat 2002, p.585), by virtue of its corrosive, self-sustaining egocentrism: *'Leave me to my sufferings. In spite of my wretchedness, I have still strength enough for endurance'* (Goethe 2019, p.50). Now, having engaged in an extended, evocative analysis of the subject's regression into bare subsistence, bereft of alterity, the atrocities which lie in wait within the vast *il y a* may truly be apprehended. The benignity of 'ambiguity', deceiving as to the potency of its ontological trauma.

The *il y a*, at first the refreshing indulgence of one's every whim, is now felt as the 'doom [...] which threatens to overwhelm' (Pollefeyt 2022, p.88), drowning the despondent being of subsistence. The once idle waters which seduced them, into which the ailments of intersubjectivity dissipated with each stride from the shores of alterity, has now swallowed them. They are gripped by the abysmal depths of being which cast them ever further toward immateriality and nothingness. This more grimly poetic, Masochian, reading of the *il y a*, wherein the subsistent frantically treads, on the precipice before their ontological oblivion, is most poignantly articulated within Pollefeyt's emotive conceptualising of the *il y a* as 'the horror [...] of not being anymore' (2022 p.89). Within this, the *il y a* of the subsistent, the tenebrosity of anonymity, there can be no serenity. The peace of isolation brutally undone by the distress of one's subjectivity decaying, eroding before the 'chaos where one is no longer a person but still does not (yet) cease to exist' (2022, p.89). The enormous weight of existence (Fagenblat 2002, p.585), breaking upon them, breaking them as they lie defence-less, Other-less, Self-less. Their

calculated, self-serving intent conspiring against them. Fleeing the chorus of life they have become entangled, contorted and bound in themselves, devoured by ‘the sands of interiority’ (Levinas 1969, p.300). Lost, bereft of personality, substance and Self, *Werther*, as every stray subsistent soul must, prays feverishly to Eros for their salvation. Desperate to rediscover the endowments of sociality in its most alluring guise, love. However, this is not a love which is found. Counterintuitively, necessarily it is one which is asserted. A required, plastic love. Compelled by the subsistent’s consternation, this is an Eros which must succeed for the subsistent to be saved, and yet without a subject it is always condemned, as the subsistent is, to fail.

5.3. Subsistent Eros: Love without the Other

I smile at the suggestions of my heart, and obey its dictates’ (Goethe 2019, p.43).

Besieged by their absence of alterity, ruing the isolation of their homogeneity, Eros appears to the subsistent, offering a speculative means to transcend their obscurity. And thereby, once more affirm their being through the metaphysical. Patently, any analysis of *Werther* would be decidedly incomplete without an extensive discussion of Eros and the subsistent subject’s relation therewith. Though, what is most distinct about that iteration which befalls *Werther*, is somewhat surprisingly, its convenience and necessity; hardly the wondrous exaltations one expects to be levied toward this most divine embodiment of the Other. Subsistent, unable to find a society of his own beyond the Other, lacking accomplishment, purpose and context, ever failing his true love/Other, *Werther* is fortuitously beset by Eros: “*Why do I not write to you?*” *You lay claim to learning, and ask such a question. You should have guessed that I am well - that is to say - in a word, I have made an acquaintance who has won my heart: I have - I know not’* (Goethe 2019, p.8). The closing admission of this declaration of love indicative of its unattainable nature. Indeed, the Eros which enthralls *Werther*, is distinct from most recognisable conceptions of romantic love. At the very least those intemperate iterations considered herein. This is not an Eros which abounds in the unbridled possibilities of difference, the virginal wonders of an accomplished, shared future with the beloved Other. Nor is this a noble, if ruinous, exhibition of unrequited love, that in which the subject loses their beloved beneath their intoxicating fantasies, wherein Eros supplants the Other. This, the Eros of the subsistent, is a far more severe conception, compelled not by the titillating, stupefying delights of fantasy, but by its very exigency. This is a love befitting its

subject, without foundation, without substance. A love which could never have succeeded, and which was fanned only by frantic ontological necessity. This futility gracing the subsistent with a welcome distraction from the homogenous 'hell', of their interiority (Han 2018, p.9). The terrible, compelling void of the *il y a*, framing the subsistent's manic Eros. A distraught, impious eulogy.

Despite the apparent severity of this reading of *Werther's* Eros, it is evidenced repeatedly within his steadfast belligerence and the oppressive infliction of affections. His love baring the despair of his fragile, splintered existence. Within such an interpretation, his liaison with Eros could be perceived as having been foretold, the notion of his impending erotic excedence instilled within him innocuously, as in the moments prior to his ill-fated erotic malady, he is cautioned to, "*Take care [...] that you do not lose your heart.*" "*Why?*" said I. "*Because she is already engaged to a very worthy man,*" *she replied*" (Goethe 2019, p.9). Forewarned, aware of the futility which awaits any endeavour, he is all too easily ensnared moments later. Offering himself completely to this vacuous Eros' potent designs. What seduces him within this analysis, is not the beauty of his beloved, *Charlotte*, nor his innate susceptibility to her charms. It is that she so earnestly embodies the relation with alterity and subjectivity which he so churlishly discarded and fled from: "*Pray forgive me for giving you the trouble to come for me, and for keeping the ladies waiting: but dressing, and arranging some household duties before I leave, had made me forget my children's supper: and they do not like it from anyone but me*" (Goethe 2019, pp.9-10). Immediately, this interaction, upon which his Eros rests and where it eternally resides, as with all those which follow, is patently lacking any suggestions of erotic 'persuasion and seduction' (Landgraf 2004, p.38). However, few such altruistic, doting displays could ever present as beguilingly to the subsistent.

In the kindness of her words, the work of her hands and the slicing of bread, she personifies alterity. A beyond-being realised triumphantly in delightful subjugation. To the subsistent, she is haunting, a dazzling vision of subjectivity which strikes at the very heart of his blind being. Within her selfless subjugation, the arresting sting of the metaphysical which he had refuted reverberates through him, felt if not known. It is this which so captivates dear *Werther*, the terrifying, shameful proximity to one so willing to serve the Other; the splendour of a realised, achieved Self. Effortlessly, she expresses all that he lacks, all that he may no longer attain. In spite of this vain endeavour, he is consumed by this moment, this delicate whisper of alterity, his subsistent Eros, dictating the final strokes of his demise. Only love, 'as strong as death' (Levinas 1987, p.76), could offer any solace from his anguish. Nevertheless, as will be detailed, without a

Self, there is no Other whom the subsistent may know, let alone love. Conversely, the subsistent Eros presents as a calamitous endeavour of delusion, the Other never amounting to more than a crude effigy constructed by their hand, capturing not a person, merely a moment lies within and beneath their disobedient clay. Ensuring that this personal artefact is enchained to the domain of their homogeneity, the past. Unable to know the Other, incapable of conceiving of a shared, ethical future, unwilling to offer themselves through the shackles of intersubjectivity; they are left rudderless to inflict their masturbatory relation upon their supposed beloved. The subsistent Eros amounting only to the obsession of a madman with what never was, what never could have been and what never will be. The familiar ache of an astray Self, yearning for an ontological foundation, for love's salvation.

Within this ephemeral engagement with the metaphysical, manifest through the overflowing compassion of *Charlotte*, *Werther's* subsistent being is disoriented, distorted, torn between the false sanguinity of his idle homogeneity, the *il y a*, and the Other which confronts him. Mesmerised by this brief revelation of divinity, his subsistent being becomes anchored, enchained to this transitory, insignificant glimpse of transcendence. The indefatigable radiance of her doting, ethical being pleads with the ashes of his, imploring the subsistent to find himself as a Self again. Begging him to return from his sanctum. Only then may she, and all other such beyond-beings, know him once more. Effortlessly exhibiting the reverence with which the metaphysical merits, she sees through *Werther's* insulated psyche and recognises the Other before, an other deserving of her service. Had any other lost soul clumsily found themselves in her sublime presence, they too would have been bestowed with similar grace. Before her she intuits only an other in need of her 'bread' (Levinas 1999, p.74), as all others are. A welcome opportunity to offer oneself to alterity. This ethical enfolding is portrayed in the most appropriately menial of terms, as she bestows him, this lost Soul, with an identity. Proudly identifying his pitiful subsistence as her Self as an other, a welcome extension of her legalistic ontology, as her kin: "*Louis, shake hands with your cousin.*" *The little fellow obeyed willingly; and I could not resist giving him a hearty kiss, notwithstanding his rather dirty face. "Cousin," said I to Charlotte, as I handed her down, "do you think I deserve the happiness of being related to you?" She replied with a ready smile, "Oh! I have such a number of cousins, that I should be sorry if you were the most undeserving of them"* (Goethe 2019, p.10).

Clearly, it is not the frenzied passions and carnal desires of a deliciously enigmatic Eros which captivates and conspires against *Werther*. It is simply the frivolity of intersubjectivity, the triviality which underlies metaphysical transcendence. This invigorating jolt of hypostasis descends upon

him through his congress with ethical being, seizing his subsistent shell of a Self, offering a return to the bountiful, piercing shores of subjectivity. Still, the cost of subjectivity has not lessened in his absence. To return to the Self and Other which abide in the present, as he knows all too well, is to freely endure the unending trauma of their first 'birth' (Levinas 1987, p.81), anew. The tear of themselves afresh from the infinite murmur of the *il y a*, to latch onto a being not veiled by obscurity. To attain such tormented liberation, the subsistent herein must be willing to confront their past, to abide with themselves, and the anxiety of materiality which awaits (Levinas 1987, pp.55-56). Such accomplishment is beyond the purview of our dear *Werther*, and many of his subsistent echoes. The subsistent cannot bear themselves. That is from what they run. The violence of their former being, the history of their atrocities, the weight of their awkward marauding existence is overwhelming to them still. To return to the Other is to consign oneself to eternal subjugation, a life served only in tireless atonement to alterity. To face oneself and to look upon the abhorrence you have inflicted upon the innocent, 'weak', 'poor' Other (Levinas 1987, p.83). To suffer the wrath which you are. Compelled, driven only by the yearning for reprieve, the furious intent to preserve their less-than-Self, the Subsistent cannot answer the Other's call. *Werther* remains adrift, estranged from *Wilhelm*. Nonetheless, this reverie fatally compromises his fractured being. Providing the blind subsistent with the most delectable morsel of alterity upon which he will thirst voraciously for satisfaction until what remains of his subsistent Self is extinguished. He is encased within this moment *Charlotte* has bestowed him. He cannot let her/the Other go. Clinging to it desperately, unwilling to heed its metaphysical message. His lack of Self, the derelict essence of subsistence, deteriorating further as he is injured in this assail by that which he carelessly abandoned. He persists only, beset by the anxiety of his fanciful temporality. A subject without history, without present, without future or Self. For, to be Other, to bask in the glories of exteriority, is to be able to speak of the future (Levinas 1987, p.77), to embrace the challenge and peril which give import to the promises of love (Oliver 2001, p.228), and applaud every opportunity to repent for the blood of the Other which decorates their being.

Alternatively, *Werther* revels in the speculation of this brief moment. He becomes fixated with this contextless encounter where no promises must be upheld, no history revealed, no being, Self or Other need be known. It is the very absurdity of such a 'love' materialising in the absence of a subject or Other which consumes him so. Something which *Charlotte* and the reader discern, powerless to abate his obsession: '*I fear, I much fear, that it is only the impossibility of possessing me which makes your desire for me so strong*' (Goethe 2019, p.61). Little else could conspire so completely

against a subsistent subject as that of the notion of a subjectivity which cannot be attained. This moment tantalises them, mocking them, saturating their being with the poisonous seed of this counterfactual phantom. One cannot be in love, if one cannot *be*. It is a fallacious relation, mimicking that of Barthes' retelling of a mandarin who is charged with spending a hundred nights waiting for his beloved beneath her window, and departs on the ninety-ninth (Barthes 2002, p.40). For *Werther* succumbs not to his beloved but to the majesty of alterity which awaits therein, which can never be realised by a subsistent being. Of which he is unworthy. This idea scourges him tirelessly, the madness of his love expressing the incompetence of his own being. In spite of this, as long as they remain subsistent, this wondrous idea may never need to contend with the belligerence of reality. His love is free. Fantastical, absurd though free nonetheless to persist and manipulate its pliable host, unencumbered by the legalistic irons of being. The subsistent Eros amounts to nothing more than an empty, deceitful promise. The calamitous obsession with a passing moment, reimagined magnificently, necessarily so, as one which warrants commemoration in perpetuity. A fabricated construction which unmistakably bears the hallmarks of their lack of being: '*I pursue a chimera, till it leads me to the edge of a precipice at which I shudder*' (Goethe 2019, p.44). The impetuous, if vital, cherishing of this collision coiling itself about the subsistent who fixates upon it, giving form to them, conspiring a prison of obsession. A lack of being defined now by their implacable monomania. A false Other, an illusory future, impaled to this past. This belies the true sorrow of *Werther* and subsistence, that of a displaced being which gives themselves too freely to any means of refuge, who dives enthusiastically into the temporal cesspit of homogeneity, and who could so easily be seduced by kindness.

Resolving to act upon this fraying strand to which they ardently cling, the subsistent contentiously attempts to realise the ambition of their Eros through the act of the caress. Ordinarily, the caress epitomises the consummation of the erotic relation wherein the subject who so cherishes their beloved, 'goes beyond this contact' (Levinas 1987, p.89). Here, unencumbered by the crude appetites found within the tactile collision of bodies, the caress is realised as that of the sincere longing to discern the majesty of possibility which overflows within the beloved other. The countless aspects, dreams and thoughts of their beloved which can never be known, which fascinate them, nonetheless. Overtly abstract and exotic, this is a relation the loving subject establishes with 'something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come' (Levinas 1987, p.89). The mysticism of the beloved, the subject's abject incapacity for satisfaction compels the 'hunger' of their voraciously curious Eros (1987, p.89). The nobility of a never-ending search which discovers nothing and still never relents. The titillating intrigue of

possibility tantalising them endlessly. Through the caress of the beloved other, the erotic subject gains access, faintly, to a future not contextualised only by their guilt, the promise of a shared ‘dream’ (Levinas 1969, p.259), which may never come to pass, though it remains ever present, dictating the very essence of their erotic being: *‘Think of you - I do not think of you: you are ever before my soul!’* (Goethe 2019, p.33).

Regrettably, expectedly, such an articulation is incongruent with the ignobility of the subsistent’s Eros. The joyous celebration of intersubjectivity expressed in the yearning for possibility is displaced by the subsistent’s fervent preoccupation. Their inability to surrender that momentary apparition of excedence which is now assigned conspicuously to the past. Such a relation lacks any prospect of that which could be, resigned obsessively to the singular image upon which this cataclysmic event rests. Within this corrosive haunting which eats at the subsistent, there is not the allure of possibility, nor a future to be realised, nor, most notably, a Self/Other to be caressed. The temporal parameters of this relation inhibit its every impassioned ambition. Consequently, the act of the subsistent in Eros is the inversion of their ethical brethren. Not a caress. No, this is a loveless, craven seizure (Crignon, Simek & Zalloua 2004, p.109, *Inverted*). The ever finding, curious hand of the erotic subject, with which the future ‘ceaselessly’ toyed (Levinas 1969, p.257), now wielded by the indelicate subsistent, appears as a blunt, brutal instrument of disoriented aggression, ravaging this innocent moment which enchants them. Consequently, the remaining remnants of the subsistent are desecrated, defiled by their own frenzied Eros, ‘lost, forever’ (Barthes 2002, p.49) to that which they imagined themselves. A silent, violent Eros which now assaults their ostensibly beloved, each forsaken attempt to caress them heard only as the narcissistic solicitations of a depraved drunken lunatic perpetrated within the church of alterity; the imposition of deplorable vanity upon the order of the ethical which is the Law of the Other: *‘love and attachment, the noblest feelings of human nature, had been converted into violence’* (Goethe 2019, p.56).

Essentially devoid, without a relationship, unbound by the confines of the intersubject promise, unable to even envision the wondrous future of the subject’s Eros, ignorant to the ramification which mar possibility, the subsistent’s Eros merely exacerbates their perverted subjectivity. This false love, harassing their beloved mode of alterity, hurting what remains of themselves. The ‘violation’ of this erotic movement is felt inwardly, as the relation herein exists only between and within the subsistent (Levinas 1969, p.260). Harboured within the interiority of their barren, insipid being, there is nothing to offer, naught to be discovered, no secrets to disclose, no

‘virginal’ wonders to be reaped, no ‘nudity’, ‘mystery’ or ‘escape’ (Levinas 1969). Only the Same, only the subsistent, only this enduring moment which they have barbarised, dragging heedlessly to ruin for their own inane amusement. The nagging inquisition of alterity which laid therein ringing about their lack of person, tormenting them and their lamentable subsistence. The character of the erotic relation devolves demonstrably in their raking hands. The possessive intent, formerly quelled by the spectral essence of the future, is no longer abated. The subsistent acknowledges what they possess and gladly lets it possess them. Both an indigent master and a gratified slave to/of their Eros. Within this onanistic Eros, there is no Other to be discovered, only their lack of Self awaits. Whilst the subject in Eros triumphantly ‘springs forth without returning, find[ing] itself the self of an other: its pleasure, its pain is pleasure over the pleasure of the other or over his pain’ (Levinas 1969, p.271), the subsistent is left to remain within, residing with the pain of their existence and the absence of alterity which rewards the crowded isolation of the *il y a*. Each clumsy, hopeless attempt to embrace their beloved amounts to nothing, achieving only the momentary reprisal of this masturbatory celebration, compounding their desolation. All they may find is their subsistence, their dearth of Self. A pitiful trace of being pining despondently for the caress of the Other, which they cannot know, and the warmth of intersubjectivity which has long since forgotten them. Each lunge taken in Eros’ name, each declaration of this delusional love conveys within them a pathetic plea for permanence, to be made ‘human’ once more, to be seen by the Other once more, to *be* (Levinas 2017, p.12). Accursed, each of the subsistent’s supplications must go unmet, imperceptible to the Other. The Other of Eros who was never really there/theirs, who they needed more than they could have ever loved: *‘I stretched out my arms, and she vanished’* (Goethe 2019, p.33).

The subsistent’s ravenous hunger for Eros, this voracious infantile compulsion, elucidates the barren emptiness which constitutes them, scarring their flawed adoration of the Other. Within the endless sea of faces which populate the screaming landscape of exteriority, the subsistent presents superficially as a ‘plastic’ image (Levinas 2017, p.92), a spurious mask concealing the cadaverous absence of subjectivity which lingers behind. Even within the solemnity of their detached isolation, gazing raptly upon the tranquil swells of the *il y a*, they find no reflection, no visage to greet them. They fail to find within their distorted, fractured image that which could be an other to the Other. Only the inky cloud of subsistence permeates. Their exile derides them, ridiculing their want, the haunting spectre of familiarity and the insufferable moan of existence which professes to contextualise their less-than -being. Resigned to the ‘hell’ of the Same (Han 2018, p.9), lord of that which cannot imbue their being with purpose, which refuses to give voice

to their once ethical character. Little wonder then that the purported reprieve of the erotic found within their impetuous dally with their impetuous Eros devours them, consuming their essence. An oil-soaked rag, beckoning the flame, begging to feel the rapturous scorch of the inferno and the solace which is to be found in the ashes of their existence.

Possessing nothing with themselves, the offer of the Subsistent to Eros is both meagre and irresistible, their hollow ontology contorting itself about this false salvation, their very ipseity contingent upon it and nothing else. All that the subsistent is, all that drives their fragile, stumbling, mutilated being is circumscribed by the necessity of their false Eros: *'I possess so much, but my love for her absorbs it all. I possess so much [through her], but without her I have nothing'* (Goethe 2019, p.49). Tethered utterly by their necessity, the Subsistent's Eros is one free from the ethical injunction. The unimpeded dependence of the subsistent upon this moment which shelters them, driving them to demonstrate those all-too-familiar traits unbecoming of Eros, a body of volatility and covetousness. Sullyng the sincerity of intersubjective Eros which dances in delicate synchronicity beyond satisfaction (Ellis 2013, p.249, *Inverted*), the subsistent Eros zealously requires gratification. Truculent, they demand their needs be met, asserting combatively that the beloved is *for them*, an ethereal object of their Eros to be contained within their affection and therein 'consumed' (Ellis 2013, p.355). *Werther*, this deceptive deity's most ardent servant, succumbs to this intoxication, growing increasingly unhinged as Eros takes hold, unable to find placation, sinking deeper into their ontological despair as one who quenches their first upon the arid depths of a mirage: *'I sometimes cannot understand how she can love another, how she dares love another, when I love nothing in this world so completely, so devotedly as I love her, when I know only her, and have no other possessions'* (Goethe 2019, p.45). The subsistent's entirety oriented toward, about and through this virulent, imaginary love, reverberating through its perversion the subjectivity achieved in the metaphysical relation, that which they cannot attain. A love and Self without the Other is no love or Self at all.

Though this conception of Eros which befalls the subsistent is characterised by its absurdity, it, nonetheless, warrants the recognition and esteem befitting of any iteration of Eros. In accord with the former discussions of earlier chapters which have identified Eros' capacity to incite cruel intent within its sincere acolyte, be that through the irrefutable allure of the interioristic projection of the beloved, or its selfish, harmful weaponization unto the beloved. The Eros of the subsistent strikes an unsettlingly familiar chord to those willing to engage in honest, forthright discussion about those such loves which do not conform to the idealistic casts of the

merely ethical (Fuchs 2008, p.50). As one such iteration, this examination, though delivered in an appropriately critical, frustrated tone, is not intended to solely admonish its enthused martyr, as this mode of Eros reeks of humanity, unashamedly and shamefully so. The precipitous decline into obsession of subsistent Eros, in its essence exhibits the flawed subject's futile yearning for the stability and affirmation of exteriority, that which is found in the reciprocated embrace of the Other. Longing to find this once again and to re-establish the ontological orientation of their being, they are undone by their inability to tolerate the exhausting cries of the Other, incapable and unwilling to acknowledge the innate brutality of intersubjectivity. Subsistent Eros is the articulation of this excedence, the need to escape from a lost, shattered, poverty-stricken ontology. The urgent need for relief from the mundanity of the grievous *il y a*. The subsistent's Eros, the love of this sacrilegious heretic, because of their ontological frailty is perhaps its most potent iteration, and its most pitiful.

Upon reflection, by virtue of the many rambling pages which precede, one may contend that this, the Subsistent and their conspiratorial Eros is in truth the love and ontological destitution which has been extolled surreptitiously throughout this thesis. That this sinister iteration is that which is in truth exhibited by the reverie of Sacher-Masoch's implacable spectre of *Wanda*, that to which *Severin* offers himself in willed, humiliating subjugation, which purports to contextualise and justify the cruelty which befalls *Manon*, which inspires its doting victim to rave upon the wonders of Eros incessantly. Various guises of subsistent selves, all relishing the distress of their fixation, aching loudly to rectify their ontological deficiency, praying with a proud voice for Eros and the playful interlude it offers from the burden of being. As has been outlined more overtly within *Werther*, as for all such subsistents, the failure of such a love to liberate them from their indulgent metaphysical indolence is merely representative of one of several defeats which marks their disavowal of the Other (Scheff and Mahlendorf 1988, p.65). A first, Levinasian un-'birth' (1987, p.81), serving only to delay that which is inevitable for all who depart the Other. The achievement of their shameful, sensitive subsistence expressed metaphorically/metaphysically in their demise, or the absolution of their ethical rebirth. Regardless, the subsistent cannot persist, lost either to the image of the beloved other they cannot relinquish, or to the rupture of the future found within the Other, the unending devastation of ethical 'rebirth' (Capili 2011, p.681).

5.4. The End of Subsistence: Nothingness or the Other

Approaching *Werther's* sorrows through this Levinasian interpretation which celebrates the primacy of the relation to the Other, and the accomplishment of subjectivity which it achieves, the most devastating facet of his tale is not that of his puerile Eros which infects and corrupts him. It is, conversely, his valiant effort to return to sociality through a new guise of the Other, wherein he endeavours to reaffirm his meagre existence and establish purpose, desire and import anew. The endowments of a new idealised alterity which resides within the esteem of the ambassador, the Count and employment. Succumbing, briefly, to the toil and futility of his furious, adolescent infatuation, no longer able to stomach the toxicity of this image of Eros which enraptured him fully, he reluctantly concedes that he must find a reprieve from that which afflicts him. His broken, bereft being hoping that in removing himself from the delights of proximity to *Lotte*, that in which he revels, as though a swine in filth, he may find some solace from her inescapable shadow which looms over him: *'Sometimes I lie stretched on the ground, overcome with fatigue and dying with thirst' sometimes late in the night, when the moon shines above me, I recline against an aged tree in some sequestered forest, to rest my weary limbs, when exhausted and worn, I sleep till break of day [...] I see no end to this wretchedness except the grave [...] I must away'* (Goethe 2019, pp.30-31).

No longer capable of enduring the subsistent addiction with their ruinous image, the notion of alterity, the autonomy attained through servitude, the notion of Self, the Other which they have been unable to forget, all which they have lost and surrendered to the anonymous chasms of subsistence and the *il y a* suddenly appears as an alluring alternative. If just for a moment. Against the inescapable ruin of their duplicitous Eros, the extended, calloused hand of the Other is received in gratitude. *Werther*, so long a submissive slave to his erotic impulses, denies their hold over him, assuming a respectable if un-noteworthy position under the ambassador. Through the assumption of this occupation, the subsistent can be read as refuting the solipsistic solace of serving only their own, anonymous wants. Those depraved, craven hungers of a being who feasts upon their own flesh, unable to distinguish the source of their nourishment from that of their pain. In accepting the humility, which is required of enthused servitude, the subsistent appears to accept the lack of their being, desiring to rectify this through the Other. Wishing to find themselves a Self, to orient their being and feel the exalted atmosphere of the metaphysical once more. Relieving his being of Eros, from its incessant machinations, the silhouette of subjectivity begins to re-emerge. Just for a second, it appears that within the context afforded by the Other, the desperation which had consumed him, the acidic waters of the *il y a* which drove him to her, wearing away at his exposed flesh, has been nullified by this reluctant transcendence. Assuming responsibility, the duty and diligence of service to and under the Other, *Werther* is

awarded with sanctuary from the anonymity and aimlessness of his being. The ontological accomplishment, articulated in the placidity of his terms, '*now I am at rest for another week, and no longer at variance with myself. Content and peace of mind are valuable things: I could wish, my dear friend, that these were less transitory*' (Goethe 2019, p.38).

Transitory though, they are. As is to be expected given the eponymous character's well-versed fate, his adherence to alterity's dictates proves to fall victim to impermanence. His epiphany of subjectivity failing to meet the demands of the Other, unable to bear the incessant accusations of exteriority and the mar of his own history he finds etched unto the Other's face before him. In a manner consistent with his character, it is once again his inability to reckon with the violence of his own being which proves to be the stage for his most profound ontological defeat.

Committing an act of thoughtlessness, he awkwardly inflicts upon his aristocratic hosts the barbarous offence of overstaying his welcome. Offending all those who are subject to his presence, reminded of his class, reminded of the ineptitude of his being, the history of indiscretions which he expresses, he is confronted forthrightly, '*he saw me, approached me, and said in a low tone, "You have met with a disagreeable adventure," "I!" I exclaimed. "The count obliged you to withdraw from the assembly!" "Dence take the assembly!" said I. "I was very glad to be gone"*' (Goethe 2019, p.30). Far exceeding the frivolous heft of a social faux pas, the ontological import of this confrontation with the consequences of his existence, is manifest in its aftermath.

Mirroring, disappointingly, the excuse-laden justificatory context which accompanied his first refutation of alterity, the first descent into subsistence found in his departure from *Wilhelm*, the 'limitless torment', (Scheff and Mahlendorf 1988, p.72) this afflicts upon his sprouting subjectivity is conveyed in his obdurate blindness to his trespass, the flagrant inability to reconcile the violence of his own being. Reminiscent of his initial departure, he cannot tolerate that which he may have inflicted upon others, the infantile yearning for an existence free of consequence, free of the Other, unveiled afresh. Even when faced with this infantile antagonist, the courtesy of the Other pervades, *Wilhelm*, the Count, *Adelin* etc., all demonstrate a reluctance to accost him for his indelicate transgressions. The Other demanding willed, enthused, comprehended sacrifice, not wishing to convince or coerce ethical action. It is the necessary 'election' (Anckaert 2020, p.68) of service, the recognition of the duality of alterity, the wonders and subjugation which populate exteriority, which achieves the accomplishment of 'human' being. Free of any overt expression of condemnation, *Werther*, the subsistent, can return to the silence of *il y a*, free of the tarnish of history and any inconveniently cumbersome notion of

sociality and Self. Having approached the precipice of subjectivity and been reminded of its exorbitant cost, it is of little surprise that *Werther*, that delicate, pitiful subject, resolves to return to subsistence and the enveloping anonymity which he mistakenly fled. Asking for his leave from the Court, he appears to recognise his own lack, aware of his inability to be Self or Other and wishes to be free of the shame which plights the social: '*It is necessary I should leave this place. I know you will urge me to stay [...] I am unable to do anything for myself: how, then, should I be competent to assist others?*' (Goethe 2019, p.41). Slipping back into anonymity, he is truly 'adrift', careening defeatedly towards his demise, one which is not guided by love, but the 'despair' (Withington 1912, p.45) of subsistence. All that remains sensible within the darkness is the proffered refuge of their ontological opiate, Eros. This vacuous Eros presents as a final reminder of the futility of subsistence. An Eros which cannot sustain them, within which they wish to rest regardless. The final choice facing the subsistent is that which *Werther* has exhibited, the selection of fates which arises between the enchanting, self-mutilating pull of the imaginary or the calloused labours of alterity. With no Self, and no Other, fleeing both and his history of failures to which they sing in harmony, *Werther*, ratifying his tragic end, returns to the *il y a*, to *Lotte*, with no alternatives he can weather. It is upon the thorns of his illusory affectation that he must thrust himself. The penetrating barbs of his fallacious love, the only wound he can bear: '*What a heavenly treasure is imagination*' (Goethe 2019, p.46).

Prostrating fully, blind and nude before this subsistent Eros, *Werther's* final days evidence the most tumultuous, agonising aspects of the subsistent's being. Defiant in their refutation of alterity, the necrosis of their subjectivity flourishes, reducing them to a rotting, fading corpse, already doomed without the Other. All that sustains this erotic revenant, moving the ethereal echoes of their being, is the image of Eros to which they cling. An image which compels and inspires them, always urging them further still from the Other. Moving but not living in any true sense, simply subsisting. To live is to find happiness, to cherish and celebrate the affectivity and sentiment of intersubjectivity, to find ones being derived joyously upon the very character of a life formed within exteriority (Levinas 1969, p.115). This carnival is antithetical to the condition of the subsistent. For this being, having once known the euphoria of life, the excitement of a future uninhibited, the delicate dance of reciprocity found in the face of the Other, the happiness of life and overcoming existence, are all now foreign to the subsistent. Buried deep within their noxious mind. That which is left in their stead, is now merely 'despair', the life defined by its happiness (Levinas 1969, p.115), now fails. Withering without the warmth of exteriority and the attentive gaze of the Other to found them, any aspiration of happiness is folly, left in the

eternally open arms of the Other/*Wilhelm*. The dearth of happiness and life, rather than its presence, is the enduring condition of subsisting within the *il y a*. A subsistent subject projecting themselves hopelessly onto a distorted, creased artefact, uglying their dilapidated subjectivity. Investing the entirety of their diminished essence into a chimerical dream, seeking, so rationally, so familiarly, so foolishly, to perpetually evade the harshness of life: *'How her image haunts me! Waking or asleep, she fills my entire soul! Soon as I close my eyes, here, in my brain, where all the nerves of vision are concentrated, her dark eyes are imprinted. Here - I do not know how to describe it; but, if I shut my eyes, hers are immediately before me: dark as an abyss they open upon me, and absorb my senses'* (Goethe 2019, p.54).

The misery which accompanies subsistence, an unfortunate symptom of their negligent relation to alterity, though profound, never amounts to animosity against the Other. In a tragic manner, which maintains the Levinasian primacy of the Other, the subsistent does not resent alterity. It is their own fragility, bemoaning their inability to embrace the Other, and succumbs to the unenviable collapse of subjectivity which is articulated in their self-hatred. More aptly, the hatred of their lack of Self. Thus, this hatred is distinct, a subsistent derivation, from that which Levinas conceived as hatred in the sadistic desire of a subject for the death of the Other (1969, p.239). Further, this subject of hatred, must seek to both cause and witness this suffering upon alterity, driven by the intent to despicably reduce them to the undignified 'rank of object' (1969, p.239). Ordinarily, such spite is abated by the 'logical absurdity', of the sentiment as the irreducibility of the Other satisfied the hatred by virtue of its inability to achieve the death of the Other (1969, p.239). Subjectivity and intersubjectivity conspiring to dismiss such unsavoury notions. Alas, the ambition of the subsistent's self-loathing eludes the mercy of absurdity as within this iteration the subsistent's desire is not the death of the Other, nor is it necessarily their own death, it is the death of their subjectivity, of the Self. The hatred of the lack of Self, is an aggressive expression of their inability to inhabit their history and the burden of being which vigilantly follows them, merely compounding their desire. Still there is of course, from the perspective of the observer at least, a degree of absurdity found within such an existential equation, this does little to lessen their resolve and merely speaks to the tragedy of subsistence.

Subsequently, the relation the subsistent maintains with their lack of Self, this compulsive admonishment of their own inability, appears as the wilful reduction of their once magnificent subjectivity to that of an object of Eros. The metaphysical reduced to the material. An object which does not think, serving only an insatiable hunger, an un-being. Objectifying themselves, they are a body of wild sentiment, yearning to no longer sustain the lofty ideals and expectant

countenances of intersubjectivity. Wishing only to be free from the Other, loathing the fact that they never can be. Left to resent themselves, furiously bemoaning the Other's incessant generosity which serves only to further ridicule their resolve. Overtly cognisant of the impropriety of their actions, the unrequited love which contextualises their lesser being, which will never, must never, accomplish reciprocity and possesses their every futile thought and fibre, and the Other which they have offended repeatedly in their selfish estrangement. Nevertheless, they brazenly relish their determination, finding comfort in their self-reference, their insanity appreciating that they do not, to their own discordant mind at least, deserve the Other, nor satisfaction. Accepting that the fate of the madman, possessed by a demon of their own choosing, is befitting of their sorry subsistence: *'I thank you, Wilhelm, for your cordial sympathy, for your excellent advice and I implore you to be quiet'* (Goethe 2019, p.50).

Ultimately, the subsistent's downfall is precipitated by the inescapable sense of shame that exposes the duplicitous virulence of their refuted relation to exteriority, permeating into their fractured lack of Self. Through the erotic image, around which they frantically contort and orient themselves, they seek to 'hide', from both the Other and from themselves (Levinas 2003, p.64). This belies the intimate nature of the subsistent's descent, that of a singular individual wishing to escape from and within oneself. Yet, in longing to be free of their own subjectivity, of their own personality and being, they are abruptly confronted by the impossibility of this ambition, the futility of 'fleeing' their own Self (Levinas 2003, p.64). The subsistent subject remains inextricably 'riveted' to themselves (2003, p.64), their relation with existing maintaining a modality of Self. Their denial of the Other and the erotic malaise consumes them, rendering them incapable of achieving their liberty. Cruelly, their willed ignorance merely uncovers themselves in each slanderous attempted refutation. Unable to be rid of their own being and the 'shameful nakedness' (Levinas 2003, p.64), in which they are draped. This failure mocks them, as their lack of being serves as a constant reminder of what they once were, what they amounted to and transcended with the Other. In the absence of reprieve, their misery encases them. Harried by their self-loathing, they must bear the shame of being chokingly bound to such a flawed, failed subject. The ubiquity of their subsistence is achieved as it permeates through and perverts all facets of their existence. Rendering them as a 'hypersensitive' (Barthes 2002, p.96) phantom of misplaced sentiment. Adrift in a void of understanding or definition. Their actions present to the grieving faces of alterity as the nonsensical rhapsody of a maniacal zealot, or the unconsolable cries of an infant, those not possessing the faculties required to convey the depth nor meaning of

their distress. A solitary soul, trapped in their own stifling embrace, finding relief only in their pathological delusion and anguish.

Exhausted, unable to overcome their obsessive fascination with their Eros, drained and beaten by the irrepressible weight of the *il y a* which engulfs them, the subsistent wearily conspires to liberate themselves from the suffering of existing, contemplating their own demise. Such a response to life is both overtly tragic and marred by its very absurdity. The tragedy of such malicious intent presents in the act's inability to resolve that which inspires it. As Levinas notes within his own writings on death and suicide, 'death does not bring a resolution', (1969, p.146) to the problems of life. It is a 'powerless' act as that which it resolves to flee from and terminate is unimpeded by their withdrawal (1969, p.146). In spite of them, the Other will persist magnanimously, still calling to them, always calling, urging them to return 'home', (1969, p.37) and to feel the security of their smothering embrace once more. This aspect of existence further evidences its duality, as suffering, that which one may never escape, which stirs the pounding mass of the *il y a*, 'loves' (1969, p.146) the being to which they are riveted and beleaguered, nonetheless. Suffering knows all too well the 'impossibility of quitting life', (1969, p.146) as life will always remain, adorned by their miserly companion. Demonstrated through this dark comedic tragedy, is the depths of *Werther's* torturous subsistent Eros, the profundity of his love and the revelry he feels before *Lotte*, that which characterises his own *taedium vitae*, and beckons his demise: '*Since the first hour I saw you, how impossible have I found it to leave you*' (Goethe 2019, p.73).

Adopting an admirable approach, when writing on suicide, Levinas engages in a certain degree of ethical diplomacy, considering such an act of violence against the Self and subjectivity as one which is not only absurd, by virtue of its futility, but is also deemed an act which, cruelly, is only befitting of an accomplished being. Accordingly, the act of suicide is only considered as a possibility to the being which has been 'elevated', (Levinas 1969, p.149) through the surrender of their Self to the Other. By this interpretation, only they who vaunt the metaphysical and transcend being by welcoming the vacant mouths of exteriority are capable of this most violent mode of 'sacrifice' (1969, p.149). Therefore, only the being of sociality may comprehend the commission of this act. In limiting this most egregious expression of self-abuse to the purview of the ethical 'human', Levinas appears to negate the act's very necessity, inverting the intent through his circular construction as, 'one flees life toward life' (1969, p.149). However, though this ingenious inversion is to be applauded, such a conception is markedly at odds with the less than aspirational essence of subsistence which is defined by its perversion of Levinas's serene

ethical subjectivity. The hesitant acknowledgement of this act's viability must not be mistaken for an endorsement. It does, however, reiterate the incumbent need to muddy oneself with the unenviable anguish of actualised existence, even if it extends to its sombre end. One cannot indulge in tautological equations of convenience and avert their gaze so wilfully from that which is so regrettably a prevalent mode of human conclusion. To conceive of subsistence, this failed lost being which is so ordinary, one must be too be willing to also comprehend and engage with suicide. The subsistent, less than being, beset by their despair, is the only articulation of subjectivity who could entertain such a pitiful thought: '*It is much easier to die than to bear a life of misery with fortitude*' (Goethe 2019, p.25).

Assuming this perspective, *Werther's* final act is not one which is redeemed by absurdity. Tragically, it is an expression of reluctant concession. The intent, though inhibited, is to attain the unattainable and be freed within the impossibility of nothingness. In the absence of the Other, *Werther* has been unable to find either peace or purpose. Flitting frivolously from one failed creative endeavour to the next, finding no society within which he can re-establish his being. All that has been revealed is the lack of substance which he embodies. Even within his brief affair with alterity he could not face the violence of exteriority, desiring an existence free of history, normativity and his own Self. A fanciful notion entertained only by the historical image of Eros to which he clings. As the most ardent and pious servant of Eros, he has refuted the metaphysical for the fantastical, enduring for his delusional relation, persisting by virtue of its own absurdity and the absence of ethical accusations he discerns therein. Such a being cannot abide in perpetuity. Eventually, even the subsistent must confront the vapid modality of ontology which they have so enthusiastically adopted. Each flurry of overwhelming emotion is unceremoniously dismissed by the folly of the image which underpins them: '*Though angel! for the first time in my existence, I felt rapture glow within my inmost soul. She loves, she loves me! [...] And what do they mean by saying Albert is your husband? He may be so for this world; and in this world it is a sin to love you, to wish to tear you from his embrace. Yes, it is a crime; and I suffer the punishment*' (Goethe 2019, p.69).

For *Werther*, his departing gesture approaches the ethical, whispering of a subjectivity that was, though not succeeding to be salvaged by the absurdity of his malintent. Resigned to compel his fate, his final writings woefully convey an appreciation of his subsistence, imparting a desire to atone for his indiscrete being, finally accepting the brutality of his own history, that which he has inflicted upon others, finding some solace in no longer being bridled by the anxieties of the future. His ultimate act is both for himself and the Other, an assertion of his flawed thirsting for

nothingness accompanied by an expression of remorse which could never atone for his subsistent being. His final words are apologies, to his Other, *Wilhelm*, his mother, the embodiments of the past, and to *Albert*, *Charlotte's* husband against whom his erotic indulgences have enthusiastically trespassed. An admission of his flawed subsistence, through an attempt to engage with the Other as a subject of the metaphysical: '*I have requited you badly, Albert; but you will forgive me [...] Albert! make that angel happy, and the blessing of heaven be upon you*' (Goethe 2019, p.72). Even here his subsistence is articulated as he comprehends the flagrant offence of his existence yet still cannot endure it. The recognition alone is harrowing enough.

Contextualised thus, *Werther's* act of taking his own life, is not simply the lamentable admission of his subsistence, it is also imbued with a performative aspect. In his suicide, there is conveyed a desire to communicate, finally, with the Other, in a manner which speaks to the absurdity of the act, of his own being. As commentators such as Landgraf have observed, the stage is set by *Werther* for his conclusion, his last, most successful foray into the artistic (2004, p.40). The pistols he uses, borrowed from *Albert*, articulating his inability to abide with alterity and in their usage portraying how he himself has felt wounded by its vigilance. Weaponizing the kindness of the Other. The arrangement of the room itself is an orchestrated exhibition of his subsistence. An open bottle of wine, with only a glass taken from its contents, uttering promises of a future that will never be. The overt display of the well-known romantic text, *Emilia Galotti*, itself detailing a fatal love concluding in death, a further effort to communicate himself to the Others who will attend his aftermath, aiding their comprehension of his actions (Goethe 2019, p.74). In death, he achieves a fleeting moment of intersubjectivity, conceiving of a means to communicate and be understood by the Other. A means which need not be bound by the confines of rationality or language, and which expresses, in sincerity, his subsistent being. Unlike the empty words he has proffered, his performance yearns for permanence. The offering of his life engraving the message of his being upon the poor souls who bear witness to this, his denouement. Patently, the subsistent must not persist, their being an affront to the Other through which life is found. They must either expire eventually beneath the anonymity of the *il y a*, as *Werther* has, or in their re-birth within the Other. That which he could not stomach. His determination endures as a testament to his fidelity to his Eros. Deeming that a more palatable fate than the racket of alterity. A subsistent electing death so that they need not return from their fantasy, so that they need not face themselves or the Other. So, they may exist, within their absence from existence. Free of suffering, a permanent, if joyless expression of their affection. Subsumed into the generality of the *il y a*, their suffering now subsumed into that of existing which haunts in their

stead. A romantic image, lost beneath the waves, serving their Eros, 'beyond death' (Levinas 1969, p.253).

5.5. Conclusion

By charting the descent of the subsistent being, this final chapter has once again advocated for the need to depart, flagrantly, from the purviews of the strictly, traditionally Levinasian. Through the engagement with this flawed being, they who cannot endure the arduous price of the metaphysical and so churlishly flee the Other, the subsistent broadens the horizons of Levinasian subjectivity through its refutation thereof. And yet, though their conception is the expression of a positive, intrepid intent, invariably such a being who forgoes the primacy of the Other must incur the profound consequences. Therefore, the subsistent is in every essence of their lack of being, lost. Lingering beyond the domain of language, dismissing reason, they merely persist in their subsistence. Not living, nor surrendering to nothingness. They float, precariously, upon the crushing tide of the *il y a*, the horror of simply existing, the suffering of being laid bare. To such a being, enveloped within themselves and the obscurity of their subjectivity, the transcendental celebration of intersubjectivity proffered through Eros, or for that matter any convenient means which allows for a similarly illusory escape from themselves, presents as the most irresistible reprieve. In spite of this, such an Eros without a Self or an Other, is preposterous. There is no love without either. The delicate synchronicity of the caress cannot be achieved. Even the unfortunate loss of a lover to their Eros is not conceivable as this is not the Eros of subjectivity, it is of subsistence. A plastic, static bride which cannot deny their advances for it does not have substance. Unto this ignoble endeavour, they fling their subsistent being without concern for the consequences. Lacking a Self to suffer them. Committing themselves irrevocably to a static image. An ideal of Eros which cannot be attained and serves only to contort the temporality of their being, averting them from the future. Leaving them ignorant to the present, so they may obsess wholly upon this singular moment. A look, and nothing more, of Eros. The superficiality of this relation does not warrant their confused contemplation. The madness of subsistence evidenced in its ferocity. The same fervour which inspires the animus they harbour internally. That which, in *Werther's* mournful tale, conspires against them, leading them to renege absurdity and commit to nothingness. Another voiceless body offered to the murmurs of the *il y a*.

Having examined the subsistent through the literary analysis of Goethe's *Werther*, it is necessary to state that within the plight conveyed there should present an undeniable familiarity to this

fallible mode of ontology. Characterised by their lack of 'ipseity' (Capili 2011, p.681), by virtue of this absence of personality, the unsettling ubiquity of the subsistent subjectivity arises. The undesirable capacity for a subject to forget and even deny the call of the Other, to inflict such violence upon the constitution of their own subjectivity is, candidly, an unnervingly familiar predicament. As is outlined in passing within the preceding discussions, the lack of individuation which clothes the subsistent being, afford them the sympathy befitting the uniformity of subsistence. Any and all poor souls which descend from the lofty, laboured heights of the metaphysical, appear as ontologically indistinguishable from those which tread the same dreadful path. All devoid of the 'uniqueness' which is bestowed by alterity (Petrilli 2002, p.41). Every being lost from the ethical realm of exteriority assumes the same empty mask. A replicable silhouette of subjectivity pleading for the affirmatory haven of the Other, flouting the metaphysical. As a result, each subsistent is conspicuously identifiable, *Werther*, *Des Grieux*, *Severin*, *Adolphe*, etc., empty canvases painted with longing, their nude absence the culmination of their art. And consequently they must all face the same existential conundrum, determining whether or not they can muster the return to the Other, or succumb to nothingness. Whilst his contemporaries are spared this final decision, either by the expiration of their Eros or their beloved, it is *Werther* who singularly cannot, must not, forgo his Eros. What is apparent in all such instances, is that the subsistent cannot endure. One cannot abide in subsistence and attain permanence. A being entrapped in the past cannot be maintained within the present. Death, or at least the end of their being, accompanies the subsistent, the antithesis of suffering, satisfied either in the subject's return to the Other and the barbarity of their re-birth through the metaphysical, or in their frustrated yield to the *il y a*.

This final emotive revisiting of Levinas, furthering that initial intent first adopted within the Masochian turn, as with its forebear, will invariably present as unpalatable, if not sacrilegious, to the traditionalist reader of Levinas. Undeniably, what is considered within subsistence is an overtly anti-Levinasian conception of subjectivity. An antithetical subject devoid of the ethical constitution which characterises the subject and doctrine of Levinas. Yet, this itself is maintained by the central edict of his writings, espousing the primacy of the Other at its root, the potency of the metaphysical relation appearing as most perceptible within its absence. Through such a construction moves not only away from the earnestly Levinasian, and against it, as with the Masochian turn espoused throughout, this machination is justified by its desire to further expand and explore the horizons of Levinasian subjectivity which have not adequately equated for the other-than-ethical being. Though the perversion of the sanguine, ethical subject through

the 'excessive sensibility' (Noon 1978, p. 381), of *Werther* is an affront to the originary ontology of Levinas, it affords a welcome, if mischievous, opportunity to challenge Levinas and the Other, through the conception of a subject which refutes the metaphysical and in so doing their own subjectivity. A subject which is inescapably contingent upon the Other, yet nonetheless aspires to be free of their affirming, contextualising alterity. A being, echoing the decree of Masoch's subject which inspired this literary excursion, of love and volatility, who cannot abide with or without the Other: *'I cannot exist without you; I shall die if you set me free. Let me be your slave, kill me, but do not turn me away!'* (Sacher-Masoch 1991, p.237)

Interlude 5: Love?

Love, you ask me what is love?
I've tried countless times to tell you.
To convey to you her resplendence in terms you would understand.
I could talk of her, her mind, her smile, her charm, her body, but that all seems a bit trivial.
You know I loved her, regardless of any of those facets.
And yet you pester me all the same.

Then perhaps, it is more appropriate to speak of being in love.
Maybe here you will find the answers you seek.
For here, there is certainty, truth even.
A macabre truth which passes through the mind of any person in love.
Which confirms their love and haunts its absence.
That if I were to die, I would die happy.

The romantic edict writ proudly:
Find love and let it kill you.

6. Conclusion

In diving into Levinas through the Masochian reading, and relishing the indulgent romanticism which awaits there, this text has ardently stated the need to challenge the binaristic confines of Levinas's ethical and erotic subjectivity and offered its own re-charting thereof. Moved by the perceived necessity to address the burdens of subjectivity, within the binds of the legal, the fervour of the erotic or what is found in their absence, the text has bestowed the Levinasian with the flawed, sensitivities of its author and the literary protagonists referenced throughout. All the while, resolving to move beyond the Levinasian, it has remained steadfast in its affinity for its conceptual origin, maintaining obsessively its fealty to the primacy of the metaphysical and the Other. In doing so, the text has attempted to articulate the human personality of the subject. To hear and respond to their desolate cries and attempt to understand them where they lie. To see their calloused, tired ethical body beaten by the arduity of their service and the manic psychosis which compels it. Recognising the desperation which summons them relentlessly to answer the call of the Other, to submit to the Law of their Being. The madness of subjectivity which makes love the most tantalising and welcome of interruptions. A love which gladly flies from the ethical, untouched by the stifling protestations of reason, soaring into the depths of the subject's frail interiority. A love which may liberate as much as it may corrupt. Leaving the subject's acts to determine whether they terrorise or adore their beloved and the love which they pursue. But, most poignantly, the text is an embrace of a subject who resides within their failures. The subject who begs for a reprieve from the history of violence which defines their being and lost to escape the Other. Here, perhaps, is the most human subject the text offers. The subject who runs from sociality, throwing themselves upon the thorns of love, and yet in so doing losing themselves.

Distancing itself from the tangible, material applications of Levinasian subjectivity, ultimately the text stands as a declaration of the need to afford the subject the space to fail. Whichever of the incursions the text takes into Levinasian through literature, this is what is expressed throughout, various conceptions and modes of subjectivity writhing from the clutches of accomplishment. And while this may seem a peculiar intent to commit oneself to, to so willingly yank at the boundaries and complexion of the Levinasian subject, in so doing it celebrates the traditional articulations thereof. Affording the subject the grace to fail, the election of the ethical emerges in its hardship as the profound triumph of the subject over their being. Refuting, even if

inconsistently, the allure of retreating from the subjugation found within the Other's arms, the election of the subject's ethical endeavours presents as a more profound capacity to sacrifice oneself, and the enjoyment of oneself, in service of alterity. Similarly, by speaking to the moral ambiguity of love, and addressing its capacity to brutally assail the beloved, to ensnare the lover within the fantastical chasms of their own mind, is itself an expression of reverence for the achievement of that love which dances joyously in reciprocity. In conceiving of a love which may fail, the celebration thereof is to be seen. Even within the dire sorrows of subsistence, a final appreciation of the burden of sociality, ethical being is celebrated, as the rewards of the social are found, spectating terribly upon *Werther* and the subsistent's demise. As such, the text, this brazen emotive challenge to the Levinasian is concurrently a celebration of all which it condemns. An envious expression heard within the protagonists and narrative of the joys of love, sociality and being which seem to elude their grasp.

Though the course of the text itself is maintained throughout by the emotive sensibility which founded it, moving through Levinas and literature whilst confronting its own relation with Love, its culmination finds it somewhere outside of this domain. Clearly, the text develops distance, growing apart from that which is found in the opening passages. The fascination with Levinas and Eros, giving way so that it may scrutinise and examine its own formation. Of love, found within the pages of Levinas and Literature, the trajectory of the text slowly wishes to move beyond its own fascination, wishing to know itself. The formative chapters embody the amorous ardour, dotingly loyal to love and the Levinasian, conveying the esteem with which they were held at this point. Subjects, protagonists and arguments still constrained by the hold of love which consumes their being. The Eros of *Severin* and *Demetrius* is itself the articulation of the text's commitment to Levinas, their hypersensitivity reflecting its wish to exalt the modality of subjectivity and Eros it provides. A testament to both Love and the Levinasian, unwilling to rebuke either, ignorant of the failings which reside beneath the veil of this affectionate lens.

Slowly, reluctantly, with the grace of time it begins to discern that beneath its own euphoric chauvinism it has inverted itself. That the Love and Levinas it purports to adore is marred, stained by the humanity and character it has been bestowed by its authors. Stumbling towards a semblance of self-awareness, within the cruel demise of *Manon Lescaut* and the stern commentary of Wanda von Sacher-Masoch, the text portrays the internal conflict which is seen within this impasse. Attempting to conceive of a manner to recognise the violent capacity of that which it has eulogised, whilst also wishing to somehow preserve its potency. Hoping to exculpate itself

from its own indelicate transgressions in Love against the beloved/Other. Finally, with an earnestness which it begrudgingly recognises as ever present within the text, it casts its gaze from the vaunted silhouettes of the Other, in all her wondrous forms, to that of the subject themselves. Beholding before them, within them the blemished, deficient subjectivity which has surreptitiously been addressed throughout, it finds a flawed subject unable to abide their own imperfections, wishing urgently to attain the nonpareil magnificence of Eros, even if for only the most fleeting illusory of moments. A subject, like *Werther*, who revels in this instant, clutching it to their chest so they may persist, compelled by the faint grace of the Other which it tends. The text then, having started in love, closes without Love and in Love, appreciating that the zeal of the romantic must give way to the torment of its absence. It is a narrative of Levinasian being in and outside of Love, yet oriented about Love nonetheless, as we all are.

Conceptually this inversion is realised through the progressing iterations of Levinasian subjectivity the text offers by virtue of the Masochian reading. The amorous fealty of its early passages realised within an interpretation of Levinasian subjectivity which is ever before the subject, inescapable, as the Other traces and defines their being, inextricably within them. The Other as Law proffering a relation which can find no solace whilst the relation is maintained, which may seek to rid itself of its firm hold yet returns all the same. A relation with the Other which bathes and affirms their being through anguished subjugation. With similar tendresse, the declaration of Eros' need to be unencumbered by the parameters of the ethical, is a declaratory assertion of the text's love of love which spills over in these formative chapters. Wishing to recognise and revere all of love's vast iterations, not just those which are afforded the grace to bask in the warmth of reciprocity, it holds with esteem even the most selfish of lovers. Finding a space within the Levinasian for all lovers, so long as their affection is sincere, regardless of their actions or their beloved. Establishing a love for even the most fanciful, illusory of loves, and their poor, noble lover.

Here, at the peak of its exaltations for the lover, it recognises before it the silent, tearful eyes of the beloved who has been absent. Conceiving of an Eros which lies beyond the ethical, which is not necessarily mutual or reciprocal, a love which is experienced regardless of the beloved's intimations, the capacity to forgo them in service of Love and afflict them with the vigour of affection, is seen. Here, in the consequences of the Masochian reading of the Erotic which had been laid before the reader, the burden of being beloved and the violence of Love is laid bare. Demonstrating how the fantasy of the lover may plague their beloved and how their enthused,

masculine, subjectivity may contain the beloved other in stifling durance. A subjectivity which may simply return to the legalistic domain of the social when their love, or their lover has expired.

From this theoretical and thematic pivot, wishing to preserve the reverence of the erotic and ensure it does not, within its conception, forget or prohibit the feminine, it seeks the guidance of admonishment. Wishing to learn from those it has forgotten or harmed in its obsessions how it may rectify itself, how it may be redeemed and welcome them into its horizons. Returning to the foundational relation of the metaphysical, it asserts the need to ensure that subjectivity and Eros are realised within ambiguity. Dismissing the feminine character of Levinasian alterity and Eros, it offers a relation to the Other and Eros which celebrates the infinite allure of difference found within the dazzling conception of abstract ambiguity. Through this revisiting and rejection of the traditionally Levinasian, a reading presents which welcomes the feminine and all other others, all non-masculine others to the domain of subjectivity. So, they too may reap the rewards found within the toils of sociality and attain the status of ethical being, so they too may *be*. In addition, Eros is stripped of the coarse language which crudely sexualises it. The nudity of the virgin other, an image drenched in the most arcane of masculine fantasies, is foregone so that Eros persists only as a mystery. A tantalising whisper of that which is unknowable, which may assume any form and will mesmerise them all the more. Such a love refutes any notion of heteronormative binarism or the unwelcome imposition of the sexual. It is an expression of that which lies beyond the order of ethical: unruly, irreducible and fantastical. A love which seeks not the vain produce of the child but simply to persevere, to endure with their beloved beyond language, bound by the sharing of a promise. A love maintained by a dream of the future, realised within the social chorus of the present. A most ardently Levinasian Eros, which is overtly other than Levinasian. A redemptive perversion of its former conception.

Finally, the peregrination of the text is presented within the culmination of its inversion. Having spoken openly of the violence of its love and subsequently presented a relation to alterity and of Eros which is joyously ambiguous, only to be sullied by the actions of the subject themselves. It is upon the subject and their being the text concludes. Perceiving retrospectively within the text, as is portrayed through the literary endowment of *Werther*, a realisation that the subject dedicated to love, the lover of love, is one who *needs* the excedence they find within the erotic. Plainly, carrying over the cynical assessment of such subjectivities which is found within *Manon Lescaut* and Wanda's ruminations upon her life and loves, we find within the romantic protagonist a

being who wishes to reside in Eros, unwilling to partake of sociality and too impatient for Eros to assume them. A being lacking in Self or the Other, succumbing to the waves of the *il y a*. Through this exploration, returning thematically to a relation which mirrored that of the opening chapter, a mode of being is realised in that subject who cannot be with the Other. The subject who refutes the order and ardour of sociality and longs to otherwise than be. However, beyond the Other, beyond reason and language, they are lost, descending from being to mere existing, fearing life itself. To such a subject, Eros in the most illusory of iterations provides a distraction from the dire calamity of their subsistence. Yet, it cannot be maintained. Without the Other, there is no Self, no Love, no purpose, no being. A modality of Levinasian un-being which perceives the humanity within the subject's failure and invites them within the forgiving boundaries of the Levinasian which is found through the Masochian reading.

More broadly, having challenged and expanded upon the nature and limits of Levinasian subjectivity through the volatile expressions of humanity found within the literary excursions adopted, the text wishes to have convinced of the merits of such liaisons with Levinas. Forgoing the shackles of abstract philosophy and the veil of metaphors and metaphysics which separate the theorist from their subject, the text wishes to stand as a testament, undoubtedly flawed by virtue of its form and intimacy, of what can be achieved through such literary analysis of the Levinasian. Sincerely, the text hopes to leave its incursion into the Levinasian in a more alluring, accessible position than that which it found it. Yearning for the dense, obtuse prose of Levinas and his saintly ethical subject to now be accompanied by a reading which celebrates the indulgent sensitivity of subjectivity, providing a recognisably flawed subject which simply asks within Levinas that we may all find the space to be. Imploring that when we engage with being we consider it in all of its wondrous, diverse ambiguity. Finding the space to be ethical, bound by the Other as Law. The space to be Lost. And to be even when we fail to do so. Responding to the oft neglected need to recognise our own capacity to otherwise than be. The melodramatic subjectivity found in the romantic ravings of the literary protagonists it adopts, and as is evident, its author. Lost between being and Love. Consumed by their Other.

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