The Eyeball of the Mind:
the need for a fantasy of something

Danilo Kiš

What effect was produced by deliberately turning the eyeball of the mind? Thoughts, images, sounds, were deformed and dispersed, but the nightmarish memory was watched over by the fair-haired angel of dreams, an angel with red cheeks, a big bosom, and hands red and swollen from washing glasses. (Ah, proprietress's hands, fateful hands!): Danilo Kiš

1

Into the Gap

Amongst a shortlist of 'basic agonies' Donald Winnicott (1974) proposes 'falling forever'; it certainly is the stuff of nightmares. A young man recalled as a child shouting out in terror as he awoke from such a dream he'd had more than once. He remembered how it alarmed his mother who came running to find out what was the matter and took him into her bed. He recalled the comfort he derived in extremis from the feel of her body through her flannel nightgown. The dream was heralded by a menacing rhythmic throb which, although suggestive of a heartbeat, was impossible to replicate in a waking state, but in sleep, was instantly recognizable as the sign that he was beginning to fall. In the dream he saw himself as a tiny speck peeling off the inside rim of a vast industrial cooling tower and completely unsupported, experienced himself falling slowly into the wide open black depths. His scream thrust him awake. I will attempt to identify the universality of a 'basic agony' which this reported dream would seem to be one representation of.

My paper takes its name from an analogy used by Danilo Kiš to refer to the dropping out of consciousness of some nightmarish perception or, as may be, the reversal of a vital conception. The great Serbian writer, who died in 1989, and most of whose family were murdered in Auschwitz, uses the metaphor for this lacuna of the occlusion of an image where it coincides with the blindspot on the retina. Kiš goes on to express with his particular poetic genius how the excluded unthinkable thought remains in another compartment of the mind - the province of dreams. It is its absence from consciousness that constitutes its nightmare status. To put it another way, dream-life (so often ignored) preserves a coded representation of the fate of what had been or might have been the most cherished (and here I imply a distinction between an experience in consciousness lost and something pre-
existent in a development lacking the conditions for its materialising in consciousness. A nightmare, by tagging it bad dream should not be taken as a negative element; it contains vital heuristic content, containing keys to psychic development. After all, according to Kiš, they are, our dreams, watched over by a fair-haired angel.

I will try to argue in this paper how the existence of such lack (‘blind spot’ sic, necessitates the urgent need is for a substitute - a soterial (saving) something or other—and will endeavour to show, with reference to mental disturbance and the history of collective brutality, reflected, for example, in the literary works of Kiš, how the great universal dread may be that of nothingness. In reflecting on this notion of occlusion I will consider the therapeutic value of Freud’s concept of splitting a state he recognized (Freud, S. 1927, pp. 152ff)) in which, without contradiction the mind can entertain the existence and non-existence of something simultaneously (disavowal) (vid. Freud, 1938, pp. 275-8).

Turning back to the young man’s dream, this dropping or falling through which is also a falling out of the bottom into space, has the same sense as the phrase, translated from the Serbo-Croat above as ‘deformed and dispersed’ and refers to ‘images’ leaving the conscious mind. Freud’s notion of repression was of a defensive mechanism driven by anxiety and resulting in a lacuna (a gap) which in turn is no longer known about. Something may be lost stolen or strayed but is not missed because repression acts in a way that covers its tracks. The other sense is of something in the genetic programme that has not yet had a chance to enter consciousness and persists as an inkling awaiting realisation.

This word ‘falling’ to index his dread represented in the young man’s dream bring to mind phrases such as ‘that sinking-feeling’ or ‘the ground opened up and swallowed me’. But we are still left with the possibility that this was only a dream, albeit a recurring ‘bad’ one. Yet if it is taken as representing a forgotten experience of a sinking-feeling of falling out (of love), of the loss of a prized other, vital for the sense of wellbeing, an experience to which a blind eye has been turned, how are its traces, apart from speculating about the function of a recurrence of the nightmare, to be detected?

The metaphor, ‘closing the door on something’, would also be indicative in the event of something having fallen apart, but with the addition implication of its being irreparable. As we say, we draw a line under such things. The French slang je me casse equivalent to 'I'm out of here' hints at something of the same break up with a trusted other or order, following a perceived betrayal. The implication is that the rejected one can escape the pain by switching the roles. These metaphors of blotting things out do not necessarily refer to conscious acts of revision. This paper reflects on the possibility of something dropping out of consciousness completely and subsequently existing in a pre-conscious state perhaps accessible only to the ciphers and ghosts of dream-life and ‘—in the machine’, where they continue to have their effect. The concept of hurt may be lost but the finding of faults excuses a refusal of intimacy. The unbearable feeling though effectively lost has certainly not become extinct. The nightmare finds ways of tormenting sleep by pouring salt into the wounds in the emotional delayed life. Being ‘dropped’—especially long ago when highly dependent on the capacity of another—may be represented in nightmare as falling forever. The dreamer is left with no support, nothing to cling on to, devoid of hope. What he dreams is a ‘basic agony’ which has become unthinkable. What is represented, however, is the ongoing repudiation of just these agencies of support, the discovery of an internal support system, and this we can think of as central to the impetus of nightmares. Thus it is feasible to consider a bad dream to be good. In a wonderful passage in Hourglass E.S. is asked during his interrogation what he likes about dreams. Among the many things he lists ‘their bottomless depths and eerie heights... their resemblance to death and their power to confer intimations of eternity... their power to pry the deepest secrets out of us... their resemblance to madness without the consequences of madness... their disrespect for chronology and the classical unities of time and action.’ (Kiš 1992 p. 95)
Are we thinking here of irreparable damage done? Yes and no! If this points to the sequelae of a trauma, not only has the memory been erased, but with it some vital parts of the ego have gone adrift. Thus the young man dreaming Winnicott’s ‘agonia’ may evince his attitude that people, instead of being seen as persons, are treated as having functions, susceptible to becoming his accomplices, prized as captives or belongings or put down as ‘waste of space’. Perhaps these attitudes may only be inferred from his habit of lying about trivia, temporarily forgetting the name of someone close, or his habit of suddenly losing interest in a friendship or—something he considers to be a virtue – disposing of it with a shrug or the fact he never misses anyone. He may also be seen to be in the habit of cancelling an arrangement when a better offer comes up, and all these habits slip easily under his radar and are plausibly rationalised in terms of expediency. Is there, he may say, any meaning to the notion of the ‘sanctity of the individual’ over against his ‘divine right!’ Such states, ultimately superficial, are dealt with at great length and detail by Karel Čapek in his novel Meteor [Their] fear and hatred merely settled on his broad and indifferent shoulders, always as if ready to shrug. Tear your guts out, or get out, it's not my affair. But quite deep down, deep down below everything, a tiny and pained astonishment was stirring, a kind of eternal numbness (Čapek, 1948, p. 273).

2

Out of Madness

Danilo Kiš (1935 -1989) is a consummate writer. His Hourglass (1992) is set in Yugoslavia during the Holocaust. The text itself is as if someone on the brink of madness had left anguished notes of survival hidden and scattered behind him while atrocious things might appear to be going on close by, glimpsed, as it were in the next room through a crack in a door, or when hurrying past in the snow like a fugitive, hardly believing what he thought he saw going on out of the corner of his eye down a side street. It is a comfortless account of survival of the soul of E.S. in the face of defeat, attenuation, humiliation and loss, becoming coherent piece by piece like a jigsaw of horror and brutality.

In his book The Spider’s Web Joseph Roth (1894 -1939) presents his central character Theodor Lhose against the background of the rise to power of Hitler. The book is a study of the dehumanising process in a man caught up in the equivocal aegis of a ruthless gang. ‘To obey orders under all circumstances was a condition, as was silence. Betrayal meant death and an ill-considered statement meant certain destruction’ (J. Roth, 1967, p.15). It both frightened and suited Lhose. ‘He had always been a silent type [...] He could only utter what he had learned by heart, the sound of which was already prepared, formed silently a dozen times in his ears and his throat [...] Everything which happened was frightening, because it was new, yet it vanished before making any impression [...] Only in the army was he happy. There he had to believe what he was told, and others had to believe what he himself told them’ (ibid, pp. 4, 5). This is the character of the man who at last surmounts his fear by treachery and lies and terror to become the leader of the gang. Roth writes in short sentences, each a self-contained thought; it reads almost like a list. The cumulative power of Roth’s writing in The Spider’s Web rises to a crescendo by three quarters way through, taking in the vast sweep of a diverse people caught up in a doomed process of extinction in just a few paragraphs. The effect is similar to the way Inger Blom’s (Malmo Symphony Chorus) devastating Es geschah from Alfred Schnittke’s (1934 -98) Faust Cantata (Seid nuchtern und wachet registers —’a story of negative passion’ (Alexander Ivashkin, cellist and conductor). I first came across Joseph Roth in the 1960s. His Weights and Measures struck me as a literary coup.
Both men were Jewish. Both possessed an acute sense of truth and a furious apprehension of beauty survives in their writing, standing out against the spectacle of brutality and the spectre of power. Their faith is what I am tempted to call meta-Jewishness. Joseph Roth’s non-fiction book The Wandering Jews is a disinterested unalloyed treatment of the Jewish character of the diaspora. And moving indeed is his modest plea in the foreword. ‘The author has the fond hope that there may still be readers from whom the Eastern Jews do not require protection: readers with respect for pain, for human greatness, and for the squalor that everywhere accompanies misery; Western Europeans who are not merely proud of their clean mattresses.’ (Roth, 1927, p. 2).

Kiš’s eclectic mind is subsumed under the heading of ‘conviction’. In the setting of his great book that would seem equivocal since what he sees as the destroyer and the source of inhumanity takes the form of conviction while his whole oeuvre embodies both passionate human conviction and final utter openness. As such he reminds me of the Romanian Petru Dimitriu’s refusal to judge in the face of persecution, the real burden of his 1964 novel Incognito. In the 63rd section of Hourglass entitled Notes of a Madman (V) Kiš comments on Spinoza’s reductive arguments against miracles and for his part writes, ‘There is no better proof than conviction. Accordingly, my only argument against his [Spinoza’s] positivistic contention that “divine miracle” – the manifestation of Yahweh to Noah – “was simply the reflection and refraction of the sun’s rays in the droplets of water [sic] suspended in the clouds” is my contrary conviction (which itself, however, partakes of positivistic reasoning); namely, that it was simply a dream, or simply what it actually was, to wit, Yahweh’s spoken word and face’ (Kiš, 1972 p. 259) – openness, to which must be added humour as the truth (and the miracle) of survival. But this is not Kiš’s last word.

Kiš’s writing is a testament to the possibility of preserving one’s humanity and apprehension of beauty: he is clear-eyed as to what seem to lie at the heart of man’s inhumanity to man, his pogroms, massacres, torture, is the dread of nothingness. For that reason, religious zeal, predicated on the belief that there is something and that to believe positively in nothing is a damned heresy sanctions the disposal of the ‘disbeliever’.

In keeping with the theme of this paper, Michael Haneke’s film The White Ribbon is a similar creative achievement in that it focuses on Protestantism in a small Austrian community prior to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the outbreak of the First World War and exposes its religion as psychological brutality incarnate, powerfully hinting it to be productive of a psychopathic inhumanity in the children subjected to it by their zealous parents.

3

The Murky Depths of Unconscious Happenings

In his book A Tomb for Boris Davidovich (1978), set at the time of the Russian Revolution, Danilo Kiš presents the interweaving tales of seven Jews, each living for the Revolution and each destroyed by it. The fifth and longest story centres on Boris Davidovich (Novsky) a terrorist with a passion to go down in history as a hero of the Revolution. In the face of constant imprisonment and torture he does not capitulate. Hunted down, he commits suicide in the furnace, a fate like that he perpetrated on his victims. Novsky dies in the vain hope to round off a perfect biography, but his quest is fatally vitiated, driven by revenge and the dread of nothingness.

The book opens with the story of Miksha, a tailor from Bukovina who ‘could sew on a button
in ten seconds’ but who ‘did not become master craftsman’ but is ‘sent off with a curse’ by his employee the Talmudist Reb E.M.Mendel. Miksha is revealed early in the story to be capable of heinous brutality to a skunk. His hatred born of rejection leads to his ready co-opting to an underground movement and the commission to murder a suspected inside spy the Romanian Hanny Krzyzewska who he eviscerates in obedience to the task he is entrusted with as coolly as he skins alive the skunk who has been preying on Reb Mendel’s hens, reducing it to ‘a bloody ball suspended on a wire and writhing on the doorstep’. Reb Mendel, far from thanking him, in a voice ‘hoarse and terrible, like the voice of a prophet’, tells Miksha, ‘Wash the blood of your hands and face. And be damned, Herr Micksat!’’ His murder of Hanna is as much of an atrocity as his adept skinning alive of the skunk. Under torture the man who co-opted Miksha confesses that Hannah had only been proscribed and names Miksha before hanging himself. Later, Miksat Kantesku, alias Miksha, a Czech, was released to the Sudeten Germans as a spy of importance to the Russians. Under slaughterhouse conditions Miksha confessed to being an agent of the Gestapo. Amongst the twelve accomplices he named was one E.M.Mendel, a master tailor and M.L. Jusef, a tailor who had refused to employ him in those days after Reb Mendel had put round the word. Kiš tells his story as if, as he sets out to say ‘it was recorded by the hands of honourable people and reliable witnesses [...] yet by the logic of chance and of murky deep unconscious happenings, through the consciousness of the narrator [...] the humble pleadings and awful beseeching of Hanna Krzyzewska would resound... as if her death were only the consequence of some great and fatal misunderstanding [...] and just before the death rattle and the final calm her incoherence would turn into the prayer for the dead, spoken in Hebrew, the language of being and dying, a prayer, we are led to believe, Miksha, in his hatred, never heard.

4

Absolute Loneliness

Clearly the story of The Knife with the Rosewood Handle implies an inherent cruelty in Miksha’s character; the reason for my suggesting it is to try to clarify the status of Kiš’s thinking over against what seems to be revealed in the young man’s recurring dream of falling forever. In the latter a concept of nothingness may be inferred in the terror, experienced by the dreamer, of having nothing to take hold of. In James Marsh’s film, Man On Wire Philippe Petit spent 45 minutes alone, in the air, at a height of 1,350 ft, balancing on a slim steel wire that connected the newly constructed World Trade Centre towers. As I write this I sense my palms sweat.

Slack-lining is distinct from tightrope walking in that the nylon line is not held rigidly taut but bounces and sways. In a Channel 4 05/10/09 Skywalker Dean Potter is shown walking on a rope across a 100-foot chasm between Lost Arrow and El Capitan 3,200 feet in the air above the Yosemite Valley. Dean explains how nothing could compare with the extreme focus of being on the very edge of dying. For him it is a compulsion. I felt that perhaps for these men it was a substitute for what was sensed to be an even more terrifying experience of being in a relationship and dependent on another; the extreme high derived from the sense of omnipotence. The Sun (28/08/10) reports another slack-liner, the 51-year-old Austrian Heinz Zak who walked the same line in the Yosemite barefoot as saying: ‘What I do is not about adrenaline. When I am up there I completely lose myself. If you think about anything else it could mean death. You have to be in the moment completely, thinking only about the next step.’

What extremes a person may have to go to in an attempt to remain self-sufficient and
independent hint at the severity of dimly perceived risks inherent in tenderness and anxieties around trusting and separation, necessitating the occlusion of areas of potential growth in the self. The denial of need, the psychic surgery, resulting from a failure of 'magic' is, however, accompanied by nightmarish noises-off from the unconscious. The great peril for the 'slack-liner' tottering three thousand feet above the Yosemite without a safety sling for the sake of his magical high of omnipotence is that he loses focus (turns the 'eyeball of the mind') for a split second and plummets to his death, the unconscious being a dab hand at interfering with prescribed courses.

The terrifying nightmare of trying in vain to clutch at a smooth surface and falling into the abyss might not, however, be a buried memory of infantile omnipotence crushed prematurely. In Kiš's writing *nothingness* is a concept inherent in existence and fundamental to faith. In Miksha's case his hatred and brutality may be in measure attributed by the author to individual causes. The following, for example, is an expression of exulting revolutionary vengeance: "Reb Mendel, one single match could blow up all the oil fields of Ploesti." While he imagined the distant future illuminated by a huge blaze [...] It'll be a wonderful flame, Reb Mendel" (Kiš, 1978, p. 4). But beyond this Kiš implies a universal principle of individual extinction to which it is practically impossible not to turn a blind eye and which is the major factor in the process of dehumanisation. It is, in the end, close to a schizophrenic part of the personality which 'suffers from absolute loneliness, and, while it despairs of finding its way back or being rescued, it lives in the hope of capturing at least one other part of the personality to keep it company in its isolation from everything real' (Meltzer, D. 1975, p. 372). Miksha's final vitiated confession by which he implicates all those who he considers have done him down in life is extracted, not by the prolonged torture and starvation he is subjected to, but by the warm glow of allegiance to the Party 'as he is observed from the wall of the modest interrogator's office by the portrait of the One Who Must Be Believed... that good-natured face, the kind face of the wise old man so much like his grandfather's' (Kis, 1978, p. 14).

5

Mind The Gap

The gap indicates the presence somewhere of something from which the 'eyeball of the mind' turns away from integrity and into banality. In Petru Dimitriu's *Incognito* his character Sebastian Ionesco, a Romanian aristocrat deposed by the Communists is being badly beaten by the brutal Securisti 'It was then, 'he writes 'that I learnt that the semblance of personal dignity is a matter of no great importance... Our true self has withdrawn in mortal affliction to the innermost recesses of our being. And in this final withdrawal there is a strange dignity that cannot be lost' (Dumitriu, 1964, p. 351). In his writing Danilo Kiš is forced to come to terms with the idea of 'nothingness'. Kiš does not turn away from the likelihood that there is no afterlife. Towards the end of his 1978 novel *Hourglass* he provides a note to the effect that his Boris Davidovich was inadvertently a replay of the true inquisition of one Baruch David Neumann and, having made this discovery, he points to a coincidence in the dates of their respective arrests and in their names which appeared to the author to be an example of the classical notion of the cyclic motion of time. He quotes Marcus Aurelius as illustration: 'He who has seen the present has seen everything, that which happened in the most distant past and that which will happen in the future' (p. 124). The story of Baruch David Neumann is that of the forcible conversion of Jews to Christianity on pain of death. Seeing the fury of the mob he replies that he would 'rather be converted than killed, since, in spite of everything, the temporary agony of being is more valuable than the ultimate void of nothingness' (p.114).
What Kiš is concerned to focus on is how beliefs that serve to shore up the essential ‘shortfall’ of earthly life may be dehumanising and lead such believers to resort to inhuman lengths to protect their beliefs. It may be that a belief in an afterlife functions in such a way, and affects basic life values, such as the survival of the ‘soul’ (a phrase that requires to be defined in the context of life, differently from a belief in the afterlife.

At the very end of Hourglass Kiš has a ‘P.S. It is better to be among the persecuted than among the persecutors’ and a few pages before the end comes this passage: ‘Thanks to suffering and madness, I have had a finer, richer life than any of you, and I wish to go to my death with dignity, as befits the great moment after which all dignity and majesty cease. Let my body be my ark and my death a long floating on the waves of eternity. A nothing amid nothingness. What defence have I against nothingness but this ark in which I have tried to gather everything that was dear to me, people, birds, animals, and plants, everything that I carry in my eye and in my heart, in the triple-decked arc of my body and soul,’ and he continues in a mood reminiscent of Rilke’s in the penultimate verse of his Tenth Elegy:

But if the endlessly dead awakened a symbol in us,
Perhaps they would point to the catkin’s hanging from the bare
branches of the hazel-trees, or
Would evoke the raindrops that fall onto the dark earth in springtime.

...’I wanted to ennoble eternity’s unconscionable void,’ writes Kiš, ‘with the bitter herbs that spring from the heart of man to ennoble the soundless emptiness of eternity with the cry of the cuckoo and the song of the lark’ (Kiš, 1990 p.262,3).

And so his ‘nothingness is the spur to create a ‘bitter metaphor’ to seek to highlight what he calls his egoism of death which is merely a counterweight to the egoism of life, the resistance of nothingness (my death as opposed to death).

With this excursion I return to the seeming nothingness which is the psychic gap when suffering is instantly refused and denied. So which is the madness?–that of which Kiš speaks or that of those who preferred to be persecutors to banish an unbearable sense of having been persecuted, a persecution which persists and deepens and darkens in their persecuting as in the case of Miksha, so naively brutal so banal in his story The Knife with the Rosewood Handle (1978). The terror here is of a nothingness (a lack) and the defence against it the desperate destruction of the ‘infidel’.

6

Faith or Banality

It does seem to follow that a belief in a something existing after death between the poles of heaven and hell might be considered detrimental, indicating an ‘unquenchable desire to overcome the limitation of death’ (Kierkegaard). My hypothesis is that a belief in ‘nothingness’ (as opposed to nihilism) is life-enhancing. According to Slavoj Žižek (1997), Freud emphasises there is no ‘death-anxiety’ in the unconscious, no notion or representation there of death and that the very phenomenon of ‘consciousness’ is grounded on our awareness of mortality. So this is the ‘death drive’ (Todestrieb). Through this alone the
apprehension of the beauty of life persists in the psyche. If such a significance can be attributed to it, the term ‘everlasting life’ stands.

For this reason it is not poetic licence to hold that a fervent belief in the after-life makes up for a developmental gap in the psyche (cf. the apostle Paul’s counsel to the new converts in Thessalonica, the fantastic imagery he uses for how they would after death be gathered up to heaven, concluding –Wherefore comfort one another with these words’ 1 Thessalonians 4:18). An analogy might be that the neurotic is not afraid of death; rather, afraid of life. I would at the moment argue that beliefs in an afterlife, a fortiori as symbolised anthropomorphically, function to fill a gap which is un-fill-able and which needs to be reckoned with in order for the soul to survive and fill out the potential of its incarnation. ‘What he’ [the neurotic] ‘escapes from into his fixed compulsive rituals is ultimately life itself since the only endurable life for him is that of a “living dead”, the life of disavowed, mortified desire (op. cit. p. 123, n. 8). Moreover this need to believe in an afterlife is part and parcel of every other way individuals, groups and populations operate in flight into a tolerable ‘reality’ (sic Lacan) governed by fantasy, a flight from the inaccessible ‘Real’ (sic). This applies a positive value to the suffering of limitation. ‘Drive’ [and therefore Freud’s ‘death drive’] ‘is immortal, eternal, “undead”: the annihilation towards which the death drive tends is not death as the unsurpassable limit of man qua finite being. (Žižek, S. 1997, p. 89)

I do not wish to stray from the notion of a gap in the potential for individual human development in which a supposed trauma is swallowed up along with the consciousness of an imaginable support system. What is indicated by the idea of a gap is the recoil from dependency detectable in pseudo independent, isolating attitudes and behaviour. My argument is that these circumstances may be similar to the false dependency on an afterlife to cover up the presentiment of a void at the core of life. Surviving life is here dialectically opposed to living life. How life is to flow back is a dilemma facing the natural history of psychoanalysis. And the need for a makeshift, to negate the lack and barricaded in by a fantasy is powerful indeed. Such resorts are hardly chosen; rather they are linked-in in such a way as to be second nature.

In the same way, what Imre Kertész experienced in a series of concentration camps for him demythologised the notion of being Jewish. When Heinz Zak speaks of having to be completely in the moment, thinking only about the next step there is an echo in these words of how Kertész survived his years in the camps; he does not speak of atrocities but of steps. Whereas I have evinced the slack-liner as shutting out a vital element for the psych by substituting a false focus, Kertész is talking of preserving his humanity. His aged relatives to whom he returned gave the impression of the austerity of something nebulous and indecipherable which simply had to be put behind them. ‘Whether one looks back or ahead,’ he writes, ‘both are flawed perspectives. After all, there are times when twenty minutes, in and of themselves, can be quite a lot of time. Each minute had started, endured, and then ended before the next one started. Now, I said, let’s just consider: every one of those minutes might in fact have brought something new [...] Each and every minute something else might have happened other than what actually did happen, at Auschwitz just as much as, let’s suppose, here at home’ (Kertész, 1975, pp. 258f). And that is what he meant as ‘steps’. ‘Everyone took steps; I took my own steps, and not just in the queue at Birkenau’ (ibid). And having started to take these steps he realised it meant nothing to be Jewish—‘there is no different blood, nothing else {...} there are only given situations and the new givens inherent in them’(ibid). So here is the obverse of turning the eyeball of the mind; he insisted on making sense of everything he witnessed.

A highly intelligent and studious undergraduate I knew who suffered from such a compulsion did throw himself off a high harbour wall into the sea, not, as I understand it, because he
wanted to die, but because he couldn’t help himself, and simply because there was nothing to stop him. I began to think of this as the absence of a convincingly cautionary voice with which to consult, some protective ideal and to search for signs of this is the language of his dreams. Here I turn to the fortuitous intention of dream thought. Conversely was I looking at the presence in internal reality of the presence of a harsh superego that tells the pessimistic paranoiac ego, ‘Jump!’ One way or another it argues for the absence of a ground of support within, or the presence of a gap impenetrable to thought.

Talk of ‘voices’ may give rise to the surmise of delusion in such a case. It is certainly a dimension of phobia and hallucination. But then does not a sense of nothingness entail a kind of madness. Seen in a different way, a form of omnipotence is present, boundlessness, the obverse of the boundless potentiality of soul. It would only be a delusion if, like Icarus, it was attended by the conviction he could fly—a mania. Manic elements in dreams are ubiquitous. It may be either a dream of flying or the fear of flying, or of being shot and yet unharmed. The dreamer escapes while a figure the dreamer believes he cares about is set upon and carved up, or it is a dream of being stuck in a precarious position on a slippery rock face or being rescued by a mad professor in a beautiful balloon, the rescuer himself at the mercy of the machinations of the idealised woman in the prodigious scarlet satin dress. Dreams are likely to be coded messages of what has been excised from consciousness and that represent the terror itself as well as the fantasy flight from it, constituting an inescapable trap or unyielding pretence. (Hermann Ungar gives a vivid portrayal of such a trap in his Story of a Murder (Ungar, H, 1974, pp. 61ff). With those who live with the constant anxiety of catastrophe of their own doing it seems that the dream has crept out into the daylight ostensibly to showcase stunts of death-defying manic defence. A life-support system is failing and a kind ofverted omnipotence rules. It is interesting to me that some of the people I have mentioned this compulsion to fly above the void have said they have been gripped by such a terror at one point or other.

It may be that what is represented in the nightmare of falling forever is the sense, at who knows what stage of development, the sense of nothingness, of a lack of anything to sustain human viability, and universally present by analogy is our need to mediate that dread with such fictions as an afterlife.

Lacan’s concept of jouissance first appeared in his Ethics of psychoanalysis (1959-60) and can be thought to mean a ‘meaningless intrusion’. It seems to refer to a fundamental point at which pleasure becomes pain—fundamental in the sense of an inherent capacity of life. Paradoxically a word more commonly associated with ‘enjoyment’ is used to signify going beyond the limits of endurance, but also the limits of conceptualising. This is not that ‘exaggeration’ (of pleasure) as Hegel uses it (as far as I can understand Hegel—my grandfather who studied philosophy at the beginning of last century once quoted a passage from Hegel to me, adding that it was the only bit of Hegel he knew and he had memorised it because he could not grasp it!). ‘Exaggeration’ for Hegel is the driver of process (of knowledge); in short, it upsets the balance which ipse facto is falsity, in the sense of ‘a stopping short’. Thus for Hegel ‘totality’ is ‘crazy’ and requires a ‘constrained balance’ in order to obviate intense suffering (‘craziness’). This interpretation of Hegel is my interpretation of how Slavoj Žižek (1997) approaches the concept of jouissance.

For Žižek jouissance is related to an ecstasy or an unbearable flooding by the unconscious of a sense of the inaccessible, experienced as horror or the abyss. To maintain balance (support) an emergency fix(-ation) is required. There is something un-grasp-able not only in the concept but in what it connotes (as perhaps in Hegel’s dialectic, at least for some). It points to a dimension of nothingness beyond an unconscious which reveals itself, for instance, in symbols and dreams. It is a non-area, which a reductionist like Lacan speaks of
as the ‘Real’ to be distinguished from ‘reality’ apprehended only by fixed fantasy. The presentiment of the unknowable no-thing is apprehended as a lack or gap. It is hard to say when and how this presentiment becomes a trauma in consciousness, whether in an event experienced as a lack in the subject or in the other or in the big Other, the ground of being, but it entails the impossibility to symbolise; it is this presentiment which constellates the fixation. The slack-liner wobbles over the abyss and ‘completely loses’ himself. This is paradoxically present as absence, as the unknowable trauma, the driver of the reification of our fantasy.

Žižek uses this system of thought to explore the many meanings and the ubiquity of fetishism (op. cit.). His eclectic treatment of the many applications of that concept boils down to an anatomising of the universal phenomenon of supplanting the horror of a fissure in the ground of being. Danilo Kiš intends the reader to understand that Miksha’s exultant brutality is related to his espousing of the Revolution and perhaps implies his character’s presentiment of all being swept away which propels him into the dehumanising fantasy of all-permissive allegiance to the benevolent One Who Must Be Obeyed. At such a point in his writing could it be that hovering there is an allusion (critique or otherwise) to the rigorous hermeneutics of orthodox Judaism?

The fetish is a prime example of psychic reduction and substitution (which symbol Žižek extends to refer to the phenomenon in general). The use of the ‘fetish’ (in the context of sexual perversion as well as related to commodities, religious belief) to illustrate the turning of the eyeball of the mind a fortiori exemplifies not only the attention shift away from disquiet but its replacement to shore up its burial by means of authorised substitutions. Žižek explains Lacan’s concept jouissance as ‘the disturbed balance [...] which accounts for the passage from Nothing to Something’ (op. cit., p.49) the balance is disturbed by ‘this absolutely meaningless intrusion’ (ibid.), here ‘meaningless’ not in the nature of the fetish object, but what it is that upsets the balance, the ‘Nothing’. The fetish constitutes what he calls ‘the density of the subject’s reality’ – it is only in this “sinthom” sic that the subject encounters the density of being – when he is deprived of it, his universe is empty (ibid.). The notion of a gap is central to Žižek’s anatomy of the fetish as the ‘stand-in ("sinthom")’.

Crucial for the fetish-object is that it emerges at the intersection of two lacks: the subject’s own lack as well as the lack of his big Other. Therein lies Lacan’s fundamental paradox: within the symbolic order (the order of differential relations based on a radical lack), the positivity of an object occurs not when the lack is filled but, on the contrary, when two lacks overlap. The fetish functions simultaneously as the representative of the Other’s inaccessible depth and as its exact opposite, as the stand-in for that which the other itself lacks [...]. At its most fundamental, the fetish is a screen concealing the luminal experience of the Other’s impotence – the experience best epitomised by the vertiginous awareness “that the secrets of the Egyptians were also secrets for the Egyptians themselves” (p. 103)

It is, I think, in the awareness of such a lack that Karel Čapek charts the panic of a fragmented life at the onset of death – ‘Yes, it is like that: only a fragmentary and casual life is swallowed up by death’ (Čapek, K., 1948, p.187). In Meteor, a dying man lies unconscious and around him a group speculates as to his identity and history – a surgeon, specialist, poet, clairvoyant and a ‘sister of mercy’. Čapek’s basic preoccupation in these three novels is to express in poetic form the fact that eventually no one can really be known; we are unknowable not only to others and they to us, but we cannot ever really know the whole truth of ourselves. The deep questions of living and dying can only be glimpsed through a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Intuition cannot be discarded and his trilogy is a triumph of creative imagination. Sitting by his side throughout the night the sister character dreams of the unlived life of the crash victim. Čapek epitomises it by contrast with the
declaration, dreamed by the sister, and uttered in her dream by a lover: ‘Now I belong to you’. In these words she detects certainty and joy, but above all decision and commitment. The one to whom the girl makes her vow is unable to hear it, realising that until that moment life and death have not entered him. So the sister dreams a consciousness for the man on the brink of death. Such ‘permanence’ terrifies the unlived life, when it becomes late in the day and it draws to a close. He had, all but obliviously, despair ed of being equal to her submission for he had never undertaken anything permanent. (Perhaps he had gone in a direction similar to the obsession that drove Novsky in Kiš’ novel to seek to achieve his perfect biography and who had been too late confronted by his folly.) ‘I stood puny and humiliated,’ goes the nun’s dream, ‘before that courage to live, while I fluttered ridiculously before the decision to die. [...] Don’t you see that I am not complete enough to live. I am not yet complete enough to endure, not brave enough to decide.’ And as the author intends, not ready to die. So here is the lack, the gap, the source of a terrible loneliness. There never was a hand so never could he clasp, the clairvoyant suggests (vid. Čapek, p.210). This is the double lack of which Žižek speaks, in which a fetish has its origin. And at such a juncture occurs the ‘splitting’ and what Freud called ‘disavowal’—an illusion that one is loved in the face of an inability to respond or entertain the single fact that there is no one there—not her, not him and from this he must turn away the eyeball of the mind.

In Sartre’s story *The Wall* Pablo Ibbieta is imprisoned by the falangistas and to face the firing squad in the morning. There came a moment when he realised that up till then: ‘I took everything as seriously as if I were immortal. At that moment I felt that I had my whole life in front of me and I thought, “it’s a damned lie.”’ And he goes on, ‘I had spent my time counterfeiting eternity {...} but death had disenchanted everything.’ In one sense the conclusion is diametrically opposed to that of Čapek’s. Thus Sartre: ‘several hours or several years of waiting is all the same when you have lost the illusion of being eternal,’ writes Sartre, and yet in the next sentence his character thinks ‘I clung to nothing, [my italics] in a way I was calm.’ And although the author characterises it ‘a horrible calm’ it turns the loss of the illusion of immortality into a potential for authentic life, which is just what Čapek would snatch at as the readiness to die. And here again is a hint of Freud’s *Todestrieb*. And reading Sartre’s story can help to make one realise what an unimaginable courage is represented by Imre Kertész by invoking the idea of ‘taking steps’.

The final stanza of *Duino Elegies* that follows the one quoted above brings the ideas of falling together. Here happiness is seen as manic escape from the dread of dependency which is mirrored in the nightmare of falling for ever. The emotion Rilke refers to is the joy of discovering a ground within the self when the suffering instead of being disposed of is sustained, what I referred to earlier as the unimaginable support system imagined. Such is the testimony of men like Danilo Kiš, Petru Dumitriu, Imre Kertész, and perhaps those who endure the trials and tribulations of a psychoanalysis. And so in life we are in death.

Yet nothing has been said here about fate or of those cut off ere their prime. Kertész’ novel is called *Fateless*. It is up to the reader to understand why. Perhaps for fate we could think ‘foregone conclusion’ where taking steps would seem to have little point. And it may be that for Sartre reality is at root absurd. Does he look unflinchingly at a haphazard or, on the contrary, turn a blind eye to a meaning for ‘humanity’? And there is no denying a finality in loss. In his 1930 Preface to Hermann Ungar’s book, Thomas Mann bemoaned the early death of such a talented artist at the age of thirty-six. Mann writes:

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And though to rebuke fate for its carelessness, Mann writes, ‘would be to take after the king who had the sea flogged, one is tempted to reproach it with all the things in Ungar’s melancholy oeuvre that woo life with such poetic ardour; it should have shown more favour toward such sensual fidelity... [He] was raised by his talent into a deeper and holier communion with nature—and it is these posthumously published stories which reveal most vividly, showing perhaps more clearly than those published during Ungar’s lifetime what potential for development was nipped in the bud by his premature death, and their publication, for us, is a true human indictment of fate.

‘Or perhaps—if all else is drowned in the great flood—my madness and my dream will remain like a northern light and a distant echo. Perhaps someone will see that light or hear that distant echo, the shadow of a sound that was once, and will grasp the meaning of that light, that echo. But anything that survives death is a paltry victory over the eternity of nothingness—a proof of man’s greatness and Yahweh’s mercy. 《Omnis moriar》 (Kiš, 1990, p. 264).

But the last word is with the Russian poet Anna Akhamatova (1985, p. 124)

And especially when our dreams imagine
All that must still be enacted:
Death everywhere—our city burnt through...
And Tashkent in flower for a wedding...
Very soon the asiatic wind will tell me
What is eternal and true.

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For a story to be considered “fantasy,” it needs to contain some sort of magic system. But what exactly do we mean by this? In short, a magic system refers to things that occur or exist in your story that do not or cannot exist in the real world. If your magic system is completely unique and imaginative, if it’s something readers haven’t seen before, your novel has a point of difference. An innovative, intriguing magic system is often the key to helping your novel stand out in the saturated fantasy market. Your magic system should play a key part in your story. Whether it’s a source of conflict (see more on this below), a driving plot force, or a means for character development, magic is of vital importance in every fantasy novel. Fantasy is a genre of speculative fiction set in a fictional universe, often inspired by real world myth and folklore. Its roots are in oral traditions, which then became fantasy literature and drama. From the twentieth century it has expanded further into various media, including film, television, graphic novels, manga, animated movies and video games. Fantasy is distinguished from the genres of science fiction and horror by the respective absence of scientific or macabre themes, though these genres Master the plot, structure, and monomyth/hero’s journey; analyze what fantasy novels have in common: construct a story outline and start writing a fantasy novel for yourself. Feyre dies for a good few minutes after releasing the courts from Amarantha’s curse. The Ultimate Boon. Feyre receives magical help from all high lords of Prythian in gratitude to her saving their lands.