

Forfeits and Comparisons: Turgenev's First Love

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[Postprint of] “Forfeits and Comparisons: Turgenev’s *First Love*”

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Love has so honeycombed today’s ethical discourse that it’s as though we have been taken hostage by an Other whose escalating demands on our affection now carry the full force and weight of the original super-egoic injunction from which Freud so famously recoiled.¹ Yet the proper answer to this loving impasse is not, as Slavoj Žižek has recently suggested, to respond with a fully “ethical” violence that shatters the loving circle but, rather, *more* love.² Or to put it more accurately, as the recent spate of divorces attributed to the website Friends Reunited attests, the proper response to love’s spiraling demands is to return to one’s first love. Why our first love? Because by returning us to the originary, primary imbalance, the primordial experience of being seized by an other, the One is fractured in Two and from there, as Badiou has suggested, the (truly ethical) vistas of infinity open out: “One, Two, infinity: such is the numericity of the amorous procedure.”³ I will return to Badiou’s loving count presently but let us first note with Kierkegaard how, because of this imbalance, one’s first love must remain qualitatively different from the merely quantitative succession of all subsequent loves. This is witnessed by its remarkably labile ability to shift places within this numerical series as Kierkegaard’s narrator shortly discovers: “I had not seen [my first love] for a long time, and I found her now, engaged, happy, and glad, and it was a pleasure for me to see her. She assured me that she had never loved me, but that her betrothed was her first love, and [. . .] that only the first love is the true love.”⁴

For this reason, too, one's first love can never become a partnership, with the reciprocity that this implies. Instead, our first love haunts us as the failure of what Lacan, in his seminar on transference, calls love's "signification." In first love, there is no mysterious flower-turned-hand stretching back as one grasps towards it in the dark, as Lacan famously described the loving relationship in this seminar. There is no transmuting loving "miracle" that converts the loved object, *eromenos*, into the desiring subject, *erastes* willing, like Achilles with Patroclus, to take the place of the lover and assume his Symbolic "debt."⁵ What the entire literary tradition has dedicated itself to showing in not inconsiderable detail is the way first love offers nothing but the sublimity of a deep and lasting torment from which we never fully recover, – even if, for some unknown reason, our "first love" miraculously loves us back.⁶ First love thus remains a deeply asymmetrical relation. It permanently defeats the closure of the ethical "metaphor of love" that subjectifies the object and, in the work of love that is analysis, transforms the particularity of individual misery into the universality of common unhappiness. Even so, this initiation into heartache that is first love plays a fundamentally important role as we will shortly see. For first love is ultimately what prevents love's "metaphor" from fully crossing over into becoming a perverse circle with its accompanying escalating super-egoic demands.

A case in point right now is psychoanalysis itself. Psychoanalysis is increasingly beset on all sides by demands that it justify itself in relation to a host of competing discourses. "The psychoanalytic subject is the subject of science," goes one oft-repeated

refrain. Opposing demands are heard from the recent religious recrudescence that has long tried to appropriate the psychoanalytic concept of the big Other for its own. Philosophy, too, has apparently claimed its own special place in the pantheon of psychoanalytic knowledge under the guise of the ethical turn. In a situation like this, psychoanalysis perhaps can be forgiven for returning to its own “first love,” literature.

Set in early nineteenth-century Russia, Turgenev’s short story *First Love*⁷ describes the narrator’s first “summer of love” when he meets the mercurial young princess Zinaida whose impecunious mother has taken rooms in the summer residence next door to his family. As merely one of a band of six ardent suitors, the narrator despairs of being selected for Zinaida’s special attentions, and he devotes himself to trying to discover which of the group is the favored one. One night, having received a hint that the successful suitor is to meet Zinaida for a midnight tryst by the fountain, he slips into the garden to confront his rival. Hearing footsteps, the narrator poises himself for the attack only to discover at the last minute, in a moment of utter confusion and astonishment, the stranger is no one other than his own father. Shortly afterwards, upon receiving an anonymous letter detailing an affair between the princess and the narrator’s father, the family leaves in haste for Moscow. Several weeks later, still nursing his emotional wound, the narrator and his father take a ride to the outskirts of town. The father leaves his horse with his son and disappears down a small alleyway. Eventually getting bored, and tormented by an old Finn wearing an absurd military helmet, the

narrator follows the path his father had taken and finds him talking to Zinaida through a window. They appear to be arguing, with Zinaida “saying words of only one syllable, without raising her eyes and simply smiling – smiling submissively and stubbornly” (198). All of a sudden the unbelievable happens: “my father suddenly raised his riding-crop, which he had been using to flick the dust of the folds of his coat, and I heard the sharp blow as it struck the arm bared to the elbow.” Instead of crying out, however, Zinaida merely shudders, gazes at her lover, and kisses the “scarlet weal” that has appeared on her arm. The father then flings the riding crop aside, dashes into the house, while the narrator himself flees from the scene back to the river. “I stared senselessly at the river and didn’t notice that there were tears pouring down my cheeks. ‘They’re whipping her,’ I thought, ‘whipping her . . . whipping her . . .’” (199). Later that evening, the narrator muses on the scene he has witnessed. “‘That’s what love is,’ I told myself again, sitting at night in front of my desk on which books and notebooks had begun to appear. ‘That’s real passion! Not to object, to bear a blow of any kind, even from someone you love very much – is that possible? It’s possible, it seems, if you’re in love . . .’” (199-200).

Eight months later the father dies unexpectedly from a stroke following the receipt of another upsetting letter, and a large sum of money is mysteriously dispatched to Moscow. The son reads his father’s final words in an unfinished letter addressed to him: “‘My son, [. . .] beware a woman’s love, beware that happiness, that poison . . .’” (200). The narrator never sees Zinaida again, but four years later hears that she had apparently become a Mrs. Dolsky who died recently in childbirth. “So that’s how it’s all

worked out!’ the narrator reflects. “‘It’s to this that that young, ardent, brilliant life has come after all its haste and excitement!’” (201). The story then ends with the narrator attending the death of an old woman and marveling at the strength of the body’s resistance to its approaching end. “And I remember”, he says, “that as I stood there, beside the death-bed of that poor old woman, I began to feel terrified for Zinaida and I felt I wanted to pray for her, for my father – and for myself. (202).

Let us begin with a simple question: who is the “first love” of the tale? The first, and most obvious, answer is of course Zinaida, the object of the narrator’s first youthful passion. The premise of the story itself – a group of friends sitting around after dinner agreeing to tell each other the story of their first love – urges this interpretation on us as we escort the narrator through the soaring ecstasies and piercing torments that issue from Zinaida’s impulsive and capricious dealings with him. The second answer, no less patent, can be found in Zinaida’s love for the narrator’s father. In this older, elegant, sophisticated man – the narrator is unstinting in his admiration for his father who is invariably described as “intelligent, “handsome” (164), the “ideal example of a man” (163) – Zinaida finally discovers someone she can’t “look down on” (167), a man who can “break [her] in two” (167). In contrast to the band of rivals, the father is evidently of an order apart and it is for his sake that she sacrifices her all, suffering torments which even the narrator, despite the abyssal soundings of his own wretchedness, can scarcely gauge:

I knelt down at the edge of the path. She was so pale and such bitter sorrow, such profound exhaustion showed in every feature of her face that my heart sank and

I muttered: ‘What’s wrong?’ [. . .]. At that instant, I think, I would gladly have given up my life simply to make sure she stopped feeling so sad. I gazed at her, and though I didn’t understand why she was so miserable I vividly imagined to myself how she had suddenly, in a fit of overwhelming grief, gone into the garden and fallen to the ground as though scythed down. (169).

The third, and perhaps less immediate, answer can be found in the father’s own love for Zinaida, a love which similarly seems to be distinguished from the rest of his erotic adventures. This, perhaps his first, real passion is what ultimately seems to have killed him. The fourth answer is then easy to find in the competing band of rivals, each of whom strives to become “first” in Zinaida’s affections. Each rival thus appeals to a different part of Zinaida’s nature and although each, as the narrator observes, “was needed by her,” none succeed in her eyes (166).

“Belovzorov, whom she sometimes called ‘my beast’ [. . .] would gladly have flung himself into the flames for her. Placing no hopes on his intellectual resources and other attributes, he was always making her proposals of marriage, hinting that the others were so many talkers. Maidanov appealed to the poetic strings of her spirit: a man of fairly cold temperament, like almost all writers, he strove to assure her – and perhaps himself as well – that he adored her, wrote endless verses in her honour and declaimed them to her with a kind of unnatural and yet sincere enthusiasm. [. . .]. Lushin, the mocking, cynical doctor, knew her better than them all and loved her more than the others, though he scolded her to her eyes and behind her back. She respected him but didn’t let him off scot-free and occasionally took a particularly malicious pleasure in making him feel that he was in her hands. [. . .]. I least

understood the relationship which existed between Zinaida and Count Malevsky. He was good-looking, capable and clever, but something dubious, something false was apparent in him even to me, a sixteen-year-old boy, and I was amazed that Zinaida didn't notice it. [. . .]. "Why do you want to have Mr Malevsky about the place" I asked her once.

"He's got such beautiful little moustaches," she answered. "Anyhow, it's none of your business."⁸ (166)

There is a fifth answer, however, that I would like to venture here, namely, that the "first love" of the tale lies in the psychoanalytic love of literature – literature, insofar as she proudly carries the scars of the signifier. Let me try to elucidate this somewhat enigmatic statement.

During the course of their wild evenings in the summer residence, Zinaida invents two games. One is a game of forfeits where each suitor picks a ticket from a hat and the one who wins has the right to demand a forfeit from her. Zinaida determines the forfeits herself – a kiss, perhaps, or standing immobile as a statue using the "ugly Nirmatsky" as a pedestal. One time, on winning the forfeit, the narrator relates how,

I had to sit next to her, the two of us covered by a silk scarf, and I was ordered to tell her *my secret*. I remember how close our heads were in the stuffy, semi-transparent, perfumed shade, how closely and softly her eyes shone in this shade and how hot the breath was from her open lips and how I could see her teeth and felt the burning, tickling touch of the ends of her hair. (160-1)

The other game is called comparisons: some object is named, everyone has to try

to compare it with something else and the best comparison wins a prize (174). The merry band play comparisons one day not long after the narrator has gleaned that Zinaida must be in love:

‘What do those clouds look like?’ Zinaida asked and, without waiting for one of us to answer, said ‘I think they look like those purple sails on Cleopatra’s golden ship when she sailed out to meet Antony. Do you remember, Maidanov, you recently told me about that?’

We all agreed, like Polonius in Hamlet, that the clouds reminded us of those very sails and that not one of us would be able to find a better comparison.

‘How old was Antony then?’ asked Zinaida.

‘He was probably a young man,’ Malevsky remarked.

‘Yes, he was young,’ Maidanov confidently confirmed.

‘Excuse me,’ exclaimed Lushin, ‘but he was over forty.’

‘Over forty,’ repeated Zinaida, shooting a quick glance at him.

I soon went home. ‘She’s in love,’ my lips whispered despite themselves, but with whom?’ (174)

It is not difficult to make out two of the three psychoanalytic psychic economies operative in these two games. The first game, forfeits, proceeds according to the logic of perversion: within the band of rivals, one person must assume the position of the exception, someone who is singled out from the pack and wins a special favor from the princess. What distinguishes this from the structure of neurosis, equally founded upon an

exception, is the way this game takes place within an entirely closed environment. In a forfeiture economy, there are only positives and negatives; one has either won or lost, and the entire game revolves around the princess as a regionally central Other who is forced to dispense favors and perform certain absurd acts on cue. The exception, or to put it into Hegelian terms, the negative, thus appears as a local event: one member of the band of rivals assumes a position that momentarily sets him apart from the rest before being jettisoned and re-absorbed once more into the general facelessness of the pack. There is no meaning to the structure aside from the chance event of winning the ticket: one cannot buy or sell one's location in the arrangement ("‘Sell me your ticket’, Belovzorov suddenly bellowed in my ear. [. . .] I gave the hussar such a look of disapproval that Zinaida clapped her hands and Lushin exclaimed: ‘Splendid!’" (160)). And, despite Belovzorov's subsequent complaint, the game is in fact entirely "fair" to the extent that it is played among true equals. Everyone has an equal chance of assuming the position of the exception.

Comparisons, on the other hand, entails something quite different, and its structure mirrors that of neurosis. In comparisons, a game which we note was invented *after* the princess has fallen in love with the narrator's father, the exception is located outside the circle of the rivals. One effect of this is to enable objects to stand in for one another without losing their original place in game. Clouds can become Cleopatra's sails, Cleopatra can stand in for Zinaida, and the entire comparison can become an oblique reference to the princess's desire to comparably "sail out" to her lover, another Antony who, like the original, is "over forty." All of these substitutions can take place simply

because the exception (the lover, the narrator's father) is in a position of perpetual exclusion outside the game. Such an expulsion frees up the earlier, binary logic of positives and negatives to allow objects or words to refer to two different things at the same time. The signifier has become detached from its signified and can now circulate in multiple, i.e. non-binary relations and compositions. Furthermore, if the game of forfeits depended on the blind machinery of chance, comparisons relies on a relation of resemblance, introducing an element of necessity into the ludic equation.

Stated in this way, the economic structures of the two games fails to tell us anything particularly new or psychoanalytically striking. What is interesting, however, is the way the figure of literature makes its appearance in the game of comparisons. The comparative economy is one that depends upon a body of literary knowledge in order for the comparison to work. The clouds cannot be just any sails, but must be *Cleopatra's* sails – and the rivals themselves must be ridiculously sycophantic not just in any ordinary way, but in a *Polonius in Hamlet* kind of way. What might this literary underpinning of the comparative or, as we might as well call it, Symbolic, economy tell us about the psychoanalytic psychic structures? Freud, of course, made no secret of the fact that many of his discoveries concerning the unconscious are sourced from the literary tradition — from Sophocles, Shakespeare, Jensen, Hoffmann, Dostoevsky, Goethe to name just the immediate ones, not to mention the well-documented presence of Greek myth, the biblical tradition etc. in his thinking. Still, my intention here is not to try to argue for some kind of literary “primacy” for psychoanalysis — as if all the psychoanalytic insights discover their Ur-texts in literature and it is simply a matter of digging out their

references. This would, to all intents and purposes, be a strictly perverse argument, one that inserts the psychoanalytic first love of literature into the circular, forfeiture economy of priority and belatedness. Although, as we saw, this is certainly one of the structures operative in Turgenev's text, it is not the only one and in order to explore the others, let us go back in a little more detail to *First Love*.

As far as the neurotic structure is concerned, for example, it is well known that Turgenev was profoundly fascinated by the complex relations between *Fathers and Sons*, to name only one of his better-known novels. *First Love* is thus far from unique within his oeuvre in its exploration of the theme of the "superfluous man" (the title of another Turgenev short story). The superfluous man is the man who never fully emerges from the long shadow cast by his father — the would-be lover collapsing back into a ridiculous impotence at the first appearance of the father's desire. Of the momentous scene by the fountain in *First Love*, for instance, the narrator recounts how he,

The jealous Othello who had been ready to commit murder was suddenly turned into a schoolboy . . . I was so frightened by the unexpected appearance of my father that at first I didn't even notice where he had come from or where he had gone. [. . .]. From fear I dropped my penknife in the grass, but I didn't even start looking for it: I was very ashamed. I had come to my senses in a flash" (190).

The Turgenev man is without question only a semi-Oedipalised man, unable fully to recover from the cut of paternal castration and inhabit the "comparative" economy of Symbolic desire. He remains caught somewhere between the perverse band of dueling rivals and the neurotic realm of the exception. He is both inside and outside the circle at

the same time, as the narrator's unusual position in relation to Zinaida makes clear. By turns encouraged and repelled by her capricious flirtations and inexplicable rebuffs, at first the narrator merely supplies one more member to the band of rivals. But after the princess falls in love with his father, the narrator becomes a unique favorite on the basis of father and son's mutual resemblance: "'Yes. The very same eyes,' she added, becoming thoughtful and covering her face with her hands" (169), while later, in their final, unexpectedly passionate farewell, the narrator reflects "God knows who it was this prolonged farewell kiss sought to find, but I greedily savoured all its sweetness. I knew it would never be repeated" (196). The name Zinaida bestows on this unique position is that of "page-boy" (182).

Despite its own potential for becoming ridiculous (the threat of which our Volodya, like other heroes of the Russian literary tradition, is acutely sensitive to), this title conveys something very important about the narrator's position. As Zinaida explains while presenting him a rose for his buttonhole as the "sign" of his "new position": "pageboys must never be separated from their mistresses" (182). In the game of forfeits, the favor was always contingent, momentary and elusive, but this time the narrator is decorated with a Symbolic signifier that marks out his special relation (even if, like all tumescent flowers, it is soon destined to wither). While not quite King to her Queen like his father, he is nevertheless set apart from the eternal merry-go-round of unpredictable and non-sensical favors suffered by the rivals.

The question I would now introduce is what kind of economy psychoanalysis

represents, what is its own deep psychic structure? We know from Lacan that in the analytic discourse, the object (a) occupies the position of agent, the split subject is in the position of the other, the product is the master signifier while its truth is unconscious knowledge. We know, too, that the analytic discourse, as Lacan puts it, is the “sign of love” that emerges whenever a quarter-turn shift occurs in the three other discourses (the hysterical, university and master discourses).

[discourse of the analyst]

My question is why, their structural uniformity notwithstanding, the psychoanalytic discourse is not functionally perverse even though it similarly positions the object (a) in the place of the agent. What prevents the desire of the analyst from becoming perverse despite its being articulated on the same structural plane as perversion? In his twelfth seminar, “Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis,” in a session that has remarkable resonance for the present discussion, Lacan refers to the game the subject plays with its unconscious knowledge. Like the children’s game of paper, stone, scissors with which Lacan analogizes it, this is a game of “rotating dominance” that pivots around the central stumbling block of sexual difference. Every time the subject believes it has beaten this stumbling point and finally become “determined” i.e. acquired being, through knowledge, this new certainty finds itself overturned so that Lacan can say the subject discovers his refuge in the “pure default of sex.” The game’s ruling principle is to try anticipate the unexpected but, as Lacan observes, the unexpected is thus not truly unexpected since it is precisely what one readies oneself for: “one prepares oneself for

the unexpected. [. . .] what is the unexpected if not what reveals itself as being already expected, but only when it arrives.”⁹

It is this circular game of the discordance between knowledge and being that engages the subject when it enters analysis. In fact, Lacan says that it “grounds” the analytic operation which is, interestingly, similarly described as a game in this seminar. However, the two games operate in different ways. Lacan explains how the subject’s game with its unconscious knowledge is reliant on a hidden sleight of hand that allows the subject, to the extent that he supposes the analyst to be the knowing subject, to secretly keep his “hand in knowledge.” As he puts it, “the person holding the marbles knows whether their number is odd or even.” This then enables the subject to anticipate the unexpected and, consequently, to keep his distance from it. The analytic game, however, is characterized by an altogether different principle which Lacan describes in terms of waiting. The analytic “game” is nothing but a waiting game in which the analyst waits for the patient to show him how to act: “this is what the desire of the analyst is in its operation. To lead the patient to his original fantasy, is not to teach him anything, it is to learn from him how to act.” While the subject anticipates, and in anticipating defends himself against the unexpected, the analyst merely waits and consequently opens herself to surprise.

From here it is not difficult to see how the analyst’s “supreme complicity” with surprise, as Lacan calls it, is another way of formulating the famous emptiness of the analytic position as the object (a), which is thereby distinguished from that of the pervert.

The pervert, as object (a), is characterized by a supreme conviction that enables her to act on behalf of the Other's jouissance and become the instrument of its will. Perverse love is a love that circles around knowledge, as the perverse formula of disavowal expresses very clearly: "I *know* very well [that the woman does not have the phallus], but all the same . . .". Analytic love, on the other hand, is not interested in knowledge and its games of deception but, rather, in truth.¹⁰ Hence while the relationship of the pervert to the object (a) is one of identification — convinced it knows what the Other wants, the pervert identifies with the object (a) and becomes the instrument of the Other's will — the analyst, in the waiting game that is analysis, "ends up with something other than an identification" to the extent that the analyst is able to recognize the object (a) as a "semblance." "Love," Lacan explains in his 20th seminar "is addressed to the semblance. And if it is true that the Other is only reached if it attaches itself [. . .] to a, the cause of desire, then love is also addressed to the semblance of being." (Sem XX 92).

To unpack the implications of this, let us now imagine the analytic situation. The analyst and patient are engaged in the analytic work of love. The patient tries desperately to establish his or her own priority in the analyst's affections, wondering about the analyst's likes and dislikes, trying to comprehend the seemingly random acts of kindness and cruelty that the analyst capriciously doles out. What makes the analytic circle of rivals different from the game of forfeiture played by Zinaida with her suitors? The difference is that, like Zinaida, the analyst is in love with another, with a figure who is beyond the immediate circle. Literature, as the first love of psychoanalysis, provides the conditions under which the game of (Symbolic) comparisons can begin (and whose other

name is interpretation).

Let me try to explain. The crucial scene in the tale is when the narrator secretly follows his father down the alley and watches the older lover strike his beloved. Recall how the narrator then rushes from the scene back to the river and, with tears pouring down his cheeks, repeats to himself “they’re whipping her . . . whipping her, whipping her” (199). Yet despite displaying the hallmarks of a perverse scenario (including its ironic echo of an earlier scene in the garden when the princess lightly taps each suitor’s forehead with a pale-mauve flower), this scene differs from perversion in one crucial respect: rather than positioning the narrator as the Other for whom the perverse scenario is being staged (and whose ultimate function, as we know, is to deny or disavow feminine castration by the momentary singling out a winner (or fetish) who temporarily assumes and fills out the lack), this scene serves instead finally to extricate the narrator from the overpowering shadow of his father: by revealing that his father is castrated.

Two elements of this scene are important here. One is Zinaida’s role in causing the violent eruption. Recall how Zinaida, “saying words of only one syllable [. . .] and simply smiling – smiling submissively and stubbornly” finally forces the father to act. It is Zinaida’s interminable, senseless repetition of a word, along with her simultaneously stubborn and submissive smile that goads the father into striking her, and in that instant of acting reveals his true impotence: “My father flung the riding-crop aside and, hurriedly running up the porch steps, dashed into the house” (198). But it is this very impotence that Zinaida ultimately provokes and loves — it is indeed what every woman loves —

and this is what distinguishes the narrator's father from the rest of the band of rivals, namely, his castration. Zinaida loves the father's castration precisely because it is evidence of the fact that there is someone or something beyond him who is not castrated. His castration is the guarantee of the presence of an other "father," an exceptional, castrating but uncastrated father that Zinaida loves in and through her love for her impotent and castrated lover. One must point out here how radically different this is from the perverse play of the game of forfeits. In forfeits, the exceptional, i.e. castrated position always remains a temporary favor. Forfeits requires a black and white game of simple positives and negatives that always returns the (missing) phallus back into the unbroken circle. Any member of the band can momentarily assume the castrated position, but he will always fall back afterwards into the undifferentiated whole. The lack, in other words, is Imaginary and circulates internally within a fetishistic economy. With the narrator's father, however, the lack is Symbolic and therefore, and most vitally if we remember the lesson of Little Hans, *detachable*, enabling it to be "flung aside."¹¹ As a Symbolic lack, it bears witness to the father's Real impotence.

Secondly, although Zinaida desires a lover who will "break [her] in two", it is the narrator who ultimately comes out of the story in two halves. The evidence of this lies in the other striking aspect of this scene, namely, the very curious use of the plural form in the narrator's riverside wail: "*They're* whipping her . . . whipping her, whipping her." Why this sudden intrusion of the multiple into what is plainly an exchange between only two people? The first answer, which is clearly the narrator's own unconscious one, is that by this act the father has himself now entered the perverse circle of rivals, and become

merely one of the “many.” The dream the narrator has that night reveals just how incapable he really is of psychically assuming the new knowledge he has acquired:

That very night I dreamed a strange and awful dream. I dreamed that I went into a dark low-ceilinged room. My father was standing there with a whip in his hand and stamping his feet. Zinaida was crouching in a corner and there was a bright red weal not on her arm but her forehead. And behind both there rose the figure of Belovzorov all covered in blood, and he opened his pale lips and angrily threatened my father. (200).

Unable psychically to consent to what he has just seen, the narrator immediately resorts to the first game Zinaida has taught him and inserts the father into the band of rivals with its forfeiture economy.

But I would like to suggest another interpretation of the narrator’s interesting slip.¹² When he cries out that “they” are whipping Zinaida, it is hard not to think of the classic Freudian study, “A Child is Being Beaten.” In his fifth seminar, Lacan reads this fantasy as a kind of allegory of subject formation which takes place in three logical rather than temporal stages: my father is beating a child whom I hate, I am being beaten by my father and, finally, the fantasy’s title, a child is being beaten. The second moment, however, is permanently excluded and must be reconstructed through a complicated, a-temporal movement that goes from the third moment to the first and only then to the second.

In his reading, Lacan sees the first moment as articulating the primary

intersubjective relation between a child and a rival whereupon I, seeing my father beating the other child (a sister or brother), take this to mean that the father does not love my rival who is thereby is negated, a statement which simultaneously contains its elated obverse, namely that I, in contrast, am loved — I exist.¹³ The third moment which, as I said, occurs prior to the first and the second moments, presents an objectification of this primary relationship in the form of an external scene or an image — *a* child (i.e. an unnamed other rather than my brother or sister or myself) is being beaten and I am watching as a spectator. The second moment is the moment of cross-over between the first and third stages and is, for this reason, both necessary and fugitive as Lacan says (Sem IV, 116), and must be reconstructed, i.e. it can never be represented in either memory or words. Here the yet-to-be subject is itself being beaten and, judging by the pleasure with which the subject invests the other two moments, is also *enjoying* it. In Lacan's interpretation of "A Child is Being Beaten," this second, occluded moment thus speaks of a fundamental masochistic enjoyment that accompanies the subject's entry into language. For the fantasy, as Dominiek Hoens puts it, "is an imaginary representation of what happened to the child symbolically. The child brings into play and, one could say, fantasizes about what it means to be a subject of the Symbolic order: one is beaten away, rubbed out, by something from outside."¹⁴ Furthermore, and particularly relevantly for our purposes here, this primordial perverse enjoyment of the pounding by the paternal signifier has the result, as Lacan points out, of permanently investing language with an element of eroticism (Sem IV, 117).

Hence when the narrator uses the plural form in his agonized wail that "they" are

“whipping her,” I suggest that here we might find traces of evidence of an occlusion or repression comparable to the second moment of the “A Child is Being Beaten” fantasy. The narrator’s peculiar use of “they”, that is, provides unconscious testimony of the fact that a moment of subjectification has occurred. Although, as in the fantasy, this second moment can never be represented or put into conscious form, we can glean from the presence of the third moment – whose element of spectatorship Turgenev quite deliberately highlights when he has Zinaida framed in the window-sill and half screened by a curtain — that this must indeed have occurred. Two consequences immediately follow from this. One is that we see now that it is not Zinaida, nor the father, nor any member of the band of rivals but language itself, in its primary form of the signifier, that is the “first (perverse) love” of the text — language, that is, to the extent that in it resides the fundamental masochistic erotic fantasy in which all subsequent fantasmatic desiring “scenes” or loving representations participate. The other consequence is that it is this (per-)first love that succeeds in fracturing the One into a Two, as Badiou put it earlier. The subject having literally been broken in two, i.e. irretrievably split between the first and third components of the fantasy, the “numericity” of the amorous procedure may now begin in the form of the quantitative count to infinity of all possible successive loves.

If my construction is correct, is analytic love a (per-)first love after all? Here we must recall Lacan’s assertion that (analytic) love is addressed to a *semblance*. A semblance is a counterfeit, a double, a wraithlike form that may possess either actual or apparent resemblance to something real. A semblance thus has no being in itself aside from that which it resembles — one could say that it is *nothing but* a relation (of

similitude), which returns us to question of the emptiness of the analytic object (a). To the extent that it is a semblance, the analyst as object (a) can be inhabited effectively by anyone. That is to say, any analyst can, in principle, be “my” analyst. Analytic love does not depend upon any particular likeness (or difference) to the Real object in my life that is the support of my desire. As a semblance, the analyst as object (a) is, quite literally, ‘nothing’ aside from a relation, i.e. it is a purely formal similitude, possessing no particular content. Despite the potential for confusion between the two terms, then, the analyst as the “semblance of object (a)” embodies (the desire for) an “absolute difference,” as Lacan puts it in Seminar XI, by which I understand him to mean this: to the extent that the semblance has nothing grounding itself beyond its purely formal relation of similarity, it can never be the object of an identification. In the transference, there is nothing to identify with beyond the formal relation of likeness itself.¹⁵

But let us return to the third moment of subjectivity. When Freud discovered the deep structures of psychoanalysis in literature, he invented an Other scene for psychoanalysis in whose dim reddish light the singular shapes of his patients could emerge. The images that surfaced from this developing process are the classic psychoanalytic case histories whose doubles can be found hovering in the larger backdrop of literature. Every subject of analysis thus enters analysis against this literary scene, but it is important to emphasize that analysis has nothing to do with mapping individual subjects onto a literary template — analysis doesn’t take place inside the black and white economy of forfeits but rather in the semblances of comparisons; interpretations are not identity-seeking metaphors but likenesses, similes. Nevertheless,

without the presence of this literary Other, analysis would be caught in either an imaginary or a perverse game. The literary knowledge upon which comparisons is founded pries open what would otherwise be the closed analytic circle: either an imaginary round of hatred and rivalry, or a sado-masochistic scene of enjoyment. To change the metaphor a little, we might say that literature supplies a partially transparent, imaginary screen onto which the third moment of subjectivity can be projected, a screen that enables the generation of a plural “they” whose principal feature is that it can refer simultaneously to the singular suffering individual of analysis *and* its exemplary double in the literary typology.

What is it that prevents literature, then, from becoming either just another fetish, i.e. a temporary exception or forfeit whose sole function is to re-close the analytic circle, – or a religion, i.e. a founding exclusion that guarantees the comparison economy by ensuring that all signs, all signifieds ultimately converge upon a single point, whether we call that point God, the father, the master signifier, or the phallus? The answer lies in literature itself which, in addition to being a discourse of love, is also the discourse of subjectivity par excellence. The two things are in fact the same: the discourse of love is nothing other than the discourse of the subject *as such*.¹⁶ But for this reason, literature as psychoanalysis’ Other, remains perpetually split and, as split, can never serve entirely on one or the other side of the circle. Like a pageboy, literature is always neither fully inside nor outside the analytic loop; it constitutes an Other but this is an Other that will be eternally incomplete and self-divided. It is this internal self-division of literature, whose scars of the signifier it proudly bears, that defends the analyst as object (a) against the

acquisition of (perverse) content.

Could we not say, then, that literature is the “pageboy” of psychoanalysis?

Literature must never be separated from psychoanalysis, but nor may it ever become King to her Queen. It is marked out from all other rival discourses by a singular relation, precisely because they both possess the same first love for the signifier, for the primordial scarifying letter of language. Hence when Zinaida sees Cleopatra’s sails in the purple clouds, or when an analyst discovers a “veritable Hamlet” in one of her patients, or when a literary critic perhaps comes across an “Antigone” in a Jamesian heroine, such comparisons are no straightjackets of the imagination. Instead they are testimonies to the presence of analytic love, the love of letters in both of its senses, whose ethical function at the end of the day is to prevent the closure of the analyst and analysand’s potentially perverse loving circle. We are narrative subjects, after all, and it is only our uniquely singular narratives, awkwardly traced out in relief against our uncanny doppelgängers in the backdrop of the literary Other, that slow down if not actually stop the inexorable closing of the blind, senseless machinery of contingency that makes up life’s perverse cycle of birth and death.

Covered in rags, laid on hard boards, with a sack placed under her head [the old woman] was dying painfully and with difficulty. [. . .]. She had seen no joy in her life, had never tasted the honey of happiness – why, then, I thought, shouldn’t she be glad of death, of its freedom and its peace? And yet so long as her frail body still struggled, so long as her chest rose and fell agonizingly beneath the ice-cold hand resting on it, so long as her final strength remained the old woman went on crossing

herself and whispering: “Dear God, forgive me my sins,” and it was only with the last spark of consciousness that there vanished from her eyes the look of fear and horror at her approaching end. And I remember that as I stood there, beside the death-bed of that poor old woman, I began to feel terrified for Zinaida and I felt I wanted to pray for her, for my father — and for myself. (202)

Given that the despair of prayer has long since ceased to be an option for most of us, how then ought one to respond ethically to the escalation of the Other’s demands for more and more love? My earlier metaphor of the hostage might suggest an answer. One is a hostage, after all, only insofar as one desires to leave one’s hostage-taker. Yet what would happen if one suddenly, unexpectedly assumed the hostage-taker’s “cause”?¹⁷ What if one was to turn to one’s hostage-taker and pronounce, in a preposterous and ridiculous evocation of the lover’s solemn promise: “I swear I will never, ever leave you. Even if you kill me, my love for you will only have been made stronger, because I will have become a martyr to your cause”? Yet isn’t it something like such a radical shift in the parameters of discourse that love, to the extent that it is a *metaphor*, as Lacan tells us, succeeds in effecting? Like a metaphor, love’s substitution of *erastes* for *eromenos* produces a decisive change in the ordinary logical distance between things.¹⁸ From having been an object, one is transformed by the loving substitution into a subject that reaches back in desire. Not only does this give a new twist to the psychoanalytic imperative to become one’s own cause, i.e. one must become or adopt the particular cause that, as a hostage, one clearly already “is” (and, in the process, “give” what you don’t “have,” another Lacanian definition of love). It also provides a succinct illustration of how loving someone is, strictly speaking, an intensely *political* (rather than purely

ethical) act insofar as it radically transforms existing power relationships. As your lover-hostage, I meet your suspension of the law with an equally exceptional suspension; I subjectify, i.e. “*politivize*” your objectifying appropriation of me through an equivalently political return embrace.

To close this discussion, let us turn back to another of the narrator’s peculiar formulations. Recall how, after watching the strange scene between Zinaida and his father, the narrator reflects on the nature of love: “‘That’s what love is,’ I told myself again, sitting at night in front of my desk on which books and notebooks *had begun to appear*. ‘That’s real passion!’” (199-200, my emphasis). It is surely no coincidence that, following the (reconstructed) moment of subjectification, books and notebooks begin as if spontaneously to propagate themselves on the narrator’s desk. For while our narrator has yet to realize it, the truly loving partnership, it seems, lies in the mutual sharing of the “real passion” for the signifier that first individually marked us as speaking subjects and whose scarlet welts we now lovingly caress in our beloved’s tragic scars. Yet as it traces out the now faint ravages of the signifier, love’s hand simultaneously discovers surprising new shapes, patterns and comparisons on the body’s page. For that’s what love is: the infinitely generative source for the stories we tell about ourselves and which ultimately compose us as narrative subjects.

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Psychoanalysis and Literature, “Over de Schreef” at Ghent University 2004.

¹ I'm thinking of the recent turn toward "feeling in theory" to give it the name of Rei Terada's splendid exemplar of it in her *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the 'Death of the Subject'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001). This "turn" is seen in such divergent philosophical approaches as Luce Irigaray's *The Way of Love* (London: Continuum, 2003), Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) and Julia Kristeva's classic, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1989). A brief glance over recent titles confirms our current ethical steeping in the loving affect, see for example Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: Continuum, 2001), Roger Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love. Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights* (Wisconsin: Marquette UP, 2002). Derrida's recent work on mourning, John Protevi argues, can be regarded as one long meditation on love as the experience of originary difference. See his essay "Love" in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, ed. Paul Patton and John Protevi (London: Continuum, 2003) 195-202. Note also the recent reprint of Niklas Luhmann's, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), Paul Verhaeghe, *Love in a Time of Loneliness: Three Essays on Drive and Desire*, trans. Plym Peters and Tony Langham (London: Rebus, 1999), Michael Stocker, and Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 1996). "The Passions" was the subject of a recent UCLA Humanities Seminar (1998-9), while it seems similarly telling that the first event of Research Group on Formations of the Clinic in the Lacanian Field's "Lacan in English" seminar in 2003 was devoted to the transference, Seminar VIII and the second, in 2005, will be devoted to the Ethics Seminar.

² Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Ethical Violence," *Umbr(a): War* (2004): 75-89.

³ Alain Badiou, "What is Love?," trans. Justin Clemens, *Umbr(a)* 1 (1996): 37-53. 45.

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Vol. 1, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, rev. and foreword Howard A. Johnson (New York: Anchor, 1959) 242.

⁵ See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VIII, Le transfert*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain

Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991, 2001) 70.

⁶ In such a case, one must make a distinction between the “first love” proper, and the moment of choice where one “chooses” one’s first choice again. It is only through such a structure of repetition that one can properly marry one’s first love. For a discussion of this paradox in Henry James, see my essay, “Portrait of an Act: Aesthetics and Ethics in *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Henry James Review* 25.1 (2004): 67-86. Stanley Cavell has also devoted some attention to this seeming paradox. See his *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁷ Ivan Turgenev, *First Love and Other Stories*, trans. and intro. Richard Freeborn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁸ Interestingly, the fifth rival, the “retired captain” Nirmatsky is left out from this litany of Zinaida’s “needs”, but we know from elsewhere in the text that he is “ugly”, was made to dress as a bear and drink salt and water (161). The other four, the Hussar, the Poet, the Doctor, and the Count each appeal respectively to the competing claims made on Zinaida by warring masculinity (and economic security), art, science and class status. Furthermore, these are all instances of what Freud called “the narcissism of minor differences”: while each rival is identified from the others by the possession of certain unique characteristics, they are all materially the same when it comes to the signifying difference of the signifier, as Zinaida’s mocking reply to the narrator nicely conveys: i.e. to imagine that one is loved for one’s particular phenomenal qualities is quite as absurd (and at the same ontic level) as imagining one is loved for one’s moustache.

⁹ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XII: Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis, 1964-65*, unpublished seminar, session 19 May, 1965.

¹⁰ “Indeed, the analyst [. . .] is the one who, by putting object (a) in the place of semblance, is in the best position to do what should rightfully (*juste*) be done, namely, to investigate the status of truth as knowledge,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*, ed. J-A. Miller, trans. with notes Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998) 95.

¹¹ Recall Little Hans' fantasy of a detachable penis that would screw into his belly. For Lacan, this detachability is the primary characteristic of the Symbolic phallus, enabling it to light upon any empirical object or signifier without losing its power of negation. See Lacan's discussion of this fantasy in Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre IV: La relation d'objet*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1994) 266-7.

¹² Technically, in the original Russian, this is not really a slip. The Russian reads "Ee b'jut, dumal ja, b'jut... b'jut" which my colleague Thomas Langerak explains can be translated in two ways. The most literal is the one Richard Freeborn provides, i.e. "they are whipping her . . ." where an impersonal action is expressed in Russian in the third person plural. The other translation possibility is "she is being whipped." Even with this second translation, however, we continue to retain the sense of impersonality and objectivity that is typical of the third moment of the "A Child is Being Beaten" fantasy and whose significance I discuss below.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1998) 242.

¹⁴ Dominiek Hoens, "Hamlet and the Letter a," (*a*): *the journal of culture and the unconscious* 2.2 (2002): 91-101. 94.

¹⁵ "The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference," Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton) 276.

¹⁶ This is how I interpret Lacan's statement in *Encore* that love is a "subject-to-subject relationship," whose formula Bruce Fink writes as $S <> S$. See Bruce Fink, "Knowledge and Jouissance," in *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002) 21-45, 45. See also Lacan's statement, "In love what is aimed at is the subject, the subject as such," which he qualifies as being "nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers" as an "effect" of the signifier. *Seminar*

¹⁷ Like, perhaps, the two French journalists, Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, who were taken hostage in Iraq in protest of the French ban on Muslim headscarves in French schools in 2004. Released in the meantime, there had been rumours on the internet that they had been freed but had chosen to remain with their captors, the better to cover the Iraq war from the Iraqi perspective. It should be clear that the (impossible) gesture I am describing is radically different from what is known as the Stockholm syndrome. In the Stockholm syndrome, the hostage *identifies* with the hostage taker, in an ultimate form of self-defense. In “love”, the hostage gives up precisely all forms of identification. In the loving substitution, identity is radically suspended.

¹⁸ “[the] decisive problem that an interaction theory of metaphor has helped to delineate but not solve is the transition from literal incongruence to metaphorical congruence between two semantic fields. Here the metaphor of space is useful. It is as though a change of distance between meanings occurred within a logical space. The *new* pertinence or congruence proper to a meaningful metaphoric utterance proceeds from the kind of semantic proximity which suddenly obtains between terms in spite of their distance. Things or ideas which were remote now appear as close.” Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979) 141-57. 145. What Ricoeur ultimately calls “feeling” in this essay is thus not so far from what Lacan would call “love.” Ricoeur writes, “To *feel*, in the emotional sense of the word, is to make *ours* what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase. [. . .]. Its function is to abolish the distance between knower and known without canceling the cognitive structure of thought and the intentional distance which it implies” 154.