Love's Polysemy

What happens, for example, when one lives an event as an image? Maurice Blanchot, (SL, 261)

When I can no longer maintain my own interest in the metaphoric his sitting on the edge of the chair he simultaneously pulls up to himself from behind fascinates in the purity of its mechanics. The scene contracts perfectly to its particularities and resembles itself. In resembling itself it disappears and as it disappears reveals that here, somewhere in the course of the hour, language begins all over again. The patient comes to love the therapist and the therapist goes on to write.

This paper, which I am calling *Love's Polysemy*, elaborates on ideas I presented in an earlier paper called *Writing the Vignette*. Both papers are about writing and the special relationship I perceive between writing and psychotherapy. By 'writing,' however, I'm not referring to words on a page or the activity of inscription. Instead, I am trying to shape the vague intuition that writing is an interruption and extension that inevitably occurs when I encounter the patient. At some point my attending to what a patient says and does becomes something else. Writing is not how I reflect or record after the fact but what I always catch myself doing mid-step.

She lounges on the couch, not the way any adult would, talking about animal experimentation and putting her pony tails in her nose. She touches her fingertips, 'ensyweensy spider' style and I see myself looking at her face through the window of her hands. Langauge is more irrelevant than ever and suddenly all there is. The event interrupts itself and recedes into eventfulness.

This is my starting place: these strange and familiar moments of interruption when one thing disappears, and nothing changes, and I am writing. It is one act performed by two people; one disappears, the other writes. It is the story of Eurydice and Orpheus and it is there in every hour of psychotherapy. The patient comes to love the therapist and the therapist goes on to write.

Clinical writing is always an experiment. To practice psychotherapy is an invitation to invent new ways of writing. Between our respective theories and the poetry between us the patient and I are left to trace the contours of genre. What happens when we write about a patient? In the the turmoil that is that encounter what forms emerge when we are held between a desire to explain things when they are ideas and the demand to experience them when they are not. The therapist is like Orpheus who, in his pursuit discovers himself as the beloved and finds himself writing, endlessly, again.

The trajectory of the paper follows the story of Orpheus: love, writing, and polysemy, the term I use later to elaborate 'endlessly again.' There are four sections. The first is about love in which I consider the relation between disappearance and love; I describe part of a visit I had with a twelve year boy; and recall a time while walking in the woods when I heard a sound coming from a bush. In the second section I relate the receiving of the patient's love to my own act of writing and describe another visit with a different boy. In the third section of the paper I introduce the word 'polysemy' as a way to imagine what happens to language when writing is the receiving of love and I describe part of another hour with yet a different patient. In the fourth and last section of my paper I come back to thinking about the nature of playing.

"It is not a miscarried knowledge that love is love." (EI, 67)

'The patient comes to love the therapist and the therapist goes on to write.' When we speak of love in the clincial context it is usually imaginary. The patient is transferring or enacting something infantile, erotic, romantic, perverse, or perhaps even platonic. Eventually we may experience and talk about what we call the 'real relationship;' an authentic mutual love. But the encounter itself, that which goes beyond the relationship that enjoys the luxury of context or reference, is something, I propose, between one infinite and another. Subject and object, self and other, even the idea of beings or existants seems to leave most of it out. Love, as Winnicott puts it, is originally "ruthless," and, I would add, perfectly anonymous.

When Orpheus turns to look at Eurydice and she is not there, it is in her disappearance that everything else appears. Orpheus is no longer the recipient of an individual's ('imaginary') love, but now faced with the disappearance accomplished by her otherness, he is now merely, and entirely, the 'beloved.' A status that is beyond even his own presence. Levinas writes that love: "It is the relationship with alterity, with mystery - that is to say, with the future, with what (in the world where there is everything) is never there, with what cannot be there when everything is there . ." (*TO*, p. 88). To become the beloved is to encounter that different everything; what is there when nothing is there. It is not the patient's hope, but rather the demand of the situation of 'ruthless' anonymous love itself that makes for the disappearance of the one and its replacement with the everything that is the treation of the beloved.

A twelve year old boy asks me: "has last week's creation been detroyed?" He's talking about the hexagonal cyclinder of magnetic ball bearings he made the week before that has, in fact, disappeared into a rough and shiny heap. He's curious about the other boy who comes in after he leaves. Is he the one who destroyed it? What did he make? Does

he play with the magnets at all? What does he play with? What do I do with him? What is it I do with each child that comes to see me? He's asking me all these questions without looking up from what he's doing. It takes me a little while because at first I am distracted by the questions, but eventually I notice he's rebuilt the cyclinder but that as he continues working, taking away from its width to extend its height it is disappearing. When I ask he explains, again without looking up, that if he keeps going all he'll have will be a single strand. What he is making he is making disappear. As he makes nothing appear I am drawn into a world of relentless transformations where there is nothing to turn away from, and so no turning away.

Orpheus turns to look at Eurydice and because she is not to be seen he is, instead, seen by everything else. He is listened into the world. Fascination obscures context and substitutes multiplicity. In Blanchot's words: "When concealment appears, concealment, having become appearance, makes 'everything disappear,' but of this 'everything has disappeared' it makes another appearance." (*SL*, 253) These are the circumstances of the beloved.

I am walking on a path by some woods. I have reached a place where things change. The trees crowd here and there are more shadows. If there's been rain, a puddle forms at this bend which is also the beginning of an incline. This is where, for some reason, the dogs always get excited. Just now I hear a rustling in the bushes, and turn, and almost at the same time see a small bird come flying out. This moment of rustling and flight is one of confusion and two outcomes. First there is interpretation, the familiarity of narrative: it was the bird moving in the bush that made the rustling sounds. But before that: bird, rustling, dogs and trees, darkness and the path's turning up are relentlessly independently infinite; loosened from one another, extending and touching one thing after another. The end of story is the beginning of writing.

Section Two – Writing

Blanchot has written that: "... one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write, one has to write already." (*SL*, 176)

"To write already" is also to write again. When the boy sitting on his chair or the magnets disappear, the scene contracts perfectly to its particularities, and I find myself in that position I inevitably always assume that I am calling 'writing.' As the beloved we accept a relationship with that which has no origin or direction and in this situation where things resemble themselves our noticing becomes a writing. Our sentences are contiguous with whatever they describe. Language is what is in the room.

Beyond the urgency of meeting each other, we are at any given moment likely to experience the world encountering itself. 'Love' is a word that can easily take us back to the comfort of humanism but which I am using here to refer to something radically different: an event we manifest and witness but for which we cannot claim intention. It is post-humanist and calls to my mind Blanchot's notion of 'the relation of the third kind' which he describes as ". . . a relation of impossibly and strangeness – [which] . . . originates only in the space and time of language – there where language, through writing, undoes the idea of origin." (IC, 71) 'Writing' is the extension of a love that unsubjects us. It is our proximity to that gap between us. As the beloved to write is ultimately an ethics because it is the encounter with the other that preserves otherness.

I can hear him before I can see him. His footsteps, like leaps across a rushing stream, or the final strides before a layup, or a predator's pounce, stop right outside my door. My own measured steps meet his when I open the door. There is already more arrival than the visit could hope to hold. He walks past me and asks if I remember that he is nine. The kind of greeting we've exchanged since he was seven. Then he asks for the purple pen and the drawings that have accumulated and that I've saved for weeks. The book he is writing and illustrating, again and again, is the story of Chicken Little. Drawings of

increasing sophistication and humor that accompany words that never change. I have thought about the revival of his development in my company against the nearly impassable anxiety of recalling his sky falling, but waching the way he draws reminds me again how relatively uninteresting these thoughts are compared to trying to see what is happening. I watch him draw. He makes me sit across the office and wait for each drawing he runs over to me as soon as it's done. From where I watch him draw I can see a little of the drawings on the paper, but I also see the drawings in his finger curling his hair and the drawings he makes, the moment he's done with paper, in the air with the pen he flourishes with even greater strokes. Maybe it's a dance, not a drawing, but it is the dance that erases any distinctions.

In the first line of his uncategorizable work, *Awaiting Oblivion*, Blanchot writes: "Here, and on this sentence that was perhaps also meant for him, he was obliged to stop." (*AO*,1) Writing is not what one does but where one stops; where one discovers onself capitvated by the unobservable gaze of the other. What fascinates me, writes me writing. Writing already, and again, we are caught continuing what never ceases. When the rustling bush does not give itself to causality, as the antecedent to a flying bird, or a patient's gestures refuse to become a metaphor for something else, then a boy's variation on the theme of sitting in a chair is contiguous with my own sentences which do and do not describe him. Writing is the return to the event that resembles itself and the stance one inevitably assumes in a place, like the therapeutic hour, where we are inevitably the beloved.

Three - Polysemy

"The ordeal of the end's absence." (Blanchot, SL, 172)

Although in the dictionary, 'polysemy' is a noun denoting 'many meanings,' of the words I have wrestled with and bent out of shape in this paper (love and writing so far), it is the most problematic. As a word about other words there is a way it escapes the dictionary. It

refers to a 'many' that is not the opposite of one. As one approaches the semantic horizon of a particular word multiplicity is not a function of the addition of more meanings but the interruption of a greater gravity. Polysemy only pretends to be a term for an effect within the language we always use when it is really a reference to what is just beyond.

The poet, Paul Celan, speaks of polysemy in this way: "I don't musicalize anymore, as at the time of the much-touted "Todesfuge," which by now has been threshed over in many a textbook . . . As for my alleged encoding, I'd rather say: Polysemy unmasked, thus corresponding exactly to my sense of the intersection of ideas (*Begriffsuberschneidung*), the overlapping of relations. [You are aware of the phenomenon of interference, the effect of waves of the same frequency coming together] . . . I try to reproduce cuttings from the spectral analysis of things, to show them in several aspects and permeations at once . . . I see my alleged abstractness and ambiquity as moments of realism." (*Selections*, 34-5)

There is a great deal to be taken from Celan's description. The phrases: "the intersection of ideas," "the overlapping of relations," and "several permeations at once," are helpful in my being able to express a strange and vaguely incorrect intuition about language and polysemy. There is a sense that language always has direction; as subtle as gravity. There's always an 'A' that leads to or addresses a 'B.' Communication implies a 'two' and a 'between.' Sentences point. I would propose, however, a counterpoint. The sentence is spring-loaded. This is not the opposite direction, or the opposite of direction, but a directionlessness in motion. In other words, the plurality or multiplicity associated with polysemy comes from a doubling of listening; the experience beyond experience of listening to the other listening to me. Polysemy is language going in two directions at once and then all directions at the same time. But, more importantly, the polysemous is grounded in our willingness to listen, to listen to being listened to; a willingness to receive the other perpetually. In this sense, polysemy is the essence of writing as an ethics. It is the mark of love on language. It is what happens to language when it is the

response to the situation of becoming the beloved. An inversion of witnessing which is a 'being listened into the world.'

In terms of what hits the page polysemy is not just the many but is writing's unmooring from the one; from genre, voice, direction or chronology. To turn, as Orpheus does, and face the other's now anonymous and ubiquitous gaze, and then – inevitably - to write, is to discover polysemy as the substituting of a univocal subjectivity for experience that inevitably always includes but fails to hold. Polysemy itself is never represented but left behind and 'remembered' in each metaphor's shortcoming. In our case, the boundaries between theory and poetry buckle a little and things themselves drift forward to intrude.

It all goes into the bag in the end, then behind the couch, not to be seen, or as far as anyone knows, given another thought for the next week. I hold it open just under the table's edge while he sweeps whatever is unused, still in doubt but a possibility, into the same plastic bag that we've used for the last six months. These remnants and promises are nothing yet; they exist in suspension; in a perfect state of transitionality. The bag is a metaphor for where we leave things and because we leave them the end of metaphors as well; 'an interruption of the incessant, and the incessant interrupting,' to paraphrase Blanchot.

Meanwhile, there's progress: trucks that carry smaller trucks, and boats; any of which may someday show up at a disaster, although one that is presently unnamed and far off. Before these latest vehicles there was one giant truck that hid behind my couch for months. That one was disassembled and its pieces recycled and now he suddenly remembers we never took a picture of it. Now it becomes a loss. A tree that falls in the forest, when there is no one there to hear it, is the only one that makes a sound.

There's more: he says he ran the mile again but this time it didn't hurt. He's got the right shoes. He tells me about the man at the store who studied his walk and recommended this particular pair. But I remember this part: he's run the mile before and it didn't hurt; and I

knew about the shoes. There's a funny backspin to his story that interrupts the otherwise perfect notion of 'forward.'

Another thing (the serial trumps the sequential and the object replaces the word): alongside the trucks and their part (chasis, wheels, sterring wheels) there's a funny, useless circular piece we'd considered once but never included, or – for that matter - excluded from the plastic bag. I point to it now and he squints and does a quick back and forth once of the head to indicate 'no.' But in a funny way, I still love this piece and in the prismatizing that we would recognize in listening to a dream, our keeping it on the table while doing nothing with it becomes our simply loving each other still. Each of us slipping away like Eurydice and each of us turning like Orpheus. With none of this in mind then, I make a larger opening for it on the crowded table. And there is never mention that over the course of the hour, parallel to our working on the truck, we add bits and pieces to that round one, eventually naming it a 'merry-go-round,' and his finally placing it in a clearing he makes on the shelf over my desk.

Section Four - Playing

Imagine yourself in a theatre. The house lights are already down. The orchestra has stopped tuning and fidgeting. The conductor is standing at the podium and slowly raises her arms. This is 'the upbeat;' that which precedes the beginning. That time in which everything is happening already, simultaneously, and forever. What happens next is the beginning. Not only of the music, but also of the 'everything-already-all-the-time-forever that comes before. It is, strangely, this initiation of something that accounts for the essential nothing. It might be conceived as Winnicott's 'spontaneous gesture' meets Levinas' 'il y a.' It is how I understand 'playing' as the nothing we do.

In the end I always say something: "I suppose if I won the lottery I would invest the money into research on anti-gravity technology," I say when he reminds me that I haven't answered his question about what I would do with ten million dollars. I have some idea where this is going (facing the risk of feeling hope; grieving the loss of one's omnipotence; together), but his reminder is, more importantly, that things simply have to keep going. And it 'goes' better, in my opinion (and this is why I wrote this paper), if I can be aware of that element of the purely 'extensive' nature of my contribution rather than imagining it as some kind of shape, explanation, reflection, or truth. The bush is followed by a bird which, in turn, is followed by something else. We turn, Eurydice is no longer there, and we are doing something else.

Something will slip back to what it is. I am turning in my hands a twenty-four sided paper form I sat and watched him make and which he left me as a gift. But the thing, in its presence, obscures itself. It is only when I write about it that it disappears in order to appear. To write, or to name, is not to install it within some narrative which integrates it and gives it legitimacy. Rather, to write, or to make an image, is always also to interrupt the narrative and establish the thing as merely that to begin with. To quote Blanchot: "In the image, the object again grazes something which it had dominated in order to be an object – something counter to which it had defined and built itself up. Now that its value, its meaning is suspended, now that the world abandons it to idleness and lays it aside, the truth in it ebbs, and materiality, the elemental, reclaims it. This impoverishment, or enrichment, consecrates it as image." (SL, 256)

While the patient relies on the therapist for his interpretations to demonstrate and cultivate a symbolic capacity that is the foundation of the language shared by selves, at the same time the relationship itself, which is just the one loving the other, demands the discovery of images that are the disappearance of the object. This is the strange abandonment that is playing. It matters that we understand one another; that we hear the music once the conductor lowers the baton, but "so much depends," as the poet once said, on our listening to things that disappear as they remain just what they are. 'The patient

loves the therapist,' the encounter that is between us and beyond us, and 'the therapist goes on to write,' to make images that are now things that surround and welcome us 'already-all-the-time-forever.'

There are limits to what we can propose. Whatever I have expressed in the essay I have just read to you about the meaning of love, the nature of writing, polysemy, or playing I did not intend as arguments but rather as loosenings. We will all, including myself, go on to anthropomorphize love; to think we wrote what we thought; to count many as the opposite of one; and to play by the rules. I did not expect any of us to change our minds. But these unfamiliar configurations we have briefly entertained - love without subjects; writing as the stance one inevitably assumes; playing as abandonment - have been exactly that, new and temporary arrangements. Things go back to the way they were, after they disappear.

[When he writes about writing he is either, or both, philosopher and/or artist. But what he writes, and the way he writes, whether within or between these genres causes writing to disappear. It is not the simple words on a page or the placing them there; Blanchot turns writing into the pure event that precedes, surrounds, and follows it. Writing disappears and takes everything with it. It is the event that occurs in the encounter that is no longer a relationship; when a person draws a picture right in front of you that no one can see.]

[On this particular occasion, but what I believe to be true on every other occasion as well, I also saw the bird go one way and the rustling continue to go in its own direction. One thing was added to another, really the beginning of everything being added to everything, rather than one thing following another and therefore making an event out of it. I suppose we could say that sounds in the forest do exist but (and I would add, and this important, thankfully) have nothing to do with falling trees. Reflection, mine in this case, is exactly that, the thing stopped in its tracks and sent back to where it came from. At the same time the thing itself is exactly what continues on its own trajectory.]

And Blanchot, who writes: There is a reason children love riddles. An answer might be straight forward, but our getting to it should reassure us that it is not. The relationship Levinas speaks of with what Blanchot says appears in its disappearance is, in my own words, the other who always remains so. This is the relationship the patient asks for when they come and when we stand and turn to see them and they are not where we thought we'd find them. It is our willingness to be loved by them before and after our knowing them.

Love is neither knowledge nor its opposite; nor – I would say by way of extension – is it erotic, romantic, platonic, attached, preverse or otherwise. It would seem Levinas is defining love as its own definition; "love is love," he says. This 'contraction' or equivalence suggests to me that love is that which is beyond the domain of subjective experience or act; it is less a quality of, or an event within, a relationship with an other than the encounter that results in the expansion of the subject into something other; something that I would call the 'beloved.' It is an approach that becomes a withdrawl that allows for a movement. This is the story of Orpheus who goes to Hades to retrieve Eurydice who follows him until he turns to see if she is there. Eurydice is Eurydice because she is unseen; no longer what he can imagine, but what he must simply acknowledge as there (perhaps Levinas would say "il y a"). The moment of his turning, which is as Blanchot points out, predetermined or part as it were of the original plan, is Eurydice's return to Hades and preserves Orpheus as the purely beloved while it perpetuates him as poet.]

[this is how this boy makes me the beloved; by letting everything touch everything; the pressure of all things]

It is here I find myself when the boy at the table draws.

First: A Preface

It would make perfect sense that I should tell you what, at least I think, I'm up to. The best word I can (could) choose to do that would be 'playing;' I am playing. It is the best word, but as the word 'best' would imply, it is also inadequate. I don't think we ought to hold that against the word 'playing' as it is more likely the manner in which we listen that to words in general that creates the difficulty; too much attention to direction, not enough to the movement itself.

Twenty some years ago I read some of the things Winnicott had to say about playing: that is was out of this activity that a person's sense of feeling real could emerge; that psychotherapy existed in the overlap of two areas of playing, the patient's and the therapist's; and that all therapies aspired to playing.

One, A Preface, In Dialogue

- It makes perfect sense that I should tell you what I am doing.
- What are you doing?
- I'm playing?
- What's 'playing?'
- Good question. Hard to say. Not what you're thinking.
- I'm listening.
- Winnicott wrote that playing is that activity out of which a sense of feeling real could emerge; that people's areas of playing should overlap; and that, at the beginning, it is better not to ask if what you are playing with is something you made or something you found.
- That sounds like it should make sense, but it's theoretical.
- You're right, let me try again. Since I was a child I have had the experience of things around me sometimes seeming to play a game of 'peek-a-boo.' For a moment something I'm looking at stands out, stands apart from itself. Then it slips back into itself, as if nothing happened. A movement too small to have been a movement. An event in which all that has occurred is eventfulness itself. For a

moment it was merely, and more, than the thing, for having seemed to whisper its own word for itself.

- Do you answer?
- Good question. Hard to say. When each thing constitutes its own language, lasting only as long as we speak, I can do nothing but answer, and do without end. [Blanchot writes: "One writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write one has to write already." (176, *SL*)] But playing is nothing we do; it is the 'spontaneous gesture' of the 'inifinte conversation.'

[Answering suggests coming afterward; something outside or other than myself who is still and was always speaking. [listened into speech] from Language is different when everything is already talking. And I always feel invited to.]

When I finally relinquish my interest in the metaphoric, his sitting on the edge of the chair that he simultaneously pulls up to himself from behind, is just this: fascinating in the purity of its mechanics. While I wonder: 'how this becomes my next sentence.' This is my starting place: 'the patient comes to love the therapist; [and] the therapist goes on to write.'

I will need to explain what I mean by love, what it has to do with writing and how I imagine both inevitably meeting in the conducting of a psychotherapeutic relationship.

I have made a proposal: 'the patient comes to love the therapist; the therapist goes on to write,' and propositions are misleading

What is 'purely mechanical' in its making absent any intention, meaning, or communication, is pure in its presence. But as I turn, he disappears into the next thing

he's doing and what was there a moment ago is gone as it remains just as it was. And all of this is something he gives me.

This is my starting place: events like these that Interrupt to slip or turn away while beckoning me to make them into images. [As therapists we are also always Orpheus.]

Although propositions are misleading and [my experience as a psychotherapist has been to seee the need to discover another way of writing.

[The work of the psychotherapist is many things: diagnosis, formulation, and interpretation, if not necessary are inevitable. But at its heart, I believe, we are always retelling ourselves the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, the classic struggle between knowing and loving.]

[The other refusing to be anything other; leaving me with nothing but an entirely new relationship with my own sentences. This is, of course, the timeless situation of Orpheus and Eurydice, but is, as well, mine and many of my patients on a daily basis.]

Because I am writing about writing, my own writing shows the effect. Looking at these pages, from which I am about to read, I see what you may only hear. Paragraphs that lack indentation. Those helpful tabs and slots, like the ones that keep cereal boxes closed, are the visual representation of the steps in propositional discourse and create the flow that is narration. Without them a text looks and sound more like a stack of ideas than a sequence of thoughts; not so much film as snapshots. Continuity is forestalled and is replaced by the interruption of perpetual beginning. What better way to call attention to the idea of interruption than to interrupt? But this doesn't last long. There are limits to what we can propose but we relentlessly listen propositionally. Things start up again. And yet it is

when we write that we feel the pull between direction and whatever stillness was there already. Closing the indent leaves the paragraph where it was and gives something of the sense of another way of watching something happen.