1

SOLUNA

Dissolution and Flow in *Sleep*, *O*, and *Light*

"A consciousness disjunct / Being but this overblotted / Series / Of intermittences . . ."

(Pound, *Mauberley*)

"white diagonal lines / ravel without gathering . . ."

(Morrison, *Sleep*[1])

Madison Morrison has been working on a poetic project so vast in scope as to be, it may seem, difficult to "encompass" even through a combination of critical approaches. ("The compass / opens / black and white triangles / collapse into white spheres . . ."[2]) But what less could we expect from a literary life's work that aims at capturing or expressing "the divine"? SOLUNA (SOL/LUNA, Sun/Moon) represent(s) the first two of seven stages, each a god's or goddess' name, of the cosmological epic **Sentence of the Gods**. The gods who utter and/or are uttered by the **Sentence** are SOL, LUNA, ARES, HERMES, HERA, APHRODITE, EL, all (except EL/SOL) interconnected by initial or final letters: the final A of LUNA serves, for instance, as the initial A of ARES, the final S of ARES as the final S of HERMES. This crossword-puzzle "jointness" or "doubleness" of the key letters, one of which is the binding L of SOLUNA—echoed on another lexical-morphemic level[3] by the **Sentence**'s ultimate sequence, EL—suggests differentiation as well as fusion. Sun and Moon must, after all, be distinct before they can combine in the rhythmic cosmic cycle (also that of waking and sleeping) "spelled out"[4] by the words that utter/are uttered by the letters of their names: the first ten words of *this* sentence (corresponding to Sol, Luna, Ares) are "Sleep O Light U Need A Revolution Each Second."

Any attempt to interpret the entire **Sentence** would need to begin from the conjunction or intersection of spatiality and verbal language (textuality) as suggested by this crossword-puzzle design that permeates, circumscribes, names (utters) the whole. Yet the **Sentence** as spoken utterance or *parole* also implies temporality; Morrison's is (like all great epic poems) preeminently a mythic and *cosmological* work, driven like all cosmologies by a cosmogonic or generative force that is fundamentally spatio-temporal. Thus my interpretation of Morrison's epic in this book will set out, at the most general level, to elucidate its intersections of space, time and language, its fundamentally spatio-temporal-textual nature.

SOLUNA (even by its title) immediately brings us into the sphere of cosmogony and cosmology: to venture an interpretation of it (and beyond it of the **Sentence**) we would most naturally begin with the moon/sun/moon (sleep/waking/sleep) or sun/moon/sun cycle or "revolution" which is repeated on various levels, with various tones or frequencies of reverberation, through-out all the stages or sequences of the **Sentence**. This cyclic repetition of

opposites implies both conjunction and disjunction. Becoming, change or flow has been taken, after all, ever since early Greek thought in the West and the Chinese *I Ching* in the East as an identity of opposites. Thus Heracleitus (at least on Hegel's much later reading in the *Science of Logic*) sees the Logos or "measure of change" as the identity of Being and Non-Being; Lao Tzu's Tao can be read in very much the same light (or same obscurity) as Heracleitus' Logos, for it has its earlier ground in the *I Ching* where the heaven/earth, light/dark, male/female, *yang/yin* polarity becomes the cosmic life-flow. But Morrison's SOLUNA is the first stage of the **Sentence** and thus, we may assume, in some sense the stage that generates (or procreates) the following stages, or expresses within itself the subsequent divine names or words. Therefore in the context of this initial stage (actually a double-stage) we must at the outset also consider the notion of "creation" itself.

Does sun generate moon, or moon generate sun, or are they not both, like Earth and Heaven at the opening of Hesiod's *Theogony*, generated out of the yawning gap of Chaos?[5] The figure "yawning gap" is not idly used here: the Greek *Xaos* is tied back to the Indo-European base *gheu*, "to gape," whence Old Norse *gaula*, "howl" and "gum," by extension "yawning gap" or "mouth."[6] Then we might more naturally think of Hesiod's chaotic "background" of Earth/Sky as a primeval disorder or mixture, out of which Earth and Sky are "distinguished" or "ordered," but Cornford among others takes Chaos as a Gap, as the paradoxically pre-existing difference (or "space") between Earth/Sky. Similarly Lao Tzu's Tao is both a *wu hun ch'eng*, "thing confusedly formed"—which could be interpreted as a Chaos but also as a Cosmos (the Greek term *Kosmos* just means "order")—and the *t'ien ti chih chien*, "Sky-Earth Difference," which again might be seen as Order and/or Disorder.

The idea of change, flow or becoming as a cyclic repetition of Nothing/Being (dark/light, moon/sun, earth/sky) is already an idea of the *difference* between the opposed terms, and this might seem the most obvious starting point for a cosmogonically-grounded interpretation of SOLUNA. Indeed the above-quoted lines from near the beginning of *Sleep*, "The compass / opens / black and white triangles / collapse into white spheres . . . ," lend themselves to just such a reading. Yet the movements of "opening" and "collapse" here might also be seen in terms of a chaotic or disordered background that subsequently self-orders into the opposed terms (sky/earth, white/black, light/dark, sun/moon) and then "dissolves" again. Chaos as indeterminate background[7] for a process of self-ordering or self-generation is also suggested by the opening line of *Sleep*, the first book of SOLUNA: "white diagonal lines / ravel without gathering . . ." Such a model is after all one way of looking at sun/moon difference as the alternation of sun (now taken as "order") and moon (as "disorder" . . . or *vice versa*.)

In the non-linear-dynamics-based chaos theory of contemporary physics as explicated by Serres (who is referring back to the poet Lucretius and the chemist Prigogine among others), all "bodies" self-order through repetition (thus becoming temporally irreversible) out of random (and temporally reversible) flows of atoms, back into which they will again decay. All orders are thus temporary orders of disorder, just as disorders are temporary disorders of order, and the "direction of flow" (chaos to order or order to chaos) may be so hard to determine that the two directions are virtually indistinguishable. Furthermore, for Serres all sounds/languages/meanings are tuned in out of background noise like stations out of static on a radio and "decay" back again into this noise.[8] The sound or meaning emerging out of noise becomes in effect, at its highest degree of refinement or "attunement," human logic or rationality; and yet in Serres' view (see *The Parasite, Genesis*) hyper-rationality becomes (as hyper-repetition) nonsensical redundancy and thus begins to decay back into disorder. We thus have, in effect, three flows: the random flows of primordial or "dark" chaos, the flow from dark chaos to order and then hyper-order through the repetition of elements, and the flow from hyper-order ("blank" chaos in Serres) back into disorder (see note 8).

One way of looking at the rhythmic cycle of sun/moon alternation is then as a flow or process of self-ordering out of disorder followed inevitably by the process of dissolution or decay back again into chaos—where traditionally sun (male, rational principle) would probably be correlated with order and moon with disorder, though one could think of it the "other way around" as well. (Indeed, chaos theory tends to reinforce the notion of just such an order-disorder "*Gestalt*-switch" effect.) As noted in the brief discussions of astrophysical "cosmology" in Chapters 4 and 6, the once-dominant Big Bang theory saw the universe as beginning with an explosion from a single point into ever-expanding entropic disorder, at some point (perhaps) to be followed by contraction back into this single, highly-ordered source, after which (perhaps) another cycle of expansion (increasing disorder) will occur. Even if such a model were the virtual equivalent of the chaos-theory model just outlined (which it probably is not), contemporary M theory (or string theory) in physics posits a multiverse or pluriverse; while there seems to be an over-all ongoing expansion (at an accelerating rate) of the parts of the universe most distant from us with no clear indication of a future slowing down, let alone a return-to-origin, it also seems there may be expansions and contractions (or collapses) going on at various "points" in space (and at various rates) simultaneously, depending on the degree of (positive or negative) "vacuum energy" at that point. (Vacuum energy is posited as a force that counteracts gravitational attraction or "contraction.")

In this book, then, beyond attempting to elucidate the spatio-temporal-textual nature (or "texture") of Morrison's "totalized" text via a combination of

critical approaches, I will mainly focus on a reading of the **Sentence** that notes the more localized patterns of flow-and-dissolution (order, hyper-order and disorder; randomness, rationality and redundancy) within the various books that make up the several stages or sequences of the epic. However, I will also suggest, somewhat more tentatively, an over-all interpretation of the **Sentence** that sees it as moving in general from dark chaos (SOLUNA) through "order" (epitomized by the opening book, *Her*, of HERA) to blank chaos (EL). Morrison claims that his **Sentence** is *reversible* (we can also begin from EL and end with SOLUNA), an idea that fits with the praxis of moment-to-moment self-realization ("*a revolution each second*"); it may also fit (in some way) the chaos-theory notion that dark (and/or blank) chaos comprises temporally (as well as spatially) reversible flows, thereby reinforcing one's sense of the suitability (or at least possibility) of a chaos-theory approach. (The subsequent discussion of this chaos-theory reading of the entire **Sentence**'s "flow-pattern" will mainly take place in Chapters 4 and 6.)

By definition an "epic" is a long work that "contains everything" (history, politics, culture, art, religion, philosophy, science), and the chaotic cosmos of Morrison's **Sentence** contains a vast and complex mixture of many textual forms, styles and techniques. Of the three books of SOLUNA that I shall be concerned with here, *Sleep* and *Light* present us with lyric poetry in a modernist (e.g. imagist) and/or postmodernist style; *A* is something quite different, more experimental, perhaps (in its self-parodying and breaking down of the textual boundary) more overtly postmodern. In this first chapter, then, I will present an extended close reading of the initial three sequences of the first book of SOLUNA, *Sleep*, in which the logic of excluded (A or not-A) and included (A and not-A) *middles* will be foregrounded. I will then present a much more concise and generalized interpretation of SOLUNA's middle and final books, *Light* and *A*, one that will bring into play the model of order-disorder repetition, now seen also in terms of the problem of included and excluded middles. For if sleep is the disorder that precedes the moment of self-ordering (rational consciousness, wide-awakeness, the light in "*Sleep O Light*"), it is also the disorder that follows this moment, and as such it is the middle between the two lights (a night between two days), preceding (as disorder) and generating the possibility of day/light/being; its counterpart is the wide-awakeness of sun and light, which similarly stands (as the blank chaos of hyper-order on the Serresian reading) between two darknesses, two states of Sleep. *Sleep* itself can then be read as a "middle" both excluded (the process of logical ordering which becomes indistinguishable from *Light*) and included (the "logical disorder" of the primal beginning which, as we shall see, is repeated with variation in SOLUNA's sixth and final book, *A*).[9]

Sleep

Sleep[10] opens with "10 FINGERS,"[11] which itself opens with these lines:

> white diagonal lines / ravel without gathering / a shingled roof / flat grey cloud / fine funicular / sides / saturated red / basin below / dawn / herringbone suit / mended jacket / back to the sleeper / an ax / hacking branches / out of the tree crotch / wine without cheese

The "funicular" followed by the "sleeper" suggest that we (the speaker but also reader) may be on a train blasting forward: the view up-track takes the form of "white diagonal lines" that "ravel without gathering"; this suggests the train as spacecraft (see the final segment of *Space Odyssey*, "Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite"), before we land abruptly, breathing loudly within our helmets, in a seventeenth century French drawing room. Beginning *in medias res*, in the midst of a life's journey, is an epic motif of Homer's *Odyssey* ("Sing in me, Muse . . . the story of . . . the wanderer, who . . . after he plundered . . . saw the townlands"), nicely echoed in Pound's rendering of the aftermath of the Circe episode at the opening of Canto 1: "And then went down to the ship, / Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and / We set up mast and sail on that swart ship . . ." Such motion is further condensed and attenuated, away from narrative into pure stream-of-consciousness, into pure phenomenological experience by Williams at the opening of *Paterson* II.1 ("Sunday in the Park"): "Outside / outside myself / there is a world, / he rumbled, subject to my incursions— / a world / (to me) at rest, / which I approach / concretely." It is still further condensed and attenuated by Morrison, whose own series of intermittences here lacks even a subject, just the onrushing form of space itself, "lines / ravel without gathering"[12]), motion condensed to its bare (objective) reality, visual space at time t (the moment). Abstract painting that freezes the moment; sculpted form. Lessing: painting catches the total body but only at a single moment, poetry catches only the partial body at each instant but moves through points of time. Morrison's "sculptural forms" in *Yesterday* echo Pound in *Mauberley*, where he wants not a "prose kinema" but the "'sculpture' of rhyme."

But Morrison's "sculptural form" is after all (and not just in Pound's derogatory sense) a "kinema," a dynamic flow already decaying or "unraveling" into a series of still shots, that is, a force field of "diagonal lines" that "ravel without gathering / a shingled roof / flat grey cloud." The Indo-European base of "shingle'" is "*(s)k(h)end*," "to split, whence scatter," and in its second sense "shingle" means "large, coarse, waterworn gravel as found on a beach," "an area, as a beach, covered with this." "Ravel" as a noun means "loose thread" and so as a verb (just as "thread" becomes "to thread" and perhaps also "to unthread") has a self-contradictory or self-deconstructing, aporistic sense: it means both "to make complicated or tangled, involve" and "to separate the

parts, especially threads of, untwist, unweave, unravel" where the second meaning can suggest both "to make clear, disentangle" (as in scientific analysis) and "to become unwoven, fray" (as in chaotic decay).[13] The "fine funicular / sides" reinforce such a reading: a "funicular train" is drawn by cables ("funicular" means "of, worked by or hanging from a cord or cable"; *funis* is "cord" or "rope," "funicle" is "little cord or fiber, thread" (something very *fine*) and specifically a "funiculus" ("a small bundle of nerve fibers; a division of the white matter of the central nervous system; *obsolete*: the umbilical or spermatic cord"[14]). The "sides" of the train-car itself are already decayed/decaying into "white lines," into a kind of microcosmic or microscopic structure of elements; these "sides" are already "saturated" (completely filled because thoroughly penetrated, as with two liquids or substances that fully intermix, because each has dissolved into the other and so itself become neutralized). Forms (figures) are here then always already in motion and always already displaced, or (like night/day, moon/sun) intermixed. But this displacement or intermixing, perceived all along by an absent subject, is also the displacement/intermixing of subject and object—"light / across the subject / light yellow an / occasional rose / light is bent by gravity / brains work in a similar way / experience / displaced into new forms . . ." (FINGER 3)—where it must create (at least at the atomic level) problems of (Heisenbergian) "uncertainty."

We get "cables" again, and (space) vehicles (vehicles moving through space), and the problem of macro/microscopic perception at the opening of *Yesterday*, the second sequence of *Sleep*, cast in the context ("yesterday" as perhaps the 1950s, to say nothing of the total accumulated past) of satellite "spying":

> A mule satellite floats over Naples / hearing its own brays with rabbit ears. / Its radish blue, blue-black eyes are dotty. / Its stonily terrified reddish face / nibbles the tip top of Texas, bats at / the flat sear-face rabid inner head, / turning the motorized platform . . . / If eyes are large human eyes with lashes / (emphasis on woundability), / over Broadway oozily secreting / needlepoint mist . . . / the globular excrescences are men . . . / But, they deliquesce . . .

Here we have the macro/microcosmic/scopic point of view of a spy satellite encircling the earth, or of someone on top of the Empire State Building looking down at the pavement below. Or perhaps the perspective of an alien or non-human life form, a giant or miniscule insect: in FINGER 4 we get "a golden / slug dot dot / the fish on fire / antennae retract . . ." But who is spying on whom? Back to the subject-object dialectic: "Across / the street, someone is observing spies. / You give yourself away" ("PRESCRIPTION" in *A Warfilm Is a Peacefilm*). "Deliquesce" (from *liquere*, "to be liquid") returns us to the fine (biochemical) analysis of what someone's (say a rabbit's or insect's) perception might actually look like: it means "to melt away (in the course of growth or decay)"; "to branch into many fine divisions, as leaf veins"; "to become liquid by absorbing moisture from the air." The first and second senses

suggest our analysis of the opening lines of FINGER 1 (that finger pointing perhaps at moon or satellite) in terms of the (un)raveling of (life's) funicular threads or shingles; the third suggests clouds in the sky but also reminds us of that other earth-circling, night-spying orb, pulled by the alternating (funicular) cables or (centripetal/fugal) forces of gravity, LUNA, who (especially in her feminine aspect) is associated with liquidity, the chaotic madness of the tides. But this cosmic deliquescence (dissolution or intermixing) must be seen in the context of the "orogeny" that Morrison introduces into the later "ESSE" ("being" or "essence") section of *Yesterday*:

> This is the essence of California / by California . . . Orogenesis by God. It starts high / but levels into a form of notation / familiar in electric circuitry . . . / breaching black international water. / Nonetheless swarter fluids surround it, / (Anamnesis.) Under the shelf, eyes lit, / vinyl shrouds entomb perfect astronauts. . . . a missile hidden in the white wrinkles . . . / poofing at the people. There. / Diagonality, the water tank. (11)

"Orogenesis" is defined as the "formation of mountains through structural disturbances of the earth's crust, especially by folding and faulting." Thus we get a variation on the destruction-creation cycle or *aporia* of "dissolution" (creation as a synthesis in which two substances, sun and moon, man and wife become one); the earth's surface covers (and belies, disguises, misrepresents) its own inner or underlying forces, its *esse*: the solar heat (blasted into molten lava) within earth's core, the constant shifting of tectonic plates ("the plane / shifting / carries cargo" in FINGER 4), its own (un)raveling diagonal lines. Earth too is a spaceship, like the moon with its mountains and pock-marked craters; orogenesis is the earth (or the moon, the sun, the moon-sun) turning itself inward/outward; earth too (like the moon-satellite) "bats at / the flat sear-face rabid inner head," just as in FINGER 4 the "touring car / turns inward / waves of universal matter / beat against a shelf . . ." Missiles may be hidden down in underground caves, in the "white wrinkles" of earth's face, but this orogenesis, while "starting high" (the perception of height, the gasping experience of high altitude but also the "seriousness" of such a scientific process, or of God's own genesis), "levels into a form of notation / familiar in electric circuitry" (we might think of the horizontal zigzag symbol for a resistor): we come back to the (postmodernist) play of literary self-consciousness.[15] So the "mule satellite . . . hearing its own brays with rabbit ears" casts the madness of high tech, of a cold war threatening the thermonuclear sort into a rather absurd or black humor context—self-destructive high-tech satellites are braying jackasses, clown-like figures—so "California / by California" and "Orogenesis by God" suggest postmodernist high-camp ("poofing at the people"), as in the jargon of fashion shows (the parading down the ramp of Venus or an eroticized Luna?): "Jeans for casual wear by Calvin Klein," "The new look in evening gowns by Versace," perhaps

too "Windows 2000 by Microsoft" and "747 Bombers by Boeing." And if LUNA is the (feminine) illusion of high fashion's veiling, she can also be the play of deception, or folly, or the nonserious—Erasmus' "Lady Folly," or Nietzsche's "Truth is a woman."

But I want to return to the opening of FINGER 1, those "white diagonal lines" whose "raveling" makes merely (the fine chaos or *bricolage* of) a "shingled roof / flat grey cloud," in order to pick up what may seem another "thread" although surely it is closely interwoven. These "lines" of space or substance which, like the *aporia* of (un)raveling or (dis)solution, "cut both ways," as too on the "herringbone suit" and in the arc of a swinging "ax" can also be lines of time (figuring orogenesis) and, more specifically (as its subjective "notation") of memory. Is FINGER 1 perhaps autobiographical, giving us not just a memory-slice of the speaker at time t (wearing or seeing someone in a "mended jacket," his "back to the sleeper," that is, to the sleeping subject, but also a distant memory, childhood memory, something rather early in the train-trip of life? Perhaps our moment of awakening is like that of Proust's speaker at the beginning of his search for *temps perdu*, a very gradual becoming-conscious, a "waxing" (like a new moon) out of darkness/nothingness? Or was this *Sleep*-speaker's train-memory that of his father? Which takes us to the strikingly "Oedipal" (castration-complex) image of the ax "hacking branches / out of the tree crotch": perhaps we may tie it to Freudian, pre-Oedipal or Oedipal stages as well as to Pound's aesthetic (and also Oedipal in precisely Bloom's sense) "Pact" with Whitman: "I come to you as a grown child / Who has had a pigheaded father; / . . . It was you that broke the new wood, / Now is a time for carving. / We have one sap and one root— / Let there be commerce between us." But: "wine without cheese"? Christ-like transcendence without bodily immanence? FINGER 2 at any rate explicitly suggests fragments (as with the young Stephen at the opening of Joyce's *Portrait*) of early childhood memories, thus reinforcing and further "clarifying"[16] our sense that FINGER 1 may be autobiographical:

> "I know you'll make the decision" / nothing imperative / *l'embourgeoisement de la poésie* / x = y / a row of bricks / at the back fence / keyboard / alternating red and white / the "natural" world / child in his mother's bed / a car passes up the hill / bedroom dormered / acceptance / baby carriage / infant in it / face and hand a unit . . .

Again the play of red against white, repeated with variation (as on a piano's keys) from FINGER 1: a "natural" observation of the objective world reduced to the purely abstract pattern of our perception (abstract painting, Williams' red wheelbarrow/white chickens); the interplay (in childhood perception) of fence/keyboard works well. We might contrast this with that "darker" vision of early childhood (and its memories) from the end of *Yesterday*: " . . . swarter fluids surround it, / (Anamnesis.[17]) Under the shelf, eyes lit, / vinyl shrouds

entomb perfect astronauts. . . .” But what about the opening lines, ending with the equation “x = y”? Perhaps an authority figure, the would-be poet’s father (Stephen Daedalus again) telling him he has to be practical: in order to make a living, he cannot be a pure artist but (even as artist) must be bourgeois. Of course we could give this paternal advice a positive and indeed “moral” interpretation: the father is merely counseling moderation, “reasonableness” in the usual sense, the Aristotelian and Confucian “golden mean.” (For Aristotle “virtue is rational,” thus a form of “moderation”; each virtue is a “middle way” between two extremes, as courage between cowardice and foolhardiness; we think too of the Socratic *sophrosune*, self-knowledge and self-control, and the Confucian *chung yung* or middle way.) While Morrison may be regarded as mildly ambivalent with regard to (Poundian) “Confucianism,” especially in his post-SOLUNA phase, in FINGER 8 he evokes in this context “a Chinaman’s back” (a Chinaman’s “return passage,” which here completes the circle): “military prudence / vanity / golden meanness / tit for tat.” This is clearly a “cut” at “golden meanness” (the term “meanness” already working both ways, an *aporia*-term) or at least, again by way of a purely abstract, logical framework (and correlatively an ironic tone), a subversion of its “sense.”

At any rate the immediate context of FINGER 2 already points us toward a “negative” reading. *L’embourgeoisement de la poésie* is obviously going to be the inevitable commercialization, prostitution of pure art. Just as Morrison’s “sculptural forms” plays off Pound in *Mauberley*—the “modern age” demands a “prose kinema,” not the “sculpture of rhyme”—so his “old Kentucky banks swollen through worn tires, / timeless plastic waters always flowing” (also in the “BESSIE” section of *Yesterday*) plays off Pound’s “All things are a flowing / Sage Heracleitus says; / But a tawdry cheapness / Shall outlast our days. / . . . We see *to kalon*[18] / Decreed in the market place.” Does the speaker then mean with “x = y” that “pure art” inevitably devolves into “not art” (becomes “middle class,” through a process of *embourgeoisement*), but that it is ironically (for this demand is sent down from the greatest patriarchal heights) “nothing imperative,” as in “x becomes not-x”? Clearly in *Sleep* Morrison is concerned with this question of the “excluded middle”—Aristotle’s Principle of Identity (A = A) is also called the Principle of Non-Contradiction or the Law of the Excluded Middle (not “A *and* not-A,” where “and” is the “middle term,” but only “A *or* not-A”)—and so he says in *A Warfilm Is a Peacefilm* (“RALLY”): “You have squeezed until it hurts / but found nothing in the middle.” One reading here is surely this: “you” (the reader and/or speaker) cannot find the mystical truth of logic-transcending paradox, with its “middle term,” no matter how hard you “squeeze together” the two poles or horns of a dilemma (paradoxically, as then we would be trying to *squeeze out* any middles, not *find* them). This reading of the “equation” in FINGER 2—“Art is something bourgeois,” “Art cannot be (pure) art”—suggests a self-reflection on Morrison’s

highly abstracted imagist style. If these "diagonal lines" embody a radically immanent objectivity, they simultaneously point toward transcendence: such radical immanence (the world seen microscopically) is already transcendent. Here then we jump beyond that "golden mean" (or "meanness") of bourgeois reality, the compromise of the "practical" world, the world as conventionally perceived, to the "included middle" of paradox which points both ways, toward immanence (moon) and transcendence (sun).[19]

The "nothing in the middle" passage from *A Warfilm Is a Peacefilm* (and we note this title's own included middle, that is, logical contradiction), occurs in the third sequence of *Sleep* and therefore follows the "orogenesis" of *Yesterday* and its hidden missiles, techno-war paranoia and clown-like absurdity: "We are concerned about your age, / for you're an unextraordinary thirty-three. / Some say you're not typical. Your demeanor says / otherwise. You have squeezed until it hurts / but found nothing in the middle." Again we hear an authority figure's (father figure's) voice: perhaps a military officer or recruiter if not indeed the father himself telling the young soldier/anti-war activist, the young man or "son" that he is really quite ordinary (despite what others, perhaps his teachers, may think); the son is 33 and, the father chides him, does not know what he's doing with his life. In any event the 33-year-old, though in the middle of his life, finds "nothing in the middle" of it. Carravetta takes this as the crucial point of the whole book: "SOLUNA is a search for 'sense,'" he says, "at that fatidic *mezzo cammin* [middle of the way] . . . the narrator ponders what he is all about, juxtaposing the external image he is recognized by with what he feels is his inner perception or attitude. Wringing the knot further, he finds there is nothing there to rest his soul . . . on."[20] But if it's the chiding father, it could also be God-the-Father, for Christ-the-Son was 33 in the year of his crucifixion: if Christian theology regards the Son as the middle-term between God and man (between Father and Holy Ghost) then to "find nothing in the middle" could express a skeptical view of the Christian faith, one which combines the more mundane sense of "life's emptiness"—I myself (the Son) do not exist, "I was / And I no more exist; / Here drifted / An hedonist" (*Mauberley*)—with the logical notion of "no middle" as "no paradox," leaving us only the super-rational (Serresian) world of modern high-tech, a "hollow" world ("nothing in the middle") devoid of divine meaning, of (the possibility of) mystical transcendence. But the 33-year-old "son" can also be a Christ-figure—here we might think of Jesus' despair in the wilderness before his final period of preaching. Is the bourgeois father telling his son that he can never be a "pure artist," that he is "ordinary" even though "some" (perhaps his disciples) "say you're not typical" (with a play on "type" and "anti-type")? If we read the poet-son as the Son of God unrecognized as such by all but his disciples[21] then the irony cuts both ways, for now who is crazier, the blind Father or the Son

with his delusions of grandeur, indeed his delusions of (an absolutely logic-transcending) "divinity"?

Carravetta's *mezzo cammin* gives the "nothing in the middle" a Dantean interpretation, which fits our sense of *Sleep* as being (among other things) an "autobiographical" work; it also reinforces our earlier observation that *Sleep* begins *in medias res* as do the epics of Homer, Vergil and (with their increasingly open form) Pound and Williams. Dante begins his *Inferno* Canto 1: "When I had journeyed half of our life's way (*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*), / I found myself within a shadowed forest (*selva oscura*), / for I had found the path that does not stray." Whereas most commentators claim that Dante should be 35[22] Carravetta apparently assumes him to be the Christological age of 33. The following lines of "RALLY" support a Dantean reading (walking in the dark forest of his own sin and corruption, Dante encounters three symbolic beasts) but also a "Christian" one; I suspect Morrison is combining the two:

> . . . walking down a country road, / talking quietly to your "believer," / the pebbly underfoot is shaded . . . / . . . In your ear / motorcycles enter, more than you imagine. / . . . A fiat brings it to an end. / You wince, offering your crust in appeasement, but / there is no stopping. Another twosome / makes an entrance. . . / . . . two final figures / veer toward you on their vehicles. / Once in the shadow, they are courting in the sun. / They've dismounted and they apprehend you. There's been / a "fire" in the "tank" . . . (13)

The "two figures" and "shadow"/"sun" suggest Dante's narrative; "crust" and "fiat"—which plays on both the Italian car and the dictatorial (see the political "RALLY") or divine "decree"—suggest the Bible. A "fiat" (from Latin *fieri*, "to become," "come into being," thus "Let it be done") is an absolute (and absolutely arbitrary) command: "You've broken the law!" (anti-war protester perhaps but also Christ before the crucifixion), "You're under arrest!" ("they apprehend you"). Thus it may be God's own fiat: "My Son must die," "Isaac must be sacrificed," "X must be (X or Y)."[23] One reading: the speaker here is Christ on the verge of the crucifixion (God's order); the "two final figures" might then be the two thieves framing him on the cross. "Two final figures . . . Once in the shadow, they are courting in the sun": we also think of the crucial ("final" or "ultimate") archetypal game of SOLUNA, the interplayed or interwoven (though here in rather "sinister" fashion) figures of sun/moon, sun/shadow; "courting" could have the sense of "spatializing" (by verbalizing the noun "court") as well as the more obvious verbal sense of "loving" or "desiring," thus already "moving toward" (as in a vehicle) or "becoming." Then on the metaphysical (as against political/revolutionary) plane, "'fire' in the 'tank'" mixes, blends, dissolves fire/water, sun/moon archetypes. This fusion or dissolution calls us back to "There. / Diagonality, the water tank" at the end of *Yesterday*: taking "diagonality" as an indirectness, an obliqueness that interfuses the "perpendicular" opposites—that is, as the "included middle" of logical

contradiction and paradox—we get a wider context for reading *Sleep*'s opening "white diagonal lines . . ."

But the "tank," a container for such (dis)solution of opposites, could also be its "vehicle." "Vehicle" is from Latin *vehere*, "to carry"; "way" is from the Indo-European base *wegh*, to go, whence again Latin *vehere*, to carry, ride, and the Greek *ochos*, "wagon." "Veer" is from French *virer*, to turn around, related through Latin to "vibrate"; "trope" ("figure") also of course means "turn." Thus a "vehicle" is a means of carrying/expressing our thoughts/feelings (a "form" or again a "container"), but it may also be the "content," the thoughts/feelings themselves "contained" or the "flow," the force or motion of expression: the "poem" may be all three simultaneously. Then the above passage—". . . two final figures / veer toward you on their vehicles. / . . . They've dismounted . . ."—arguably moves, through an intense linguistic and literary self-consciousness, past its own rich network of allusions and beyond any literal or "serious" traditional interpretation, such as by metaphors or figures of speech, thereby also moving beyond (dismounting from) their own "vehicles" (the "final figures" here taken as authoritative interpretations). But we must still take seriously, despite their seemingly absurd nature, these "statements"—self-contradictory or paradoxical fiats perhaps, like God's demand of Abraham that he kill his son.

In FINGER 3 at the opening of *Sleep* we get a sur-Poundian displacement (slight displacement of classical imagism): "light is bent by gravity / brains work in a similar way / experience / displaced into new forms . . ." Again the figure embodies a motion: a moving vehicle displaces a medium through which it moves. Thus in FINGER 4—the "fingers" suggest both the "intention" (pointing) of a meaning and its "displacement," the signifier-signified split—we get the car:

> A golden / slug dot dot / the fish on fire / antennae retract / the compass / opens / black and white triangles / collapse into white spheres / the plane / shifting / carries cargo / through a Pacific mist / an early '30s touring car / turns inward /waves of universal matter / beat against a shelf . . .

The "early '30s touring car" can of course be a 1930s car but also the speaker ("son") in his early 30s, he who sees his in-between or "middle" life as meaningless because lacking a true middle (substance), thereby lacking perhaps the transcendence that he seeks. Thus in "turning inward" we assume that he is trying to reach just such a higher spiritual state. And yet where Emerson feels that the "currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God," here the "waves of universal matter" merely "beat against a shelf." We can take it as genuine and bitter disillusionment—the middle that would have allowed the transcendence of self-contradiction and paradox is repressed by these vainly "beating waves"—but also as parody (of earnest meditation techniques, more specifically of Emerson and perhaps Whitman).

Here we are back inside the constraining enclosure of a vehicle, an old car, train car with its "shingled roof" and "funicular / sides," variation on the high-tech satellite circling the earth and going mad in its self-enclosed infinite Kierkegaardian inwardness, "batting" (at) its own "inner head." Yet the disillusionment (or dissolution) of the "excluded middle"—only logic and rationality, only imprisonment within a computerized, "flat sear-face rabid inner head," which precludes spiritual transcendence through paradox—is played off against the equally bitter disillusionment of paradoxes when they are stupid, mindless, absurd, perhaps making you even more crazy: the son being told that "art cannot really be art" or in the last stanza of *A Warfilm Is a Peacefilm* ("HOSTELRY"): "The hotel is a prison . . . / Before they all come in to look, / you read a plaque above the glass. / It says, 'A Warfilm Is a Peacefilm,' / which makes you madder." Anti-war movements depend on "showing war," and their effect may be the opposite of the one desired: to encourage war. Or more simply it's that wise old adage: "to preserve the peace war is necessary." Here "A = not A" gets closer to the madness of Orwell's "double-think" in *1984*: closer to the brainwashing mantra, "War is peace."

But we have already suggested that these "vehicles" can carry multiple senses: a vehicle is a limiting container or "body" ("touring car") with its contents (mind, soul), but as the middle-term or "carrier" the vehicle is also the "way" (Tao, path) toward spiritual truth, transcending logic by the mediation of opposites. The vehicle displaces, when in motion, the very medium through which it moves—the air or water, the context of its meaning, a sort of larger vehicle. Vehicles may "carry weight" but they also "shift through mist": they not only shift or change form within the surrounding medium of mist (meaning), but their shifting may cause the mist to shift. And what if this is sun/fire dissolving within moon/water. Water would be on fire, fire would be drowned in water; "the fish on fire" suggests fish as a vehicle moving through water and burning within the water; but then paradoxically the water is also burning, perhaps its initial burning (seeing it the other way around, in a *Gestalt*-switch) set the fish on fire. Fish gliding through sea, sun ("golden / slug dot dot . . . ," the ellipsis suggests open-ended motion) or satellite/moon orbiting the earth: " . . . antennae retract / the compass / opens / black and white triangles / collapse into white spheres. . . ." A repetition with (geometrical) variation on, or a fuller "reading" of, "white diagonal lines / ravel without gathering . . ." And Dante's vision of God: "As the geometer intently seeks / To square the circle, but he cannot reach, / Through thought on thought, the principle he needs. / So I searched that strange sight. . . .": the ultimate dissolution of logic, transcendence of the included middle. Or Dickinson (378): "I saw no Way—the Heavens were stitched— / I felt the Columns close— / The Earth reversed her hemi-spheres— / I touched the Universe."

Light and *A*

Having focused thus far on *Sleep*, let me now turn briefly to a consideration of *Light* (the fusing book of SOLUNA) and *A* (its final letter and book). This means stepping back for a moment and recalling the over-reaching interpretive model that I suggested at the outset, that of a cyclic repetition of disorder-order. The book of *Sleep* is crucially concerned with the raveling/unraveling of "lines" (squares, triangles, circles, geometrical forms), their flowing from dissolution through order to super-order and back again into dissolution; *Sleep*, that is, already rehearses for us the whole cyclic process of order-disorder-reordering. The very term "ravel" is an *aporia*-term that means both "gather together" and "unravel" simultaneously, and thus might be said to embody in itself that "middle" which is here at stake. *Sleep* is the chaotic pre-order out of which SOLUNA and the rest of the **Sentence** will be generated, and as such it is the included middle of the paradox, of the mixture, of indeterminacy itself; but it is also potentially the excluded middle (A *or* not-A) of pure logical order itself, which becomes in the extreme form the blank chaos or redundancy of hyper-order. After all, as lines of poetry that "ravel" *Sleep* is already the process of self-ordering, "sound" that has emerged out of background noise and is already moving toward the nonsense of empty abstraction.

Yet it is *Light*, the book that fuses SOL and LUNA, that more truly embodies this (excluded) middle of pure abstract rationality. The middle "L" (repeated or "echoed" at the end of the **Sentence** by El, He, the Judaic God or YHWH) of SOLUNA mediates between Sol and Luna, sun and moon but also, in a sense, between sun and sun; it is the middle between two lights; as the purest form of "light" (rationality, formal logic) it becomes a more concrete embodiment of the Serresian blank chaos, that is, the "hollowness" of purely rational thinking, the nonsense or "mere noise" of formal abstraction. *Light* opens:

> 1 If the globe eye is / irised, all colors of the rainbow pulled on / the pupil's pole, / you might think / night smokes or the spout / drains or the barrel ends / in the room. / Such / velleities. / In fact: /

> 2 I'm a / different person / . . . I'm homesick without your hand. / The day of the week is missing. (87)

"If the globe eye is / irised, all colors . . . / . . . pulled on / the pupil's pole" then we do indeed have the absolute blankness of "pure whiteness," for white is the combination, the mixing of all colors; the "pupil's pole" suggests just such an extreme limit, at which we have moved beyond the possibility of rationality and have returned to disorder, the "smoking night" of chaos. The light is of course also *not* the light—"*Sleep O Light*"; between the light and light, between sun and sun, between the A and A (A = A) of formal Aristotelian logic there can be only the darkness of excessive brightness or blankness.

"Velleities" are "the weakest kind of desire or volition," "a mere wish that does not lead to the slightest action." With "Such / velleities. / In fact: / . . ." one thinks again of Pound in *Mauberley*, who too is in effect no longer himself ("I'm a / different person"), is "missing" (his own middle, body, consciousness or self missing), "A consciousness disjunct / Being but this overblotted / Series / Of intermittences . . ."

Morrison's *Light*, stanza 20 begins: "I live in one room. / I live in two. / . . . I live on the second floor in a single room / I live on the third floor. . . / . . . I have just arrived. I know / by the etching on the wall / I've been sitting all night in the hall." The sun-moon as Sleep of pre-existence, pre-consciousness is here the sun-moon of Light whose middle is truly emptied out, the darkened sun which has "been sitting all night in the hall" awaiting its diurnal return. This waiting, this *suspension* is also a velleity, weak will or lack of will, as in stanza 25: "Now this / is bombardment: / . . . Or is it? / In the wide / spiral opening gravity pulls / their missiles back. / But I'm powerless too, / without the will / to kill." Suspending the political (particularly anti-Vietnam War) meanings here, we could take this gravity that "pulls back" as the sense of a weakened (or non-existent) will power, a Light that (itself pulled back by gravitational force toward the very sun from which it radiated) is forced to wait, suspended in space.

But whereas *Sleep* combines several poetic forms or modes, some much more "prosaic," *Light* is homogeneous. Its form is purely modernist-"abstract": the rather short lines of varying length contain numerous breaks and discontinuities ("excluded middles"), yet here each stanza has exactly ten lines, and is thus in some sense perfectly "complete" within itself, as perhaps the L (the middle, the dark-light) that joins SOL and LUNA must be totally self-contained. This book is in one sense perhaps Morrison's "empty cathedral" of *Light*, stanza 38: "The eternal cathedral / is a plotless stage. / Its empty nave masses / the pupils in its transepts. / . . . The eating / question teaches the / end of the story." Of this play (drama), "Gaunt but conscient, / the father has observed / the final act. In a / hallway encounter he / wrinkles his brow at / the interpretation. / Preoccupied, he enters the room / without knocking, / a thick white handkerchief / held before his face" (stanza 40). Suspension again, moon-sun or sun-moon hanging in the middle, but here cast in the light of the ambiguity of meaning, the uncertainty of interpretation. The suspended light, held back by gravity, is also a self-reflexive light. "The / reflection reverses / grey to beige . . ." (stanza 90). "The fork / pokes at an / undiscovered source" (stanza 163). "The arch . . . / details of white, a / cathedral frame, the / other as the echo of / an echo, its subject, the / natural scene. A branch / goes out past the viewpoint" (stanza 200).

The last book, and letter, of SOLUNA is *A*; this is also the first letter of the following sequence and god, ARES—whom we might expect to be an embodi-

ment, on some level, of chaos, randomness, dispersion, dissolution. The first sense of this *A* must indeed be that of the indefinite article itself inasmuch as SOLUNA and ARES (SOLUNARES) enunciate ("spell") the sentence, "Sleep O Light U Need A Revolution Each Second . . . ." Once we think of *A* as possessing all the open-ended indefiniteness and thus *freedom* of an indefinite article, which after all can "define" or point to *anything*—a book, a stone, a god, a common noun or proper name—it seems fitting that this book is in fact made up of a wide assortment of seemingly "found" texts (*textes trouvés*, *poèmes trouvés*), ostensibly "non-poetic" and "non-fictional" texts, such things as catalogues, advertisements and announcements, which the poet has encountered in the course of his everyday life in 1970s Oklahoma and faithfully "transcribed." Or perhaps the transcription is not absolutely "faithful" after all; perhaps the found texts have been rearranged or artistically transmuted. The reader's uncertainty as to what degree these "texts" have been so modified (as clearly at least some of them have been) is a crucial part of the meaning of *A*, that is, its "indeterminacy" or "indefiniteness." Thus we are often left in a sort of suspension, wondering to what degree these texts have been (re)formed, if only (as may be usually the case) through cutting, editing, "rearrangement" of what was already "there" rather than through the poet's "addition."

Thus in "TARGET":

> "The Sale" kisses / high prices goodbye / Chapter 1: "The Sale" Comes to Your House / . . . / Trike in bright red metal / Wading Pool in polyethylene with / Polynesian designs / . . . / Chapter 2: Indoor Cents Appeal / domestics / helpers / . . . / Chapter 4: / Every Body / Needs "The Sale" . . . . (233-235)

Morrison claims that even the "Chapters" were already present in the sales catalogue, so this passage may serve as an example of what is often done so effectively in *A*: we may want to think these "Chapters" have been added, to make an originally mundane "commercial text" seem like a "literary text," yet if this is our definition of the latter then the former was already "literary." This points us toward the more general issue at stake here: why couldn't a sales catalogue in fact be just as "literary" (or as "aesthetically well-formed") as a "poem" or "novel"? What are the boundaries by which we discriminate? By breaking it down into these discontinuous, juxtaposed fragments, this in fact becomes a modern-abstract poem: why would the "Trike in bright red metal / Wading Pool in polyethylene with / Polynesian designs" be any less effective or "valuable" as poetry than comparable lines from Williams ("The Red Wheelbarrow" comes to mind), Pound or Morrison? Yet, with its chapter divisions suggesting a narrative form—perhaps this catalogue is an "epic" one—the condensed lyric is unexpectedly "expanded."

And so in "ADS" it seems an actual "found text" has become a "modern poem" simply through the disruptions or discontinuities created by the linebreaks: "So. You're very / 1973. / Helpless? Never. / Your man may be all /

thumbs. But you're not. / You can solder toys and / fix your own plumbing" (219). We are led to question our own aesthetic assumptions: *why* do we think such discontinuity makes what might have seemed mundane into "art"? In "NEWSWEEK" the ironic and self-parodic effects of the defamiliarization gained through "editing," though always subtly present in these texts, are perhaps more obvious: "Kathy Rigby / competing in / Olympics / Detroit's heroin / subculture / the President / in Shanghai / meeting with / Chou / En-lai / Secretariat / superhorse / the running / backs / world trade" (218).

"LEGAL QUESTIONS" is something else; here Morrison has listed a series of (quite literally) legal questions which either he has read and edited or which, perhaps, he has thought of: "If you found a / wallet on the street / could you keep it? / . . . / Is a check in pencil valid? In tomato juice? / . . . / In a separation / who keeps the stereo? / . . . / How often can you / change your name?" (221) The question "Is a check in tomato juice valid?" makes perfect sense on the first or empirical level: if we wrote a personal check using tomato juice for ink, would the bank still accept it? The problem is that we can't easily picture any actual legal situation or "context" in which this question would arise, so we guess (but are not certain) that it is an author-generated question.

This notion of "context" may be crucial here. The "uncertain" textual status of all these pieces in *A* is really a matter of the wider context from which they have been "taken," in which they have been "found." This brings us back to that interpretive framework in which *A* would be read as a form of order-as-disorder and/or disorder-as-order whose widest "background" (widest context or frame) is somehow indeterminate, thus in effect "noise." Yet this is precisely the sense in which the indefinite article "a" is "noisy" (chaotically free, horizontally open-ended in meaning or reference): it refers to the most general case ("a" book can be "any" book). Thus like static on the radio it "means nothing," is nonsensical. In the same way, for Hegel in his *Logic* we must begin with the concept of absolute Being, which because it can mean Anything actually means Nothing; thus we synthesize Being and Nothing and arrive at Becoming (change, flow).

A also forces us, in effect, to ask this question: because of the very "factual" nature of these texts, their empirical grounding in immanent reality, do we come to know more about the actual time and space (place) of SOLUNA's author at the time he wrote its books, about his and thus SOLUNA's empirical "history," than in the very "personal" *Sleep* with its childhood memories and frequent allusions to the life experience of the speaker? Clearly we come to know his physical environment better in one very limited sense, while in many ways *A* is much more impersonal and "public": it deals with advertisements, announcements and newspapers. Although in *Light* the subject is "displaced" from itself we still have his or its (radically abstracted or "disjunct") sub-

jectivity; the poet's or speaker's self is absolutely lacking in *A*, for what we see is simply what "he sees" in the most objective sense.

And yet because what he sees is the world of the media, public life, popular culture in which he is enmeshed, there *is* also a strange sense in which the impersonal speaker of these public texts is speaking to *you*, the reader. This very sort of deception is a factor in the power of advertising. Thus in the opening text of *A*, in the sequence *'73-'74*, "COSMOPOLITAN" begins:

> Step Into *My* Parlor / Women Artists Today / How Sexually Mature Are *You*? / . . . / Get Thin and Stay Thin! / . . . / Come to *Me* in Silence / The Inhibited Man / Long-Distance Love Affair / . . . / Indecision / Thinking of a Used Car? / . . . How *I* Fight Insomnia . . . [my emphases]

We assume that this material was taken directly from a contemporary issue of *Cosmopolitan* (the lady's fashion magazine). To get the very personal and indeed "erotic" effect of the "My," "Me," "Man" and "Love Affair" here, it would help to hear (as I have) this poem read, preferably in a woman's seductive voice. We are again forced to reflect: what should have been the most "impersonal" or "long-distance" sort of "love affair" (between reader and speaker) has, as ideally perhaps in all forms of advertising, become the most "personal." Analogous effects have always been captured by written letters and now are omnipresent on the Internet, where the random "shotgun effect" of email and even chat room messages gets increasingly mixed with that of overt advertisements, not a few of them explicitly pornographic. We could read this sort of personalizing of the radically impersonal as, again, a function or meaning of the indefinite article "a."

Coming back to our interpretive model of cyclic order-and-disorder, we may more generally relate this *openness* of the "a" (or "an") to primordial disorder, chaos, out of which bodies, selves, worlds self-order and back into which they decay or dissolve. For if *Sleep* reaches its limit of hyper-order with the middle book *Light*, it returns in a certain fashion to (primordial or dark) disorder with the final book *A*. But the central point of chaos theory, made quite clear in Serres' reading of it, is again that every order is a potential disorder and vice versa. While then these reformed "found texts" (or perhaps "refound texts") may seem "disordered" (darkly chaotic) in certain ways—above all we are not certain if there is any unifying frame or (aesthetic) form for the whole book of *A*—they do nonetheless have another *kind* of coherence. And again, the special form of *A*'s poems (and thus of *A*) makes us question why we would think this any less "aesthetically proper" or "poetic" a form than that of canonical or academic "poetry."

Perhaps then the way in which what seems in one sense less formed also seems in another to be even more formed, or at least equally well-formed, can be interpreted via chaos theory: the highest level of form must inevitably decay back into disorder and formlessness, out of which it will again arise; the most

"refined" poem is potentially, in a sense, a mere "found text," and may at any point decay into just such a text; furthermore, the disjunctive or disjointed abstraction of modernists like Pound, Williams and Morrison (in *Sleep* and *Light*) may be virtually indistinguishable from that of found texts once the latter are very slightly edited, broken into discontinuous fragments. Thus one might ask with much "modern" poetry (that is, "poetry since Mallarmé" as Foucault says)—for example with *Light*—whether there is any more apparent connection between the words and phrases of their "hyper-ordered" stanzas than the names/terms/phrases in an apparently "random" found text.

And therefore, as one would already have predicted, just as *Sleep* has elements of blank as well as dark chaos and *Light* has aspects of darkness as well as blankness, *A* could not be taken as merely a "dark-chaotic" (purely random) text; it also demands to be read as blank hyper-order. But this may not be only the blank hyper-order just alluded to, that of modernist (fragmented, discontinuous, abstracted and thus "hyper-rational") verse; it could also be—or is it finally the same thing?—the blank hyper-order of postmodern media (TV, magazines, advertising) with their hyper-efficient means and techniques of communication, of which Serres speaks in *The Parasite*. Whereas we may have to puzzle over the meaning of modern poems, what could be more rationally clear and *efficient*, as "communication to the reader," than "Be cool! Be smart! Buy a Toyota Camry today!"? In the first place we *already know* that an ad is trying to convince us to buy something, whereas we may not have a clue as to the intended effect or meaning (if there is one) of a "poem." This pure efficiency of communication, pure factuality becomes in effect the highest or purest form of "realism," unmatched even by Homer or Hemingway. As Sergeant Joe Friday used to say in the 1950s TV show "Dragnet": "Just the facts, ma'am, nothing but the facts."

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In one sense, then, *A* is a perfect example of what Serres has called the "information death" and "terminal equilibrium" of (blankly chaotic or non-sensical) hyper-order, that is, of the maximally efficient A-to-B communication that is unblocked by any form of "parasitic noise." As Paulson suggests in *The Noise of Culture*, it is in fact precisely the works of art (and most obviously literary texts) that are "noisy," and whose noise is necessary to regenerate or re-

vitalize (reorder) a too-rational, too high-tech society; this is precisely why the (presumably) greatest forms of poetic or literary realism could or would not be as "purely realistic" as the above-quoted passages from *A*, they will inevitably be "noisier." But of course, as with *Sleep* and *Light*, we really can only read *A* both ways simultaneously, as hyper-order and as noise, for chaos becomes hyper-order and hyper-order becomes chaos. Yet one tends to see *A* in the first place as a kind of repetition with variation of *Sleep*'s primordial chaos: the cycle repeats itself, returns upon itself.

Conclusion: SOLUNA and EL

FINGER 5, near the beginning of *Sleep*, includes the line: "'T' the capital of 'the' / a sentence / the last letters visible / the middle repressed . . . " Again, we begin from the excluded (or repressed) middle, the excluded "vehicle" (means or way): no golden mean (ethics), no paradox (logic), no meaningful middle-life . . . or perhaps too no middle to the whole Morrisonian **Sentence of the Gods**. For the mention here of "a sentence" makes us think of the **Sentence** itself, which begins with SOLUNA but ends with EL, "el" the Spanish for masculine "the" which can thus also suggest "he" or "He." Moreover, the sound of EL is the same as the letter shared by SOL and LUNA, which "joins" them together. On the highest plane "El" is the Hebrew name (letter) for "Jehovah," and so we might say that the last stage in Morrison's extended project ends with God. But as this is a self-repeating cycle, it should also end with the sound with which it had opened. The real opening sound of SOLUNA, the one that "reverberates," is the L-sound, pointed back and ahead to by the final EL: Morrison intends that the **Sentence** be read both forwards and backwards, and so the word and letter at its conclusion points us back to its beginning. If we take *out* the middle of SOLUNA (the L, the EL, the "the")— remove the medium or carrier through which the vehicle or figure of God, of transcendent meaning, emerges or manifests itself, dissolve away the very point of sun/moon interface which interfuses or dissolves sun/moon into one another—we arrive at the logical either/or, "Either A or not-A," "either sun or moon." If we leave *in* the middle (the "el" that now also occurs again at the *end* of the **Sentence**) we get the "both/and," included middle, joining of paradox, wedlock of sun-moon interface.

According to the traditional correlation—which Morrison may well be subverting if not reversing—sun will be male transcendence (God, Heaven, the other-worldly) and moon will be female immanence (immediate presence of the earthly, material world, this space, this time, the now-moment of our perception). Moving slightly away from our chaos-theory model to perhaps a more traditional interpretive model, then, sun-moon intermixing or "dissolution" will be the immanence-transcendence identity spoken of by many if not all mystical

traditions, certainly by Taoism and Chan Buddhism. And then the "El"-God that joins the pair becomes just this point of intersection or interface. But we would need to bear in mind that, over against the "seriousness" of SOL's (patriarchal) Truth, of the quest for (transcendent or absolute) truth, meaning and enlightenment, LUNA can represent another (and relatively non-serious) truth. This is Erasmus' "Lady Folly" again, and/or Nietzsche's "Truth is a woman," and/or "Truth is the self-difference of truth," the difference between dogmatic and relative truth, the man-woman difference or rather identity-and-difference of French feminism.) Thus in the Morrisonian poetics of SOL-UNA's (sun-moon) identity-and-difference the "L" not just of "light" and "love" but also of Nietzschean and postmodernist "laughter"—irony, parody of serious poetic-metaphysical texts (even of Pound himself), above all self-parody—inevitably comes into play. Perhaps immanence-transcendence inter-face as "orogenesis": on earth's, mind's or text's surface, "what goes up must come down," since it has been from the start already undermined. The "El" is very "elevated" as phallogocentric "God," as the "elevated train" or "car" of (a deadly serious) transcendence—like the written shape of "L" itself it "starts high / but levels into a form of notation / familiar in electric circuitry. / An amp, detention camp, an ohm, a home."

I would like to conclude, as befits orbiting satellites and touring cars, with a brief cross-cultural (lunar-solar) glance at *Sleep*'s *aporia*-term of "(dis)solution," the counterpart of "(un)raveling." In Chinese (*I Ching* and Taoist) metaphysics there is a notion of *chin* (盡)-"limit" as simultaneously "penetrating" or "filling to the limit" and "emptying out" or "exhausting" that I think may parallel "(dis)solution." *Chin*-limit seems to have a more dynamic sense than the western "limit" as (nominal) "line" or "boundary" ("white diagonal lines" may be moving toward the dynamic sense), just as the negative *wu chin*, "no limit" or "unlimited" of classical texts can be interpreted as a dynamic "no filling (emptying/exhausting) to/of the limit." There is also in classical Chinese a *ying* (盈)[24] -"filling"—sometimes it means "waxing" of the moon—which can also mean "overflowing" and thus, as temporal (future) projection, "emptying out" or "waning." A third *aporia*-term would be *chung* (沖), "middle" (中) with the water radical on the left—was the middle included or excluded here?—which means both "flowing" and "empty" (in the sense of "flushed" or "washed out"). So in the *Lao Tzu* Chapter 4 we get the line, paradoxical on any reading: "Tao *chung*, use it but *pu ying*, no *ying*." The last two words are variously translated: "never need to fill it" and "never overflows." Thus: "Tao is empty, use it but never fill it," and/or "Tao always flows, use but never fill," and/or "Tao is empty, use it yet it never overflows," and/or "Tao always flows, use it yet it never overflows." But we must remember: *ying* is also the *waxing* of a new moon—blackness/nothingness, ". . . swarter fluids surround it, / (Anamnesis) . . ."[25]—into solidity and being, shape and figure, future and destiny.

Here we might think also of hexagram 29 in the *I Ching*, *k'an*, (坎), "water" or "pit," "abyss," which is *k'an* over *k'an*. The *k'an*-trigram or "middle son" has the solid *yang* ("male," "creative") line in the center with the broken *yin* ("female," "receptive") lines on both sides, and thus should be (on the face of things at least) less prone to "essential dissolution" than would be its counterpart *li* (離), "fire" or "clinging," the "middle daughter," with the broken *yin* line in the center—"*nothing in the middle*" again—and solid *yang* lines on the outside. (The "lines / ravel without gathering . . .") The last two hexagrams of the *I* are "water over fire" ("After Completion") and, finally, "fire over water" ("Before Completion"). Eternal recurrence, *omega* to *alpha* and back to omega,[26] ending before it started.

K'an (hexagram 29) suggests both moment of danger "falling into a pit" and overcoming danger. And I am especially struck by the reading for "nine in the fifth place": "The abyss is not filled to overflowing (*k'an pu ying*), / It is filled only to the brim (*ping*, 'even,' 'level,' *peaceful*, 'safe')." A traditional comment on this line goes: "*k'an pu ying*, for the central line is not yet great." Wilhelm ties this to another line: "Water flows on and nowhere piles up."[27]

Notes

1. These are the opening lines of *Sleep*, from the first section of a poem called "10 FINGERS" (subsequently referred to as FINGER 1, etc.). *Sleep* is itself the opening book of a sequence of six published as *SOLUNA: Collected Earlier Poems*, Sterling Publishers (P.) Ltd., New Delhi, 1989. All subsequent quotations are from this collection. (*Sleep, O* and *Light* were first published by The Working Week Press in 1981, 1982 and 1983; they are reprinted, together with *U, Need* and *A*, in the 1989 Sterling edition.)

2. From FINGER 4 of *Sleep*. (See previous note.)

3. Here the "L" or "El" (Hebrew letter and name for Elohim, Jehovah, YHWH, God) marks the interface between SOL and LUNA. (See the discussion of "El" at the end of this article.)

4. Thinking too of "spell" in the sense of "magic spell" and of "time spell" (period of time). "Spell" is tied to the IE base *(s)pel*, "to speak loudly" (from which comes the Greek *apeilein*, "to threaten, vow") and hence magic formula or incantation, but also to OE *spelian*, "to substitute for, akin to *spala*, "a substitute"—as perhaps in rhythmic alternation. The sense of *apeilein* as "vow" or "threat" suggests the possibility that writing this virtually impossible epic is the "life sentence" the author has given himself.

5. More precisely, Hesiod's Earth and Eros come directly out of Chaos, then Father Sky out of Mother Earth; Earth/Sky are then joined by the force of Eros, erotic desire (perhaps embodied by the impregnating rain) and the gods are generated from this "union."

6. Perhaps then even the Christian notion of Christ as Logos or Word of (spoken by) God is an hypostasis of the primitive and primordial "gaping mouth."

7. Anaximander's *apeiron*, out of which all existing things come to be and back into which they return, is "unlimited" or "indefinite." This *apeiron* is for Cornford the hypostasis of Hesiod's mythic personification of Chaos; for Heidegger (*Early Greek Thinking*) Anaximander's fragment is the "oldest fragment of western thinking."

8. There may be different models for describing this "decay"; the one I foreground in this book (also emphasized by Serres in *The Parasite* and *Genesis*)—the *Gestalt*-switch of terminal blank chaos (hyper-ordered terminal equilibrium) into (primordial, random) dark chaos—is just one. It is interesting to note, in light of the notion of order decaying back into disorder, that the biblical Tower of Babel story (which takes God as fragmenting mankind's common or "universal" language into many discrete languages so men could no longer communicate with each other, thus could not build their tower up to Heaven, transgressing into God's proper domain), has as its prototype a story in the much earlier Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*. In the latter, which serves as model for both the biblical Flood (God destroys the earth because mankind has become "evil") and Babel, the gods can no longer stand the "noise" ("babel") made by humans down on earth, that prevents them from sleeping, and so they destroy earth with a flood. This nonsensical (chaotic) babel which even one language (let alone many languages spoken simultaneously) will sound like when heard from far enough away might be one way to "picture" the decay-into-disorder of that linguistic order known as human speech.

9. The first five books are mixed lyric and narrative verse forms, whereas the concluding (and, alphabet-wise, "re-commencing") *A* is a series of poetic works that cast into verse various "found texts" drawn from the empirical world of 1970s U.S.A.). "Cataloguing" is an epic technique that, along with various forms of repetition, originates in *Gilgamesh*, the Bible, Homer and other early narrative poems; Morrison's literalization of this technique seems both serious and parodic.

10. Again, "sleep" (appearing at the opening of SOL) can be correlated with both sun and moon. Morrison claims that SOL can have feminine connotations and LUNA masculine ones; Lévi-Strauss identified 26 variations on the masculine-feminine forms of Sun and Moon in

primitive cultures: masculine-masculine, masculine-feminine, feminine-masculine, androgynous, and so on. The cover design of the Sterling edition also suggests such complexity. Thus clearly the poet means to break beyond rather than merely reverse stereotypical (patriarchal and phallogocentric) correlations.

11. Yet there are only nine fingers "present" in the text, only nine of them pointing at *this* moon: one of them *is* after all "missing," perhaps already enlightened or "absorbed." Morrison knows well the Chan Buddhist *koan* (puzzle): when the finger points at the moon we may be left with just the moon (enlightenment, for now the mind has disappeared or dissolved into the moon), or with just the finger (pointing, seeking mind). Lacan and Derrida come to mind when we speak of "just the finger" (mind, field of signifiers).

12. We think too of Mallarmé in "Autre Éventail":

> Une fraicheur de crépuscule
> Te vient a chaque battement
> Dont le coup prisonnier récule
> L'horizon délicatement
> Vertige! Voici que frisson
> L'espace comme un grand baiser . . .

13. The *aporia* or self-contradictory, self-deconstructing force of the term "ravel" is fore-grounded by Dickinson in Poem 937. Here she gives us her own version of a "consciousness disjunct":

> I felt a Cleaving in my Mind—
> As if my Brain had split—
> I tried to match it—Seam by Seam—
> But could not make them fit.
>
> The thought behind, I strove to join
> Unto the thought before—
> But sequence raveled out of Sound
> Like Balls—upon a Floor.

These "Balls" are generally taken as balls of yarn; while the speaker is given the traditionally feminine task of sewing, this "Seam" (or edge) can suggest "textual" (as well as mental) "margin." For a Derridean reading, see Stevenson, "Raveled out of Sound," National Taiwan Normal University's *Studies in English Literature and Linguistics*.20 (June 1994): 145-164.

14. The "white lines" again; the umbilical (and funicular) cord could suggest the omphalos, tied to the earliest Greek conception of the Delphic oracle. This was "spoken" first by an earth-serpent goddess and only later by Hermes or Apollo: "Apollo, after killing Python (and presum-ably also his mate Delphyne), seizes the oracular shrine of Mother Earth at Delphi—for Hera was Mother Earth, or Delphyne in her prophetic aspect." (See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, London: Penguin, 1992, 80.) This omphalos-umbilical cord connection is played upon by Joyce at the beginning of *Ulysses*, Chapter 3: "Ineluctable modality of the visible . . . thought through my eyes . . . Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. . . . Creation from nothing. What has she in the bag? A misbirth with a trailing navelcord . . . the cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos. Hello. Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one."

15. And perhaps too a parody of Emerson's transcendentalist notion that "Nature is a symbolic language," that we can read a (human) meaning into all nature's "signs."

16. Williams in "Spring and All":

> One by one objects are defined—
> It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf . . .

17. Plato's doctrine of "recollection" from the *Meno*—before birth (in a body) our souls have

seen a divine vision of absolute ideas ("Good," "Beauty"), of pure Logos ("A = A"), thus our inborn capacity to "think logically"—revised by Wordsworth in the "Intimations Ode": if for Plato we forget the vision of Beauty at birth (but can be later "reminded" of it), for Wordsworth at birth we have the clearest memory of Beauty and then increasingly forget it as we grow older.

18. "Beauty" in Greek. (As in Plato's ideal "Beauty" of the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*.)

19. Dickinson's "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant— / Success in Circuit lies" raises a closely related issue: do we say that poetic (paradoxical) language, with its "included middle," tells us the (absolute, unthinkable) truth indirectly ("circuitously," "slant")—since we are not being "logical" after all—or that, by overcoming (the impediment of) logic, it does so directly? I tend to think Dickinson (and Morrison) do the latter: sudden enlightenment means we get hit over the head by the Zen master's stick. ("Slant" in another sense?)

20. Peter Carravetta in "Possible Genesis of a Poetica Cosmographica."

21. In Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" story Christ returns to earth, but the Catholic inquisitors cannot believe it is truly He, so He is put to death a second time.

22. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* 7.1 (Lawall, Mack *et al*, eds., New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), whose translation (Allen Mandelbaum's) of the Comedy I have just used, gives two reasons for the 35 (1303 note): " . . . Dante was thirty-five in 1300, the fictional date of the poem. The biblical span of human life is seventy (see Psalms 90.10 and Isaiah 38.10)."

23. While "x = y" suggests the absolute power of the arbitrary yet absurd (paradoxical) command, e.g. "You must kill your son," Derrida's understanding of the logocentric "violence of difference" implies that even the foundation of Logos (formal logic), "x = x," is arbitrary (based on some form of absolute authority as "origin") and thus ultimately absurd. This view has connections with Serres' chaos theory: the tautological redundancy ("x = x") of super-order (high-tech super-efficiency of late capitalism, "Micosoft, Inc.") commences to decay into disorder; Poe in Eureka ("God" as the "Principle of Absolute Irrelativity") also plays with this idea.

24. 盡 and 盈 share the min (皿)-cup radical on the bottom.

25. The darker fluids of *anamnesis* (recollection of eternity, see note 17) are also the amniotic fluids of the mother's womb, surrounding the embryo/new moon. (See note 14.) Chinese *shih* (始)-"origin" has woman on the left, embryo on the right.

26. Morrison thinks of SOLUNA's concluding book *A* as a return-move to the beginning. The last word of *A* is the Spanish "europea" (ending in an "a")—and the poet regards the "w" of the opening word of FINGER 1, "white," as a Greek omega. Thus SOLUNA goes from omega to alpha and, in its cyclic repetition, if not also simultaneously, from alpha "back" to omega. "Europa," associated with the sea and moon, was a goddess raped by Zeus; one of their sons was Minos, ancient king of Crete. Graves (770) speaks of Minos as being "? *meinos osia*, the moon's creature."

27. *I Ching*, trans. R. Wilhelm/C.F. Baynes (Princeton UP, 1950), 534.