



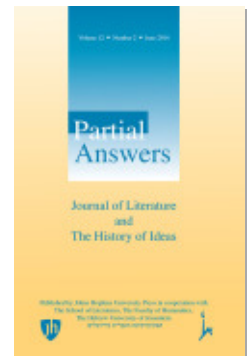
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and this too is one of the guises of love.

Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net*¹

Only art now — our bodies, brushstroke, pigment, motif;
our story, figment, suspension of disbelief;
the thrum of our blood, percussion;
chords, minor, for the music of our grief.

Carol Ann Duffy, “Art”²

Glasgow 1993. A new housemate turns out not to be the Martin whom Jennifer Wilson and her fellow-tenants were expecting. Not Martin, he is not quite Martian either — though he does wonder what planet he has landed on, and he glows in the dark. An uncertain intimacy develops between Jennifer and the not-Martin, and as his initial amnesia gradually recedes, his improbable identity emerges.

“Tell me who you are, then. Really.”

“Savinien de Cyrano which is the truth. I promise you. I swear on everything I no longer have that my name is my only possession. I am neither mad nor mistaken, I am only impossible. Men who tell lies will always say impossible things, but all men who say impossible things need not be liars. I would maintain this rule remains unaltered when we consider *being* impossible.”

“All right, whatever. I’ll suspend my disbelief.”

“Oh, that’s good. You have a fine way with phrases. That’s very pretty. Original?”

“Yes, I just made it up on the spur of the moment. The suspension of disbelief. Nice one.”

I know he knows I’m lying.

“Truly?”

He knows I know he knows I’m lying.

¹ Murdoch 268.

² Duffy 60.

“Mm hm.”

I know he knows I know he knows I am. Lying is good like this, it becomes a truth that only the parties included can understand and nothing to do with deception. (Kennedy 76)

We know she knows we know she is — but we also know another truth unknown to the early modern French master of swords and words implausibly transported to late-ish modern Scotland in A. L. Kennedy’s 1995 novel *So I Am Glad*: the real origin of the phrase in the vast body of writing enveloping a sacred monster of middle modern English letters, Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” a tale about “persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic,” composed, as Coleridge recollects in the *Biographia Literaria*, with a view “to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (II: 6). Kennedy’s character Jennifer can credibly quote the phrase without that knowledge — but Kennedy’s novel cannot if we do not let it. And there are too many reasons not to. As Coleridge indicates, the willing suspension of disbelief is quite literally a matter of make-belief, and what Kennedy’s novel inherits from Coleridge is indeed a concern with the production of belief, more specifically belief in the humans we imagine ourselves and others to be in this other-than-Earth we call world. Both in the “Rime” and in *So I Am Glad*, the supernatural is a foiling figure for the other-than-natural mark of the human: the suspension of disbelief ultimately involves not the status of improbably resurrected bodies, be they zombie sailors or a French libertine returned from the dead, but rather the fully embodied fictions that human beings willingly, lovingly, live by.

Consider the idiot question no reading of the “Rime” can ever fully resolve: Why kill the albatross in the first place? Most of the tentative answers to that question read the bird as a symbol for something or someone else (Christ and Coleridge’s soon-to-be-estranged wife Sara are favorites); less imaginatively, I suggest that the Mariner kills the bird because it is a bird.³ Recall the scene: a storm blasts the ship southward

³ For a survey of the poem’s hyperinterpretability, see Perkins 425: “Coleridge’s ‘Ancient Mariner’ has by now achieved the classic status of omniscience, like *Hamlet*. Depending on the interpreter, it expresses Coleridge’s personal life or psychoanalytic case, his poetic theories, religious beliefs, pantheist metaphysics, biblical hermeneutics, belatedness in literary history, or feelings about Western maritime expansion, about slavery, or about politics generally. The albatross is nature, Coleridge himself, Sarah Coleridge, a human

to the inhospitable extremes of the Antarctic, the ice all round cracks and growls and roars and howls, ironically underscoring both the utter absence of life off the ship and the lack of communication on board; then the albatross breaks through the fog and something like living communication is restored: "As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God's name" (ll. 65-66). The crew feed the bird and from then on "every day, for food or play, / [it] Came to the mariners' hollo!" (ll. 73-74). Something has shifted: the protagonist is no longer one with the "we" that initially hailed the bird — they, "the mariners," continue their play-acting; he, the Mariner, puts an end to that nonsense because, or as if, the recognition of the bird as a soul casts doubt on any other living thing being anything other than in-animate life — soulless zombie life. If a bird can seem a Christian soul, then humans may just as easily be mere animals — no different from the "slimy things [that] crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea" (ll. 125-26). With Stanley Cavell (45-65), I take the Mariner's position to be one of radical skepticism: disbelief in the world and the human as worthy of anything like love. As we suspend our disbelief in the ensuing weirdness on board and around the ship, we witness the lifting of the Mariner's more radical disbelief as he watches the water-snakes: "A spring of love gushed from my heart / And I blessed them unaware" (ll. 284-85). Crucially, the suspension of the Mariner's disbelief in lovability occurs as a blessing "unaware" that bespeaks the arch-performative power of prayer — call it poetic faith, constitutively oblivious of its having been made up: "He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird and beast" (ll. 612-13).

The suspension of disbelief, the emergence of love, and the power of the performative are part of what is at stake in the genre-struggles informing the literature of modernity. Coleridge's "Rime" is arguably the mad ballad it is because it seeks to balance a resistance to the rise of the novel as a vehicle of modern love (the Ancient Mariner *must* spoil the wedding party) with the powerful evasion of the erotic which Wordsworth, fellow architect of the *Lyrical Ballads*, calmly imposes on poetry but which Coleridge can only manage — and thus fails to achieve — in the mode of hyperbolic demonization — "The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she, / Who thicks man's blood with cold," ll. 193-94). Love of nature leading to love of mankind, as Wordsworth would have it (268), leaves love

being, Christ, the Divine immanent in nature, or fresh meat as an anti-scorbutic. The world of the poem is providential, existential, morally incoherent, or dreamily irrelevant" (425). My thanks to Zoe Beenstock for bringing this article to my attention.

for woman, or man, let alone for the world, in limbo. If Wordsworth's ultimately theotropic anerotic ideology makes love eminently available as a figure for a general and critically unproblematic kindly disposition towards nature and the humankind that it contains, for Coleridge love constitutes a precarious promise, both energized and compromised by the intense desire of the human as the animal that desperately must, but at best barely manages to, relate — (to) itself, (to) others, (to) the world next to nature it produces as its problem. Coleridge's crises and Wordsworth's composure throughout their respective careers can partly be accounted for in terms of the fit, or lack of it, between their distinct logics of love and the laws of the genres they practiced. The complex textual constellation of the Odes on Immortality and Dejection is a case in point, involving as it does Coleridge's abject compliance with Wordsworth's command to write his illicit love for Sara Hutchinson, sister of Wordsworth's bride-to-be, out of his Ode.⁴ The ultimate result is the construction of a faceless "Lady" (l. 47), a "simple spirit" (l. 137) mindlessly receiving a "Joy" (l. 67) that she cannot think and that her self-censoring would-be lover cannot feel since, significantly, his "shaping spirit of Imagination" has been "[s]uspend[ed]" (ll. 85–86).⁵

The tension between suspended imagination and suspended disbelief that marks the (non-)experience of love in Coleridge's writing can also be said to characterize the very engagement with love as a challenge in modern times more generally. Before I return to explore how *So I Am Glad* inherits that challenge, I want to briefly consider an ambitious historico-sociological account of the reconfiguration of intimacy in modernity, which helps to highlight the critical thrust of Kennedy's make-belief love-making.

In his dense study on the codification of intimacy, *Liebe als Passion*, Niklas Luhmann specifies the general predicament of love in the modern condition in terms of a critical combination of disenchantment, individualization, increasing impersonal relations, intensified personal relations, and wholesale underdetermination, opening a perspective on love as "not a mere anomaly, but indeed a quite normal improbability" (1986: 9).⁶

⁴ See Ruoff for a tour of the relevant record.

⁵ Quotations are from the 1817 version of "Dejection."

⁶ I owe much of my understanding of Luhmann, and of *Liebe als Passion* in particular, to the staff seminars devoted to the book conducted by my friend and colleague the late

That love should be an improbability in the first place is due to the expanded complexity of society as it morphs from a hierarchically stratified and segmented system, where all individuals in principle know their place, into the ever-shifting constellation of functionally differentiated systems in which individuals are required to invent their multiple places. Shared understanding about the state of things between individuals in modern society is no longer a given, so communication, and with it love as a medium of communication, becomes less probable.

As a result of destratification and desegmentation, modern individuals become relatively underdetermined subjects whose identity in diverse increasingly differentiated social (or impersonal) and personal networks is constantly in flux, no longer firmly codified in terms of birth, region, religion, caste, gender, or even species (137). Individuals are *obliterated*: they are obliged to be free and simultaneously charged with the task of determining themselves in terms that must nonetheless make sense to the society from which, as individuals, they have been released — or even expelled. Like most other challenges of modernity, this is a tall order involving risk-taking on the basis of expectations in a context whose increasing complexity and contingency makes expectation itself near-dysfunctional. For Luhmann, modern society is essentially a set of self-generating systems that stabilize expectations against the odds by means of symbolically generalized media of communication such as politics, science, economics, law — codes that allow individuals to share or claim power, truth, money and justice. None of these four instances (politics, science, economics, law) properly involve individuals as singular agents: they only enable communication on power, truth, money, and justice between anybody and anybody. But anybody also has a body, and the thing that has that body is a soul and that site of singularity, too, must be represented. Love kicks in.

Love, for Luhmann, is not a feeling (20) but precisely the symbolically generalized medium of communication that codifies the ways in which individuals as singular bodies and singular souls can feel what we call love not just for but, more importantly, with an other and, even more importantly, feel this in a way that makes sense to the social environment that surrounds them, even as that same environment has relegated them as individuals to a realm of intimacy beyond the reach of society. While

Koen Geldof in 1999. For the present summary account of *Love as Passion*, I have benefited greatly from Stephen Schecter’s 2011 review essay. More generally, Cary Wolfe (see 2010) continues inspiring work to win Luhmann the attention of anglophone cultural scholarship he deserves but rarely gets.

the circulation of power, truth, money, and justice is, in principle, open to impersonal societal inspection, the circulation of love is, in principle, a private affair which is nonetheless assumed to follow routines that stabilize it as an experience that all subjects should eventually be able to suffer and enjoy. In love, lovers communicate their individuality to each other and themselves in private terms that modern society is strategically indifferent to but (in as much as it requires subjects to be self-determined agents or psychic systems) ultimately dependent on. One of the public forms of managing this dependency is the novel, a tool to teach love as a code to increase the plausibility of the implausible: that each individual can successfully say “I love you,” achieve “interhuman interpenetration”⁷ and perhaps make it last.

As a sociologist, Luhmann is primarily interested in the ways in which social systems maintain themselves. As far as the circulation of ideational or semantic codes is concerned, he describes what he observes, just as a biologist would describe the circulation of bio-code, with this proviso that for the ideologist, the matter to be observed is observation itself: not ideas *per se*, which then would solicit a kind of judgment in terms of a dominant distinction such as just/unjust, true/false, personal/impersonal, *plaisir/amour* — that is the business of the (individual as) ideologue — but the media communicating and thereby observing these distinctions. This implies an acknowledged bias in favor of mainstream observation at the expense of the exceptional: in his study of the transformations of the love-code in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourse, he focuses explicitly on “second- and third-rate” writing confirming rather than questioning code (1986: 11); as he moves into the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, secondary data-mining sources take over, but these too tend to avoid the implicit literary canon of first-rate writing — which may do things differently, without thereby invalidating the sociologist’s observations.⁸ In fact, as Luhmann’s love story comes closer to the time of its composition (late 1960s to early 1980s), there is not only a marked increase in the number of alternative perspectives on modern love that he articulates but also a more pronounced sense of uncertainty. This almost

⁷ The original German has *zwischenmenschliche Interpenetration* (1998: 14); the translation has “interpersonal interpenetration” (1986: 13).

⁸ A similar point involves the relation between the novel and poetry. Luhmann has little to say on love poetry as an alternative tool for self-articulation, arguably because it may appear less worried about the improbability of love and seems to respond to the indifference of society as an enabling condition rather than a double bind. The fact that some of the greatest love poetry resists that impression does not necessarily make it less plausible.

anxious ethos of caution is not only admirably true to the unavailability of a manageable corpus of first-order observations to submit to second-order observation (instances of love code in the second half of the twentieth century multiply at rates which only retrospect can hope to control back into pattern); it also remains open to the challenge of a writing that sociology may never digest, even as it leaves that writing unread. The two closing chapters are especially remarkable in this regard. The penultimate chapter, tellingly titled "What Now? Problems and Alternatives," tests a few hypotheses about the semantics of love at the time of writing and comes to rest in a slightly wistful reflection upon the difference between then and now. When love started becoming an issue as dominant social stratification started to give, society was not yet strongly impersonalized and individuals could still be led to learn, through literature, "to become totally involved in an other of their choice and to live in and through that other" (1986: 171), leaving the semantics of love to legitimate that choice for an alternative personal investment.⁹ "Today," the general impersonalization of society requires no such legitimation for "the construction of a purely personal world," since society has just about abandoned any claims on the space for the personal anyway. Yet, and this is the conclusion, it is probably only now that individuals experience how improbable such a construction really is. The final chapter, "Love as a System of Interpenetration," first takes a deep breath to recover from this sobering suggestion by summarizing the book "from the point of view of systems theory" (1986: 172), only to return to the thought that the personal world of interpenetrating lovers can never be firmly founded, but this time ending on a strange string of verse:

Therefore, it is not possible to say everything. Transparency only exists in the *relationship* of system and system, and by virtue, so to speak, of the difference of system and environment, which constitutes the system in the first place. Love and love alone can be such transparency:

A face in front of
 one
 neither now any more sub-ject
 only reference
 intangible
 and fixed.

(Friedrich Rudolf Hohl) (1986: 177–78)¹⁰

⁹ I have slightly modified the translation to recover Luhmann's insistence on alterity: "einen ausgewählten anderen" (1998: 215) rather than the "person" in the English translation.

¹⁰ Drucilla Cornell draws our attention to this poem as an indication of what she calls Luhmann's "dream of love" (86).

The bracketed name of the author of the previously unpublished lines closes the book: Friedrich Rudolf Hohl, a close friend of Luhmann's to whose memory the book is dedicated, further modulating the elegiac undecidabilities in its closing lines.

While the strange face at the end of *Love as Passion* requires a reading in its own right, it also recalls the importance of reading to modern love as such, both in the sense that lovers must somehow read each other to construct their intimacy and in the sense that instructions for this operation require reading as well. But neither kind of reading can be taken for granted, though that is exactly what is needed for the reading to function, as instruction, as construction. Accompanying and interrupting these functionings, there is always something underway which may still be called deconstruction and which is attended to by writing that resists codification even as it affirms the world as the promise of the code.

In *So I Am Glad* that deconstruction is at least double: the novel revisits the possibility conditions for the construction of intimacy by insisting, trivially but crucially, on feeling as embodied experience; yet it resists the privatization or domestication accompanying the modern codification of love. The first exploration involves the somatic singularity of the construction of intimacy that is necessarily but problematically bracketed in an account of love as a symbolically generalized medium of communication; the second entertains the public reinscription of the suspension of disbelief in love as an impassioned performance of careful feeling for an other-than-purely-personal world.

For all its focus on the improbability of love and its deep engagement with the paradoxes and ineffabilities that the codification of intimacy comes up against, Luhmann's analysis rests on the assumption that while individuals may not yet be initiated in the code of love, they are in principle ready to be taught to feel it, even to the limit when it breaks down, but then in a workable awareness of what it is, exactly, that breaks down — access to the inner experience of the other. From Luhmann's sociological perspective, explicitly informed as it is by information theory and cybernetics, humans tend to appear as so many processors uniformly hardwired to plug into the system, run a social code, and balance input with output. Communication breakdown is interesting only insofar as it involves the system, not the performance of any one theoretically indifferent individual. Yet while individuals must to some extent indeed be

theoretically interchangeable as so many standard humans for systems sociology to do its work, love does seem to raise a special challenge. Inasmuch as love indeed occurs as the quite normal improbability of “interhuman interpenetration” in a “purely personal world,” bracketing personal differences may be more problematic, especially when these differences are not just contingent idiosyncracies but other-than-normalities that question the norm of the human as the animal in principle fit for love-code processing and the experience of feeling.¹¹

Kennedy’s protagonist Jennifer Wilson embodies that question. Her “principal characteristic” is a disposition she calls “calmness” but also recognizes as “an invincible lack of involvement,” “in fact, empty space — or, to be more exact, a pause” (4): “When something happens to me, I don’t know how to feel” (4–5). Most people “have whole hordes of feeling all barrelling round inside them like tireless moles”; as children, “[t]hey will pack a room to the ceiling with riotous, tunnelling mammals for no special reason at all. They have moles and they will exercise them, simply because they are there” (ibid.). “I have read,” Jennifer writes, that as they grow up “these innocent mole containers go out in the world and learn to conserve their moles”:

They are taught that other people’s livestock may be unpleasant and do their little charges harm. A room full of moles can be messy and troublesome, even painful. The world is full of sharp little edges and nasty corners and such factors must encourage a level of reasonable restraint to protect both the moles and their minds.

This means that adults can behave quite calmly and safely with barely a trace of their animal insides showing from day to day. Equally, it only takes a first morning of perfect snow, a rapid descent into love or divorce, an especially manipulative film and the moles are out and rolling all over the carpet. So even if we can’t see them, we take it for granted that everyone has moles. (5–6)

Rewriting what she has read about humans and their feelings as this vivid vignette of blind furry animals tunneling away through human space, in the opening pages of her story Jennifer makes us reread what we take for granted and then gives us herself to read:

¹¹ The suggestion that love as a medium of communication in Luhmann’s systems theory is somehow a special case — so special even that it challenges the theory’s cardinal insistence that society does not consist of people and thereby affects its foundational distinction between social systems and psychic systems — requires more unpacking than is conceivable, or desirable, here.

As I write this, I can see extremely clearly that nothing terribly bad has ever happened to me. I can't recall a single moment of damage that could have turned me out to be who I am today. I can dig down as deep as there is to dig inside me and there truly is nothing there. Not a squeak. For no good reason, no reason at all, I am empty. I don't have any moles. (6–7)

“Sometimes, the best beginning is a lie” (280), she writes on the final page of her book, and having read the love story it narrates, we know we had to believe this lie, suspending our disbelief, for the thought experiment that Kennedy performs to work — to grant us an experience of the unreadability of the other not as a pious trope but as a fact that we must preserve even as we learn to disbelieve it.¹² Stripped down to basics, the thought experiment involves increasing the improbability of love by manipulating the standard love parameters. Instead of making up all too human beings equipped with default neurotypical wetware and located close enough to each other in space and time to meet and construct love's “purely personal world” of “interhuman interpenetration,” Kennedy stages a match between a constitutionally unemotional and invincibly uninvolved late twentieth-century woman and a long-dead seventeenth-century French erudite libertine swashbuckler dropped from the darkness into an upstairs bedroom. Although the text does not mention autism or spectrum disorder,¹³ Jennifer is imaginatively manipulated to express ASD traits in a voice exploring what it means not to be able to access the inner life of others.¹⁴ For that exploration to compel, the

¹² The line I will pursue here is that the relevant lie is “I don't have any moles” (i.e. emotions), rather than “nothing terribly bad has ever happened to me” — which, unless all of Jennifer's story is a lie, or unless you want to quibble about what does or does not qualify as “terrible” or “happening to,” is a lie too. Both lies may be related, but Kennedy is too good at fiction to fall for facile constructions of causality. The relation between the unnerving physical and psychological violence in *So I Am Glad* and its exploration of love remains unread here. For a more sustained exploration of Kennedy's ethics of lying, see Stirling. David Borthwick correctly identifies Kennedy's disruption of “narrative linearity” as a means to establish “the realist authenticity of Jennifer's emotional disposition” before exposing the reader to the supernatural weirdness of her story “without seriously upsetting the novel's verisimilitude” (265); yet the novel's real challenge in terms of verisimilitude involves not so much the credibility of its streaks of fantasy as it does the very notion of “emotional integrity.”

¹³ Autism as a term has been around for about a century now, but has only fairly recently become the everyday word it still is, though the term “autism spectrum disorder” (ASD, coined in the late 1980s) or just “spectrum disorder” is beginning to replace it. For an excellent succinct account of autism in contemporary culture, see Hacking.

¹⁴ “I stopped trying to be normal and began to enjoy a small, still life that fitted very snugly around nobody but me. . . . I once believed I had an overly practical nature and that my

voice has to be articulate, so Jennifer is tacitly nudged towards the high-functioning side of the spectrum and given a job doing voices for radio: “I place something invisible in the air, just so, give it a tangible shape and somewhere, someone, a stranger, will get a word and the feeling in that word — both of them at once and because of me. I can do that” (38). As a soul that cannot feel yet is possessed of a voice that can project feeling across time and space, Jennifer is a liminal being living the undecidable difference between artifice bereft of authenticity and the truth about language as the soul’s tool to touch itself and other souls into being and loving. Neurotypical wetware obscures this truth by unreflectively naturalizing the technology of the trace that enables humans to imagine each other. If, as much contemporary neuroscience excited by mirror neurons suggests, neurotypical humans at a basic level indeed do experience the emotions and behavior of others without linguistic mediation, through a “mechanism of embodied simulation,” it does not follow that the complex intentional dispositions involved in reading the other as a loved soul — an intense form of what neuroscientists call “brain-to-brain coupling” — can be adequately accounted for without recourse to the symbolic transmission technology of language.¹⁵ Yet to the extent that the touch of the other transmitted through symbolic traces releases somatic responses similar to those activated in unmediated embodied simulation, it is tempting to short-circuit mediation altogether and to conflate human emotional practices with the neural mechanisms they generate. Popular neuroscience today tends to foster this further and thereby installs a “high-tech phrenology”¹⁶ regime of neuro-ideological self-evidence badly in need of interruption.

Jennifer’s fanciful vision of emotional life as mole frenzy at once sup-
plies and suspends such interruption. She may not know, but Kennedy’s

lack of romantic enthusiasm stemmed from that, but now I know I have simply been unable to share in the emotional payoff, to feel the benefits of close company and sex. I’m not good at emotional payoffs. I am not emotional” (4). Yet she also notes, “This is one thing I can say in my favour — if I have no idea of your mental state, I will ask you for more information. Many people base a lifetime’s personal relations solely on guess-work” (31).

¹⁵ For an excellent and accessible account of the “mechanism of embodied simulation,” see Gallese. As one of the neuroscientists who first discovered and described the operations of mirror neurons, Vittorio Gallese is inspiringly skeptical about facile extrapolations of his findings to more comprehensive accounts of human comportment. For the notion of “brain-to-brain coupling,” see Hasson et al.

¹⁶ “[H]igh-tech phrenology” is Gallese’s dismissive phrase for attempts “to locate in the brain the module through which you can theorize about the mind of others, as if intentions, beliefs, and desires were objects located in a brain box” (14).

text does, and enjoins us to read what it knows. For Jennifer's imagination of average inner life as a mole menagerie is critically reminiscent of Cyrano de Bergerac's "mitology," the theory of "cironalité universelle" (94) ("universal mitedom") expounded in his *L'Autre Monde ou les États et Empires de la Lune*, first published in a posthumous expurgated version in 1657, later better known as *Voyage dans la lune* or *Voyage to the Moon*.¹⁷ Cyrano's "mitology" suggests that the human animal amounts to a colony of smaller animals, but it initially remains undecided on the locus of agency:

Perhaps our Flesh, Blood, and Spirits, are nothing else but a Contexture of little Animals that correspond, lend us Motion from theirs, and blindly suffer themselves to be guided by our Will, which is their Coachman; or otherwise conduct us, and all Conspiring together, produce that Action which we call Life. (1899: 165)

Later, however, the animals take control when "the Soul," in the blink of an intercalated premise, is defined as "the Action of these little Beasts" (168). The point here, in Kennedy's revisitiation of this vision, is not that the soul would somehow be degraded in this incipient radically materialist reading of human being — it is not, it only becomes more properly the object of what Nietzsche presciently envisaged as a proper science of the soul as the "social structure of the instincts and the passions" (§12)¹⁸ — but rather that it raises the question as to what kind of soul humans whose internal menagerie is empty can be said to have. If the emotional life of average human beings is a matter of moles scurrying around, what of those beings who, like Jennifer, "don't have any moles" — and, im-

¹⁷Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Cyrano are from the late-nineteenth-century edition of the 1687 English translation by Archibald Lovell (1899). For a helpful fairly recent account of Cyrano's "savoir fiction," see Romanowski. "Universal mitedom" is Romanowski's translation of Cyrano's "cironalité universelle"; Lovell's translation has "universal *Vermicularity*" (168), a neologism (unrecognised by the *OED*) based on the translation of the French "ciron" (mite) as "Hand-worm" (165), the name of one particularly nasty mite.

¹⁸This is probably the best place to acknowledge that my mumbling on the soul here and elsewhere requires clearer articulation, and I thank Naomi Rokotnitz and Tom Toremans for their expressions of frustration on this point. For now, I would just clarify that I take on board Nietzsche's denunciation (in §12 of *Beyond Good and Evil*) of Christian (or any other theotropic) "soul-atomism," but critically embrace his insistence that this need not spell a getting rid of "the soul," which happens when we abandon it to what he calls the "naturalists." To be continued — in a conversation with neuropsychology and cognitive science that does not dismiss a thought like this: the soul is the body that delivers itself as symbol and remains as symbol when the flesh fades.

portantly, were born without them?¹⁹ For "moles" read "molecules," or more precisely those molecules making up DNA macromolecules in the genome such that certain neural pathways involved in emotion processing are impacted — or less precisely any of the biological bits building "modules" that distinguish neurotypicals from humans with the kind of mindblindness that comes with spectrum disorder.²⁰ The precise scientific detail of the mole-model Jennifer inherits from *Cyrano* does not much matter here; what matters is its animal materialism, and that only matters inasmuch as it is supplemented with an alternative, other-than-animal materialism.

For overruling her atypical wetware, language rewires Jennifer for love and she suffers a massive mole invasion.

The first indication of the emergence of affect between Jennifer and Savinien is appropriately triggered by the materiality of voice: "Something in his tone of voice set up a cold little splash of nervous reaction tight under my heart, but I didn't think about it" (53). Jennifer significantly interrupts her reconstruction of the ensuing conversation, in which *Cyrano* begins to reveal his identity, with an admission of defeat underscoring the upsurge of feeling: "If I could, I would write his voice so that you could feel it the way I did, dark and simple. Also good, very pleasant to hear — except for the chill of confusion under it that left him speaking from somewhere I couldn't touch" (56). The scene ends with *Cyrano*'s first full self-articulation — "I was Savinien de *Cyrano de Bergerac* and I was true" (59), leaving Jennifer with, she writes, "an unfamiliar tightness keeping snug under my scarf. I blew my nose. It didn't help" (60). The love story that starts to unfold here is the faltering construction of a relation between somatic experience and the reality of the other "somewhere" you cannot touch — though the point is precisely to touch there. Such is the theory of the point Savinien teaches Jennifer. He asks her to say his name: "Only the first one. Sa-vi-nien. It's like if you eat something and it tastes good and then better, best at the very end. Sa-vi-nien. You look at me in my eyes and say that. Please" (77). Jennifer complies, and saying his name makes what Savinien calls "a point": "When a point has been made you will feel it like nothing else and any explanation is no longer to the point — it is beside the point. Which is a beginning of getting an impression of the true point" (77–78).

¹⁹ Jennifer takes pains to spell out that her moles are not just sleepy or in hiding but that "almost the first thing" she noticed about herself was that she "had a certain moleyness something missing" (6).

²⁰ For the classic account of mindblindness, see Baron-Cohen.

“The point is that single moment when you truly touch another person. You reach to them with a word, a thought, a gesture, an attack from the third position that flicks to the fourth and slips through, hits its mark. And within the point which is a very brief thing (not enough time for your heart to beat) two human beings are one. The speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader, the man who bleeds and the man who makes him, they are the same thing. You, when you say my name — there — that’s a point.”

“I don’t think I would like that.”

“You wouldn’t like what?”

I can feel the beginning of a nervous cough, but I swallow it down.

“Points, they sound uncomfortable.”

“They are alive. Don’t you like to be alive. Ah no, I forgot, you are mostly oblivious.” His hands flutter their fingers together and he peers.

“Alive, this isn’t attractive, just in some corner of Jennifer. Touched by life.” (78)

The analogy between dialogue and dueling underscores the somatic impact of the linguistic point as well as the potential for trauma that any true trace of touch carries.²¹ It also indicates that truly touching involves practice, not just predisposition — that the achievement of the improbable is a matter of exposure to code. As Jennifer finally imagines herself writing: “*I don’t have to say who I am writing this to — we already know. We are we, Écuyer de Cyrano. We are we. I am more than myself now when I never asked to be because I am still you and I. I can remember how to be that. The bare words are I love you*” (203). After which she finally succumbs to the “mystifying necessity” of kissing (208).

By delicately entertaining the materialist miracle that suspends innate mindblindness through the language of love and realizes itself in impossible passion, the novel increases love’s unlikelihood only to affirm its possibility as the supreme fiction acknowledging the unreadable but overwhelmingly believable soul of the other. If love is this, what have the neurotypicals been feeling? Again, *So I Am Glad* does not mention autism, and as a result is not in danger of stereotyping and thus misrepresenting a clinical condition.²² Rather, it implicitly invokes aspects of the

²¹ In a sustained reading of the novel, the potential for pain in love in this sense would have to be distinguished from the theatrical sado-masochism in Jennifer’s half-hearted love relation with Steven, which she picks up again, to horrifying effect, in the period of Savinien’s absence. Connections between sadism and spectrum disorder are easier to imagine than to establish.

²² For critical comments on cultural representations of autism, see Osteen 29–41 and Draaisma.

clinical condition to make strange again the doubly material neurotechnics of mind-reading so easily taken for granted and therefore denied in the stereotypes of all too likely love we live by.

But the novel does not only reclaim the unlikelihood of love as an interpenetration of souls; it also resists the domestication or privatization accompanying "the construction of a purely personal world" which Luhmann diagnoses as modern love's labor. Resonating with Jennifer's first sensation of something like love in response to a "tone" (53) in Savinien's voice, this resistance to the sidetracking of sentiment takes shape as a "tone" (218) invading Jennifer's voice. Reading out romantic novels on to tape for the visually impaired she has to overcome the interference of her own emotional involvement but generally manages to do her job, "to be a mouth without a brain" (217). Reading out the news is another matter: no longer able to smoothly deliver the daily litany of ills and evils, she "develop[s] a tone," an "unnecessary color in the voice, an air of negative comment" (218). Unnecessary to her superiors, but vital to her: "Someone I loved was living here and I cared about them. People who cared about each other were out there, beyond the studio, up to their necks in crap. I had to say. I couldn't help it" (220). The lucid blindness of love generates care for the world as a volitional necessity: she could not help helping the world by giving voice to its wrongs.²³ Instead of feeding either sentimental self-involvement or the blithe assumption that personal emotional consummation in and of itself establishes justice, love here releases critical sentiment as the care to curse.²⁴ Yet while Jennifer's tone bespeaks love as also always the desire to affirm the world, it is, as she acknowledges, "the only protest I could make," weak and ineffectual, and "[w]hen the European election came by in June, I couldn't even bring myself to vote" (221). The uncast vote and the inarticulate tone are the unvoiced echoes of the arch-performative "I love" which the world continues to demand and for which Cyrano, sadly, is barely remembered, even though that utopian performative is his true legacy

²³ For the concept of volitional necessity, see Frankfurt. Some reflections on its relation to love come up in de Graef.

²⁴ Simon Baron-Cohen's notion of empathy as a "universal solvent" (2012: 132) is a particularly unconvincing instance of the miraculous extension of personal sentiment to world peace.

— not the ghostloveletterwriting visited on him by Rostand, or indeed his nose — further testimony to the privatization of love as a separate sphere.²⁵

Recovering this legacy, *So I Am Glad* is also a labor of love, reimagining Cyrano against the tragicomedy-of-errors icon parading under his name on stage and screen. Early on in her narrative, Jennifer recalls an afternoon when she first “noticed Martin becoming more of himself” (39). The reader does not yet know who Martin really is, but in retrospect the ensuing scene grants him the chance to truly and triumphantly become “more of himself” again. Jennifer has just told him about her job as a broadcaster, and Martin runs with the idea, first speculating on the “remarkable power” (39) this technology holds, and then performing a sustained satirical riff for the benefit of the imaginary “gentle listener” (41) on the pervasive lunacy of late twentieth-century public life:

Who will be sure, in that Babel of opinion, that infanticide and the other noble forms of slaughter are not the most virtuous forms of enterprise? I can foresee that we will embrace them as excellent means of saving weak or innocent souls from the hardships and temptations they might otherwise meet and succumb to in life.

But how will your government survive when this supremacy of the demented is fully achieved? Let me tell you, gentle listener, it will walk among us finally unafraid to be itself. These are the men and women who are paid to improve your health by removing your physicians, to educate your scholars by removing their books, to shelter your people by removing their homes, to guard your souls by destroying your faith, to cherish the truth by hiding it in petty ignorance, who imprison the blameless, free the guilty, nourish your poor with starvation and let loose senility, terror and confusion in your streets because this will be to the benefit of you all. We are mad to suffer them and they are, most assuredly, true paragons of madness, every one. (41)

The unmistakable nod to Swift’s *Modest Proposal* is a matter of poetic justice, recording Swift’s debt to Cyrano; but equally important is Martin’s remark after his pretend performance, “Of course, I would have prepared what I would say. I would wish to combine a certain immediate fire with a smoothness in the flow of speaking” (42), which establishes a relation with contemporary stand-up comedy, a genre also practiced by A. L. Kennedy herself, and certainly one of the forms of speaking truth to power keeping the spirit of satire alive. And the point is indeed in the spirit, as witness also the destruction of faith at the centre of Savinien’s

²⁵ See Harvey for an engaging classic account of Cyrano as a “mad” rationalist materialist freethinker.

catastrophe catalogue, which finds an echo in Jennifer's own indictment of the state of things in the wake of his passing. Unable to claim the utopian confidence with which Cyrano imagined this world an Other World of liberty, equality, and embodied pleasure for fully flourishing humans, Jennifer nonetheless inherits and remembers all of Savinien's voice in the emptiness he leaves — "not a part of it fades" (280), and it informs her book with a passionate anger at the resentful nihilism of these barren times: "Say it loud, say it proud, this is when I finally become certain that only my time, the one I am used to and where I feel at home, has the power to make belief irrelevant, sentimental, banal" (219–20). Belief is what souls hold against the odds: faith in the readability of the unreadable other, in the lovability of an unlovable world. Sentimental. Banal. Irrelevant. Imperative.

The recovery of Cyrano's legacy comes at a price. Jennifer and Savinien travel to Paris and visit the "writers' mass grave" (270) that is the Bibliothèque Nationale to look up Cyrano's published work. Savinien does not like "the edge of amusement that greet[s] any mention of his work" (270), and when his books finally arrive, "[e]very opened page sen[ds] up the harsh, cold scent of pure time" (270). The expurgations inflicted by his friend Henri Lebret enrage Savinien, the record of his friend's memoir touches him, but the exposure to the traces of pure time preserved under his name recalls his death and, after a few days of loving shared denial, on the 339th anniversary of his dying day he dies again. The suspension of disbelief in the other and of cynical disbelief in a world worth loving requires faith in language as the arch-technology of transmission, but that technology is also the precondition of our predicament as things of time and thus cannot but spell death (Derrida 375). In Coleridge, poetic faith fades into the death-denial of religion when the credibility of the world becomes a figment of the imagination as "the repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." (1: 304). Kennedy's counter-formula — "He knows I know he knows I am" — conjures up the alternative materialist infinity of linguistic recursion as the technology that invents us as beings in time inheriting the love to curse that powers worldly prayer for more generous justice now.²⁶ Jennifer's final sentences record Savinien de Cyrano de Berger-

²⁶ The classic case for recursion as "the only uniquely human component of the faculty of language" (1569) and the engine of so-called "discrete infinity" ("a finite set of elements . . . yields a potentially infinite array of discrete expressions") (1571) is Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch. Corballis gives an accessible account of recursion as a central component of theory of mind and time-consciousness.

ac's gift in a last lie that deceives no one yet commands belief: "So now there's no one here but me and you and this. I will miss this and I will miss Savinien and I will be glad." (280). Seeking to release love as also always care for the world, *So I Am Glad* realizes such release requires suspending the disbelief in death that bodies in love are blessed with against their better knowledge. Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac dies, again. But he will always have made his point.

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