

The Problem of Originality:
Reading Thomas Mann's Joseph and His Brothers

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Abstract

The present study examines the problem of historical originality in order to theorize education as both the teaching and learning undergone within a society according to certain models and also the development of those models themselves. Such a study requires a method that is generated by the problem of originality itself. The present study therefore takes a reading of Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers* as a unit of analysis that can simultaneously generate insights into the problem of originality and an original method of interpretation. *Joseph and His Brothers* is concerned with the concept of originality, takes the problem as generative of its own method of narration, and elicits a kind of reading that is developed in this study into a method. The study concludes that a 'readerly' understanding of the problem of originality supports theorizing education and the interpretation of historical experience without slipping into some of the pitfalls that accompany the presumption of authoritative self-knowledge.

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Dedication

To: Braam, Arie, Lewis, and Kaylee

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Introduction

Education as Human Development in the Historical Mode

Educational processes of teaching and learning initiate new individuals into the knowledge, skills and norms of a society, and reproduces that society through time. Society itself, because it never fully corresponds with what can be imagined as its ideal version, undergoes change at the same time as the individual, as part of the same process. A theory of education must account for the changes that individuals undergo as well as the changes exhibited by society at large. However, because society only exists as the organization of those same individuals, the education of those individuals is also the education of society. The challenge that this poses to educators is that there are no fully educated individuals who can provide an example according to which the education of others can proceed, because all individual members of that society are already participating in the same processes of education. No individual exists who embodies the final state of what society ought to be like. Therefore, a theory of education depends on imagining what the ideal society and the individual ought to be like, and not simply reproducing a currently existing form of society. Plato's theory of education accounts for the direction of educational change by reference to the world of the Forms which exist outside of the temporal field of change. The *Meno* describes individual learning as a kind of recollection of what the soul knew prior to embodied, temporal experience, while in the *Republic*, Plato describes a stable society that exists as the Form towards which all temporal societies can work, and of which they are the approximate instantiation. In this way, the direction of temporal change at the individual and societal level is given direction by an example which is conceived as existing outside of time. At the individual level, the distinction between embodied experience and the life of the mind allowed Plato to conceive of education as the individual's recovery of its knowledge of the Truth despite the corrupting influence of embodied temporality, and when society is understood as the organization of corrupted individuals, it only intensifies the corruption and darkens the shadows of

human life. Therefore, because the same problem establishes the distance between the individual and its Form, and society and its Form, the same process of recovery enlightens the individual and re-establishes society on its true footing: the process of education. Like Plato's, Rousseau's theory of education also depends on imagining the place of the individual in an ideal society towards which the actual changes of society can be oriented. Education for Rousseau is also a process of recovering a state of affairs provided by the idea of a state of Nature from which society had become debased. Rousseau, like Plato, also recognizes the unity of the debasement of the individual and of society, and that the same process of education is effective in their recovery. For Rousseau, the education of the individual depends on allowing the expression and development of what is bestowed by nature prior to the corrupting influence of society. At the same time, society itself is to be changed by the education of such individuals that can modify its norms and practices in closer accordance with the model offered by Nature. Of course, the model of a Natural society only exists as an imagined ideal and is never actually achieved, and so, as in Plato, actual changes in time are understood by reference to a model outside of itself.¹

These major theories of education still inform practices of teaching and learning despite their having fallen out of favour as general theories that might be prescriptively imposed on schools or on society. The modern, historical understanding of time, according to which origins are sought in the past and fulfilment in the future, runs counter to their basis in modes of thinking about time that are organized by appeal outside of time. Plato's metaphysics, and to some degree metaphysics in general, locate the ideal from which temporal processes are oriented outside of time, and Rousseau's idea of Nature invites a kind of cyclical, mythical, thinking about time. Both run counter to the linearity of historical time. Education today still depends on the reproduction of society, which means applying educational practices that bring individuals into alignment with exemplars of society, and this process still cannot do without some idea of what society ought to be like. One could study contemporary

processes and institutions of education and find traces of Plato's and Rousseau's influence, or at least traces of the same kind of thinking that relies on appeals outside of temporal experience in order to understand temporal processes. For example, certain dichotomies have plagued educational thought in ways that do not accurately describe actual process of education, such as the distinctions between primitive vs civilized societies, formal vs informal education, passive vs active education, each of which reflects a static and hierarchical view of education and the societies in which it takes place, and reproduce the cultural and social biases implied in these dichotomies.²

The philosophical orientation towards an immanent understanding of human life rather than an appeal to something outside of it still needs to be realized in educational theory. Dewey's is a significant move to address this difficulty as a pragmatic problem, which attempts to sidestep it by declining to describe an ideal society in favour of describing the institutions and practices that will contribute to the continued improvement of a free and democratic society.³ Dewey's theory of education is based on an image of society defined by its own continual improvement. But even Dewey's theory depends on an optimistic view of the individual in society, and of the potential for democracy, in ways that depend on a particular view of social and developmental psychology in the context of a democratic society rather than being derived from the processes of education themselves.⁴ The purpose of this dissertation is to provide new ways of thinking about education from within the temporal process without appeal to any fixed point outside of itself towards which it can be directed.

One way to describe the challenge that faces educational theory, of describing the direction of temporal change without a model from outside of time, is by the concept of 'originality', which describes both the sources of educational processes – their 'origins' in the past – and their aims and future direction – the 'original' ways of life that are produced. In other words, the problem of originality in education makes it possible to think about education as a distinctly historical process rather than one that depends on appeals outside of temporal life. An education based on this historical

conception of time can bring individuals from having little grasp on how the disparate sources of ourselves determine us towards a self-possession sufficient to project ourselves uniquely and coherently into the future, and can bring about a better future for society without simply recapitulating the past.⁵

Originality in Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*

These are the same problems that govern Thomas Mann's novel *Joseph and His Brothers*,⁶ which retells the stories of that ancient family in whom the historical disposition originated as they lived in a world organized by myth, and which, especially as it reflects on its own response to the paradox of origins, is instructive for education and its study. The model of historical thinking provided by the novel is that of 'reading'. Instead of 'authoring' one's life as though onto a blank page and thus smuggling in all sorts of prior and unconscious determinations akin to the way that educational theory often smuggles in unacknowledged appeals to sources outside of time, in *Joseph*, Mann considers what it means cultivate oneself by reading one's life into one's inherited stories that are thereby also renewed. In *Joseph*, Mann tells the stories of the family, who united a zeal for the future with a faithfulness to their origins. Each generation of this family considered itself the inheritor of the promise first made by God to Abraham of a blessed future, but, as Abraham's descendants, also its first fulfilment, and therefore at least partly responsible for its continued realization. In this they began to experience the present as the fulcrum of time, whose origins lay in the past and hopes in the future, rather than as the recurrence of some cycle of myth larger than – and therefore indifferent to – the fate of any particular person or family. But this novel relation to time could not appear, fully formed, out of nowhere. Abraham was already an old man when he discovered God. He had no model for historical thinking and could provide none to his descendants, apart from this zeal for the future and a restless refusal to be resigned to 'the way things are'. The origin stories of Joseph's family did not teach them

their new way of thinking about origins. This had to be developed over time. The generations following Abraham could not simply jettison the mythical operations that organized their world. To do so would be incomprehensible because there existed no alternative modes of making sense of the world. Joseph's family was steeped in the language of myth and developed their new sense of time by innovating on myth. They only said anything new by making sense of their sources in a new way, and so in the genesis of history, the structures of myth persisted. Just as today it appears to be impossible to live in a purely historical relation to time, without any ignorance of one's sources, so for the ancients it was impossible to live purely on the cusp of the future, purely, as they would say, face to face with God. In Mann's novel, the emergence of history out of myth is rendered as much as the story of taking shelter in the consolations of myth as it is of a radically new way of life. This helps us understand why mythical thinking, or its analogs, persist today, and that they are not vestigial, but express the basic ambivalence of the historical and educational project. In the stories of this family we see both an instance of the beginnings of the historical conception of time and the reasons for the perennial difficulty of articulating it into a theory of education. The narrator shares our concern with uncovering the origin of origins, and a significant part of the novel consists of the narrator's reflections on how to get these stories right. The narrator is aware of the problem of regress that the search for the true origin of origins implies, and does not invent, but aims to get them right by scrupulous reading of the source materials. Therefore, *Joseph's* own reader who wishes to understand originality also reads on two levels at once: both in order to understand the concept of originality as it is treated in the story, and in order to figure out how such an investigation should proceed. Just as the novel is both a conceptual treatment and example of originality, so the present dissertation develops originality as a concept at the same time as it develops and exemplifies originality in its method. Therefore the reading of *Joseph* developed in this study must answer to *Joseph* without recourse to other methods, ideas, or other scholarly apparatus.

The upshot of this approach is that to study ‘originality’ in this way will help provide new ways to think about education and prevent educational theory from slipping into patterns of thought that rest on appeals outside of time to make sense of the temporal processes of teaching and learning. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of some of the implications for educational thinking that follow from studying the concept of originality in a reading of *Joseph and His Brothers*, particularly concerning the resulting change in metaphor from ‘authorship’ to ‘readership’. Whereas an education that appeals to ‘authorship’ or its cognates like ‘authentic’ is based on a notion of self-sufficiency of identity and self-understanding that *Joseph* demonstrates to be misguided, a ‘readerly’ education is one that calls for humble participation in the sources of the individual and of society that reproduces but simultaneously reshapes and renews them for the future.

Method

The present dissertation will interpret *Joseph and His Brothers* in terms of the concept of originality and also in terms of how the novel itself exemplifies originality.⁷ The method of doing so must echo this multi-layered approach to originality: it must both interpret the concept of originality in *Joseph* and also pursue an original method of doing so. In other words, the method of this study is the elaboration of a reading of *Joseph*, unbuttressed by any methods or conceptual frameworks external to the reading itself. The unit of analysis is my own experience of reading, which must furnish its own methods and produce its own concepts. The risk of pursuing such a reading as the basis of a dissertation is that it will start and end in subjective experience, producing an interpretation that is merely the opinion of the reader. Yet in proposing such a method, I also contend that the experience of the reader is not absolutely subjective, but, as it answers to the text of the novel, that not any feeling, idea, or experience on the part of the reader fits, and that *Joseph* provides a course in feeling and thinking, drawing out the experience of the reader in particular ways as interpretation proceeds. In this, *Joseph* is not only ‘about’ educational concerns: it educates its own reader. The outcome of this dissertation cannot be guaranteed in advance by a statement of method because to do so would be to refuse the educational influence of the novel on the reader from the outset. Instead, the method of this dissertation must be considered an experiment in allowing the novel to teach the reader how it should be read. The criteria for its success derives from the plausibility of what is produced along the way, and whether or not it is answerable to the text of the novel. In other words, while the present reading does indeed begin in the subjective experience of the reader, the outcome of interpretation must be demonstrable and contestable as it continually answers to the text of the novel. Yes, the starting points of interpretation are my own, subjective, and arbitrary, but if in the interpretation I can demonstrate how they are produced by the text, why they are appropriate, and how they contribute to the fuller understanding of originality, then they do not remain subjective, but enter into the sphere of public

dialogue. The emergence of this public discourse from the private experience of reading provides an example of the kind of originality that is developed as a concept along the way. The primary contribution of this project is to the philosophy of education, and not primarily to literary criticism or Thomas Mann scholarship, even though it proceeds via a literary study of *Joseph*.

Reading as an A-Methodical Approach to Understanding Joseph and His Brothers

To establish a method for any given study requires first describing the unit of analysis. In the case of *Joseph*, the problem of unity and the closure of meaning, of the self, of stories, and so on is thematized with the result that although it stands as a work of art, as a novel between two covers, it also continually disrupts its own unity. In its content, *Joseph* is concerned with the ultimate escape of life's origins from the grasp of the characters who wrestle with the idea that time is organized from past to future, and this escape is repeated in formal terms as the story itself escapes the grasp of the narrator who knows that the realistic narration of time is ultimately impossible. Together, these disruptions of the unity of meaning imply that the historical individual at large suffers the same problem.

If historical life overflows any idea of its own unity, and the same difficulty is encountered in any study of *Joseph*, then to study *Joseph* in terms of originality requires a method that also includes the problem of the closure of meaning. Other methods for studying *Joseph* are of course perfectly suitable if other aims than a concentrated treatment of originality are in mind. Only a method that includes the problem of the closure of meaning at the heart of the notion of originality will succeed here.

Therefore the present dissertation takes 'reading the novel' itself, following its own indications of how it is to be read, as its method, on the grounds that the experience of reading provides a unit of analysis from which to make sense both of *Joseph* and the tendency of *Joseph* to exceed its own conceptual and formal unity. Reading maintains a flexibility that other methods do not, and so can change as it proceeds. The reader learns to read while the reading is already underway. What it means

to read is always at stake in the kind of reading proposed here. This method allows some degree of unity to the novel, but tracks how the novel itself, in its concern with origins and originality, continually raises the idea of the unity of its concept and its formal unity as questions throughout, open to revision.

The proposal of reading as the approach of this dissertation to *Joseph* gains support from the novel itself, both in terms of its content, but also in the way that Mann wrote it. Somehow Mann manages to write a sprawling novel that has his artistic fingerprints all over it and yet remains faithful to the letter of the ‘original’, familiar, version from the book of Genesis. Even where Mann writes of things that were not already in Genesis, he demonstrates himself to be such an attentive reader that his own art often feels more like the elaboration of things already there than invention.⁸ Mann, Mann’s narrator, and Mann’s characters exemplify attention, care, and fidelity to origins, as well as the pleasure, wit and idiosyncrasy that belong to the privilege of any reader. To interpret the novel well, in this study, means following this lead, and attempting a similarly faithful reading of *Joseph*; one that answers to the text of the novel, and can demonstrate how its own insights and developments emerge as elaborations of the reading. This kind of reading joins, alongside Mann, the generations of shepherds gathered around a fire who sang these stories to one another, and the young man and his father sitting by a well under the stars on a warm spring evening, who debated with both worry and wit, what it meant to be grandsons of Abraham, heirs of a promise and at the headwaters of history.⁹

Amateur Analysis

Part of the experience of reading any novel, and *Joseph* in particular, is that it is enjoyable. If there is no pleasure in the reading, then the reader has missed the point of the novel as such, no matter how astutely it may be treated as a historical or literary object, or as part of academic discourse, or as the object of intellectual review, evaluation or censorship and so on.¹⁰ These approaches may be correct

in some or many ways, but are studying something other than the novel as such, if the pleasure of reading is understood as essential to novels. Despite a reputation, at least in English, for being stuffy, Mann considered himself a humorous writer and wanted to be enjoyed.¹¹ If reading *Joseph and His Brothers* is not enjoyed, in other words, then it is not understood. This seems to me an insurmountable problem in establishing a method for the present study, unless the method includes the pleasure of reading, because the pleasure of reading is baked into the novel, both as a product of Mann's art and in its contents. In the chapter 'Good Enough Reading', I examine the pleasure that Joseph took in his lessons as a youth, and there is a memorable episode where Joseph as a young man in Potiphar's house earns the job of reading aloud to his master, and does so with such evident pleasure and skill and without pretence that the text really comes to life. Joseph 'literally read himself into his listener's heart' (Mann, 2005, p. 745). It is this kind of reading that understands *Joseph*. My own reading began as a pleasure reading during a time away from my studies, and the success of my interpretation depends on the maintenance of this amateur's attitude; amateur here in the sense of a study motivated by love, and not in the sense of fumbling inexpertise.

There are two aspects of this amateur's approach that bear further discussion, which are what it means to begin a reading from the love of a text when this seems to risk mere subjectivity and what to do with the inevitable influences and biases that operate, even unconsciously, on any particular reading and which might undermine originality of the reading, revealing it to be merely, even if unwittingly, conventional. These of course imply each other, for the correction to the first problem of subjectivity implies bringing other influences to bear on a reading, and to correct the second implies bringing what is absolutely individual about a reading to bear instead of only relying on existing discourse about the text. The complexity of the dynamic between originality and convention is examined throughout this dissertation. The chapters 'Jacob Mourns for Joseph' and 'Narrating Interiority: The Hidden Face' in

particular demonstrate the way that originality is not total rejection of convention but its continual modification.

The first aspect, the love of the text, must be understood not as the foundation of any exclusive claims to proper interpretation or any claims that the given interpretation is the correct one on the basis of the incontrovertible feelings experienced by the reader during the reading. Any other reader, or that same reader on a different day might feel something else and read differently. Instead, the experience of the reader provides a starting point for interpretation germane to the text, and then itself is interpreted. What the reader notices, feels, and thinks in the course of the reading is interpreted in terms of how that experience is generated by the text. Even though the interpretation begins in subjective experience, what it produces can still be discussed and critiqued as getting the novel right or wrong. The upshot of this approach is it guards against misreadings of the novel without limiting the number of ways in which it can be faithfully read. There are as many true readings of the novel as there are readings, and corrective dialogue among them ensures their fidelity to the novel.

The second aspect, in which the reader's experience is prioritized without reference to the influence of everything else that reader has previously read, thought or felt, carries the risk of the reader simply remaining ignorant of what has influenced one's reading. There is no such thing as a naive reading. One solution is to account, as thoroughly as possible, for every influence upon a given reading, so that a metacritique of readerly self-awareness embeds the sense of a text in prior existing and publicly available discourses of meaning. This, however, comes at the cost of hobbling the method proposed here, which is to interpret the avowedly idiosyncratic reading that began in the individual experience of the reader rather than to use the reader's experience as a ground for interpreting the text. What insights may once have flushed in the mind of an absorbed reader can cool in the work of tracing influences, to the point where further criticism loses touch with that original reading. If a first reading is somewhat naive, then a kind of commitment to naivete is called for in any re-reading, or in the

reading of anything new, even after years of wide reading. Skillful reading depends on the cultivation of this sort of naivete. The reading pursued here is not entirely naive, and the influence of the rest of my life certainly informed it, but the method of reading here is to read ‘as if’ naively, so that the reading itself, rather than any external methods or ideas, provides the entry point into interpretation.

The trick of an amateur analysis such as mine is to maintain a kind of naivete that does not sacrifice care, attentiveness, or strict argument, but holds everything else in the body of ‘Thomas Mann scholarship’, or ‘*Joseph* scholarship’, in abeyance. If *Joseph* succeeds as a work of art, its effect cannot depend on familiarity with the scholarly discourse that surrounds it. One need not, perhaps, even know the *Joseph* story as it is told in Genesis, even though the narrator assumes that one does and trades on the reader’s familiarity with the story to produce certain effects.¹² Any intelligent reader should be able to pick up the novel without preparation, enjoy, and understand it.

A similar approach to reading turns up in Mann’s essay on Kleist’s *Amphitryon*, contemporary with the composition of *Joseph*, in which he argues for the necessity of the exact same suspension of the knowledge of existing commentary for the faithful and loyal consideration of a well-loved work. For Mann, this work in consideration was *Amphitryon* and it was the theme of loyalty in the work, and Mann’s own loyalty to the work that inspired his own demonstrative renunciation of what ‘everyone else’ had said about the work.¹³ Of course, in naming those commentators, Mann betrays his knowledge of them, but this only indicates that naivete is not ignorance, but a committed willingness to allow the text to work on him as a reader. Its themes of loyalty elicited a method of readers’ loyalty from Mann, and *Joseph*’s highly original treatment of originality requires that my own work attain some degree of originality if it is to be faithful to the novel. Part of *Joseph*’s pedagogical effect is that it teaches its reader to read it in this way. This mode of reading is at the root of how Mann’s care to get the source material ‘just right’ enabled him to write a characteristically ‘Mann’ novel, and how the characters in learning how to read their own origins developed their distinctive tradition, and therefore is the kind of

faithful reading out of which anything new emerges. It provides a model for my own reading. In Mann's concern for loyalty to *Amphitryon*, in his fidelity to the Joseph story in his composition of *Joseph*, and in my concern for originality in *Joseph*, it is the love of the novel that shuns scholarly apparatus and jealously guards the primacy of the amateur's experience of reading as the beginning of any interpretation.

Reading 'As If' Naively

The method of the present dissertation in dealing with the issue of how other ideas and other scholarship relates to the pursuit of this amateur's reading is to treat everything that informed this reading more as an acknowledged resonance of ideas rather than as a system of influence. While other reading in philosophy of history, language and literature has certainly informed my intellectual disposition and continued to inform the present interpretation of *Joseph and His Brothers*, the workings of such influence is too mysterious to trace. Who can say what influenced any particular moment of readerly interest? An account of these influences on the present reading would be impossible to contest or verify.¹⁴ It would be dishonest to explain the present reading in terms of the influence of some theory, thinker, method, or idea because such influence would have to be taken at my word. Besides, if I am right about *Joseph* or the problem of originality in some way, the rigour, accuracy, and nuance of this reading can only be contested in public and scholarly discourse by its answerability to the text of *Joseph*, which provides the interpretive anchor for the present reading, and protects this reading from solipsism, or from being mere opinion. A more humble approach to other texts and ideas is to acknowledge the places where I notice their resonance with ideas and themes that have been produced directly in the reading, which provides a sort of foothold for future dialogue between the particular interpretation pursued here and other readings of *Joseph* or of the ideas that emerge here. The expectation of this potential, future, continued dialogue is essential to the interpretation developed here.

As long as it remains answerable to *Joseph*, the present reading stands in implicit and potential dialogue with every other reading – even other of my own possible readings – that is likewise answerable to the novel. The acknowledgement of points of contact between this dissertation and other studies gives some suggestion about the direction that dialogue between them could take. For this task, it is not necessary that every single other idea or text that could be brought into dialogue with this study is enumerated, but only enough that a sense of the scholarly and philosophical context of the ideas in this dissertation be established, so that conversation can continue.

To this end, there will be throughout the main text of this study a series of endnotes that indicate some of the associations that I myself made with other thinkers and theories as the present reading was underway that may provide some direction for further discussion or research. These notes will include other theoretical treatments of ideas similar to those produced in this study, further commentary on *Joseph* that may be interesting or important but is tangential to whatever main idea is being discussed in the main text, or indications of the internal connections of the present study that would overwhelm the main text if included at every point. They should not be read as explanations for what is argued in the main text, but as points of generative association. Sometimes they seem to agree with ideas in the main text in a different idiom or context, and sometimes they are points of difference. They were largely jotted as notes to myself in the first composition of the main text, and so rightfully belong to it. Together they indicate at least some of the resonance of ideas that informed the present reading, even though the exact mechanism of their influence remains mysterious and even though they are only those influences of which I was conscious at the time of writing. They may be of interest to the reader, but are not absolutely necessary and should not be taken as providing the interpretive key to the main text.

Risk

Setting out this method of reading at the outset was intended to avoid smuggling in a system of meaning external to *Joseph* by the application of some predetermined method. This aim requires acknowledging that no perfectly naive reading exists. Therefore, this study must continually re-articulate its own method by continually developing its own vocabulary of ‘reading’ throughout. Yes, *Joseph* must be approached with the naivete of an amateur’s reading, but by invoking the method of ‘reading’, part of the goal of this dissertation is to learn what it means to read. This is the same attitude of slightly irreverent piety that pervades the novel – both in the character of Joseph and in Mann’s own serious but playful re-telling. Reading *Joseph* on these terms is a risk whose downside is foolishness, but whose upside is that it becomes possible to understand the possibility of historical experience, including its turn away from an exhaustive grasp of its sources. The risk corresponds to that which is available for every historical individual to take at every moment. There are so many ways that pure historical experience is evaded out of the fear that it is impossible and that only concessions to ignorance, or irony, can get an individual through life. To risk historical experience in a way that corresponds to the risk of reading *Joseph* in this way comes with the downside of slipping – perhaps deeper than before – into the illusions that make up historical life, but with the upside that even by giving up on being the exhaustive authority on ourselves, which is the ostensive ideal of historical individuality, a new way of living through historical individuality may become possible.

Writing in Response to Reading

While the pleasure-reading of novels is ostensibly a private activity, any interpretation, even the amateur’s analysis proposed here, produces a response, in life or letters, to the reading. The greatest effort is demanded of the reader who writes a response, because as it takes on the coherence of public language it risks losing touch with the privacy of the experience of reading. In this it is like the

difficulty of dream interpretation, where vivid private experience pales in the telling. The challenge of saying something true about the reading follows from the degree of privacy and individuality that corresponds to the skill of the reader. The most skilled reader is most attuned to how their own experience is elicited by the text, while the less skilled reader only elaborates tropes, typical feelings or old ideas. The less skilled reader lacks originality, and in expounding what is ostensibly a personal experience in fact trades in cliché. In other words, the one who understands a text best also has the most private experience of reading. The skill required for the public response involved in interpretation increases with every corresponding increase in the private skill of the reader. This apparent paradox, that what a skilled reader says will be true of the text, and publicly verifiable, but also of the utterly private experience of the reading, indicates the possibility of the kind of originality at issue in *Joseph* and in this study.

No reading exhausts its text, but also cannot be sustained forever, and at some point turns away from the text and produces a response. The skilled reader exploits this turn towards publicity. While the less skilled reader makes apologies for the gap between the text and the response and authorizes their incomplete interpretation on the basis of feeling or subjective experience, the skilled reader articulates the quality of turn from privacy to publicity. Where the less skilled reader justifies an interpretation based on, say, identification with a character or the feeling experienced in reading, the skilled reader notices these readerly experiences and describes the features of the text which elicited them. Such a response is the elaboration of a reading entirely answerable to, but not entirely derived from, the text, and can be questioned in terms of how accurately the text is related. A reading can be wrong about a text, and in that case should be contested, but the truth of any response can never be guaranteed by appeal the text alone. No text contains its own meaning in itself as if as a kernel of truth – unchanging, objective, univocal, unambiguous. The text is what it is – a text that elicits interpretation. The kind of response that begins in the acknowledgement of the inevitable turn away of the reader from the text to

public response is one that precludes closure of meaning while remaining committed to clarity, insight, and fidelity to the text. Such a response always remains open to, and even calls for, further reading and further response.

The present dissertation is a response in writing to an amateur's reading of *Joseph and His Brothers*. The problem of method involves not only an account of what kind of reading this is, but also the kind of writing that it can produce. How is it possible to write about the novel's excess of meaning and the potential of any number of readings without imposing arbitrary distinctions on it? The purpose of the present dissertation is to show that the kind of amateur, experiential reading proposed here does not produce mere opinion but can be written up in a way that answers to the novel and at the same time demonstrates the pedagogical effect of *Joseph* on its reader. The written response of the reader – in this case, myself in this dissertation – can be devoted to demonstrating this effect in a way that any other reader can contest in terms of how well the arguments of this dissertation answer to *Joseph*. To do so, of course, that future reader is required to participate in the same kind of interpretation of their own experience of reading the novel. The present dissertation is written to suggest that the kind of interpretation pursued here and continued by any other reader proves that *Joseph* teaches its reader how to think and feel. Not any subjective feeling is appropriate and not any opinion about the text is germane. Instead, continual interpretation, which is sustained here over a couple hundred pages but implicitly expects the possibility of more, draws out particular kinds of readerly experience which are not identical but remain mutually intelligible. This dissertation is contestable, but does not participate in a zero-sum game intended to 'get to the bottom' of *Joseph* and thus to fix its meaning. It is obviously a response to only part of what *Joseph* is about, and another reading will produce another response, and it is the mutual sympathy of these responses that is the guarantee of their truth.

Fragmentary Writing

To recognize the excessive totality of meaning of *Joseph* without imposing arbitrary distinctions on it precludes the kind of writing that imposes some external idea to it by the application of method. Writing that remains aware of its incapacity to make full sense of its beginnings and maintains a provisional vocabulary of method can be described as ‘fragmentary’. It is fragmentary in the sense that each chapter, each ‘fragment’, of this dissertation pursues a specific and particular interpretation of reading some aspect of *Joseph* and does not essentially rely on any of the others. Each chapter has a degree of independence from the others. At the same time, as the dissertation proceeds, chapter after chapter, the method of ‘reading’ and the concept of ‘originality’ are progressively developed, and the dissertation does achieve a coherent unity.¹⁵

The contents of this dissertation are elaborations of particular moments of reading the novel, drawn from a piles of index cards jotted during moments of insight, excitement, curiosity and pleasure, and developed as part of a unified account of my reading. In the development of some notes others were pulled in, each of which could have anchored another discussion that would have proceeded differently. Therefore many of my notes remain untouched and undiscussed and those that are, could have been elaborated with a different focus, with the result that the reading presented here is one particular reading among so many possible others – it is even one of many of my own possible readings – and therefore wildly independent of the kind of scholarly verification that would seek other work that overlaps or corresponds with my own. Yet the availability of *Joseph* to any of my own readers allows them to see whether or not I have misread or misrepresented it, and the inner coherence of my own argument, form the twin pillars of the scholarly merit of the present work.

This fragmentary mode of writing is to write without any pretence of exhausting the meaning of *Joseph*. It will indicate and elaborate, but not resolve, complexities and tensions within the novel, by trying to make sense of them on their own terms, recognizing that even the selection of passages places

some meaningful connections outside the scope of any given fragment of interpretation. Fragmentary writing is always a near-miss, like any other method of writing, but it is a method that takes failure to perfectly represent its subject as its principle. *Joseph* is a text that clearly elicits this kind of fragmentary interpretation because it is so complex and self-referential that any methodical attempt at totalizing its meaning would be quickly frustrated. Any direct approach to explaining it would simply glance off one of its many facets. Therefore, the present study will read selected passages from the novel as simultaneously exemplifying and revising the vocabulary of ‘originality’ and ‘reading’. At times, this will involve close attention to a single passage and at other times tracing the connections between various passages. As no single passage in a novel has ultimate priority over the rest, the reading described in the writing of this dissertation is always tentative and provisional. Gathering fragments together is like the accumulation of tangents around a progressively described circle. As they gather, fragments of writing get ever-nearer to the spirit of a faithful reading. Part of what is going on in this dissertation is the continual revision of its own vocabulary of the process of interpretation underway. In other words, it is not only to read, but to continually learn what it means to read, and so to prepare for new insights into the possibility of originality. In this, it echoes the stories of Joseph’s family, out of whose reckoning with their origins emerged the language of the future, and so connects the possibility of an original reading with the possibility of the kind of historical originality that is the concern of education.

Completion

The essential incompleteness of these fragments is opposed by the need to complete the dissertation, which can only occur when some boundedness, unity, closure, is established. There is no fixed finish line for this kind of fragmentary writing, and the predicament of figuring out what counts as ‘finished’ echoes the experience of the narrator of *Joseph*, who admits of the story that ‘ultimately it

no more has an end than it actually had a beginning, and instead, since it cannot possibly go on forever like this, it must excuse itself and simply cease its narration.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1431)

The relative completion of this dissertation follows from its having touched on most of the major moments in the Joseph story, and from having developed out of the novel a unifying sense of how ‘originality’ works – unifying not because it is a unified concept that requires no further revision, but that the consistency of what each fragment says about originality increases with each, until the idea is sufficiently saturated that the addition of another fragment would fit, but would not add all that much to the central idea of the reading. In the present case, everything written here is focused inward, according to a kind of organizational gravity centred on the notion of originality. If this centre were a cornerstone on top of which the edifice of a study could be built, limits to its size and scope would be in order, and clarity of completion would be readily apparent. But originality is never finished; the new is the origin of the even newer, even before it grows old. Originality is more like a space over which an arch of fragmentary writing is built, each stone tending inwards, each relying on the others to maintain its place in the structure. Scope, in fragmentary writing, is determined by this inward focus, to the effect that each element remains open at the back to all the other texts and meanings in relation to which it exists but which do not form the central focus of the study.

Secondary Literature

As the present study takes my reading of the novel as the unit of analysis, and argues that the interpretation of that reading will generate publicly and objectively verifiable insights about the novel at the same time that it demonstrates the educational effect of the novel on the experience of the reader, the primary purpose of this literature review is to describe the scholarly landscape concerning *Joseph and His Brothers* without engaging directly with that scholarship as part of the interpretation pursued in this study. Some of the studies described below are very different than my own, especially those that place the novel within a larger context, so that the unit of analysis is not the experience of reading, nor of the novel itself, but Mann's oeuvre, his psychology, the political and historical context and so on, with the novel serving as an exemplary part of that larger unit of analysis. The distinction of my own work from these follows from this essential difference in the unit of analysis under consideration. As described above, in the section on the method of this study, those other readings that I noticed had some resonance with the ideas developed in this study are noted in the appropriate places as endnotes to the main text. They are not included in this literature review, which serves to provide a post-hoc review of other studies that have been made of *Joseph and His Brothers*, but played no role in the interpretation pursued in the present study. There are some very important insights provided in the studies surveyed below, but they did not in any way help to advance my own articulations of originality, for the simple reason that they were all read after the present study was drafted. It is important to emphasize that the method and contents of the present study were generated by the reading itself and any conclusions drawn in the present study are always demonstrable results of the interpretation of the reading of *Joseph*, and require no secondary scholarship, even when that scholarship includes similar ideas. With that said, the value of including a review of this scholarship in this dissertation is that by situating the present study in the context of other scholarship, areas of potential dialogue between different readings are indicated. The studies surveyed here that differ greatly from my own indicate a gap in the literature

that the present dissertation addresses. Where a degree of sympathy appears between my own interpretation and some of the others discussed below, even when they apply a very different method than the one used here, that sympathy testifies to the validity of the central argument of this dissertation, which is that the reading provides an education for the reader that is simultaneously original and amenable to continued public dialogue.

Joseph and His Brothers was written at a time of great historical upheaval which placed the question of the artist's political and moral responsibilities in high relief. All the scholarship devoted to the novel in the context of these larger analyses, say as a recovery of myth from how it appears in Nazi ideology, is valuable as long as the unit of analysis is clearly understood when conclusions are proposed. The present study takes a reading of *Joseph* as its unit of analysis, and there are significant risks of unit confusion that arise if anything other than the material of the reading is developed in the interpretation. It is tempting, for example, to conflate a study of the context of the novel's composition with a study of the novel itself, and then to make unwarranted explanatory conclusions about the novel, particularly in the case of a novel by Thomas Mann, whose novels attempt to make sense of the life of the artist. To make this attempt within the work of art itself can be taken as another layer of artistic expression, and offers no firm footing for understanding the art or the artist at all. What justification can Mann's letters, lectures or even diaries provide for a interpreting his novels in terms of the biographical details of his life, his psychological makeup, and so on, if his own words are the best source for knowing these, and if in the novels the very trustworthiness of an artist's word is questioned? To make sense of the novels or of Mann's life or the historical or literary contexts of the novels requires some other unit of analysis that provides an entry point for interpretation. The present study produces insights into *Joseph* by establishing its unit of analysis as the present reading of the novel, with no other explanatory ideas or information being included as essential to the interpretation pursued. At the same time, and equally germane to the unit of analysis described, insights into the education of the

reader are generated. As long as the scope of a study is clear, and the method proposed fits that scope, there are any number of fruitful directions in which to pursue studies of Thomas Mann or of any of his works, including *Joseph*. Yes, this means that there should be no problem drawing the limits of scholarly scope closely around reading a single work, as I do here, and leaving the rest of Mann's life, works and letters aside, along with the field of other scholarship that studies these.

If my own work is faithful to the novel then it will transmit some degree of the educational effect that *Joseph* has on its readers on to my own. I hope that my readers do not only learn something that fits into an existing system of scholarly expertise surrounding Thomas Mann or *Joseph*, or to learn something 'about' *Joseph*, but come to understand my particular reading of the novel and have their own readings enlivened. I hope that my own readers feel like they are at some level reading along with me and understand my reading to the point that they understand the possibility of their own and will be interested enough to pick up *Joseph* for themselves. The existing scholarship concerning *Joseph* provides an important guardrail against mis-reading, but cannot vouch for the truth of any particular reading. In other words, familiarity with the scholarship will verify that my own reading of *Joseph* is not wrong, but can say nothing about its truth, which depends on its own elaboration, my own readers, and my reader's reading of *Joseph and His Brothers*. My minimal goal for this work that it points to *Joseph* as an abiding source of pleasure and insight into some universal aspects of human experience, and into some specific aspects of historical experience which are described here as 'education', and that some of my readers will pick up *Joseph* and let the novel do its pedagogical work on them. If my own writing exemplifies some degree of originality in its methods and its insights, it will continue the tradition inaugurated by Joseph's family of originality always drawing out the possibility of more originality.

The following survey of existing scholarship on *Joseph and His Brothers* is organized to show how it almost exclusively places the novel in broader contexts of analysis. Only McDonald's 1999

book, *Thomas Mann's Joseph and His Brothers: Writing, Performance, and the Politics of Loyalty*, pursues the kind of readerly approach to *Joseph* similar to my own, and is treated at greater length than the other sources. However, even this book takes as its unit of analysis Thomas Mann's entire written production during the time of *Joseph's* composition, with special emphasis on some lectures, written concurrently with *Joseph*, which are demonstrated to have contributed to the creative process of writing the novel. To its credit, the book is explicit about what it examined, and it is not the novel as such, nor McDonald's particular readerly experience, but is the novel as a part of Mann's creative process of performance and self-influence. Following an examination of McDonald's book in some detail will be a survey of the various ways that *Joseph* has been considered in terms of its place in a given context. There are works (Heller, 1981; Newmark, 2012; Stock, 1994; Van Doren, 1957) that consider *Joseph* as a whole in terms of how its artistic tone expresses certain ideas that run through Mann's career. This tone is variously described as 'irony' or 'humour' or 'comedy' but in each case the author locates *Joseph* within Mann's oeuvre and suggests that any insights or ideas drawn from the novels are inseparable from this tone. There are other works (Corngold, 2022; King, 1978; Kurzke, 2002; Rosenwald, 1978) that describe *Joseph's* place in Mann's biography. While almost all the sources mentioned so far pay at least some attention to how *Joseph* stands *vis a vis* the rise of Nazism as an example of a kind of humanistic myth, a study like Von Rohr Scaff's (1990) examines this issue in more detail. After these works that place *Joseph* in biographical and historical context, there are many (Bishop, 1996; Bloch, 1963; Cerf, 1982; Dolgoy, 2013; Gurska, 2017; Putz, 2014; Reed, 1974; Schonfield, 2006; Seidlin, 1962; Slade, 1971) that place *Joseph* in the context of its own sources and influence. A final set of studies (Levenson, 1998; Tomes, 1977; Tumanov, 2007) consider *Joseph* in the context of biblical scholarship and commentary.

In addition to those studies which place *Joseph* more or less as a whole in broader contexts, there will be several others that take a specific and partial look at some aspect of the novel, isolated

from a reading of the novel as a whole. Some (Swenson, 1989; Voronina, 2019) examine very specific literary techniques and some (Khapaeva, 2012; Spariosu, 2015; Tumanov, 2007) pursue a limited, specific reading of some part. The risk of such partial readings is that they can easily be more consistent with some pre-existing idea than with *Joseph* itself and result in a misreading. One exemplary study that falls into such misreading (Marquard, 2015) helps to illustrate the importance of the particular method proposed in the present dissertation, which is to sustain a reading of the novel, as a whole, on its own terms. Among all the secondary sources to be surveyed, none do this; they either locate the whole of *Joseph and His Brothers* in larger contexts, or focus on partial readings that risk a loss of the sense of the whole.

McDonald Book and Reviews

William McDonald's 1999 book, *Thomas Mann's Joseph and his Brothers: Writing, Performance, and the Politics of Loyalty*, is a significant and relatively (in the history of Mann studies) recent entry into the studies of Thomas Mann's writing of *Joseph and His Brothers*. It stands out as worthy of some consideration here because it is the rare example of a book length treatment of *Joseph and His Brothers*. Most other commentary on *Joseph* consists of book chapters within larger projects concerning Mann's career or some theme that runs throughout, or are narrowly defined article length studies that do not have the space to draw out extended readings of the novel, which results in their missing out on the 'readability' of the novel and also how that readability itself is significant for how the ideas in the novel are worked out. To miss it is also to misunderstand, or understand too narrowly, how Mann works out his concerns in *Joseph*. McDonald's book is a notable entry in this regard, which is written out of a 'long-standing love and loyalty toward *Joseph and His Brothers*' (McDonald, 199, p. x) and maintains this attitude to the novel throughout the book. McDonald, throughout, examines how the same themes of love and loyalty form the main cloth of the novel as the concern of its characters

and of Mann's own relation to it. In this appreciation of how everything important in the novel is also expressed in its style, my work is in close agreement with McDonald's. In my work, this appreciation is expressed as a concern with 'originality'. Mann's highly original work, whose characters are motivated by a concern with their own origins, draws out in my own work a thematization of 'originality' as a concept, and a degree of originality of method. In McDonald's reading, performance and loyalty take central place. A conceptual bridge between 'originality' and performance and loyalty can be developed; the latter two can be imagined as twin aspects of originality, with performance oriented to the future as the ever new, and loyalty to the past, but to do so would lead away from the more pertinent discussion of how McDonald's work proceeds, and the present dissertation differs from it in important ways. In the end, McDonald's and my own reading of *Joseph and His Brothers* are complementary, even though there is little explicit overlap in methods or conclusions.

McDonald's book sets out to discuss *Joseph* in terms of its place in Mann's overall creative, intellectual, and political life which all contribute to a web of what McDonald calls 'self-influence'. McDonald knows that any 'loving and loyal' reading of the novel will appreciate that there is always more to say about the influences in Mann's life that inform the novel, and critically, that each of these are complicated by their interweaving with the rest. Therefore McDonald proposes to concentrate on the intertextual relationships between the *Joseph* project and several of the lecture-essays that took shape in and around its making. I interpret these connections in light of Mann's "voice", not only the oral qualities of the narrative but his love of performing all his texts in public, of making his voice heard. (McDonald, 1999, p. x)

For McDonald, loyalty to the novel means considering it as a performed text, about performance, in the context of Mann's working out his own loyalties to his intellectual, cultural, political inheritance, his own work, and the details of his own personality. The term loyalty derives from Mann's essay on Kleist's *Amphitryon*, which is one of the essays that McDonald studies as a text

contemporary to *Joseph*. It resembles another term which I have tended to use, and which was derived from *Joseph*, which is 'faithfulness'. McDonald describes his method as an 'imitation' of Mann's own, in *Joseph*, which is given not to exhaustive retelling, but to 'giving the reader what he terms "representative" conversations among the many others he claims he might have recorded.' (McDonald, 1999, p. xi) and proceeds to give detailed accounts of several significant passages in the novel. Only an extended work like McDonald's can do this and still give a satisfying view of the whole novel without relying on the kind of summary that risks a slide away from the novel and towards the conceptual concerns of the critic or the overall study in which the reading is placed. McDonald discusses selected passages with the idea of Mann's own performances in mind, including performances of some of Mann's other lectures, which have been preserved as essays.¹⁶ In every case McDonald treats these essays as performances, paying attention to their contexts and the features which lend them to oral delivery: 'But even silent readers half-consciously project a voice of a narrator; when we read we also listen.' (McDonald, 1999, p. 229)

Once a beginning has been made in terms of reading the novel and the essays with oral performance in mind, McDonald is furnished with an abundance of material for consideration in his book. Indeed, when 'performance is literally everywhere in *Joseph the Provider*' (McDonald, 1999, p. 232), when Mann was well known for 'his love of performing all his texts in public' (McDonald, 1999, p. x), significant reason is provided for interpreting all of his essays and *Joseph* in terms of their performance. Further, when what is performed is often exactly the same in the novel as in Mann's life, that is, issues of narcissism and loyalty, these two ideas justify reading the novel in terms of the lectures, and vice versa. The book proceeds by considering in detail selected of Mann's essays that are contemporary with *Joseph* alongside those passages which seem to deal with the same ideas. In particular, Mann's essay on Kleist's *Amphitryon* furnishes McDonald with the means of understanding identity and Joseph's narcissism in terms of performance, relationship, and shifting appearances rather

than in more convenient terms of a Freudian, Oedipal, reading. (McDonald, 1999, p. 64) Mann's two essays on Freud also figure significantly in McDonald's reading of the latter parts of *Joseph*, and are discussed in terms of how Mann 'contains' and 'revises' the work that he had recently read in Freud's *Civilization and Discontents*. For example, while McDonald describes in detail all the ways in which '*Civilization and its Discontents* appears everywhere in *Joseph in Egypt*...' (McDonald, 1999, p. 182) he concentrates on how Mann situates these ideas in Egypt, in the voice of Potiphar's wife Mut-em-Enet, as a way to come to terms with its pessimistic contrast to the overall optimism of Mann's project. McDonald quips that '*Joseph in Egypt*'s almost audible subtitle is "Joseph in the Freudian Sheol"' (McDonald, 1999, p. 196), and later that 'At several points Mut seems to quote *Civilization* directly' (McDonald, 1999, p. 207). McDonald's skillful reading of all of these texts in their interrelation illuminates the ways in which Mann reckoned with them all and worked out his own project.

McDonald's book argues that by reading *Joseph and His Brothers* alongside those of Mann's lecture-essays that were contemporary with it, *Joseph* appears to be a kind of Kleistian alternative to a Freudian account of narcissism and identity centred on performance and a constellation of relationships rather than heroic self-discovery, and that this insight is confirmed by the way *Joseph* itself is written in terms of performance. One of the unique contributions that McDonald makes is to help readers of *Joseph and His Brothers* appreciate it in terms of performance by considering passages where writing, reading and performance are so interwoven that 'we listen, as we read, to Mann's reading of Potiphar's listening to Joseph's reading – intricacies enough to suspend the reader and listener well above any simple binaries or ephemeral speech and permanent writing' (McDonald, 1999, p. 203), and passages where a degree of 'orality' might be missed by the silent reader. McDonald even enjoins the reader to try reading at least part of *Joseph* out loud, in order appreciate the rhythms and even comedy that depend on the voice.

One of the upshots of McDonald's way of reading *Joseph* is that a conceptual continuity is noted between the way the novel deals with the problem of beginnings and the way that the novel itself has many beginnings. Within the novel, there is no single or simple beginning. Origins are always multiple, tentative, and interrelated, according to the present concerns of the characters whose 'performances of identity', to stick with McDonald's vocabulary, constantly shuffle and refigure them. *Joseph* has 'no definable, controlling origin though many of its intertexts and inaugural points can be seen.' (McDonald, 1999, p. 151) Likewise, '*Joseph and His Brothers* begins at multiple points and in multiple ways' (McDonald, 1999, p. 1) and there is a degree of arbitrariness to the choice of beginning with Mann's *Amphitryon* essay as the way into reading *Joseph*, which McDonald acknowledges (McDonald, 1999, p. 7). But the book must start somewhere, and contemplating the various possibilities for those of Mann's essays which provide the best starting point for his book 'would require a length surpassing that of the tetralogy itself.' (McDonald, 1999, p. 7), so McDonald is well justified in the choice of performance and loyalty as they appear in the *Amphitryon* essay and in *Joseph* as his start. Of course, this decision rests in McDonald, and despite its plausibility is not *necessarily* consistent with what Mann himself said about his own work.¹⁷ In deciding on this particular starting point, McDonald's consideration of *all* of Mann's writings as performances requires that there is no firm, clear, authoritative account – even in Mann's own letters and diaries – for what Mann is up to in any of them. They must be interpreted in light of the whole of Mann's performative life, and McDonald recognizes that framing his project in this way as a reading of the performative unity of Mann's work, is to 'implicitly claim to recognize more than Mann did about aspects of his creations' (McDonald, 1999, p. x), namely, the details of the mutual influence between his various works. Later, McDonald acknowledges the risks involved in such a method, but defends it by suggesting that his 'Answers can only be speculative, but one-way, causal conclusions seem to me less illuminating than the dynamic,

shifting web of connections and feelings that this action produced in our two interwoven texts. *Joseph* enables the “Kleist” essay, and the “Kleist”, *Joseph*.’ (McDonald, 1999, p. 65)

My own beginning is sympathetic with this concern to avoid the kind of ‘one-way causal conclusions’ that are risked by bringing any pre-existing methodological or conceptual commitments to bear on the reading of a novel. McDonald provides an excellent example of how to avoid that mistake, and acknowledges the risks that are entailed by pursuing a ‘loving and loyal’ reading. I also begin with a love of the novel, and propose that to understand it correctly requires that every interpretation must begin in reading the novel on its own terms, and with pleasure. As the beginning of the present dissertation is even narrower than the beginning of McDonald’s book, so the accompanying risk of being wrong, of misreading, is intensified. But in this I remain in good company. In discussing the interactions between Mann’s *Joseph* and his reflections on Freud, McDonald suggests that

both political exigencies and his own reluctances produced a hypercontrolled misreading of Freud. But “misreading” is not, by itself, the proper term. ... Mann does not attempt to mummify *Civilization* in the elaborate wrappings of the Munich lecture. ... Mann needed – and was ready – to face the bleaker consequences of Freud’s essay and resituate them in his own recreation of Egyptian civilization. (McDonald, 1999, p. 182)

In other words, Mann’s Freud may be the Freud he needed, and it is his deviation from Freud’s own understanding or from scholarly consensus that generates Mann’s own work. At the remove in time and space and degree of scholarly distance from Mann and from *Joseph and His Brothers*, both McDonald and I risk this sort of mis-reading of the novel in the name of sacrificing exhaustive – and exhausting – correctness for love, loyalty and fidelity to the novel. Where McDonald acknowledged this risk and guards against it to some degree by gathering multiple texts into his unity of analysis and thus distributes it among them, the present dissertation seeks to amplify the risk and thematize it in the method of ‘amateur’s analysis’ pursued here. If I am wrong, then I am very wrong, but my contention is

that only such a ‘hypercontrolled misreading’ as I attempt can produce the kind of insights about *Joseph and His Brothers* that I achieve. McDonald’s book and my own work are different but complementary. The degree of difference between my own work and the other scholarship surrounding *Joseph and His Brothers* corresponds to ‘how far back’ the difference in beginnings is located. By beginning with a reading of the novel and sticking with that beginning, the theme, method, and concept of originality emerged, and it is the proximity of this beginning to McDonald’s beginning with the consideration of *Joseph* and its satellite texts as *readings* that leads to the sympathy of the ideas that follow.

McDonald’s book received some interesting responses, including Miller’s 2002 review which appreciates that looking for ‘a consistency of motivation in the fictional writer and the non-fictional author ... reveals tensions and consistencies that one might miss in reading the *Joseph* novels as authorless narrative’ (Miller, 2002, p. 341). Miller points out the risk of an approach like my own which seeks to understand the novel as a whole, on its own terms, which is that an important interpretive key to the novel will be missed. But the success of my project also derives from its approach, because if all the cross-fertilization that McDonald indicates really exists, then it would leave its traces in the novel itself, as interconnectedness, formal innovations and interruptions. Whatever external cross-fertilizations exist, including between the novel and Mann as the author, are interesting to trace, but only meaningful insofar as their significance could have been read within the novel already. In other words, to study the novel itself without really attending to the author’s motivations does *not* mean missing out on the details that Miller names, but will lead to discussing them in other terms and from other beginnings. There is a near analogy here to the cross-fertilization of dreams and reason that I discuss in *Joseph*: Within the dream itself there is enough of the complexity and influence of waking life to interpret it. Everything external to the dream can confirm and guide interpretation, if that is the method one chooses, but the initial interpretation always remains in the dream’s first telling. Only

Pharaoh's bungling courtiers and magicians sought to explain the dream in terms foreign to it. There is room for methods like McDonald's and my own to both say something true about *Joseph*, and a similar kind of sympathy between them as there was between Pharaoh's and Joseph's interpretations of the same dream.

Minden's 2000 review of McDonald's book asks why such a monograph should be written on Mann's novel when Mann's star seems to be on the wane, and suggests that it proceeds from the same kind of loyalty that Mann himself discusses in the *Amphitryon* essay as a mode of reading and analysis. This is certainly justification enough. Minden notes that McDonald finds a new way between critics who view Mann's politics as their own, independent theme that is 'adjunct or interruption' of his fiction, and those 'for whom Mann's political engagement was indisputably real and entirely compatible with his work as a writer. This seems a valuable and productive contribution.' (Minden, 2000, p. 126) This review was written 20 years ago, and since then every return of interest in Mann seems to centre on his politics. I think that *Joseph* actually is one of the books that can support renewed interest in Mann in broader terms.

Tone and Ideas

The following studies examine *Joseph and His Brothers* in terms of how its artistic tone conveys certain insights or ideas that are taken to be part of Mann's overall oeuvre. As such, they gain insight into the novel at the expense of drawing out what is specific about this novel, or of how its specificity is produced. With this in mind, I will draw attention to how the following studies relate to my own.

Mark Van Doren's 1957 study, *Joseph and His Brothers: A Comedy in Four Parts*, provides an important commentary on the relation between comedy and conceptions of time, which helps to situate my own concern with originality with the common approach to treating the comedy of Mann's work in

terms of ‘irony’ as a way of conceptually gathering the multi-layered features of his writing that resist straightforward interpretation. The tensions between Mann’s voice and his narrators’ and those that are generated by treating the problem of the artist in society within a work of art all contribute to the difficulty of interpreting his works, and their comedy helps the reader come to terms with this difficulty. But interpretation of Mann’s fiction in terms of its irony must be complemented by reading Mann’s work as comedy in a way that cannot be reduced to irony, and which opens up avenues of interpretation that irony does not. Van Doren’s crucial insight is to connect comedy with a particular vision of time, and writes that

Tragedy believes furiously, even obsessively, in time; time always presses there, leaving the hero unfree to act in the wise way he might if he had the leisure. Comedy, on the other hand, relaxes and disperses time; spreads it out or draws it thin so that it looks a little like eternity (Van Doren, 1957, p. 97).

Comedy relishes surprises and unpredictability and elaborates those particular moments in which these form part of the experience of freedom in time. Van Doren writes that

...when we have succeeded in giving ourselves the present moment we are near to eternity as we shall ever get. Eternity is not a lot of time; it is no time at all, and so is this moment that passes before we know it has come – except that we do know some moments when they come, and it is these and only these from which we learn. The comic genius loves to speculate about such matters.... (Van Doren, 1957, p. 96).

Joseph and His Brothers links the possibility of human freedom and individuality to the comic spirit. Van Doren, summarizes his description of Mann’s work, with the argument that ‘...the greatest thing in man is his power to know and remember many things at once; to master time; to be in a word the receptacle of the comic spirit.’ (Van Doren, 1957, p. 99) The conception of comedy in terms of the expansive vision of time includes and exceeds everything that irony makes possible. Comedy allows

for all the same play of illusion and appearance, identity and distances that a study of irony will notice, because it 'knows that time both does and does not exist; it can look like sheer illusion, though the illusion is one in which comedy is one in which comedy will luxuriously live.' (Van Doren, 1957, p. 99). This study helps to guard scholarship on *Joseph and His Brothers* from being too restricted by theories of irony, and miss so much else. Irvin Stock, whose 1994 book, *Ironic out of Love: The Novels of Thomas Mann*, shares this view, describes it in terms of a basic love of life and humanity that undergirds every ironic experiment, gesture, interrogation that Mann undertakes.

Van Doren points out that, as a result of its expansive and patient view of time, in comedy unlike tragedy, scenes of recognition are downplayed. In the example of the affair between Mut-emet and Joseph, Van Doren suggests that the comic thinning of time slows things down so that the episode can be expressed fully and completely in the time that it is narrated. The episode, in the comic spirit, is self-contained and requires no integration with the inexorability of lived historical experience. In fact, it is Joseph's realization that the affair is incommensurable with his essential and characteristic concern for the future that allows him finally to break it off. The comic spirit allows Mann, Van Doren suggests, to dispense with any scene of reunion and recognition later on that would have plausibly been the result of Joseph's elevation in Pharaoh's court and would have spelled the tragic finale of the affair. Yes, Van Doren rightly points out that the narrator 'discusses the possibility [of a reunion scene] only to reject it' (Van Doren, 1957, p. 105). Van Doren sees this comic element everywhere as Mann's invention: 'And this work is endless; it fills a fearsome multitude of pages; nor was any of it done in *Genesis*. It is all Mann, all modern, and all comedy.' (Van Doren, 1957, p. 102) However, the license for comic treatment is already located in *Genesis* when the tragic potential for revenge in the recognition scene between Joseph and his brothers, is reversed in Joseph's open armed declaration that all the fraternal strife was turned, by God, towards good. Mann draws out the comedy of the family reunion in a chapter entitled 'The Holy Game', in which the narrator knows that narrative elements like

suspense have no part and where laughter derives from forestalling the scene of recognition. There is more comedy involved with the narrator's voice than can be fully discussed here. The narrator often chuckles at and comments on the characters, narration itself, and the reader in amusing ways that go beyond the scope of the present study. The main significance of this narrative posture for the present study is primarily explored in terms of how the narrator's voice provides a key, but not exclusive, element of how *Joseph* teaches its reader how it should be read.

Kevin Newmark's 2012 book *Irony on Occasion* makes the important link between the ironic imagination and the possibility of history as a category of temporal experience, based on drawing out the word 'occasion' in its dual senses of describing a moment in time and of naming a cause, that which 'occasions'. This dual sense is similar to what I draw out of the work 'originality', which in expressing novelty must always also go back to origins. Newmark draws out of 'occasion' the cause, accident, critical moment that he sees at the heart of expressions of irony which leave their mark on human conceptions of time as 'history'. Newmark poses a question that he sees as 'leitmotif throughout his [Mann's] literary production. Do the arts have their foundation in goodness, and can they therefore reliably promise a serene clarity of vision in which hatred and stupidity might ultimately be dissolved?' (Newmark, 2012, p. 183) Most of Newmark's analysis of Mann's irony is a reading of *Death in Venice*, which 'exposes the pose of aesthetic virtuosity as a mere hoax' (Newmark, 2012, p. 197). The character of Joseph certainly has a degree of Mann's famous type of character – the imposter – but this aspect is not really taken up in Newmark's comments on *Joseph*. There is a missed opportunity to find out what *Joseph* has to say about the 'occasion' of history. Newmark certainly had the opportunity to do so, and spends some time discussing the passage early in the novel where Jacob and Joseph discuss Jacob's anxiety about his place in the tradition vis-à-vis Abraham. Jacob worries that he would never have been able to pass the test of faith, while Joseph reimagines the scene so that if Jacob *could* have done as Abraham had done when called to sacrifice his son, then he would have mistaken and betrayed his

actual place in the tradition. There is an entire novel that follows about how such ‘occasions’ of imagining one’s place in tradition also produce and renew that tradition. Unfortunately, Newmark only notices the ‘irony’ present in the scene and investigates that irony by way of an extended reading of Mann’s *older* work, *Death in Venice*. Irony in Mann, Newmark concludes, is basically aesthetic detachment, and Mann’s contribution is to indicate the stupidity that results from detachment and also to suggest that ‘the stupidest thing would be to present that we could one day learn how to shake free of it once and for all.’ (Newmark, 2012, p. 202) While this is true, and serves Newmark’s project in which this chapter on Mann is only one consideration of irony, it is unfortunate that so little is made of what *Joseph* would have to say about such a fruitful combination of ideas as Newmark suggests by relating ‘occasion’ and ‘history’. The fruitfulness of Newmark’s treatment of the word ‘occasion’ as a multi-layered expression of both the impetus for an event and the time at which occurs is similar to that of the word ‘originality’, and it would be interesting to pursue it further in terms of the possibility of history.

Erich Heller’s 1981 book *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German* is a central text in the tradition of interpreting Mann’s writing in terms of irony, and suggests one of the ways that my own dissertation distinguishes itself from that tradition. Whereas a great deal of scholarship of irony has been pursued, Heller’s treatment of *Joseph and His Brothers* explicitly disclaims an elaboration of the modes and varieties of irony that can be found in it. ‘Irony? *Joseph and His Brothers* is, if nothing else, one of the greatest and friendliest conquests the imagination has ever made of irony.’ (Heller, 1981, p. 258) Heller’s approach shares with my own and with McDonald’s the notion that the only way to really understand *Joseph and His Brothers*, and its ironic register, is to read it on its own terms, but Heller is hamstrung, to a degree, by the need to integrate the chapter on *Joseph* into a book organized by the concept of irony.

Heller’s analysis helps his reader understand *Joseph and His Brothers* by placing it in its literary and philosophical contexts. Heller particularly notes the importance of F. Schlegel, Schopenhauer, and

gnostic/Manichean sources for Mann's project, which is to revise the relation between art and the myths of a society. A great deal of scholarship on *Joseph and His Brothers* describes its purpose as a reclamation of myth from Nazi Germany's fascism. Heller writes that the old job of art was to 'improve on common mythology', giving them 'the subtlety and depth of the their exact imaginative minds' (Heller, 1981, p. 215) but that in modernity the artist must, via irony, generate 'new, publicly unrecognizable myths' (Heller, 1981, p. 216). Heller relates Schlegel's prediction that in this task modernity will either 'regain the objectivity of the ancients or destroy itself in the frantic pursuit of the eccentric and the over-individualized.' (Heller, 1981, pp. 217) There are moments, Heller notes, 'in *Joseph and his Brothers* when it seems that Schlegel's utopian literary hopes may be fulfilled.' (Heller, 1981, p. 218) Immediately after this high praise, Heller turns away from the novel specifically and comments on its context, elucidating for the reader the sources and conceptual concern with irony that Mann deployed in the novel.

The most interesting part of Heller's chapter on *Joseph* comes late, as a kind of review that betrays an insight that never had the chance to be developed: 'We have recapitulated the theology of irony at such length, and tried to *render its tone as faithfully as is possible in another language without the help of still lengthier quotations*, because, like an elaborately composed overture it contains the whole thematic and stylistic structure of the work.' (Heller, 1981, p 234, my italics) In the present dissertation, I also note the tendency of faithful quotation to multiply and overwhelm the interpretive enterprise, but explicitly resist the compulsion to 'translate' the reading into a 'different language' which causes Heller his difficulties. Although his is a different project with different constraints than my own, there are moment in his analysis where Heller reveals a sympathy with the motivations that propel my work. 'If it were for nothing else, *Joseph and His Brothers* would be an astonishing work for the ease and naturalness with which the biblical story, unharmed in its original structure, takes its apparently predestined place within Thomas Mann's literary career. In retrospect it almost looks as if,

had it not existed, he would have had to invent it.' (Heller, 1981, p 234). Here we note that Heller takes a step back and gives his criticism a breather in order to express something that struck him primarily as a *reader*, prior to critical, scholarly engagement. And it is in this moment that Heller notes one of the most important elements of *Joseph*, which is the necessity of originality. That Mann would have *had* to invent the highly original story, which Van Doren (1957) described as 'all modern, all Mann' opens into questions of how originality emerges out of sustained and faithful attention to, or reading of, origins. All the scholarship that concerns Mann's specific techniques, concepts, or interprets *Joseph* in its historical and political context is implied in the question of how trying to get origins 'right' is precisely what leads to originality, but none of these other concerns are starting points that could ever furnish insight into the necessity of originality.

This is the issue that motivates Irvin Stock's 1994 book *Ironic out of Love: The Novels of Thomas Mann*, in which attention to individual works is emphasized in order to limit analysis from spreading out into the kind of wider questions of Mann's psychology, of existing scholarship, and so on, that tend to dominate the scholarship. The motivation for doing so is to remain as 'fresh and immediate' as possible and to keep the novels as the subject of the study. While this approach presupposes that 'we can find a writer's meaning in what he or she has written', Stock also acknowledges that 'Mann was never the kind of writer who regards stories chiefly as vehicles of meaning.' (Stock, 1994, p. 3) The complication presented by Mann's thematizing the role of the narrator and of the artist within the novels themselves seems to suggest that studying the novels will produce reflections on why the kind of 'readerly' approach that both Stock and I endorse is indicated in the novels themselves. My goal is to discern in *Joseph* a theme of originality that demands this particular method of 'readerly' interpretation.

As it is, Stock's chapter on *Joseph and his Brothers* is part of a book that has an overarching thematic concern with 'Mann's subject, [which] in short, is the vicissitudes of consciousness, of mind

(or “spirit”) driven by feeling – what it opposes and is opposed by, what it costs and what it can win’ (Stock, 1994, p. 4), which results in a chapter that still feels a little scholarly, a little detached from the ‘fresh and immediate’ reading promised. There is still much to be learned. There is an explanation of the meaning of myth and its functions in regards to the ‘Descent into Hell’ prelude to the novel. An overview of ‘At the Well’ begins nicely as a specific reading, and makes the important point that in *Joseph* ‘... the will of God – what is right – changes as human beings change.’ and that it is the power of the artist to ‘sense the changing character of reality, that is, of man and his world and the relationship between them, and thereby to free us from inappropriate ideas’ (Stock, 1994, p. 88).

The development of young Joseph is traced from narcissism to self-consciousness of mythical pattern. Throughout, Stock tends to organize his reading of *Joseph* according to ideas that originate outside of the text. For example, concerning the episode of the affair with Mut, Stock writes that ‘Accepting Freud’s myth of the Id ... Mann has shown the answer of the Ego as that of the child of Abraham and the artist.’ (Stock, 1994, p. 109) and then ‘Once again we have seen our artist saved from crippling reduction to the part by his fidelity to the whole, to life, and by his own creative will.’ (Stock, 1994, p. 110) When Stock quotes from *Joseph*, quotations tend to be numerous small snippets that are selected, rearranged and melded into Stock’s prose, and give the impression that Stock is telling his readers *about*, rather than performing a reading *of*, the novel.

Near the end of the chapter on *Joseph and his Brothers*, Stock writes that

Mann has to know more than Joseph, and what he knows is what Joseph light-heartedly grants is possible, that the artist’s rich awareness, which means (among other things) of the good in evil and the evil in good, must at certain times give way to the moralist’s single-mindedness. (Stock, 1994, p. 123)

It is in this ‘must’ that the present dissertation finds a vein of insight. Why is it that eventually the free imagination must eventually make up its mind, and how are the varieties of decisiveness, or

single-mindedness to be differentiated? Stock does not really develop the mechanism of this necessary turning away from ‘rich awareness’ towards particular, active commitments in life, which is one of the main insights developed in the present dissertation.

Historical Contexts

Whereas the previous studies located *Joseph and His Brothers* within the larger contexts of Thomas Mann’s body of work, and therefore understood it in terms of dominant ideas and styles ascribed to Mann’s art, and ran the risk of missing the specificity of the novel on its own terms, or of how its specificity is actually produced, the following studies run the same risk by a different path. The following studies locate *Joseph* in the larger context of Thomas Mann’s life, which includes the historical and political circumstances of his exile to the United States. In these studies, Mann’s life as an artist, as an exile, and in the context of historical upheaval serves as the unifying principle of his written output, and therefore a guide for interpreting *Joseph*.

Stanley Corngold’s 2022 book *The Mind in Exile: Mann in Princeton* examines the early days of Mann’s exile in the USA, before he headed out west to Santa Monica. At Princeton he was given a generous appointment as a well salaried lecturer with light duties. Corngold’s analysis repeats what we already know from Mann’s ‘Sixteen Years’ introduction to *Joseph and His Brothers*, that writing for him was a refuge from the turmoil of the world around him. Corngold emphasizes that Mann writes all of his political and personal experience into his fiction. The classic example from this time is the modelling of Joseph’s witty administration of Egypt on the example of President Roosevelt, whom Mann admired and who invited Mann to a visit at the White House. Mann was in contact, during his exile, with others who shared the same fate, and this fellowship fortified Mann personally and for the main business of his fiction writing. While at Princeton, although *Joseph* was well underway, Mann was working mostly on his Goethe novel, *The Beloved Returns*. Corngold’s analysis is mainly a

mixture of describing Mann's personal and political situation at this time in his life, and describing how these showed up in his work, which was dedicated – in fiction and in essays and lectures – to the articulation of a political humanism that could stand up against Nazism. In this, Corngold is in agreement with the main stream of Mann scholarship, and offers useful discussion of an under-studied sliver of time in Mann's career, which when viewed from a distance can seem to move directly from Germany to his sojourn in California.

The interesting comment that Mann's fiction writing was 'not permeable to influence' (Corngold, 2022, p. 213) is supported by demonstrating that in *Joseph the Provider*, which was begun at Princeton, Joseph is depicted traveling down the Nile to prison, in disrepute following the affair with Mut-em-enet, and happy to be alone, able to entertain himself in the kind of 'meditative play' (Corngold, 2022, p. 213) that is the main tenor of his life. By analogy, Corngold allows that Mann's American experience left its mark on the fiction, but emphasizes the strong independence of Mann's imagination. Joseph's trip down the Nile is a curious example of independence because other examples abound in the novel, of Joseph getting to know himself precisely in terms of influence. A central idea of the novel is that of living a self *as* myth, that is, as tradition and influence. To be sure Joseph's character achieves more freedom in this regard than others, but it is not a freedom *from* myth or influence, but in the way that these are taken up. Therefore, while it is right to see *Joseph* as a kind of refuge in the midst of Mann's experience of a life and world in turmoil, it is important to note that such refuge is not the denial or avoidance of influence, but the establishment of freedom within it. The interesting thing about *Joseph and His Brothers* is to learn about the various ways that this is possible, and what is special about Joseph himself in this regard. While Corngold may consider this a quibble, I emphasize the way that Corngold quotes from *Joseph* in support of his own conclusions that are more broadly based on historical and biographical work. Whether or not Corngold is right, to argue in this way that goes beyond the biographical purpose of his work risks a basic misunderstanding of *Joseph*

and of the relation between an author and a text. This particular instance is especially telling as it concerns the notion of influence. To read and discuss a novel that is all about influence, that is, getting back to sources, requires one to describe influence and sources in their various forms in the terms according to which they appear in the novel. The present dissertation gathers such concern under the rubric – suggested by the novel itself – of the notion of ‘originality’.

Kurzke’s 2002 biography *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art* recounts the history of the writing of *Joseph* and describes the imprint on the novel of its social, biographical, and psychological contexts. It includes a “who’s who” of people in Mann’s life who supplied images and inspiration for the characters in *Joseph* and traces psychological issues that Mann is working out personally – his faith, his sexuality – as the main lines of the novel. In Kurzke’s reading, *Joseph* illuminates Mann’s life. In a biography, such connections are interesting to note, but they stand outside the specific concerns of the present study, which is to interpret the novel in the way that it teaches its reader how to read it, in which case, interest in characters is organized around their roles in the novel. If further dialogue were to be pursued between my own work and Kurzke’s biographical work in terms of the human models for characters, the way that those models figure in art should be interpreted in terms of the recurring quality of mythical types; that is, in the terms in which *Joseph* itself considers questions of identity. Mann himself responded, after the publication of *The Magic Mountain*, to similar charges that a character was modelled on a real person. When the ‘models’ were living people, just after the publication of *The Magic Mountain*, these claims, unlike Kurzke’s, were accusations of caricature and a lack of discretion. Mann’s defence at the time was that nothing essential was taken from real people, that of course the lingering impression of powerful personalities colours his characters, but that ‘only a few furrows on the forehead are borrowed from reality.’ (Mann, 1975, p. 120) In the hindsight provided by decades of remove, Kurzke’s identification of the models of characters can be helpful for

biographical concerns. However, if the object of the study is to interpret a reading of the novel itself rather than the author-novel nexus, the reader's interest in character should rest on its role in the novel.

Rosenwald's 1978 article concerns the relation between *Joseph and his Brothers* and Mann's own personal and psychological experience, as do other biographical studies, particularly as it concerns his experience of exile, but here the argument suggests that the influence between the artist and a work of art runs both ways, and there is more to the interpretation of a work of art than unpacking the intentions of the artist, or the symbols according to which it represents aspects of the author's personality. Rosenwald, in accordance with Mann's own comments in the 'Sixteen Years' essay concerning the writing of Joseph, says that Mann was healed through his art, through crises of a political and personal nature. In working out themes of loyalty and inheritance in the novel, Mann works these out for himself, particularly in relation to his German tradition. The implication is that a work of art has a measure of independence from the author, who may not fully understand it, and that its interpretation also requires the reader. The author, Rosenwald writes,

restrains himself for his own sake. Insofar as the author enables the audience to share in his experience, he is like them. But when we stress that he *invites* them to share it then we recognize that he is in a more exposed, in a different position, perhaps like a host sharing a meal with his guests. (Rosenwald, 1978, p. 557)

In this, Rosenwald offers a welcome corrective to over-psychological readings of Mann's writing, including *Joseph and His Brothers*, suggesting that

It would be absurd to imply that Mann had committed himself to a tetralogy of 1800 pages so as to prove his father wrong or to rehabilitate himself as a humanist before an apparently skeptical readership. It seems reasonable, however, that the creation of the novels was psychologically sustained by their role in reinterpreting, for Mann himself, the meaning and relevance of [his own experiences]. (Rosenwald, 1978, p. 559)

The value of Rosenwald's essay is also to invite the reader to the table as an important player in interpretation.

The studies above that placed *Joseph and His Brothers* in the context of Mann's personal biography and as an expression of his psychology are also joined by those that emphasize the historical and political trends of the first half of the twentieth century in terms of the resurgence of myth in the political imagination, particular in the myths of the National Socialist movement in Germany.

King's 1978 article notices that in the context of a 'dramatic increase in the secularization of life' (King, 1978, p. 417) Mann's generation turned increasingly to the scriptures to provide their material. This was not motivated by a

desire to ignore or escape the often terrifying pressures of the modern world ... [but indicates] an extremely serious attitude toward their own situations and by extension, toward how they viewed the Bible as it spoke to their experience. One aspect of this almost radical seriousness was an increase of interest in the psychological interplay lurking beneath the surface of the Bible stories. (King, 1978, p. 417)

This description of Mann's generation fits well enough for Mann himself, except that Mann also described *Joseph* as an escape, a consolation and shelter from the turmoil of the times. That its writing served Mann in this way does not diminish the truth that the modern context motivates his concern with the Bible and that it is precisely the psychological activity that he discerned 'between the lines' of the Genesis story that he takes as his task to illuminate, and which could serve as a 'constructive paradigm for living creatively in the face of an indifferent or hostile cosmos.' (King, 1978, p. 417) We might recall others (Stock, 1994; Van Doren, 1957) who have emphasized the importance of comedy in Mann's artistic mien and ability to both engage with serious issues and find consolation in fiction, and read *Joseph* as both an engagement with the world and as a balm for a heart troubled by the times.

King proposes that there is a real resonance between Joseph's times and our own. The period of the ancient world in which Mann sets the story was

characterized by a high degree of urbanization and cosmopolitanism, which produced a breakdown in old social bonds and an increase in individualism. In fact, there is probably no other period of man's past which is so like our present world, with its loss of viable meaning structures and the overwhelming sense of the individual's loneliness in the face of what Camus called "the benign indifference of the universe." (King, 1978, p. 4)

While there are others (Levenson, 1998) who locate within the biblical text much of the potential that Mann exploits, King's is an argument that the very context in which those texts were produced shared a great deal with our own times. Both stand in opposition to arguments like van Doren's (1957) who wrote of *Joseph* that Mann's 'work is endless; it fills a fearsome multitude of pages; nor was any of it done in *Genesis*. It is all Mann, all modern, and all comedy.' (Van Doren, 1957, p. 102) In the end, adjudicating between these views is outside the scope of the present dissertation. For now, it is important only to indicate that the scholarship in general connects *Joseph* in its essential conception to the historical trends of its time.

King sticks with the main line of scholarship on *Joseph*, suggesting that it was directed 'specifically to the socio-political problems of his particular environment, attempting to use Nazism's own weapons against it by presenting a humanized myth to combat the barbarism of Hitler's worldview ... [and that on a personal level] ... his novel provided him a refuge from the centrifugal pressures of World War II.' (King, 1978, p. 424) King's analysis of the difference between Mann's use of myth and that of the Nazis depends on a reading – particularly of the affair with Mut-em-enet – in terms of Freudian psychology. The present dissertation agrees with the importance of myth for understanding *Joseph* but works in the direction of understanding the operations of myth within the novel itself rather than by references to Freudian or other theories of myth. To work directly with Freud

in a different study of *Joseph* would be interesting, but according to the method of the present study, which is to pursue an interpretation based on a reading of *Joseph*, it is not necessary to be versed in Freud. If the present reading produces something that someone well versed in Freud recognizes, then an opportunity for dialogue between this study and subsequent studies arises.

Von Rohr Scaff's 1990 article also considers the way that in *Joseph and his Brothers* Thomas Mann looks for the positive potential of the expression of myth in history. Von Rohr Scaff is right to note the unique character in *Joseph* among Mann's works, which are otherwise almost exclusively directed towards exposing the negative sides of myth. *Joseph* is unique in its 'healing vision' and in the suggestion that myth and history can be reconciled to 'explain humanity's deep capacity for beneficent history'. (Von Rohr Scaff, 1990, p.183) In *Joseph*, Mann has taken a refuge in the ancient world from the upheavals of contemporary history, but by the inversions which he so loves, in that ancient world he discerns the germ of history and in contemporary history the resurgence of reactionary myth. Von Rohr Scaff spends time going through the mythical structure of time vis a vis Eliade's studies of myth, and indicates that 'Despite its assurances of temporal renewal, however, circular time remains locked within a fundamentally atemporal way of thinking which cannot conceive of the unexpected and new'. (Von Rohr Scaff, 1990, p.181) It is this tension between the possibility of the unexpected and new, and the mythical time that overwrites such a possibility that Mann exploits in psychologizing myth, which is to show how myth can be lived out by recognizably human individual personalities. For Mann, the human experience of time is always a negotiation between timeless structures of meaning, such as the spatialized image of time in the rotating sphere which is oft-described by the narrator, and the surprises and changes that suggest a chronological time in which the future is novel. Von Rohr Scaff misses an opportunity to differentiate between what, in *Joseph*, allows some of these negotiated compromises between the 'hermetic timelessness' (Von Rohr Scaff, 1990, p.181) of myth and the unconstrained chronology of ideal history to lead to life and renewal while others to decay, stagnation, and reaction.

Though Von Rohr Scaff describes Mann as developing the psychology of the experience of myth, there is little attention paid to the psychology of experiences of the unknown, or that lead to the unknown, which we might name, to use Newmark's (2012) language, the 'occasions' of reimagining time, as the present dissertation does particularly in the examinations of desire and of dreams.

Von Rohr Scaff's basic conclusion is that '*Joseph* represents Mann's most complex view of the temporal human psyche. In it human beings re-conceive truth "mythically" through history at the behest of the god they have created to guide them.' (Von Rohr Scaff, 1990, p.187) This is well enough as far as it goes in a good article that gives many examples of Mann's conception of the temporality of archetypical experiences, in reference to other such conceptions. But if the problem with myth is that it lacks room for novelty and innovation, and so defends against it, then surprisingly little attention is paid to the sources within human experience that impel us towards originality. Yes, Von Rohr Scaff refers to Cassirer in suggesting that to complete a mythical cycle is also to break through it, suggesting that myth contains its own source of temporal motion, but I think it is fair to expect a closer examination of how the possibility of innovative modes of temporal experience within a world organized by myth is explored within *Joseph* itself. In the present reading this is recognized as one of the central attributes of the novel.

Sources

The following section deals with how scholars have traced the influence of other sources on *Joseph and His Brothers*. The first to be discussed are those that also concern myth, but unlike the previous sources, which considered the functions of myth in *Joseph* in relation to myth in the historical context, these next sources trace the sources of Mann's thinking about myth to earlier works on or examples of myth. Later, Mann's use of various other sources in writing *Joseph* is considered, culminating with a discussion of Reed's 1974 book which not only traces Mann's work to specific

sources but suggests that to understand the way Mann used sources is a key element in understanding his work.

Myth

Dolgoy (2013) describes Mann's project as going to ancient Egypt to 'dig in the literal and metaphorical past in order to expose certain socio-political undercurrents of the sociopolitical reality of the Weimar Republic and Rooseveltian U.S.' (Dolgoy, 2013, p. 5) In this, Dolgoy situates *Joseph and His Brothers* in the contemporary historical context, but concentrates on the sources of Mann's treatment of myth. Dolgoy makes an interesting case, similar to my own, that trying to exhaustively understand the sources, or origins, of *Joseph* is doomed to fail precisely because the novel thematizes the problem of origins. Therefore, what one hopes to achieve will influence to what origins one returns. Dolgoy identifies Joseph's identity work with the modern project of making an identity out of groundlessness, and the mythical work of *Joseph* as a kind of rebuttal of contemporary political realities. This way of reading *Joseph* leads Dolgoy to examine the specific origins of the novel in ancient Egypt, specifically at the time of the Amarna revolution, which is the setting given to the Joseph story by Mann, when the throne was moved by Akhenaten to Amarna and the state religion of Amun was replaced with an early monotheism. Dolgoy also indicates that this is the same setting that Freud treated in *Moses and Monotheism*, establishing agreement between the historical period and another of Mann's sources in the work of Freud. Dolgoy's astute comments about the problems of origins leads to a specifically historical concern for the sources of Mann's writing, without extending this concern for origins, as I do in the present dissertation, to the spiritual concern of the novel itself, which includes all the characters, Mann's own use of sources, and also the reader. In other words, Dolgoy treats the origins of *Joseph* without extending the argument to what *Joseph* has to say about origins, or how a reader – who brings their own concern for origins – interacts with the novel. This is

not a weakness of Dolgoy's argument, but an indication of the limits of its scope and methods. In the present work, when the unit of analysis is narrowed even more closely around a reading of the novel itself, there corresponds an intensification of the problem of origins so that there is already so much to say about the treatment of origins in the novel and the reader's concern for origins, that extending the analysis, as Dolgoy does, to historical sources, is out of the question.

Another study of the sources of the mythical content of *Joseph and His Brothers* is pursued in Gurska's unpublished 2017 Ph.D. dissertation, which does not derive the problem of origins from the novel itself, as Dolgoy's did, but develops a more straightforward analysis in terms of comparative mythology. Gurska relies on bibliographical reasoning, which explains Mann's allusions by reference to other sources of the myths that appear. This kind of work can help someone unfamiliar with the myths of the ancient near east to make headway if *Joseph* confronts them with too many unfamiliar names and stories. The value of research like Gurska's is for the specialist concerned with myth who wishes to finely trace the modifications these myths undergo in *Joseph* in order to better understand how Joseph and his contemporaries take them up. However, the reader who is willing to learn from the novel itself as it goes along will learn the myths well enough for the narrative purposes in *Joseph*, which is to explore how these myths are taken up and refashioned in that ancient world, and especially how out of such a world a new vision of time can emerge. It is not necessary to be an expert in these myths in order to understand the novel. One quickly comes to see them as 'types', which turns out to be consistent with how Mann himself described their use in characterizing Joseph in the early days of writing the novel, in a letter dated from 1926 in which he mentions the preliminary intuition that he sees Joseph as a 'Tammuz-Osiris-Adonis-Dionysus figure' (Mann, 1975, p.141).

Finally, as an example of the kind of excellent work that can be done in considering the sources of the novel itself, Slade's 1971 article examines the notion and function of eternal return in *Joseph and His Brothers*, indicates his sources in this regard in Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, and

describes three distinctive ways that eternal return appears in *Joseph* as a kind of willed recurrence. Importantly, Slade does not simply trace these lines of influence but shows how this notion of myth functions in the novel itself and has an effect on the reader. The present dissertation is in sympathy with the idea that the novel works on the reader, and teaches the reader how to understand the mythical cast of mind along the way. Mann's distinctive use of eternal recurrence as a plot vehicle shapes the chaotic world of the story and presents Joseph's development as the emergence of the individual from the collective, is a device of formal unity of the work, which is organized throughout by the narrative commentary on the recurring themes and stories in the work, and is a tool to cancel time, so that the totality of ancient existence could be contemplated, all at once, by the modern reader. Meanwhile, this heavy notion of recurrence is prevented from overburdening the novel, Slade notes, by the humour which offsets it.

Two specific examples of what Slade notices along the way that are useful to help understand the present dissertation are that the fourth book of the novel *feels* different to the reader, more propulsive and linear, and that Slade connects this with Joseph's own state of personal development, where by the time of the fourth book, his personality has increasingly emerged from the collective and is no longer so subject to the collective patterns of recurrence that organize the ancient world, and his own youth. To add to this line of thinking, I also note that the potential for recognition and anticipation takes on a new form in this fourth book in discussion of Benjamin's 'imprisoned cry' which is strikingly modern relative to the kind of mythical recognition that dominates the world of the novel. Slade's second interesting observation is connected. It is that the early parts of the book gain extra significance, in formal terms, because Joseph's experiences of recurrence and the innovations on them that are depicted later in the novel, need patterns to follow, which are given in *The Stories of Jacob* and in *Young Joseph*. In pedagogical terms, Slade notes that in its early parts, the reader is educated in the 'tectonic principles of the novel.' (Slade, 1971, p. 190)

Slade traces the influence of sources drawn from outside the novel, and describes Mann's innovations on them in terms of the possibilities suggested by Mann's sources. In the present dissertation, similar conclusions are reached about how myth works in the novel simply by reading the novel. This is a good example of the way that the method pursued in the present dissertation can find sites of potential dialogue with scholarship.

Other

Besides studies that examine the sources of Mann's treatment of myth, there are many that examine the novel in terms of different kinds of sources. These include summative studies, such as what Putz provides in a chapter on *Joseph and His Brothers* to the 2004 *Companion to the Works of Thomas Mann* that, besides summarizing some of the main themes of the novel and commenting on some of its narrative techniques, also traces *Joseph* to a number of sources. Analogies are drawn between *Joseph* and other texts, such as Goethe's *Iphigenia auf Tauris* which also blurs the line between the human and the divine. Overall Putz takes the view that 'The Joseph novels, more than any other work by Thomas Mann, contain the highest level of such poeticized eroticism: in the form of love of self, love of the world, love of God.' (Putz, 2004, p. 175) My own chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire' discovers a similarly central role for desire in the way that Joseph begins to imagine God and the possibility of a historical view of temporal experience.

Other studies consider very specific sources that may have influenced *Joseph*. These include Schonfield's 2006 article, which examines the question of the influence of James Joyce on Mann, who are both concerned with the modern resurgence of myth, finding that Mann's approach is to combine myth and psychology, Joyce's is to combine myth with naturalistic detail. Both are interested in psychoanalysis and in myth as a generative technique in their fiction. Schonfield points out that of all their big novels, only *Joseph* foregrounds myth. Bishop (1996) and Bloch (1963) both write articles

that argue for the influence Jung had on *Joseph and His Brothers*. Bloch examines many of the Jungian archetypes that appear in the novel to argue that while Freud's influence is unmistakable, Jung's is also present. There is a passage in Mann's *Freud and the Future* where Mann basically draws Jung into Freud's shadow, and given Reed's (1974) argument that Mann's scholarship often did not run too deep, and Mann's own admission in a letter of his from 1926 that 'to my mind an artist is not obligated to know a great deal or to solve problems, to be a teacher and leader' (Mann, 1975, p.137), it is fair to suggest that *Joseph* could have been influenced by Jung without overstating how important it is to trace that influence in the novel. Bishop argues that the Jungian influence runs deeper than what appears to a surface reading of the novel, and that its traces can be found even, for example, in the structure of Joseph's identity formation. Cerf (1982) makes interesting comments both in terms of the influence of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* on the *Joseph's* structure. Cerf writes that Mann's interest and confidence in the fourth volume, *Joseph the Provider*, had wavered. *Joseph* had been interrupted by lectures, essays, other fiction, exile, and by the demands of a public to whom Mann had made 'imprudently let it be known that he had a conscience, thereby sowing the misunderstanding that he was a born preceptor.' (Mann, 1975, p. 136) Cerf refers to underlined parts in Mann's copy of Sterne, in German translation, which helped him manage the digressions in the novel that Mann worried would become boring and repetitive. These include the lengthy part concerning Tamar, which is almost a novella in itself, interpolated into *Joseph*. Cerf notes Mann's neat trick having the narrator comment, having related Tamar's line of descent out of which the nation of Israel grew, that 'Joseph's story could be seen as an interpolation into Tamar's' (Cerf, 1982, p. 55). Cerf's is an interesting article that uses some work on Mann's source material in order to make better sense of the narrator's role, which in *Joseph*, can be confusing. In any case, to trace these influences too scrupulously to their sources risks turning the reading into a treasure hunt and miss out on how these ideas operate in the fiction, regardless of their source.

Seidlin's interesting study in 1962 revisits the origin story of *Joseph and His Brothers* which is commonly traced to a quote from Goethe in which the Joseph story in Genesis is described as 'much too short and ought to be carried out in all its details' (Seidlin, 1962, p. 496), and Mann's subsequent re-reading of the tale in his family's ancestral Bible. This origin story seems to date from Mann's own comments in 'Sixteen Years' but according to Seidlin's research it appears to be a later interpolation of a vague recollection of the actual beginnings of the novel. Seidlin suggests that an even earlier engagement with Theodor Fontane was the real instigation for writing *Joseph*. In 1910, Mann commented on a character in a Fontane novel who goes into an explanation of when the name 'Ruben' is special, by discussing the eldest of Joseph's brothers. Seidlin suggests that Fontane's retelling of the Joseph story is a plausible source of Mann's approach of combining myth and psychology in his own retelling. The study illustrates the issues that arise in considering Mann's sources, and Mann's accounts of his sources. The Goethe and the image of dusting off an old bible makes a better story than remembering a passage from a Fontane novel; Mann was not above creatively presenting his own life and motivations and so even his accounts of his sources need to be considered at least to some degree performative.

One final study of the sources of *Joseph and His Brothers* warrants some extended comment because it explicitly connects the way Mann uses sources to the kinds of books he writes. In this, Dolgoy (2013) is similar, but on a smaller scale. T.J. Reed's 1974 book *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition* links Mann's own scholarship to his style, and considers some of the theoretical implications of the way they are related. Mann's work gives the impression that he is extremely well read. *Joseph and His Brothers* includes all sort of commentary on Egyptian history, the mythologies of the ancient near east, the biblical story and traditions of commentary on it. More, to those who know their Freud, their Nietzsche, their Schopenhauer, their Goethe, and so on, will recognize the influence of these on the novel. But the thrust of Reed's argument is that Mann uses his sources entirely for his own needs in

the fiction, with the result that sometimes they are not rendered in much depth, or that in Mann's hands, they take on aspects that belong more to Mann than to themselves. Mann's Freud, for example is the Freud Mann needs, not necessarily the one that Freud himself or a Freud scholar would agree with. Reed emphasizes Mann's opportunistic uses of tradition by contrasting his practices with Flaubert's whose research for his fiction was exhaustive and strict, writing that

Mann makes it clear that the minimum possible study is to yield the maximum possible return: the thinnest skimmings from a subject, duly transferred, are to create the impression of a surface under which lies solid substance. ... Mann used the term montage... (Reed, 1974, p. 104)

A less flattering term would be 'pastiche'. Reed notes that none of this is hidden or apologized for, and finds that 'a certain ironic glee informs his [Mann's] account, as well as a high degree of honesty.' (Reed, 1974, p. 104) Most of Reed's book proceeds chronologically through Mann's career with a constant eye on Mann's relation to his sources. Relatively little attention is paid to *Joseph*, compared to the other works, which is a little strange given how explicitly the novel is concerned with sources, origins and traditions.

Describing Mann's method, Reed says that it is not that he 'moulds and reworks his subject at a deep level of the mind or personality, not that he expresses the essentials of something he has fully assimilated, but that he picks up some deceptively knowing phrases and by using them is able to present a thin skin as solid substance.' (Reed, 1974, p. 105) If this description fits Mann's own uses of tradition in *Joseph*, a reader might object to the novel's own claims to realism and the accurate telling of the story. However, if that reader recognizes in the novel – in the character of Joseph particularly – the same work of rendering tradition as an individual identity, then the whole question of what counts as fidelity to sources shifts. When the question of tradition appears in terms of individual identity, which straddles both origins in tradition and the particularity of new experiences, then it doesn't owe

tradition a strictly accurate recapitulation. Reed agrees with this way of putting it, and writes concerning Mann's sort of use of tradition that

the absence of its 'reality' does not mean a loss of its richness and complexity, nor does it imply that art involves peeling off the 'mere' appearance of things in a facile manner. It only implies an absence in the reader of certain kinds of practical claims on the object before him. There is no question of art presenting an illusory experience: it presents *only* the appearance, but of the real world. (Reed, 1974, p. 107)

This issue of whether illusions can still be 'realistic' gets complicated in the narration of history, which is the avowed project of the narrator in *Joseph and His Brothers*, because historical 'fact' is actually the kind of experience produced by living according to this kind of acceptance of appearance. The appearance of thin skin as substance is what historical fact is actually made of. At every level, from the characters in the novel, to Mann's authorship and use of tradition, this process of illusions becoming real is repeated as the real experience of people, and the facts of history, are organized and shaped by the way they are imagined.

Reed argues that the purpose of Mann's work is not to get back to a classical aesthetic illusion by which we can live, which in terms of 'myth' would be to develop a healthy, humanistic myth, but to generate an illusion

far more extreme and frankly deceptive ... a theory more sceptical about the reality of appearance itself; an aesthetic concerned with the creating of autonomous illusion, whose criterion is success in deceiving, whose justification is men's need to be deceived, whose tragedy is the recognized valuelessness of the deceit. This is the art Mann is aware of practicing... (Reed, 1974, p. 113).

In other words, what Reed detects in Mann's characteristic use of his sources is repeated in Mann's style and informs the interpretations of his work that can be drawn. The pervasiveness of

deception that Reed describes here appears in the present dissertation as well, as the inevitability of some degree of illusion, of ‘turning away’ from sources in any viable historical life. But whereas Reed strikes a tragic tone, it is the argument of this dissertation to investigate how in *Joseph and His Brothers* Mann finds the possibility of hope and an open future even in ‘men’s need to be deceived’, and to differentiate between modes of illusion that are life affirming and those that are regressive and reactionary.

Biblical Scholarship

It should not be surprising that *Joseph and His Brothers* should receive attention in terms of its place in traditions of biblical scholarship. Some of these (Tomes, 1977; Tumanov, 2000) examine some of the specific questions in biblical scholarship, particularly regarding source criticism, which is the study of which ancient texts were combined to form what has been received as the Bible. Genesis, which tells the Joseph story, is part of both the Hebrew and the Christian Bible. The way that the authors of the various books of the Bible, including Genesis, combined their own sources has given Biblical scholarship a distinctive set of questions that are relevant to the present dissertation because they are the same questions that Mann deals with in *Joseph*. These questions pertain to what constitutes the unity of the Bible as, at least partly, the product of selection and canonization, when it remains a heterogenous collection of texts that not only stand in tension with each other, but also bear signs of inner contradiction. In the faith that the ‘unified’ text is somehow a whole, entire traditions of interpretation have sprung up – including, but not limited to source criticism.

Tomes’s 1977 article is a good example of how scholarship concerning *Joseph and His Brothers* tends to overlap the various thematic groups that I have suggested in this review. Tomes joins the ranks of those who consider the relation between *Joseph and His Brothers* and contemporary history, particularly in the context of Nazi Germany. Tomes is interested in Mann’s development of the Joseph

story as an exploration of the possibilities for life that are under threat in Nazi Germany. However, unlike those who pursue the question of *Joseph's* historical context in the ways described above, Tomes examines the way that Mann's novel deals with some of the issues raised in source criticism. The impetus for this project is to consider the viability of Mann's 'humanistic' myth as an alternative to Nazi mythologizing, a viability that depends on the unity of the novel as a work of art.

Tomes demonstrates that Mann finds these problems generative. For example, Mann makes 'Ishmaelite' the generic and 'Midianite' the precise description of the traders who both take Joseph from the pit and pay the brothers for him, even though source critics have noted the discrepancy between these names in Genesis and attributed these different aspects of the story to different sources. Tomes describes Mann's novel as an elaboration of the harmonization of these sources that is already underway in the Genesis account. In other words, Mann continues in the tradition that presumes an existing harmony of sources that guides their unification in a single text. Tomes's insight is that Mann makes a literary point of this elaboration, which is that harmonization is an interpretation, which Mann develops over the course of the novel. Out of the tensions in the story that are raised by the question of which hypotexts – the 'sources' of the Bible – contribute to which aspects of the Genesis account, Mann finds exactly the kinds of rich material that he spins into this lengthy account of how everything happened, particularly in terms of the motivations of the characters. It is the motivations of the characters in terms of psychological plausibility that ultimately, for Mann, provides the criterion for what from the ongoing tradition of harmonizing interpretation is accepted and what is rejected.

Tomes' project, which connects this work to source criticism, depends on the idea that to trace the instances where Mann's elaborations of the story reconcile apparent contradictions or oppositions in it is also to illuminate its interpretive principle, which is to explore the plausibility of the kind of faith expressed by the characters in the story. Tomes shows how Mann makes the issue of faith central to the novel by quoting Mann's correspondence in which he writes that 'with the best will in the world I

cannot tell whether or not I believe' (Tomes, 1977, 32). Further, Tomes demonstrates that the possibility of that faith rests on the difficult issue of the interpretation of sources, and not, as Mann also suggested, on 'pathos and religious fervour' (Tomes, 1977, p. 31). Indeed the ambivalence that Mann expresses in his letters is also found throughout the novel, which constantly ironizes its claims about the divine, and can be understood as informing the pedagogical value of the novel. To declare a decision for faith or its rejection would have been to leave behind all the ambivalence and complexity of the novel in which these questions are explored, and only out of which would such faith be possible, if it is possible. The pedagogical result of the novel – for Mann himself, and for readers, and his characters – is not an answer on questions of faith, but an education in the thinking of such questions. 'Pathos and religious fervour' (Tomes, 1977, p. 31) would equal the kind of emotional manipulation, indoctrination, preaching to the choir that marks the kind of mythologizing that Mann detested, and not the education of a good will oriented to ultimate questions. Whatever decision one arrives at in this manner never leaves behind the morass of life from which it emerges, and so it can be directed towards life. Whatever conclusions that I make in this reading of *Joseph and His Brothers* remain open to further interpretation based on further study of the novel itself and also to sympathetic studies in other fields oriented to similar questions. This is not indecision, but the conclusion that faith is only possible where it has not already been foreclosed by decision. The success of *Joseph and His Brothers* depends on coming to the conclusion that if one, with good will, cannot tell whether or not one believes, one still expresses belief in the possibility of faith.

Tumanov's 2000 article is an even more specific examination of the methods by which Mann 'stitches' various contributing documentary origins of the Joseph story into the account rendered in *Joseph and His Brothers*. In this, it is similar to Tomes (1977). Tumanov indicates that in the P (for 'Priestly') source, which is the name given to one of the source texts of the Genesis account, for example, characters don't seem to know about Jacob's theft of Esau's blessing, and there is a curious

silence between Rebekah and Isaac concerning it. Mann's version stitches these together by developing the kind of psychology and motivational rationality that allows such apparent discrepancies to make sense:

Whereas in P Esau decides to marry Ishmael's daughter for reasons unrelated to any quarrel with Jacob, in Mann the alliance between Esau and Ishmael is naturalized as a conspiracy against Isaac meant to avenge the unjust dispensation of the blessing. The lack of any vengeful action on the part of P's Esau is naturalized as the inability of the conspirators to agree on a murder plan and the lack of any reference to the blessing theft on the part of P's Rebekah and Isaac is naturalized as a tacit agreement between the spouses to avoid the disturbing topic in order to keep everything calm and not jeopardize Jacob's departure. (Tumanov, 2000, p. 257)

Again, along the same lines argued by Tumes, this work of stitching is a determined effort to unify the story according to an inner coherence of logic and common sense based on the psychological plausibility of characters' motivations. No harmonizing efforts can be total, and the kind of discrepancies that remain in the story depend on the interpretive principle that guides harmonization. Where ruptures or inconsistencies remain in *Joseph* even after harmonization, the narrator's own commentary about the problem resolves them at the level of the novel's retelling. For example, the narrator names the limits of narration as the work of elaborating 'how' everything took place, what motivated the actions of the characters, that still leaves open the basic mystery of 'why' anything happens. In other words, where the narrator does not fully 'stitch' the story together, in commenting on the difficulties of narration, harmonization is accomplished at the level of the novel where it is incomplete at the level of the narrative.

Besides work that seeks to understand *Joseph* in terms of the questions of source criticism, there are studies like Levenson's 1998 article that consider the status of *Joseph and His Brothers* a part of the

Jewish tradition of biblical commentary called ‘Midrash’. Despite it being a novel, Levenson describes the merits of considering *Joseph* as midrash ‘if the salient features of midrash include verse-centeredness, problem-oriented commentary, imaginative rather than logically systematic exegesis, ideology and, above all, an endless expanding of the biblical text, then Mann's *Joseph* passes muster easily.’ (Levenson, 1998, p. 167)

Mann’s method of using sources does not, simply on the basis of identifying connections between sources and elements of *Joseph*, suggest that Mann was an expert on all the material. Instead, Levenson describes Mann as starting out inspired, familiar enough with the Joseph story as anyone else, but really not an expert on it or any traditions of commentary on it. Mann starts out from scratch, more or less as an amateur, and dusts off the old family Bible to refamiliarize himself with the story. Then Mann went through a Hebrew concordance, an index of where specific words are found in the text, in order to make sense of all sorts of things he did *not* know, for example the word ‘ketonet passim’, which allowed Mann to draw the link between Joseph’s coat of many colours and his mother’s wedding veil. *Joseph* is explicit about that link, and developing it turns out to deeply inform the structure of the novel. So much of the expansion of the story in the novel derives from this kind of describing the connections that Mann finds by ‘reading between the lines’ of the Genesis account, so that *Joseph* can be read as a kind of biblical commentary, and Mann became ‘as familiar with the biblical and rabbinical traditions as any non-Hebraist could be in the 1920’s-1940’s.’ (Levenson, 1998, p.167) Levenson notes that there has been relatively little discussion of *Joseph* as biblical commentary, apart from Lewisohn’s description of *Joseph*, in the mid-1950’s, as a “super midrash”. (Levenson, 1998, p. 166) Levenson attributes this lack of discussion of *Joseph* as midrash to its nature as a novel, which allows it to be read on its own, rather than in the continuing tradition of midrash, which always implies the entire tradition of interpretation. The implication is that if it was midrash, attention would have to be paid to Mann’s sources for *Joseph*, but in its independence as a novel, this is not required.

This argument encourages the method that I pursue in the present study, and also offers some nuance to the concept of originality that I pursue here. While originality has already been described as expressing something about the new, innovative, and most recent in time, as well as the sources, or origins, from which the new emerges, the exploration of the novel as midrash helps to illustrate the way that originality is not just a moment *in* a historical tradition, but is itself characteristic of the tradition of history as such. In other words, just as *Joseph*, as a novel ‘of’ midrash also participates ‘in’ the tradition of midrash, so any expression of originality in a historical tradition both draws on that tradition and participates in it, with the result that every expression of originality is simultaneously the source and origin of another, and that this is as true of the sources of history in Abraham as it is the most recent expressions of historical life which, as soon as they are expressed, become available as source for the ever new.

Levenson asks: Is *Joseph* midrash? The significance of the question for my own purposes is that the distinction between ‘novel’ and ‘midrash’ in this case turns on the way that Mann reads the biblical source and expresses it in an original way. If we take a novel to be the working of the artist’s imagination, a self-contained cosmos distinct from the biblical text, as Levenson cites Josopovici’s 1998 *The Book of God* as arguing, then Mann’s novel cannot be midrash because his characters know too much about themselves and their futures and that Christian interpretation already organizes the way characters think about themselves. But Levenson suggests that Mann’s thoroughness of interpretation and expansion of the text, rather than ‘explaining’ its original and ultimate mysteries, actually makes them more salient. In *Joseph*, God, desire and dreams are not rendered naturalistically in order that they might be harmonized with a gentle, reasonable humanism. Rather, the elements of naturalism in *Joseph* only intensify the irrationality of these mysteries. Levenson rightly notes that Mann’s narrator stresses the narrative responsibility to accuracy about things ‘that’ happened, truth about ‘how’ they happened, and a humble silence concerning the ultimate mystery of ‘why’ (Levenson, 1998, p. 667). Therefore,

Levenson's 'yes and no' answer concerning the status of *Joseph* as midrash depends on the way the role of reading and narration appears in *Joseph*.

Techniques

There are a number of interesting studies that consider various specific narrative techniques employed in *Joseph and His Brothers*. These are often consistent with the kinds of insight that I derive, but are even more narrow in scope, and do not extend their analyses into discussions of how the novel works as a whole. For example, Swenson's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of 1989 tackles the specific and interesting question of the identity of the narrator in *Joseph and His Brothers*, and challenges the too-quick identification of Mann with the narrator. Swenson notes that the kind of scholarship that recognizes the distance Mann establishes between himself and his narrative voices in *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus* is curiously missing from *Joseph* scholarship. There are examples related of cues in the narrative that disrupt the narrative voice, including the 'Prelude in the Higher Echelons', narrated by an angel, which precedes the final book of the novel. The reader would rather ignore or consider as flaws these few interruptions in the narrative voice than consider them. The interesting upshot that aligns with my own priority of *reading* in the interpretation of the novel, is that

the reader resists examining the voice which tells the story – the instrument of the narrative's authority – since to undermine the stability of the narrative's authority would be to recognize that there is no absolute authority in the story but only that temporary and constructed authority which results from each individual reading of the text. (Swenson, 1989, p. iii)

Overall, this is an interesting discussion that complements my own reading nicely. Where Swenson maintains a narrow scope of examining the identity of the narrator, mine concerns the novel

as a whole, and where Swenson arrives at some conclusions about how the novel prioritizes reading, the present dissertation takes this as its starting point.

Voronina's 2019 book *Depicting the Divine* includes a chapter that considers how, in *Joseph and His Brothers*, Mann accomplishes the coexistence of the psychologization, or demystification, of the divine with the possibility of transcendence. This is another interesting study that notices a specific feature of the novel and examines how it was accomplished. Like Swenson, however, Voronina does not generalize this analysis to understanding the novel as a whole. Voronina writes that in *Joseph* God is, in a fashion, demystified by being 'discovered' by Abram. Of course, the narrator couches this with the proviso that it remains a mystery whether or not God possessed the attributes later developed, prior to their being discovered by Abram. This constant tension between the divine and demystification in *Joseph* produces an 'Aporia which constitutes an integral part of Mann's poetic design' (Voronina, 2009, p.9). The most interesting part of the Voronina's analysis is the discussion of three interjections of the supernatural into an otherwise naturalistic narration of the story, including the apparent narration by angels in one part of the novel that was also examined by Swenson (1989). Voronina focuses on the way that, depending on the interpretive emphasis, Mann writes in a way that leaves a sliver of the possibility of explaining away these divine interjections in naturalistic terms. The value of this study is its analysis that in *Joseph* even God is placed, as ultimate mystery, beyond the notion of omniscient narration. That is, if even the 'higher views' that apparently appear in the divine interjections into the novel are themselves limited to their narrative appearance, then the sense of reality 'as narration' is also disrupted. The upshot of this line of argument is that in emphasizing the porosity of reality and narrative, there remains the openness of life to surprise and originality despite any narrative organization one undertakes. Along similar lines, the present dissertation examines how even the most faithful readerly attitude towards a text or towards life itself will inevitably come up against the limits

of any narrative organization and into contact with the mysterious – what Voronina describes as aporetic – impetus for the unfolding and understanding of life.

Partial Reading

As the thematic organization, in this review, of the various kinds of scholarship that concern *Joseph and His Brothers* has narrowed in focus, closer and closer to the text, the next group of studies maintains an even tighter focus than that of the present dissertation. The following studies are readings of the novel and concerned with the novel, but as I demonstrate, are only partial readings. Sometimes these partial readings align with my own examination of the novel as a whole, but they also risk missing the sense of the novel by a too-close emphasis on some part of it.

Khapaeva (2013) writes an interesting article about the relation between nightmare and the writing of history, its sources and its motivations. What I appreciate in this article is the acknowledgment that the historical and political background may have influenced the similarity between history and ‘materialized nightmare’ in *Joseph* but that such a note is not the final word on Mann’s motivations. This is helpful because so much of the scholarship concerning *Joseph* is overdetermined by some or another idea, generally concerning the importance of the political context or Mann’s psychology on the work, or how the work illustrates Mann’s general artistic concerns. In this case, Khapaeva finds at the beginning of *Joseph*, in the ‘Descent into Hell’, fertile material for considering the question of why we write history. The very beginning of the novel tells us that the deep well of the past exceeds any investigation, but the narrator plunges downward anyway. Why? Khapaeva suggests that even more than the fear of death, we write history in order to tame the nightmare experience of the direct experience of time. Even though it is impossible to write history, when we are still drawn to ‘simulating this journey back in time, against the natural flow, in comfortable conditions and without any obvious risk we reproduce a deep, internal and irrational

experience under the pretence of acquiring positive knowledge' (Khapaeva, 2013, p. 194) of the past. Yes, the importance of interpretation is emphasized in *Joseph and His Brothers*, and Pharaoh's own dreams were a kind of nightmare. When Pharaoh fears that his dream would realize itself in reality if it was not interpreted, we have the same kind of notion that Khapaeva suggests is the ground of historiography. In Mann's 'Descent' Khapaeva finds ample evidence for the argument, especially as the descent gets deeper and deeper, even deeper than the human until the well 'spews monsters, humans with animal heads, which are ancient gods.' (Khapaeva, 2013, p. 196) In the ancient world, Khapaeva suggests, the nightmare experience was translated into the waking experience of time, more predictably organized, according to myth and supplied images which in myth are taken to describe gods. At the time in which *Joseph* was being composed, history was also populated by monsters. Khapaeva's compelling argument helps us to see why. It also foregrounds the question at the heart of *Joseph and His Brothers* concerning whether there is any reason to be optimistic about history; whether it can be life affirming or whether it is always merely a modern cloak on a timeless nightmare.

There is a deep sympathy between Khapaeva's article and the present dissertation, especially concerning the irrational sources of what becomes articulated into history. Many commentators seem to project their fervent wish onto Mann that in *Joseph* a reasonable, humane myth will be articulated, and miss its inescapably irrational element. There is nothing in *Joseph* that suggests an escape from myth into a democratic, humanistic history. We remain in the thrall of the stories we tell about time that insulate us from the horror of experiencing it directly. Khapaeva's suggestion that history originates in the nightmare experience seems to trap us into a pessimistic compromise with temporal experience. Everything Khapaeva notes about the 'Descent into Hell' is important, but it is important also to note that this chapter serves as a prelude to the novel as a whole, which strikes a lighter, optimistic, even comic tone throughout all of the ups and downs of the fates of its characters. What is important is that Khapaeva does not attend to the possibility of an optimistic interpretation of history. Is it true that the

direct experience of time is a nightmare experience? Many of the dreams in *Joseph* suggest otherwise. To her credit, Khapaeva notices the problem that the story of Joseph's career is 'too original' to nicely fit the nightmare schema, because it 'does not really contain a legend that can be repeated' (Khapaeva, 2013, p. 202) but leaves it unresolved, offering only that 'Indeed, in Mann's opinion, this is the very mystery of nightmare prophecy' (Khapaeva, 2013, p. 203). It is one of the main concerns of the present dissertation to consider how exactly Mann sees this dream-fuelled history working out in the name of life and not only as the materialization of a nightmare. The conclusion that I come to is that while myth is well stocked with nightmare imagery, *Joseph* explores the possibility that even though history remains closely aligned with myth, it originated in Joseph's love of life and of God. The nightmare experience of history in fascism is a betrayal of this origin, and a regression to the monstrous images of myth. However, the limited scope of Khapaeva's study hews too closely to the notion of the 'nightmare' in ways that fail to account for the tone and ideas that are pursued throughout the rest of the novel, and which can only be understood by reading the novel as a whole.

Spariosu (2015) describes *Joseph and His Brothers* as concerning 'theotopian bridges over the existential void' (Spariosu, 2015, p. 161), which is a marked resistance to the dystopian trend of modernity. Spariosu reads the novel as a 'series of confrontations between his young hero and the void ... which Joseph, unlike secular modernists and post-modernist fictional characters ... defers through hope and faith.' (Spariosu, 2015, p. 164) This liminality appears in *Joseph* 'not only as a confrontation with the abyss, but also [as] a potentiality' (Spariosu, 2015, p. 165). This similarity is even more striking where Spariosu writes that the task of constructing these 'different kinds of bridges over "the bottomless well"' requires 'an irenic mentality, ... , willing to learn how to take full advantage of the ludic-liminal nature of the literary and artistic phenomena in general.' (Spariosu, 2015, p. 169) In the present dissertation, in sympathy with Spariosu's study, dreams are considered in their capacity to

fuel the sense of possibility and future that anchors Joseph's faith, not despite their irrationality but in and through it.

Partial readings of the novel can actually miss the point of the novel as a whole, as seems to be the case with Tumanov's 2007 article which considers *Joseph and His Brothers* in terms of the gender relations that are at play by comparing it to Diamant's 1997 novel *The Red Tent*. Tumanov writes that Diamant's novel seems to "correct" an imbalance present in both the Genesis account and Mann's, in which 'far more psychological depth and a greater range of action are given to the male characters than to female ones.' (Tumanov, 2007, p. 376) Tumanov suggests that Diamant accomplishes this correction by mining some of the same possibilities of interpreting Genesis as Mann does in order to suggest that there was no rape, and thereby to justify the creation of a romantic heroine. In Mann's version, the rape in Genesis is in *Joseph* turned into part of bargaining between the male characters and a kind of arranged marriage. The suggestion is that 'there is no rape because Mann, in line with Genesis, denies Dinah the completeness of character and the fullness of humanity' (Tumanov, 2007, p. 378). Tumanov shows how Diamant is obliged to rearrange the chronology of events in Genesis in order to suggest that there was no rape. This article misses an opportunity to examine how Mann deals with this episode in more detail. After all, Mann accomplished something remarkable here by managing, without disturbing the source material and without denying the patriarchal organization of society and sex within that society, to at the same time reveal its violence and the victimization that did occur. Diamant's version, by Tumanov's own account, is a made-up story that without warrant in any of the sources revises the original in the name of modern sensibilities. Whether or not one prefers the ancient to modern sexual ethics and gender norms, it is far more illuminating to consider the specific techniques that Mann uses in this episode, as I do in discussions of 'The Hidden Face'. Mann's Dinah episode culminates in a section titled 'The Butchery' which is as much about the loss of Dinah's future, and the exposure of her child, as it is of Levi and Simeon's attack on the city, in a quiet indictment of the whole androcentric,

patriarchal moral scheme. Jacob, despite our attachment to him as the hero of the story so far, in this episode appears in a monstrous light, as a harsh and distant self-involved father. The narrator does not hold back. My own treatment of this episode and of reading the novel as a whole is a staunch opposition to the temptation to import external ideas or sensibilities to the novel, as Diamant does. Tumanov misses an opportunity for a careful reading of Mann's version.

Implications for Methods

Whether or not the 'partial' readings discussed above are successful or not, they each risk misreading *Joseph* by focussing too closely on some partial element in it. The following discussion explores this risk in detail by contrasting two articles that come to opposing conclusions. Marquardt's 2015 article levels the charge of anti-semitism at Thomas Mann with evidence provided from *Joseph and His Brothers*, and Levenson's 1998 article is revisited for its claim that *Joseph* is deeply philosemitic. Without ultimately arbitrating the charge, I do show that Marquardt's approach is so narrow that it is in the end a mis-reading, and that to get the novel right requires reading it as a whole and reading it on its own terms, rather than the terms of whatever idea, commitment, method, or ideology that a reader holds prior to the reading.

If *Joseph* is not a 'Jewish book', according to Mann and his subsequent critics, then why, Marquard asks, 'Mann should have chosen this fundamentally Jewish story in order not to write a Jewish book.' (Marquardt, 2015, 229) Is it enough to argue that Mann's project of reclaiming 'myth' from the Nazis authorizes this use of a Jewish story? Not for Marquardt, who argues that the Nazis were interested in different myths anyway, and not those of the Jewish people, and denies that 'Simply by pondering the Bible during the Nazi era, thus runs the argument, Mann is ultimately above all suspicion' (Marquardt, 2015, 229), which is an argument that reduces and simplifies anti-semitism to 'whatever the Nazis were doing' and 'excludes the possibility of unintended antisemitism' (Marquardt,

2015, 229). It is not clear what unintended antisemitism means, and relying on Marquardt's reading of the novel does not really help. The main line of the charge comes from the emphasis in *Joseph* on universality over particularity, and the overcoming of particularity through history. Marquardt makes the interesting observation, regarding origins, that the particularity of Joseph and his family, of anything really particular in the novel come from the confusions of partial beginnings. Marquardt's analysis depends on the idea that particularity is a state of confusion while understanding always leads to the universal, with the implication that the particular, in this case the particular Jewishness of Joseph and his family is reduced to sameness. Does this constitute marginalization or erasure? Is particularity, strangeness, otherness only a temporary role to be overcome by history and illustrate its universal humaneness? In a closer reading of *Joseph*, it is clear that particular identities are heightened and intensified as they become more open to universal human experience; they are not smoothed over or made the same. It is only by the family of Israel having considered themselves uniquely chosen, and setting itself off from the world that any of their innovations in the domain of the experience and imagination of temporal experience were accomplished, and it is these innovations that *Joseph and His Brothers* elaborates. If on these terms *Joseph* is considered to be antisemitic, then it is so in a way that also inheres in Christianity insofar as it is characterized by its supersessionism and its universalizing message. If scholarship gets stuck trading salvos about what constitutes the trace of racism in a work of fiction, especially in a work of irony and complexity like Mann's, the essence of that work is lost. Contrary to the contention central to Marquardt's analysis of racism, that to stretch universality over all humanity comes at the expense of particularity, *Joseph and His Brothers* emphasizes the mutual dependence of particularity and universality. The universal is only achieved *by way of* the particular – this particular family, this particular story.

But Marquardt also offers some very specific pieces of evidence to support the charge. When the narrator refers to Joseph's beauty early in the novel, it is with the disclaimer that his "dark

Arabian” appearance cannot really appeal to us today. While the text claims to be talking about “taste” in this passage, it is in fact implying something quite different.’ (Marquardt, 2015, 239) In the context of a theoretical discussion about the way that beauty in fact depends on some degree of imperfection, the narrator describes Joseph’s face, and Marquardt suggests that ‘All of these features from Joseph’s list of facial “defects” can be found almost literally in the repertoires of the Rassenkunde’ (Marquardt, 2015, p. 239). Further, as Joseph matures in Egypt, Marquardt shows that the narrator’s descriptions emphasize his clothing, his bearing, more than the Canaanite features described earlier. Joseph changes so much in order to pass off as Egyptian by ‘making exclusive use of the “airs and juices of Egypt”, of “Keme’s food” and “the water of her rivers”, by “speaking her speech”, that is, by denying and refuting his own cultural identity.’ (Marquardt 2015, p. 242) Egypt here is associated with ‘sameness’ and universality and Enlightenment. But this is a too-hasty conclusion, especially when Egypt is considered throughout the novel to be the land of death and depravity, and that Joseph’s “becoming Egyptian” is such a compromise that the family blessing, in the end, passes over him. It also pays too little attention to the relationship between descriptions of physiognomy and expressions of character throughout the novel, for its semitic and its Egyptian characters.

Marquardt also points out the use of ‘blood’ as an identity marker in the novel. There is a lot of talk about Jacob and Joseph’s concern with the blood purity of the family, which Marquardt suggests plays into antisemitic tropes. There is little attention to the way, in fact, that the novel emphasizes the spiritual unity of the family, to the point of raising Tamar as the heroine of the fourth book as she interpolates herself into the story of this family so thoroughly that the line of Israel is traced directly through her.

There is much presented here for fruitful discussion, which should be had before coming to the conclusions of antisemitism. Such a discussion would certainly concede any indication that Joseph’s face was described in stereotypical ways that were current and troubling at the time, and ask what this

means in the context of the novel. As it is, Marquardt reads the novel too hastily for preconceived markers of antisemitism. This method of sniffing things out in a text, based on definitions and frameworks such as ‘anti-semitism’ that are held a priori of any reading runs contrary to my own approach of always interpreting elements in the novel in terms of their place and role in the novel. Work like Marquardt’s is not really reading a novel and making sense of it as such. The unit of analysis is wider – includes the author, social context, historical period, etc. – and the notions such as ‘anti-semitism’ that they already have worked out. Further, to make claims like Marquardt’s seems to require the further work of making sense of the author’s motivations, accountability, and so on, for a work of art; work which in this case is not done.

Along these lines, Levenson (1998) comes to the opposite conclusion as Marquardt. To the charge that Mann’s *Joseph* is too Christian to be a Jewish book or part of a tradition of midrash, a charge that can lead to labeling *Joseph* as a Christian cooption of Jewish heritage, Levenson suggests that being a Christian text does not preclude it from being ‘philosemitic’. Notable evidence is given in Mann’s ‘selection of Tamar as a heroine’ in whose case ‘Jewish commentators consistently champion her actions, while Christian commentators tend to condemn her.’ (Levenson, 1998, p. 172) Further, and in direct opposition to Marquardt’s 2015 article which seeks to expose anti-semitism in *Joseph* by indicating the theme of blood purity in it, Levenson notes Mann clearly writes Tamar as a ‘symbol of the “triumph of spirit over blood”. ... Tamar serves as a moving rebuke to the racial legislation being enacted by the Nazi regime. ... here is Mann’s own explicitly anti-racist aside, “Blood kinship is always possible to demonstrate if one takes in enough of the picture”’ (Levenson, 1998, p. 171) Levenson stresses Mann’s ability to write from a Christian tradition in a philosemitic manner, and does so by examining the question with reference to a broad base of evidence in the novel.

The risk of works that follow a method like Marquardt’s is that its logic depends also on their readers already agreeing on such fraught issues like what counts as racism, and concerning the relation

of the artist to the art. All of this can be avoided by reading the novel on its own terms. If anti-semitism (or anything else offensive) really is in the novel, then it will show up with a careful reading of the novel as a whole. Depending on the reader's idiosyncrasies, such elements may show up earlier or later in the course of interpretation, but, if as the present dissertation argues and demonstrates, the reading is shaped by the text of the novel, they will be recognized. Of course, this assertion depends on one of the main arguments of the present dissertation, which is that while careful reading cannot escape the biases of the reader at the outset, that it educates the reader along the way, so that a reader's biases themselves are put to the test. The biased reader who reads carelessly may simply not notice something like racial bias in a novel, but the careful reader cannot simply apply pre-formed ideas about race to the novel and look for evidence of bias. If Marquardt intuitively anti-semitism in some details in *Joseph*, then the responsible method for analyzing it is to make sense of those details in terms of a sustained reading of the novel as a whole. According to the methods and conclusions of the present dissertation, any 'racial reading' or 'reading for racism', is always from the outset a misreading if these starting points are not themselves at stake in the course of the reading. That said, if a reading of *Joseph*, or any other work of art, pursued in good faith, turned up anti-semitism, or any other troubling issues, then they are important to consider.

Guide to the Reader

The work of this dissertation is a reading of *Joseph and His Brothers* in terms of the problem of originality that arises both in its content and its in highly original treatment of the story from Genesis. That this dissertation avoids the imposition of preexisting theories about the novel or methods of analysis means that the problem of method is also at stake throughout. This dissertation is both a reading of *Joseph*, and at the same time an example of learning how to read from *Joseph*. Therefore the work that follows must both follow the main trajectory of the story of the novel, and highlight important moments in the development of the concept of reading that undergirds the method and the concept of originality which it is the goal of this dissertation to develop and exemplify. Embarking on a project intended to generate its own concepts rather than allow concepts determined by method to be applied to the reading means that the attentive reader of this dissertation will notice that these concepts appear in germinal form at the beginning and undergo development throughout. Neither the terms of the method nor of the conclusions remain static and interchangeable throughout. In this, the dissertation exhibits, in its formal structure, some degree of the originality which it also sets out to discuss.

The dissertation begins in the same kind of restless dissatisfaction in which Abram discerned a call and a promise of a future. Abram had to set out from home without knowing where he was going, except that it was in the direction of finding the ‘Highest’ and away from every false claim to the highest.¹⁸ This dissertation began by rejecting methodological strictures that would have guaranteed the production of insight, but not one of any originality, or concerning the concept of ‘originality’, or really one that could honestly be said to have been learned from *Joseph* itself. To do otherwise would have been to ignore the pedagogical effect that *Joseph* has on its reader in terms of how it should be read, and would have cut off the possibility of any insights into any fundamental question concerning education as a domain of the potential for originality. Having embarked without a map, but in good

faith and enthusiasm, I struggled with problems to which there is no solution to be found except in the kind of language and concepts that are generated by the struggle.

While the best view of what is argued in the present dissertation is achieved at the end when an overview of the whole is achieved, each chapter does make a self-contained argument based on reading some specific passage or aspect of *Joseph*. The reader of this dissertation should therefore read with attention to both the specific insights and interpretations of *Joseph* that are pursued and also to the development of the terms of method that are relied on throughout. When in later stages of the dissertation a more general hermeneutic takes shape it does so on the basis of a notion of participatory and active reading that was developed in the earlier chapters, and put to conscious use in the later ones. Where at the beginning, the concept of originality is stated as the paradoxical problem of how, from origins in the past, it is possible to be original, by the end, the concept of originality comes to describe expressions of life that locate the sources of language within language itself, specifically in the way the privacy of desire and of dreams interact with the public languages of understanding in the generation of historical originality.

This orientation towards sources is exemplified by the character of Joseph, by Mann in writing the novel, and by the novel's reader-critic, all of whom learn to conceive of the problem of originality faced by the historical individual in terms of the same kind of generative mode of 'reading' and responding to origins. Therefore by demonstration as much as by argument, in this dissertation the concept of 'originality' is developed into a general hermeneutic of possibility whose existence is implied by the persistence of questions of education but not satisfactorily supplied by any of its theories.

Part of the method of this dissertation involves the development of its own methodological concepts along the way. It is by no means the case that the present reading is entirely naive, and therefore achieves some privileged insight into *Joseph* that is inaccessible to other methods. Rather, the

present reading, by allowing *Joseph* to have an educational effect on its reader, is the demonstration of how a reader's subjective experience is shaped by a sustained interpretation. Therefore it would be dishonest to retroactively apply late conclusions to early and preparatory efforts, and particularly when the concept of 'originality' is at stake, which is unthinkable apart from its own process of development. It would be a false interpretation and application of the concept of 'originality' to render it in anything but the form of its own genesis. The risk of the approach taken by this dissertation, is of course, that it will produce mere opinion; the dissertation guards against that risk by always connecting interpretation to the text of the novel itself, and demonstrating that the approach of the reading pursued in each chapter concerning different parts of *Joseph* still produces a unified perspective on the novel. The unity and effect of this dissertation depends on the how convincing the development of its interpretation is throughout, rather than its stability of definition.

The claim of this dissertation to have produced a faithful interpretation of *Joseph* means that it is not wrong in its specific readings, each of which are demonstrated by reference to the text of the novel and are therefore defensible. Each aspect of its reading is contestable without foreclosing the possibility of other, complementary readings. It also means that the present dissertation is organized around the idiosyncratic concerns of the present reader's questions concerning education, originality and historical experience. These are derived from the novel, but are not the only focal concepts that could be drawn from a faithful reading of *Joseph*. The difficulty of the problem set here is that both the individuality of the reader and the anchor of the text must be sustained and generate a new language of reading and originality. This is true of every such reading and is one way that the inexhaustible sources of human life in language expresses themselves in original ways.

The following paragraphs offer a brief description of each chapter, in terms of the parts of the *Joseph* story that is read, and in terms of how the central concepts and methods of the dissertation are developed.

Sequence

The present dissertation is sequenced as it is in order to follow the development of its central concepts – originality and its readerly method – as they emerged in the course of the reading so that my own reader is invited to accompany me on the reading that I elaborate in this dissertation. Therefore the first chapters have to do more with the concrete problems of method that I had to deal with in the early stages of the work while the later chapters leverage what was achieved in the earlier chapters in order to pursue a slightly more theoretical reading. The fragments of this dissertation are also sequenced in a way that more or less follows the trajectory of the Joseph story as it is found in Genesis. While it is not necessary for my own reader to already be familiar with the Joseph story, those who are will appreciate that my own work follows a familiar narrative order.

The first of the fragments is in Chapter 5, ‘Good Enough Reading’, and it begins the reading that forms the main part of this dissertation. It begins by noting the difficulty that accompanied the present effort to write about *Joseph* on its own terms, without simply applying a pre-existing method or looking in it for specific pre-formed ideas. The importance of this chapter is mainly that it exemplifies the kind of method that characterizes this dissertation. On one hand, it sets out with a clear commitment to only justify interpretations of part of *Joseph* in terms of the novel itself, and on the other, it illustrates how difficult it is to get started without recourse to anything outside the text. Over the course of the chapter, the sustained effort to do so still produces, out of this difficulty, some initial insights into how the novel teaches its reader how to read. The effort to justify the interpretation of any part of *Joseph* only in terms of the novel itself soon became swamped in digressions, explanations and connections. It is noted that this follows from the thoroughly interconnected nature of *Joseph*, so that to understand any of its particular elements depends on making sense of so many others as well. To somehow hide or overcome this problem and make it invisible to my own reader would be to misrepresent an important aspect of *Joseph*, which is that it teaches its reader how to read, and so the first chapter is devoted not

to resolving, but exploring this problem. It turns out that Joseph and other characters in the novel face the similar issue of having to come up with a response to something they struggle to fully understand, and the first chapter works out what would constitute a ‘good enough’ reading, partly on the example given by the characters, that while imperfect can support a response that does not lose touch with its sources.

Chapter 6, ‘No Beginning’, notes the difficulty of finding a true beginning to *Joseph*. In this, *Joseph* exhibits in a formal sense the same problematization of sources and origins that preoccupy its characters and form the main concern of the present dissertation. That ‘originality’ appears in so many guises, from explicit discussion by the characters and the narrator, to the formal structure which makes it difficult to find a true beginning of the novel, to the conceptualization of ‘originality’ as at the heart of historical and educational experience is part of what poses such a difficulty for the present inquiry that even its methods are compelled towards originality. Therefore, to examine how the ‘origin’ of *Joseph* is difficult to identify despite the fact that it must exist – the novel does indisputably begin – provides the present study a case in point of the operations of ‘originality’ that it sets out to explore.

Several candidate beginnings of *Joseph* are considered, from the physical first page of the book, to the beginning of the narrative proper, after the prefatory chapters, but none are as clear cut as one might hope. This second chapter considers this in light of the difference between the lived experience of time, according to which we always find ourselves ‘in the middle of things’,¹⁹ and the narration of time which does allow for beginnings and endings. Time only takes sensible shape when it is narrated, but that narrated shape of time is not identical with its lived experience. Unfortunately for the historical individual, there is no escaping this dilemma, and we always live according to an image of time that itself is always to some degree illusory.²⁰ In this chapter, connections are made between the experience of the characters, *Joseph*’s composition, the work of the present dissertation and the experience of the historical individual.

Chapter 7, 'Quoting *Joseph*', takes up the issue of how difficult it is to quote from *Joseph*, which is an unavoidable requirement of the present work, which seeks to interpret the novel on its own terms. The interconnectedness and varying register of the narration makes it hard to single out any specific element of a given quotation to discuss in detail, without having to indicate many of its connections to other parts of the novel. The risk undertaken by the interpretation of any given passage is that the interpretation misrepresents or only gives a partial sense of its meaning. There is always more, or something else to say, about any given quotation, which confronts the reader with the problem of how to guarantee the truth of any given particular interpretation. This chapter recalls some of the issues raised in 'Good Enough Reading'. Here, these issues are traced back to practices of quotation from my own of Mann's, Mann's of his sources, Mann's characters of each other, and so on, until a continuum appears between the oral, social, and divinely orientated linguistic practices out of which Joseph's family emerged and the kind of written language that the present dissertation relies upon. The idea is that the problem of originality that plagues written, representational, propositional language in particular as the opposition between novelty and comprehensibility does not appear in the same way in oral and social language. If written language can regain living contact with orality, perhaps some headway can be made on the problem of originality, and in this chapter I suggest that emphasizing readership over authorship can help in this regard.

Chapter 8, 'Jacob Mourns for Joseph', explores the nature of language, particularly in terms of its relation to embodied reality. Jacob receives a token, his son's bloodied coat of many colours, and is denied the flexibility of words that may have softened the blow. It is in the elaborations of words that Jacob achieves the kind of self-deception that allows him to rail against fate and fail to acknowledge his own complicity in the fraternal conflict. The limits of language are explored following this example as a way to reimagine the apparent paradox of 'originality' in terms of the mysterious relation between

language and the body. The work of clarifying this relation prepares the reader for the next chapter, in which possible sources of originality in historical experience are explored.

Chapter 9, 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire', deals with the affair between Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Mut-em-enet, and pursues the earlier insights into the representation of time and into the relation between the body and language even further. In this chapter it is suggested that while desire appears to provide the kind of impetus towards the future that is at the heart of the historical conception of time, it also can disrupt whatever shape of time one has avowed in making sense of life. The importance of this chapter is that it becomes clear that desire cannot be trusted as an immediate and unambiguous source of direction for interpreting experience, and that it must itself be interpreted. This is the first time in the dissertation that one of its key insights is articulated, which is that the apparent sources of language that make originality possible are not themselves independent of language. This both aids the study of originality and makes it more difficult. It helps by continuing to articulate an account of reading and language that unifies language and the body, and makes it more difficult by rejecting the possibility that the desiring body can serve as source of making sense of life as a solution to the problem of the regress of temporal origins.

Chapter 10, 'The Hidden Face', continues with Mut-em-enet for a while in consideration of how Mann establishes the interiority of his characters. Mut's character is an interesting example because all we know of her from the Genesis story is that she is Joseph's seductress. Mann's narrator sets out from the start to recover her reputation from being reduced to this role, without ignoring any of the 'facts' of what she said and did. In *Joseph* her role in the affair is even emphasized as a mythical pattern, and yet there is made apparent an ineradicable gap between such patterns and the embodied, individual experience of life by allowing Mut, in a critical moment, a moment of privacy where the language of narration and of embodied expression cannot reach. It is interesting that only by pushing

the patterning power of language as far as it can go is it possible to establish the limits of language to fully account for individuality in its public expression.

Finally, Chapter 11, ‘Dreaming, Reading, Writing’, discusses Joseph’s career as a dreamer and interpreter of dreams in light of everything that has been developed so far. While so many possible treatments of this element of Joseph’s life are possible, the emphasis of this chapter concerns the essential unity of language with what we tend to think of as its sources. In this case, the language of interpretation is essentially the public aspect of the private experience of dreaming, with the reverse also being true, that dreaming is the private aspect of public language use. This notion recalls the chapter on desire in that both dreams and desire are understood to fuel the fecundity of language. It has also become apparent that neither of these ‘sources’ are totally independent of the public languages that express them and struggle to make sense of them. In both cases, an emphasis on reading is suggested as a linguistic mode that does a better job than ‘authorship’ of holding these aspects, the source and the shape, the private and the public, together simultaneously. In *Joseph* the characters name God as the ultimately mysterious source of all language, of all private experience, and this makes it possible for them to straddle the difficult enough dynamic between language and its sources sufficiently to re-imagine time in terms of the possibility of originality. We modern historical individuals have inherited this shape of time from them, but without appealing to God we struggle to make sense of originality. The chapter works out the problem of originality in terms of the unity of the private sources of public language, and suggests that a readerly approach to the problem allows the required openness to mystery and the inevitable turn away from sources to be accomplished in good faith in a way that an emphasis on authorship and the authorization of certain uses of language to shape historical life do not.

For the aid of the reader who wishes to keep track of important moments in the development of the concept of ‘originality’, the following key features are briefly described here. Each of these chapters is intelligible on its own, and a casual reader will still gain from them, but the reader who

wishes to gain the kind of insight only possible from the vantage of an overview will be more easily able to gain an overview of the study by paying attention to these critical moments. They include the inevitability of a ‘turn away’ from rock solid sources and absolute beginnings. The quality of this turn distinguishes irony from faith and the possibility of a future from the punishing cycles of myth. The development of the concept also emphasizes the interdependence and connection between language and its sources. Desire and dreams exist on the border between language and that which is utterly mysterious, and they provide the constant injection of fuel into hermeneutics, without which language circles an abyss of incomprehensibility, and with which a hermeneutics of possibility is possible via the concept of ‘originality’. Joseph’s family named the ultimate and abiding source of language ‘God’ and its realization a ‘blessing’ that was a destiny, the destiny of *having a future*, and not just endless recurrence. In modernity we name both that future and the source of its possibility as ‘history’, but when that name loses touch with its own sources – the body, dreams, and more – then it resolves into yet another cycle of myth, however finely developed. The historical attitude of ‘originality’ requires faithful contact with and participation in its own sources – an attitude that remains always a risk that can be avoided by claims of solid beginnings and clear directions; claims that are comforting but are also concessions to ignorance and the way to self-deception. All quotations from *Joseph and His Brothers* are from the John Woods English translation, published in 2005.

Writing and Good Enough Reading

Every time I start to write about a passage in *Joseph and His Brothers*, I have an idea of what I want to say about it, but when I begin, I find that there is something that I need to explain first, some other aspect of the passage that needs to be explained in order to talk about what I had set out to discuss. This stems from the problem of method acknowledged at the outset, which is that if this dissertation is to understand *Joseph* on its own terms, rather than according to the terms set out by a given method or ideological perspective, then these cannot be relied upon to keep digressions, endnotes, and eddies of detail under control. These accumulate in every instance where something the reader noticed in the course of reading needs to be explained in terms of the reading, until they soon engulf the idea they were meant to explain, and then what has been written starts to become unwieldy, too big and setting off in too many directions at once. Setting out to understand *Joseph* on its own terms re-introduces, in terms of method, the same kind of regress that plagues the search for origins in the past. The practical question of when a reading is ‘good enough’ to support a coherent response in writing, without misrepresenting the text, is of the same kind as the question of when the search for origins in the past has gone deep enough, and so serves as a suitable starting point for the proposed reading.

Some of this problem come from my own writerly disposition, to be sure, which having been trained on Thomas Mann’s writing, can tend to weave and twist, complicating itself, and sometimes without the control that preserves the clarity of his. But even when my writing is simple and lucid, my efforts to clearly express something about *Joseph* can end up doing the opposite, even if it appeared simple enough to me at the time of reading. Mann’s narrator suggests that this ancient story has had a similar effect on writers since the beginning, and that even the most ancient sources we have for the story are themselves ‘late and tendentious interpolations’ (Mann, 2005, p. 6) so that

...this original was itself not actually an original, not *the* original if viewed correctly. It was itself already a copy of a document from God knows what ancient times ... [and] in its own day a scribal hand had doctored it with glosses and addenda intended as an aid for better understanding of yet another text... though probably achieving just the opposite by his “modern” transmogrification of its wisdom. (Mann, 2005, p. 12, italics in the original).

The narrator experiences the same thing in relation to its source material as I do in relation to my own in *Joseph*, where commentary can tend to work against clarity. As I find myself caught in whorls of restatement and contextualization, so the narrator is often found restating a theme or referring multiple times to the same episode in the story, from various perspectives. I need to learn from the narrator the way that this can be turned into a productive principle for the present work as it is for *Joseph*. In my own writing, to do justice to any particular aspect of *Joseph* requires also attention to its place in the novel’s ‘kaleidoscope’ (Mann, 2005, p. 677), to use the narrator’s own language, of meanings and so entails the risk of getting lost in the weeds of interconnection and endless qualification. In order for this complexity to aid my own reader’s understanding requires learning from how the narrator deals with the same issue. This chapter, therefore, argues by demonstration that *Joseph* teaches its readers how to read and can therefore support interpretations that do not rely on external methods or ideas, but receive immanent justification within a reading of the novel itself.

My work, one interpretation among many possible, still needs to answer to the text of the novel, and this requirement leads to a tendency towards chasing down the innumerable connections that present themselves to even the most cursory reader. My copy of the book is penciled on nearly every page with cross references and marginal notes that trace some of these connections, and to say

something true about the novel must convey this interconnectedness, even though these connections exceed my capacity to note and describe them without simply re-writing the entire novel, given how essential these connections are to the construction of the novel which Mann himself described as ‘everything connected to everything else’ (McDonald, 1999, p. 98). To do so – for example by writing an ‘Annotated *Joseph*’ – would be to miss the point of the novel, which is not to belabour the difficulty of imagining and representing origins, but to express the means by which originality is liveable.

In writing *Joseph*, Mann must have experienced something akin to what I described above. After all, this ‘monument to the labours of a single man’ (Mann, 2005, p. xxxii) took sixteen years and 1500 pages to compose out of source material that is only about 50 pages long. The paratactic concision of that original version in Genesis conveys to the careful reader a manifold of tensions, implications and rich veins of real human experience.²¹ It is these that Mann develops over the course of the novel, far beyond what is explicitly written in the story in Genesis. The narrator insists that this novel will ‘re-tell the story in the way that life first told it’, will ‘get it right’, (Mann, 2005, p. 815) and claims fidelity to its source material for Mann’s project, despite its formal status as art. At one point the narrator even blusters: ‘Do we know our story or do we not?’ (Mann, 2005, p. 671) as if to preempt the suspicion that may have niggled at the reader since the outset, with some justification, that the apparent authority that unifies the novel might be illusory. The dual aspect of the term ‘originality’ arises here. The dedication to getting the story right by sticking with source material is a desire for authenticity that goes back to the origin as the ‘first’ appearance of the story. But given that such a faithful, authentic, retelling cannot be identical, these thousands of years later, to its sources, the originality of Mann’s retelling is that it is also distinct and new in time. Originality unites both of these opposing impulses, towards authentic connection to the origin which is in the past, and also towards the new and distinct,

so that both remain active; the work of this dissertation is to explore the operations of originality as it is the concern of, and is expressed by, Mann's *Joseph*.

Mann, in an authorial introduction, submits that he himself considers this a 'good, faithful work' (Mann, 2005, p. xl). But what counts as 'faithful'? It is not strict and severe accuracy. One mark of Mann's fidelity to his sources is that Mann's 'reading between the lines' of the original source text is explicitly thematized in the novel, particularly in the later section 'The Rascal Servant', which I treat in the chapter 'Dreaming, Reading, Writing', and is also repeated in the experience of his own reader. My own subjective experience of reading *Joseph* is that it rewards the kind of reading that does not always take things at face value and finds in some of its ironies or gaps in narration important thematic and unifying principles. Showing how this experience was produced by specific reference to the text of the novel in the chapters that follow, particularly in the narrator's treatment of Jacob's mourning of Joseph, justifies a degree of generalization of this experience to other readers of *Joseph*, without making any authoritative claims about Mann's authorial intentions. That the narrator, in 'The Rascal Servant', explicitly leads the reader on such a course of reading bolsters this claim. Mann uses the liberties available to him as a novelist to produce this effect. The reader can go through the Genesis account alongside Mann's *Joseph* without finding any points of contradiction, even while appreciating the novelty of Mann's work.²² There are, for example, passages like the one in which Joseph wheedles the famous coat of many colours from Jacob, which draws its entire thematic development from the way that the same Hebrew term in Genesis, *ketonet passim*, describes both that coat of many colours and Rachel's wedding veil, and nothing else in Genesis.²³ In the episode the cloak becomes a potent symbol of the transference of Jacob's love from Rachel to Joseph, a theme that motivates a significant amount of Jacob's psychology. Later, Mann makes a similar exploration of a striking textual detail. In the example of the story of Joseph and Mut-em-enet, Potiphar's wife, the Genesis version, always stingy

with the quotation of direct speech, has Mut utter the repeated invitation to Joseph to ‘come lie with me’.²⁴ This urgent and repeated command is taken up by the narrator as one of the main points of entry into unfolding the story, arguing that surely a high status woman such as Mut would not make such a bold and increasingly desperate approach when it would be in her power simply to command that Joseph, the slave, be brought to her. In both of these examples, Mann’s invention is devoted to the interpretation of a salient feature of the Genesis text. As a work of art, *Joseph* answers to, but has the luxury of some independence from, its sources.

Joseph is essentially concerned with the question not only of origins, but of how origins open up a future. It is of a people whose identity comes from its inherited promise of a future, of a community not primarily of flesh and blood but of the spirit. This is the story of those who wrestled with their own inheritance a tradition of stories that are concerned with the future; those ‘in whom a new history begins.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 7) This tradition began with Abram’s discernment of God’s promise of a future and his expectant faith in that future, and was sustained by every generation that re-enacted the sense of that promise and in carrying it into the future, began to fulfill it. Anyone who deals with this story experiences the same difficulty as its protagonists, which is to be both faithful to sources and oriented towards the future, towards what is new. From its beginnings when, as the narrator says, ‘life first told it’ (Mann, 2005, p. 815) to its earliest recorded form, to Mann’s retelling and to the present project, this story has confronted its readership with the problem of origins. To say anything about it that does not betray this essential concern is to miss its central point.²⁵ Mann’s own artistic achievement – and part of the irony of *Joseph* – is to make the intractability of this problem explicit, and still to produce a formally coherent work of art. Mann’s clever solution is to make it a theme of the novel itself, to repeat the characters’ problem with original expressions at the level of the narrator, and thus also implicating the author, and we readers who also turn to writing. Therefore in this dissertation,

the very problem of what counts as a ‘good enough’ reading is also thematized as a way into making sense of *Joseph*.

The differentiation between a ‘good enough’ reading and a misreading is not easy to make because while the too serious, critical, reading carries the risk of being drawn into endless regress and missing the point, the amateur reading I suggest here, motivated as it is, first of all, by the pleasure of reading, comes with the risk of being too self-referential, so that anything that confirms the pleasure of reading is taken to be true. In other words, if the unifying principle of a reading derives from the attitudes and experiences of the reader, it is all too easy to confuse those for insight into the text. While a too-critical reading can be misleading, a too enjoyable reading can be superficial or incorrect. The challenge is to remain oriented to and determined by the text while allowing the experience of reading to serve as the unifying principle of the interpretation. A ‘good enough’ reading that avoids seeking only the confirmation of its own self-regard in the text must concern itself with a hermeneutic object, a ‘unit’ of analysis which is provided by the novel itself. Any of its formal, semantic, historical, or other of its aspects can be investigated, and lead to all sorts of interesting things outside the novel, but the unity of the novel in itself is only forged in its effect on a reader.

The effect of the text on the reader can serve as the entry point into making sense of the novel in a way that disciplines a reading to answer to its source material without at the same time betraying the experience of an amateur reading. Such a reading might follow the guiding question of ‘how is this effect accomplished?’, and would support a dialogue between readers in a way that simple pleasure-reading that confuses pleasure for insight does not, because of the necessity of talking about the text and verifying any insights by reference to it. The reader’s experience remains the distinct purview of the individual, and cannot really be understood by anyone else – except, perhaps by a thorough and continuing dialogue about the ‘text’ that participates in producing the effect, which means that there are

as many possible true insights into the novel as there are readings.²⁶ Of course it is always possible to deny that a given effect is produced by any text. One might dispute, for example, the sense of tension and relief that I suggest, in the chapter ‘No Beginning’, is produced by the transition between the *Descent into Hell* and *At the Well* even though I describe in some detail how I see it produced. It becomes possible to describe how a given effect is produced, and so to develop idiosyncratic readings in such a way that they can be recognized by a community of readers, and even be used to evaluate apparently ‘expert’ readings. What this does require is a pact of solidarity between readers that the idiosyncratic element of the unit of analysis – the reader’s experience – is offered in good faith and humility. Good faith that one isn’t just making up the experience. Humility, because when one submits a feeling as having been produced in a certain time and place and in a certain way by a given text, it is vulnerable to re-interpretation. One might have mis-read the text. The original ‘feeling’ may have been experienced, but it may have come from an incorrect reading of the text. This can be embarrassing. Humility also because there is no limit to the depth at which a reading of how it is produced can be pursued, and so there is in principle no limit to the re-articulation and revision of understanding of one’s own feelings, which is the same thing as feeling them differently. Therefore it is important that one’s feelings are not treated as an unequivocal foundation for interpretation. One might read the same passage tomorrow and feel differently, after all, but treated as the entry point into interpretation. Feelings are produced in the reading, and to use these feelings to interpret the novel must always proceed from making sense of how they are produced by the novel. In this continual process of feeling and interpreting those feelings in terms of their relation to the novel, a cultivation of some feelings rather than others occurs which allows the reader to understand the novel with increasing nuance. If any feeling goes, then the novel is merely the catalyst of emotional experience and not itself subject to interpretation, which can be valuable as far as it goes. But one function of a novel like *Joseph* is to

engage an interested reader in a course of emotional education that allows the readerly experience of feelings to provide an entry point into interpretation.²⁷

The possibility of this endless re-reading differs from the endless regress of a critical reading that must always remain provisional until it is complete because when the unit of analysis is the *effect* that draws equally on the text and the experience of the reader, it is actually the solidarity between reader who say ‘Yes, I feel that too’ that can provide some basis for a positive interpretation. Pharaoh memorably praises Joseph’s interpretation of his dreams after having rejected those of his advisers, magicians and prophets by exclaiming that prior to Joseph’s interpretation he ‘only knew what was wrong, but not what was right’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1170). Too critical analysis or too naively individual pleasure-reading can be very correct about the text or about the pleasure of reading and still miss the point. A ‘correct’ analysis can easily miss the effect on the reader that is a major function of the novel, and an unexamined emotional response to a text might be incommunicable to other readers.

In this dissertation the challenge of writing something that gets the source material right without being so overwhelmed by always having to say more, or to qualify what has been written makes it difficult to actually finish composing anything. No solution to this problem is perfect. *Rapprochement* between the demands of telling the truth about the source material and actually managing to finish saying anything at all began, in this case, with the setting out of scope and methods to the writing. The present dissertation cannot say everything that is relevant or important about *Joseph* or even about the particular concerns that I take up from the novel. In this, my problem is shared by writers in general – no one manages to fully express what they hope to write. The statement of scope in the present case is of some help because it limits the number and kind of features and connections of *Joseph* which must be accounted for, but it also sharpens the problem because it claims issues of reading, writing and

originality as the concern of the present project. In other words, even the effort to restrict the scope of the present project results in amplifying the basic problems of originality and of fidelity to sources.

Examples

Joseph himself and other characters must learn what constitutes a ‘good enough’ reading of the sources of their own tradition. Mann’s own use of sources is compelled to do justice to this very ancient story as well as the intellectual tradition in which he thinks and writes. The problem as it faces the reader of *Joseph*, one whose reading must be accurate enough to support a written response, has already been introduced. That reader notices that the problem of a ‘good enough’ reading of textual or linguistic sources is the same as the problem of imagining the past, which always recedes before the investigator gives it full account, and generalizes the problem of reading to the hermeneutic predicaments of historical life in general, in which to make sense of one’s self *as* an historic individual is to engage in the same reading of one’s sources. At the individual level, the reader learns to make sense of the self, and it is the work of a readerly community to make sense of what a good society consists of; its sources and its future direction. Education can be located at the junction between these two abstracted levels of the historical project, which, despite the tendency to think of the individual as distinct from or embedded within a cultural context, only ever proceeds in particular instances which are both individual *and* communal.²⁸ There is much to learn about how to read from this novel on these four levels then, admitting that to distinguish them is always an abstraction: of what goes on *in* the novel, in the authoring of the novel, in reading the novel, and in the insinuation of the reader’s reading into the rest of the reader’s life.

Joseph grew up in a world where understanding the past did not deal so strictly in differentiating it from the present. He and his contemporaries never tried to exhaustively trace their own pasts. The

passage in which the reader is first introduced to Jacob by means of a very fuzzy family tree, full of overlapping identities and intertwining branches of experience – not at all like the trees neatly illustrated in textbooks of taxonomies.²⁹ Such a sense of identity was not without its own logic, which, for example, governed the place of Eliezer in the family. The old man, servant and teacher, namesake of the Eliezer who accompanied Abraham in earlier days, referred to the Eliezer of each generation as ‘I’. He was ‘both at once, and not just both, but Eliezers *in general*, for since the days of the eldest of them, in the camps of the heads of the clan there had often been a freed slave named Eliezer...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 93) Thus in teaching Joseph the family stories, Eliezer told the boy that ‘I’ had gone to war alongside Abram (Mann, 2005, p. 342), that ‘I’ ‘had been sent to the clan’s relatives in Mesopotamia to woo Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel and Laban’s sister, on Yitzchak’s behalf, had told it in exact detail, down to the little moons and crescents that had jingled from the necks of his ten dromedaries, ...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 94). In this re-telling, the stories were so like the old man’s memory that

Joseph listened to it all with a delight that could not be diminished in the least by the grammatical form in which Eliezer presented it; he was far from being offended by the fact that the old man’s “I” did not turn out to be solidly encompassed but, as it were, stood open to the rear, overflowed into earlier times, into areas beyond his own individuality, and incorporated experiences that, when given shape as memory and narration, should have actually – viewed by the light of day – been cast in the third person, rather than the first. But what does “actually” mean in this context, and is the human ego something closed sturdily in on itself, sealed tightly within its own temporal and fleshly limits? Do not many of the elements out of which it is built belong to the world before and outside of it? And is the notion that someone is no one other than himself not simply a convention that for the sake of good order and comfortableness

diligently ignores all those bridges that bind individual self-awareness to the general consciousness? (Mann, 2005, p. 94)³⁰

Joseph would certainly forgive Eliezer – who ‘knew how to say “I” in such an easy and grand manner’ (Mann, 2005, p. 341) – this imprecision, for things ‘look different by moonlight than by the bright of day, and its clarity may indeed have seemed the true clarity to those minds in that time and place.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 93)³¹ Joseph allowed himself the same kind of dreamy imprecision as on the moonlit night where we met him ‘At the Well’, ruminating on loosely connected associations of thought about the moon, God, his forefathers, and more, until his father enjoined him in serious conversation. But while Joseph enjoyed such play of association, he was too clever to allow it full reign in his mind. He *enjoyed* it, which is also to say that he did not take it too seriously, as perhaps Eliezer and the general society of the ancient Near East did in their total immersion in the patterns of the world and of the past, or as Jacob did in his serious attempts to reconcile those patterns with the particularity of considering his family to be specially chosen by God. Individual identity dissolves in the former and the latter is the way to anxiety. Most of the characters in the novel express a mixture of these approaches.³²

As the reader eavesdrops on Joseph’s lessons with Eliezer, which concern the stories of his family, the numerological significance of the lunar and solar cycles, the recurrence of the past in the present, and much else besides, it becomes clear that Joseph plays these lessons as a game.³³ In them he enjoys the play of numbers that describe the world and of the blurring of identity that allowed events and identities to be connected in cycles between which ‘all the world’s other periods and great circular orbits were completed. Each such cycle comprised four hundred thirty-two thousand years and was an exact repetition of all that had gone before’ (Mann, 2005, p. 327). Of course, within that great cycle, inner cycles went through their own rotations so that on the human temporal scale, it took great

learning and insight to decipher the apparent recurrence of events and identities, which were never quite perfect. In their discourse, teacher and pupil had to attend to all the divisions and cycles above, and learn their correspondence to those below, until they ‘did not differentiate between the heavenly and the earthly.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 324) In this, Joseph followed Eliezer, but with conscious pleasure in doing so. Joseph laughed, and at the end of the lesson Eliezer ‘would kiss the hem of his pupil’s robe and cry, “Hail, son of a lovely wife! You are making brilliant progress...”’ (Mann, 2005, p. 330) Eliezer, it seemed, knew everything, and while Joseph delighted to learn it, his playfulness set him apart from Eliezer, and gave him something else to think about during these lessons. Joseph’s ‘perception of time and space now expanded to something superhuman...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 326) according to the idea guiding the lessons that God ‘had given them the ability to conceive of eons and thus in some sense, likewise to rise up to be their master...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 327). But Joseph was less concerned with mastery of the eons than he was with mastering his brothers in their rivalry for Jacob’s affections. Joseph enjoyed playing with the ideas Eliezer taught, but only really wanted to confirm, by his adroit handling of them, his father’s favour. Yes, Joseph was ‘so quick-witted at it that whenever Jacob listened in, he would cluck his tongue and exclaim, “Like an angel!”’ (Mann, 2005, p 328). It was certainly Joseph’s immaturity that guided his playful learning because he learned it more for his own vanity than anything else. But, even though Eliezer would have disapproved of such self-regard, it still led Joseph to worthwhile considerations.

Joseph’s process of making sense of his life was inseparable from this kind of scene of dialogue. He always needed an audience. In this, Joseph exhibits many of the traits of the kind of ‘imposter’ or confidence-man character that Mann liked to write.³⁴ For example, when they were young, Joseph would thrill his little brother Benjamin with re-enactments of mythical scenes. When he was older, he loved to ‘take people aback’ (Mann, 2005, 1007), such as when he staged his first introduction to

Potiphar in Potiphar's garden in a way that gave him a pretence for talking about himself. Later still, he startled his jailor with the confident and dramatic 'I am he' (Mann, 2005, p. 1157) in answer to the jailor's perfunctory question about his identity. In each of these cases Joseph would use situations and other people to reflect back on his own self-regard or the pursuit of his own projects. He could be manipulative and didn't mind it when someone was even 'shunted aside' (Mann, 2005, p. 933) for his own benefit. All of this depends on a striking degree of pride and self-confidence, which Joseph maintained even to his own downfall, as in the case when he would continue meeting with Mut under the pretense of curing her infatuation by coolly delivering lessons to her, making himself ignore that he was in fact stoking the fires of her desire. He uses his effect on others to manipulate them. Joseph is a trickster, but there is also a significant difference between his tricks and those played by the usual confidence artists on their victims, which even though he begins in narcissism, Joseph ultimately submits even his own pride and ego to his understanding of the plans of God. Joseph's pride is inseparable from his piety. For a fuller discussion of how tricks, games and laughter are holy occupations for Joseph, see note 115 concerning 'The Holy Game'.

Even though the material content of what Eliezer had to teach was little more than a game to Joseph, the *impressions* of this old man, whose identity was so porous, were 'the most abiding and effective ones he gained from instruction by old Eliezer.' (Mann, 2005, p. 343) Indeed, one of the reasons Eliezer had been tasked with Joseph's instructions in serious matters was Jacob's anxiety about Joseph's tendency to slip into undisciplined and undifferentiated alliance with all forms of pleasure, beauty and illusion.

He knew of Joseph's proclivity for vaguely ecstatic states, which though not fully formed and even half pretended, ..., and he was very uncertain how a father profoundly aware of

the holy and pernicious ambiguity of such tendencies ought to respond. (Mann, 2005, p. 336)

In tasking Eliezer with Joseph's education, Jacob hopes to steer his son away from these dreamy tendencies or at least to give them a counterweight in reasonable and pious understanding. They could not be stamped out, nor would Jacob have wanted that, as he also loved these slightly dubious tendencies in Joseph, and found comfort for his own anxieties in them, even as he hesitated to endorse them entirely. Earlier in the novel, at the well, when Jacob anxiously compares his own faith to Abraham's, he accepts Joseph's reassurances, but not entirely.³⁵ 'Only half the truth is in your words, and the other half remains with what I said, for I proved weak in my trust. But you clothed your part of the truth with grace, anointing it with the oil of wit, so that it is a delight for the understanding and a balm for my heart.' (Mann, 2005, p. 82) Jacob always worries that Joseph will get carried away and lose touch with the truth entirely, for

whenever God-given reason broke down and lewd frenzy took its place, that was for him the beginning of what he called "folly," a very strong word in his mouth, strong enough to express utter disapproval. ... Nakedness, chanting circles of dancers, festal gluttony, worship as fornication with temple women, the cult of Sheol, and "Aulasaukaulala" and vile oracular seizures – that was Canaan, it all belonged together, it was all the same thing, and it was folly in Jacob's eyes. (Mann, 2005, p. 337)

But Joseph's 'childish proclivity for rolling his eyes and dreamlike babbling' (Mann, 2005, p. 337) still received encouragement in the favour he received from all quarters. His own wit and good looks had not only charmed his father but were famous in the region, so that Joseph sought, and found, confirmation in the world for his own vain self-regard. This is the source of the strife between brothers and it would not be a stretch to describe it as narcissism. No wonder Jacob wanted to educate Joseph

into the finely reasoned discourse of higher learning, if this is what he sees risked by allowing pleasure to reign over the mind. Of course, to choose Joseph for these lessons was yet another mark of Jacob's special favour and 'contributed much to Joseph's estrangement from the sons of Leah and the handmaids, and that isolation sowed many of the seeds of arrogance on the one side and of jealousy on the other.' (Mann, 2005, p. 333)³⁶ Consistent with the playful and relational approach to his education described above, Joseph plays into this partiality of Jacob's. It is not *only* Jacob's favour that causes the seeds of strife between the brothers, but also Joseph's playing the favourite, as he did for example when he visited them in the fields, adorned in the beautiful cloak, to check up on them, as a supervisor or elder brother would, which was the visit that led to his downfall. Yes, Joseph played the part of favourite, manipulated Jacob into explicit demonstrations of favouritism, shows off and is too much a chatterbox not to thoroughly frustrate and annoy his brothers.³⁷

Nevertheless, Joseph did learn something worth learning even by the ways and means and pleasure and playfulness about which Jacob was rightfully anxious, and which in no way were encouraged by Eliezer, but began in Joseph's enjoyment of the impression that Eliezer made in his teaching: 'These were lessons of majesty that entertained Joseph in grand style.' (Mann, 2005, p. 327) Joseph's dreamy playfulness was unwittingly encouraged by these lessons, even though it was not intended, but 'Children are not being inattentive when their teachers scold them for it; they are merely attending to things that are perhaps more essential than those their practical instructors have in mind.' (Mann, 2005, p. 343) So in this case, Joseph's mind was elevated beyond the material of Eliezer's lessons to a mysterious concern that abided through his entire life – that of how the unity of the body – its feelings and ecstatic states, its intuitions and exultations – and the mind – its sobriety, clarity and individuality – were mysteriously brought together in the pleasure of learning. This mystery was

Joseph's guiding idea from the narcissism of his youth to his maturity, and it could only be contemplated in laughter.³⁸

The example of Joseph's education is by no means exhausted in the treatment above. There are many connecting threads to other parts of the novel and other ideas that could be indicated, and which would also provide more nuance to the complexities of Joseph's lessons. This, and every other example in the present study immediately elicits a desire to connect with more, and serves as a good example of what constitutes a 'good enough' reading. Just as Joseph knew that there was no getting to the bottom of the marvellous things he heard from Eliezer, and knew that in order for them to be taken up in a life and in the understanding, they needed to be taken up lightly and with a laugh even in their seriousness, so in the present study one attribute of a 'good enough' reading is that it is guided by the pleasure of the reading and that the seriousness of the task of 'getting it right' is not allowed to overwhelm the necessity of actually turning from reading to writing.

No Beginning

How *Joseph* Begins

Joseph and His Brothers doesn't really have a beginning. The first page really isn't the beginning but offers some narrative comment on the impossibility of getting down to beginnings. The reader arrives in the middle of a story. Not even the beginning of the hero's life is the beginning of the story because we meet the hero, Joseph, in the midst of contemplating his origins in the stories of others who preceded him.³⁹

The narrator of this avowedly realistic version of the Joseph story must face the apparently stark difference between the modern and the ancient conceptions and experiences of time. To relate how something 'really happened' (Mann, 2005, p. 119), for us moderns, always involves getting back to its origins in the past and filling in enough naturalistic detail that a story becomes plausible as history. But when *Joseph* begins without a real beginning, the essential concession of this kind of historical realism to arbitrary and unfounded 'beginnings' is made explicit. When the narrator peers deep into the 'well of the past' (Mann, 2005, p. 3), in the first line of the novel, it is only to recognize that it is bottomless, and then to carry on a pseudo-scientific research into the problem of origins in which every beginning also has a beginning, further in the past. No wonder this introductory chapter is titled the 'Descent into Hell', for when the accurate writing of history is determined to be impossible, every idea we have about ourselves personally and as a culture must admit to a false start.⁴⁰ We citizens of modernity habitually peer back at those ancient peoples who avoided the problem by affirming origins that stood outside of time, as stories about the way things are that interacted with day to day life as cycles of recurrence and pattern. This mythical conception of time avoids an endless regress of beginnings precisely by giving up what we consider a realistic understanding of time. The narrator of *Joseph* needs to find a way to give a historically realistic account of people who lived mythically, and the crux of the

challenge is that the very origins by which those ancient people understood themselves are already, to the modern mind, unrealistic.⁴¹

The immediate admission that the historical appetite for firm beginnings is impossible to satisfy sets the narrator's course for the novel, which is to reconcile these apparently opposed conceptions of time by forcing us to recognize the mythical aspects of our own thinking. Treating the basic problem of origins allows the narrator to show that, in a way, history is our myth; to realistically depict the mythical conception of time that prevailed in the setting of the Joseph story; and to discern in it the spur of a historical conception of time. If it was 'in these stories that a new history began' (Mann, 2005, p. 7) then we might learn something about how to live through the problems of history in a manner that less rigidly defends the legitimacy of history as such. When we read how it 'was so easy for young Joseph to make his own little mistakes, we should also note that he made them in 'good faith' (Mann, 2005, p. 10). Perhaps rather than eradicating the illusions that haunt historical experience we might also learn to make 'self-deception in good faith.' (Mann, 2005, p. 27) This is the possibility that runs through the entirety of *Joseph* and is promised to the reader who accepts the narrator's challenge to pursue the problem of origins even though the way is hard and no guarantee of success is provided. The first lines of this monumental novel calls its own legitimacy into question, and yet proceeds for another 1500 pages, in a literary echo of the exact same problem of writing history, which is to write of beginnings without having any firm beginnings at the outset.⁴² Genesis begins 'In the beginning...' but *Joseph* avails itself of all the evasions and disguises offered by the novelistic form of writing by which its own lack of beginnings can be obscured and which work toward the realistic representation of time. If even through all the sustained commentary by the narrator concerning the pitfalls of the narrative enterprise, some beginning is still accomplished that treats the story faithfully, then an examination of how *Joseph* begins might also suggest grounds for the possibility of good faith and hope in the midst of historical uncertainty. This essay is devoted to reading *Joseph* in search of its beginning.

Where is Page One?

There is no real ‘page 1’ that begins the story of *Joseph*. The first page of the novel belongs to a prelude to the narrative, the ‘Descent into Hell’, a gnarly 40 page introduction to the ideas and difficulties concerning origins that motivate the rest of the novel. In it the reader is ostensibly enjoined to consider the problem of origins scientifically, but what begins as a dizzying tour of world mythologies soon, and without the narrator’s giving up the guise of ‘research’, involves a wildly speculative tale in which the basic ambivalence of the human life in the flesh is rendered as a result of the original adventures of spirit, soul and matter, and finally even an explicit argument that such confusions as these are *necessary* for any investigations into human origins. Here the novel does not really begin, but begins with this examination of the troubles of beginning. Translator John Woods, in an introduction to *Joseph*, even suggests that a reader might skip over this part and revisit it only when having become comfortable with the flow of true narrative of the later sections. But it would not be right to consider this section an appendage to the novel proper, as, say, part of the front materials of the book, which in the most recent English translation by John Woods includes a table of contents, translator’s introduction, select bibliography, chronology of Mann’s life and career in historical context, and Mann’s own foreword entitled *Sixteen Years*. Even though it is given the heading ‘*Prelude*’, it really is the start of the novel despite the disgruntling effect it will have on any reader who wants a clean beginning. The ‘Descent into Hell’ introduces, but does not resolve, many of the thematic problems that make the consideration of ‘originality’ difficult. It names some of the characters – Joseph, Jacob, Abraham – but does not narrate anything about them.

The most that can be said about the ‘Descent into Hell’ *qua* beginning, is that it is the beginning of the reader’s attitude towards the story and the issues. Any reader who makes it through its forty pages will, given the stakes and ‘with heart pounding, in part out of desire but in part also out of fear and the apprehension in his bones’ (Mann, 2005, p. 38) will have had to take it all in a kind of good

humour that will also come to characterize the tone of the rest of the novel. 'At the Well' gives us the main characters of the first book of the novel, Jacob and Joseph, in the conversation of a quiet evening whose serenity is only disturbed by an anxious father's remonstrations to his seventeen year old son. The sense of the scene's tranquility derives in large part from the contrast and the transition from the 'Descent into Hell', which concludes with direct address to the reader: 'If you squeezed your eyes tight during the descent, open them now! We have arrived. Look – a night of sharp edged moonlit shadows above a peaceful hilly landscape! Feel the gentle freshness of the spring night blazoned with summer's stars!' (Mann, 2005, p. 40) If the 'Descent into Hell' has begun anything, it is the reader's orientation to what comes next – a sense of the trouble of beginnings and a readiness to join our heroes at the beginning of their tale, whose beginnings they only sort-of knew and which was really the "yes" that was always the answer of the community...' (Mann, 2005, p. 8) to the mystery of the divine promise, that, however uncertain and described in the fuzzy memory of tradition, provided the origin that established them as a community.

The reader who is too baffled by the 'Descent into Hell' to smile at it, or is too blithe to sense that there are real undercurrents of anxiety, described as the 'apprehension' (Mann, 2005, p. 38) experienced by descending to the abyss of the past, to a land of monsters, and that are overwritten by the irony of playing at a serious historical research will miss the way that it sets up the reader's stake in what follows, and the indications that the reader's attitude is key to understanding the novel. Indeed, it is the continuity and development of tone and the eliciting of a particular attitude on the part of the reader that proves that the 'Descent into Hell' is a necessary start, a real 'page one' to the story. That reader's attitude is a mixture of having been dizzied, excited, confused, but with enough ironic distance from these feelings to have made it through the 'Descent into Hell' without despairing at the apparent impossibility of historical understanding. The transition from the 'Descent into Hell' to the next

section, titled 'At the Well', depends so thoroughly on this experience of the reader that understanding the narrative beginning of 'At the Well' requires the non-beginning of the 'Descent into Hell'.

Stop for a moment to consider the juxtaposition of the titles of these chapters which nonetheless are deeply marked by their continuity, and compel the reader to consider why a descent into 'hell' would find a landing point at a 'well', at a source of water. The double meaning of 'well' here recurs throughout the novel in various figures from the literal dry well into which Joseph's brothers will throw him to the 'Second Pit' of his sojourn in the Egyptian prison. Both involve suffering a harrowing descent that is also the occasion of rebirth and renewal. Joseph is sensitive to his career of being 'cast down and raised up' according to the models well known from myth. What is original in *Joseph* is actually also what is original in Joseph's innovations on this cycle, for Joseph imagines a third movement to the cycle, that of being cast down and raised up *in order to send for*, a minor but constant deviation from its solemnly eternal revolutions that forces it to spiral off on an ever-original path.⁴³

Yes, Joseph and the reader are both made immediately aware that the dual meaning of the 'well' as the end of a harrowing descent and also the source of life indicates the kind of cyclical sense of reality into which Joseph introduces the slightest deviation and inaugurated a whole history of such originality. Yes, the descent and the well suggest something like the water cycle as the model of temporal experience, but it is the slight reimagining of the cycle at every moment that produces the history of originality, which is history itself.⁴⁴ This slight deviation from cyclical is the traditional 'yes' of the family in response to its mysterious source in the promise of a future and must be sustained, repeated at every moment, in order to continue the historical possibility of originality. The past and present are replete with examples of those who falter in their 'yes' and revert to myth, ideology, violence, servitude, resignation. It is only the sustained 'yes', the continual – even if minuscule – faith that originality is possible out of which its possibility remains open, just as a continually minimal angle of deviation from a circumference must be sustained to produce a spiral rather than a circle.⁴⁵ *Joseph* is

set up to force the reader into the same kind of relation to its beginning as its characters stand in relation to the beginning of their own tradition, with the result that their struggle with origins in the mythical context of the ancient world is rendered legible to a modern sensibility. The minimal deviation from myth that is necessary to initiate history has the dual effect in *Joseph* of bringing the characters of the novel near to us in time and of suggesting that what appears to be original in modern historical experience still hews close to ancient tracks. The ancient characters, the narrator suggests, are our ‘contemporaries’ (Mann, 2005, p. 11).

At the Well

Despite all this preparation of the reader’s expectation that the narrative will finally begin, another fifty pages go by without anything happening apart from a varied and meandering conversation between father and son. Joseph’s age – seventeen – is mentioned, which provides at least some chronological foothold in the story, and there are related some events of the day, of fraternal strife, but in such an episodic and reflective manner that we get no sense of their being part of a story, of their forming part of a narrative temporal arc. In the context of the rest of the novel ‘At the Well’ is an extended and standalone episode in which the reader becomes acquainted with the father and son relationship of the principal characters and with the themes of inheritance, of faith, of beauty and of ambivalence that occupy them, and the narrative arc which really emerges only later draws on all of these. This sketch of characters in relation serves as a kind of thematic index to the rest of the novel, but is not much of a story. The reader who expected the story to begin at page one now realizes that the novel will take a while to get started and now feels the weight of 1400 more pages in the right hand as confirmation that Thomas Mann will take his time. So far the novel has begun from a kind of distant overview that renders the problem of originality with a certain objectivity. In doing so Mann effects a displacement of the Genesis story, long interpreted as ‘the’ first story of origins in the traditions which

followed it, by offering the variety of views of beginnings described here. The origin stories of the personal identities of these characters, and the big picture of historical beginnings all tell the same story to *Joseph's* reader: that this story that has for a long time been considered the original, itself also has origins. Mann's various approaches to the beginning raises the question of the origin of origins.

One of the ways in which Mann accomplishes this is by the varying temporal distances from which the narrator treats the story. The 'investigations' of the 'Descent into Hell', pursued as they are on a cosmic scale of time, are really not a story, but do suggest that a closer approach will reveal a narrative. On the more 'zoomed in' temporal view of the rest of the novel, individual lives occupy more of the frame and their acting and suffering, the material for narration, becomes visible.⁴⁶ The 'zoomed out' view of these stories in the 'Descent into Hell' renders these stories in a kind of eternity and stability of chronological form, suggesting that whatever chronology might be apparent on a closer view still resolves on a larger model, visible only from afar. But rather than resolving Joseph's story into the same kind of mythical patterns as his contemporaries, as a relatively unique but still consistent epicycle within the mythical model, the narrator of *Joseph* contends that it is part of God's new story, and that this story is intelligible to us as history.⁴⁷ Whereas the 'Descent into Hell' dealt with humanity in general, 'At the Well' begins to approach and distinguish individual characters, but is not yet close enough to depict them in the kind of chronology that eventually forms the story. It remains part of the narrator's 'setting the stage' for the story to follow, and remains more like dramatic dialogue than the narration of events.

In the Middle of Things

But even after 'At the Well' the narration does not really begin. Events begin to be recounted, but still not in the chronological terms expected of the narration of plot. Instead they form the material for Jacob's pondering, his contemplation of his stories, and the title of the first book of the novel is

'The Stories of Jacob'. Jacob's is remarkably intense pondering: a spectacle for onlookers, his primary mode of facing conflict in life, the claiming of his inheritance, the source and shape of his character. 'Look!' onlookers would note, 'Israel is pondering his stories!...' (Mann, 2005, p. 1255) In 'At the Well', Jacob is introduced to the reader entering a conversation with his young son Joseph, but almost immediately falls to a pondering that lasts for several pages of description, from page 69 to 73, and this pondering seems to serve as a model for the narrator's own associations in relating the events of the pages that follow 'At the Well'. This is a very interesting feature of the novel's beginning that the narrator (for once) does not make explicit. The stories that begin to be narrated in 'The Stories of Jacob' are associated according to the logic of daydreams, where the unaccountable personal associations of memory, hope and feeling provide the linkages between episodes, and not with the chronological logic of causality or plot.

The unity of the various episodes that are related in the early pages of the novel which are not in chronological order and greatly compress the years of Jacob's life so that they range from his birth and youth to his aged years depends on the device of having the narrator 'explaining' things to us, filling in the gaps in our understanding of Jacob, and really setting the stage for the main storyline. The narrator's comments trace the kind of associations that could plausibly have shaped Jacob's own memories of these events, and so even though we are ostensibly being introduced to Jacob by the narrator, the process by which this happens echoes Jacob's own sense of himself. Just as Jacob would become lost in his stories and would live them out again in the mind without a strict sense of their chronology, so the 'present' of the narrative voice shifts and jumps around. This shifting present is a kind of analogue of Jacob's pondering. The success of this approach rests on two main factors: that it allows events to be narrated even without a chronological beginning, and that our main characters are introduced not by authorial fiat, but as they appear to themselves – already in the middle of things. It is fitting that we are introduced to the characters here by the well, at this point in the cycle of their lives,

because the well makes the comparison to cycles like the water cycle explicit and emphasizes the narrator's refusal – stemming from awareness of impossibility – of showing how the characters originate. We meet them, as we meet ourselves, in the middle of things. Importantly, this strategy is not avowed by the narrator, but this reading fits the evidence of the text, and really does help to see how the novel gets off the ground. Each episode is narrated *as if* it is in the flow of an overall narrative chronology, but this set of episodes does not organize itself into a larger narrative arc, at least not yet. At one point before it does, the narrator, in subtle but increasing independence from the model of Jacob's own consciousness, interpolates an entire novella that seems set apart from everything else so far. This is 'The Story of Dinah', which stands under its own chapter heading, and which has its own narrative arc in miniature. This kind of narrative interpolation is explicitly thematized later, both by the narrator and by Joseph. The narrator includes in a discussion of the interpolation of Tamar's story into Joseph's tale, in the fourth book of *Joseph*, the comment that it is also possible to conceive of as the reverse, that if Tamar's story is the history of Israel, then Joseph's is the interpolation into her story (Mann, 2005, p. 55). Joseph describes Mai-Sakhme, his erstwhile jailor turned friend and advisor, as interpolating himself into God's story. This narrative trick of interpolation was beyond the capabilities of Isaac, whose blindness is associated with his inability to accommodate his personal experience within the story of God as he had received it from Abraham, that is, to 'fit the small myth inside a much larger and more powerful one' (Mann, 2005, p. 158). In other words, this narrative technique of interpolation counts as one of the innovations according to which Joseph's family understood the beginnings of their own history, and which the narrator imitates in beginning for *Joseph* without really beginning the story outright.⁴⁸

The novel has already begun by explicitly forestalling beginning, and the earliest narrative material that the reader encounters is arranged according to patterns of association that belong properly to Jacob's pondering, not according to their chronology. The semblance of narrative is so convincing

that the reader may not immediately notice that this kind of tunnelling through Jacob's mind involved the interpolation of memories into one another, summaries and the re-narration of some events from Jacob's life. The narrator's silence concerning this technique, especially given the voluble discussions the narrator makes of so many other issues of technique, further obscures the beginning of the main temporal arc of the novel and elicits in the reader a sense of already having begun without actually being able to indicate a beginning to the story. In my own experience of reading and writing about *Joseph*, for example, I have struggled to find certain passages concerning Esau's story that I need to discuss. Bits of his narrative arc are dissolved throughout *The Stories of Jacob*, and not exactly in chronological order. It seems to be nowhere and everywhere at once. This is true not only of Esau's story but of the entire first section of the book that provides most of the 'events' of Jacob's life, yet in the experience of front-to-back reading, things all happen in what appears to be the right order. Only on re-reading, it becomes clear that this sense of rightness derives from the way the associations that the narrator makes between episodes follow those that Jacob could plausibly have himself made in his pondering.⁴⁹

When narrative interrogates its own origins, it cannot do so otherwise than by narrating them. To interrogate the appearance of narrative appearing out of non-narrative beginnings too closely risks spoiling it. In hindsight, *after* having gone through all the readerly experience of the first section of the novel, it becomes interesting to recognize what has happened, and then to look for the 'actual' beginning of the narrative. But by that point the reader has allowed the experience enjoined by the narrator to convey them through a significant amount of the book so that such a reader will acknowledge, even if some point where the chronological beginning of the narrative is found, that what counts as the 'actual' beginning of narrative hovers between the point studiously located by the reader, and page one of the novel. This depends on the readerly acceptance of a 'good enough' approach to making sense of the novel, such as was the concern of the previous chapter. The reader who is

unwilling to follow the promptings of *Joseph* to such a reading, and from the first page seeks consistency and stability of interpretation will have long since put the book aside out of frustration or boredom before getting into the flow of things.

The Life of the Hero as Narrative Arc

The troubles with beginnings that are described above are associated with another difficulty, which is that even the life of the hero of the story does not provide firm enough boundaries for *Joseph* to begin. Joseph only makes sense, to himself, and as a character to the reader, as the son of Jacob, and so *Joseph* begins with an entire book devoted to his father. But neither does Jacob's own life provide a stable anchor for the beginning of the story. For both Joseph and Jacob, to know the character is to know the family and the tradition in which they participate. To know Joseph we need to know Jacob, and to know Jacob we need to know where he came from. The first step is simple enough as Jacob has enough stories of his own to warrant a retelling, but the second is more difficult because the source material gets pretty sketchy with the next generational leap to Jacob's father Isaac. There isn't much told about Isaac, in Genesis or in *Joseph*, except about his betrothal to Rebekah. Other than that, he figures mostly as a figure in Jacob's own stories, such as when he disguised himself as his older twin Esau in order to steal the blessing from Isaac, now old and gone blind, or else in the story of Abraham's test of faith, or even as a kind of echo of Abram, such as when he seems to repeat the same adventure – claiming his wife as his sister to avoid trouble with local authorities – in the same place – Gerar – with the same king – Abimelek; an adventure which in Abram's case was already a recurrence or a retelling of almost the same events that he had already experienced with the Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore to get to know Jacob it is impossible simply to step one generation earlier in the story, and even if it was, eventually the generations would fade into times prior to memory. Indeed, the narrator makes a point of all this in an extensive reflection that ranges under the heading 'Who Jacob Was' from pages 95-102, in

which the problem of understanding parentage is reframed from a strictly chronological notion of individual succession to one where individuality (and the inheritance of tradition) is described as a more ‘open identity, which stands alongside that of imitation or devolution and, locking arms with it, define’s one’s sense of self.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 98) In navigating this narrative difficulty, Mann guides the reader in precisely the kind of method of reading that is theoretically proposed in the prelude, and of the kind proposed as the method of the present dissertation. To read into beginnings requires accepting that there is no true beginning behind the layers of repetition and recurrence through which historical investigations seek. This is consistent with the mythical conception of time thus far, but when underneath many of the layers of time *Joseph* takes as its beginning – however conditional – these characters who are slightly skeptical about other people’s views of ‘the way things are’ and always expect something new to come out of the future, Mann indicates that this method of reading will, through the novel, produce a conception of time that is irreducible to the repetition and recurrence that it still includes.

Thus to know Jacob is to know him as he understood himself, not as an individual self-contained in time and inheritor of the past, but as a type. Concerning their own identities, ‘many an Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob had witnessed the birth of day out of night since then without ... differentiating with daylight clarity between the present he experienced and a present experienced in the past, nor very clearly demarcating his own “individuality” from the individuality of earlier Abrahams, Isaaks, and Jacobs.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 99)⁵⁰ However, in *Joseph*, the realistic characterization of particular individuals must start at some point, and the narrator starts with Jacob. How was the realism of the character established? To the question of who Jacob was, the narrator answered that Jacob was he who pondered his own stories. From there, from depicting the stories themselves, according to the associations that they would have had for Jacob himself, the reader gets to know

Jacob, sympathize with him, and understand the origins of the motivational structure of his psychology even though we meet him already in his maturity.

Joseph and His Brothers begins by making it clear that concerning human experience and understanding, beginnings are impossible to locate. The theme of origins that occupies its main characters is repeated at the level of the novel itself, so that the same attitude of good faith towards origins despite their lack of clarity is rendered in the novel as having been able to get underway without at any clear point beginning the narrative. The attentive reader will still find that at some point the narrative has been well underway without having noticed a distinct moment when it ‘began’. Finding oneself well already underway, the reader can only smile and carry on: the kind of inquiry into chronological beginnings that I have sketched in the preceding pages is by no means definitive and anyone who pushes it much more scrupulously will actually lose touch with the pleasure of the narrative momentum which, without really beginning, is well underway. In this regard, *Joseph* can be read as the objectification in art of the same kind feeling that accompanied historical experience, which is that one finds oneself underway and can lose touch with the momentum of a vital historical life if too much energy is devoted to uncovering ever-receding origins. The possibility of originality in historical experience requires the kind of approach to one’s own past as is elicited in *Joseph’s* reader. In this, *Joseph and His Brothers* approaches the realistic representation of the historical experience of time.

The Problem of Origins in the Representation of Time

The advantage of narrative over life is that while in life there are no clear beginnings and one always finds oneself ‘in the middle of things’, narrative always begins, and accounts for beginnings. Despite the illusion of having no beginning that *Joseph and His Brothers* achieves, it is not real life; even if the reader struggles to point to a specific beginning, it is easy enough to point out that ‘page one’ is somewhere between the two covers, or that there was a time when it did not exist even in

Thomas Mann's imagination. In life, no such 'prior' to life exists to suggest to us that if we struggle to find a beginning that it must be there. There is no clear beginning to one's life. It is quickly admitted that it began prior to one's own consciousness of it, and from there no suitable junctures can be indicated as the beginning of one's life. One 'begins', without exception, in the deep past of humanity. But we do find ourselves well underway in a temporal life that has shape and can be narrated in terms of beginnings and endings, however arbitrary those are. Thinking in this way, the experience of time is not *rendered* in narrative in order to understand it; instead, that time can be experienced at all in the first place implies, at least in the human domain of memory and expectation, its narrative shape.⁵¹ The narrator sets the goal of telling the story realistically, which is understood as the way that 'life first told it' (Mann, 2005, p. 815). Thus a tension appears between the narrative shape of temporal experience and any of the particular stories which we actually tell ourselves about it, each of which as a product of the imagination *does* have some beginning no matter how obscure. There is no alternative to the narration of life, but it is only with a degree of irony or self-deception that any particular story of life can be considered. *Joseph and His Brothers* takes this tension as a central theme and dwells on the germ of the possibility of historical life lived in good faith in the context of a world structured by myths which are inevitably enforced by violence.

The kinds of stories that Joseph and his family were accustomed to were those set in an eternally distant past, a 'time of origins', time immemorial, and no matter how true these are taken to be, they remain at a remove from the mundane and depend on the activity of the imagination to come into contact with the day to day experience of chronological time. In its independence from mundane experience, this deep past is not beholden to strict chronology or to the open-endedness that characterizes both past and future in chronological terms, and so permits stories whose temporality is self-sufficient. These stories – myths – organize time as patterns of recurrence. The narrator returns throughout *Joseph* to two central images for this organization of time: that everything has its place in

the grand stories of life and that every ‘hour of the feast’ (Mann, 2005, p. 367), including suffering, is thereby honoured and elevated; and that reality is a rolling sphere, whose movements cycle through the ups and downs and repetitions of life, and unify the apparent reversals of fate, of fortune and loss, of the interpenetration of the divine and the mundane, in a single sphere.⁵² Stories that imagine time like this make sense on their own terms and require no more ‘primal’ stories for their explication. Myths do not require origin stories. They certainly include stories of origins, of cosmogonies, but do not lead to an endless regress of origins located in the chronological past.

Joseph’s narrator assures us that ‘chronology ... was certainly not unknown in his own cultural sphere and era.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 8), but that they also had a sense of time ‘of things indefinite and a very great age or, better, from time out of time [of which the] Egyptians said “From the days of Set,” referring, of course, to one of their gods, and the conniving brother of their Mardug or Tammuz, whom they called Osiris, the martyr - ...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 13), with the result that ‘despite all the objectivity of Chaldean measurement, the size of time is uneven’ (Mann, 2005, p. 8). There was in the psychological experience of mythical life a distinction between the two domains of time, and one of the primary concerns of *Joseph* is to explore the imaginative operations by which these incommensurable notions of time, of the chronological and of the mythical, are reconciled. It is in this vein that the narrator continues:

Memories based on oral tradition passed from generation to generation were more direct, unimpeded, intimate; time was more uniform, the eye could pierce through its vista more easily. In short, there is no reason to be annoyed at Joseph for dreamily collapsing time and, at least occasionally, when his mind was less exact, at night perhaps or by moonlight, for considering the man from Ur [Abram] to be his father’s grandfather ... For in all probability, we should add, the man from Ur was not the real and original man of Ur. (Mann, 2005, p. 9)

Thus, myth does not provide people a grasp of their origins because they are ignorant of chronology, but because it allows the imagination to slip the exacting constraints of chronology and so to establish – and traverse – a border between chronology and its origins, giving shape to daily life.⁵³ It does so by the formal features of narrative which allow it to depict a time that is independent of chronology⁵⁴.

It is in the safety of the imagination that questions of origins can be explored, which otherwise threaten to overwhelm if taken too seriously, or too concretely. Origin stories are illusions that allow us to explore the real problem of beginnings which can never be satisfied by delving ever deeper into a past which is too enormous to bear. But how is it that the access of the imagination to a time of origins can make a difference in daily life? That is, how does the illusion of shaped time, given by narrative, organize the living experience of time? The short answer is that they do so by hiding any disjunction between narrated time and the living experience of time, which cannot be anything but narrated, yet does not quite fit any particular narration. Disjunctions can be experienced as the porosity of the world to the divine, can support claims of divine inspiration, can be regularized by ritual practice, or elicit primal emotions that can be safely expressed by various cathartic means. In various and changing ways, some more or less unconscious, narrative has always organized the mysterious unity of a body and mind in time that otherwise lacks stable beginnings.

The historical dilemma, which Mann's narrator makes explicit in the 'Descent into Hell', is that either we accept a narrative shape to the time of our lives, including its imaginary provenance, or we are drawn into an infinite regress of interrogation, and it is the exact same dilemma that the narrator faces in re-telling the Joseph story, and so the warning given to the reader who accompanies the narrator applies to the historical individual in general as well. 'And so in our scrutiny, *either* we shall have to hold to conditional pseudo-beginnings that we confuse with real beginnings in much the same way that Joseph confused the wanderer from Ur, on the one hand, with the man's father, and on the other, with his own great grandfather, *or* we shall be lured backward, ever backward, from one coastal

backdrop to another and into immeasurable depths.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 11) No wonder the narrator urges the reader who follows ‘not just out of desire, but very much with apprehension’ (Mann, 2005, p. 39): ‘So down then, and no wavering!’ (Mann, 2005, p. 40), and names the opening chapter the ‘Descent into Hell’. It is because the problem of getting the novel started is identified exactly with the problem of historical life.⁵⁵ The narrator carries on in this vein even in introducing the characters, saying about Joseph that ‘we feel him close to us, our contemporary in relation to that underworldly gorge of the past, into which he too, now so distant, has already peered.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 11) No magnitude is greater than any other when considered in relation to infinity, and so in relation to the negative infinity of the past, the narrator establishes a universal familiarity with a concern for origins. We share the same concern with origins, and so, with the difference that while we who understand ourselves historically are disposed to deny our own concessions to ignorance, ‘...the distant Joseph, whose stage of development – apart from the little dreamy imprecisions that bring a friendly smile to our lips – already no longer differed in its essentials from our own’ (Mann, 2005, p. 16) was not so concerned with chronological consistency.

The knottiness of the task of a realistic retelling of the Joseph story should be obvious to anyone with a passing familiarity with the story of *Joseph*, which comes down to us early in the book, Genesis, that also gave us the prototypical ‘In the beginning’. The stories of this family are inseparable from their relation to divine origins, and if they are taken to have even a shred of historical veracity, they would have occurred thousands of years ago, which is about as ‘deep’ in the past as it is possible to conceive in continuity with our own time. But the narrator doubles down in the effort to make Joseph familiar by describing even those ‘original’ and ancient sources that we also know as, relative to the *really* deep and mysterious past, as ‘late and tendentious interpolations’ (Mann, 2005, 6) so that

...this original was itself not actually an original, not *the* original if viewed correctly. It was itself already a copy of a document from God knows what ancient times ... [and] in

its own day a scribal hand had doctored it with glosses and addenda intended as an aid for better understanding of yet another text... though probable achieving just the opposite by his “modern” transmogrification of its wisdom. (Mann, 2005, p. 12, italics in the original)⁵⁶

The narrator’s gambit is that by claiming that because even the ‘original’ had origins, a sympathy between Joseph and the modern historical sensibility can be forged. It is an audacious claim, but not without some support in Genesis itself. The story that runs from Abraham through to Joseph in the book of Genesis definitely stands as an ‘origin story’ in the sense that there is no sense in making a strictly chronological inquiry into it. But it is also unlike other origin stories, even those that precede it in Genesis. Abraham is given a degree of interiority and complexity that was perhaps unique in ancient literature.⁵⁷ The narrative moves along with very little divine intervention. The people are ‘characters’ in a way that Adam and Noah, for example, are not. The arc has been appreciated as a kind of ancient ‘novella’ for a long time.⁵⁸ While the story remains an ‘origin story’, it is of a particular kind. Rather than standing as an origin story distinct from the lived experience of time, it seems to inaugurate a new sense of time, where the sense of the present is defined by the expectation of future felicity and memory is not merely recognition of recurrence, but the account of inherited promises.

The importance of God as the origin of this family seems to preclude its historically realistic retelling. It is worth restating that even in the original, God is discussed, but mostly as a concern of the human actors, whose motivations make sense on a purely human level. Where God once spoke and created, here God only promises and doesn’t do much of anything else. God may be in the minds of the people in this story and so motivate them, but *they* take the action. Nonetheless, in *Joseph*, God will have to be made realistic, plausible in terms that satisfy both his characters in their ancient milieu and a modern historical sensibility. This tension between divine and human agency persists both in Genesis and in Mann’s version, but it is made explicit in the novel – one of the overarching themes of the novel

is that we don't know whether God develops along with humanity or not! We do know that some characters consider themselves as having the 'duty to assist God the King in fulfilling the promise' (Mann, 2005, p. 288), or acting towards the 'mutual sanctification' (Mann, 2005, p. 922) of God and humanity, or even outpacing God.⁵⁹ While this tension is present in the original, and in thousands of years of theological debate, it is treated as yet more material for a novelistic retelling that is energized by the potential that God can be both the origin of time and participate in it.

All of this is to say that the novel brings the modern and the ancient together by having us share the basic problem of originality. *Joseph* is built on the affinity we can sense today between this family and the historical experience of time. Indeed, it is in their remarkable, insistent, and possibly unique in the ancient world, future-orientation that Mann detects the germ of originality and describes them as standing at the headwaters of history. The modern reader is therefore forced to recognize the ways that an individual self-possession robust enough to persist through day to day life, or rather to 'get through the night', depends on certain practices and ideas that, under scrutiny, reveal themselves to be concessions to ignorance in ways analogous to the 'myths and rituals' that modernity claims to have left behind. *Joseph and His Brothers* teaches that the modern has not shaken off the mythical.

Joseph and His Brothers imagines the risk of delving too deeply into origins. It discusses the difficulties of doing so explicitly, in 'The Descent into Hell', and concludes that the only possible origins are tentative at best, and life depends on finding a way not to interrogate them too closely. This same notion is worked out in the formal features of the beginning of the novel as well, which establishes *Joseph* as an image of the historical experience of time. To depict time realistically, which means to convincingly 'begin without beginning', threatens to undermine the project from the start. If *Joseph* fails in this, at worst no one would read the novel. But by so closely identifying the risk of historical experience with that of beginning a novel, and by novelistic eliciting of certain feelings in the reader, *Joseph* is the occasion, both in the noun and verb sense of the word, of risk in the flesh and

blood people who actually need some kind of resolution to the problems of history in order to make a life. It might be argued that the stakes remain relatively low because the pact between reader and author only attains when the novel is in the reader's hand. However uncertain its beginnings, a novel can always be put down, or perhaps more commonly these days, one can decline to read it in the first place and go on blithely through life. But it is perhaps more dangerous to avoid the risk: the non-readers will still imagine time to have a shape and will either borrow from someone else's stories, those of therapy, management/human resources, doctrine, the mob, propaganda, Hollywood, the influencer, or will adopt the especially pernicious notion of self-sufficient authorship of one's own life. This path is wide, many walk it, and in greater safety than those who interrogate their own stories at the risk of revealing and straining the ineradicable seams of a narrated life in time. *Joseph* at least offers a guide and, if not a model, an apprenticeship in the kind of reading of origins that can renew the historical sense of temporal experience.

Quoting *Joseph*

Challenges of Quoting *Joseph*

One of the first problems that confronts anyone writing about Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers* is the difficulty of quotation, which is surprising given *Joseph's* overall readability. The plot is familiar, dramatic scenes have tension, descriptions are memorable, detail is fascinating and psychology is believable. There is a wonderful cadence to the patiently unfolding sentences and there is often a smile on the reader's face. Of Mann's novels, this one may be one of the easiest to read, despite its being the longest and at least as chock full of ideas as the rest.⁶⁰

It is a difficult book to quote, partly because of the variety and complexity of its contents, but even more so by the way that a relatively small narrative kernel is developed by a continual process of self-reference and interconnection into a monumental novel of 1500 pages. The same ideas are revisited throughout, modified by their appearance in new contexts and placed in new combinations – and not just ideas, but events as well. To the mythical mind of the characters, events are patterned repetitions and variations of primal events, and this is how they are narrated in this self-avowedly realistic retelling of the ancient story. Ideas and events become at the same time familiar to the reader and difficult to pin down to some specific place or some specific instance of narration in the novel. This is especially true in the narration of Jacob's life in the first book of the novel, 'The Stories of Jacob', where a blend of action, of narrated memories, of narrative interjection, and of recounted stories all contribute to a shifting sense of the 'present' of the narration. One feels compelled to explain any given passage in terms of the various connections, too numerous to count, that it maintains with the rest of the book; in other words, to accompany each quotation with another, and yet another, at the risk of simply copying out the whole book. The web of interconnection within the novel is maintained by a strong narrative voice whose perspective on the story – its origins in Genesis, the subsequent tradition of commentary, as well as the version being narrated – provides both closure and an entry point into the story, without

which the story would exceed the capabilities of the written word. Narrative closure provides boundaries within which the play of interconnection can be expressed. But this narrator knows that the arbitrary nature of any such closure renders all narration artificial, and so constantly undermines it in order to re-tell the story ‘as life first told it’ (Mann, 2005, p. 815). Therefore the narrator takes an active critical role in the novel itself, a strong perspective that interprets the novel, the ongoing status of the project, and the presumed experience of the reader, at the same time as the novel proceeds, with the result that every one of the connections apparent between different aspects of the novel are always already provisional and subject to ongoing interpretation. Therefore while the difficulty of quoting *Joseph* does not make it impossible if one does not rely on quotation to give a total sense of the novel, the ways in which it is difficult calls for a sustained exploration because of the relevance of quotation – getting back to sources – to the problem of originality, because the difficulty of quotation is also raised by the characters – particularly when Jacob re-enacts Abraham's test of faith and later when he grieves for Joseph, and finally because the whole novel is set up by the narrator as a kind of extended quotation of the story ‘as life first told it’ (Mann, 2005, p. 815). The examination of the difficulty of quoting *Joseph*, aids the present dissertation in its method of developing a mode of reading out of the very process of reading *Joseph*.

Joseph's would-be critic thus faces two challenges here. First, that the interconnections discernible to the attentive reader are explicitly not limited in number and do not form a closed system. No matter how many links are described in the novel by a critic, the narrator tells us that there are more, and that in principle they cannot be exhausted as long as the novel purports to say something about real life events. Second, that any interpretation of the meaning of the interconnection of the novel must also include an interpretation of the narrator's voice, which is both already a first interpretation of the novel and part of it. The would-be critic of this novel, resistant as it is to narrative closure, quickly ends up in a hall of hermeneutic mirrors. Therefore, the kind of reading that emerges is always

fundamentally incomplete and descriptive. The present chapter is devoted to showing how the very difficulties of quotation that make totalizing explanation of the novel impossible, nonetheless lead by way of the kind of reading that it does support, to some of its specific and essential insights into originality.

This novel submits and explains itself to the reader at the same time. The practical problem of critical quotation turns out to already have been instrumental in *Joseph's* composition which itself reflects several layers of inner quotation and commentary. If getting the quotation of *Joseph* right requires tracing each quotation to its own links within the novel, then one risks copying out the entire text in reproductions as numerous as there are foci of critical perspectives on it, in a kind of manifold of hyperlinked virtual copies. My own reader certainly expects my quotation to honestly reflect the way each quotation works contextually within the novel, but by devoting this chapter to demonstrating the difficulty of doing so I explicitly thematize the impossibility of doing so completely. *Joseph* is the kind of book that calls for the quotation of the entire thing, which, in the end is not quotation at all, but the performance of a reading – one of as many possible readings as there are readers. And this is all without considering the task of tracing Mann's own practice of quotation to his own sources, which is the task of other scholarly projects different from the one pursued here.

The problem of quotation is raised to yet another degree when the narrator explicitly traces the chain of quotation back through the 'scribal gloss' of written tradition all the way to the stories told by shepherds around the campfire. This fidelity of writing to its oral sources lends the text of *Joseph* a decidedly oral quality itself. There is a circuitous, repetitive quality to the text, full of little asides to the reader (and listener), pauses, qualifications and 'verbal' interjections such as "of course..", "as it were..", and so on. This oral quality rewards an expressive reader who can unfold the various connections, layers of meaning, sense of humour, that this book contains, with just the right pacing, tone of voice, verbal emphasis, etc.⁶¹ But this same oral quality resists being demonstrated in selective

quotation, and challenges the scholar whose task requires such quotation in order to authorize claims and arguments about the book, its author, its various historical, political, cultural contexts, or its place in theoretical or ideological analysis. *Joseph* rewards the reader but shakes off the critic. This is a novel that seems eminently quotable – until one tries.

One of my favourite parts of the book demonstrates the difficulty of effective quotation. The following quotation describes Jacob’s pondering in detail, and is followed by a lengthy discussion of how Jacob’s son Joseph admired this pondering, of the occasion for the pondering and of its contents. This discussion carries on for multiple pages before there arrives another passage, as lengthy as the one quoted below, in which it is related that how Jacob ‘ended his pondering and returned from his profound absence was no less impressive than his descent into it.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 73) In other words, the quotation offered below is already too long and complex to simply quote in support of some straightforward idea about the novel without clearly betraying the sense of the passage as a whole or its place in the context of what immediately follows it in the next pages.

And in fact Jacob was not listening, but “pondering.” It was a mighty and eloquent pondering, the essence of pondering, its very definition, so to speak, an emotional self-absorption of the highest degree – he never did less than that. When Jacob pondered, then it had to be a pondering visible at a good hundred paces, a pondering so grand and strong that not only was it obvious to anyone that Jacob was lost in thought, but also people realized for the first time in their lives what it truly means to ponder and were left awestruck by such a state and sight: the old man leaning with both hands grasping his long staff, his head bent over one arm, an ardently dreamy bitterness playing upon the lips within his silver beard, the brown aged eyes burrowing and probing deep into memory and thought, their self-absorbed and blunted gaze directed from so far below that it appeared caught in his overhanging brows... Emotional people are expressive

people, for emotions, in their need to be taken seriously, find expression by casting off silence and inhibition; expression arises from a tender but great soul, where languor and boldness, sensuality and nobility, naturalness and mannerism, all blend to form the most sublime theatricality, which other people may regard with slightly amused awe. Jacob was very impressive (Mann, 2005, p. 69)

Limiting the present discussion to two main practical difficulties that prevent more limited, incisive, quotation leads to sufficient insight into *Joseph* and the problem of quotation in general without resorting to admittedly vague assertions about how to use quotation to provide a ‘sense of the whole.’ Here, to a demand that the quotation be selected with more precision, one replies with the questions ‘what would you skip?’ and given the recapitulation of many of its aspects in very similar passages throughout the novel, ‘which quote would you choose instead’?

What should be excised from the above? There is a lot contained in this lengthy quote and no clear junctures at which to apply the scalpel of quotation. It seems that any smaller part of the passage would be ‘excessive in its abbreviation, deletion, and shrinkage, and [would] seem to be an eviscerated, salted, and embalmed remnant of the truth, not the truth’s living form...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1209) But consider even this short quotation as a case in point of the risks of isolating a passage from its context. Who says this in the novel? Is it Joseph or Mai-Sakhme discussing the difficulties of writing? Is it the narrator, and if so, in which of the narrative registers that play throughout the novel? Does it occur in one of the more fantastic and therefore more dubious parts of the novel, like the ‘Prelude in the Higher Echelon’, which is narrated by an angel? Can it be trusted and taken at face value or does it require its own interpretation? This short quotation supports my argument directly, but to rely on its support seems to dodge the problem of quotation simply by repeating it. Therefore, in the interest of my own desire to say something true about the novel, I will let the quotation under consideration stand as is, lengthy as it is, because its length illustrates one of the very problems with effective quotation that I describe here,

and I will reflect on it with a level of detail commensurate with its length and its own patient unfolding. The goal of this discussion will be to indicate that any shortening would necessarily betray two of its significant features: its play of ideas and its style.

The quoted paragraph serves as an excellent catalogue of some of the themes and ideas that comprise the content of this novel. First, pondering is described as a state of profound self-absorption. Self-absorption, in various forms provides much of the material for the novel. In Jacob's case, he dwelt in the stories of his personal past and in those that were inherited from his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. The stories formed the basis of his entire life, in times of blessing and in times of suffering. He especially retreated into them at critical moments when action or decision was required, and in these moments his pondering was a relinquishing of decision in order to just 'let things happen'. When, on the pretence of prayer, Jacob absented himself from the city of Shechem, his twin sons Simeon and Levi revenged the rape of their sister Dinah in a brutal sack of the city. Jacob's absence on the pretence of prayer resulted in this tragic and predictable episode. Again, when Rachel was in the labour of childbirth, Jacob himself was 'labouring with his profound thoughts, [and] he seemed to have forgotten the urgency of Rachel's condition.' (Mann, 2005, p. 309) Rachel died by the side of the road while giving birth to her youngest, Benjamin. Later, this self-absorption appears to be the definitive trait that Joseph inherited from his father, although in his case it took the form of a narcissism that saw all of life as somehow organized around himself. In contrast to Jacob, for whom self-absorption was an anxious retreat from life, Joseph, though given to dreaminess, remained in contact with life and found a way to channel narcissism into maturity and personal and historical agency. The self-absorbed experience of interiority is decisive for the personality development of both Jacob and Joseph, as well as for the historical character of their family story. But this last assertion is to anticipate conclusions beyond the warrant of the given quotation. The point is that marking each connection that the quotation has with other aspects of the novel tends to evoke more, and more.

The oral, performative character of Mann's style is evident in this quotation. The word 'ponder' is repeated, in various tenses, seven times in the first three sentences, lending a clarity of theme and a rhythmicity to the multi-claused sentences far more effectively than if Mann had carefully plotted all those adjectives and descriptions of pondering into a single-claused, grammatically coherent sentence that nonetheless would be a chore to hear. Mann chose this holy number for the number of repetitions in an echo of the narrator's repeating the name of Joseph seven times in a previous passage, a repetition that gave the narrator the feeling of a 'sorcerer's power' (Mann, 2005, p. 4) over the boy. In that case, the sense of the power was over the boy Joseph; in this case does the holy-numbered repetition exert an occult influence on the reader? Should this stylistic decision be missed by the silent reader who by some inhibition, or inattention or insensitivity does not relish the paragraph, re-read it, perhaps aloud, alone, or to whomever is nearby, Mann helpfully inserts the comment 'so to speak' to emphasize the oral, vernacular style of the writing. Later, several pairs of oppositions that describe the 'expressive soul' appear, one after the other – a rhetorical strategy that allows the significance not only of each of the pairs to ramify for the audience, but also for the notion of the opposed pair itself, in general, to occur. Mann uses the rhetorical strategy in order to both develop this particular passage, and to announce the unity of opposites as a theme for reflection. Finally, this passage demonstrates Mann's capability for effective, concrete, and moving description. In the physical rendering of old Jacob, the narrator simply describes, without any intervening glances at the reader. This is a notable change in the narrative register which should be noted in the context of the book as a whole. While it is possible to isolate aspects of narrative voice and style, the book is marked by multiple stylistic registers that play out simultaneously or in close succession: humorous, sober naturalistic description, dramatic, didactic, and so on. To pare this quotation down any further would be a failure to render Mann's style accurately, and while to render his style is only one reason to quote, it is a necessary one in the context of this dissertation on the novel because that style directly shapes the reading produced.

Where should quotation begin and end? The lengthy paragraph quoted is about as short a piece of text that I can imagine would effectively convey a sense of Mann's style and the ideas developed in *Joseph*, so to insist on a brief selection from this paragraph will involve some kind of editorial decision about what the point 'really is'. It is not only the variety of ideas present that makes the selection of quotations difficult, but precisely that this variety is echoed throughout the novel in various recombinations, and any understanding of the novel depends on grasping this patient, playful development of combinations.

The second practical challenge in quotation, besides the difficulty of keeping selected quotations short enough to be useful, is that there occur throughout the novel numerous instances of very similar passages that echo in other contexts, at other times in a character's life, in other narrative registers, and so on. There are quotations that use not only similar phrases but entire paragraph structures, including multiple very close echoes of the first quotation considered in which Jacob's pondering is described and which occurred early in the novel, when Joseph was just a boy of 17. Almost a thousand pages later, when Jacob, an old man now, believes that Joseph is dead, there appears a very similar passage, and later again another that describes Jacob as 'beautiful and dignified to behold' (Mann, 2005, p. 1415) as he sat swaying, thinking, atop a camel on his way to be reunited with Joseph in Egypt. The musical idea of recapitulation gives some sense of how ideas are developed in their successive appearances. Consider the following:

Jacob's personal majesty had only increased since Joseph's death – or, better, as a result of that heartrending and at first seemingly quite unacceptable event. But once he had grown more accustomed to it, once his bickering with God had exhausted itself, the cruel dispensation of that same God had found its way into a heart seized tight against it and came to be an enrichment to his life, one more weighty story for it to carry, making his pondering, whenever he fell to pondering, an all the more impressive, more picturesquely

perfect kind of pondering than it had ever been, leaving people with a sense of sacred apprehension, so that they would whisper to one another: “Behold, Israel is pondering his stories!” Expression leaves an impression – no doubt about it. The two have always belonged together, and the former always tends to keep one eye cocked to the latter, though that is nothing to laugh about when one discovers that the expression is not hollow humbug, but the real weight of stories, a life truly lived. Then, at most, a respectful smile is in order. (Mann, 2005, p. 1255)

Note the same elements that are present in this quotation as well in as the previous – the effect of the ‘performance’ on others, the link between emotions and expression, the unity of apparent oppositions, the conclusion of the paragraph naming the appropriate response as a smile. In terms of style, there is a same kind of mixture of registers from the narrative beginning to the proclamatory whispers of the onlookers, the well turned phrase ‘expression leaves an impression...’ to the modern, informal ‘humbug’.⁶² There are again features that lend an oral sense to the passage. The rolling repetition reappears: ‘pondering, whenever he fell to pondering..’ I picture Mann at a public performance, glancing at this point over his glasses with a hint of a smile, looking for the appreciative faces in the audience of those who well know Jacob’s proclivity for pondering. The hyphenated clause ‘no doubt’ serves as an aside to the audience, and makes the text feel spoken even to the silent reader.

The orality of style, however it might have served his public performances, also produces a certain effect for the reader. A listening audience would only hear one of these passages in a given performance, and be unable to compare them. It is attention to what has changed that most illuminates these quotations – and this advantage of the reader over the listener, that is, of being able to flip back to the first instance and compare the two paragraphs, reminds us that despite its oral style, this it is a novel. This novel rewards going back and forth, careful reflection, skimming, and other readerly

practices. This effect of inner comparison, of flipping back and forth, is, as these twin quotations show, even simulated – and therefore encouraged – for the reader unaccustomed to reading ‘with a pencil’.⁶³

The echoes between these two quoted passages lend a sense of particularity to each of the individual quotations. The presence of opposing elements is treated in each, but with some difference. The explicit listing of opposed pairs in the first quotation is transposed in the second to a description of Jacob’s trajectory of development that proceeds by means of resolving oppositions, in struggle. In the first quotation, the relation between the elements of each pair is not really developed except by their juxtaposed presence in Jacob’s expression. This is early in the novel and Jacob has just been introduced to the reader who has not yet been made privy to any of his formative experiences. In the second quotation, much later in the novel, opposition is described in developmental terms, in reference to Jacob’s personal history, which by now has become familiar to the reader. The opposition between unacceptable personal loss and the enrichment of life is by now well known to the reader familiar with Jacob’s life. The reader of the intervening 1000 pages between these quotations will note that in the second, unlike in the first quotation, the actual process of unifying these oppositions is described – as conflict, as exhaustion, as the development of majesty out of bickering – and will see how this reflects the development of Jacob’s personality through the various experiences described thus far.⁶⁴

Jacob’s tendency to struggle also appears in another significant difference between the two quotations in the details of how other people responded when they witnessed Jacob’s pondering. Whereas in the first quotation, Jacob’s pondering takes centre stage and the others are only mentioned, here the pondering itself is hardly described and the response of the onlookers is elaborated, even to the point of quoting them: ‘Behold, Israel is pondering his stories...’ By the name ‘Israel’ they refer to the name that Jacob earned for himself in a struggle with God, with whom Jacob wrestled through a night and who, at dawn, both bestowed the name and the promise of Israel, and touched his hip, marking him henceforth with a limp.

Finally, that ‘exhaustion’ is placed in the narrator’s voice, and the name ‘Israel’ in the voices of the onlookers is a significant stylistic development. In the first quotation, the reader is introduced to the variety of voices included in a single passage and considered them in terms of the orality of style that they produce. Here in the second quotation, not only are there multiple voices present, but the articulation of a key idea – that to struggle and to be named ‘Israel’ are, for Jacob and his descendants, identical – is distributed among them. I stop short here of drawing too firm of a conclusion from this feature of the passage, but there is a sense that Jacob’s personal experiences and those of his family are characterized by the unification of opposing tendencies, and more, that this process produces a distinctly historical, linear, progressive, sense of time. It is thus fitting that the idea of earning a name through struggle is not only Jacob’s, but belongs as well to the witnesses of his pondering, and also to the narrator, whose own place in the historical tradition inaugurated by Jacob’s family is often raised as a theme of the novel.

Given the challenges of quotation examined so far, how can it be possible to understand the difference between a quotation ‘getting it right’ or ‘getting it wrong’. Some instance of getting it wrong are clear – misquoting. Other instances are more difficult to parse. It is possible to get the words right but the meaning or spirit wrong. How can these cases be understood? Only by further quotation, but this simply raises the question to the second degree. This chapter, to this point, has been devoted to demonstrating some of the specific difficulties that are faced by trying to quote *Joseph*, and that as these difficulties result from the salient features of the novel described so far, that exploring this difficulty can serve as an entry point for the interpretation of the novel itself.

The process of quotation begun here guards itself from misquoting and becoming totally confused about *Joseph* precisely by this sustained attention to the problem of quotation itself. There is an echo here of how *Joseph* ‘begins without beginning’, as described in the previous chapter, and an anticipation of later arguments that the challenges of ‘authorship’ justify a focus on reading out of

which, by the by, writing emerges along the way. Fortunately, Mann's novel is devoted to, among other things, this exact concern with quotation and so offers, to the reader, an education in what it means to tell and to retell, to appeal to sources, to go back to the originals, in Joseph's family history, and these also describe Mann's project in writing the novel. My own quotation – and quotation in general – is another concrete instance of this project, which is to develop and participate in a tradition.

Quotation and Originality

Quotation exemplifies the difficulty of originality, which is simultaneously the impulse to say something new with the proviso that to remain understandable requires making right use of existing words and forms of expression. The difficulty of originality is that it strains towards both the new and the true.

The 'New'

Novelty risks incomprehensibility. The mutual recognition of language users of a context of meaning in which any utterance can be meaningful depends on pre-existing ideas and words. To lack a link to existing language is to babble and run the mouth, distinct from the activity of the mind. Jacob already knew this when he cautioned his son against what he described as the 'Asaulakaula' of local pagans, which he viewed as spasms of the body, devoid of meaning, and impossible to develop in the understanding. Of course this activity appears to be babbling to Jacob, who doesn't understand it. Even if it is something like a ritual, chanting vocalization, and would not pass Jacob's muster as language that can support thought, it could still be a somewhat ecstatic coordination of bodies, amenable to ritualization and therefore part of some meaningful organization of life. Jacob prized sober thought above all else, but this commitment has its own blind spots, particularly concerning the contributions of the body to making sense of life. We will see later, in the chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire',

how Joseph deals with this. But Jacob's suspicion is correct – that absolute novelty, sheer babbling, cannot be elevated into meaning and understanding, and that without these there is no originality. Jacob may have missed ritual patterning and repetition that may have been present in the 'Asaulakaula' and which could be described as a form of quotation, but makes the important point that pure babbling can never give rise to meaning out of itself.⁶⁵ Human meaning, available to thought and language, only emerges from babbling when the infant begins to imitate what is not new – the patterned vocalizations of parents. Originality, which is saying something new that also makes enough sense to be distinguished from noise, depends on making use of and repeating in some way what has already been said; in other words on quotation. The problem of originality in quotation is how it can be possible to deviate from what was previously said enough that something 'new' is uttered, but little enough that it remains intelligible in terms of what has already been said.⁶⁶

The new begins with the old, but, once surmounted, the original gains independence from the quoted. Originality treats its sources as catalysts for the expression of something new, of something never before expressed but drawn out of life as a precipitate out of solution.⁶⁷ The catalyst does not *only* instigate the present but retains its own significance in its potential to catalyze any number of new expressions. In more theoretical terms, the important question is of how language – discursive language – takes up sources of non-discursive knowledge, and this is taken up in the chapters 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire' and 'Dreaming, Reading, Writing'. In the context of this question, originality can be described as the potential for discursive language to take up these sources, and education as the process by which it occurs.⁶⁸ Thus existing texts and traditions of quotation are not forgotten but continue to influence what follows. In other words, the newly expressed, if it is at all comprehensible, *was already there* but yet to be drawn out of life – out of society, language, the unconscious – in expression.

Originality is not novelty conjured out of thin air; as far as novelty – the latest in time and the seemingly new – can reshape the experience of life, it always expresses something that existed in life first of all. The question of where it all came from has a two-fold answer. It came from forgotten or suppressed ideas – from discarded catalysts that have dissolved back into solution and become unconscious in society, surviving perhaps only in small pockets of society, or as arcane, guarded knowledge, awaiting changes in broader society which allow them renewed expression and in the meantime circulating in far more circumscribed channels. And it came from material life in the world – from the knowledge of working hands, desiring bodies, and minds attentive to nature. Both of these sources are present in *Joseph*. The former is active when characters still draw on mythic repertoires even when experiencing something apparently new and the latter when new understandings of life only follow from paths already embarked upon in the body, and both are treated in the chapter ‘The Direction/Disruption of Desire’.

If originality consists of the expression of what already exists unconsciously in language, unexpressed in society or the body, in the unrecognized potential of new combinations, then overstating *sui generis* novelty as the criterion of originality leads to terrible confusions.⁶⁹ When the new seems to appear out of thin air, it is easy to miss the reality that informs it, and what *is* real can become subjected to the newly expressed even though it is only the precipitate of some *idea*, essentially partial and derivative, about the real. To mistake novelty for originality is to mistake the partial idea for the totality of the real.⁷⁰ Such expressions are shallow, enervated, insignificant, decadent, blithely tossed by winds of critical fashion, or else functions as the guise – even if unwitting – of ideology. The originality of Joseph’s family does not consist in a sudden rupture from their own pasts but from their stubborn refusal to do so. Perhaps counterintuitively, myth depends on a kind of rupture from the past, a willingness to accept a story about it and attribute novelty to error, deviation, or epicycle and if not understood, then understandable in principle. The historical conception of time inherits the

stubbornness of Joseph's family in sustaining the attitude that the past holds the origins of the present; originality in historical experience is as much about consistency and fidelity to sources in the past as it is about novelty.

The 'True'

An admirable humility motivates the commitment to truth in quotation, but when devotion to the truth of a text overrides any impulse towards saying something new, it is difficult for originality to break out. Further, if in the name of accuracy, quotation is required to stabilize a source that is as difficult to pin down as the examples provided above, then to fix it as an object of limited complexity is to mislead.

Origins only function as such from the vantage of posterity, and it is the distinct mark of Joseph's family that even in their retellings and quotations of their own origin stories, they insist both on the openness of those origins to their own pasts, and to the originality of any faithful recapitulation of those stories. By analogy, quotation of *Joseph* in the present dissertation depends on the same understanding that my quotation does not fix the meaning of the novel, or attempt to totally represent it, and follows the narrator's lead in suggesting that this method is an echo of how quotation in *Joseph* of the earlier versions of the stories functions in the same way, and so on to the way that Joseph and his family themselves quoted their own traditions. In the case of *Joseph*, a novel with the notion of originality in its marrow, the humble and disciplined scholar who wants to 'get it right' and is hesitant to match, in the interpretation, the daring of the source, eventually loses touch with it. Any text worth studying draws out of the reader – at least in the first encounter – the impulse to respond, to say something new. Only one whose hardheaded hesitance to say anything that might be incorrect suppresses this impulse. The possibility that originality can emerge from truth-seeking labour depends on refusing to suppress the impulse to novelty that attends the moment when a commitment to 'getting

it right' brings the scholar into contact with the original vitality of the text. Originality is possible when, in the name of truth, one risks being wrong.

An example from *Joseph* demonstrates these dynamics of quotation. In the first telling of this story, as, to use a favourite phrase of the narrator, 'life first told it' (Mann, 2005, p. 815), Joseph's family never took divine revelation as a completed event in the past which provided a beginning to their family story, but as a continued process of interpretation which they understood as participation in a divine dialogue. Revelation and interpretation progressed as aspects of the same process. To demonstrate, consider the scene of Jacob and Joseph, early in the novel, where Jacob imagines himself in the place of Abraham whose faith was tested by God's demand on his only son Isaac as sacrifice. Jacob is full of anxiety and self-doubt and he explains his 'face ... lined with dreadul pain [by telling Joseph that] "I thought of God, and it was terrible."' (Mann, 2005, p. 79) Jacob, clever, but too serious, tries to understand God through a mythical identification with Abraham, and fails. 'It was as if my hand were the hand of Abraham upon the head of Yitzchak's head', but then the knife falters, and Jacob cried out that 'I am not Abraham, and my soul falters before You!' (Mann, 2005, p. 80)⁷¹ The failure of mythical identification derives from Jacob trying to put himself exactly in Abraham's place and so misconstruing the example set by Abraham, whose restlessness and expectation of future promise is in principle impossible for his descendants to repeat exactly. It was hard enough for Abraham in that original test of faith to sacrifice the son that both signified and embodied the possibility of a future, but for Jacob, who is the next of those sons, to actually be Abraham again and to raise the knife would be to refute Abraham's hard tested faith. In other words, Abraham's example can only be repeated, or quoted, by also being reinterpreted. Joseph's lively mind reimagines Abraham's example as an inheritance, and not as a mythical pattern to repeat. He soothes his father, saying that 'Yet in the next moment, the voice would have sounded ... "Do not lay your hand upon the boy" and you would have seen the ram in the thicket'.' (Mann, 2005, p. 80) Jacob resists this solutions, saying that 'I did not

know that, for it was as if I were Abraham, and the story had not yet happened.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 80) to which Joseph replies ‘But did you not say that you cried out “I am not Abraham!”’, then you were Jacob, my dear papa, and the story was an old one, and you know how it came out.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 80) But Jacob, again: ‘God tested Abraham, and I tested myself with the test of Abraham, and my soul faltered within me, for my love was stronger than my faith, and I could not do it.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 80) Joseph’s next answer is astonishing. He says this:

Most certainly I have spoken nonsense, ... but it does seem to this stupid child that if you were testing yourself, you were neither Abraham nor Jacob, but – how fearful to say it – you were the Lord, who was testing Jacob with the test of Abraham, and you had the wisdom of the Lord and knew ... that He had no intention of letting Abraham endure to the end. ... My dear papa was diverting himself by testing whether he might be able to do what the Lord forbade to Abraham, and is now fretting because he has discovered that he could never, ever do it. (Mann, 2005, p. 81)

In drawing the mystery of Abraham’s experience into their present concerns, Joseph changes the very appearance of God. He draws on stories of the past, as in myth, but sees the face of God as the face of a Father, which changed and moved and developed, not visible in carved idols or in eternal patterns. ‘Joseph imagined [the Most High] to be exactly like Jacob, experienced Him, so to speak, as his Father repeated in a higher form...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 37) Joseph understood Abraham’s example as the discovery of a God who develops alongside this family who, in faith, seek him out. For Jacob to quote Abraham required reimagining the work of quotation as the continued work of an original response to God, to the source of life, at every moment.

Mann’s *Joseph*, traced backwards through time and traditions of interpretation, is built on the idea that the story has never had a fixed source that could serve as a hermeneutic anchor for subsequent retellings or interpretations. Mann’s *Joseph*, in obedience to the original story, makes a participant of

the interpreter of the story with the surprising result that it is told as it had never been before; totally consistent with Genesis version and totally also Mann's own. Just as it is Joseph's innovation in interpretation that propels the original story forward, so it is Mann's narrator's implication in the retelling of the story that motivates the novel, and so again it is the scholar's own commitment to the truth of the story that must prevent the novel from being treated as finalized and fixed in meaning and its interpretation being restricted to commentary or annotation. Instead, understanding the story requires the risk of reading, the risk of saying something new, and possibly even being proved wrong. Only out of this risk is originality possible. The practical problems of accurately quoting *Joseph* illustrates the tension that results when to get the novel *right* demands the risk of novelty, which is also the risk of getting it *wrong*.

The 'Readerly'; or 'To Risk a Reading'

Any interpretation that depends on faithful quotation, like the one pursued here of *Joseph and His Brothers*, must involve the performance of a reading into its interpretive work. That reading is an interpretive mode, and never a pure channeling of information, is not a new idea. Now that salons and cafés have been reduced to hair and coffee, book clubs to wine and sociability, stories to sermons, school to scores, and that the place of narrative in the home has been ceded to screens, the role of the performance of reading in making sense of things has been greatly diminished. Now that adults no longer read to each other, the last holdout of reading-as-interpretation may be the bedtime story, which has a vitality that goes far beyond the simple communication of what the child will soon be able to decipher for themselves on the page. The bedtime story is a scene of originality, new life and new interpretations of life that are inseparable from the performance of a reading. The child's sense of life is formed by the voice, by the physical resonance of the voice as parent and child snuggle, even leaning their heads together so that voice is conducted by bone, in performance of a text printed on a page.

To suggest that reading is an interpretive mode suggests a shift from an ‘authorial’ to a ‘readerly’ metaphor for making sense of the work of scholarship. This shift is explored more fully in the chapter ‘Dreaming, Reading, Writing’ and this dissertation closes with a discussion of the implications of this shift for how we think about education. A ‘readerly’ interpretation still requires being expressed in writing, and whereas according to the authorial notion of scholarly writing the risk of saying something new is that the work will be wrong, the risk of a readerly notion of writing is the quieter risk of being unable to articulate a response. The scholar who proceeds in a ‘readerly’ mode risks not knowing when or how to turn from reading – which is never complete – to a written response that expresses the meaning of the reading at the same time that its unfinalizability is maintained.

Repetition and Difference: Originality from Orality

If originality is possible in this kind of ‘readerly’ mode that still includes an inevitable turn away from exact correspondence with a source, then more needs to be said about how the truth of originality, or its answerability to its sources, does not preclude difference from those same sources. The possibility of originality would depend on the quality of that difference.

Imagine, as Thomas Mann did, a society where stories only exist in their oral retelling, not writing, and where experience is probed for meaning according to its typicality, not its novelty. Stories that exist prior to contemporary experience are prototypical. They allow events to be recognized and organized, and even though they tell of precedent events, those events do not have any real priority over current events. If the stories that describe these events express some larger truth about life, they still only exist in the varied particular, and cannot be traced to some ‘first’ version from which the rest develop. If they are taken to describe a real inaugural event in the past, that past is beyond the realm of memory, in time immemorial, time before time. The primal events told in stories of the Flood, or the Tower, or the killing of the father by the sons cannot be traced in chronological time, and are

recognized to the same degree in every particular recurrence. Joseph's contemporaries in the ancient Near East were accustomed to 'seeing in every instance of rising waters 'a repetition the Great Flood' (Mann, 2005, p. 21). Imagining such a world is difficult for we who are accustomed to locating the sources of the present in the chronological past, who examine documentary evidence from the past, and who look for a comprehensible shape to the chronological time, call it 'history', and make sense of our lives according to it. As the power of the historical imagination has increased, the disposition of human inquiry towards immanent, rational, methods and aims has also increased, and the link between historical life and a time outside of time has become increasingly tenuous, so that it is difficult even to imagine a world where chronological memory and mythical meaning coexist. We tend to despise the ancient imagination as being undeveloped and ignorant. But Mann's narrator is quick to remind us that 'chronology ... was certainly not unknown in [Joseph's] cultural sphere and era...' (Mann, 2005, p. 8) and so establishes a central project of the novel – to suggest that we moderns do not comfortably inhabit historical time alone, but continue to rely on myth to give shape to chronology. No matter how much we try to make sense of things from the past, we never get to the bottom of things, and inevitably turn away from the past and posit – arbitrarily, on some scheme of temporality outside of chronology – some shape to life in order to get the historical project up and running. The difference between us and the ancients is that we obscure for ourselves this moment of turning away and convince ourselves that historical time is self-sufficient. For historical time to remain so connected to mythical conception of time means also that the mode of quotation that we are most familiar with in writing, and is at issue here in this dissertation and in *Joseph*, also remains connected to that earlier form of mythical quotation, which is the oral retelling of stories.

Joseph is set in such a world where myth and memory coexist, and our historical world in which they are sundered emerges from it. Mann's problem is of how to represent the inauguration of history out of such a world. The historical depiction of mythical time requires Mann to faithfully quote

sources and traditions that are not altogether consistent with the way that historical inquiry operates, but in such a way that his thoroughly historical readers will comprehend. Anyone else who wishes to write about *Joseph* confronts the same problem, and some understanding of how originality in writing can possibly emerge from the orality of living traditions is required.

Thus *Joseph* begins – in the prelude *Descent into Hell* – even before its own beginning, by inquiring into the origins of history with the admission that ‘Deep is the well of the past. Indeed, at least as far as humanity is concerned, it is bottomless.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 3) But far from being resigned to making do with an imperfect understanding of the origins of the story to be told, the *Descent* is devoted to describing some of the indistinct moments that are indicated in both deep memory and in writing, the Great Flood, like the story of the Tower, and describing the quality of the inevitable turn away from chronological sources to the expression of response, whether in writing or living. The narrator puts it boldly:

either we shall have to hold to conditional pseudo-beginnings that we confuse with real beginnings in much the same way that Joseph confused the wanderer from Ur on the one had with the man’s father and on the other with his own great-grandfather, or we shall be lured backward, ever backward, from one coastal backdrop to another and into immeasurable depths. (Mann, 2005, p. 11)

The narrator implies that we never make total sense of our own lives, and suggests that the best we can hope for is that as we turn from total self-knowledge, and ‘make little mistakes’, as Joseph did, that we can also ‘make them in good faith’ (Mann, 2005, p. 10). The rest of the novel works out what that turning consists of, and of how it is possible to maintain a fidelity to sources even while turning away from them, especially as such a turning develops into a written, historical tradition. Mann’s *Joseph* considers the Joseph story in the context of a historical tradition that has lost its own sense of belonging to the traditions of faithful and productive ‘turning away’ that emerge from the original Joseph story,

and is in thrall to its own sense of self-sufficiency. Thus the proximal practical difficulty of quoting *Joseph* in the present work is an echo of the countless voices – Mann’s included, and all the way back to a shepherd family around the campfire – that have told and retold this story, trying to get it right and in doing so renewing it.

No quotation is actually identical with its source. Nothing remains identical in repetition. This is evident in the case of oral quotation, which must be its most original form, but also in the case of written quotation. As for oral quotation, the difference in timbre between quoting and quoted voices sets a limit to how closely any utterance can be quoted, and this difference is not merely a remainder or an imperfection but the particular embodiment of words in a new voice, apart from which they have no existence. The reality of words is in their voicing, in the changing of voice. In the nuances of particular, repeated, and differing expression, the significance of words ramifies, yet in a way that is irreducible to any of the instances in which they have reality. No words have significance apart from their instantiations, no two of which are identical, and yet their significance derives from their *having been repeated*. Quotation is that kind of repetition that elevates words to the Word, shimmering with higher meaning that far exceeds the plain, particular human moment in which it is voiced but without which it dissipates and is forgotten. In quotation humanity contemplates itself as a question in every area of life: work, rest, desire.⁷² Originality comes into the world in the elevation of the particular human voice, sensitive to the repetition of words, whose particular timbre lends the Word the texture of reality.⁷³ Such originality depends on a way of life that understands each moment and each particularity as the instantiation of something universal.

The Idea of Meaning and Exactitude: Writing and Reference

Whereas the meaning of voiced words is inseparable from their embodied expression, writing promises to amplify our powers of quotation by giving words independence from the voice so that

quotations can always be checked against sources; so that we can refer to what was *really* said. The durability of the written word, in contrast with the evanescent spoken word, suggests that its meaning is likewise static. The suggestion that oral language is prior to written language refutes this conclusion, and allows meaning to be something continually at stake in interpretation. Part of the work of this dissertation is to show how Mann develops a written style that leads the reader to think of meaning and interpretation in these originally oral terms. Much of the difficulty of quotation described so far derives from the notion of the fixed meaning of a text, and the thematization of the those difficulties in this chapter is an argument by example that the kind of writing that Mann offers in *Joseph* supports a kind of interpretation that supports the originally oral model of originality described here.

Quotations will *always* differ from their sources, and this difference is not error, but a re-expression, a renewal of that first text into the future, into a milieu of texts-in-dialogue. Where timbre of voice gave new life to words in oral quotation, written style does for textual. Where orality lends words ritual shape according to which they have sense – liturgy, campfire songs, formalized greetings and blessings, etc. – so genre gives a context of interpretation to text, so that the sense of the same words might differ in a novel or a courtroom transcript. *Joseph* issues the challenge to consider the problem of originality in quotation because of its realistic depiction of orality, embodiment, particularity, in textual form.

Jacob Mourns for Joseph

When Jacob receives news of Joseph's death, we are told that in his grief, '...Abraham's grandson was too original a spirit ... for him to have found satisfaction in uniformity. He spoke and grieved freely, without prescribed formulas, ...' (Mann, 2005, p. 517). This is one of the episodes in *Joseph and His Brothers* itself that suggests the notion of originality and vouchsafes the present reading of the novel in terms of originality as legitimate. Devoting the present chapter to a more detailed understanding of how originality appears in this part of the novel will extend the present investigation into the concept of originality and into the activity of reading itself insofar as Jacob in his grief had to read, extend, and innovate on existing and formulaic modes of expression. In other words, an investigation of originality in this chapter proceeds both by an interpretation of *Joseph* and a consideration of the narrator's method. What does originality mean in Jacob's grief? Does he say new things? How does he make sense of and interact with the conventions of grief that others would have used to climb out of the desolation of loss? To have a clear example of originality here would certainly help the present project, however, it soon becomes clear that Jacob is not entirely free in his grief, nor is the bloodied cloak the incontrovertible token of Joseph's death that Jacob takes it to be. It turns out that the power of Jacob's personality is also the seat of his the deep illusions about himself, that his notion that the token is incontrovertible is in fact a self-deception that protects him from considering his own culpability in the fraternal strife. His originality, whatever it turns out to be, rests on these illusions at the centre of his understanding of life. Readers of *Joseph* know this even as the episode unfolds because we know that Joseph still lives, and yet Jacob is supported in his idea about the token by the narrator who, alongside the narration of the story, offers a theory of language that directly supports Jacob's conclusions. The reader must not only make sense of Jacob's experience, but of how it is presented by the narrator. Examining how originality and illusion work in Jacob's case, as conveyed by the narrator, develops the concept of originality. As in previous chapters, originality does not mean

total novelty, or unambiguous innovation, but always includes elements that seem to oppose it. Here, the possibility of originality rests on a particular understanding of the relation of language to reality and how the inevitable illusions that people live by can be channeled into what *Joseph's* narrator describes as Jacob's originality.

Tokens and Words

After much deliberation, the brothers, having sold Joseph to traders on their way to Egypt, agreed among themselves to dip his cloak in the blood of an animal – that richly embroidered ‘coat of many colours’ that had been his mother Rachel's bridal veil and since her death had been kept as a memento by Jacob, until Jacob had given it to Joseph as a gift, as a token of his favour – this cloak then, already a potent symbol in the eyes of the brothers and a source of jealousy, was to be torn and bloodied and sent as a token from which Jacob would conclude – without their having to muster the courage to lie to his face – that his favourite had been killed by some wild animal. The brothers had convinced themselves that a ‘token is milder than words’ (Mann, 2005, p. 509) and that in sending the cloak they would be sparing Jacob the pain of being told some story about why his Joseph is gone.

‘Are tokens milder than words? That's highly debatable.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 513) So begins the chapter entitled ‘Jacob mourns for Joseph’, in which the narrator sets up the moment when Jacob receives the cloak with a reflection on the varied operation of tokens and words, and their respective relations to the truth of reality. The narrator has Jacob in mind when it is given, contrary to the reasoning of the brothers, that words are actually easier for the receiver of bad news because they can be taken however he wishes. The receiver can ‘toss words to the wind, trample them underfoot as lies and ghastly drivels.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 513) If, like Jacob, one wishes to contest the truth as given in words, it is always possible to struggle, argue, and delay. Words allow a ‘temporary escape hatch’ (Mann, 2005, p. 513) so that one is not compelled – right away at least – to accept reality. Sometimes it

helps to take one's time in coming to terms with the difficulties of life. Words allow one to 'prolong your ignorance' (Mann, 2005, p. 513) – perhaps for a lifetime, but always at the risk of exposure and the myriad hidden costs of self-deception – by the tactical expansion or contraction of time, which is the narrator's privilege, into a palatable shape in the mind, which is the aim of one who receives bad news. Words establish stretchy connections between the passage of time and the mind of a kind that 'allow for this kind of temporizing struggle against the truth, but nothing of the sort is possible if a token is employed.' (Mann, 2005, p. 513) A token is concrete, immediate, and therefore establishes direct contact between the mind and the time that passes in the events of the world, in the succession of causes in the material world, and in our bodies. A token is a cog in the temporal machine; a mechanical linkage between the mind and the necessities of reality. Where language is circuitous, and works slowly, a token works right away. Reality is what it is, and the token does not say something *about* reality, does not work slowly enough to shape reality, but is part of it. The token is 'mute ... because it is the thing itself.' (Mann, 2005, p. 513)⁷⁴ But either way, whether by the immediate suffering of facts given by the appearance of a token or by the narration of time into a more acceptable shape, reality works on everyone whether or not they realize or accept it. This theorizing about language is in the narrator's reflections on page 512, and immediately precedes the presentation of the cloak to Jacob.

When Jacob is presented with the token, he falls back in a faint. Jacob cannot live in a world where the news of Joseph's death is true. All the affection and partiality that Jacob extended to Rachel, his 'true wife', before her death, has been transferred to Joseph, her firstborn. Without Joseph to anchor the meaning of Jacob's life, Jacob loses the last resource he might have had to make sense of his grief, and so Joseph's death is the only thing in the world that is wholly 'unacceptable'. Jacob literally seizes up when this 'fact of reality' confronts him in a token that affords none of the delay tactics of words. This wasn't an ordinary faint, but a 'kind of rigidity that had seized every muscle and fiber, turning his entire body to stone.' (Mann, 2005, p. 513) Jacob's faint was his mute response to the news sprung with

the mute immediacy of the token, and it wasn't really a response at all. It was more like the absolute refusal to respond, for to have moved at all would have been to admit the possibility of continued life in a world absent of Joseph. Jacob's reaction to the impossible 'demands fate can make' (Mann, 2005, p. 513) was this non-response, this 'act of desperately defiant obstinacy against the unacceptable.' (Mann, 2005, p. 513) But time still passes, the heart still beats and people come to administer help. The easing of Jacob's limbs after several hours is his first admission that life goes on; it is his 'capitulating, as it were, to the implacable pain of truth that lies in wait and must at some point be granted admission.' (Mann, 2005, p. 513).⁷⁵ Jacob begins, as he must, to accept the truth.

Or does he? We know that Joseph lives! We readers know that Jacob makes a mistake, and that the token was misinterpreted, as it was intended by the brothers to be. We know that the token is part of a world already articulated in terms of meaning prior to the words which we credit with giving it shape, and that the token does not signal bare necessity. We know, based on the evidence that he 'got it wrong', that the ostensibly pre-linguistic reaction of Jacob's body was already an act of interpretation. We know all of this even though the narrator, in developing the token vs word theory of language is clearly partial to Jacob's view of things and evokes the reader's sympathy for his grief. Jacob's response depends on treating the token *as if* it was the incontrovertible truth, *as if* the token was a mechanical linkage in the machinery of the world and *as if* all the words in the world only delay the necessity of 'fate', which is, in *Joseph*, both for the narrator and Jacob, the name of the ultimate answerability of language to the necessities of reality. As the token does *not* in fact operate prior to linguistic temporizing, the distinction between words and tokens only works for Jacob if it remains unacknowledged, and so the power of his personality in facing 'fate' begins in self-deception. The term self-deception here is used in order to show that the illusions according to which Jacob lives are motivated. Not only does Jacob's basic understanding of the world, as I argue in this chapter, stem from a basic degree of illusion, the particular form that illusion takes is motivated by the way he understands

himself in the world. In other words, where I, so far in this dissertation, have followed the narrator in suggesting that there is a degree of illusion at the beginning of *all* modes of understanding the world, this is the first time that such illusion is not taken as an unfortunate inevitability, and one that an individual simply encounters if one's understanding is interrogated thoroughly enough, but is actually established at the point where one defends the basis of one's self-understanding against such questioning. Jacob exhibits self-deception here at several levels which are apparent to the reader, who knows what Jacob does not: that Joseph lives. At the literal level, Jacob is deceived by the cloak, as he was intended to be by the brothers. He jumps to such conclusion that the brothers are spared having to lie to his face, which was what they most feared and which had precipitated their use of the token. He does so in order that his own culpability in sending Joseph to his brothers might not come into consideration. To blame a wild animal is to mourn a son lost to chance, to fate.⁷⁶ But somehow deeper, Jacob does get it right: his son is lost. His son, whom he loved most of all, was lost, and Jacob knew at some level that he could not articulate, that his own personal dignity and his highly original role in the history of the world depends on this moment. 'Torn to pieces!' (Mann, 2005, p. 513), Jacob will eventually cry, and change the course of history. Finally Jacob is faced with his test of faith. Earlier, when he had tried to put himself in Abraham's place, Joseph showed that this is to misunderstand the historical nature of the test. Abraham had his own test of faith, which was to renounce the worldly attachment to his only son, Isaac, the one promised in his old age, and having raised the knife over his son for sacrifice, to have the son returned. Jacob intuited that the loss of Joseph, whom he loved intemperately to the point of idolatry, was a test of his own faith. But because his entire mode of understanding was at stake, he himself could not articulate this in language. The only thing he could do was to take it up with God, and the chapter proceeds by describing Jacob's highly original mode of grieving. By establishing his own originality, Jacob fulfills – even before he can recognize it – his role as inheritor of the historical promise of God. The reader knows this, but Jacob does not at this time.

This startling insight into Jacob's character is made even more so because of the way Mann uses the narrator to provide intellectual cover for Jacob's self-deception in the form of the ultimately unsatisfying theory of language that identifies the token as part of 'reality' rather than part of language. So, what is the narrator up to? After all, the narrator's partiality is not unambiguous, but a kind of backhanded favour that emphasizes Jacob's view of things to the point that the reader cannot miss the way that Jacob's originality proceeds on the basis of an illusion: the basic mis-interpretation about the token. As Jacob's originality is made out in the story to be of world historical importance, the reader is faced with the possibility that the nature of language means that *all* 'originality' begins in illusion. Why then elaborate the token/word distinction in Jacob's favour even though it fails to account for the outcome we readers already expect, or the fact that the token was misinterpreted as it was intended to be by the brothers, and that it has ultimately exposed Jacob's self's deception? The narrator's partiality for Jacob is not to be taken for granted, simply because he is the main protagonist of a major part of the novel. It is neither consistent nor absolute through the story: the narrator can also be unsparing, and has not hesitated elsewhere to show us the ugliest parts of Jacob's character, as for example in the conclusion to Dinah's story.⁷⁷ The reader is compelled to read the episode and at the same time to explore the limits of language itself in describing reality.

The initial idea that emerges from Jacob's experience and from the narrator's philosophizing about language is that the functioning of language requires something outside of its articulation of meaning in the world in order to begin. Any system of meaning that *depends* on such a postulate results in some degree of self-deception. If this is the case, then follows the question of how language begins and gets off the ground. Evidently it does, but now the inevitability of illusion and self-deception haunts every utterance. The narrator rejects the modern distaste for the ancient notion of 'fate' by setting out of a philosophy of language according to which all language simply distorts the appearance of time in the mind, and that the further it is stretched from the 'real' passage of time, the more violent

its eventual snapping back into alignment is. Jacob hates, but recognizes this idea, bemoaning the futility of language, complaining ‘why has man been given fear and foresight if not to ban evil and to prevent fate early on from even thinking its wicked thoughts?’, to which his servant Eliezer replies that ‘God is free.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 518)

The prospects for the possibility of any originality fade if attempts at uniqueness or novelty appear to be, on this view of language, little more than the ignorance of what determines us.⁷⁸ Whether there is some hope for ‘originality’ in a turning back to ‘origins’ depends on the nature of reality; that is, whether or not it is anything other than a mechanical system of causality. The fact that the token was misinterpreted, and was intended to deceive, clearly places the token and Jacob’s body-response in the domain of language, undermining the status of embodied reality as the ground and stepping-off point of language. The fact that Jacob’s body, apparently prior to any consciously linguistic response, makes its own response to that unacceptable reality and pulls in Jacob’s linguistic response and interpretation of events at the same time as the narrator explicitly subordinates language to the necessities of ‘reality’ provokes the question of the status of that reality. What kind of necessity are we talking about here? Where does language begin or end? What is the nature of the reality to which language answers, and what is the status of ‘originality’ in relation to it? What becomes of any notion of originality, if everything we do is an illusion layered over necessity? The reader must note that the idea of reality as brute and mechanical fact over which illusory language is stretched is received as the implication of the token vs word philosophy of language that undermines itself at the same time as it is expounded. What reality ‘really is’ remains open if that reality is something other than mechanical necessity; something more like the God imagined by Jacob’s family who promises a future. At this point in the present reading of the episode, the question of Jacob’s so called ‘originality’ has not yet come up – he has only begun to ease out of his faint – and everything the reader encounters within the text of *Joseph* qualifies

any provisional insights into ‘originality’ that might be drawn from either Jacob or the narrator. The only way forward is to continue reading the episode.

We know that Joseph lives, and that the narrator’s theory of language is not to be unequivocally accepted. The narrative setup allows Jacob to treat the token *as if* it grounded his world of language, while because this theory of language is itself provisionally narrated, it expresses, without explicitly theorizing, the limits of language as such. The token-vs-word theory gives Jacob a bedrock for his language and also exposes its insufficiency. The narrator pits the reader’s knowledge of events against a theory of language explicitly theorized by the narrator that also functioned to organize Jacob’s sense of life in order to show that there is no bedrock for the operations of language that nonetheless appeal to one. Language only works if it begins in reality, but no matter how deeply you delve into language, you never get deeper than language. Any attempt to find a ‘ground’ for language can only occur within language. We are compelled to turn away, and push off from our illusions in order to get language started and off the ground. The reader must respect how far Jacob was committed to his view of language and fate, and to the sense he has of how the world works. He persisted to the point where only the beating of his heart prevented him from denying that his understanding was wrong. No one can say that Jacob’s eventual response was not given in good faith, as it began in the simple temporal persistence of his living body. It is the quality of the turn away from the sources of language towards its interpretations of life that seems to determine here what qualifies as ‘originality’, if it is accepted that *every* interpretation of life begins in this turn away from sources and so has some degree of illusion.

Jacob’s Grief

How does Jacob manage to be original in his grief even when he knows that words merely distract from the inexorable realization of fate? Jacob’s newly eased limbs are beginning to make customary movements of grief. Still lost for words, Jacob’s body begins to move in accordance with

convention. He tears his clothes, sits naked on an ash heap, and scrapes imaginary sores from his skin with shards of a broken pot. Jacob's physical responses already accord with the kind of 'prescribed formula' that onlookers would have associated with grief, and that we have been told that he rejected. Furthermore, when Jacob does begin to speak, his first words are also conventional and we are told that they proceeded by following an example set long ago; that 'according to the ancient song, Noah himself spoke these or similar words when looking out upon the Flood.' (Mann, 2005, p. 516) Jacob would not be alone in availing himself of conventions of grief. They are valuable conventions for dealing with suffering. 'It is good, consoling and useful', suggests the narrator, 'that phrases of lamentation from the early days of humanity are preserved and lie at the ready ... in order to ease the pain of life ... and join one's own suffering with ancient and ever present pain.' (Mann, 2005, p. 516) The consolation of conventions may ease one's personal pain to some extent, and if the mechanism of the consolations of convention are not narcotic and do not necessarily ameliorate suffering, they still make it transparent to other instances and make it 'impossible to be entirely gloomy' (Mann, 2005, p. 1053), offering at least some solidarity with others who suffer. But it would be a mistake to read Jacob's use of formulae as succumbing to the temptation of these consolations. Jacob's so called 'originality' clearly is not to be understood as novelty but as a particular way of taking up these existing forms of grief. As he gets rolling, Jacob's use of at least 'partially preformed words' (Mann, 2005, p. 516) begins to take on a distinctive stamp. These first words of Jacob are already less about the consolation than they are about framing his personal plight in cosmic terms, in direct and individual relation to God, and therefore beyond the scope of convention. 'Indeed, Jacob could pay his misery no greater honor than to equate it with the Great Flood...' (Mann, 2005, p. 516), which was a cataclysm suffered by humanity universally and was so primal that no conventions could have informed Noah's words. To directly link his own pre-formed words – and what other kind are there? – with Noah's is Jacob's stubborn refusal to capitulate to the formulae he inevitably relies on. From here on, they do not

ease, but intensify Jacob's pain as he argues with the basic human experience of suffering, with fate, with God.

Jacob knows that all of his language answers to the demands of necessity as first expressed in his body, knows that there are nothing but pre-formed words, and still refuses to acquiesce to convention. While Eliezer, the family servant in a long line of 'Eliezers' who had served the family since Abram's day, starts out accompanying Jacob in his grief, offering comfort by joining in with murmurs, wails, and repetitive words, 'as long as it kept to ... set formulas and coinages or phrases closely modeled on them..' (Mann, 2005, p. 517), he soon realizes that Jacob is using these conventional words to say some extremely unconventional things, to the point of blasphemy. The increasingly horrified Eliezer tries to keep Jacob in the bounds of propriety, warning Jacob 'Do not sin, Israel!' (Mann, 2005, p. 519) and 'Compose yourself!' (Mann, 2005, p. 522) to which Jacob responds with the astonishing claim that 'I speak differently – and in doing so am closer to Him than you are', to which Eliezer concedes that 'Each must deal with God as best he understands and as far as understanding reaches, for no one reaches Him.' (Mann, 2005, p. 525)⁷⁹ Really, Jacob is unconcerned about the novelty of any of his words, and it is not in their novelty that we should identify Jacob's 'originality', but in the use to which he puts them. Jacob musters all of his strength to argue, and in so arguing, to accomplish something apparently foreclosed by language – an approach to the truth, that is, to God. Eventually, Jacob 'let himself be led to his tent. For he, too, had no more interest in rubbish, stark nakedness, and scraping – they were of service only so that he could dispute with God at length.' (Mann, 2005, p. 516) Jacob's originality is in his orientation to ultimate reality, to God whom he understands in personal terms, and he puts conventional responses to use in approaching God even though insofar as they are conventional they can only offer consolations and accommodation to fate.

It is our reader's privilege that allows us to examine more closely the possibilities opened up by Jacob's disputation that Jacob himself, in his grief, cannot recognize. When Jacob uses convention to

rail against convention on the basis of his taking the token as fact, he at the same time buttresses the deeper illusion that maintains his blindness to his own culpability in the situation. It was his preference for Joseph that stoked the brother's jealousy, and his sending the ostentatiously dressed Joseph to check up on his brothers hard at work in distant fields that made the tragedy possible in the first place. In other words, Jacob's self-deception is *identical* with his originality, and any notion of originality that the reader develops must reckon with the limits of language as exposed in this case.

The Limits of Language

The power of language is to dilate and compress time in representation, and so doing, to shape it to accommodate experience to the understanding. In language, a day can fill a thousand years, and a thousand years a day, and it contains the god-like potential to narrate into existence lives of meaning that according to strict chronology would be incomprehensible. Language allows the shaping of time into portions, establishing the start and end of things where no such divisions are imposed by chronological time itself. The limit of language is the representation of the unfolding of things according to their inner necessity, which is to say, to represent reality itself as it appears in time.⁸⁰ Even at its closest approach, language will never achieve perfect correspondence with the reality of the time it represents simply because language itself takes time, and so the term 'reality' itself only suggests that limit to which language answers despite its ultimate inaccessibility.⁸¹

Language is limited by and answers to the perfect representation of time, but is unbounded and infinitely flexible in the direction of articulation, fantasy, invention. In fact, these two extremes imply one another. Even as language is limited, that very limit gives it life. Without the limit of 'reality' to constrain invention, the productions of language would be nothing more than mutually incomprehensible fantasies, and therefore language would be impossible. Language use is coordinated by a shared orientation to its limits.⁸² Meanwhile, the limit of 'real' temporality itself only appears

within the imagination of those engaged in language.⁸³ The power of language therefore proceeds from its answerability to the limit of the representation of time, a limit that we give the name of the 'real'.⁸⁴

Language and Self-Deception

As the limit of language can only be contemplated within language, there is no way to tell how close to 'reality' language approaches, without simply trying to push ever closer. The limit of language recedes as we approach it, and so beyond every appearance of the limit we find further possibilities. This is the same problem that the narrator identifies in the receding of the past in the face of any historical investigation, saying that the historian is 'much like a stroller at the shore whose wanderings find no end, because behind each backdrop of loamy dunes that he strives to reach lie new expanses to lure him onward to another cape.' (Mann, 2005, p. 3) Language is always expressed in the idiom of some not-quite-adequate notion of its limit. Where language functions, so does illusion. Language is always possible just a little bit further than it appears to be, and that even the most honest and nuanced uses of language in the understanding are laced with a degree of un-reality. We deceive ourselves when we posit a firm beginning for our linguistic adventures and treat it as though it is outside the domain of language. Understanding originates in illusion. But what else should we do, for 'in our scrutiny either we shall have to hold to conditional pseudo-beginnings ..., or we shall be lured backward, ever backward, from one coastal backdrop to another and into immeasurable depths.' (Mann, 2005, p. 11) The practical concern of getting language started, getting it 'off the ground', requires the acceptance of some illusory foundation as its origin. The power of language to articulate the sense of life is always accompanied by a corresponding vulnerability to self-deception.⁸⁵ Jacob could continue to live and make sense of life in language only on the illusion that the token of the bloody cloak is the unmediated proof of the reality of Joseph's death. The modern historical capacity for individual self-expression and agency and the articulation of individual identity depends on reifying 'lived experience' and treating it

like a cornerstone for the edifice of self-understanding. But there is no pure experience prior to language, on which language can rest. Experience is always already articulated in language and so understanding it always proceeds at the cost of some illusion. In several episodes of *Joseph*, self-deception establishes itself where language appears to have established a specifiable limit, when in actuality it had merely turned away from its infinitely receding limit. The example of Jacob's grief, which when I described it as self-deception on the grounds that it posited the response of the body as a non-interpretation even though the token and the response were already thoroughly linguistic, is explicitly directed at this issue of the limits of language, and offers the means of making sense of other examples in *Joseph* as in our own experience of historical life. Dreams, desire, and divine favour all figure in *Joseph* as those things that are both prior to individual agency, and inextricable from that individual's sense of self. In each case, the appearance of the limit of language lends power to the character's language, but is also what betrays their innermost self-deceptions. In the present reading of the episode in which Jacob receives news that Joseph is dead, we are told that '...Abraham's grandson was too original a spirit ... for him to have found satisfaction in uniformity. He spoke and grieved freely, without prescribed formulas, ...' (Mann, 2005, p. 517) so that in his time of trial, the most primordial fault lines in Jacob's personality are revealed, those that express the interweaving of the power of his personality and its basis in self-deception.⁸⁶

Jacob's originality consists in innovating on conventional notions of grief and thereby expressing something genuinely new about human experience that is future oriented and shapes history. Part of what appears to allow this originality is that Jacob connects the expressions of his body with verbal expressions. His body is never unregulated. Rather, in the moment when language fails him his body also seizes up. When Jacob finds the limit of language in the material world, in the token of the cloak that has been torn, his originality also draws on materiality. It is only when his body eventually eases and his limbs soften that his words begin again, and as his body moves forward in time no matter

what, this assures him that there is a future in spite of any insufficiency of language that he might encounter. Rather than shattering convention, Jacob transforms convention by expressing his grief in a futural orientation. The self-deception that I suggest still remains at the heart of Jacob's personality derives from his treating his body and the physical token as the guarantee of the meaning of his lived experience, as a ground of language, rather than something that also must be interpreted in language. But we know that the token is false, and it is one of the arguments of this dissertation that individual, subjective, embodied experience is still something that requires interpretation in terms of public languages. See the chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire' for an extended treatment of this argument.

Originality and the Limit of Language

What the reader learns from the episode of Jacob's grief for Joseph is that language is never in full contact with its limit, which is the perfect representation of the experience of time. All understanding is based on the illusions that issue from the turn away from the limit of language that everyone makes who actually lives and makes sense of temporal life in language. But there are many ways to turn away from the sources of language to the illusion of a well-formed life, as Jacob's example demonstrates. None can escape the necessities of life that Jacob understood as 'fate' and that catch up with everyone, at minimum, in the fact of death, but it is possible to live in a state of more or less self-deception along the way.

To treat language as if it has a fixed origin, positively identified, that can provide a firm foundation for the articulation of language gives rise to a kind of 'authorial' attitude, which suggests that given the authority of a solid beginning, it is possible to elaborate any sort of life for oneself, as long as it is consistent with that beginning. Of course, the authorial attitude cannot examine that beginning too closely without discovering that it is arbitrary. If it does, or is forced to by some

circumstances of life to this realization, another suitable beginning is found, somewhat deeper. The source of the authority for narrating one's own life that is most appealing is the apparent immediacy of the body, but Jacob's example, and the example of Joseph's desire to follow in a later chapter, belie the notion that the body is somehow prior to language and can therefore provide it a solid start. The comparative richness of the life authored according to such an attitude depends entirely on the depth at which the limit of language is positively identified, but is nevertheless always based on illusion.

To be conscious of the limits of language is to admit that it recedes with every effort to approach it, and, rather than despairing when the meaning of life seems to be constantly undermined, to pursue the limit ever further in faith that reality is still meaningfully articulated, even if it is ever beyond the capacity of language to do so. In his grief, Jacob makes a start in this direction, although it causes him great anxiety, and he is followed by Joseph and everyone else who suspects that reality is replete with possibility, and not merely the machinations of chronological necessity. Jacob and Joseph used the word 'God' to name this possibility.⁸⁷ This possibility can also be understood in terms of the possibility of originality in historical life, which expresses not only new forms of living, but the inexhaustibility of the sources of the languages in which life is meaningfully articulated. The modern reader recognizes in Jacob the same history of emergence of the problem of originality as in our own times: that the notion of originality is inherited from the same tradition that it obliges us to deviate from, especially in moment of decision or crisis. How did it come to pass for Jacob that the paradox of the 'new', which is that all sense depends on prior sense and nothing really new can be uttered and remain sensible, was confronted directly in the loss of Joseph? The clue is given in the way he is introduced in the quote above, not by name, but as 'Abraham's grandson'. Abraham, that restless spirit, discovered God not by resolving paradox but by facing it directly and unflinchingly. When Jacob's family inheritance – who knows how many generations later – is precisely this disposition of facing paradox directly, the form of paradox is transposed into the problem of tradition and originality as

Jacob must deviate from the very tradition that obliges him to originality. This is precisely where we moderns find ourselves as well, having made originality the essential obligation of historical existence.⁸⁸ While Jacob resorts to the same kinds of measures that we have accustomed ourselves to in facing this paradox, in compromise and self-deception, we rarely approach it with the same intensity as he does and so can learn from his example.

The Direction/Disruption of Desire

The two great stories of desire in *Joseph*, that of Jacob's love for Rachel and of the affair between Joseph and Potiphar's wife, belie the notion that an appeal to desire might somehow serve as ground and source for temporal life if appeals to the past cannot due to their tendency towards an endless regress of sources. Desire unifies experience and impels action. It is the future orientation of the body.

The appeal of grounding the sense of temporal life in the desiring body derives from the apparent immediacy and individuality of desire. Desires seem to be mine and mine alone, and I can choose how to express them. I appeal to my privileged access to my own desires as the ultimate authority of questions of my identity and the significance of my actions. My feelings authorize my account of myself. If desire can be channeled into a coherent and living project, one is not compelled to go any further back into the murky past in order to live. If ever desire challenges a prevailing sense of self, the privilege of final arbitration rests in an appeal to the lived, embodied, experience. This privilege seems to make it possible to avoid the kind of concessions to ignorance that plague appeals to the past as the source of one's sense of life. Desire does not seem to require a hermeneutic medium, seems to appeal to no justification outside of itself, and seems in its most intense forms to gather every part of a person into a single direction. Little problem is posed by the concern that desire, utterly unique to the individual, renders us mutually unintelligible, for we all know what it means to desire. Society, on this account, becomes the relation between individual bundles of desire, and the role of language is to negotiate between them. However, a view such as this one is mistaken, and this chapter will argue that desire itself is part of the dialogue between individuals, always already experienced in language and, rather than providing a fixed, unambiguous and stable ground for the interpretation of one's life, itself requires interpretation.⁸⁹

In *Joseph*, desire appears in an entirely different light, one that does not contest the preceding arguments in the case for the desire, but demonstrates that the premise of the case for desire to function as a ground for the interpretation of temporal life, which is that of the unity and immediacy of the experience of desire in the body, is unrealistic. In *Joseph* desire is always already ambivalent and full of conflict. Jacob struggled to reconcile his desire for Rachel with his commitment to ‘higher things’, especially when those higher things – God’s plans – seemed to work through the very desire that opposed them. Later, Joseph’s affair with Potiphar’s wife is driven by a desire that has made peace with God, but at the cost of being internally ambivalent. The same single desire promises to, at the same time, fulfil Joseph and lead him to ruin. In the novel, it is only inordinate pride in one’s self-mastery that can marshal desire into the service of a coherent direction for life, and that pride never goes unpunished. The power of desire is that it gives the historical project its impulse towards the future, while its risk is that it provides a very compelling opportunity for one to fool oneself.

Jacob’s Desire

Jacob’s life was torn between two passions, for ‘God and for Rachel. And the one was at cross-purposes with the other’ (Mann, 2005, p. 307). He knew that only through the reproduction of the family could God’s promised future be realized, but also that the soul at such times is nothing more than the desiring body. And so on his wedding night, his obedience to the future promised by God could only continue by slipping into the idolatry of sexual desire. ‘Jacob sat there, tensing his thighs, thinking of his sexuality, which was now in charge of his good fortune...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 241), while he meanwhile ‘felt sorry for God, the great Lord of life and the yearned-for future, who, now that the hour was realized, had to yield His lordship over it to the idols and divinities of the flesh, under whose sign the hour stood.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 242).

Jacob cannot win here – his obedience requires the kind of desire that offends the God who demands it. It is this predicament that leads Jacob to associate desire with idolatry and so to rebuke Joseph's enjoyment of beauty, 'For what is the unbridled feeling of one human being for another – such as Jacob allowed himself to feel for Rachel and later transferred in an even stronger form, if that is possible, to her firstborn – if not idolatry?' (Mann, 2005, p. 257). Jacob surely found confirmation in his own doubts and self-recriminations in Leah's fertility and Rachel's barrenness, which appeared to be meant as

instructive chastisement for Jacob himself, who was in fact rebuked inasmuch as the selectivity and gentle despotism of his emotions, the arrogance with which he nursed and proclaimed them, did not have the approval of the Elohim – even though such a tendency to single out by displaying unbridled preference, this pride of feeling that evaded all criticism and desired the whole world's reverential acceptance, could appeal to a higher model and indeed represented its earthly imitation. Even though? Jacob's emotional despotism was punished precisely because it was an imitation. (Mann, 2005, p. 256)

In opposing God and sexual desire, the mind and the body, the higher things and the lower, Jacob made the same mistake that we do if we consider historical experience too much in the mode of consciousness, reasonableness, and the understanding, as we do in the attempt to seek reasons in the past for the way things are in the present. Just as God is ultimately inscrutable to Jacob, so the regress of sources in the past is unfathomable to historical consciousness, and so, like Jacob, we admit that the desiring body has a role to play in motivating us towards the future, but maintain a firm distinction between the desiring body and the interpreting mind. The case for desire outlined above supports another distinction according to which desire is either fickle, blind, wild and therefore to be governed by the reasonable projects we set for ourselves, or, in its immediacy and force is considered to be the source of all we are and so to lend authority to action. In this second case, which is the case that desire

can serve as the source of temporal life, desire is not reasonable, but it can furnish a first reason that can otherwise be difficult to discern.

But this bifurcation of reason and desire is the way of anxiety. Jacob, whose ‘voice always carried a tremolo of anxiety’ (Mann, 2005, p. 51), as we hear in the episode in which he meets Joseph, half-naked by the well, murmuring to the moon, and does not know what to do. His anxiety is a conflict between his sense that such behaviour should be censured and his admiration of the boy, and makes him momentarily pause. The narrator reports that ‘Jacob stayed where he was.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 51) and surmises that ‘Perhaps he noticed his son’s delight and wanted to prolong it.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 51) In any case, Jacob’s recognition of the importance of desire is accompanied with suspicion. For a moment he does not know what to do, precisely because he suspects that desire leads to unreflective activity, and is a relinquishing of self-control. At another time, Jacob and Joseph are talking, and Jacob describes his own understanding of self-control, and of anxiety. Jacob knew that ‘a man does many things, and behold, he knows not what it is he does. But if he would know and consider it, it may well be that his bowels would roll over within him, with bottom upended and now at the top, making him sick to his stomach...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 384). The body has a way of domineering the mind and giving opportunity to second guess even the most reasonable thoughts. In anxiety, reason is destabilized, one comes to distrust oneself since desire is unquestionably as much the ‘self’ as is reason. The way out of anxiety, which Jacob never really achieves, is a reconciliation between the desiring body and the interpreting mind. Jacob couldn’t reconcile the driving forces of his life – the organizational framework of his *understanding* of God, of the past and promised future, and the *desire* through which it would be realized – and it is this predicament that forms a lifelong test of his faith. Jacob knew that the risk in human passion was that it could dominate the direction of the soul, and that the promised future would dissipate in lust, but also that only desire could usher it in. This paradox is the specific shape in which Jacob’s own faith was tested. It was Abraham’s faith that permitted God’s promise of a future to be

realized, despite its absurdity, and it is up to Abraham's descendants to open up a way to live the 'soul as body' in consecration to God.⁹⁰

Young Joseph

Jacob inherited the terms of his own test of faith from his forefathers, and recognizes some of its characteristics early on in the life of his son. Young Joseph is too easy in his conflation of nakedness, beauty, and the divine; a conflation which came too close, thought the uneasy Jacob, to idolatry. But Jacob also knows that this conflation is not without its sources in his own eternally entangled opposition of desire and thought, and in the family tradition whose mark of association with God was given in the rite of circumcision, which, 'Commanded and instituted by God himself, it was the marriage of man with the deity ... The bond of faith with God was sexual...' (Mann, 2005, p. 59). This bond was understood to set this family apart from the rest of the world, as God's chosen recipients of the blessing, and even more, this blessing was understood to be carried by one particular individual in each generation, a chosen *one*, whose life was marked by the arbitrary favour of God. That the particularity and arbitrariness of this consecration is echoed in the same features of human sexual desire, and so forms a strong link with sexuality even if it seems strange and is more than we readers, or that ancient family, can comfortably make sense of. Strange though it may be, this sexual link between God and his people has the dual effect of rendering the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a jealous deity who brooked no competition, and of rendering human desire as the expression of a relation to the divine and therefore as carrying the risk of replacing God in idolatry. Joseph, being favoured by Jacob above his brothers and by nature with physical beauty, also came to expect divine favour as his due.

This, perhaps more than anything else, was the source of Jacob's anxiety when, at the opening of the narrative portion of the novel 'At the Well', Jacob finds Joseph alone beside a well, shirtless and

murmuring in the moonlight, enjoying the evening and the reflection of the beauty of the moon and the night in his own person. At first upon finding Joseph,

Jacob stayed where he was. Perhaps he noticed his son's delight and wanted to prolong it. "My child is sitting by the depths of the well?" The lad's smile broadened,... and he offered a nod in lieu of a reply. But his expression quickly changed, for Jacob's second statement was much sterner. "Cover your nakedness," he commanded. (Mann, 2005, p. 52)⁹¹

Each generation of this family makes progress on the dilemmas of the last, and so it is in Joseph's life that the covenant between God and this family takes on the earthly, embodied dimension that it had lacked up to this point. Joseph's innovation in this regard, accomplished through many trials, will be that the expression of desire must also always be part of the expression of faithfulness to this tradition:

...the truth remains that it is in passion, first and foremost, that the tempestuous term "living God" is actually and demonstrably fulfilled. And in retrospect, one will say that Joseph, however much his own flaws hurt him, had a better sense of this living God and was far more adept at taking Him into consideration than the father who begot him. (Mann, 2005, p. 257)

Joseph and Mut-em-enet

Joseph, not without pride but also not without warrant, considered himself to be one of those blessed individuals chosen by God to fulfill and develop the covenant first made with Abraham. Joseph's opinion of himself was high and further inflated by the way others responded to his good looks and his wit. He too easily considered his to be a central role in the realization of God's plans. This self-regard made an impression on people. In its expression as youthful narcissism it led his brothers to hate him and punish him, and later in its development it led Potiphar to recognize the

qualities of one with whom a household could be entrusted. Famously, Joseph also made an impression on Potiphar's wife Mut-em-enet, who was surprised, secretly pleased, and publicly concerned about Joseph's climb to the top of the household hierarchy. Potiphar justified his elevation of this newly purchased slave by explaining that Osarsiph – Joseph's assumed name in the land of Egypt – was

“under a god whom I did not know and whose jealousy surprised me. For this lonely god craves faithfulness and has betrothed himself to them as their bridegroom by blood – which is strange enough. ... among them he chooses one in particular ... set aside for this jealous god. And – what do you think – Osarsiph is such a person. ... Can one wish for a better servant and steward than a man born to be faithful and bearing a fear of sin in his bones?” ... Ah, what terror filled Mut-em-enet at these words! (Mann, 2005, p. 860)

Terror, because Mut-em-enet had also recognized Joseph's unique attractions and had, earlier in the same conversation, been actively campaigning to have Joseph sent away. She already knows about Joseph, and knows how dangerous it is to the stability of her own life to have her own desire awakened. It will come to pass that Joseph will bear some blame for the affair with Mut-em-enet, just as he bore at least some of the blame for inciting his brothers to hatred. But so far, the extent of Joseph's blame in relation to Mut-em-enet, or any of the other ‘daughters of the city [who had] been unable to catch his eye’ (Mann, 2005, p. 860) has been his enjoyment of being recognized and desired. In this he continues the self-regard of his bratty youth, even if he controls it better now and does not so brazenly flaunt it. But as he grew into manhood his own pride and pleasure take an increasingly sexual aspect and

At twenty-four his beauty still – indeed quite justly now – made people gawk, but it had ripened beyond the ambiguous charm of his early years, maintaining its universal attraction, to be sure, but concentrating its emotional efficacy more decisively in one direction, that is, in terms of its appeal to women. (Mann, 2005, p. 826)

This sexually charged pride brought with it the danger that he would, as Jacob had earlier feared, fall into the temptation of idolatry, which is desiring another human being more than God. Joseph and Mut-em-enet both understand the stakes of their aborted affair to be significant and infused with the divine. From Joseph's perspective, his own chastity was a direct expression of his faithfulness to God, and it is his associations of being faithful to God, to the 'highest', with being faithful to Potiphar, to the 'local highest', and to the expectations of his father Jacob. In the end it was this sense that the expression of his sexuality put all of that at stake that allowed him to refuse Mut-em-enet's entreaties, even though the temptation was strong and even led him down proud lanes of thought according to which the affair would be excusable or even advisable.

From Mut-em-enet's side, desire for Joseph appeared as a 'strange god' (Mann, 2005, p. 882) which threatened to upset the stability of her whole life. Far from it serving as a source and ground for life, she recognizes her desire for its capacity to upset and destabilize her life. Her desire is the experience of being pulled out of a self that she already knows and understands towards something unknown and perhaps unknowable. Her desire is never a firm step towards a new life, but is always a stepping out of herself. For this reason it is ambivalent. She both desires and fears.

Mut-em-enet

Mut-em-enet, or 'Mut', or when their intimacy had advanced, 'Eni', experienced the lover's turmoil whose desire urges them to both seek out and flee the nearness of the beloved, a turmoil that can only be resolved in expectation. The 'confused logic of love' (Mann, 2005, p. 905) can frustrate its own realization when the lover wants to have the beloved close, but not too close for fear that their own inadequacy would ruin things. 'We also know (and thus can spare ourselves the full details) of those feverish nights of love spent in a series of brief dreams in which the beloved is always present, but

seems cold and suspicious...' (Mann, 2005, p. 905). She went through this typical suffering and bliss, and even particular intensity –

Why then, if her life was blossoming so richly, had she more than once come close to sending her Nubian slave for an asp that she might apply it to her breast? Yes, she had actually once given such an order, so that the viper lay close at hand in its wicker basket and Mut abandoned her intention only at the last moment? Well, because she believed that she had ruined everything at their last meeting... (Mann, 2005, p. 905)

– but with a particular set of ideas and qualities that set it apart from the typical love affairs that her high-status friends engaged in that were less serious, more pleasure than trembling. Mut's own passion was special because she saw the same quality in Joseph that Potiphar had described and knew that her desire for him was not merely carnal and easily fit into the existing arrangements of her life. One of her confidants suggested thinking of Joseph as slave chattel used to slake her desire; another to think of him as mere flesh, a 'warm corpse' (Mann, 2005, p. 909), and therefore amenable to certain magical interventions that would bring him to her. Mut's plight, she knows, is such that neither piece of advice would bring her peace. Neither could maintain the 'balance between harmony and the whims of nature...' (Mann, 2005, p. 826) which gave the situation its particular frisson. Balance between them became increasingly difficult to maintain as the affair progressed, and Mut continued to struggle alone, misunderstood by her peers.

One of Mann's themes in *Joseph* is of how character, soul, face and body are unified in the same expressions, and while it is not at present the task to study the techniques by which this is accomplished, nor to explore its significance, this theme appears here in a physical description of Mut-em-enet that marks her out as particularly comprised of contradiction and tension. Mann's reader notes how she is particularly susceptible not to a simple love affair, but one which is energized by the risk that it entails. As the affair intensifies, the narrator notes a growing disparity between her eyes – which

expressed her childhood of being ‘light, merry, untroubled, free’ (Mann, 2005, p. 826) in a life guided by clear-eyed correspondence to the logic of society – and

that special serpentine shape of her mouth... which had gradually come about in the course of her years ... apparently in token of the fact that the mouth is a symbol and tool more closely bound to and related to lower powers than is the eye. As for her body, ...

One might say that what her body expressed was more in harmony with her mouth than with her eyes...(Mann, 2005, p. 819)

Commanding Joseph to her bed would satisfy the eyes – their clear view of her social right to take any slave – and her mouth – which expressed the carnal urge of her body – but not both, and not in harmony. Or, to read the metaphor differently, to command Joseph to bed would satisfy the body but not the eyes which seek to meet Joseph’s own, as soul to soul.

She yearns for a love that is not merely carnal, not merely formal and symbolic as her marriage is – in *Joseph*, Potiphar is a eunuch – but one that heals, that awakens her and will lead to something new. Mut is trapped and knows that the affair is impossible precisely because it is governed by more than just lust. Lust can be fit into a ritualized and symbolically articulated life in Egypt – there are gods for that – but not a full love of body and soul between a high ranking woman, a priestess of Amun, and a foreign slave. Such an affair would be an affront to the gods and would completely undermine her standing in the social hierarchy. Mut is trapped by the language of desire that is available to her in a way that recalls Jacob’s experience with the conventional language of grief. Yet she continues to risk a proximity to Joseph that stokes her impossible-to-realize ‘healing dream’ (Mann, 2005, p. 916) of love, because even though she knows it would destroy her, once awakened in her, she was ‘well aware that she had been struck with the rod of life’ (Mann, 2005, p. 832).

At first the hint of the desire that will grow, she ‘did not even notice that she had begun to look forward to meals when she would see Joseph’ (Mann, 2005, p. 828) and when these feelings intensify,

she begins to hide them and explain them away. But ‘who is supposed to be deceived by such affected, strained emphasis? ... the point is to conceal the path of adventure one’s own sweet soul demands to be pursued at any cost. Keeping the wool pulled over one’s own eyes until it’s too late – that’s what matters.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 829) Love is a ‘healthy illness, even if it is not without its dangers...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 916). Far from being a stable and fixed source for action, desire depends on a turning away the various incommensurable sources of one’s self in the direction of the desired. In any slackening of desire the threads of necessity fall back into confusion. A unified sense of self is an artifact of the experience of desire, an experience which is necessarily impossible to fully comprehend because it only appears in the turning away from its sources towards another with whom it emerges as a shared experience. Desire pulls at and strains the apparent unity of personhood which it also produces. Desire emerges as the experience of having all the threads of necessity that make up one’s reality – body, mind, history, language, social role, ideas, and so on – being pulled taut, all keening in the same direction and giving rise to the appearance of their forming a unified whole. The psychological structure of Mut’s desire is that it forbids itself and originates in the same self-deception that is the only way out of her dilemma, which is that she experience a fullness of individuality like she never has before in her desire for Joseph, a desire which she also knows to be self destructive.

It is possible to talk this way about desire from the vantage of this dissertation because it stands in the tradition of historical experience which such conflicts of desire produced. Mut-em-enet could not. She recognized in her passion the significance of what in Joseph’s family is described as a ‘special consecration to God’, and what appears when ‘for a few, brief, uncertain moments some people took Joseph to be half man, half – perhaps more than half – god.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 904) She knows that the desire she experiences is foreign to her entire way of life and also understands that its particular character depends on something that Joseph brings that is totally unfamiliar to her Egyptian way of life and understanding. In her ruminations she considers Joseph to be like a strange god, whose appearance

is powerful enough to upset the entire order of life and in this the risk that Mut-em-enet runs is not dissimilar from Jacob's in his near-idolatrous passion for Rachel. Just as Jacob experienced his passion in conflict with his devotion of God, so Mut is both grateful for her special passion for Joseph and also aware of the nature of its danger. But her situation differs from Jacob's in that while he wrestled with the tension between his passion for God and for Rachel his whole life, that struggle produced new language – of idolatry, sin and foresight – that would provide the hermeneutic resources necessary for Joseph to develop further, and to gather desire into the relationship with God as part of the covenant between God and the family. But Mut-em-enet was drawn out of a comfortable life by desire, and without the hermeneutic resources which allowed Joseph to comprehend and navigate the affair in ways which she could not. She became trapped. When the intensity of the opposing forces within her desire became too great, when 'The gently disconcerting contradiction between the eyes and sinuous mouth had clearly become stronger over the years, ... and one might even say that she had grown more beautiful...' (Mann, 2005, p. 826), she begged Potiphar to get rid of Joseph. At Potiphar's oblivious refusal, quoted above, Mut 'was overwhelmed with terrible fear, like a foreboding of what all she would have to suffer for his sake...' (Mann, 2005, p. 826). With increasing desperation she tries to maintain the balance of proximity and distance that maintains the affair without either cooling or inflaming it, for she knows well the risk posed by the suggestion of 'freedom and soul' in his eyes, and admits that she has 'an especial fear of the freedom they contain...' for the coherence and stability of her life, but also admits that the '...admiration of his freedom only heightens my longing and thereby coils me in still duskier bonds.' (Mann, 2005, p. 909)

The narrator knows that in this retelling the reader feels sympathy for Mut-em-enet: 'the reader, who, out of understandable sympathy for Mut-em-enet's suffering, may well be annoyed by Joseph's stubbornness.' (Mann, 2005, p. 921) because if he had conceded to her love, at least she would have experienced bliss and then a fall – the sort of cycle of experience perfectly comprehensible in her

world, even if it is painful and offers no real future. With Joseph's continued chastity, she is stuck in the opposing cycle of proximity and distance, of hints and the frisson of self-deception, of forestalling suicide by the snake in order to suffer her beloved yet again and to entertain fantastic hopes without any real hope or expectation of fulfillment. The contradiction intensifies to such a degree that she can no longer endure it and her desire collapses into the demands of her body and she admits to herself that she '...would be happy simply to hold his body, or better, his warm corpse, in her arms – or if it did not make her happy, it would at least leave her sad but sated.' (Mann, 2005, p. 998) She makes the bold, bare, reckless proposition for which she is famous, and famously mis-understood as a seductress.

The episode with Mut is one whose details are thoroughly filled in by Mann. My own reader may be familiar with the story, but not these details, and therefore it has been necessary to relate them in some detail, at the risk of slipping from analysis into plot summary.⁹² Writing about this episode presents a challenge for the present dissertation and therefore also provides insight into its method. The successful interpretation of *Joseph* proceeds between two poles, between the knowledge, ideas, inclinations and influences of the reader, and the inner logic of the text. This dissertation acknowledges the tension between these at all times, and to err too closely to the text itself is to risk plot summary and too closely to the experience of the reader is to bring in too many unacknowledged ideas or to merely opine. The methodical challenge throughout this dissertation has been to recognize the subjective idiosyncrasy of this method of reading, but still to anchor its claims in the text of *Joseph* itself, with the aim of demonstrating that the experience of the reader is itself shaped by the text. The approach so far has always been to start in a specific difficulty, experience, or perspective of the reader, and to interpret these in terms of the novel. In this section on Mut, the level of detail required to differentiate her experience from Joseph's in the interpretation requires filling in a lot of the detail of her own story. This section relies on more plot summary than elsewhere in this dissertation in order to establish a rich enough field of tension between Mut's and Joseph's experience that an interpretation of their respective

experiences of desire can proceed, precisely because this is also one of the sections of the novel whose narrative outline is least familiar to *Joseph's* reader. The interpretation proceeds between the necessities of the text and the experience of the reader. Later in this chapter it will be argued that desire itself works in a similar field of tension between desiring subjects.⁹³

Joseph

Joseph also walks a risky road in the affair, because his faith demands both passion and chastity. Passion for God and for a future that Joseph knows can only be realized through the passions of the body, but also a chastity that knows how sexual desire can so easily become idolatrous. Joseph's challenge is how to articulate a faith that includes and requires his own personal passion without again slipping into the pride of being a 'chosen one' that has led him into trouble before. We know the outlines of Joseph's psychology already and are not surprised that he justifies his desire with the understanding that his task is to elevate desire into the expression of faith. Of course he is again too proud and assured of his own self-mastery. He may be justified in not considering it a sin to entertain sexual desire, but his pride at being able to handle temptation leads to disaster. His real mistake is the lack of foresight he shows in leading Mut on, which he certainly did, even when he thought himself capable of managing the risk and foolishly took it upon himself to 'divert his mistress's mind from personal to practical matters, from his eyes to his cares, and in the process to cool, disenchant, and heal her..' (Mann, 2005, p. 900) Joseph's illusions in the affair consist in his thinking himself capable of managing it and even of being responsible for cooling things down, when of course it is obvious that all such efforts would only inflame desire. Of course, consistent with his convenient self-deceptions, he blamed her while 'watching as his instructive and healing regimen, embodied in the scrolls of accounts he held clamped under his arm, was foundering more and more.' (Mann, 2005, p. 916) Only after things had passed the point of no return did he become 'aware of the absurdity of his instructive healing

regimen, and for the first time it may it have dawned on him that his behaviour in his new life was no less culpable than his conduct towards his brothers had been.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 942)

Again, Joseph’s pride led to trouble and even though he had antagonized his brothers and was guilty of leading Mut on in this affair, his mistakes are always intimately connected to his faith in the future. Even though he gets it wrong so often, in each trial he develops new ways of thinking about God, about time, about individual personhood and about the role of desire in a life of faith. In the examination of Mut’s side of the affair we have already considered the basis of desire in illusion, in a primal turning away from the sources of life by which a life seems to be unified. This examination supports the initial concern of this chapter, which is to demonstrate the mistake of treating desire as a firm source for the sense and direction of temporal life. However in revealing the inner conflict and complexity of desire in Mut’s case, the specific role of desire as a stable source for life was discredited, but not its importance as an impetus for life, for orienting a life towards the future. It is with this concern in mind that Joseph’s temptation is of considerable interest, for his development of the notion of sin into a sense of expectancy goes a long way to reconciling sexual desire and the family’s faith in the future promised by God.

The same pride he felt in being chosen, a pride that in Joseph was closely associated with piety, led him to believe he could master his own temptations, and even to believe that he had to prove his own faith by such trials and holding his hand to the flame of desire. After all, his forefathers each had their own particular trials of faith. Joseph recognized that this was his, and he allowed his illusions free reign until his faith was refined into its essential aspect: faithfulness to his father, the tradition of fathers, to God and to the promised future that depended on him, were all fused into a faith that stood in a new relation with time. We cannot blame Mut-em-enet for her appearance in Joseph’s eyes when finally he recognized the straits he was in, when his own sense of temporality and expectation threw his vision of her into sharp relief.

Joseph shuddered at the thought of what Mut, an Egyptian woman, embodied in his eyes and of how a proud tradition of laws of purity warned him against mixing his blood with hers. She was the antiquity of the land into which he had been sold, a bleak and immutable expanse of time that stared out into a brutal, dead future devoid of expectation... (Mann, 2005, p. 925)

In this shudder Joseph moves from the notion of sin that he inherited from his family, which was always connected with the nascent sense of time that governed his family, but was still generally articulated in terms of purity laws, towards one that is more essentially temporal, where sin is explicitly named as a lack of foresight (568) and faith is defined by expectancy. Foresight here is not fortune telling, but knowing what will keep possibility open, and the difference between foresight and sin rests not in desire itself but on how the expression of desire is articulated in terms of the kind of life that it opens up. This new temporal language allows sexual desire to be understood in terms of expectation rather than mere satisfaction or destruction. Expectation describes a sense of desire that includes its own basic incomprehensibility, for, just as it is impossible to fully grasp the sources of the experience of desire, so it is impossible to know exactly what to expect from a promised future. In expectancy, the illusions and imaginative element in desire are made compatible with a life of faith and are not merely the artifacts of self-deception.

The moment that Joseph grasps the possibility of a faith articulated in this new temporal language, he gains clarity about the world he has been flirting with. In Mut-em-enet, he suddenly recognized the same kind of time, the same long-enduring past, that Joseph saw in the Sphinx upon his arrival in Egypt. At that time Joseph had an unnameable horror for the deep past of Egypt, which he vaguely understood as simple endurance rather than preparation, progress or development. Against this monument, 'Joseph stood there testing his heart' (Mann, 2005, p. 608) while it was 'stirring his young blood with an uneasiness for which mockery was no match and that would not let him sleep.' (Mann,

2005, p. 607) Joseph was unable to blithely laugh off the menace of such an offer to betray his family tradition of stories of a vital but risky faith by trading them for whispers of the solidity of a long, long past. At that time Joseph saw that the Sphinx represented the kind of future that proceeds from a past ‘that was brutal and dead, for it was merely endurance and a false eternity, devoid of all expectancy.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 608) This enabled him to refuse the Sphinx which in his dream that night ‘said to him, “I love you. Come to me and name your name to me, whatever my nature may be.” by answering, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against my God?”’ (Mann, 2005, p. 608)

That first refusal based on faith in a promised future was easier than in later years when the urgency of sex was involved, when his lover suddenly appeared to him, Sphinx-like, was even more difficult to mock, and in a last desperate bid even mocked him for his chastity. In the test of his faith, the stakes for Joseph were identical to those in his confrontation with the Sphinx. In both, he was offered a life shaped by a sense of time in which his desires, his talents and even his pride could find their place, but it would come at the cost of giving up on the future promised to his family that Joseph understood could only be realized through him. Yes, Egypt offered a shape to time and Mut-em-enet’s desire was future-oriented, but not in the sense that Joseph cared about or out of which he could initiate history. Egypt’s temporality was a mixture of brooding endurance and the same cyclical shape that was characteristic of the ancient Near East that Joseph had been familiar with his whole life. In this temporality, there was at best anticipation, but not expectation. Mut-em-enet could anticipate the chain of events that would issue from the satisfaction of their mutual desire, and even if these included a destructive fall, they made sense according to the practices and pantheon that shaped the Egyptian mind. But to satisfy their desire would be to reduce it to something comprehensible, but also to compromise it, for it was charged by Joseph’s sense of expectancy and Mut’s sense of its impossibility, to such a degree that it even gathered incomprehensibility into its character. By comparison to anticipation, which is knowing what will happen, or will probably happen, Joseph’s expectancy as

foresight is always attuned to what will keep possibility open without claiming to know the specific details of what will happen. Yes, such a full desire that draws all of life into a unified future-orientation – even life’s quality of incomprehensibility – depends for its possibility on imagining time in a way that allows for the continual expression of expectancy, of the pursuit of originality, of the continual project of ushering in a better future.

We know how things played out. Mut proposed. Joseph just barely refused. Mut accused him. Joseph was sent to his ‘second pit’, in prison. He did this in the faith that God could work even through this new suffering, that possibilities impossible to anticipate would present themselves, and they did, in the royal servants who were also jailed, one of whom eventually brought Joseph to the attention of the Pharaoh himself.

Later, Joseph did marry and father children, and it is interesting to note that by this time he had in some ways compromised the radical nature of his faith, and had become in some essential ways, Egyptian. Whether or not this compromise was necessary, as Joseph would argue, to elevate his faith is impossible to know. On one hand, it did allow him such unequalled power in Egypt that he could declare himself to his family to be truly reborn, having truly been lost to them, and to rescue them and their future (543). On the other, Joseph, in Jacob’s eyes, had accommodated too much to Egyptian ways. Of course Jacob still loved him, but it was a ‘love that must deny’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1450) and the family blessing was given not to the eldest, nor the next, each of whom had made terrible transgressions in life, nor to Joseph, for whom it had been reserved, but to Judah who was himself not the most shining candidate, but who ultimately did prove his faithfulness to the family. The narrator, in describing the stage in life where Joseph has risen to power in Egypt, married and had children, and become very comfortable, contends that

Joseph had obviously arrived at a time of permissions and liberties, and one can be certain that he knew how to square all of this with Him who had separated him from his

family, ... [not] an outcast, but rather someone set aside for special purposes, ... (Mann, 2005, p. 1240)

Of present concern is the implication that once Joseph had in many ways accommodated himself to the ways of Egypt, his sexuality became part of the stability of the life Joseph now led, and unlike his affair with Mut-em-enet, it did not – in his view of things – contradict the long term future that he envisioned. Interestingly, in his future wife Asenath, there was no contradiction between ‘eye and mouth’, between ‘soul and body’ as impossible passion had drawn out in Mut-em-enet. Asenath’s ‘eyes had a peculiarly fixed, attentive look ... her glance revealed an inner expectancy...’ and ‘Charming and in a certain sense unique *as well* were the lines of her body...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1238) My own italics in the previous quotation indicate a total lack of contradiction and opposition in her life; their marriage was perfectly acceptable and made sense according to the way that all parties understood their futures. Could anything truly original come out of it, in the way that Joseph’s new understanding of expectancy had out of the furnace of his previous affair? Maybe not in such dramatic fashion, but it may be that desire that emerges from and is articulated into a sense of self that builds in a sense of its own unknowability need not place such a strain on those involved in allowing for the generation of originality. Such a possibility aligns with Joseph’s view of the acceptability of his own marriage and adaptation to Egyptian ways, and if we live in the kind of historical mode of life that he was instrumental in bringing about, this should be no surprise. To interrogate Joseph too closely on this point would require imagining an entirely different conception of historical experience.

The Accommodation of Desire to Time

Desire may be necessary to the future orientation of any original project, but might also always undermine it on the basis of its ultimate ambiguity, its inner division. The candidacy of desire as a sufficient source and ground to any claim of originality must be discounted, even as its necessity is

affirmed. It takes more than appealing to desire for anything original to be expressed. It takes a *reading* of desire, as will be argued in the next section, of its conditions of emergence, and of the quality of the illusions it accepts in turning away from its sources. But none of this means that all desire, or all forms of desire as such need always to be invested with the significance of providing a critical occasion for originality. Most of life, for most of us, seems not to be of world historical significance and it is interesting to consider the sketches of the structure of desire outlined here in terms of more common, everyday experience. In other words, what happens to people who have a brush with desire in the sense that we have examined, but do not end up as a fulcrum of history? In other words, what happened to Mut-em-enet?

Mut-em-enet's fate is not recorded in the oldest sources, but in *Joseph* the reader encounters her one more time, although Joseph does not. On the occasion of his investiture into Pharaoh's direct service, it would not have been surprising for Joseph to encounter Potiphar and Mut-em-enet again, given their own social status and the significance of the occasion. However, the narrator 'can only confirm and declare as fully justified a silence' (Mann, 2005, p. 1219) on this point. If a meeting did ever occur, 'one can be certain that that it took place without the bat of an eyelash, with total discretion and sovereign disregard of the past.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1220) For Joseph's part, he really did learn something in prison, his second pit, and would not have been tempted to rekindle things. But more importantly, for Mut-em-enet's part, she entered into the silence of renunciation. What else could she do after the 'failure of her desperate attempt to escape from an honorary into a truly human life' (Mann, 2005, p. 1220)? She was 'forced to return for good and all to the only form of life that before her affliction she had regarded as perfectly natural' (Mann, 2005, p. 1221). Mut-em-enet retreated into the mostly-symbolic marriage with the eunuch Potiphar even with some new affection and she renewed her devotion to her duties as priestess of Amun. We can understand her renunciation of the possibility of the 'healing love' of which she once dreamed, the one that promised to bring her from the strictures of

a ritualized, symbolic life into a wholly human life even as it threatened to upset the only life she knew. We have only really attended to her affliction, seen her as a representative of ‘Egypt’, with all that entails in the eyes of Joseph’s family, and seen her left by the wayside of Joseph’s innovations the in notion of expectancy and the reconciliation of sexual desire and the family faith, and it may be unfair to leave her experience there. Really, hers might be the most common fate of all; that of experiencing desire that exceeds one’s ability to realize anything from it and resolving it in a renunciation of originality and a retreat into form. But even though hers was not to be fulfilled, the experience of desire that she shared with Joseph still lent a depth of individuality to her life that was unknowable to her confidants and contemporaries. The last word on Mut-em-enet’s experience goes to the narrator who allows her to leave the story with dignity and reputation intact. After the affair with Joseph, she once again

celebrated sacred constancy, the eternal balance of the scales, the stony stare of endurance. And yet at the bottom of her soul lay a treasure in which she secretly took greater pride than in all her spiritual and worldly honors, and which, whether she admitted it or not, she would not have surrendered for anything in the world. A sunken treasure in the depths – but it still silently sent its light up into the murky days of her renunciation. And however much it represented her defeat it also lent her ... a pride in life ... it was a recognition of her justification, the awareness that she had blossomed and burned, had loved and suffered. (Mann, 2005, p. 1222)⁹⁴

A much younger Joseph had once suggested that each person has ‘his own special world-circle, of which he is the center’ (Mann, 2005, p. 563) and in the historical experience this is to some extent true even while it suggests an intensity of life and desire that we may not be equal to. Stories of desire are usually of people who got a taste of the possibility of originality but lacked either language or courage and so ‘persisted in old customs in the very act of trying to accommodate what was new in the

world.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 713) Mut-em-enet’s fate suggests that even such defeats can still be considered ‘critical experiences of the soul, which color our existence’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1234) Myth, in *Joseph*, provides the patterns for life which allow the individual to avoid confrontation with the risk of groundlessness and living according to roles implies an ignorance of the possibilities of individuality, and is therefore a concession to ignorance. Mut’s experience is an example of an individual whose experience remains structured by the interpretive resources of myth, but in its brush with the possibility of originality, attains a kind of personal depth, a kind of knowingness that was impossible for her prior to the affair with Joseph. Even as her experience is recuperated by the mythical interpretation of her life, the psychology of her renunciation shows the depth and richness of experience that mythical patterning makes possible.

The intensity of their affair depends precisely on its inherent contradictions remaining unresolved; on the glimpse of original experience that is suggested by its very impossibility. The impossibility – and potential – of their affair is not only that their respective social stations presented an obstacle, but that if any of Mut-em-enet’s plans or schemes really would have satisfied her and Joseph, then the affair would have been merely conventional. They are both tempted towards that which can only in its realization disappoint or destroy them. They know this, and if they audacity did not have the audacity to enjoy the temptation, either one of them could easily have dismissed the flicker of nascent desire before it revealed its power. It is because they knowingly toyed with temptation that the affair deepened and progressed to the point that it did. When no convenient way to avoid it remained, the possibility of destruction yet remained – however conventional that would have been. Her flirtation with ‘...her inadmissible desires’ (Mann, 2005, p. 885) and his

awareness of his own guilt, [as] in his heart he admitted that he had foolishly stood by as things came to this pass.... exposing himself “daily” – or let us say, almost daily – to the breath of the fiery bull, daring over and over to confront

one of the strongest temptations that has ever laid siege to a lad in the history of the world? (Mann, 2005, p. 976)

produced a situation that carried the risk of experiencing something new and original, for which there was no model, and which could never be actually realized without succumbing to pattern, but must continually be risked in order to produce itself. In the end it could not be sustained, but intensity established in each a previously unknown depth of individuality, dignity and maturity. While he channeled this increase back into his concern with history, posterity and originality, she had no such pretenses and took the path of renunciation, which is in itself not a victory, but is only possible for those who have won for themselves a new richness of individual experience. It is that the originality was risked, even if its realization would disappoint or destroy, that earned them an increase in life and opened up a way of understanding desire in terms of expectancy, of faith in a promised even if never realized future. It is that this future, always arriving, depends on the continual risk of its own disappointment in conventionality or destruction, that requires desire. 'Without guilt and passion nothing would ever move ahead' (Mann, 2005, p. 271): passion that unifies life and looks to the future; guilt for inviting ruin, toying with what is most precious.

The fourth book provides a heroine whose experience of time and desire stands as a contrast to Mut's, and helps to understand the role of desire in imagining time. That heroine is Tamar, who was resolved, cost what it might, to interpolate herself with the help of her womanhood into the history of the world. She was that ambitious. ... Granted – everyone stands within the history of the world. ... Most people, however, swarm modestly off at the periphery, unaware ... Tamar loved Judah, entirely for an idea. It was a new basis for love, the first time it ever happened.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1272)

In the episode where Tamar, a local Canaanite woman, learns about the family at the foot of an elderly Jacob, desire is subordinated to her idea of entering the history of the family of Israel through marriage.

After several instances where her marriage to the sons of Judah are aborted by the death of each of his sons in turn, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute, and tricks Judah into marrying her. In this episode desire turns up in both of its extreme forms: from his side of things, Judah's lust was his shame and was distinctly and persistently opposed to his piety. It tormented him as it had tormented his father Jacob. From her side, it was merely a tool of her historical ambitions. As it happened, the family blessing fell to Judah because after all his older brothers squandered their priority in sin, he was the first whose humility allowed him to acknowledge his own faults, and so the blessing of Israel passes through the child of Tamar and Judah. In a way, the entire run of Joseph's story, itself only a 'charming interpolation in an epic of incomparably vaster scale', into God's plan for the salvation of the family, is merely an interpolation into the larger story of the universalization of this conception of time into history of which Tamar was the heroine. Did she know this? This was her faith – and this word, despite its importance for the reading of *Joseph* pursued here, only appears a couple of times in the novel, including as it is attributed to Tamar. 'One can very easily be in a story without understanding it.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1491) Faith is knowing it, and consciously interpolating oneself into it as Tamar did, when, among the crowd gathered at Jacob's deathbed,

Only one person among them all already knew of it and had been waiting eagerly to hear it. We cannot help casting a glance outside to the outline of her shadow – there she stood very erect, in darkling pride, as Jacob proclaimed this woman's seed. (Mann, 2005, p. 1472)

She knew that she was the one through whom the family blessing would proceed. Maybe her faith exceeded even that of Joseph, who was perhaps too clever for his own good, always still too committed to understanding everything and who eventually received the ambivalent blessing of a 'love that must deny' (Mann, 2005, p. 1419). Tamar's example is a direct counter to that of Mut, but it also qualifies

the reader's understanding of Joseph, going so far as to suggest that history moves forward at least as much on acts of faith than on the those of the understanding.

Reading Desire

Desire makes a strong claim to serve as the source and direction of a life of originality where looking to the past fails to find firm footing because desire apparently bypasses the language games that we usually blame for self-deception, and is experienced directly and uniquely by the individual. It is tempting to treat desire as the starting point for the articulation of historical experience. But this is to make a mistake about the reality of desire which draws together of a confusion of life's sources into an imagined future, and is nothing stable or unified at all. To treat desire as a uniform and unidirectional impetus for originality is to enter into the same kind of self-deception that crops up everywhere the sources of historical experience are taken to be fixed. *Joseph* shows that desire is never singular, never entirely one's own, always ambivalent, and that all of these complications increase to the degree which what is desired promises the potential of originality.

We often think of the torments of desire as resulting from the resistance desire encounters in the world, in social norms, and so on, and while this form of resistance is real, it also provides a convenient excuse for ignoring the even more original appearance of the torments within desire itself that result precisely from its not being purely one's own. Rather, desire is

...a special authorship, which is divided between the "I" and the "you", remaining bound to the latter to be sure, but also having its home in the former: it is the binding and intertwining of the outer and inner, of image and soul – which is to say, a marriage out of which gods have indeed emerged, their manifestations being declared, not without reason, divine. ... there is no denying a certain logic here. (Mann, 2005, p. 906)

The case for desire as the source of whatever originality the historical individual can muster will falter if under scrutiny it admits to having its own origins in the past and in the linguistic mediation between past and present embodied experience. If historical agency is expected to cohere in the present experience of embodiment, then the desiring body must be transparent and immediate to individual consciousness. Where this is not the case, the work of mediating the past and present experience attempts to recover some past instance of that transparency and immediacy. If this is shown to be impossible, or is suspected of being in actuality an unattainable ideal, then the possibility must be explored that desire is always already historically informed and therefore mediated in language as the preceding analysis of Mut and Joseph's affair has suggested. In this eventuality, the whole notion of desire 'authorizing' original expressions of life should be revised in terms of 'reading' one's desires, and reading in such a way that affects the future orientation of life – reading, in other words, that in turn informs desire.

Far from serving as the starting point for making sense of life, desire itself is subject to interpretation, for the visions of life that it produces – the gods which it manifests – are beyond convention, strange, new, and original. In paying attention to desire itself, rather than blindly accepting the visions that it produces, it fragments into shards – heavenly, earthly, material, imaginary, present, future, etc., each of which is both one of its sources and refracted in it. The past is one of these aspects. Part of the mysterious nature of desire, of the kind of that the narrator describes as belonging to everything real (that is, not ideal) where 'The line between the earthly and the heavenly is fluid, and one need only let one's eye rest upon a single phenomenon and it breaks apart into a double perspective' (Mann, 2005, p. 733), is that for all of its future orientation, desire is also inseparable from a sense of the past. Desire is always also a history of desire, and while it provides a necessary impetus towards the future that is required of a real life, it requires the same kind of historical hermeneutic – reading – as any other problem of history. Yet it is not simply one object of interpretation among all

these others – even while it needs to be interpreted, it is desire that vitiates all the other modes of interpretation – the pleasure of the text, the desire for insight, and so on.⁹⁵ Rather than killing desire by explanation, it is possible to make sense of it by learning how to handle its risks, tensions and possibilities and to cultivate it in continued, mutual, finely modulated pleasure.

Historical experience can be understood on the same model, as an extension of the same practice. The desiring subject never fully coincides with the object of desire, and desire only exists in a kind of tension between these. Where desire gets too close to satisfaction, the unknown might disappoint or destroy; too far and desire can cool. These same movements describe historical experience as the management of attention to life in time, a sliding from the close attention which breaks up illusions into the incommensurable threads of necessity that make up real temporal life to the dreamy gaze under which ambiguity firms up into the kind of indistinct but firm illusions that make it possible to step forward into the future. At the outset of the novel, the narrator describes the kind of origins sought by historical inquiry as

illusory stations and goals, behind which, once we reach them, we discover new stretches of the past opening up – much like a stroller at the shore whose wanderings find no end, because behind each backdrop of loamy dunes that he strives to reach lie new expanses to lure him onward to another cape. (Mann, 2005, p. 3)

But rather than reject these illusions as totally unsuitable to making sense of historical life, the narrator soon concludes that we are faced with a dilemma:

either we shall have to hold to conditional pseudo-beginnings that we confuse with real beginnings ... or we shall be lured backward, ever backward, from one coastal backdrop to another and into immeasurable depths. (Mann, 2005, p. 11)

In other words, the viability of historical experience depends on the same attitude towards exactness and illusion that are present in the reading of desire, and to go too far in either direction destroys the

whole thing. This kind of modulation allows for differentiation in skill, for expertise, for maturation and experience, and so supports a hermeneutic model where historical awareness can develop, be honed by practice, and be the subject of education.

The charge that this model is not one that leads to understanding historical life at all, but is a docile acceptance of illusion and eventually tends towards immobility is correct in its recognition of illusion but incorrect in its diagnosis of immobility. After all, in reading desire, which is both an analogue and instance of reading historical experience, immobility is never really a risk. Maybe desires become more comfortable, and one 'moves' in desire progressively less.⁹⁶ But this stability, far from being a life-sapping stasis, is one careful to maintain the initial taste of pleasure, its basic attitude of expectancy. It is not at all like finding the equilibrium between two points, where stability is immobility. It is a constant modulation of the risk of the unknown, of the possibility of originality and requires activity, maintenance and above all, continued pleasure. It is the constant task of those who cultivate pleasure to manage the opponent processes of stabilization and innovation. To read desire is not merely to analyze it. That would kill it. Analysis kills desire because it assumes that that analyst, the desiring individual, has sole authority to take it apart and see how it works. In its fullness, desire is a co-authored experience over which one does not have sole control, and this uncertainty is one of its constitutive elements. Desire cannot be taken out of temporal experience, paused, and analyzed. Desire only survives when it is enjoyed, when it is carried on, and something wild must remain part of it. In desire, there always remains infinite opportunity to relish, to clarify, to make fine distinctions of taste that do not require that the first taste of pleasure is left behind. The fine pleasures remain close to their first, immediate and inarticulate experience. Appreciating polyphony does not come at the expense of the pleasures of punk and no refinement in sex makes it any less primal. This mode of bi-directional modulation of desire is the condition of possibility, and not only an analogue, for historical experience.

Therefore, learning to read desire is the same thing as learning to read historical experience and the possibility of originality.

The Temporality of Desire

This dissertation is about the possibility of imagining time as historical in a way that opens up a path to original expressions of life, to ways of living that are both original and new but also draw on origins in the past as its source. When the temporal past tends towards an endless regress that threatens to undermine the historical project, the life of the body, specifically as it is drawn together in desire, appears as a candidate for the ground of making sense of a life within time. But reading of *Joseph and His Brothers* teaches that desire itself is already ambivalent and fraught with conflict. It is always already an interpretation of one's place in life that also always requires more. The present chapter explores the temporality of desire in terms of its candidacy as a source of historical experience. The time of desire is futural insofar as the satisfaction of desire is always in the future, and on this Mut and Joseph agreed. But where Mut could only imagine desire in terms of cycles of urge and satisfaction, almost like a hunger, Joseph imagined it as an indication of a promised future. The difference between their respective experiences turns on the way that they articulate the future orientation of their desire. Desire always looks ahead, but the shape of the future that each imagined also gave their desire a certain shape and the incompatibility of the temporal shape of sexual desire that each party imagined it to have doomed the affair.

Historical experience that depends on the kind of expectancy that Joseph exhibited derives directly from his articulating of desire in terms of historical time. Therefore, to make sense of the historical experience of time, including its effects on the experience of desire, requires that any such sense resolves in something like 'expectancy', and that the emotional, desiring valence of expectancy is recognized. The problem of originality was first presented in this dissertation as the intellectual

paradox of locating sources for the coherence of experience in the past, and of articulating from them the coherence necessary for a person to act and live into the future. This intellectual approach meets the paradox of the regress of sources. But insistence on the problem of originality and of historical experience does not come from only this problem of the mind but from the fact that embodied experience always carries on in time and renders all temporal sense-making efforts incomplete at best. If desire that is the basic orientation of the body towards the future, then to understand historical experience it remains necessary to investigate history as an intellectual project, but it is also necessary to desire a future, and to include desire in giving shape to one's sense of time. *Joseph* teaches this and also educates the emotional sensitivities and the nuances of the responses of the reader. The kind of reader that can imagine a future of possibility and originality is one who involves the intensity of embodied desire and all of its emotional accoutrements in the development of a language of historical experience. Only the reader whose pleasure and desire is involved in the interpretation of the novel will learn from *Joseph* what it has to say about the role of desire in opening the possibility of originality in historical experience.

Narrating Interiority: The Hidden Face

Interiority and Historical Experience

What expression did the face of Mut-em-enet – Potiphar’s wife – bear when Potiphar passed sentence on Joseph in a public denunciation at which she must certainly have been present, she whose passion tempted Joseph to the limit and whose accusation against him condemned him? What mix of regret, revenge, humiliation, sorrow, satisfaction played on her ‘sinuous mouth’ and the ‘unusual shadowy hollow of the cheeks’ (Mann, 2005, p. 826), or does the reader notice the ‘look of arrogant austerity in her eyes’ (Mann, 2005, p. 824)? Nothing experienced is not expressed in the body in *Joseph and His Brothers*, and the narrator has not hesitated to describe bodies, faces and expressions in terms of psychological experience, dispositions of character, histories of experience, mythical resemblance.⁹⁷ Mut’s own face and body have been rendered by the narrator as expressive of the contradictions of her desire, of her social status. The reader recalls that even Jacob apparently doing nothing – merely pondering – is highly expressive, as discussed in the chapter ‘Quoting Joseph’. All of this is part of the narrator’s efforts to tell the story faithfully and to let the reader know what really happened at the time. Therefore at this critical moment Mut’s experience must also have been expressed. These efforts at the realistic depiction even of the minutia of embodied experience are required by a historical imagination where the sources of life, and any possible originality, are located in life itself, in the immanent history of human experience.⁹⁸ The difficulty is that such efforts at the realistic depiction of life cannot ever exhaust its richness, and when they also become part of the historical past and source for the future, it is inevitable that they lose touch, to some degree, with the embodied life they purport to represent. Joseph and his family are the first in the tradition, which has come down to us as historical experience, to recognize their status as both progenitors and inheritors of tradition. Historical experience, on the cusp of the future and drawing on the past, is the locus of any possible originality, but when that same experience is itself past and become woven into the fabric of historical understanding, then that

potentiality, that subjective experience of risk and possibility is no longer apparent. This was no problem in a society organized by myth because the stories that articulate the meaning of life allow any deviations and innovations from convention to be attributed to divine intervention, to revelation, or to the workings of fate. The stories of myth transcend the human domain of experience and so the sources of life remain mysterious and always just out of reach of human understanding. But the tendency of historical interpretation to extend its understanding to as much of human experience as possible seems to work against including any kind of mystery in an immanent orientation to life's sources. Where could the sources of experience reside if when a moment is past it becomes fully interpreted into historical narratives and causal explanations? What freedom does the individual have if the entirety of experience is transparent to and mediated by public languages, especially given that earlier, in the chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire', the experience of the body was discounted as a reliable source of private experience, itself requiring interpretation. The same difficulty carries forward to the modern, historical, mode of experience, where public languages increasingly encroach on whatever individual privacy to which we attribute the possibility of originality.⁹⁹

The solution worked out by the narrator of *Joseph* is to suggest that the most realistic way to represent experience in language is to represent the experience of the potential of originality within the immanent account that brings experience into historical understanding, and this means that the interpretation of experience has limits and narration must include these limits within itself. Therefore, at the critical moment of decision, the narrator elects not to describe Mut's expression, only that one 'saw her bend low across the footstool that stood before the judge's chair and hide her brown in her consort's feet.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1037). It must be possible to narrate – that is, to interpret and bring to the understanding – experience in a way that realistically represents what it was like in the present; undecided, risky, ambiguous, potentially original, and everything else that people feel as subjective interiority. Interiority is a kind of private experience that, when it is inevitably expressed and slips into

the past, becomes the source of historical originality, while in its own present this interiority involves a degree of turning away from the visible, public sources of the self. Historical understanding depends on such narration of interiority, and because historical understanding is a moment of historical experience, the historical experience of originality depends on the possibility of the realistic narration of interiority.¹⁰⁰

A similar dynamic accompanies the present dissertation. If everything I say here in interpreting *Joseph and His Brothers* is to be verifiable by reference to the text, and along the way I have noted places where my thinking has followed paths indicated by other associated writings, then how is it possible for the present work to claim any originality? The answer to these is that *Joseph* elicits as many responses as there are readings, even as these interpretations gather into a coherent sense of the novel, and what is drawn out of the other writings that I have associated with my thinking is impossible to trace exactly. I had to ‘turn away’ from these other sources in order to make any progress in my own reading and writing. And that turn is ultimately idiosyncratic, arbitrary and inscrutable. Likewise, the possibility of originality in historical experience involves a kind of private turning away from the public languages that dominate the sense of the self and even threaten to dissolve it entirely.

The present chapter examines the narrator’s allowance of a moment of privacy to Mut in terms of the significance it holds in the establishment of the kind of individual interiority which is essential to the possibility of originality in historical experience. The central insight is that the importance of this briefest moment of privacy is only established by the kind of exhaustive detail and psychological discussion concerning Mut’s experience that the narrator carries on in the preceding two hundred pages. Only the detailed narration of her particular experience can concentrate the mysterious source of her interiority into this one sentence moment of privacy, and therefore establish Mut in full humanity in contrast with the tradition that cast her in and limited her to the role of seductress.¹⁰¹ Interiority is *not* inexpressible because everything, in *Joseph*, is potentially expressed. If there was anything that could

not be expressed and understood and narrated, if it were truly incomprehensible, it could not support originality. If everything can in principle be expressed and still interiority is not achieved by total transparency to narration, then moments of privacy must be understood as a narrative technique, and intentional. In practice narration cannot keep up with temporal experience, but the particular point at which narrative turns away from the complete disclosure of a character's experience must be understood as a tactic.

The implication of the interpretation of this episode for historical experience in general, in which one's self-understanding becomes identical with one's narrative overview of oneself, is that the possibility of original, personal historical experience depends on such moments of turning away from a total overview of the self, away from the total interpretation of the sources of the self, which is also to say, away from total self-interpretation.¹⁰²

Realism and the Narration of Experience

The story of the affair between Mut-em-enet and Joseph is one of the most famous elements of the Joseph story as it is told in Genesis. The stylistic concision of narration in Genesis means that human speech is usually abbreviated or excised, and that when it is included, it must be taken rather seriously, and so Mut's explicit and repeated proposition to Joseph in the Genesis account must attract notice.¹⁰³ The narrator knows that the effect of giving Mut-em-enet such explicit words is that they become identified with her character, until in the common account of the story 'seductress' becomes an epithet for 'Potiphar's wife'. Therefore in telling the story of the affair between Joseph and Mut-em-enet, the narrator simultaneously undertakes the project of recovering Mut-em-enet's reputation.

And it came to pass after these things, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said - The whole world knows what Mut-em-enet, Potiphar's titular consort, is supposed to have said after having "cast" her eyes upon Joseph, her husband's young overseer; and

we neither wish nor dare to deny that there finally came a day when, in utter confusion, in the highest fever of desperation, she did indeed speak precisely the blunt phrase of terrible directness that tradition has put in her mouth – words so abrupt and wanton in their explicitness as to suggest the proposal came quite naturally to her and at no personal cost ... (Mann, 2005, p. 815)

The next 200 pages are devoted to the story in direct repudiation of the tradition, based on the effect of the stylistic concision of Genesis, of understanding Mut as a seductress. Concision, abbreviation, abridgement and all of the tools of narrative style are demanded by any effort to narrate the events of life, and the narrator is fully aware of the difficulty that this poses to the stated purpose of *Joseph* as a whole, which is to tell ‘life just as it once told itself’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1209) and of the episode of this affair in particular, which is to set the record straight regarding Mut-em-enet’s reputation. The narrator is placed in a quandary: it is the concision of the Genesis account that gives the impression of Mut-em-enet as a seductress, but it is impossible to tell the story without *some* abbreviation: even 200 pages is really not enough to bring the episode fully to life. The tools which are at the disposal of the narrator with which her reputation can be recovered are the same ones that led to the problem in the first place. Therefore the narrator spends a great deal of *Joseph* discussing the particular quality of the truth depicted in the narration, and that the truth of life is not accessed by the accumulation of detail, not achieved by exhaustiveness. In a later digression, the narrator says as much:

Let there be no misunderstanding – we have nothing against deletion. It is beneficial and necessary, for in the long run it is completely impossible to tell life just as it once told itself. Where would that get us? It leads to infinity, overtaxes human capability. Whoever took that into his head would not only never finish the job, but also suffocate in its initial stages, entangled in a web of crazed accuracy. ...deletion plays an important an indispensable role. We prudently practice it at every step... (Mann, 2005, p. 1210)

This idea was first stated in the ‘Descent into Hell’ and reappears throughout the novel at various times, including when Joseph’s own reputation as a too-tough administrator of Egypt needs to be rescued in the section titled ‘The Rascal Servant’. There, the narrator blames the earliest accounts for starting poorly informed rumours that have circulated over these many years, frequently degenerating into slurs and slander. The primary blame for such misunderstandings ... rests – and there is no getting around the charge – on the earliest recorded version, which is so laconic that it cannot come close to the story as it originally told itself, that is, to reality as it once happened. (Mann, 2005, p. 1438)

In order to make any convincing recovery of Mut-em-enet’s reputation, and Joseph’s later on, the narrator is obliged to explain how the early instance in Genesis of narrative concision can be misleading if carelessly read, while the present instance of narrative concision – for the narrator admits that even a 1500 page retelling is an abbreviation – tells the truth. In both cases the only sources that exist are narrative. Therefore, why should one that is simply longer be more trustworthy? Could it not be that a more concise version, unadorned by extra detail, gets closer to the truth? In the preceding quotations the narrator makes it clear that the same tools of narrative can tell the truth or mislead, and that they must be used prudently. But in what does such prudence consist? How can a reader trust the account of one narrative over another? In any case, the reader has been reminded that *no* source and retelling is identical to reality, and that accuracy should not be confused with truth, because total accuracy is impossible and some degree of illusion is inevitable.

The differences between telling something *that* happened, *how* it happened, and ultimately *why* it happened provide the governing principles for the narrator’s claim to getting closer to the truth. There is no narration of life’s events that is entirely accurate, and so the narrator proposes to exploit these differences. Accounting for ‘why’ things happen is left to mystery, but the narrator argues that in the

difference between the ‘that’ and the ‘how’ lies the possibility of distinguishing a faithful from a misleading account:

...is not a discussion of the “how” as worth and important in life as the transmission of the “that”? Yes, is not life first truly fulfilled in the “how”? Yes, in every case life ‘must first tell itself – and indeed tell it in the kind of detail ... that lies beyond any narrator’s hope or prospects of attaining it. He is able only to approximate such detail by serving the “how” of life *more faithfully* than the lapidary spirit of the “that” has deigned to do. (Mann, 2005, p. 815, italics mine)

On this basis, the enlargement of the text of the story in *Joseph* as compared to the version in Genesis is not intended to convince the reader by an exhaustion of detail, as if at some point there is ‘enough’ detail to be deemed accurate, but to provide the story enough breathing room that it is possible to narrate ‘how’ things happened in a way that realistically depicts the interiority of the subjects in whose experience the story first unfolded. The experience of motivation, for example, is notoriously difficult to narrate in a realistic manner, because human motivations are always complex, often ambivalent, and often mysterious even to the one who acts, and it is this quality of experience in which originality becomes possible not by exhaustive self-interpretation but by the risk of decision out of the opacity of private interior experience even to oneself. Much of *Joseph’s* length is due to the diligence with which the narrator describes the conditions, the relations, the emotions, the causes and effects of actions, which all contribute to some character’s action. But even all of this narrative work cannot provide a total explanation for the motivations or experience of a character in a critical moment of decision, just like no amount of psychological explanation can make our own lived experience fully transparent to explanation. Just as we reserve a degree of privacy and even a degree of opacity to ourselves, so the realistic depiction of characters in narration must accord to them the same so that their personality and experience are not totally dissolved in the objectivity of narrative detail. After all, the facts are arrayed

against Mut. It is true ‘that’ she said those words to Joseph, and the only hope of recovering her reputation is by the narrator’s ability to both concede these facts and to find in them more than is readily apparent in order to propose an account of ‘how’ things happened that is more faithful to her actual experience.

Narrating Roles

The depiction of characters in *Joseph* depends on great expansion of the detail in which their lives are narrated.¹⁰⁴ What is so briefly told in Genesis is treated in much more detail in *Joseph*. There are times when a character receives ‘backstory’ supplementation, and it is tempting to attribute to these additions the work of lending characters interiority. In *Joseph* everything from faces to bodies to movements and clothes is expressive of a particular orientation towards life, and the expansion of descriptive details accompanied by narrative commentary on their expressive qualities can fill pages of narrating what in Genesis was conveyed in a single line. It is tempting to attribute the psychological realism of *Joseph* to these expansions of detail, and this is at least partly a mistake. It is not exhaustive detail that produces the effect of interiority required of psychological realism, because in fact there are minor characters who receive the same kind of detailed treatment without achieving convincing interiority. These minor characters are described as so completely as expressive of certain structures and patterns of meaning that their entire person appears to be transparent to those patterns. We don’t really read these characters as people as much as we do as the embodiment of the mythical roles they occupy and patterns they enact. Their coherence and legibility as characters depends on the mythical patterns they express more than any integration of individuality in which we recognize a common experience of personhood. Characters of this stock include Esau, Laban, the twin brothers Levi and Simeon, and others who are significant enough to receive detailed description, of both their physicality, of their words and actions, and even their thoughts.

Esau is depicted as proud, even in his fall, because everything that unfolded in his life, hard as it was ‘simply confirmed what was already so: that his character, that is, his role on earth, had been determined far in advance and that he had long been perfectly aware of both his character and its role.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 104) The unity of his character and role is given abundantly in physical descriptions as ‘hairy, reddish Esau’ (Mann, 2005, p. 105), and his ‘relations with the people of Seir’ (Mann, 2005, p. 108) led him to be identified with Edom and be called ‘The Red One’, or even simply ‘Edom’. All of this so fully determines his character so that even when Jacob cheats Esau we recognize in his sorrow and anger no original type of experience, but another moment in the role he plays in life. The reader’s understanding of Esau in mythical terms is re-enforced by Esau’s own self-conception in such terms. Thus the narrator contends that

In truth, no one was cheated, not even Esau. For if it is our ticklish task to tell of people who did not always know precisely who they were, and if Esau did not always know it all that exactly either, but at times took himself for the primal goat of the people of Seir, speaking of it in the first person, ... Certainly he wept and raged after he had been “cheated” and laid snares in his blessed brother’s path ... he did it all because it was part of his character’s role, and because in his piety he was perfectly aware that ... it had to happen according to an established archetype. (Mann, 2005, p. 160)

When the twins meet again, decades later, Esau continues to embody the role which has always been the essence of his character, and appeared to Jacob ‘to be the same natural lad from long ago, ... Even his face was not changed... Besides which, Esau was dancing. Pipe at his lips, a bow upon his back, and a tattered goatskin around his loins... a goatish musical oaf.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 114)¹⁰⁵ This example is sufficient to show how the elaboration of details of what is expressed in an individual life and what an individual even thinks about themselves does not supply the kind of interiority of experience that we modern readers associate with psychological realism or our own experience. But as the narrator

suggests, this is perhaps an artifact of the opaqueness of such characters to themselves when their self-conception rests so directly on their enactment of pre-existing roles.

Even the example of Joseph's twin brothers, Simeon and Levi, who take the stage several times in the tale do not, in their development, reveal any real interiority. They are never more or other than the violent twins who attacked Shechem, and only inhabit their roles more thoroughly until even at the end, in receiving their final blessing – or curse – from Jacob on his deathbed. They are always 'the twins', 'villains', and 'cursed'. Far from undermining their own sense of selfhood, they held their heads high, knowing that '...the outcast is a role like any other and had its own dignity. Any status is a status of honor – that was not just their opinion, but the view of everyone else as well.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1469) In all of these examples a kind of psychological realism of mythical experience is produced, but the framework of understanding human experience according to myth and role can only amplify the salience of the stereotypes associated with a given role.

The role of 'seductress' has been so firmly attached to Mut that no elaboration of the affair in the terms in which it is familiar will relieve her of that reputation. The bare facts of the proposition, refusal, and accusation stand against her. The narrator's work to recover Mut's reputation depends on locating in and through the facts a different view of the experience, reframing 'how' things happened without denying 'that' the affair proceeded as described in Genesis. This is accomplished by the narrative description of the experience of the unfolding of events in a way that is irreducible to the pattern which the affair seems to follow without contradicting that pattern.

Interiority as the Product and Condition of Historical Self-Understanding

Joseph narrates its characters according to myth and admits that everything of the mind and body that is articulated by myth contributes to the totality of what makes up one's identity, and still suggests that myth does not exhaust the experience of being a person. A final word is always

reserved.¹⁰⁶ In *Joseph*, the narration of events must not disregard the patterns of life ‘that’ appear, must not contravene the facts but treat them as the soil out of which, under the right conditions, new ways of experiencing and imagining personality emerged. In short, while the interiority of characters in *Joseph* does depend on the increase of detail according to which events are narrated, compared to their narration in Genesis, this increase also runs the risk of further entrenching the patterns and roles according to which these characters appear to us, because the characters understood themselves in this way. In order to depict characters who appear to us to have the kind of interiority of experience that we recognize as belonging to human individuality, it is necessary to depict characters who understood themselves as possessing a reserve of interiority that is accessed by public systems of meaning such as myth, but is not exhausted by that access of the understanding. In *Joseph* as in life today, there are people whose self-understanding begins and ends with the modes of understanding that depend entirely on public roles and systems of meaning and for whom anything unexpected must be integrated into those roles or denied, discarded, consigned to ignorance. But there are also those who understand themselves in terms of the capacity for the experience of interiority. *Joseph* can be read as the development, in the context of mythical self-understanding, of an experience of interiority that derives from understanding the sources of one’s experience as those same myths, but also from the experience of exceeding the meaning that those myths can articulate. In this mode of self-understanding, Joseph’s family channeled the surplus of individual experience into a tradition of articulating that surplus as the inheritance of a destiny and its realization in the future; this tactic has come down to us as the idea of history and the category of historical experience. To experience life in terms of history rather than myth is to understand oneself in terms of the comprehensible sources of one’s roles and also at the same time as not entirely transparent to or determined by those source. The coherence of this historical system of understanding holds because both present and past historical experience can exhibit this kind of private

interiority. To narrate interiority is to represent historical experience realistically, but also involves turning away from exhaustive detail and allow characters a degree of privacy.

The Turn from Understanding to Privacy

The depiction of the experience of interiority in *Joseph* is accomplished by allowing characters momentary privacy from narrative purview at critical moments such as when Mut hides her face when Joseph's sentence is pronounced by Potiphar.¹⁰⁷ In the mythical context of the novel, an un-narratable element of life is unthinkable. Everything is understood according to mythical patterns, including all the twists and turns of life. Ups and downs are part of the cycles of falling and rising that dominate much of the mythical landscape. Self-understanding, as in Esau's case and throughout, is understanding the role that one plays. When any difficulty in self-understanding arises, there is always another, larger myth that can accommodate one's experience.¹⁰⁸ Anything difficult to understand was simply not understood *yet*, and oracles and interpreters may be required. The idea of something basically un-narratable has no place in the mythical structure of experience. *Joseph* depicts a new way of understanding the narration of life, and it is in the principal characters of *Joseph* in whom 'a new history begins' (Mann, 2005, p. 7), which is of narrating experience in a way that becomes history. In this new mode of narrating life, what is not understood is not explained by recourse to myth, but is rendered as a surplus of personal experience that is expressed as the expectation of a *future* in which it all makes sense, is all fulfilled.

In its first iterations, the new mode of self-understanding that projected the ineradicable individuality of experience into the future rather than according it with existing modes of understanding was a defiant turn *against* self-understanding. Abram didn't know his destination when he set off from home in his restless dissatisfaction with existing ways of comprehending the world. He just had a vague sense of what he called 'God' to follow and only gained direction after starting out. Later, even

after the family tradition had a more developed notion of God and of the nature of ‘blessing’, when Jacob grieves Joseph he still struggles to reconcile personal grief and loss with stories according to which he understood his life, and would rather cherish his own suffering than explain it away. His desperate wish is that God himself could not see into him (Mann, 2005, 519); that he could experience something private that God himself could not access. It is only if Jacob can grieve as an individual and not as a ‘type’ that he can open up new possibilities for life that are not already written in the patterns of traditional grief, and Jacob realizes that this is only possible if his experience retains a degree of opacity – even to God. It is Jacob’s innovation in affliction that begins to develop the notion of ‘God’ as one with whom a personal relationship is possible, in contrast to the mythical context of an indifferent pantheon, and what is original in Jacob is the plea for privacy and for the imperfect access of knowledge to the self – even for God. When Joseph develops this further, so that the self is understood explicitly in terms of story and narration, as ‘reading oneself into God’s story’, then self-understanding begins to be identified with the narrative perspective, and eventually with a kind of ‘God’s eye view’ on oneself.¹⁰⁹ But when this all stems from guarding a degree of privacy even from God, then privacy from the narrative gaze is identical to the opacity of experience to the self. In other words, individual interiority of experience – everything that we have come to understand as the redoubt of the self, even the source of our freedoms – stems from a turn *away* from the kind of total self-understanding that is available in the publicly available patterns of meaning that in *Joseph* are depicted as myth. If life always challenges the best available understanding, if narrative always has some blind spots in relation to reality, then the experience of the historical individual concentrates those blind spots in the experience of particular people. Imagining a person capable of anything *original* thus depends on imagining that they have some inaccessible reserve of experience. Experiencing oneself as a historical individual capable of original expressions of life also depends on preserving in oneself some reserve of mystery. In *Joseph*, the highest degree of recognizable humanity, which is of individual experience *as*

individual, of personality rather than mere character, is given to those characters into whom even the narrator's insight does not fully extend. Mut is one of these characters, and although she does not enter into the history of God's story, and although her experience is ultimately recuperated in the consolations of mythical self-understanding rather than in Joseph's radically futural mode, she did, with Joseph, experience something really new.

The narrator's declared intention to recover Mut's reputation sets the goal of depicting Mut as caught up in a real and complex experience, of conflicting desires and of final desperation, rather than as simply playing the role of 'seductress'; of rendering her as a person, and not merely as a type. As a type, Mut was the occasion of Joseph's temptation and triumph, but as a person, she is a participant in the story. In a way, the believability of Joseph's character rests on the sense that his interactions are with real people, and so even though the reader's interest in Mut is ultimately secondary to the reader's interest in Joseph, hers is a realistic human experience. For Joseph's temptation to be real, the affair must be realistic, and this requires the humanity of both actors. In the 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire' it is demonstrated that Mut experiences a new *kind* of desire, conflict, crisis. The narrator knows that Joseph *was* seduced and that desire become perilously close to being acted upon, and that the affair was nearly acted out according to a familiar script. Had it been, it would have been a shallow, sordid, futile dead end marked in all likelihood by Joseph's death. Whatever possibility of original experience was being opened up through Joseph's crisis would have collapsed. It is important that this is a new kind of affair, one that had not been experienced before and is therefore basically incomprehensible to Mut and her circle of confidants, because in its irreducibility to pattern, the possibility of entering into the story of originality becomes possible.

Privacy in Proximity to Role

The possibility of original experience contained in the episode also depends not only on the inclusion of something unnarratable, but on its nearness to narratable pattern. Totally novel situations make so little sense that they leave no trace on experience. The affair was only charged with desire because it tracked so closely to comprehensible patterns, leaving very little space for the possibility of originality. Desire emerged in this affair because of its minimal difference from any comprehensible pattern. No matter how Mut and Joseph each tried to conceive of it, their situation could not quite be contained. This minimal difference from pattern led both individuals to recognize in their temptation not merely sordid urges but something more. For Mut, it was a totally new kind of experience, and was eventually recuperated into a new and deeper mode of living out her role in life. For Joseph, who developed new possibilities in language itself in order to deal with the situation, it took on world-historical significance. The possibility of originality rests in individuals who are extremely close to, yet not quite, living out pre-formed roles. The narrator emphasizes this, especially in dealing with Mut's experience, in the narration of the most intense dialogue between her and Joseph.

Just as Joseph was on the verge of squandering his sense of the future, of God, and his originality, so also Mut was on the verge of simply being yet another 'Woman' – that is, a type and not a person. For both individuals, the affair would have collapsed into convention if in any way they succumbed to their temptation. As the affair intensified Mut began to lose self-control and passed on her proposition to Joseph in the form of a note. Their next conversation is given in direct quotation rather than narration, as in a dramatic script, so that Joseph's speech is rendered as 'Joseph: _____' and hers as 'The Woman: _____'. The narrator knows that there is truth to the forms that pattern our experience, and that to deny them is false. Mut's reputation recovery must elaborate and intensify the model according to which she has been known for thousands of years: not as person, but as 'Woman', and even as the particular kind of 'Woman' – the woman whose role is the occasion of the man's sexual

experience: the ‘seductress’. Only through intensified examination of her experience in terms of *role* does it become possible to note the fleeting moments in which the truth of ‘how’ it happened, from her perspective, becomes apparent. The originality of their desire reaches its point of highest intensity when it is the closest to being acted upon, and releasing itself into the patterns of convention. If desire emerges as a field of tension between desiring subjects, it intensifies as the centres of subjectivity come ever closer to one another as each solidifies into mutually comprehensible roles and leaves ever diminishing space between them as for the expression of desire.

The entirety of *Joseph* argues in this way regarding various elements of the story. The model according to which desire emerges as the minimal space between subjects who tend towards collapsing into roles coincides with the model of historical originality as emerging from risking returning to patterns of sources, to stereotypes, to ignorance of the ugliness of the unexamined past, that is, risking a descent to hell. The past never firms up for historical investigation, and only by admitting that the particular shape of the past that it presents to the understanding is to a degree illusory is it possible to renew historical understanding as such. Likewise, as loath as the narrator is to trace the details of the affair between Mut and Joseph in terms of temptation and seduction, this is the only possible way to renew its meaning – or to recover its original meaning as it was lived out by Joseph and Mut – without simply making up an alternate history of events. Only in comprehensive elaboration of the model or pattern that it followed and almost collapsed into is it possible for the narrator to make the simple adjustment that revises *everything*.

What expression did the face of Mut-em-enet bear when Potiphar passed sentence on Joseph? To know it *fully* would be the same thing as knowing Mut entirely, and if we have really become as familiar with her as we feel like we have over the preceding two hundred pages, to know her final expression would mean to finally know her as a ‘type’. She would be a very nuanced and complex example of a type, but she would be merely ‘Woman’, or ‘Seductress’, nonetheless. Therefore at the

moment of decision, ‘One saw her bend low across the footstool that stood before the judge’s chair and hide her brow in her consort’s feet.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1037) After all the insight into her experience that the narrator has made the reader privilege to, Mut-em-enet hides her face. Those inclined to understand her experience in terms of some model will, like Potiphar himself, jump to conclusions. When she hides her face across his feet, he presumed that he understands her and says “‘No need to thank me, my friend,” he said. “I would be happy if I have succeeded in satisfying you in this affliction....”’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1037) Readers for thousands of years have also jumped to the conclusion that she was a seductress even though we fundamentally know nothing about ‘how’ the affair proceeded, a fact that the narrator renders by granting Mut-em-enet privacy at the critical moment that would have made her experience transparent to us. Regret, revenge, humiliation, sorrow, satisfaction could all have plausibly flickered across her brow in that moment, and the reader will never know.

To answer the charge that too much is made here of a single phrase in the two hundred page elaboration of the affair, it is important to point out that Mut’s own experience has been available to the narrator throughout, and that there is an example of her face, hidden from the view of others, being legible to the narrator. Once before Mut-em-enet had hidden her face, when, after arguing unsuccessfully with Potiphar to send Joseph away on certain pretenses but really in order to be released from the coils of impossible desire, ‘She turned her back on him and walked toward the columned archway. She paused there for a moment, holding several pleats of her robe in her hand, which she braced against one of the fragile pillars, her brow pressed to her hand, her face hidden in the gathered robe. There was no one to behold Mut’s face hidden behind its folds. Then she clapped her hands and left the hall.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 863) Something happened inside of Mut in this critical moment that was not witnessed by anyone, and in the next twenty pages the phenomenon of the inner ambivalence of desire is explored, so that the reader learns to avoid a too-quick conclusion about what expression her

face bore, which is to say, what she felt and thought, as Potiphar did in the example given previously.

Eventually the narrator lets the reader in on the secret expression:

No one beheld Mut-em-enet's face when, after struggling in vain with Petepre, her husband, for him to banish Joseph, she hid it in the folds of her garment as she leaned against a pillar. But there is good, indeed best reason to suppose that the face she concealed was beaming with joy, because now she might have to go on seeing the man who had awakened her and might not have to forget him. (Mann, 2005, p. 888)

In this passage, the narrator allows the reader to surmise, but not see, what is written on Mut's face. The narrator has not been shy about allowing the reader access to Mut's innermost, even conflicted, thoughts and feelings, in the very same chapter: 'Mut was enraptured...' (Mann, 2005, p. 890), 'She knew, and it frightened her to know....' (Mann, 2005, p. 890) 'Mindful, out of both pride and fear, of her beauty, she gazed at his...' (Mann, 2005, p. 891), 'In her proudly fearful self-awareness...' (Mann, 2005, p. 891). In this instance where the narrator only 'surmises' that Mut 'must have been' beaming with joy in her privacy, the narrator establishes a kind of differential access to her interiority between the reader and the narrator that renders her as a person with whom the reader shares a common humanity – and not as a character who, no matter how complex, is fully transparent to the reader can only ever be a 'type'. All of the preceding is the groundwork necessary for the effect of the final hiding of the face to be achieved. To have too quickly tried to render her experience as private would have made her appear even more as a narrative figment, a mere prop in the story. Opacity to narrative perspective renders a character realistic only to the degree that such opacity is restricted to the most critical junctures and is forestalled to the last moment. In the first hiding of the face, the narrator establishes her opacity in relation to other characters, and prepares the reader to understand the subsequent hiding of her face in terms of the ultimate privacy of her personal experience. To recognize

this kind of privacy in another person is to recognize their ultimate independence from ‘role’ or ‘type’, and so the narrator’s goal of recovering her reputation is complete.

Surviving the affair required both Mut and Joseph to risk everything. Mut had to turn away from rendering her experience as legible and from realizing her desires. She had to renounce their satisfaction, but gained the ‘sunken treasure’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1216) as it is later described, of a new depth and richness of mythically comprehensible experience. Joseph, for his part, risked everything as a test and refinement of his own place in God’s story, and in doing so managed to include even more of human experience – sexual desire – into the nascent historical imagination than had any of his forefathers.

The Story of Dinah

The story of the rape of Dinah is another significant example of allowing a character a moment of privacy that revises the reader’s grasp of the humanity of the story without denying any of its details. If the rape was the customarily ritualized ‘abduction’ (Mann, 2005, p. 137) marriage, an idea the narrator entertains, then it also required a ritualized revenge which in this case either got out of hand or was exaggerated in the retelling, perhaps in order to align with certain mythical and ritual patterns. Mann relates an episode whose victim – a young girl – has no voice in the version related in Genesis. Rather than a revisionary account that ‘tells it from her perspective’ – a doomed project if it were taken on – Mann is compelled by his fidelity to the source of the story in Genesis, and to the realistic depiction of that ancient world, to tell the story again, and again from the perspective of the men in Dinah’s life. His artistic merit shows here in being able to retell the story within the ancient, ritualized, patriarchal context in which it took place, from the same narrative perspective as the source material in Genesis, as the unfolding of ‘impersonal’ patterns, and yet to tell it as a story of victimization. This episode provides plenty of fodder for anyone wishing to criticize Mann for being a man writing about

women. For example, the linking of action with mythical pattern does have the effect, if not of gaining sympathy for the perpetrators of violence, of at least lending it some ‘dignity’. This episode becomes written into the characters of the twins, Simeon and Levi, eventually allowing them to hold their heads high. On his deathbed, Jacob curses the twins, identifies them with Castor and Pollux, and ‘they, along with the audience, were convinced that the outcast was a role like any other and had its own dignity.... Can one be cursed any more honorably than to be confused with the Dioscuri...?’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1469) To be sure, dignity by association with mythical violence is inconsistent with modern moral sensibilities. The criticism might be extended by showing how Mann’s elaboration of the mythical context of the violence reduces Dinah to a prop in the twins story rather than an agent of her own. However, to retell the story in a way that would rectify this problem would also fail to render the context of mythical consciousness in which it took place, and therefore also Dinah’s experience. Instead, the reader should note how Mann doubles down on exactly these difficult aspects of the story and, in intensifying the patterned and patriarchal character of the story, manages to make it obvious exactly who suffered here, and how. Mann ends the story with a chapter entitled ‘The Butchery’ in which the actual violence wrought by the twins on the city is described – but also Jacob’s dealings with the twins and with Dinah. When they return to camp to face Jacob, the brothers said:

Were we supposed to let our sister be dealt with like a harlot?’ Yes!’”, he cried, beside himself, horrifying them. “Better that than to endanger life and the promise. Are you with child?” he snapped at Dinah, cowering in her nothingness on the floor. “How can I know that?” she wailed. “The child shall not live,” he declared, and she wailed again.

More calmly he announced, “Israel shall now break camp....” (Mann, 2005, p. 145)

It is hard to see Jacob in a favourable light after this episode. Generally, in the novel, we take Jacob’s mythic sensibility as ennobling, but here, the abrupt shift from his own personal anger to the elevated language in which he speaks as and for ‘Israel’ gives it a cowardly aspect. After this ugly

exchange, the narrator describes the conclusion of the episode with a directness that is emphatic in this novel so often styled in elevated ideas about mythical resonance, performance, theatricality –

She was with child. The baby she brought into the world when her time came was left exposed, for so the men had decided. She herself grieved and withered away before her time. At fifteen her unhappy little face was that of an old woman. (Mann, 2005, p. 146)

That Mann emphasizes that the decision belonged to the men and closes the entire chapter with these comments alerts the reader to the butchery that is most of interest to the novelist. This episode makes it clear exactly on whom the myth resolves – onto real individual lives that are marked by suffering. In this case, as in many others, it was the women who suffered. The reader is never given access to Dinah's inner experience in order to augment her minor role in the traditional narrative, or to tell a different story of what happened, and yet by elaborating the traditional narrative to such a degree that her humanity inevitably becomes obvious as the victim of the story, her full humanity is established and gains the reader's sympathy. This technique is similar to that which previously established the interiority of the character Mut-em-enet.

Conclusion

Rendering interiority of experience depends on reserving some privacy for a character even from the purview of the narrator. The degree to which a character is realistic depends on the detail according to which that character is narrated, which is also to say, the degree to which that character is rendered in terms of role or type or model. In *Joseph*, the level of detail according to which characters are made intelligible means that *everything* is expressive, from words to actions to faces and expressions. Such detail can only conform to the expectations associated with roles in order to contribute to understanding, which entails the reduction of everything we associate with originality – agency, novelty, and so on. But this exhaustive-seeming level of detail is balanced by the ultimate

privacy of individual experience, so that any possible ‘originality’ is concentrated in a very narrow scope of reserve – critical moments of human experience that we associate with decision or acts of the will. In *Joseph* this scope is so minute that the narrator muses on the implication with the question: ‘Does action come from our will or does not will first reveal itself in action instead?’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1020) ‘Balance’ is perhaps not the best word to describe the twin narrative impulses in *Joseph* that pull in one direction towards exhaustive detailing and the limiting of the possibility of original individual experience and in the other towards the ultimate inscrutability of life. In the case of Mut and Joseph’s affair, the narrator is ‘dismayed at the grudging brevity of an account that does so little justice to life’s bitter and exacting particularity as our source does here, and seldom have we been more acutely aware than in this instance of how unfair laconic abridgement is to truth.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 815) and so proceeds to an extremely detailed account of the affair. But that detailed account adds details to events ‘that’ happened, which would only have reinforced a reader’s sense of the ‘roles’ of the characters’, and a version of ‘how’ they happened, which allows us to recognize the characters in their humanity, is achieved by limiting the access of the more detailed account at precisely the moments of critical inner decision.

When self-understanding comes to be understood on the model of narration, the inner experience of the historical individual – wherein resides any possibility of originality – depends on exactly the same kind of moments of opacity. To understand one’s experience in terms of history is to render it in the same kind of novelistic narrative form according to which *Joseph’s* narrator allowed the principal characters to imagine their own experience in terms of a historical, rather than mythical, sense of time. Just as the narrator was obliged to relinquish total access to Mut’s experience in order to lend her interiority, so we must turn away from the goal of total access to our own sources in order to achieve an experience in which individual originality is possible. To understand oneself still requires the articulation of experience in terms of material necessity and the functions of the roles in which we

find ourselves, but the possibility of original historical experience depends on our ability to read these in such detail that we really do get to know ourselves richly and realistically but also at critical moments to forego self-interrogation, to turn away from a search for causes, and admit a degree of opacity to the self.¹¹⁰ The possibility of originality depends on the power of the historical imagination (and its narrative resources) to offer us detailed and realistic insight into the conditions of our own experience, which includes its ultimate inscrutability.

Dreaming, Reading, Writing

The first dream in *Joseph* occurs early on, in the chapter ‘At the Well’ when Joseph is just seventeen, and in it the reader can already discern the central tension regarding dreams in Joseph, which is that they betray a dependence on waking life even as they are taken to be received from outside the domain of human experience, from God. This basic tension is developed through the rest of the novel until the mature Joseph, who has become an interpreter of other people’s dreams, understands them both as entirely legible in the languages of waking life and also as the mysterious infusion of whatever is new and original in those languages. In this chapter, the generalization of dreams and their interpretation to a general hermeneutic for temporal life becomes the basis for the kind of expectancy that is characteristic of historical experience, and a certain dreaminess becomes proper to thinking about a life in time. The implication of this work for the method of this dissertation is that the work of reading *Joseph* and responding to it in writing entails a process similar to that of the way that Joseph interprets dreams. The latter part of this chapter deals explicitly with this issue of how the interpretation of dreams informs the method of reading and writing that this dissertation pursues.

At the well, Joseph tells Jacob that it will rain. He has been listening ‘to what is both within and without...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 86) and notes the brightness of the moon, the direction of the wind and the smell of something in the air over the pastures and meadows, all as signs that ‘the Lord ordained that it should be watered from the heavens ... just as I beheld them in my dream as I lay sleeping beneath the oracle tree yesterday.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 86) Joseph assures his father that ‘my lord can be confident and certain in the matter of quenching waters’ (Mann, 2005, p. 87), news that Jacob receives gladly and responds to by announcing sacrifices and a burnt offering ‘so that it may turn out as you say’ (Mann, 2005, p. 87). Both the evidence of the senses and the corroboration in dream are understood as the source of insight here, but they are also distinguished. Dreaming can be looked on with suspicion, and Jacob admonishes Joseph to ‘not tell just anyone that you dream beneath the tree ... for they might take

offense at your talent.’, to which Joseph replies with brash confidence that ‘when reason demands it, I can most certainly master my tongue.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 87) Finally as father and son continue to talk, Jacob sets out the structure of the relation between dreaming and reason as it is introduced and developed throughout the novel.¹¹¹ Jacob tells the family story of their descent from Abel, and Isaak, each of whom dreamed,

And that is why we have both reason and dreams which two are a great delight. For it is precious to possess wisdom and words, so that one understands to speak and to reply and to name all things. And it is equally precious to be a fool before the Lord, so that one may stumble all unawares upon the place that binds heaven and earth, and be given to know in a sleep the purposes of His counsel and to interpret dreams and visions, as far as they indicate what will happen from moon to moon. (Mann, 2005, p. 88)

While dreams and reason are explicitly opposed here, nonetheless in the immediately preceding example, Joseph’s waking reasoning and his dreams are in concert. As the reader discovers throughout the novel, this simultaneous interdependence and distinction is characteristic of dreams and their interpretation. The way that characters dream and make sense of their dreams, and the way that the narrator discusses the issue all turn around on this apparent difficulty. This chapter explores how the novel treats the relationship between dreams and their interpretation, which, after offering Jacob’s explicit opposition of the two, come to be understood as mutually interdependent in Joseph’s life. On the theory of dreams that Joseph promulgates later on, the apparent opposition between dreams and what is understood by day is actually an opportunity for education, in which dreams and their interpretation draw out of each other the possibility of originality according to an historical sense of time. Dream interpretation becomes the relation of language to its sources, which are never exhausted, and so furnishes the possibility of originality.

If there was an activity of the mind that was totally independent from reason, it would be so incomprehensible that it could not be arranged at all into the symbols or narrative forms with which we tell dreams. And without their being told and brought into some degree of sympathy with waking thought then they certainly cannot have anything to do with the way that we understand the shape of time, or, in the language of the characters of the novel, with the meaning of God's plans. It is unclear how dreams so divorced from reason could even be remembered in the morning, told to oneself or anyone else. Dreams, despite Jacob's opposing them to reason, cannot be totally unreasonable. His objection can only be that he could not integrate his own dreams into the language of the plan of God to give his family a future that he was struggling to work out. It is an interesting feature of *Joseph* that Jacob's famous dreams are related by the narrator; Jacob never tells them to anyone else. They are significant, but impossible for Jacob to articulate into his nascent historical sense, apart from the bare fact of their significance and divine origins. By contrast, the reader hears about Joseph's dreams as he himself recounts them. For us modern readers to make sense of Jacob's suspicion of dreams, it is necessary to recognize how he accepted dreams as indicating the shape of God's otherwise inscrutable thought, and therefore not being entirely foolish and formless, and that the difficulty of dreams is not that they lack meaning but that they are excessively meaningful, beyond what can be understood by day. In dreaming Joseph expresses the talents that are both his downfall and the salvation of his family; his downfall in moments of pride and his elevation when he accepts them as the occasion and source for self-development. The originality of Joseph's self-development, unique among his family and his surroundings in Egypt, is at least in part instigated by dreams, which he learned to interpret in terms of the language of expectancy, the language of the future out of which developed the historical sense of time. The reader of *Joseph* notes that out of the education of the dreamer is produced a more general hermeneutic – historical, novelistic – that contains within itself the tension between sense and nonsense that always makes interpretation a risk, but also fuels the continual possibility of historical originality.

The Dreams of Jacob

Jacob dreams of ‘the umbilical cord between heaven and earth’ (Mann, 2005, p. 109) as a stairway trafficked in heavenly beings. Upon waking he laughs at the plight he finds himself in, sleeping on the ground with his head on a rock, having been chased and robbed by his nephew, the son of Esau, whom Jacob has just tricked out of their father Isaac’s blessing. Jacob has been ‘brought low’ but is heartened by the dream and sets up his headstone as an altar, anoints it with oil, and names it Beth-El, a place of the Presence. But he does not interpret the dream and tells it to no one because he takes the meaning of the dream to *have been dreamed*, not having any clearly interpretable meaning. It is that God has chosen to draw close to Jacob that makes him shudder, strengthens him, and draws out a promise of faithfulness. For Jacob, the meaning of dreaming is that it is a proximity to God and not that it contains any specific symbolic message.

Earlier in his life, Jacob’s dreams would remain isolated from his thoughts by day, if he even remembered them. There is an episode just prior to his wedding night, the night in which Jacob will be tricked into marrying Leah, the older sister of Rachel to whom he is betrothed, which brings Jacob dreams of meeting a boy with the head of a dog whom he recognizes as Anup, or Anubis, guide to the underworld. The god relates the story of his own conception ‘with the wrong wife’ as a mythical antecedent to what is about to happen to Jacob, and one might think that such a dream would give Jacob pause enough to suspect Laban’s motivations and notice the opportunity for a trick. But Jacob does not. ‘The dream of Anubis, the jackal, was soon erased from his mind. ... The only part of the dream that remained in his soul for a while was a forgiving sadness...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 235)

Late in his life, Jacob has made some advances in dreaming. On his way down to Egypt to meet Joseph again, the family passes by the place where Joseph had dreamed under the oracle tree, by the well, and Jacob calls to make camp for three nights, and teaches and dreams under the same tree. The first two nights he did not dream, but the third ‘...brought the dream that had been the purpose of his

sleep and whose consolation and strength he sorely needed.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1419) Jacob still does not dream in order to interpret but to recover after having by day, year after year, struggled to reconcile his understanding of God and of the world. Jacob had always been incredibly sensitive to the contradictions inherent to a faith in a future promised by a God who works through very earthly means which are otherwise prohibited. Jacob fears that God has cancelled the covenant as a result of his family’s going down to Egypt and abandoning His ways. On the other hand, it is by means of this descent that the family is saved and continues into the future promised by God. Jacob exhausts himself with these thoughts and needs sleep to let his guard down and to dream. At one point, this dreaming produces a nighttime of wrestling in which he earns a new name for himself, ‘Israel’, which is his identity in the historical mode and joins his individuality to the particular blessing of his people, past and future. This ‘dream’ is so active that it appears to be a concrete event that leaves him with a limp, and yet while Jacob’s new name organizes the way he understands his place in time, his dreams remain apart from the ponderous consideration of ‘his stories’ that weigh him down by day.

Now, later in life, Jacob still does not interpret, but has a better sense that dreams do have an essential connection to waking life and that the dreamer has a role to play. Finally now, Jacob dreams not merely of the divine which stands in opposition to waking life, but of the opposing tendencies towards God and towards his own family that imbue his entire life, both day and night. He knows that dreaming is not merely a passive experience but an activity that risks the meeting of opposing tendencies in his life, and that in the dream lies the possibility of reconciling them.

At the end of his life Jacob continued to draw strength from his still-inscrutable dreams. In his old age, on his way down to Egypt, Jacob ‘slept so that he might learn’ the ‘intimately ambiguous message’ that ‘might mean that his son, a mighty man of the world, would protect and care for him, but also that his favorite would one day close his eyes in death – a dream that the dreamer had long since not dared to dream.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1419) At this point in his life, Jacob finally ‘dared to dream it,

dream both messages ...' (Mann, 2005, p. 1419) and to recognize that his perennial struggle to reconcile the arbitrariness of his passions with the universality of his divine calling still indicated, even though he could never resolve it, the direction and possibility of its future development through Joseph.

Young Joseph the Dreamer

For young Joseph, dreaming is from the start bound up with its interpretation, and one way to view his life of dreaming is as an apprenticeship in the interpretation of dreams. From the first, Joseph knew that dreams were a special kind of vision upon waking life, and that making sense of them was intimately if mysteriously connected with the reasoning that made sense of reality by day. The first example given above testifies to the naturalness with which he accepted into the understanding both dreams and the observations made in real time as complementary. But he also knew that dreams were not interchangeable for thought and that Jacob would look sternly on the irrationality of such a confusion. The cultivation of his talent for dreams and their interpretation required Joseph to learn prudence, tact, patience and everything that is required to weave mysterious anticipations into the fabric of waking life. In his youth, and in the experience of all those for whom dreaming opposed reason, interpretation is fraught with danger for the simple reason that what is given in dreams necessarily confound waking reason and so, rushing in, one either gets it wrong and stumbles in life, or gets it right without heeding the possible dark sides of what is given. In either case, it is the apparent opposition of the structure of dreams is with that of the language of waking reason that must be overcome in order to advance in the interpretation of dreams. Eventually, it is only by restructuring the language of time that what is given in dreams can be reconciled with life, even if only in a newly imagined future of possibility. At this stage in his career, Joseph too-confidently enjoys his dreams and their vital link with waking reason without understanding the danger that such confidence entails. The narrator comments that:

It is almost impossible to tell about dreams and put them into words, because a dream is far less about its narratable substance and almost completely about its aroma and aura, its ineffable meaning, that sense of horror or happiness – or both – pervading it, the effects of which often fill the dreamer’s soul for long afterward. Dreams play a decisive role in our story – its hero dreamed grand and childish dreams, and there will be others yet who will also dream. But in what predicaments they all landed by trying to share with others some rough sense of that inner experience, how unsatisfactory for them were the results of every such attempt. One need only recall Joseph’s dream about the sun, moon, and stars and how incoherently the helpless dreamer imparted it. (Mann, 2005, p. 830)

This is one of the pair of dreams that stoked the jealousy and anger of Joseph’s older brothers. Between this and Joseph’s traipsing to the fields of their labour adorned in the famously decorated coat which was both a symbol of Jacob’s favouritism and, because it was totally unsuitable for labour, of Joseph’s conceit that he has been sent to supervise his older brothers, it is no wonder that he ended up at the bottom of a dry well. Even the reader, putting aside for a moment natural sympathy with the story’s hero, is annoyed at Joseph.

Here we arrive at the first indication of the hermeneutic relation between dreams and their interpretation, which is that dreams receive their first interpretation in their telling, and without that telling they are incapable of exerting any influence on waking life, apart from the kind of vague spiritual resolve that Jacob drew from them. Indeed, Joseph’s first theory of dreams indicates the direction his future development will take when he tells his brothers that ‘...the dreamer should never interpret, but rather someone else’ (Mann, 2005, p. 411), which is to say that the meaning of a dream depends on it being expressed in language, which is public and shared, and its urgency or novelty depends on its utterly private first experience. This theory covers for his wish to relate the dream to his

brothers and is a mark of his youthful narcissism, but it will never be completely discarded, only developed. And so his oldest brother Ruben watches him fall asleep one evening in the fields.

The sleeper was turned toward him – and his was not a calm face. The brow, the eyelids twitched, and the slack mouth moved as if to speak. ... Joseph awakened and sat up. “I have had a dream,” he said, looking around at his brothers and smiling in amazement.

(Mann, 2005, p. 410)

Joseph is about to tell his dream, but how can dreams be told? If they are made fully comprehensible to the waking mind, their strange origins in the night, when the dreamer thinks without thinking and seems to receive something that the ancients attributed to the divine, would be betrayed. Neither can they be related as so utterly strange that the right words cannot be found, without simply being described as inchoate and confused half-insomnia, or anxious tossing and turning. The best teller of dreams gives them the least ready-made meaning in the most recognizable symbolic and narrative guise. In other words, to tell a dream perfectly well gives linguistic form to the experience of what cannot be fully understood in language. It is no wonder that the immature Joseph struggles to relate the dream and that he errs in the telling towards a completely self-serving story to those whose role in the dream is subservient. Joseph and his contemporaries understood the workings of the sleeping mind, unmoored from the logical necessities of the day, to be a surplus of meaning given by a divine revelation that exceeds the human capacity to comprehend. One must learn to tell dreams, or to exercise discretion when dreaming would disturb things, as did Jacob, who never tells his dreams to anyone despite recognizing their significance.

Joseph dimly knows that his dream needs to be told to be made sense of, and that its specific content has something to do with things that will happen in life. In this Joseph’s dreaming differs from Jacob’s. In his youth, so blinded by his own self-regard that he expects the brothers, for whom the very announcement of the dream is yet another instance of Joseph’s showing off, will want to share in the

amazement of the dream. Joseph was surprised then, after telling his brothers the dream ‘that the experience of satisfying their curiosity had evidently not brought them unalloyed pleasure.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 419) Of course it was Joseph who wanted to tell: “‘Don’t you want to hear about my dream?’” Joseph asked. No one responded.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 410) Joseph kept pestering them and they kept trying to shut him up until finally, when they could not stop him from telling his dream, they ended up angrily arguing about how boastful the whole thing obviously was and thus doing the work of dream-interpretation that they had tried so stoutly to refuse.

As he struggles to tell the dream in a form where it makes sense, Joseph is, without realizing it, already making its first interpretation. No wonder he stumbles into the familiar languages of sibling rivalry. He will learn that the interpretation of dreams requires prudence and caution. Rushing brashly to conclusions before sounding the dream for its hidden sense merely repeats and solidifies what is already known. False interpretation only repeats the languages with which reality is fortified against the unknown. Joseph needed to learn that the reason why someone else should interpret the dream is that a good interpreter is one whose command of language and grasp of reality is such that they can articulate the dream into public language *better than the dreamer*.

Joseph the Interpreter of Dreams

Joseph’s later career as an interpreter of dreams has deep roots in his childhood when Jacob instilled in him respect for reason. When Joseph describes his own theory of dream interpretation by saying that ‘Interpretation is clear and intelligible, not some *aulasaukaulala*’” (Mann, 2005, p. 1157) he recalls, with the term to mimic the sound of babbling, Jacob’s revulsion by those who rejected ‘God given reason..’ in favour of

Nakedness, chanting circles of dancers, festal gluttony, worship as fornication with temple women, the cult of Sheol, and “Aulasaukaulala” and vile oracular seizures – that was

Canaan, it all belonged together, it was all the same thing, and it was folly in Jacob's eyes.

(Mann, 2005, p. 337)

In his youth, Joseph couldn't help slipping into a vague dreaminess that came too close to all of this, in Jacob's eyes, especially when Joseph associated the body, beauty and understanding the ways of the divine, because Jacob knew that reason driven by the body's desires could never seek beyond the objects of its desire and would result in the kind of ecstatic rites by which one submerged the self into natural and divine rhythms, out of which nothing new could emerge. Joseph's maturation traces a path from one whose intelligence and heritage of learning was continually undermined by his self-regard rooted in a sense of his own beauty. Early on, Jacob worries that Joseph's '...proclivity for raptures of less than a model sort had been allied with nakedness, that is, with abandonment, that is with Baal and Sheol, with an enchantment with death and netherworldly unreason..' (Mann, 2005, p. 338) indicated an 'instability and diminishment' (Mann, 2005, p. 338) of the family's great tradition of dreams and visions. His own 'grandest dreams had been respectable and tempered.' (Mann, 2005, p. 338) But despite Jacob's concern, he still saw something true in Joseph's dreams; that 'Joseph's dreams could stand the precise discipline of what was letter-perfect and reasonable – it might prove a blessing for firming up his instability, and as an educated man he would bear no resemblance to horned men running about naked and foaming at the mouth.' (Mann, 2005, p. 338) It is Joseph's course of education, his 'methodical practice in the word and literacy under skilled tutelage' (Mann, 2005, p. 338) with the old family servant, Eliezer, that led Joseph to Pharaoh's court. Of course, his teacher knows the old ways, the old stories, and can be counted on to teach Joseph something that will fortify his mind, but will not be able to show him the way to anything really new. It is Joseph's pleasure in the lessons, as described in the chapter 'Writing and Good Enough Reading', that initiates him on a long career of self-cultivation out of which his innovations in the interpretations of dreams originate.

There are two scenes of dream interpretation that lead to Joseph's being raised above all Egypt as the right hand man of the Pharaoh, and the first anticipates the second. While Joseph is in prison after the affair with Potiphar's wife, he was introduced to a pair of new prisoners, the royal butler and the royal baker. Both dream, and having heard that Joseph is also a dreamer, ask him to interpret theirs. Joseph agrees, and the baker begins haltingly, complaining that '...I must do my best to pull myself together to find the right words for my dream and not take its life by telling it. ... and alas, we know too well how once a dream is wrapped in words it is only just a mummy.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1103) Joseph remembers this experience from the difficulties that he has had in relating his own dreams, but now he knows that this experience comes from the fact that the first telling of the dream is not the dream itself, but its first interpretation. Based on what he knows about the provenance of these prisoners, their demeanour, and the rumours that have trickled in about a conspiracy against Pharaoh's life, Joseph could make a pretty good guess about the meaning of the dreams even before they told them. Sure enough, when each tells the dream that indicates their guilt or innocence in the conspiracy, Joseph is able to pick a specific day in the near future when both will be raised up out of prison; one raised back to his former office, and the other raised on a gibbet. Joseph knows the feast days, that Pharaoh's birthday approaches in three days, and that there could be no more auspicious time to deal with the plotters. From Joseph's perspective, a great deal of the interpretation has already occurred even before the dream has been told; for the butler and the baker, the dreams express the fears and confusions that prevent them from understanding their plight and fate.

In *Joseph*, the interpretation of dreams is not some magical insight into the future, but a careful reading of life by one who is more perspicacious than the dreamer and more skilled in articulating mysterious sources of life into the language of understanding. In a kind of partnership, the dreamer provides the materials out of which the interpreter weaves an original way of understanding life. Indeed, the most apparently magical element of Joseph's interpretation in this case is his assertion to

the butler that although he will be restored to Pharaoh's table, and despite his astonishment at the fulfillment of the interpretation, he will nonetheless forget all about Joseph who will remain in prison, but even this is not magic, but a good guess based on astute psychological insight that turns out to be correct. Only two years later does the butler in a shameful recollection bring Joseph to mind and suggest his services to Pharaoh once again after the failure of all the wise men and magicians of the court to make heads or tails of a pair of disturbing dreams.

This second scene of interpretation in *Joseph* is dominated by discussions about interpretation itself, for Pharaoh is a sensitive thinker and is already frustrated by the failure of all of 'his dreadfully frightened prophets bunglers and ignoramuses' (Mann, 2005, p. 1139) in whose attempts at interpretation he sees only their own confusions, their fear of being wrong, and their ambition expressed as unctuous flattery. Pharaoh is amenable to Joseph's views on interpretation, and has even made some initial progress in a similar vein based on his strange experience of dreaming 'a dream so eloquent and immediate' (Mann, 2005, p. 1132) that it seems to be 'crying out for interpretation' (Mann, 2005, p. 1132) and yet being disappointed by all attempts at interpretation. The story is so familiar to us modern readers that we may miss the strangeness of the situation, which is that Pharaoh is at the same time unable to understand his own dream, but perfectly capable of recognizing false interpretations. Mann has the narrator linger here on a theoretical dialogue between Joseph and Pharaoh which presents several of the tensions in dream interpretation for the reader's consideration. What should be made of the apparent tension between the immediacy and the eloquence of a dream? As far as the understanding goes, eloquence suggests the mediation of language and symbol, and anything thus articulated into sense can no longer be immediate. There is the notable objection that when language itself is taken to be the phenomenon of concern, say in poetry or some forms of narrative, at least as much as that which is ostensibly describes, then immediacy (of the language, not of its object) and eloquence go hand in hand. In the case of the Pharaoh's dreams, this apparent tension forces us to

consider the reality of dreams to be the language in which they appear. If we think of translating them *into* words, we have already mistaken them for something prior to language instead of the linguistic expression of something mysterious. The strange reality of his dreams bothered the Pharaoh who wished to ‘find out if what he had beheld could be put into words’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1132).

Pharaoh’s difficulty is that he, like the baker previously, struggled to put the dreams into words that in their experience were so clear.

The dreams had still been fresh, natural, and impressive by night; by day and put into words they looked like poorly prepared mummies with distorted faces – one couldn’t be seen in their company. He was ashamed and finished his story only with some effort.

(Mann, 2005, p. 1137)

Part of the clarity of his dreams was the royal nature of the dreams which Joseph also recognized immediately and discussed with the Pharaoh as a way to present himself in humility. The narrator lets the reader in on this insight before Pharaoh tells the dream to anyone by describing these dreams in specifically royal terms: ‘A king could not put up with such dreams – although, on the other hand, they could only have come to a king.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1133) That these dreams are therefore ‘crying out for interpretation’ simultaneously means that they already have sense – as royal dreams, to do with the fate of the kingdom – and that they still escape the understanding. Pharaoh fears that to dream such dreams without having them interpreted would mean to leave them to ‘interpret themselves without hindrance, by which he meant were to be fulfilled and take the shape of the reality of which they had been only the prophetic disguise.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1135) In other words, because the dreams are shaped by and express something about real life, to leave them uninterpreted means allowing whatever is going on in life to unfold without any intervention, allowing them, ‘barring any preventative measures, to realize their own sad fulfillment’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1141). Pharaoh senses that the possibility of agency depends on interpreting the dreams, of bringing into awareness what one already somehow obscurely knows.

Pharaoh's insight is that even dreams which escape understanding still have to do with real life, and that it is only the problem of understanding them that gives them their strange appearance. Further, that the vital channel between waking sense and dreams runs both ways, and that one only dreams when one's living experience exceeds the capability of waking language to understand it. Therefore, whether it is the body or some aspect of the mind that knows something that remains obscure, it is in dreams that this strange knowledge is encountered. Indeed, it is the temporal urgency of the body that supplies ever new mysteries to the mind as was suggested in the chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire'. This being the case, Pharaoh knows that the dream and its interpretation are part of the same articulation of mystery into the sense of life, and that while interpretation necessarily escapes the dreamer alone, yet only the dreamer can vouch for the truth of the interpretation. Pharaoh knows that 'dream and interpretation must recognize one another' (Mann, 2005, p. 1141), so that the dreamer can vouch for the truth of an interpretation that he could not have made on his own. Joseph knows, from the interpreter's side of things, that dreaming and interpretation imply one another in both directions, and that while waking life is not sufficient to fully explain dream content, as the narrator suggests when relating Joseph's youthful dreams that 'It is in no way an explanation for the source of dreams to note that viewing the scene of heaven's hosts before sleep may well have shaped and influenced his dreams.' (Mann, 2005, p. 418) There is a degree to which the mysterious source of dreams exceeds any full explanation, but it is enough that an interpreter is sensitive to the various 'influences' on a dream that an interpretation can be attempted. Joseph interprets dreams based on their telling, which is their first clumsy interpretation, and on everything else that he reads in the life and world of the dreamer. The interpreter has no special access to the dreams. It is the interpreter's awareness of the gaps, inconsistencies, and seams of the dreamer's account, which always include more than the telling of the dream, that allows insight into the content of dreams. Everything that the interpreter relies on is also available to the dreamer, but remains unarticulated by the dreamer into consciousness. In other words,

we might rephrase the narrator's earlier comment to suggest that interpretation is in no way an explanation of dreams, but it is the kind of insight that can astonish a dreamer and allow understanding and responsible agency where before there was only mystery and fate. In other words, dreams and their interpretation are aspects of the same occasion of originality out of which new language emerges, propelled by the basic mystery of life.

Interpretation, Education, and the Temporal Imagination

Though Pharaoh was one 'to whom this was apparent' (Mann, 2005, p. 1141), referring to the insights concerning interpretation discussed above, Joseph was the one able to express all of this in words, as when he had explained to the butler, those years earlier, that

It may well be that there is a wholeness to dreaming, that it is a circle to which both the dream and its interpretation belong and that dreamer and interpreter only seem to be two entirely separate things ... Whoever dreams interprets as well, and he who would interpret must first have dreamt. ... by nature every man is the interpreter of his own dream and so has his dream interpreted only for the sake of elegance. .. I wish to reveal to you the secret behind our dreaming: the interpretation precedes the dream and what we dream issues from the interpretation. How else could it be that a person knows perfectly well if an interpretation is false and cries out: "Begone, you bungler! I want a different interpreter, one who will tell me the truth." (Mann, 2005, p. 1103)

Mann also agrees with the unity of dreamer and interpreter, even titling the section in which Pharaoh recounts his dream 'Pharaoh Prophecies'. Joseph's job as interpreter is to reveal for Pharaoh the interpretation that is already latent in the telling of his dream. The difference in their facility with the language of dream interpretation, despite their mutual sympathy of perspective on the matter, places Joseph and Pharaoh in exactly the kind of pedagogical relation on which interpretation depends. One

aspect of the problem of theorizing education as posed at the beginning of this dissertation is that the individuals involved cannot be definitively separated into the role of ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’. Dreams and their interpretation provide an example of the way that meaning only emerges in dialogue between dreamer and interpreter; neither individual alone can express the meaning of the dream. When Pharaoh and his counsellors did not see eye to eye on what the process of interpretation was really about, interpretation was impossible. If Pharaoh was as equally articulate about dream interpretation as Joseph, then he probably would have dreamed differently and in any case Joseph would have been unable to interpret. As it is, Joseph still has a notion about the nexus of language, symbol and time that Pharaoh does not and that is the key to the success of interpretation in this case. When Joseph has interpreted, Pharaoh admits that ‘I find it hard to understand how it could have remained obscure to me until this hour.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1171) What has been revealed to Pharaoh with new obviousness is not some hidden meaning to his dreams, but a new way of describing them in language which allows more of them to be revealed to thought and available to guide action. The language of dream interpretation only proceeds between the two subjects – the dreamer and the interpreter. The potential for dream interpretation to renew language and make originality possible cannot exist without both. Neither dreamer nor interpreter has sole authority over what is produced in dream interpretation.¹¹²

The difficulty faced by the dreamers in *Joseph* of telling their dreams comes from the challenge of translating symbolic meaning into the world of words, which is the world of time. Joseph knew this by the time of his encounter with Pharaoh, citing the ‘inadequacy of words, which belong to time and can only deal with one thing after the other, unlike images which enjoy the luxury of being side by side.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1173) In the experience of dreaming, image-content has the luxury of remaining symbolic and exceeding what one is capable of articulating into meaningful words by day. The source of this excess will always remain mysterious simply because it has to do with a life in time that always proceeds in advance of the sense we make of it, with the result that we always ‘know’, in a fashion,

more than we can ever say in language. Pharaoh already knows everything that Joseph tells him, which is what allows him to recognize and affirm Joseph's interpretation, but he cannot say it on his own. In fact, in the interpretation Joseph leads Pharaoh to fill in the details in a chapter called 'Pharaoh Prophecies'. Joseph begins by declaiming to Pharaoh that

“Your servant is capable of no more than offering him in prophecy what he already knows. Did you not see the cows climbing up out of the flood, one after the other in single file, hot on each other's heels, first the fat ones, then the lean, with no break in their rank, but all in one line? What rises out of the vessel of eternity, one after the other, not side by side, but in single file, with no gap between what is departing and arriving, with no break in rank?” “Years!” Amenhotep cried, thrusting his fingers forward and snapping them. (Mann, 2005, p. 1170)

The symbolic content of his dreams is an artifact of his inability to articulate that which he already 'knows' – in the body, in the unconscious, by divine revelation, or however else we wish to imagine it – into consciousness. In their symbolic form they are suggestive but ultimately confound. Pharaoh's dreams require the interpretation into words in order to support the direction of action in the real world, but this he cannot do on his own.

On their own, without the work of interpretation, dream symbols ignore laws of reality, as when skinny cows gobble up fat ones and skinny sheaves of wheat gobble up fat ones, or form a closed loop, as in the image of Jacob's ladder where one imagines the most fantastic escalator of cherubim, seraphim and the rest of the angelic menagerie ascending and descending for eternity. In neither case can these moving images gain any purchase on the necessities of temporal reality. The best we can do is enlarge the loops to such a degree that an entire scope of life can be fit within so that the peripeteia of life can always be included in imaginary cycles and epicycles of recurrence; cycles which in *Joseph* are called 'myth', and which are capable of cohering entire lives. Pharaoh thought keenly all about these

things, and so dreamed dreams that cried out for a different kind of interpretation. Pharaoh's dreams resisted being resolved into the kind of cyclical symbols that are so prevalent when considering time as flowing from a source, as the reader of *Joseph* has become familiar with in terms, for example, of the symbol of the well, which is both source and destination of the ups and downs of life. Pharaoh's cows all came in a row and Joseph's nascent historical sense of time allowed him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph succeeds where others failed because he did not pour the content of Pharaoh's dreams into pre-existing moulds of the mind, but noted precisely their originality and singularity as royal dreams of historic import. Joseph's success is to retell what Pharaoh 'already knew' in a language adequate to historical agency; a language of prudence, expectation and foresight that was until then foreign to the Egyptian cast of mind. The effort to make such ideas understandable to Pharaoh enlarged Joseph's language at the same time. The dreamer and interpreter need each other and together provide the source of originality. The dreamer and the interpreter depend on each other produce the language in which ever-new mysteries can be articulated into an original sense of life and which supports historical agency, which is to act in and not merely to suffer the unfolding of temporal life. When interpretation clothes mystery in language, the mind is allowed to participate in the mysterious. To do so, interpretation cannot be completely based on the kind of reasonableness that characterizes clear thought by daytime, but must carry something of the first experience of the dream in it, as Joseph did in telling and beginning to make sense of his dreams as a youth: 'Joseph usually told this dream with his eyes closed and in a low voice that could suddenly burst into fervor' (Mann, 2005, p. 371), in a first interpretation that was also a kind of performance of the experience of dreaming. What can this mean but that interpretation as a waking endeavour must also retain something dreamlike about it, in order not to divorce itself from its own sources?

The Convergence of Dreams and Reality

The mode of interpretation elaborated and practiced by Joseph depends on marshalling all of life – the body, the past, reason, wit, sleep, wakefulness – in service of the imagination of possibility. In dreams, Joseph believes that there is a glimpse of a future that is not yet comprehensible, and that their interpretation is the occasion in which language is propelled forward to that future. The interpretation of dreams is a resolutely immanent project for Joseph, who, despite attributing dreams and their fulfillment to God, understood the task of interpretation to be the careful reading of *all* of life without recourse to any arcane knowledge, inspiration, or privileged skill. All the wayward strands of necessity that escape our notice and still bind us to the sources of our lives reveal themselves in dreams and are, in interpretation, braided into a vision of a future of possibility. As an interpreter, Joseph does not play the oracle. In fact, it is to the dreamer, to Pharaoh, that prophecy is attributed which we readers come to understand as reading mundane life, in its totality, at the risk of noticing where the languages in which life makes sense fall short. In this risk lies the promised future of possibility. Whereas in the common, chronological, sense of the time, dreaming was understood as an infusion of the divine into reality, for Joseph, dreaming and interpretation converge with reality as a temporal project that opens up the possibility of historical time. All these conclusions derive from Joseph's career as an interpreter, with the implication that this convergence of dreams and reality characterizes the kind of historical imagination opened up for those of us downstream in time from Joseph. His younger brother Benjamin, who was his first willing partner in dream interpretation when they were both young – their relationship was depicted by the narrator in their telling of and listening to dreams in the chapter 'Joseph and Benjamin' – provides a first example of the kind of 'dreaminess' that characterizes the intuition of the potential for originality in historical experience.

Benjamin's experience just prior to the revelation of Joseph's identity and the reconciliation of the brothers attests to the tendency of Joseph's notion of dreams and their interpretation to converge in

real lived time and to produce a whole new vision of temporal life. Here, at the climax of the whole story, ‘They were here, his brothers in Jacob, reemerging out of time – his murderers because of dreams, led to him here by dreams, and *all of it like a dream.*’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1306, italics mine). Joseph can hardly believe how things are unfolding, and his brothers are all totally bewildered by their being summoned by the overseer of Egypt and accused of espionage on their innocent journey to buy grain in the midst of famine. Benjamin, not among the accused, but required, by this ‘overseer’, to be presented in Egypt by his brothers, senses something in the strange unfolding of their journey to Egypt that he cannot express, and that the others, wrapped in their own preoccupations and their silent guilt that grew in their proximity to Egypt, miss.

Banished within Benjamin’s heart, which he almost hoped would burst, that cry [of recognition] was not really present, was only an unrealized cry with no unified object to name... This unrealized cry filling his heart had no choice but to dissolve into confused and crazy dreams by night. But when morning came and it had solidified again into its oppressive semi-existence... (Mann, 2005, p. 1361)

Benjamin’s intuitions of his real life situation are dreamlike, and cry out for articulation into sense just as Pharaoh’s dreams are intuitions about his real life situation and cry out for interpretation. In both cases, dreamlike experience takes for its content the various and mysterious elements of reality. Dreaming in *Joseph* has always been the expression of movement towards a future that does not yet exist by one whose waking language does not suffice to articulate it. The dream is the mystery of life, of the unimaginable possibility of the future, clothed in the best language and symbol that the dreamer already grasps, until interpretation suddenly illuminates it and the dreamer, like Pharaoh, realizes for the first time what they already knew in the dream.

Until then, Benjamin cries out to himself that “‘It is time for a cry that does not yet exist, and we simply cannot return to our father with this cry in our hearts and go on living as before, not when

the cry is on the verge of entering the world, of filling the whole world. ...” (Mann, 2005, p. 1361) For Benjamin, everything is changed *in advance* of the arrival of the future made clear by Joseph’s self-revelation. Benjamin’s dreamlike expectancy then makes a difference in concrete temporal life, for instead of plodding on, Benjamin insists to Ruben, the eldest, and then the others, that they must go back to Egypt however strange might be their fate. Expectation actually changes the course of events and allows what Benjamin could not understand, his ‘imprisoned cry’, itself to form another source of what will be to come. In this way, Benjamin’s dream-like expectancy actually helps to bring about that which he did not yet know how to believe. Benjamin’s was a heart that was close to belief, and this faith brings in the future.

Whereas previously dreams would unsettle waking life and interpretation would be required to recover confidence in the dreamer’s sense of reality, here waking life itself takes on the sense of nameless anticipation, of inarticulate expectancy. Waking life becomes dreamlike when a future is anticipated that requires for its realization the development of a whole new language. In the hindsight offered in the moment of Joseph’s declaration that ‘It is I. I truly am your brother Joseph.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1377), Benjamin’s imprisoned cry is instantly understood to be the cry of recognition, and a whole new reality opens up. The brothers are terrified and bicker, unable to understand that Joseph’s revelation of himself is an offer of freedom from the cycles of guilt and sacrifice to which they are accustomed. Yes, the image of the well has been central to the sense of justice according to which this family operates. Joseph was cast down into a well and rose up. The brothers expect their own downfall in retribution. But while they can only think of cycles of being cast down and raised up, Joseph has developed a new way of understanding the ups and downs of life. Yes, he had been cast down, into the pit by his brothers and later also by Potiphar, but he had been raised up not just to repeat the cycle, but ‘incomprehensibly and apparently quite unjustly called to higher service’ (Mann, 2005, p. 740). Joseph reassures them: ‘Do not quarrel... for God has turned it all to the right.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1380) and ‘It

all had to be this way, and God did it, not you.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1378) With these words Joseph opens to the brothers a view of the stories of their lives which, elsewhere in *Joseph*, are described as interpolations into ‘God’s story’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1324). This view makes the historical mode of expectancy possible for them too, who according to their habitual search for patterns by which to recognize the shape of their own lives, could only previously have played the roles of villains and now are reconciled to their brother, and to the future of their family in Egypt, safe from the famine.

Dreaminess and Historical Thinking

Joseph’s idea is that dreams are already part of the whole of life. Dreams express that surplus of individual life that extends beyond the limits of what discursive language can articulate in understanding. Asleep, language unmoored by necessity continues to speak and reveals the gaps and seams where in waking life the understanding is insufficient to reality. Upon waking, the dreamer thinks and speaks, and as the dream is realized in the language of the world, in a first telling that accords to the grammar of comprehensibility, their immediate experience fades into the background of interpretation. In this way, the dream, if it takes any form at all and is not simply immediately forgotten nighttime noise in the mind, is an artifact of the limits of what is understood by day.

Joseph’s notion of interpretation is that their interpretation is the articulation of that surplus, not into total comprehensibility, but into a language according to which time is imagined differently and includes a future of possibility. A faithful interpretation must elaborate not only the telling of the dream into the understanding, which means to read the dream as part of the totality of the dreamer’s life and so to tell it better than the dreamer could, but also the dreaminess by which it reveals the process of language stitching over the unknowable. False interpretation fixes the dream entirely into meaning, ossifies and kills it. When Pharaoh told his dreams to his advisors, he already felt their power slipping away. ‘The dreams had still been fresh, natural, and impressive by night; by day and put into words

they looked like poorly prepared mummies with distorted faces... He was ashamed and finished his story only with some effort.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1137) Why did this interpretation fail? Because when Pharaoh 'asked if what his wise men had told him was found in their books .. [and].. they replied that their presentation was a sound combination of what was in their books and deductions derived from their own joint efforts, he sprang from his chair and ... called his dreadfully frightened prophets bunglers and ignoramuses.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1139) Their false interpretation was instantly recognizable because it derived from sources external to the dream and to Pharaoh's life as a whole. When Joseph leads Pharaoh to the right interpretation by weaving together Pharaoh's dreams with the sense of his waking life, it all belonged together so obviously that Pharaoh declared that 'I find it hard to understand how it could have remained obscure to me until this hour.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1171) Interpretation therefore can initiate the dreamer into a new relation to one's own sources of experience in the past, in the body, in the wayward activity of the mind at night.

The implication of this model of dream interpretation for a general hermeneutic of historical experience is that the project of thinking clearly and soberly about life, refusing as magical thinking the notion of 'divine revelation', still depends on a certain dreaminess, that is, on a certain sense of life beyond what narrative or discursive language can contain, for its success. Such dreaminess is a kind of experience that is meaningful beyond what narrated, discursive language can contain but is not altogether incomprehensible. Dreaminess is a living experience that exceeds the capacities of language without being totally distinct from it. It serves as the source of originality in language where meaning is generated and renewed not only within conscious, discursive or narrative languages, but in the interplay between language and the wildness of dreamy experience. This challenges the notion that life can be totally colonized by languages of the understanding. The persistence of dreams belies the suitability of the grammar of understanding to encompass all of life. Joseph's notion of dreams and their interpretation depends on recognizing dreams as symptomatic of the form of language that organizes

waking life. Their interpretation is essentially a pedagogical endeavour that brings people together in language that mutually draws out in one another original expressions of life that are impossible from within the confines of one's own subjective and conscious grasp of language. To step outside of one's own linguistic facility allows a view of how living experience exceeds its articulation in consciousness; only this view from outside, like that accessible to those who enter into the dialogue of dreaming and interpretation, can perceive the gaps and seams which attest to this excess. In dreams one is faced with the unknowable, but in dream interpretation the sense of one's life and language develops in cooperation with another person who helps to articulate more into one's sense of life than one is capable of alone.

The Turn from Dream to Meaning in Interpretation

Whereas in the ancient past organized by a mythical sense of time any originality was credited to divine inspiration, often experienced in dreams, the modern reluctance to ascribe the sense of life to the divine leads us to locate its sources in the rich store of human experience that comes to us from the past, from the experience of the body, and yes, also still from dreams. In each case, the modern conception of time as historical means that all those sources, including dreams, must be interpreted as part of history itself. If dreams are historical in some way, then all historical understanding requires a degree of turning away from its own sources. After all, one must stop dreaming in order to wake up and start thinking clearly about anything, including historical research and interpretation.

The interpretation of dreams always involves leaving the dream itself behind. By the light of day, the dream is either forgotten, or takes a shape in the telling that is never identical with its first experience. Once a dream is told, it is hard to tell it again any differently; it takes shape in its first interpretation. When Pharaoh finally gets to Joseph, 'he painstakingly told his now stale visions for the sixth time' (Mann, 2005, p. 1167). False interpretation mummifies a dream, but even a valid

interpretation stabilizes it. Interpretation answers to, but cannot master its source in the dream, and always involves a turn away from the dream-source towards the stability of the kind of meaning that can be articulated into reasonable language by day. The interpretation stabilizes the dream without having exhausted it. In this, the interpretation of dreams is analogous to the kind of reading of *Joseph* that is pursued here. The present dissertation does not exhaust my experience of reading the novel, and certainly does not preclude other readings and interpretations. However, as it develops, the memory and sense of the novel that I have has stabilized into the form expressed in the writing of this dissertation. Unlike a dream, which cannot be revisited, I can continually re-read and revisit *Joseph*, but still find that my interpretation, while always subject to nuance and increasing complexity and detail, stabilizes in its main sense. Reading *Joseph* is an education in the experience of reading and requires for its realization some degree of turning away from exhaustive interpretation and towards the expression of its central sense. There is nothing in the experience of reading that itself signals its completion, and it is the turn away from the reading towards writing meaningfully about the novel that stabilizes the particular sense of the experience of reading. If I had turned away from the reading towards a different writing project perhaps the particular sense I have of the novel would have stabilized in a different, but compatible, sense.¹¹³

People tend to dream the same kinds of dreams as one other, and the same kinds of dreams throughout a life. We all know about dreams of going back to school, of flying, and so on. Both *Joseph's* and *Pharaoh's* significant dreams came in pairs; the baker and the butler were a pair in similar straits and dreamed corresponding dreams. If people turn towards the same patterns of understanding their lives by day, then it is no wonder that their dreams stabilize in similar ways. This first step of interpretation, which is to wake up, stop dreaming, and remember and tell the dream, sets the course for the conclusions reached but also gives shape to the dream itself, to the source of interpretation. *Joseph's* originality is that he goes beyond the conventional interpretations that simply repeat familiar patterns of

life and produces those that are flexible, playful, innovative. The result of interpreting dreams with a new language and set of guiding concerns is that it becomes possible to dream new dreams, and dream in new ways. It opens up new spaces of contact between language and its sources, which become less distinctly separated by the difference between wakeful thought and the activity of the sleeping mind. Benjamin's example shows that to locate the source of language within waking life, which is also to say, within language itself, means that the interpretation of waking life in immanent historical terms becomes analogous to the way that Joseph interpreted dreams. The latter part of the present chapter pursues the idea that reading and writing are analogous to dreaming and interpretation in that both generate originality by bringing language into contact with its sources, and that both proceed not by language's mastery of its own sources, which is impossible, but by an initial turn away from mastery towards original expressions of life. This analogue becomes a model for the interpretation of historical experience as such, consistent with, but developed further than, the first statement of the historical dilemma at the beginning of the novel, in the 'Descent into Hell', which is that either we accept conditional beginnings, knowing that they are conditional, or we are drawn into an abyss of the past.

The result of everything argued so far in this chapter is that the interpretation of historical experience, like the operations of originality in language itself, is most realistic when it works somewhere between what is clearly comprehensible and conventional, and sources that exceed all mastery. In this regard, the realistic understanding of historical experience is analogous to the interpretation of dreams, and realistic historical interpretation retains something dreamy about it. To pursue this kind of historical understanding of life does not diminish the facticity of temporal life but fringes it with the possibility of originality.

Joseph's interpretation of dreams becomes the witty appreciation and playful participation in the 'holy game' of life.¹¹⁴ To think about dream interpretation in terms of reading establishes a link between dreams and making sense of historical experience. Just as in the kind of reading described in

this dissertation depends on an attitude of careful attention and interpretation as well as the kind of enjoyment that motivates both the pleasure of the reading and the desire to respond, so the interpretation of dreams is both an analytic project and a kind of playful orientation towards the future. The similarity between the kind of reading that has been described along the way of the present reading of *Joseph*, the interpretation of dreams, and making sense of historical life is that in each case the source or origin is inexhaustible; the desiring subject both interprets and turns away from interpretation towards future response, and that these processes all take place within pedagogical relationships. One learns to read with someone more skilled; one's desires emerge as a field of tension between subjects and their potential for originality derives from dialogue between different languages for making sense of that experience, and the interpretation of dreams requires both participants in the ways described in this chapter. The 'holy game' of historical life oriented towards originality shares these features. To make sense of it requires not only strict interpretation of its sources in the past, but the desire to live forward, into the future. Originality is the enlivening of historical experience that is possible when interpreting historical experience reveals the gaps and fissures of the conscious understanding of life and develops new language that encompasses ever more of life and its sources. In this it is the same as Joseph's interpretation of dreams, which works by discovering the limitations of the dreamer's understanding of their life and their dream, and suggesting language that also encompasses the dream in the overall understanding of life. This is the kind of realistic gaze requires the relaxation of openness to experience that eludes us in the traffic of daily life or the intensity of focussed thought.

Joseph was capable of more of this sense of reality than most of us are. Sometimes it makes him seem strange, too self-assured for our readerly sympathies. There are moments in the novel where the narrator admits to being 'annoyed with Joseph' (Mann, 2005, p. 9) and these occur at times when it is difficult to tell whether Joseph is still childish and selfish or if he has a better grasp of things than we can make sense of. Joseph was able to sustain a gaze into the abyss of the sources of the self far beyond

what most people can manage precisely because he maintained the dreaminess of his gaze in real life, towards the real past, in a way that is opposed to the way that historical understanding wants to master the past.

Reading and Writing

Joseph and *Joseph*, both character and novel, show how this kind of dreamy-realistic gaze can develop, and the work of this dissertation is to learn it from the novel, and reproduce it on the levels of both content and method. This dissertation both talks about and exemplifies an education in how to view experience according to the language of originality. The education of such a gaze is an education in the hermeneutics of possibility, of faith, of openness to originality. It depends on being able to discern the sources of language within language itself. In other words, just as to learn how to interpret dreams is to develop public language in making sense of what to the dreamer is mysterious, so all of historical experience participates in this pedagogical dynamic where the gaps and seams and incongruities in one's use of language that indicate the superfluity of private experience to the understanding become apparent in public dialogue, and in their interpretation open new possibilities for life and enrich public language at the same time. To develop this interpretive model is in this chapter to learn how to read. What has been discussed concerning reading thus far in this dissertation indicates it as a good fit, especially concerning how no reading exhausts its source, and eventually turns towards response, in writing or in living. Developing this understanding of reading further at this point will add what has been learned about the kind of 'dreaminess' of the attitude of the interpreter of historical life to understanding reading. To do so, this chapter examines the relation between the model of dream interpretation developed so far and the theories and examples of reading that are found in especially the later parts of *Joseph*.

In *Joseph*, reading is the interpretation of the *surplus* of meaning that in every expression of life exceeds the capability of language to render in meaningful form. Every expression of life contains more than can be articulated into existing structures of meaning. The method of the present dissertation admits that the interpretation pursued here is in no way exhaustive and that a reading of *Joseph* – or any text – contains more than can be articulated into a coherent interpretation, and the present chapter generalizes from the specific process of reading a text – exemplified in the present work and also by some episodes within the novel – a notion of reading as the model of historical interpretation. *Joseph* as a whole illustrates Mann’s expansive reading of the Genesis story, of his own historical and political context, and the history of the ancient Near East, elaborating more than is apparent to a cursory reader of the same.¹¹⁵ The resulting richness of the novel elicits in its own readers an experience that exceeds what can be reflected in their own responses.¹¹⁶ In other words, the present chapter explores further what it means to read, and generalizes that process to that of making sense of historical life.¹¹⁷

In the ‘little cosmos of our story’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1438), to use the words the narrator uses to describe *Joseph*, itself part of larger spheres of storytelling and experience, including the ‘invention of God, this beautiful story of Joseph and his Brothers’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1492), there is a microcosm, a section entitled ‘The Rascal Servant’, in which just such a model of reading and writing that informs the present notion of originality appears in concentrated form. In it the reader is given a model of reading and writing that draws out more between the lines than is apparent to less perspicacious reader, and this richer reading depends on a flexibility of mind, sharpness of wit and enjoyment of a joke that escapes the sober, stern reader who only seeks to integrate a text into existing frames of meaning, just as the interpreter of dreams who takes them too seriously can only moralize and miss the point that is readily apparent to the one who interprets with a smile.

The Rascal Servant

Late in the novel the narrator interrupts the story in order to do a little bit of reputation recovery for Joseph who has been censured by ‘modern political moralists’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1441) for having exploited his position of power: reducing the people of Egypt to slavery, forcibly relocating them from their homes, and kidnapping the youth from neighbouring nations. ““To that land,” the lament was, and still is, heard, “are gone their sons, their daughters, and the wooden furnishings of their houses.”” (Mann, 2005, p. 1447) To be sure, these criticisms stem from the same story, as told in Genesis, that the narrator is elaborating. The narrator admits that the censure of Joseph’s behaviour, while often ‘degenerating into slurs and slander’ yet ‘rests – and there is no getting round the charge – on the earliest recorded version’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1438). But within that version there can also be found justification for dropping the charges against Joseph, because that version ‘is so laconic that it cannot come close to the story as it originally told itself.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1438) To counter the accusations against Joseph, the narrator must first admit that they have some basis, but that the earliest sources don’t do justice to Joseph, and that to read the story carefully will reveal Joseph’s innocence. What a claim! These are, remember, the earliest sources. One might contest a given source based on its own sources, but the earliest sources have none that have come down to us. Therefore, the audacious claim that the Genesis story does not ‘come close’ to the truly original version, which is life itself, can only be defended by reading that earliest source even better. If Joseph’s reputation for atrocious mismanagement is based on the earliest available sources, then the recovery of his reputation depends on reading that earliest source better than it has been read, indeed, better than it has *lent itself to be read*. Like Joseph’s dream interpretation, which reads the dream in its telling better than the dreamer who tells it, the narrator here reads the story better than it tells itself.¹¹⁸ After all, the ‘factual statements of the text stand firm and unshakeable’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1441) and they can be read – or misread, if the narrator’s efforts here are successful – as evidence of Joseph’s mismanagement of Egypt. There is no

escaping the facts, and there is no earlier source to which an appeal can be made, but the narrator proceeds confidently, arguing that an attentive reading of the text will reveal the seams and gaps through which more is expressed than what is explicitly said. Here again, the narrator relies on the same logic that was invoked in recovering Mut-em-enet's reputation earlier, which distinguishes between telling 'that' things happened, and the 'how', which is where re-telling the past tries to get things right, and 'why' they occurred, which always remains a mystery. The narrator suggests, concerning retelling the past faithfully, that a narrator 'is able only to approximate such detail by serving the "how" of life more faithfully than the lapidary spirit of the "that" has deigned to do' (Mann, 2005, p. 815).

Nothing magical or special is required here in the same way that there was no magic in Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams. In fact it was the magicians who were dismissed as bunglers because they could not see beyond their own notions to the truth of things. Likewise, while the fixed ideas of moralistic readings of this ancient text can grasp the basic facts of events 'that' occurred, they cannot get beyond the surface of the text to see 'how' things really occurred. To do so requires one to read carefully, to be 'well versed in its style and able to read between the lines.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1440) To re-iterate, there is nothing external or prior to this earliest source that can explain its inconsistencies or qualify the evidence that has been used to accuse Joseph, but by refusing to come too quickly to a conclusion, the narrator sustains a reading that generates a whole new view of Joseph.

This is how the narrator conceives of these efforts. A single example is worth quoting at length to give some idea of how the narrator goes about this mode of reading. Concerning the Genesis account,

That report's relationship to its own original version, that is, to the story that told itself as it happened, is hinted at by certain rough and yet utterly comical turns of phrase that sound like the remnants of some popular farce through which the character of the original

event still glimmers. When, for instance, the starving come to Joseph crying: “Give us bread! Why should we die before your eyes? Our money is gone” – a very rudimentary manner of speech found nowhere else in the Pentateuch – Joseph answers in the same style, that is, in these words: “Here! Give me your cattle! I will give you food in exchange.” Pharaoh’s great marketeer did not, it goes without saying, deal with one in that tone of voice. But these turns of phrase sound very much like a recollection of the people’s mood as they experience these events... (Mann, 2005, p. 1440)

The features of this quotation that are of note for the present reading are numerous. The first is that the narration of events is simply a later version of their original experience, and that events already have the shape of narrative as they unfold in reality. This idea is repeated numerous times, in slightly different formulations throughout *Joseph*, particularly in its later parts, and particularly in the narrator’s comments on the process of narration. My own commentary that associates practices of reading and writing with the experience of everyday life at several points draws its inspiration and support from this conception of the relation between narrative and life. For the purposes of the present argument, this means that life already has a narrative form in its first experience. While its narrative form is essential to its being experienced, life also always exceeds the way it is articulated into experience by narrative language.¹¹⁹ Rather than understanding reading as decoding meaning from a closed and self-sufficient text, here there will always be more to ‘read between the lines’ than is at first apparent to a reader and even to its own author. The narrator is justified then, in ‘reading between the lines’, by the surplus of life that expresses itself in the incompletions, the gaps, the inconsistencies of the text. Of course, this is not a warrant to say something that contradicts the text, as if the text is *wrong* about its own sources; just that there is *more* to the sources than a later version can express, but that express themselves anyway.

The narrator knows that getting to the truth of what ‘really happened’ cannot rest only in listing the facts that happened, but the sense of why they happened and so with a keen sense of the style of the original notices the incongruity of the tone of the dialogue between Joseph and the people with the rest of the text. It is striking because such dialogue is otherwise absent not only from the Joseph story but from the Pentateuch as a whole, and also because it is somewhat unrealistic. The ‘rough and utterly comical turns of phrase’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1440) would not be appropriate in a dialogue between people of such disparate stations. Who would dare approach the office of power with insolence, and what leader would respond in so casual and immediate a style? The narrator interprets this as indicating the reality of the mood more than the factual occurrence of any specific words – a mood in which the ‘universal admiration’ and ‘mythical popularity’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1438) of Joseph’s administration had an element of comedy and which was also expressed in ‘a great deal of laughter – admiring laughter – at how Joseph, by coolly exploiting every rise in price when dealing with the great and rich, .. making Pharaoh a man of gold.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1439) They appreciated these tricks, of course, because ‘Hand in hand with this, however, went the free distribution of grain among the starving commonfolk of the cities...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1438) The narrator’s interpretation of Joseph as a well-admired ‘rascal servant’, as the title of the section goes, depends not on explaining away the black and white words of the earliest version, but by reading them carefully to notice first their incongruity with the rest of the story, and with how such a situation would play out in real life. There are no earlier or outside sources appealed to in order to discredit the accusations against Joseph; only common sense and a sustained reading of how that earliest source actually functions.¹²⁰

In ‘The Rascal Servant’, the narrator provides for the reader an explicit example of the kind of reading that gets to the truth of how things really happened, without recourse to outside sources or methodical criteria. In this, the method of the present dissertation to do the same receives justification and a course of instruction.

The Private Sources of Originality

Who can say what the narrator's experience of reading the original Genesis account was like? How far can such a question be entertained, given the non-identity of the narrator and Mann as author? Any comments on the quality of that reading, whose privacy is guarded by being first wrapped in the guise of an imagined author, can only be made on the basis of again 'reading between the lines' of what is written in the text of *Joseph*. The method of the present dissertation as the interpretation of a reading of *Joseph* receives its confirmation in the model of reading and writing presented here. The argument of this dissertation is simultaneously an interpretation of *Joseph* and an experiment in a method of reading derived from *Joseph* and this dual activity is perhaps most salient in the present chapter. The unity of this dual activity depends on and implies the idea that the private sources of reading are inseparable from their public expression. Even if the experience of reading remains fundamentally private, the text being read can also be read by others, with the result that one's reading can be contested. This contestability of reading disciplines the dynamic of original interpretation and safeguards it from any claims to truth that derive from privileged and private access to that truth, however seductive such claims are. But a readerly approach to the private sources of originality suggested here also means allowing more of life to influence the understanding than purely conventional systems of understanding allow. The savvy and cautiously open-minded reader will better understand a rich text, and, by analogy, historical experience, than the one who reads from redoubts of certainty, like Pharaoh's bunglers, or rushes in brashly, like the young Joseph. The education of Joseph as a reader in the course of the novel demonstrates how the formation of his private sources of experience is identical with the innovations that he made in public languages of interpreting temporal experience, and the present dissertation participates in the same kind of engagement with its own sources with a similar orientation towards originality.

Dreamlike Reading

Reading shares the same kind of freedom that characterizes dreams. In both, something utterly private is experienced in public languages, but free from the necessities that allow public languages to be a vehicle of shared meaning. In dreams, images and activities confound the kind of physical, temporal, or conventional limits that by daytime form them into coherent symbols and stories; in reading, the reader experiences all kind of associations and emotions through the engagement with a text that do not always conform to the grammar of meaning according to which the text is written and discussed. The experience of reading has the same kind of immediacy as that of dreaming, and the same waywardness. In fact, reading often slips into daydreaming, and so it is not even the degree of consciousness that provides a strong distinction between reading and dreaming. The salient difference between them is that reading, unlike dreaming, is occasioned by a fixed text. We can only guess what elicits dreams, but the text being read is public. The text being read, publicly available, is the occasion of the dream-like state of reading, which remains private. The reader pauses in certain places, re-reads lines, skips passages, dozes off and is distracted. Reading is an inescapably idiosyncratic experience that not even the reader can fully account for.¹²¹

In the dreaminess of reading, the reader can turn outward to the world, ideas, memories, etc., so completely that the text itself seems unimportant. Perhaps the text in such cases is only a sliver of what is being 'read' and serves as a precursor or catalyst of the 'reading' of one's life as a whole. The kind of daydreaming that begins by reading can be deeply satisfying and can gather one's life back into oneself but is very difficult to integrate into any form of public accounting. Sometimes it just leads one to live slightly differently in ways that one has only an indistinct sense of. In the dreaminess of reading the reader can also turn inward towards the text itself and gain a sense of the text's own links to the totality of life and traditions of writing. In this kind of reading things are clear. The text makes sense. Ideas and emotions impress themselves as the reader takes the role of audience, and even begins to oscillate

between receptivity and the imagination of the writer in anticipation of an audience of readers. The reader can jump between parts, between attending to the whole and to its parts, can register emotional responses, in a participatory freedom that allows the hidden springs of the text to reveal themselves.¹²² The reader begins to read ‘between the lines’ in the experience of absorption in what is written in black and white.

In reading, things often seem clear, and the reader’s own sense of self expands in apparent contact with a language from beyond the mundane. Like Jacob who forgot his dreams and was left only with an emotional afterglow, the reader often feels changed, but indistinctly, and impermanently. Like Joseph, who knows that the dream only gains the substance of reality in its interpretation, the reader often knows that the articulation of a reading into publicly available language – that is, to respond – is the only way to integrate it into the understanding. This response might be in life or in letters; in consciously living differently in a publicly legible way, or in writing. It is writing which is the case of concern here, because it is the phenomenon by which private experience takes on the grammar of public intelligibility. It is another direct parallel to dreaming, because while the experience of reading proceeds in the medium of language, it remains difficult to express in writing. Just as telling a dream shears it of its private import, and can even make the sublime appear shabby, and just as this comes to the surprise and consternation of the dreamer who first dreamed in images drawn from public language, so writing thickens the experience of reading until it stalls and the writing is either abandoned or the reading is to some degree betrayed. But writing – the paradigmatic response to reading – or another mode of response that follows this model, is necessary if the reading is to have an effect on life. Only by the work of forming the language of reading – which proceeds in a recalcitrant and often irresponsible inner voice – into accord with the grammar of public understanding in writing (or its analogs) can reading enter the reasons of the mind in a way that informs the (self)-evaluations of an active life of human, historical agency.

Writing in Response to Reading

The paradigmatic response to reading is writing. Rather than thinking about writing as proceeding from its source – and no further back – in the author, we can think about writing as a response to reading, so that the sources of a text depend on everything considered about reading in above. The writer who begins as a reader knows the urgency of a reading that instigates writing, only to vanish at the very moment of putting down words, just like the enthused dreamer loses the immediacy of the dream immediately when it is told. Ungainly first attempts and false starts are eventually sculpted into something that makes sense in itself as a coherent text. That text inevitably moves away from the first clarity of reading. It takes on a substance that reader still recognizes but could not have anticipated in the process of reading. The kind of understanding that is stable, articulable, and firm enough to remember and to apply to future thinking is never a direct transcription of the reading but is produced in the hard work of writing, just as the significance of dreams depends on their interpretation. Eventually the dream itself is lost, sinking back below the surface, but interpretation remains. Eventually the experience of reading becomes obscure even to the reader turned writer, having been shunted aside to make room for the stability of the meaning that has been written down. Good writing is not transparent to that original experience of reading, but attains a hyaline clarity of surface that indicates an antecedent reading; that indicates, but does not expose, the private depths to which that reading sinks back. Eventually the original experience of reading is lost but the new writing remains, and remains as the occasion for another's reading. It is in this spirit that, as indicated in the methods section of this dissertation, endnotes trace some possible directions for such other readings of *Joseph* that could enter into dialogue with my own.

Reading is an occasion for the knowledge of the body, of nature, of what language knows without being able to say, to enter into talks with the discursive language given on the page. Consider

Joseph's warden in his Egyptian prison, the physician and thinker Mai-Sakhme whose duties as jailor were light and left him time for literary ambition.

Joseph's adventure, which had landed him in prison, his tale of the chamberlain's wife, was an object of Mai-Sakhme's literary sympathies, and Joseph told it to him with every tender consideration for the smitten woman, while showing no consideration whatever for the mistakes he had made in the course of it, presenting them as analogous to the offenses he had previously committed against his brothers, and thus against his father, the king of flocks – all of which led him then step by step back to the story of his youth and origins and *permitted the captain's clever eyes a peculiar and tellingly blurred view* of what lay behind the phenomenon of his assistant, Osarsiph the convict. .. He would have liked to put the story of Potiphar's wife to paper in the style of gratifying literature and often discussed with Joseph the best methods and strategies for doing so. But whenever he tried to write it, he ended up following the model of "The Tale of Two Brothers" and *producing another version of it*, which put an end to his attempts. (Mann, 2005, p. 1085, italics mine)

Note the dreaminess of the way in which Mai-Sakhme received Joseph's story, and the difficulty that he experienced in putting his insights into writing without merely repeating something already conventional. This conclusion recalls every other place in the reading developed in this dissertation so far where various forms of a readerly attitude allow access to those hidden sources of life, and to take up even the difficulties and mysteries of life as the source of every future possibility. When Jacob struggled to find the right words in his grief, his careful 'reading' of conventional forms allowed him to struggle against them and thereby to become such an 'original spirit'. When Joseph interpreted his desires rather than relying on them as the basis of interpretation, he was able to develop new modes of temporal experience. When the experience of reading is put into words in a new piece of writing, that

original experience of reading does sink back, inaccessible to subsequent readers, but not without leaving a trace on the text that remains as its account. The present dissertation stands as a text of this kind. Its entire method has been the expression of a sustained reading of a text that was the private experience of the author and is basically inaccessible to others, or even to the author once it has passed. But the present dissertation conducted in the language of discursive meaning in response to that private experience, relying on the existing text of *Joseph* as an anchor for its answerability, broadens the capacity of language to express lived experience in terms of historical originality. Yes, the experience of reading any text reveals more than can be included in any written account, but the increase of the power of language to gather more of life's knowledge into the discursive horizon makes more experience possible to think through and marshal in service of life's projects. The reader does not need to be too tentative here, for the written text also stabilizes the experience of reading in the memory of the author, whose authority over a given text may only be that the author is the most expert reader of that text due to familiarity, but in principle equal to any other. If the author's authority is to account for the text that is the account of a reading, that is merely the production of another text that is necessary to read.¹²³ Every new reading by the author or someone else – whether another reading of *Joseph* or of the present dissertation – brings new sources of life and language to bear and can continue the expansion of the power of language to express life without ever exhausting its sources.

Conclusions

Dreams and their interpretation form a linguistic link between what we know and the sources of lived experience that exceed the understanding. The development of this model in *Joseph* depends on taking dreams to be part of a whole expressive life, meaningful beyond what the dreamer knows by day and in need of interpretation by one whose language encompasses more of lived experience. But the richness of dreams corresponds to the fluency of the dreamer in the languages of the day; those who

dream significant dreams in *Joseph* are also those whose understanding forms a broad horizon. More, that the dreamer in telling the dream makes its first interpretation depends on an articulate understanding, and that subsequent interpretation is only as good, nuanced, subtle, as the richness of its first telling. The dreamer, stumped by the dream, still has all the same material for interpretation as does the one who offers a successful interpretation, and indeed it is the dreamer's recognition of truth that validates a given interpretation. However, the dreamer cannot interpret their own dream precisely because the dream indicates that which poses a risk to their basic sense of life. Only that which threatens to disrupt one's sense of life appears in a significant dream like the ones in *Joseph* that call out for interpretation so that they can be gathered into a renewed sense of life, into original ways of living. Therefore every interpretation is also a risk, and the only reason Joseph's particular skill as an interpreter is recognized is because no one else dared to be so perspicuous – 'no one in the Two Lands dared to give an inkling that he knew more about it than was considered good for him' (Mann, 2005, p. 1097) – and it is only this foreigner, this prisoner, this 'son of a rascal' (Mann, 2005, p. 1166) who had nothing more to lose, that allows Joseph to say out loud the significance of Pharaoh's dreams.

How then is it possible to think about the problem of originality if its beginnings are always prior to whatever we can articulate into understanding? *Joseph* offers itself as the kind of writing that makes visible this phenomenon of linguistic originality and does so by making the treatment of its content regarding dreams also the formal principle of its composition. Dreams are the roots of the language, drawing on hidden sources that nourish and renew it, and interpretation is a pedagogical process of gathering more and more of the sources of life into conscious understanding. This process is identified with the process of reading and writing in both the content of part of *Joseph*, particularly 'The Rascal Servant' and in the kind of reading that *Joseph* elicits, as exemplified in this dissertation.

Implications for Education

How We Think About Education

The purpose of this dissertation is to open up new ways of thinking about education in terms that do not rely on appeals outside of time to orient its own temporal processes, and to propose that the concept of originality provides an entry point into a mode of thinking about education that relies on an immanent conception of historical time. This dissertation began with the contention that many of the difficulties that plague educational theory, and that have a deleterious effect on practices of teaching and learning when they are translated into techniques and adopted by institutions, follow from a kind of thinking about education that rests on appeals outside of time in order to orient its temporal processes. The irony of guiding the temporal processes of education by appeal to atemporal ideas about it can lead, when it is taken up as the institutional technology for the reproduction of a society organized by some set of ideas about ‘who I am and the way things are’, to unacknowledged ideological commitments insinuating themselves in the ironic space between ideas about education and its practice. To guide education by some idea that is outside of time and therefore impervious to the kind of temporal changes it is invoked to orient means limiting education to techniques for the realization and enforcement of ideology, whether or not this is acknowledged.¹²⁴ If certain assumptions about time are reified by institutional practice, then in order for educational theory to realistically describe education, a new way of thinking about time and the temporal process of education is required. The present dissertation proposed the concept of originality, which indicates the tension between drawing on origins in the past and producing anything original in the future, as a conceptual entry point into the challenge of thinking about education only from within its historical processes.

To develop educational practices derived from atemporal ideas limits education to the reproduction of the society governed by those ideas, and this dissertation suggests that thinking about education without appeal to anything outside of its own temporal processes also makes it possible for a

society to renew those ideas and improve itself. This depends on thinking about education as a purely historical process. The various forms of using education to reproduce specific skills, knowledge and norms remain important, but thinking about education in terms of also improving society includes and goes beyond these uses of education. The contribution to the philosophy of education offered by this dissertation can effect specific educational practices, but describing these specific practical changes is outside the scope of this dissertation.

To theorize education as a purely historical process requires eschewing methods that are determined prior to the study because such a determination would already limit results to those that are already comprehensible according to some extant idea so to fail to theorize a truly original orientation for education. To do so would be to treat education as if it were outside of history. The kind of historically immanent theory of education that produces something new can therefore only be an example of the same processes of education that it theorizes, and therefore this dissertation is both a theoretical discussion of the concept of originality and an instance of it.¹²⁵ The decision to study Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers* follows from this basic concern with originality, understood not as a static organizing idea but the name of the specific problem of historical education. *Joseph* also treats originality both conceptually as the problem of opening up a future by interpreting origins in the past, and also does so with a high degree of originality, and therefore provides a suitable text for the present study.

To pursue an interpretation of *Joseph and His Brothers* that answers only to what can be contested or verified in the text of the novel itself, which is to avoid applying some pre-existing method or idea to guide the reading, means that the experience of the reader must be the starting point for interpretation, and that reader's experience must be subject to the influence of the text of the novel. To begin an interpretation based on the reader's experience means that it will be inescapably particular and idiosyncratic. A lifetime of experience and prior reading accompanies the reader from the start. But this

does not mean that the interpretation is entirely subjective and produces only opinion, or is limited to only relative conclusions. One of the major tasks of the present dissertation is to show that even though a reading always begins in subjective experience, it can be formed, shaped, and drawn out in specific ways by the novel itself in the pursuit of an interpretation that is answerable to the text of the novel, contestable and amenable to dialogue with other interpretations. This dissertation is a simultaneous argument for and demonstration of the kind of originality of method that is part of rethinking education in the terms described above.

Reading *Joseph* ‘on its own terms’ means to begin from private experience and analyze the occasion of that experience – the novel – in terms of the public language of the novel. By doing so, the reader’s experience is developed. Reading *Joseph* in this way is a course in thinking and feeling in particular ways that operates on several levels: in the concern of the characters with the language of origins which forms the content of the novel, in the reader’s experience that is explicitly shaped by the formal composition of the novel, and in the generalized insights into the possibility of originality in the language of historical experience that emerge out of sustained attention to the first two levels. The reading pursued above has analyzed the concerns of the characters, particularly in terms of their own concern for origins and how ‘reading’ their origins also transformed their most private experiences, the method of doing so has made the pedagogical effect of the novel on the reader explicit by showing how sustained attention to particular details and experiences of the text can produce generalizable insights into historical experience, and general ideas about the language of originality and historical experience, its limits and possibilities, have emerged along the way.

In this final section of the dissertation, these ideas are explored in terms of their implications for education, primarily in terms of theories about education. The terms in which education is theorized has a real effect on people as they are translated into technologies and techniques and adopted by institutions. If the terms of educational theory are not germane to the historical experience of education

as such, then their application will be deleterious. It is the aim of the present dissertation not to advocate for the revision of specific techniques of education, but to open up a new mode of thinking about education so that the consideration of any specific practice or institution can be understood and revised in terms of historical experience. Sometimes this will not lead to change in specific educational practices, simply because not all education is about historical improvement of society. Even in these cases there is still value in being able to recognize what kind of idea determines specific practices of teaching and learning and to avoid confusion about its goals and governing ideas. Thinking about education in the way proposed in this dissertation emphasizes the role of reading, rather than authorship, as the guiding mode of historical interpretation, in accordance with what was developed in the main body of this dissertation, which is the idea that reading provides a mode of engagement with origins that nonetheless always produces a response, and that to avoid the kind of naïve notion of ‘authorship’ that smuggles in all kinds of ideological determinations by this emphasis on reading will also allow the new kinds of expression that emerge to remain in living contact with their sources in the past.

Characteristics of Thinking about Education Historically: a ‘Readerly’ Approach to the Problem of Originality

In suggesting a new and readerly way of thinking about education, this dissertation does not provide a new general theory of education to replace all others, but opens up new ways of thinking about theory itself; what theory looks like and what counts as theorizing about education. If the guiding principle of thinking about education in this way is that all expressions of education – its theories, its practices, its technologies, and so on – are understood on their own terms rather than explained in terms of ideas from outside education, then global theories of education that can be applied in any context are

out of the question. Instead, there can be as many theories of education as there are instances of it, and they will share some basic characteristics.

1. Readerly theories of education can only be produced in terms that are local and germane to whatever example provides it as a unit of analysis. Such theories of education can only proceed by the interpretation of the specifically local sources of the example under consideration.¹²⁶ Therefore there will be as many theories of education as there are local practices.

2. Readerly theories of education will exhibit a lack of closure, which is to say that their interpretation of whatever aspect or example of education provides their unit of analysis will not exhaust its meaning. There will always be more, or other, things to say about that unit of analysis. The image of education that emerges will not be static, but will describe, provisionally, what is going on in the example under analysis. For this reason, the many theories of education acknowledged in the first point above need not compete in a zero-sum contest.

3. Interesting new problems will be produced by the process of thinking about education. Because no interpretation is ever total, each new moment of theorizing reveals new aspects of educational practice that are not well understood. No matter how much new understanding a theory produces, it always reveals its own limits. These domains become the problem of subsequent theorizing. Therefore these theories exemplify what was earlier in this dissertation named as ‘fragmentary’ writing. Theories do not compete because they are always in dialogue, or potentially in dialogue, with other theories. They do not form a normative hierarchy, but in testing their own descriptive approaches in dialogue with other theories, they can test their own limits with increasing perspicuity. This holds true for dialogue between theories produced in different contexts as well as those that study the ‘same’ example of education. ‘Same’ is set in quotation marks because of the fact that no example of educational practice remains the same after it has been theorized because in thinking about it, new aspects and difficulties are produced.

4. Theorizing that has this effect on actual educational practices is therefore also part of the practices that are under consideration. In a way, thinking about education is the culmination of education, considered as a historical process that must produce its own model.¹²⁷ Educational theory is not ‘about’ education, but is part of its continual process, and therefore modifies any notion of what counts as theory. Theory, in this mode, can be understood as evidence of education, and can therefore can also be interpreted as an example of education in the production of yet more theory. The present dissertation should be understood in this way. It is both a theory of education produced out of a reading of Joseph and also exemplifies the process of education. It is an expression and the culmination of my own education in reading Joseph. In this it follows *Joseph* itself as presenting both a theory of originality and historical experience, that is, of education, and also an instance of the same. Mann himself worked out his own relation to his origins, his sources texts, and his particular moment of historical experience by writing *Joseph*. *Joseph* is a theory of faith but also the expression of Mann working out his own. Education, understood as this kind of historical process is also always *thinking* about education. To be educated also requires being able to think about what education means.

Rethinking Specific Domains of Education

Identity Formation

The formation of identity is a significant goal of historically oriented education. In order not only to reproduce society but to improve it, education also works on the formation of the individuals who, as they come to embody them, will renew, refashion, rethink, and remake the norms, skills, and knowledge of society towards a better future. It is in the education of the individuals who will comprise the society of the future that any improvement of society is achieved.¹²⁸ Charles Taylor describes the historical process of identity formation as historical ‘self-interpretation’. The historical agent, whose self-interpretation proceeds in dialogue with the other individual agents who together comprise society,

is faced with and shaped by the decisions that they make. The freedom to become a certain kind of person is the capacity to decide to act in certain ways, which requires understanding the factors that contribute to any given moment of decision. One who is unaware of the historical factors that produce a moment of decision, or of the expected effects of that decision, but just chooses blindly, is ignorant of what determines their choices and therefore has no real freedom or agency. A ‘strong evaluation’ of historical decisions depends on understanding the sources of oneself, one’s context, and has a clear idea of what kind of person would make what kind of decision.

Taylor’s theory of historical agency is closely tied to his analysis of the ideal of ‘authenticity’, which follows from understanding identity formation as individually particular and historically immanent and has the appeal of suggesting that there is only one right way to be ‘me’ and the way I live my life is my own responsibility. The pitfall of the ideal of authenticity is that it is easily mistaken for something that I have privileged access to, and over which I have sole authority. It is a mistake to think that authenticity is a state to be actualized instead of a continual process. Part of the work of this dissertation has been to show that self-interpretation is never complete, never finalized. This is not to say that historical agency, in Taylor’s terms, is impossible or only possible with some degree of self-deception, but that the metaphor of ‘author’ introduces the hubristic risk that one claims totalizing authority over the meaning of one’s experiences and expressions. The later chapters of this dissertation, on desire and on dreams, make it clear that these apparently subjective experiences are not the sole domain of the individual, but emerge in dialogue between people. Desire emerges from a field of tension between subjects, not from individual subjective experience. Private experiences, like dreams, are already always informed by public languages. It is a mistake therefore – an example of self-deception – to claim sole and final authority over one’s experience and pretend that ‘authenticity’ is something that can actually be achieved. Mann knows this, and so begins the novel by showing that historical inquiry predicated on this kind of total and achievable knowledge of origins is both

impossible and, if pursued far enough, a ‘Descent into Hell’.¹²⁹ The character of Jacob shows that such a concentrated and sustained gaze into the sources of the self was abyssal, and the way of anxiety. We generally compromise in order to maintain the stability of personal identity, even though on these terms, identity – that is, the coincidence of oneself and one’s understanding of oneself – is always inauthentic. One way of framing the problem of the present dissertation is whether or not it is possible to live historically in good faith, without self-deception, without compromising one’s sense of origins. Taylor (2003) argues that authenticity functions as an ideal, not actually to be achieved, but as the guide to a process of authentication. To identify an ‘authentic’ essence of the self is to do the same kind of thinking that is given in *Joseph* as ‘myth’. This is what we do when we understand history in terms of some ideal like ‘Progress’ or ‘Justice’, in which case history itself becomes our myth, as De Certeau (1992) suggests in *The Writing of History*. It is the argument of this dissertation that the central metaphor of ‘authorship’ is prone to these kinds of mistakes. The readerly mode of interpretation developed here is similar in many ways to that described by Taylor who still worked with the language of ‘authorship’ even to reveal its tensions and difficulties.

The stakes of this issue are high because a historical sense of time has the effect of tying the fortunes of a society to the fates of the individuals who stand on the cusp of the future, who are not yet stuck in the past, and in whom rests any potential for progress, novelty, or originality. Present experience is such a narrow slice of time that it is inevitably idiosyncratic and when the renewal and very possibility of a society that is renewed in history is charged to education, the experience of the historical individual is intensified and its risks are concentrated.¹³⁰ The individual asks: What if I find something ugly in the stories I have come to live by? What if my desires are too wayward to align with cultural norms? What if there is simply too much ‘in me’ to comprehend? Humanity knows well how to distribute these dangers among its members and to diffuse them through ritual activity, but because the historical individual as such is obliged to take sole responsibility for its sources, the danger reflected in

these questions are ultimately faced alone. One asks these impossible questions as a necessary part of making sense of oneself, but always at the risk of being unable to hold a sense of self together. Thus there is a persistent tendency to make concessions to ignorance in the name of survival, adaptation, fitting in, getting by.

The present dissertation proposes the language of reading as a fruitful way to deal with these issues. Even though all meaning and understanding is expressed in language, language also functions to cover over the seams in understanding and is always a compromise between life and perfect communication, and even communication with ourselves. The model of authorship obscures this feature of language; the model of reading starts with it. One way to read *Joseph* is as Mann's developing a notion of identity, not based on the individual 'authority' of a person who cannot possibly fully understand themselves, but on the individual's role as a reader of sources and origins. To replace the metaphor of authorship with that of reading maintains the upside of modern historical individuality, but in acknowledging the risk attached to articulating individual experience as the site of any possible originality, rather than denying it as according to the 'authorship' metaphor, or distributing the sense of human life in society rather than focusing it in the individual as according to the operations of myth, the readerly metaphor also suggests the possibility that such risk, while real, indicates the possibility of a liveable identity. The readerly attitude includes an orientation to the impossibility of total self-understanding that makes it an opportunity for originality and not a shortfall.

The character of Joseph exhibits this kind of readerly attitude. When he 'recognized his tears' (Mann, 2005, p. 1055) in the throes of his affair with Mut-em-enet, he reads them in terms of those that Gilgamesh shed, and when the critical moment comes when he knows that he must act, one way or another, his awareness of being caught up in a mythical role allows him to deviate from its course and imagine an original response to his experience. Whereas according to the 'authorship' understanding of the articulation of one's identity, private experience, particularly the experiences of desire and of the

body, are taken as the authoritative grounds for one's sense of self, according to a 'readerly' sense, embodied experiences like desire and like Joseph's tears, are expressive and call for interpretation. They are minuscule magical transformations that mark the moment when the individual turns from reading to response. To treat the moments where, at the impetus of the body and the futurity of desire, one must decide, must act, must respond, as still amenable to further interpretation is the requirement of articulating an identity in dialogue with others that does not depend on getting to the bottom of things and becoming totally transparent to ourselves and each other. At stake is nothing less than the possibility of living together in society without relying on enforcement. Identity is not located within the authority of the individual but rests *between* people. While the individual retains the 'last word' for themselves, as Bakhtin (1984) noticed of Dostoevsky's heroes, identity only emerges in dialogue with others, and that last word is never actually uttered and self-identity is never actually finalized before death intervenes in the dialogue of life. To prioritize mutual understanding, as if it were a matter of communicating what we already know subjectively, ultimately leaves us in solitude. Arguments remain unresolved if they proceed by scrupulous mutual efforts to make ourselves understood – at length, we exhaust ourselves and make up, recognizing and trusting in the other's good intentions. The only way to live together is to treat language as shorthand for a basic readerly orientation towards one another and our own sources that we can only make in good faith. This shorthand exists everywhere real communication happens. In order to live with oneself and one another, the languages in which we express our sense of life must be understood as both productive of the ways that we live and always amenable to further interpretation.

Historical Inquiry

The present treatment of historical inquiry as a readerly project has implications for some of the specific practices that are used for teaching history and historical thinking in schools. One significant

curricular resource in the Canadian context is rooted in work that proposes six big historical thinking ideas that guide the education of historical inquiry. Seixas (2017), one of the main authors of the project, writes that while ‘they look like concepts, the reason that they are so generative is that they function, rather, as problems, tensions, or difficulties that demand comprehension, negotiation and, ultimately, an accommodation that is never a complete solution.’ (597) This key orientation to historical thinking as attention to a set of problems is lost when it is translated into curriculum, where it becomes a set of skills that students must be able to demonstrate: ‘To think historically, students need to be able to: ...’ (Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, 2024) In practice, in my experience as a teacher in British Columbia, particularly when I have worked as a Teacher Teaching on Call in numerous social studies and history classrooms, this approach to historical inquiry really is translated into exercises in which students must *accomplish* those modes of historical thinking that the resource presents as problems. To demonstrate proficiency at these modes of historical thinking, students might be asked, for example to ‘choose a historical character in order to understand their perspective’, rather than to develop a sense of the absolute difference of historical perspectives that makes historical identification a problem. It is understandable why teachers resort to this kind of assignment even though it betrays the framework for historical thinking suggested in the resource because it is still commonplace to think about historical understanding as something to be accomplished, as the domain of positive knowledge of the past. If the present dissertation can reframe historical thinking as a continuously ongoing process according to a readerly metaphor, perhaps some of the ways that historical thinking is taught in schools can be more successfully modified.

Pedagogy of Literacy

The method and result of the present dissertation exemplifies an approach to studying and producing texts that can contribute to the way we think about reading and writing. In the novel the

reader meets Joseph as he ‘literally read his way into his listener’s heart’ (Mann, 2005, p. 745). He is a skilled reader, and his skill depends not only on facility with decoding words, but with the performative and oral interpretation he makes of the text by just the right tone, just the right emphasis, and so on. His particular skill is in being able to read a written text in terms of an oral performance that also responds to its context. Thinking of readerly skill in this way relies on the notion that the meaning of a text lies between its words, its reader, and its context of performance. This example, and the example provided in this dissertation of my own reading of *Joseph*, provide the basis for understanding differences in skill without relying on rigid dichotomies such as between a skilled and unskilled reader, or a teacher and learner of reading.

The pedagogical difference between one who learns and one who teaches is not that one actively teaches and one passively receives, or that the learner must do the work of developing individual reading skills under the guidance of the teacher, but that as both participate in the performative dialogue of reading, the teacher exhibits a higher level of skill and, crucially, has a more developed theory of the educational activity in progress. Every instance of literacy education is unique in this regard, and so the teacher must also continually reshape their own reading, depending on the context. Indeed, the teacher improves as a reader by having to perform in the context of dialogue with a learner. When reading is understood as the particular entry into a text in a particular context of dialogue, any pedagogical difference between teacher and learner follows from the teacher’s being able to *begin* subjectively and idiosyncratically and use that subjectivity as the entry point into interpreting the text, whereas a learning reader needs to learn not to remain in that subjective experience of encountering a text, or to avoid resolving an interpretation in conventional ideas.

Education Against Authority, or Reading as Resistance

Educational institutions like schools operate on the basis of authority, and entrench dichotomies between teaching and learning, formal and informal, curriculum and its contexts, and so on. Schools arbitrate and enforce what counts as worthwhile knowledge and how it is learned, even when it exhibits shifts in the value attributed to, for example, experiential or traditional forms of knowledge. Schools arbitrate what views of issues such as citizenship, society, equity, justice, etc., are to be taught. These are not static, and different schools can advance different perspectives on each, but in each case, some views, and not others, are invested with the power of the school to enforce them. Part of this power derives from the practical fact that schooling, at least in Canada, is compulsory, and that the student is disciplined to behave in certain ways at certain times. The school system's epistemic power to arbitrate knowledge and its moral power to discipline the individual both derive from government mandated political power, including financial support. Of course, schools leverage this power in order to promote views of society, both within the school and beyond, that confirm status quo of the political system. If, for example, in the social studies classroom, all political views are acceptable as long as they fall within a certain range, then democracy, for example, can be critiqued from the perspective of improving it, but students would never be taught to pursue other forms of organizing society, despite the fact that schools, beyond their legitimation by democratic bodies, are not themselves organized democratically. According to curriculum documents in British Columbia, the education of students as whole people in their skills and attitudes, in addition to simply the knowledge they should acquire, is intended to produce democratic citizens.¹³¹ In all of these examples, the purview of education extends far beyond simply earning grades or credentials, or acquiring skills or knowledge, even when the purposes of education to 'improve society' are not explicitly avowed. Even in instances where the scope of education is apparently very limited, say, in learning a technique for multiplication, schooling still treats the individual student as the germ of a particular view of what society ought to be like. One of the implications of the argument developed in this dissertation is that it provides a way of thinking

about education as an historical process and in terms of stakes for the future of society that are located in the experience of the individual undergoing education.

So far, this section has included descriptions of the operations of power, and has not made any moral evaluation of them. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to evaluate any specific instances of the exercise of authority in school, but rather to indicate the functions of authority that pervade schooling. This dissertation suggests that thinking about education in terms of authority tends to result in the enforcement of institutional power and the contestation of that power on the basis of other competing claims to authority so that resistance to power proceeds by pitting one authority against another. Educational authority is often contested in this way that still rests on the 'authorial' metaphor. A movement towards 'authentic' educational practices predicated on the idea that some 'real' experience is available for schools to connect with still maintains that students can be authorities concerning their own experience. Competing political, social, or historical views can then be adjudicated based on the authority some person or group of people claim based on the identification of some private, lived experience that is prior to any dialogue about issues in question. Despite the urgency of some of the issues that are raised in this manner, and whatever social or institutional changes are brought about, it will nonetheless perpetuate the mode of thinking about education in terms of authority, stifle real dialogue between, and continue the enforcement that authority in systems of power that will always leave someone at a disadvantage.

The present dissertation's emphasis on reading follows from the investigation into origins, and the conclusion that in fact we are not transparent to ourselves, we are not sole authorities on our own experience, and that even our most private experiences emerge in dialogue between people, and in public languages. Therefore to resist power by pitting one dubious claim to authority against another is a losing battle. A 'readerly' conception of education cultivates practices of freedom capable of eliding the problem of authority altogether. Reading power, rather than railing against it, does not mean

passively accepting it. The opposite is true: it is the blind reaction against power that repeats the language of power. Reading power opens up sites of resistance. Abraham's commitment to questioning authority in the name of always seeking 'The Highest' power prevented him from bowing to any particular local claims to the title. He suspected Nimrod of not really being the highest power but only the highest local instance, and so he left the country.

The kind of reading proposed here, generalized to the interpretation of historical phenomena like one's 'identity' or institutions like schools, finds the seams and inconsistencies that in any system of meaning are ignored in order to 'get by' and avoid getting stuck. Reading, therefore, is active in the weak spots of power. Reading does not pit power against power, but reveals the ways in which the basis of power may be suspect. Of course, the reading of power also reveals one's own participation in it: any 'reading' of power that proceeds from an unassailably 'authentic' sense of self is disingenuous. A 'readerly' account of 'who I am and the way things are' allows one to face reality and make it one's own, while the illusion of self-authorship also means to accept an 'authorized' version of 'the way things are' and thus to cede the articulation of one's lived experience to someone else's language. When education is conceived as more than just the acquisition of skills and knowledge, but also dispositions, then the development of the entire person is at stake in the process. It is a mistake, on the model that I propose here, to contest the various forms of power that school has the authority to exercise by appeal to one's personal authority over one's own sense of selfhood, and the readerly alternative proposed here is a process that includes individuals and systems of power at once.

While in this dissertation I generalize this readerly mode to the context of education, similar generalizations are made by Michel de Certeau (1984) in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. In all kinds of areas of life people live within and in spite of authority, planning, power, and discipline, and de Certeau's book explores the way that people live freely in these areas. In the grid of the city, people produce shortcuts; from the map, people produce tours of real places for each other; from the text,

people produce a reading. Reading refuses systematization. It looks for pleasure and understanding, but is free to find these independent of what any author might have intended. The reader brings certain prior perspectives and experiences, be in a certain mood, may skim over boring parts, flip back and forth, misread key words, or be interrupted by squalling toddlers. And yet that reader's response can remain faithful to the text. It is free; determined but not dominated by the text. Of course, the reader does not avoid any of the risks of education or its study, but at least, in being aware of what they are and where they lie, avoids the blind repetition of conventional consolations or means of avoidance. The reader has occasion to face the paradox, mystery and difficulty of life and to imagine an original response.

Language and Reconciliation

When opposing ways of viewing the world come into contact, conflict often ensues, but it is also possible to accept a worldview that holds all commitments lightly, even ironically, so that what matters is getting along in life in community with those whose private convictions may be diametrically opposed to our own.¹³² Taylor (2007) describes something similar in the attitude of one whose religious convictions in secular society are not disposed of, but are refigured as private articulations of how to live well in a 'middle condition' (6) between exile, despair, emptiness, and a place of fullness where everything is hoped for is achieved, salvation is realized, and life is paradise. In secular society, the target of religious convictions can shift from the actual realization of a promised paradise to the articulation of the ideals that help one work towards becoming a good parent, a good neighbour, a good partner, a good citizen. Even religious belief in the private rewards of an afterlife can be transformed into the hope for a better future for a person's loved ones. In fact, there are all sorts of ideals that can produce these outcomes, and so people of differing and even opposed religious commitments can still live harmoniously. In this picture of modern, liberal, secular, society, what

becomes of our various specific commitments, especially as their historical legacies are explored and their contemporary modes of exercise are reflected upon? If any conflict comes to light between the ways in which people in community articulate their sense of life and society, the ironic attitude towards these articulations allows them to dissolve, be let go of, in the name of getting along together. This ironic attitude is the achieved by the author, the artist, and Mann spent a good deal of his career exploring irony as a mode of grasping a difficult world. When one among many types of authority triumphs in a clash over how society should be organized, the others can more easily give up their claims because they were never as important as the ‘middle condition’ of everyday life anyway, and to defend them risks dissolving the social glue that makes this kind of ‘middle condition’ possible in the first place. But if an ironic attitude organizes a field of authorities, each loosely held and blithely interchanged, then the social glue is actually something else, whatever holds together the conditions for the possibility of an ironic attitude, even if it is unacknowledged.¹³³ This glue, especially if unacknowledged, is firmer and more robust than any idea about the organization of society held with private irony. This dissertation explores the possibility of being historicist, like the ironist, without succumbing to the charges of irresponsibility or relativism. Mann wrote *Joseph* in a context in which no irony could diffuse conflict between diametrically opposed views of how society should be organized, and in the novel irony is revised and reimagined as faith.

One particular arena in which the issue of dealing with contact between radically different ways of understanding the world is pertinent to education is in the context of reconciliation processes between Canada and Indigenous peoples. The work of articulating a way for all the people who find themselves in a certain territory and needing to live together requires working out the differences between the organizing principles of local first nations and those that structure the government of Canada, and how the power and authority of each derives from very different principles. It turns out to be remarkably easy to make progress in conversations between radically different ways of viewing the

world when the ideas that are the basis of authority are held ironically. As long as no actual power is compromised, people are good at saying the right things. The problem is that, from an Indigenous perspective, it may appear that the process of reconciliation is slow or unreal, and just a matter of words. Where progress is apparent, it is often enough in terms of the real binding impulse of a society in which ideals are transient, which is the impulse towards economic profit. That is, reconciliation often appears to make progress in cases where Indigenous peoples are gathered into a society driven by profit and consumption, and potential barriers to articulating the profit motive in terms of traditional languages and claims to authority are removed.¹³⁴ The kind of reading of power described above would not only be a conversation between Indigenous peoples and Canada, but would be a conversation that was explicit about the bases and exercises of the various forms of power that each holds. This is a risky proposition because no party is incentivized to place their own sources or jurisdictions of power at stake in the language of reconciliation. To get away from thinking about power in terms of ‘authority’ is one way to make progress in this regard.

Education is one of the major domains in which the language of reconciliation is worked out.¹³⁵ In the best moments of dialogue between an institution governed by ‘western’, ‘colonial’, ‘settler’ ideas and Indigenous people, the friction between basic ways of making sense of the world can appear as opportunities for original ways forward.¹³⁶ I participated in a Professional Development day in which a member of a local first nation described his commitment to the language of his people and the attitude of humble participation in the natural world and in the traditions of his people that is expressed in the language itself. Out of this commitment followed a specific logic of his participation in the public school system. Unfortunately, this attitude easily gets lost in translation into English, and into the languages of teaching and learning that organize educational institutions, which depend on an idea of authority that is almost diametrically opposed to the humility described as essential to the meaning of Hul’q’umi’num’. In practice, official reconciliation proceeds in terms of ‘Western’ ‘Colonial’ ‘Settler’

languages; that is, in terms of contests of authority. Of course, these linguistic categories are not homogenous and neither are Indigenous languages, but to treat them monolithically means to cede the specificity essential to any real practice of humility towards sources of language external to the local, present instance of education so that any institutional concessions to reconciliation that do occur still unfold according to the linguistic terrain of contests of ‘authority’. Real reconciliation only occurs between real people who enter into dialogue with one another despite the interference of institutions operating in general languages. However, this pessimism concerning institutions, including schools, only holds if what is distinctive and valuable about ‘western’ civilization, language, science, politics, and history, necessarily depends on the authorial mode. I argue that it is possible to locate within the organizing idea of our educational institutions a linguistic attitude that is capable of entering into dialogue with an attitude of humble participation. There is reason for optimism if an account of ‘western’ languages can be developed which preserves its distinct historical accomplishments and character but adopts the kind of participatory, humble relation to its own roots that is exemplified in the attitudes of Indigenous languages.

In *Joseph* Mann explores ‘readership’ as the inverse of ‘authorship’, and the corresponding inverse of irony emerges, which is ‘faith’. In *Joseph* we see the play of language issuing from relations to the divine. Mann shows that our very modern concerns with the stability of meaning and of identity develop out of the history of these relations. If there is an original moment of language, on this account, it is an original utterance of praise or lament that is articulated into a language that receives a world. Returning to this model of reading would not be a reversion to some pre-modern way of life but would be a recovery of the originally doxological roots of language.¹³⁷ The only way to reconcile is to relearn a language that receives a world in humility and recognizes the same attitude in others. This would allow the dialogue of reconciliation to proceed between ‘western’ languages and local, Indigenous languages without reducing one to the other. Modern accomplishments would not be discarded, but

would likely be revised in unexpected and radical ways. Schooling might transform in significant and unexpected ways, but not in ways that require discarding or qualifying the specific achievements of ‘western’ thought and modes of thinking. The specific changes that would transform schooling are beyond the scope of this dissertation but would all follow from this adjustment in the way that we think about education.

Math and Prayer

The effects of this change from an ‘authorial’ to a ‘readerly’ understanding of education are apparent at the curricular level in the discipline that can seem the furthest away from this readerly study – mathematics. Far from being inimical to the doxological attitude indicated in the previous section, where the roots of language are located in a first, humble, participatory, acceptance of a world, the study of mathematics depends on the kind of practices of careful attention, of aesthetic experimentation and imagination that prevail in *Joseph* as the means of approaching the divine. Simone Weil (2009) even suggested that the study of math is excellent training for prayer. If the secular individual is uncomfortable with associating math with prayer, one might appreciate that prayer and math share a similar attitude, and reverse the statement. The mathematician could say that the patient attentiveness of prayer, its balance of system and intuition, its idealism, and other qualities are excellent training for mathematics. Me being neither St. John of the Cross nor Archimedes, I cannot adjudicate these opposing claims but can explore what it means for both math and prayer to have a receptive and participative readerly attitude towards the world.

Math education can be thought of in terms of the readerly attitude suggested here in a way maintains discipline and rigour but also captures the creative and imaginative aspects of math. Indeed the apparent opposition between these aspects that fuels heated debates about math education disappears with the adoption of a readerly understanding.¹³⁸ A readerly kind of mathematics would be

highly disciplined. Euclid declined to let Ptolemy in on the secrets of geometry based on the authority of his rank, suggesting out that ‘there is no royal road to geometry’, and that only careful attention to, and disciplined practice with, definitions, postulates and propositions will suffice to generate proofs. Math education, thought of in these terms, is an education in a disciplined kind of reading similar to the one argued for in this dissertation, where the _amateur reader must learn to think and feel in particular ways by allowing the text to discipline the reading. And just as the discipline of a reading by a text as exemplified in this dissertation produces an open-ended response and is the occasion of originality and innovation, so the creative possibilities and the insights produced by a mathematical discipline like geometry are only produced out of its discipline and rigour. The model of ‘reading’ allows math educators to account for the creativity and imaginative potential of mathematical thinking without pretending that students can ‘discover’ things like the Pythagorean theorem out of the blue if left alone with pencil, paper, and the right manipulables. Thinking and problem based math education relies on the students learning to follow the inner logic of something given in the development of a solution.¹³⁹

To think about math education as readerly entails a rediscovery of its own roots and I think that fostering this attitude in students could transform the way that they think about math. Consider how much of math education is learning to accept ‘authorized’ practices, rather than to exercise one’s imagination, to play and experiment with the ideas and aesthetic objects of math. Most of these ‘accepted’ practices themselves originated in intuition, play and experimentation. As it is, so many students entering secondary school have had this attitude drummed out of them in schools that not only do many 13 year olds lack facility with simple arithmetic, many that have had success do not imagine math as the domain of any kind of originality.

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¹ In this brief description of Rousseau's educational thought, I name Nature as the guiding ideal of education, but in emphasizing the unity of the individual and the social problem, it is important to acknowledge Rousseau's political thought as well. The character Emile is intended eventually to participate in the Social Contract, which can provide the moral framework for society that Nature in itself cannot. See McDonough (2021) for this argument.

² These and other dichotomies are described by Pelissier (1991) who also addresses them from an anthropological view of education and shows how actual educational practices continually frustrate these neat dichotomies. Pelissier describes the history how each of these dichotomies is contested and eventually replaced by another and argues in favour of moving beyond such dichotomies.

³ This process derives from the Hegelian tradition of historical dialectics according to which the opposition between thesis and antithesis produces a synthesis which becomes the next thesis. One major difference is that while Hegel considered history to be the process of the realization of an ideal, Dewey's is a more pragmatic approach.

⁴ While Dewey's theories are informed by his work in laboratory schools, those schools and the larger society in which they operated already instantiated many of his philosophical premises. A philosophical critique is necessary in order to consider Dewey's in terms of a general theory of education.

⁵ For more on the role of self-interpretation in human agency and its distinctively historical character, see Charles Taylor's *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (2005).

⁶ The novel will be referred to by its full title at its first appearance in each chapter, and abbreviated to *Joseph* elsewhere. Without italics, the word 'Joseph' will be used to name the character.

⁷ In my own writing, I treat *Joseph* as vital for how we imagine the perennial concerns of historical experience, not – at least not primarily – in terms of making sense of the novel in terms of its historical context. In this I follow *Joseph's* narrator who recognizes the character of Joseph as a contemporary, at least in comparison to the abyss of the deep past (Mann, 2005, p. 11).

⁸ See note 23 regarding the elaboration of a single term in Genesis *ketonet passim* into an important theme of the novel.

⁹ Walter Benjamin (2012), in 'The Storyteller', explores the fate of this kind of storytelling in the modern world. We no longer tell our crucial stories around campfires, but in the same way that Mann's *Joseph* traces its lineage all the way back to this practice of oral storytelling, so Benjamin considers the genre of the novel as the modern form of storytelling.

¹⁰ The idea that the pleasure of reading is essential to its interpretation has been put forward by Mann himself. In 'The Making of *The Magic Mountain*' (1953), Mann writes that a work of art '...must not be undertaken against one's will. It is meant to give pleasure, to entertain and enliven. If it does not have this effect on a reader, he must put it down and turn to something else. But if you have read *The Magic Mountain* once, I recommend that you read it, twice. The way in which the book is composed results in the reader's getting a deeper enjoyment from the second reading.' (unpaginated online source) This comment refers specifically to the 'musical' structure of *The Magic Mountain*, where things at the beginning are really only recognized in their fulfillment nearer to the end and should be revisited, but generalizes to *Joseph*, and other works as well. In each case, the pleasure and understanding cooperate in the interpretation of the

novel. Mann does not suggest, and neither do I in this dissertation, that pleasure alone grants access to a work of art, but rather that it initiates and is amplified by the work of interpretation. Translator John Woods, in the introduction to *Joseph*, comments on the importance of the reader's experience of 'innumerable, complex delights' (Mann, 2005, p. xv) of the novel as 'the special pleasures of *Joseph and His Brothers*: [which include] watching as Thomas Mann deftly reshapes one people's account of its beginnings and its faith in its God, turning that ancient text into richly detailed stories about splendidly vivid characters, each a manifestation of Mann's faith in our common humanity' (Mann, 2005, p. xv). In doing so, Woods points out what there is to be appreciated, but then goes on to suggest that even the difficult parts, and indeed the contrast between its pleasures and its challenges is part of interpreting *Joseph*. Woods suspects that Mann 'wanted to make sure he had readers worthy of him' (Mann, 2005, p. xvi) in a manner not unlike the way the narrator directly addresses the reader, near the end of the novel, when Jacob 'expiated captivately on the name Elohim' (Mann, 2005, p. 1417) with a subtlety and intelligence that challenged and thrilled his listeners. The narrator turns the challenge to the reader: 'I don't know if any of this touches you, but for Jacob's audience beneath the tree it was most diverting and exciting – they were gifted in that regard.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1418) Jacob's audience knew that it was 'a test of our talent for the divine – a test that even the teenagers among Jacob's people rejoiced to feel themselves equal to' (Mann, 2005, p. 1418). Roland Barthes (2009) thematizes the role of pleasure in interpretation in *The Pleasure of the Text*.

¹¹ Mann (1953) recommended to his readers, in an article on the making of *The Magic Mountain*, to put the book down if they are not enjoying it. He was gratified when his critics noticed his efforts to entertain. (Stock, 1994)

¹² The narrator knows that the reader is probably already familiar with at least the basic outline of the Joseph story, but that Joseph of course is not. The suspense of the retelling derives from its emphasis on *how* things happened, not merely the facts of events *that* happened, 'events that can leave no one in suspense as to details.' (Mann, 2005, p. 1016) The importance of this simultaneous experience of following the story *as if* in the present as well as from the overview of posterity is thematized earlier, when Joseph soothes Jacob's anxiety about putting himself in the place of Abraham's test of faith, saying that '... you were Jacob, my dear papa, and the story was an old one and you knew how it came out.' (Mann, 2005, p. 81). One of the important ways of understanding *Joseph* is as exploring what it means to be both inside and outside of a story at the same time, so that the layered stories of one's life are both the domain of experience and of interpretation.

¹³ 'Furthermore, I am discounting any knowledge of Kleist's forerunners in the field: Molière, Rotrou, Plautus. I know naught of them' (Mann, 1947, p. 203) Following this quote Mann spends about two pages giving the outline of these 'discounted' ideas.

¹⁴ Influence is a subterranean and complex process. One can only make sense of one's influences by interpreting their ineradicably idiosyncratic expressions. In other words, any named sources of influence on a given reading do not provide the hermeneutic keys to that reading. Rather the reverse is true, that the sense made of a reading on its own terms is in fact the only way to understand one's sources of influence.

¹⁵ Friedrich Schlegel (2003) writes of the 'fragment' in the Atheneum Fragment 206 that 'A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine.' Of course the isolation of the porcupine is by no means a self-sufficiency; its quills testify to the essential relation it has to the world. How do fragments relate to the world? By relating to one another. In the Atheneum Fragment 77, Schlegel writes that 'A dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments...'. Each chapter of this dissertation has a degree of completion and can be read on its own, but together they form a dialogue concerning originality that none fully expresses on its own.

¹⁶ McDonald consistently refers to these essays in terms of their original oral performances. McDonald even makes note of the way that in Helen Lowe-Porter's English translation many of the features of performance have been edited out. (McDonald, 1999, 229)

¹⁷ I do something similar in the present dissertation by choosing to interpret Joseph in terms of originality and establishing the unit of analysis as my reading of the novel. Other units of analysis are possible and would require their own methods and reach their own conclusions.

¹⁸ This restless wanderer Abram was renamed Abraham when he sensed that his suffering yet held the 'promise of a future', when he met God in the desert. Abram had nothing to recommend him as the father of a nation. No accomplishments, no strengths, nothing except an allergy to displays of political power. He took offense to 'certain structures that impressed him as impertinent' but did nothing to criticize the great Tower of King Nimrod. He was simply offended, and his soul filled 'with increasing doubt – and since it is not easy to sit still with doubt in one's soul, he had set himself in motion.' (Mann, 2005, p. 5) That's it; but as he wandered, Abram 'concluded that his suffering bore the future within it. Your torment, your restlessness, so he learned from his newly discerned God, is not be in vain - ... in a word, you will be a blessing.' (Mann, 2005, p. 7) Actually, the narrator suggests, 'destiny' would be the better translation, and so Joseph 'traced his own spiritual and physical existence' to a community whose answer to the question of 'whether this destiny may be a blessing or not ... [was always] 'yes' (Mann, 2005, p. 7).

¹⁹ Frank Kermode, in *The Sense of an Ending*, explores the way that through apocalyptic and other stories, ‘We project ourselves – a small, humble elect, perhaps – past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle.’ (Kermode, 2000, 8)

²⁰ For one of the sources of the idea that time itself only exists as the production of the mind, see book XI of Augustine’s *Confessions* (2006) which suggests that for the mind to encompass time in memory and expectation requires a distention of the soul. Paul Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative* argues that ‘time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience’. (52, italics in the original)

²¹ The style of Genesis is studied in detail by Erich Auerbach in the ‘Odysseus’ Scar’ chapter of *Mimesis* (1953, 2003), and later also by Robert Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981, 2011). In *Mimesis*, Auerbach shows how in Genesis, individual experience gains complexity and interiority in representation by leaving some things unsaid, in the background. He begins by comparing an example drawn from Homer with one drawn from Genesis in terms of their respective styles, the effect on character, and the implications for interpretation that each style produces. In the first example, Odysseus returns home, in disguise, after his long peregrination and his feet are washed by the old housekeeper, his former nurse, Eurycleia. She immediately notices the scar on his thigh, and recognizes him as Odysseus. But between her notice of the scar and the shock of recognition which leads to her drop his leg into the basin, there is a long insertion of verse. It tells of Odysseus’ birth, of his grandfather, and of the incident in which a boar wounded him and left him with the scar. The narration returns to the scene of recognition only when this detail is cleared of all mystery. The leg drops, the water splashes, and Eurycleia reaches out to her master. In the second example, God calls out ‘Abraham’, and Abraham responds ‘behold me’, but we do not know where or when this take place, or even how God and Abraham came to be in each other’s presence. The journey to the sacrificial hill is likewise undetailed. All we know is that Abraham rose early in the morning, cut wood, and set out with Isaac. The description of the journey is restricted to the moment when Abraham lifts his eyes to see the place in the distance, and companions are simply labelled ‘servants’ and ‘donkey’.

In the Homeric style, everything is in the foreground. Everything that contributes to the events of the narrative is fully explained. When a warrior joins in battle his back story is interjected into the gory narrative. When gods act, we are always told from what activity, from where, and by what means they have come. Every action is consistent with the character of a hero, which has been fully described to the point of being attached as an epithet. Think of Achilles’ vengeful rage, Odysseus’ cleverness. Everything that determines an event is fully determined in the text. When the gods push people around, they only do so in ways that are consistent with their character and situation. Every factor that contributes to events is in accord with every other. Homeric characters are overdetermined within a world that has been made fully explicit, fully present.

In the Abraham story, so much remains in the background. There is little physical description, unlike in Homer where things are described in sensual detail. Everything that Abraham and Isaac must be thinking and feeling remains unexpressed. Even the most detailed dialogue, ‘Take Isaac, your only son, whom you love’, is only an injunction that deepens the background of what is not said. What must Abraham and Isaac have felt? Unlike the Homeric scenes, in which everything significant is present in full expression, we are not told what motivates Abraham. This difference in style is most visible in the psychology of the characters in each tradition. In Homer, there is no development. Odysseus is the same – even looks the same – after years of wandering. Actions are motivated by essential character traits that do not change. Nothing can change without disrupting the unified image of the character. Homeric heroes live only in the present. The duration of memory only serves the completion of a present activity, like vengeance. But when things are unexpressed, as in the Old Testament, the action only makes sense if an unspoken history is inferred. Imagine the story of Abraham’s call to sacrifice without the history of promise! And so, imbued with history, Old Testament characters can change. Auerbach points to King David, whom we see change from a young shepherd, a harpist, and rival to the king, to a lustful ruler, and finally to an impotent old man who could not be ‘warmed’, even by Abishag the Shunnamite. Another psychological difference is that Homeric characters can only have one experience, one feeling, at a time. Individual characters only have a single thought, ‘or, at the most .. a conscious hesitation between two possible courses of action; otherwise in Homer, the complexity of psychological life is shown only in the succession and alternation of emotions; whereas Jewish writers are able to express the simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and the conflict between them.’ The Old Testament writers are able to do so only because of what they leave unsaid, in the background, and which must be imagined and interpreted by the reader. The style of the Old Testament allows character to be represented in complexity and development, as a moment and focal point of education, in a way that is not possible in Homer.

Auerbach contends that interpretation is the main difference between the styles. Homer cannot be interpreted, only analyzed. Homer’s world is self-contained, and the reader is caught up in it, on the terms of its own unity of style and form. The Old Testament, by contrast, is unevenly formed. Various literary styles are joined side-by-side, and stories are

told in different voices. Some stories are legendary, like Homer's, and others approach a more historical kind of narrative. It is up to the reader to make sense of how these differences fit together – and this is all in addition to making sense of the unexpressed background that pervades the stories.

So what is the difference between the analysis of Homer and the interpretation of the Old Testament? To understand the unity of Homer requires only the reader's perspicuity and sensitivity to describe a unity that is already present in the text. By contrast, the Old Testament does not hold together on its own, and its most distinctive stylistic mark is that it does not express much of what is important. The unity of the Old Testament is provided by the reader who relates the stories to an ethical, historical and divine orientation in real life. In other words, as Mann has it, the origins of the particular kind of temporal experience inaugurated by Joseph's family and come down to us as history, are established *as* origins by the tradition of interpreting them thus, and not on their merits as unambiguous temporal beginnings. In chapter 10, 'The Hidden Face', I discuss how Mann exploits this feature of biblical style in his efforts to establish Mut-em-enet, Potiphar's wife, as a character endowed with interiority. In Chapter 5, 'Good Enough Reading' I show how reading *Joseph* in search order to establish its meaning is an equivocal endeavour in the same way that searching in the past for origins is as well. See also Bakhtin's difference between the 'exteriorized hero' of the epic and the interiority of the hero of the novel. (Bakhtin, 2011)

For Mann's invention, see Van Doren (1957) 'And this work is endless; it fills a fearsome multitude of pages; nor was any of it done in Genesis. It is all Mann, all modern, and all comedy.' (102) and for the perspective that even Mann's invention derived from fidelity to Genesis, see Levenson (1998) and Tomes (1977).

It appears once more in the Hebrew Bible, in II Samuel 13:18-19, in reference to Tamar, the sister of Amnon, who is not to be confused with Tamar, the daughter in law of Judah who appears later in the Joseph story. The 'ketonet passim' is used in Genesis to describe the cloak given by Jacob as a gift to Joseph. The word only appears once elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, but Mann draws on its 'ornamental' or 'decorative' nature to connect it with Rachel (and Leah's) bridal veil and derives much of the treatment of the relationship between Jacob and Joseph from the transference of affection from Rachel to Joseph that the gift of the cloak expresses.

Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (2011) pursues an extended study of the importance of paying attention to direct speech in the Bible. It gains in significance precisely because it is rare.

One example of this kind of misreading is explored in the discussion of Tumanov's 2007 article, which discusses the treatment of the story of Dinah from a modern feminist sensibility in Anita Diamant's 1997 novel *The Red Tent*. My point here is that anything in Genesis that modern readers find compelling – the experience of the women, the psychological insights into fraternal conflict, jealousy, maturation, etc. – derives its force from its being one of the earliest earliest examples in world literature of exploring how these universal human issues and experiences follow from the problem of time. Mann's *Joseph* retells Genesis from a modern perspective, not by colonizing the ancient story with a modern temporal sensibility, but by demonstrating how these apparently modern questions emerge out of the central issue in Genesis of imagining time. For Mann's concern with origins in *Joseph*, see also Dolgoy (2013) and Khapaeva (2012).

A lot of poststructural theory is about precisely this point, including Barthes' (2009) *The Pleasure of the Text*, Jauss' (1982) *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, and Iser's (1978) *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*.

See link between this idea and the chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire' in which it is argued that desire itself must be interpreted in the course of historical experience.

In Bakhtin's essay on the *Bildungsroman* in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays* (1986), what he describes as the realistic representation of time requires that both the individual and the cultural background of that individual emerge simultaneously in the same expressions. It is not the case that the individual emerges against a stable background of meaning, as for example is more characteristic of the English tradition of the novel of education than the German *Bildungsroman*, nor is it the case that the individual lacks any background of meaning from which to make sensible expression. The idea that either the background or the radical individual depends on the other, for Bakhtin, issues from unrealistic representations of time.

For a discussion of the importance of this feature, see chapter 'No Beginning'.

This quotation provides an example of the exact problem that introduced this essay. There is too much to say about this quotation, too many connections to trace. Here only Joseph's *delight* in the kind of logic that governed his times is to be discussed. But how could this quote be stopped anywhere earlier, with concision in mind? Being 'open to the rear' should be linked to the fragmentary method adopted in the present project. The way that experience is shaped by memory as narration should be connected to the discussion in the chapter 'No beginning' concerning imagining time. The 'convention' of 'diligently ignoring' bridges between the individual and the sources that feed it should be connected to the premise of this essay – that the unity of historical time is illusory – and to Charles Taylor's notion of the buffered self. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor (2007) identifies the modern experience as that of the person whose individuality is understood as distinct from its contexts, which is a mode of experience distinguished from the kind of permeable sense

of self described here. This endnote holds these loose threads tentatively together in order that I might make progress on the present exploration of how Joseph learned to read. The chapter ‘Quoting Joseph’ develops this kind of problem into a hermeneutic.

³¹ For one of the sources of this distinction in the German literary tradition, between the workings of reason by day and its workings by night, see Novalis ‘Hymns to the Night’ (1988), which begins: ‘What living person, gifted with any sense, doesn’t love more than all the wonderful appearances of spread-out space around him, the all-joyful Light – with its colors, beams, waves; its gentle presence, as waking day’ (Novalis, 1988, p.11) before quickly admitting that ‘Away I turn to the holy, the unspeakable, the secretive Night.’ (Novalis, 1988, p.11) While the light of day makes sense of how things fit together, by night one sees into the ‘depths of a loving soul’ (Novalis, 1988, p. 13) and can access mystery because ‘Night’s reign is timeless and spaceless’ (Novalis, 1988, p. 15). By day, Joseph’s genealogy must admit countless generations between Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who by moonlight and by type form only three generations. Later in this novel, when Joseph is talking to Pharaoh about Pharaoh’s understanding of god as the sun, Joseph suggests that ‘For it is light that separates things and establishes each in its place, creating space and time; but night brings back the disorder, the muddle, the *tohu-bohu*.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1186) While Pharaoh operates only on the principle of illumination, Joseph relies on ‘moonlight’ thoughts as well as those of the day.

³² ‘In truth, no one was cheated, not even Esau.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 160) When Esau lost his birthright as Isaac’s firstborn as a result of Jacob’s trick, he retreated into the moment of mythical identity that could make sense of, and therefore lend a little dignity to, his disgrace. Esau, like all of his contemporaries may be duped and baffled in daily life, but ‘had an excellent understanding of who he was in his essence – that is, outside of time, mythologically’ (Mann, 2005, p. 160) which meant that he even played up his role as victim because ‘what had happened had happened because it had to happen according to an established archetype.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 160) Esau inhabited a mythical type in order to survive those moments which threatened to totally disrupt his sense of self as first-born and would have otherwise lead to despair.

³³ And the reader does eavesdrop. Dialogue is directly rendered in narration here, without quotation marks. The back and forth between teacher and pupil are directly conveyed in the narrator’s speech. See the chapter on ‘Quotation’ for this, another register in the narrator’s voice.

³⁴ When Mann was developing the character he recounted in his correspondence, that ‘I think I am on the right track in making Joseph a kind of mythic confidence man who begins early to “identify” himself as a man-god figure and is reinforced in this sense of himself by the people around him’ (Mann, 1975, p. 141).

³⁵ Joseph talks Jacob through his re-enactment of Abraham’s test of faith. This episode is treated more fully in the chapter ‘Quoting Joseph’.

³⁶ Jacob’s own culpability in the fraternal strife is evident when he loses the ability to think clearly about what he is doing when he sends Joseph to check up on his older brothers. He thought maybe that Joseph’s mission would fail, and he would come back home without his brothers, but ‘The terrible opposite never entered his mind. For its own sake, fate excluded that notion.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 428)

³⁷ Joseph is an active participant in the role that he plays with his brothers and his father. He isn’t merely the passive recipient of paternal favour or victim of fraternal anger. In the next paragraph, we see also that Joseph participates in his own education. He isn’t only a ‘learner’ but participates with Eliezer in the grand and playful process of education.

³⁸ This basic approach to life is carried all the way through to the climactic scene of recognition where Joseph plays tricks on his brothers, accusing them of thieving and spying in the guise of the Egyptian administrator before revealing his identity as their brother. In the chapter ‘The Holy Game’ this mode is elevated and generalized as the basic mode of making historical life liveable. See note 115 for further discussion of ‘The Holy Game’.

³⁹ These are several feature of *Joseph* which mark it as a ‘novel’. The Bible ‘begins in the beginning and ends at the end’ (p. 7), in Kermode’s phrase in *The Sense of an Ending*, because of people’s need ‘fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives’ (p. 7), despite their ‘rush into the midst, *in media res*’ (p. 7). The novel, unlike the Bible, is concerned with the realistic representation of time, which is the task, as Bakhtin puts it, of producing ‘the image of *man in the process of becoming*’ (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 19) and therefore must begin with a representation of the difficulty of beginnings. For a discussion of how the Jena Romantics dealt with the problem that ‘time would not sit still for its portrait’ (p. 59) and so ‘resolved to capture it in discontinuous forms and tropes.’ (p. 59), see Seyhan, 1992. These formal discontinuities are also what Bakhtin in the essay ‘The Epic and the Novel’ (Bakhtin, 2011, p. 3) indicated in describing the novel as an anti-genre, one that borrows from but disrupts and undermines older genres such as the epic. In this sense of the novel, every novel is a kind of anti-novel that resists settling into genre. This tendency is evident in their treatment of beginnings. Whereas in older genres, a formal beginning and ending served as a frame in which narrative makes sense, in the novel that same frame becomes part of the story.

40 The descent into such a past becomes uncontrollable and reveals the ephemerality of all our modes of grasping reality. The further we delve the we perceive the most mysterious shapes of human experience. Khapaeva (2012) notices how this ‘Descent into Hell’, into the deep past turns up monsters and ancient gods.

41 To some degree the book of Genesis exhibits the problem of genre and context that pose difficulties for the modern reader, who asks how the ancient mind would have made use of the mythical form of its stories of origins. Did the ancient mind wonder who was there to observe God in the act of creation in order to narrate? Within Genesis itself there are the seeds of new genres of narration, as in the more historical sense of time that marks the Joseph cycle, and this tension of genre even in Genesis provides Mann rich material for elaboration in his novel.

42 There are of course many ways to do history, but if instead of explicitly tracing origins they, for example, put events into historical context, these nonetheless only kick the problem of writing beginnings a little further down the road. For every local claim about the place of an event in some given context there can be joined the larger question of contextualizing that context, and so on, in the regress of historical beginnings. In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur explores the difficulties that attend even the initial statement of what counts as ‘event’.

43 In addition to this modification, Joseph attaches even more images to his own career. He imagines his reunion with Jacob as like that of a calf, removed from its mother, who bellows and is easily led to the calf. (Mann, 2005, p. 668)

44 In *The Birth of Physics* Michel Serres (2018) elaborates the difference between a completely stable cycle, like the model of a water cycle, or myth in which everything really does rotate and recur, and the Lucretian notion of a vortex, which is a local and temporary stabilization of the basic flow of reality. A vortex, like a child’s spinning top, does everything we expect a figure of temporal life to do: it both moves and is still. Serres draws an explicit link between the mathematics of Archimedes and the atomist physics described by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*, or *On the Nature of Things*. The inexorable recycling of myth rests on the image of the circle. In *Joseph* Mann describes reality as a ‘rotating sphere’ (Mann, 2005, p. 151) in which the divine and the human rise and fall, and celebration and lamentation, and all the other ‘hours of the feast’ (Mann, 2005, p. 367) are moments of a single movement. The work of *Joseph* to imagine how history can emerge from myth, how they are similar yet distinct, requires re-imagining the circular model of time without entirely abandoning it. Just as the circle or sphere can be used to help imagine the cycle of myth, so Archimedes spiral, or helix, which is the constant minimal deviation from a circumference can help to imagine the vortex. As the spiral follows the circle without ever retracing it, so that their difference at any point is infinitesimal, so is the relationship between history and myth. When the first origins of origins are considered in *Joseph*, their ultimate mystery is invoked. There is no accounting for the original itch of restlessness that Abram experienced, and, unable to account for it in conventional mythical terms, he had to imagine a new kind of God. To sustain that first impulse and to develop it into a sense of historical time requires sustaining it in every generation, at every moment. See in the chapter ‘No Beginning’ the discussion of the “‘yes’ that was always the answer of the community...” (Mann, 2005, p. 8) This mysterious yes could more easily be given up and the consolations of myth restored, but, without totally abandoning the model of myth without which they would be lost, this family at every moment deviated from it ever so slightly. In Lucretius, a minimal, unanticipated, deviation of an atom from an original laminar flow of atoms causes collisions, vortices. The apparent stability of the world actually emerges from an original unaccountable chaos.

45 Apart from the thrust of the present argument, it is important to note that here is one instance which refutes the charge of anti-semitism levelled by Marquardt (2005) against the novel. Crucially, the community that is established by this tradition of saying ‘yes’ is one of spirit and not of blood. (Mann, 2005, p. 8) Again, this is found on p. 8 of the novel.

46 For more on ‘acting and suffering’ serving as the kernel of narrative, see Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, particularly where he describes the ‘sequential interconnections the plot confers on the agents, their deeds, and their sufferings.’ (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 57)

47 This from Joseph’s own description of what he is doing as reading into God’s story, and the narrator’s description of this family as those ‘in whom a new history begins’ (Mann, 2005, p. 7).

48 Cerf (1982) also notices this.

49 The narrator implicitly inhabits Jacob’s own way of thinking about himself, which marks a sympathy that inclines the reader to take Jacob’s point of view on many things, so that by the end – and the novel ends shortly after Jacob’s death – the reader still holds him in high regard even after having witnessed some truly horrible behaviour, as for example in Dinah’s story. To inhabit Jacob’s associative, non-chronological mode of thinking, besides accomplishing all the other effects on the reader’s sense of the ‘beginning’ of Joseph, also produces this sympathy in the reader, which persists even when the narrative has gained enough momentum to carry on in a more or less chronological order.

50 This is an instance of the porous kind of self-understanding that Taylor (2007) contrasts with the modern, ‘buffered self’.

51 Recall Ricoeur’s comment in note 20. Consider Dilthey’s (1991) distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* as words for the ‘experience’. Whereas Dilthey describes an undifferentiated quality of experience that derives from the

resistance of the world and our bodies and is not already narrated, it is only Erlebnis, experience parcelled into event, which is amenable to interpretation and thus to consciousness. Perhaps Erfahrung is akin to what Abraham experienced as restlessness. Unable to articulate into conscious understanding, it nonetheless motivated the projects and modes of experience that he could understand. The narrator describes it as ‘an uneasiness of the soul expressed in a restlessness of the body’ (Mann, 2005, p. 4).

52 When Esau loses the birthright to Jacob, the narrator insists that none was cheated and that Esau subsequently embraced his role on the periphery of his family. He was known as ‘The red one’ (Mann, 2005, p. 154) which linked both the ruddiness of his features and his move to live in Edom, to the south. Later, when Joseph’s twin brothers Shimeon and Levi approached Jacob’s deathbed, they received a blessing that was a curse but held their heads high after being rebuked for their violence because, after all, it is an honour to be part of such a grand story, even as a villain.

53 Borders are *for* traversal. If they only marked absolute impermeability there could be no sense of what is beyond them, and everything within them would be homogenous. Thus the border qua border would not exist. For this argument, see De Certeau (1984).

54 See Bakhtin (2011), where it is ‘Epic time’, with its fully developed and ‘exteriorized’ heroes, that provides the power of myth to support investigations into origins without completely undermining the coherence of lived chronology.

55 In other words, where older genres of narrative time (myth, epic, tragedy, comedy, fairy tale, etc) relied on setting out a self-sufficient temporality independent of chronological memory by various formal means, including the invocation of the gods, the overdetermination of homeric heroes as both human actors and driven by the gods, the ‘once upon a time’ of fairy tales, the ‘In the beginning’ of Genesis, the novel is interested in origins within chronological time, and the imaginative operations which might allow such origins to support a life without slipping into regress.

56 Note my use of the same quotation in different contexts. Everything worth discussing in *Joseph* has multiple aspects and making sense of any one often leads to exploring others as well. This feature of the present reading confirms the point made in this section about the impossibility of pinning down any quotation to a single meaning, and also demonstrates that the reading developed here is one of many, even of my own possible readings, which could have emphasized other interpretations of a quotation or traced different associations between given quote and others in the novel.

57 See comment on Auerbach (2013) in note 21.

58 It was Goethe’s appreciation of the Joseph story in these terms, and the idea that one really ought to fill in the details of the story that was one of Mann’s prompts embark on the project. Seidlin (1962) challenges this story that Mann told about the impetus to write *Joseph*.

59 In his grief Jacob cries out to Eliezer concerning the injustice of having lost Joseph, that ‘*God has not kept pace – do you understand me? ... God has not kept pace in His own sanctification, but has stayed behind and is still a fiend.*’ (Mann, 2005, 523)

60 This may be because it is not so embedded in the political issues of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century – at least not so explicitly – as *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus*. While Mann’s life-affirming treatment of myth in *Joseph* can be interpreted in terms of the rise of regressive mythical thinking in Nazi fascism, *Joseph* makes sense without knowing anything about European history because its sources and setting are in ancient history. Of Mann’s novels, perhaps only *Buddenbrooks* is so easily approachable.

61 Mann himself enjoyed reading his own works in private gatherings during its composition and in public performances afterwards. His letters describe visits with friends or holiday gatherings when he would apparently read for hours, and bring everyone to tears of laughter. McDonald (1999) takes the importance of performance for *Joseph* as the starting point of an entire study of the novel.

62 I don’t have enough German to comment at all on how this mix of registers plays out in the original, but at least in this translation, it is present throughout the novel. Mann himself comments on it in the preface *Sixteen Years*: ‘... the occasional Anglo-Saxon coloring that I gladly incorporated into its German voice. ... I have no problem with someone deciding that the German ... is ‘not really German at all’... what the entire opus offers, above all else, is a work of language in whose polyphony of sounds of the ancient Near East are blended with something very modern, ... changing its linguistic masks...’ (Mann, 2005, p. xl) While Mann was publicly supportive of Lowe-Porter’s translations of his work, I think he would have appreciated the work of John Woods, whose more recent translations have paid special attention to this aspect. Woods comments on the how his translation develops a more varied tone rather than the overarching stiff biblical prose of Lowe-Porter. Mann as a writer not just concerned with what can be said in language, that is, not only the ideas and stories that make up the novel, but with language itself. When Joseph is about to meet his brothers again after so many years in Egypt, he suddenly remembers to speak Egyptian to them. ‘...all this time I’ve been speaking Canaanite with them in my mind – what an idiot I am. How am I supposed to be able to speak

Canaanite? That would be a terrible faux pas.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1302) This little joke compresses Mann’s humour from its usual slow burn to just a couple lines, an illustrates how it is accomplished by playing with language itself.

63 My own copy is filled with cross references. In addition to explicit interconnection, the reader will pick up on all sorts of parallels and differences in the process of flipping back and forth, some of which would surely have surprised and delighted Mann himself. Inner comparison is clearly suggested by the stark symmetry between paragraphs, but more subtly, the novel challenges the expectations of a ‘straight-through-front-to-back’ linear plot and chronological succession. See my chapter ‘No Beginning’ for a discussion of how in the first couple hundred pages, the ‘present’ of the narrative shifts between multiple points in the same set of stories. In these ways the novel constitutes a pedagogy of reading. By encouraging and simulating the reader’s activity, it serves as training in the kind of freedoms of the reader that De Certeau (1984) names in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which include not only the strategies mentioned already, but also skimming, skipping boring parts, nodding off now and then, and relying on the serendipity of landing on just the right page, however unexpectedly. For this imperfect – and free – reader, echoing passages are appreciated. Understanding *Joseph* depends on this engagement by the reader.

64 This tendency of Jacob’s to fight to unify oppositions within himself will also strike the reader in its contrast with the ways in which Joseph meets the same challenge by relying on his good looks, charisma, and cleverness. However, because this claim cannot be demonstrated directly by the two quotations, and to provide further quotation to support it would lead the argument astray, it remains an endnote, and an example of the exact problem of quotation taken up in this chapter, which is that it is impossible to follow up all the important threads of interpretation that are available.

65 Is he right about this? Another way of stating the problem is to ask whether signal can ever emerge from noise. Entropy will tend to degrade a signal into noise, but will never, in itself produce meaningful communication. This is one of the basic premises of information or communication theory. But, to consider Serres’ (2018) reading of Lucretius again, what if *all* ‘signal’ is only an apparent stability, an eddy in the chaotic flow of reality, and results from an original deviation? This is a reversal of the idea that noise is a deviation from signal. Here, it is important only to recognize Jacob’s own scheme, according to which reason and the spirit are absolutely distinguished from chatter, from the body, from nature. In any case, whether sense can ever emerge spontaneously from nonsense is beyond the scope of the present dissertation, in which simply the acknowledged distinction between them is necessary. It is also possible to contest Jacob’s conclusions even if the priests really are babbling. From their own perspective, perhaps the faith of the (apparently) babbling priesthood is that even their noise, if taken in a sufficient sample size of eons and multitudes, may contain cycles and patterns, even if they remain hidden to anyone limited to a mortal span. Perhaps it is (apparent) incomprehensibility itself that indicates the necessity of an infinite perspective, of a divine listener who hears beauty in babbling.

66 This can be considered as another instance of the Lucretian minimal deviation.

67 Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (2008) is devoted to the exploration of the emergence of new forms of life, of experience and society, from existing material in new combinations. The chemical notion of a catalyst, which is necessary but adds nothing to products of reaction, is important. See also Benjamin’s (2004) essay which interprets *Elective Affinities* in terms of the relation between myth and truth.

68 Langer (2007) in *Philosophy in a New Key* describes thought, which is always articulated in discursive language as a ‘tiny grammar bound island, in a sea of feeling’.

69 This is one motif of Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*. The nagging sense that we know more than we know, that something divine inheres in the mundane, and the sense that language can hold and express things of which the speaker is unaware, forms part of the alchemical appeal of life in the mountains for Hans Castorp.

70 For a treatment of Kant’s influence on the Romantic tradition, which is one of Mann’s sources of influence, see Seyhan (1992) *Representation and its Discontents*.

71 Note that ‘Yitzchak’ is a variant of the name ‘Isaac’, who was Abraham’s son and Jacob’s father.

72 De Certeau (1984) discusses the difference between a stabilized ‘text’ and one that can still take a scripture to be ‘living word’. For Pickstock (1998), liturgy is the expression of a language that maintains a living connection with God.

73 The suggestion of the ‘Word made flesh’ is intended. One way of interpreting Christ is as the historical embodiment of God whose essence is possibility. For an elaboration of this interpretation see Kearney’s 2001 book *The God who May Be*.

74 At stake here is the question of the relation between language and reality. Taylor (2005) describes the two main approaches to this question in comparing the ‘representational’ and ‘expressivist’ theories of language exemplified by Condillac and Herder, respectively. If language is taken to ‘represent’ reality, then there is always a distance between language and reality. They are not identical, and when the narrator says that the token is ‘the thing itself’, we are led to differentiate between the reality of the token and the linguistic domain of interpretation. If language is *not* the ‘thing itself’ then self-deception is possible. If language is understood as ‘expressing’ reality, then there is no such firm distinction between reality and language. The question that the reader must put to the narrator here is of whether the

token is language or not. In the present reading the token is *not* mute; it is already interpreted. If the narrator suggests that reality, including the human body, forms a system of strictly necessary relations and that language is nothing but the way we must come to terms with it, then it is necessarily and entirely illusory. One way of making sense of what is going on here is to suggest that the narrator shows how language can remain in touch with reality *and* be the site of self-deception by the operations by which it stretches time. In any case, the narrator's treatment of Jacob's grief in this section is not entirely to be taken at face value. The reader must be vigilant for the ways in which the narrator offers a theory of language that provides intellectual cover for Jacob's self-deception, *but also* the ways in which the narrator reveals that self-deception and offers qualifications of that theory of language.

75 This phrase reveals that Jacob's immobility is a posture, not, as Jacob and the narrator might have us believe, a pre-linguistic reaction of the body to reality. Even non-moving can express a certain comportment. Lear (2011) cites and discusses the example offers by Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium* of how Socrates' immobility on the battlefield is a mark of his courage and the physical expression of his intellectual deliberations.

76 Jacob's language games can do nothing against fate. 'Destiny cripples our anxious imagination by allowing it to anticipate everything except its fate – fate that thus avoids being turned aside by vigilant thoughts and retains all its primordial power and crushing blows.' (Mann, 2005, p. 428)

77 This story is treated in the chapter 'Narrating Interiority: The Hidden Face'.

78 Spinoza (1996) denies that people have free will and suggests that apparent free will is merely the ignorance of what determines our actions. Postulate 48 of Part 2 of his *Ethics* states that 'In the mind there is no absolute, or free, will, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity.' (p. 62) Only the idea of the mind that derives from imperfect knowledge of these causes supports the illusion of free will.

79 There is an echo of Simone Weil's (2009) analysis here; that we are closest to God in affliction.

80 See Seyhan's (1992) *Representation and its Discontents* for a study of the limits of the representation of time in language.

81 Or perhaps not – see Dreyfus and Taylor (2015) in *Retrieving Realism* as an entry into debates concerning the relation between language and reality. In their account, the idea that language does not have direct contact with reality invites charges of relativism, while arguments that want to preserve the grounding of meaning in reality invite charges of essentialism. In the argument pursued here, both tendencies are preserved – towards the idea that language really does go 'all the way down', that we can never 'get behind' language, but also of its ultimate answerability.

82 The 'language games', to borrow Wittgenstein's (1968) phrase, by which we actively coordinate and make sense of our lives only work and are only required because power of language is limited. We are not, in language, transparent to ourselves or others, and so participate in the mutually constructed set of rules that bind language and activity together as meaningful. Thus even the body, apparently prior to and impenetrable to language, is made meaningful and is required for meaning making. In book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions*, the incomprehensible is time itself, which is only experienced as an impossible-to-understand distention of the mind from its native experience of the present towards memory and expectation. The language of time derives its meaning from reaching its limit.

83 The experience of that which establishes a limit to language, in this case time, only appears as a limit within language. The limits of historical self-consciousness are apparent only in the language of historical consciousness, as Nietzsche (1980) suggests in *The Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*.

84 The representation of time specifically is named as the limit of language because other candidates for that limit, say, the perception of physical reality, also depend on the temporality of human consciousness. Merleau Ponty (2012) emphasizes the temporality of embodied human perception. The language of photographic 'realism' gives the illusion of capturing an 'instant' of the 'way things are' without any of the baggage of the temporality of perception. But these images are only death-masks of 'reality' as it appears in living consciousness. For more on this see Barthes' (2010) *Camera Lucida* and Van Den Berg's (1974) *Divided Experience and Complex Society* study of the early history of photographic portraiture. Before eyes had become accustomed to photography, people did not recognize their own photographic portraits. Recognition was of a living, moving person. Portraits like those painted by Rembrandt succeeded because they captured something dynamic about the subject. (Simmel, 2005) The artists of Egypt were highly skilled at static portraiture, but painted sarcophagi. Jacob refused to worship a God whose image could be given static representation because he considered his to be a living God and static idols to be dead.

85 The psychological ramification of this feature of language is that one who seeks to uncover all self-deception, or to interpret the causes of all anxieties, always finds something that requires further investigation. Hence the interminable duration of psychoanalysis. Other therapeutic approaches attempt an escape by positing 'behaviour', or the body, as the basic ground of psychological experience. If we can change the body, say through exercise or controlled breathing, we can change mood. A paradox attends all of these attempts to use language against its own pitfalls. In the end they all depend on some degree of adaptation to social reality in which a generally accepted notion of temporality and of

historical experience is accepted, and to do so requires some concession to ignoring first causes. The psychological question of historical experience is that of how to manage this concession without becoming blind, rigid, or frivolous, and to remain open to the renewal of the language of our self-understanding all the time.

⁸⁶ Joseph also undergoes personal development when he is at his lowest point. When he has been cast into the dry well his transition from narcissism to maturity really begins. That development occurs when pressure is at its greatest is also a major theme of Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. The environment of the sanitarium high in the mountains is described in its isolation from the rest of the world, and Hans Castorp's personality is 'enhanced', heightened', in the 'hermetic pressure' of the situation.

⁸⁷ This term for the mysterious but meaningful source of life is still available to us today even though it is often corralled into the service of the 'authorial' attitude as the positive beginning of language rather than the name of its potentiality. See Kearney's 2010 book *Anatheism* for an exploration of the kind of 'God' that is possible even after the notion of 'God' as one who authoritatively speaks the world into being and to whom we can appeal to ground our own claims to the authority can no longer be sustained.

⁸⁸ For a treatment of how this modern experience works out in language, see Taylor's *The Malaise of Modernity* as a treatment of the psychological ideal of authenticity, and the essay 'Self-interpreting Animals' in *Human Agency and Language Vol. 1*. (2005)

⁸⁹ The intersubjectivity of the desire between Joseph and Mut recalls and modifies the function of recognition in Hegel's (2018) master-slave dynamic. Desire itself emerges out of their mutual recognition as master (Mut) and slave (Joseph) but also in the oscillating reversals of these roles throughout their affair. Mut also recognizes Joseph as a 'man of blessing' (Mann, 2005, p. 854), and he also fooled himself into thinking he was the authority and that his was the power 'to cool, disenchant, and heal her' (Mann, 2005, p. 900).

⁹⁰ Recall the discussion of Jacob and Joseph's re-enactment of Abraham's test of faith in 'Quoting Joseph'. The inheritors of the faith face a different test than Abraham, the first to discover God.

⁹¹ Jacob's tendency towards the spiritual and reasonable makes him uncomfortable with the natural side of things, including desire, which he cannot integrate with his spiritual aims. What does Jacob fear from 'Nature'? The cyclical model of time that it provides, to which his faith is opposed. Nakedness is associated with reproduction, and reproduction belongs to other gods. On his wedding night, Jacob 'felt sorry for God, who ... now that the hour was realized had to yield His lordship over it to the idols and divinities of the flesh, under whose sign the hour stood.' (Mann, 2005, p. 242) Jacob similarly distinguishes himself from his 'earthy' brother Esau, and the reasonableness of thought from the mystery of dreams. All of these oppositions are transformed by Joseph later on, and in the argument pursued in this dissertation, desire is part of, and not isolated from, a life of interpretation.

⁹² Mann invents a lot of the detail, but he does have some other sources to draw on at times and for some episodes, such as the scene in which Mut invites her high-status friends to a gathering at which Joseph is made to appear. She has given them all fruit to eat and extremely sharp knives to peel it with. When Joseph appears, the knives slip and the women bleed. Mann finds this episode in Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*. (Tomes, 1977)

⁹³ She lacks the language of 'sin and foresight' that allows her desire to lead to any kind of living future. She cannot 'read' her own desire. Counter to Joseph's innovations in language that allow him to read his desires differently.

⁹⁴ Throughout her adventure, Mut knew, as Jacob did in his grief, that the total shattering of convention would not be the way of originality. Like Jacob, and Joseph after him, the possibility of originality is a deviation from convention that does not totally leave it behind. Part of Mann's accomplishment in recovering Mut's reputation without contradicting anything that tradition has to say about her is to account for the silence about her fate in Genesis. While Jacob and Joseph are able to deviate from conventional roles in such a way that whole new ways of life are opened, there may be some degree to which this was possible because their masculine roles allowed for a greater degree of activity and variety than did Mut's. Mann's narrator admits that Mut retreats into the roles afforded by her gender and that she does sink into historical obscurity, but then transforms the silence of tradition concerning Mut's into an expression of the 'hidden treasure' and depth of personality that she has achieved.

⁹⁵ See Barthes (2009) *The Pleasure of the Text*.

⁹⁶ It is possible that what began in desire has collapsed into a repetition compulsion or an addiction without progressing in the way suggested here. Hunger also returns.

⁹⁷ Throughout the novel, physiognomy expresses character. But unlike descriptions of faces that reduce the character to characteristics, as Marquardt (2005) suggests, the importance of faces in the novel generally derives from descriptions of their contradictions, tensions, or lack thereof. An early section about Joseph describes his beauty as imperfection. (Mann, 2005, p. 46). Mut is described in terms of the contradiction between her sinuous mouth and austere eyes, and Leah in terms of a contradiction between the form of her body and the plainness of her face. In fact it is remarkable when Joseph's own face is described as bearing a 'divine lack of tension' (Mann, 2005, p. 331), and that the kind of beauty that does not express tensions is associated with the divine.

⁹⁸ One of the innovations of Joseph's family is to describe a God who is both the source of time and develops within it. One of the feats of *Joseph* is to express this without collapsing into paradox. Faith, in the novel, is working towards the future as a project of 'mutual sanctification' (Mann, 2005, p. 922) of God and humanity.

⁹⁹ More and more of individual life becomes susceptible to public languages – of therapy, of management, of being rendered as data – which in turn shapes ever more of what used to be the private domains of life. Taste and desire, shaped by algorithms and the total publicity of the self in social media all encroach on the privacy of experience. This retreat of private experience is different from the ways in which the cultivation of one's private experience is always a stylization of one's uses of public language. It is also different from a total baring of the soul in a confessional mode. It is the ceding and loss of experience to the tools of data computation on which the individual has no formative effect. These very recent examples do not necessarily indicate a new phenomenon. Benjamin in *The Storyteller* (2012) also describes the loss of experience as storytelling practices decline and language is reduced to conveying 'information'. Benjamin writes that 'no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing happens that benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. ... the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.' (Benjamin, 2012, p. 89) I argue something similar when I notice that the narrator preserves the privacy of characters: not everything is fully explained to the reader, and so the characters achieve psychological depth of interiority.

¹⁰⁰ See chapter 'Dreaming, Reading, Writing' for more on how experience is already structured as narrative. See note 20.

¹⁰¹ Only, that is, because it would not work simply to leave more of her experience un-narrated. To do so would do nothing for the narrator's project of recovering her reputation. Too little narration and a person is merely a type; too much narration and the person is so fully explained that ultimately they are again reducible to type. Only thorough enough narration allows a moment of privacy to contain all the mystery of personal experience.

¹⁰² If historical self-understanding depends on reading oneself in the story of history, and drawing on historical experience as the source of experience, then such a reading cannot be exhaustive, but can only be a 'Good Enough Reading'. See also Jacob's anxiety, which derives from his constant concern with understanding himself and God. Modern psychological therapy reveals that the exhaustive examination of anxiety will never get to the bottom of it. At some point the way out of anxiety depends on relinquishing a total grasp on oneself and the idea that one might master anxiety. Nietzsche's (1980) *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life* suggests that the historical sense depends as much on being able to forget as it does on remembering.

¹⁰³ On the paratactic concision of Genesis, and the importance of direct speech, see Alter's (2011) *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

¹⁰⁴ See note 21, where the distinction between Biblical writing and Greek writing made by Auerbach is that psychological realism is not established by exhaustively detailed explanation, but by what is left unsaid in the background.

¹⁰⁵ In this characterization, we see Esau embodying mythical types, like Pan, from Greek myth. *Joseph* continually mixes the whole register of mythical sources in the ancient Near East. Joseph plays with his own identity in terms of Osiris, Adonis, and at one point recognizes his own tears as those of Gilgamesh. The violent twins Simeon and Levi are identified with Castor and Pollux. This kind of identification of characters with myths that are borrowed from various sources beyond the text in Genesis is accomplished by the characters themselves as well as by the narrator.

¹⁰⁶ A similar phrase appears concerning Dostoevsky's heroes in Bakhtin's (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

¹⁰⁷ See my comments on Tumanov's (2007) essay.

¹⁰⁸ Jacob's father Isaak is not a major character in *Joseph*, or in Genesis. In *Joseph*, Isaak's famous blindness is explained as his inability to fit the 'little myth' of his own genealogy within the 'bigger myth' of God's purposes for the family.

¹⁰⁹ Further: 'This whole story has already been written, Mai, in God's book, and we shall read it together amid laughter and tears. For you do intend to be part of it yourself, don't you?' (Mann, 2005, p. 1303).

¹¹⁰ To do otherwise, as Jacob does, to constantly interrogate our own decisions, is the way of anxiety, because they are ultimately impossible to fully explain.

¹¹¹ As in the opening scene of the novel, where Jacob chastises Joseph for his nakedness by the well, which he takes as mindless and idolatrous, here Jacob admonishes Joseph against the risk of dreaming instead of reasoning. Jacob operates according to these dichotomies that always link clear thinking with piety, and which are opposed by those natural elements that he takes to be opposed to reason. What does Jacob fear from the natural side of things? In the chapter 'The Direction/Disruption of Desire' I suggested that he fears losing sight of the future promised by God. Jacob does not know how to acknowledge nature as the source and origin of life, without slipping into the cyclical

understanding of time that is commonly suggested by nature. It will be for Joseph to work out how nature, as a source and origin of life, can be articulated in terms of the historical conception of time.

¹¹² In this, it is analogous to the way that desire exists between subjects, and that neither desiring subject has sole authority over desire or whatever originality emerges from its expression.

¹¹³ For more on the turn away from reading to writing, see the chapter ‘Writing and Good Enough Reading’.

¹¹⁴ The chapter entitled ‘The Holy Game’ is one of the most enjoyable in the entire novel. The reader knows that the journey of Joseph’s brothers will result in a happy reunion, and the narrator knows that the reader knows and plays up the comedy of this part of the story by forestalling the expected scene of recognition. In so doing, the narrator draws the reader into the same kind of playfulness as Joseph’s. Joseph knows that comedy derives from differential knowledge. He recognizes the brothers but they do not recognize him. All the tricks that he plays on the brothers intensify the culmination of the story in the scene of recognition, and in some ways make it possible. Joseph *must* toy with his brothers in order to make sure that the scene of recognition will be a success: he must discern whether or not the brothers have changed and are open to repenting for their ill treatment of him, and does so by tricking them into bringing Benjamin, the youngest brother, to Egypt; he must find out if Jacob is still alive, and so he accuses them of spying and questions them relentlessly; he must discern how much care they have for each other, and so takes Simeon hostage in order to provoke Judah’s famously self-sacrificial speech. Tricks and the maintenance of the unevenness of knowledge are required here in order to cut through the possibility of deception. The happy reunion is only possible once the brothers have passed these tests that make the tears of laughter that follow possible. If, for example, the brothers had turned their resentments onto Benjamin, or if Jacob was dead, or if they were too concerned with their individual fates, then Joseph could only shed tears of sorrow. The reader’s view of the end allows the narrator to play the story for comedy, but for the characters, the playfulness of the ‘Holy Game’ made that particular future possible. There is something terrible about the game, and that is why it is ‘holy’, because if the game had produced sad results, they would have been cruel, vengeful, tricks indeed. That is why Joseph attributes things to God. God planned it, God even allowed the sufferings of the past because He foresaw this conclusion and made it turn out for the good. Note the same difference in knowledge between God and Joseph as there is between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph’s faith consists in his having from the beginning expected – if not in knowledge of the details – this kind of fulfilment at some point. The laughter that he can share with the brothers is all of them joining together in their collective ignorance of God’s plans for them. Laughter establishes a link between the intellectual process of ‘reading’ and interpreting and embodied historical experience in a similar way that desire does. In laughter, the mind and the body are one in a way that gives full expression of historical experience. Of course, historical experience is not all laughter. It has its hours, as does grief and other experiences. But laughter provides perhaps the most intense moments of the embodied consciousness of historical experience. Grief, like Jacob’s is too conscious, and struggles to find a way out of anxiety. Sex is too unconscious. Jacob knew that in sex people can only ‘beget’ in ignorance and never to ‘create’ (Mann, 2005, p. 530), as only God does, in full consciousness of what is being produced. Human originality, according to this opposed pair, and in accordance with everything argued in this dissertation, is never produced by full knowledge of historical experience and always depends on a particular attitude towards one’s blind spots. Joseph’s innovation in historical originality is to learn to laugh, which allows full awareness of the inevitable sources of ignorance in one’s historical self-consciousness to be combined with the good faith that a better future is possible. Joseph’s ‘Holy Game’ is intended to make stern life laugh. There are difficult ‘questions that life poses. One cannot answer them with a long face. The human spirit can rise above them only in serene delight, so that in its own profound amusement over what is unanswerable, it may move God Himself, the great unanswering God, to laughter’ (Mann, 2015, 1304). This ‘Holy Game’ differs from his immature cleverness and tricks, and from the kind of imposter or con-artist that Mann likes to write in that the game is not played for his own individual gain. It is not egotistical but derives from his learning that historical life calls, ultimately, either for despair – the infinite regress, the descent into hell – or for it to be played like a game. See note 12 for other implications of the reader’s lack of suspense in this story. In the Holy Game, the narrator exploits the lack of suspense for comedy. Just as Joseph could laugh because he knew more than his brothers, we can laugh while he is nervous, because ‘We, on the other hand, are exempted from all such suspense, because we can recite by heart each of the stages of the story being told here...’ (Mann, 2005, 1369)

¹¹⁵ See the chapter on secondary literature for examples of these other ‘sources’ of *Joseph*.

¹¹⁶ Unless this is explicitly recognized, or some specific project other than interpreting a reading of *Joseph* is claimed, then this central aspect of the novel will be missed. See the ‘Partial Readings’ section of the chapter on secondary literature.

¹¹⁷ In contrast with the metaphors of ‘authorship’, ‘authenticity’.

¹¹⁸ Notice a link here between the narrator’s reading of the story and the ongoing project of the mutual sanctification of God and humanity which generalizes this kind of reading into a way of understanding history. Mann makes the

further link between these and his own project by having the narrator comment that *Joseph* is a retelling of what is, after all, ‘God’s invention’.

119 See note 51 regarding Dilthey on experience.

120 The rest of ‘The Rascal Servant’ carries on in this manner. The narrator detects in the verb ‘to lead’ – a ‘strange verb’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1441) which in some translations is smoothed and rendered as ‘fed’, which fits better in the sentence ‘...and he fed them with bread in exchange for all their cattle that year.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1440) but ‘is inexact and leaves out a certain allusion that the original whispers very intentionally.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1440) – a certain mythical resonance that would have been familiar to the Egyptians, and to the modern ‘mythically trained ear this silent and formulaic word ascribes to Jacob’s son the role and character of a good shepherd who tends his people, who grazes them in green pastures and leads them to fresh water.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1441); noticing the comment that Joseph acquired all their cattle could not possibly mean that he took them all into possession, because it is not true that ‘every last cow ended up in Pharaoh’s stalls and pens. Joseph did not build stalls and pens for seven years, but cone-shaped storehouses. ... Cattle were lent or pawned. ... For the most part they remained on the same farms and estates...’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1441). The narrator continues in this vein of subtle observation; observation for instance that the word ‘slavery’ does not actually pass Joseph’s lips, nor is found in the words of the narrator of Genesis, but appears as part of a ‘proposal, an offer, made by individuals, by a group belonging to a previously intractable if not rebellious class of men, the owners of great latifundia and princes of the nomes, ... [who were] the primary targets of the expropriation and resettlements we are told about.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1442) Less than slavery, the narrator calls the state to which they are reduced the ‘villeinage of serfs – and every friend of humanity and citizen of humane modernity is free to call it that as long as he is prepared, as logic demands, to apply it to himself as well.’ (Mann, 2005, p. 1443) The narrator deftly and quickly defuses the accusation that Joseph reduced the Egyptians to slaves by suggesting that it was not nearly so extreme, can be read with a smile as Joseph’s administration of a taste of their own medicine to the landowners whose economics already depended on slave labour and the legality of forced resettlement associated with land grants, and that in fact it can only be criticized at all if we are willing to view the injustices of modern economics in the same light. All of this is accomplished entirely on the basis of reading the same text on which the accusations against Joseph are grounded, albeit much more carefully and without the illusory ambition of exhausting its meaning.

121 See note 63.

122 The main difference between what I develop in this dissertation and reader response theory is that in my account, the reader’s subjective experience is the starting point of a process of interpretation that answers to the text and educates the experience of the reader, while in reader response theory the experience of the reader is itself the focus of consideration.

123 In itself, a text doesn’t give access to interpreting the author, who can only be understood based on the totality of their expressions. These notes that are attached to the main text of this dissertation serve as an example. In a sense, they are superfluous: the main text could still make sense without them. But they do augment, comment on and place the reading developed in the main text in dialogue with other texts. Insofar as these notes account for the reading, they are not authoritative, but provide a second, hypertext that itself must be read, or another aspect that must be included by the reader in the interpretation of the main text. In either case, they are part of, and do not stand outside of, my own reader’s interpretation of this dissertation.

124 See Pelissier (1991) for an anthropological study of this dynamic between the ideas about education and the actual practices of teaching and learning that continually expose their insufficiency.

125 Similar phrases are also used to describe the educational conceived of as *Bildung*. See Lovlie et al. (2003) for an exploration of contemporary views on *Bildung*.

126 The present dissertation avoids the ‘inside’ vs ‘outside’ distinction in its emphasis on the interpretation of publicly expressions. No one has privileged access even to their own expressions, and sometimes it is the ‘outsider’ – like Joseph the interpreter of dreams – who, unburdened by habitual blind spots about one’s own life, is able to interpret one’s expressions better than the one who produced them. The point is that thinking about education in the way suggested here sustains an interpretation of expressions on its own terms rather than explaining them in terms of ideas external to them.

127 Again, there are many practices of teaching and learning that should not be understood as ‘historical’ insofar as they are not concerned with improving the model of what is taught, such as training in a skill limited to a practical scope of application. But care is required even in this distinction. Take, for example, practices of apprenticeship such as those described by Pelissier (1991), which, when studied carefully on their own terms, do not appear to be practices of ahistorical training. Masters also, and not just apprentices, change and form themselves in the process. This is akin to the relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh in the practice of dream interpretation: while Pharaoh is ostensibly the one who learns, Joseph also requires the interpretive relationship in order to develop himself.

- ¹²⁸ This is consistent with Plato's idea of the individual as the microcosm of society, as discussed in the introduction, and here described in historical terms.
- ¹²⁹ Heidegger (1993) suggests something similar when describing 'authentic' experience – 'Dasein' – as being suspended over nothingness. It is not a state to be achieved and sustained or really even contemplated for more than the blink of an eye.
- ¹³⁰ Of course, whether the present is a measurable 'slice' of time with any duration, as Bergson might argue (1999) or is an artifact of the imagination of a mind stretched uncomfortably between memory and expectation, as Augustine (2006) suggests is outside the scope of this dissertation.
- ¹³¹ Province of British Columbia Curriculum available at <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca>, see in particular the section on 'Social Studies'.
- ¹³² Such an attitude, and its philosophical roots are explored in Rorty's 1989 book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, particularly in the essay 'Private Irony and Liberal Hope'. Rorty suggests that while 'All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives' (Rorty, 1989, p.73), the ironist 'has radical and continual doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies...' (Rorty, 1989, p.73). The ironist is criticized by the common-sense attitude, which is developed into an intellectual disposition by the metaphysician, as being relativistic or irresponsible. Rorty identifies himself as an ironist and thinks that the metaphysicians will never actually reach the truth, or the correspondence of their vocabulary with reality that they seek, and that in any case they will lose the ears of ordinary people who need to figure out daily life. What Rorty's essay does not sufficiently address is how or why conflicts between different vocabularies of non-intellectual commonsense people should resolve into irony. It is one thing to suggest that the ironic attitude can be sustained in a liberal society, but another to suggest that irony has anything at all to offer a society wracked by real conflicting accounts of how society should be organized. Mann wrote in such historical conditions.
- ¹³³ Rorty (1989) describes the metaphysician as requiring 'some consensus about what is universally human' (Rorty, 1989, p.84) while the ironist requires 'little more than a consensus that that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities, and that that goal requires, besides peace and wealth, the standard "bourgeois freedoms."' (Rorty, 1989, p.84) Just above, Rorty lists the requirements for the kind of free discussion and dialogue that the ironist requires when he describes it as 'simply the sort that goes on when the press, the judiciary, the elections, and the universities are free, social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher education is common and peace and wealth have made possible the leisure necessary to listen to lots of different people and think about what they say.' (Rorty, 1989, p.84) What produced these conditions? Surely not irony. Even Rorty notes that 'Nietzsche said, with a sneer, that "Democracy is Christianity made natural". Take away the sneer, and he was quite right.' (Rorty, 1989, p.87)
- ¹³⁴ Which can equate to holding those traditional claims to authority ironically. See Higgins, Madden and Korteweg (2015) for a discussion of the difficulties interpreting the relations between 'modern' and 'traditional' cultures in terms of the activity of deconstruction that often re-inscribes, upholds, or replaces certain binaries, such as those between 'modern' and 'traditional' cultures, even in the process of attending to untenable oppositions or positions, such as the 'perfect stranger' position of a teacher in relation to Indigenous culture.
- ¹³⁵ Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission said in a 2015 interview that 'Education is what got us into this mess — the use of education at least in terms of residential schools — but education is the key to reconciliation'. (Hayden Watters, CBC News)
- ¹³⁶ The words in quotes are descriptions that follow from the 'authority' sense of language. This dissertation argues that a 'readerly' approach will get behind some of the oppositions that these descriptions imply.
- ¹³⁷ See Pickstock's (1998) *After Writing*, particularly the Derrida essay.
- ¹³⁸ See debates concerning what has been labeled 'discovery' math by those who argue for a return to more traditional, standardized method. (Csanady, National Post)
- ¹³⁹ For some practical approaches to math education that can be aligned with the theory of math education proposed here, see Liljedahl (2021), Banwell et al. (1986), Lockhart (2012).