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'The Nothing That Is' as Object Blank

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The old rhetoricians have vanished, and with them that invincible confidence of theirs with which they assumed the audience (recall that Longinus anticipated the hearers). Of late, from Romanticism onwards one could say, that confidence started to desorb, shocking the poets out of their old counterparts' complacency which they desired to inherit.¹ It would be difficult to find a poet from the pre-Romantic span of English literature who became pensive amid the "din / Of towns and cities" and rejoiced in the jocund company of the non-human world (Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" ll. 25-26). Amid the dissonant din, the poet's voice was not heard, he felt forlorn, and entered *métoikos*.² With this began the undoing or re-doing of the 'self.'

The Romantics, however, might not have felt as much need of the audience as the poets of the present do. The Romantic poet at least had the respite of seeing much in the external world; however, the modern poets—like Eliot, Williams, early Pound—found themselves in the 'unreal city,' and their 'waste-land' view did not allow them to see much promise in the world without. This is the greatest poverty of human existence, as Stevens puts it succinctly:

There lies the misery, the coldest coil
That grips the centre, the actual bite, that life
Itself is like a poverty in the space of life,
So that the flapping of wind around me here
Is something in tatters that I cannot hold . . . (298-299)

The modern poets kept searching madly for the response to their sounds and songs since for them the external world was in “tatters” and incomprehensible. Frost’s “The Most of It” expresses this need:

For all the voice in answer he could wake
 Was but the mocking echo of his own
 From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake

 He would cry out on life, that what it wants
 Is not its own love back in copy speech,
 But counter-love, original response (451)

Disillusioned with the external world, the modern poet turned inward in his search for that “counter-love” or “original response.” Thus, Stevens found contentment in hearing himself speak, the phenomenon—M. Keith Booker points out—that attracted both Lacan and Derrida (495).³ Stevens’ “Of Modern Poetry” is essentially an exercise in narcissistic pleasure; the poem being the poet’s own voice, he desires it to “repeat / Exactly that which [his mind] want[ed] to hear / In an emotion as of two people” (240).⁴

Thus receding ever inward or becoming ever more concentric, the self finally—paradoxically—decentred itself. Whereas the old rhetoricians were concerned with the uncertain Fate, the modern poet exhibits the uncertainty of self. As Yeats appropriately sums up, “Unlike the rhetoricians, who get a confident voice from remembering the crowd they have won or may win, we sing in our [own] uncertainty” (*Mythologies* 331). Here, or having receded further back, the self confronted nothingness, which became the characteristic feature of much of contemporary poetry. I propose to take up two representative poems from the previous century for discussion in which the whited-out winter landscape is used as a signifier of nothingness, which may further be nothing else than a signifier itself: “Desert Places” by Robert Frost and “The Snow Man” by Wallace Stevens. Many critics have noticed similarities in the two poems; however, the two poets’ treatment of ‘nothingness’ still needs to be discussed intensively. While philosophers have divergent opinions on the nature of ‘nothingness,’ the two poets’ views on it are closer to Sartre’s glosses of it. The speakers of or in the two poems have differential positioning with regard to it since their feeling of ‘nothingness’ differs from each other’s. Thus, any philosophical thinking on ‘nothingness’ must relate it to human

desire and feelings. The 'nothingness' in the two poems, therefore, is better read together with Lacan and Sartre.

The situation in both the poems is almost identical: the speaker beholding the wintry landscape dominated by the snow. Both poems have nearly the same number of lines; "Desert Places" has sixteen lines and "The Snow Man" fifteen. Structuralism not being the touchstone here, however, I would concentrate on the most conspicuous aspect of the two and its treatment: the wintry landscape. The snow in both the poems does two things simultaneously; it beautifies the landscape and, at the same time, produces a sort of benumbing effect. Stevens' language does not *want* to betray the speaker's emotions or feelings on watching the snowy landscape, hence is highly denotative; that of Frost is almost colloquial ("fast, oh, fast") and straightforward without much stylizing, and does betray the speaker's fear even though he says "They cannot scare me." Frost's language clearly intends to record the benumbing experience, whereas Stevens' poem, however denotative its language, does record the chilling effect on the 'listener' as he is stranded between "Nothing that is not there" and "the nothing that is."⁵

The readers' experience indicates that the weight of the two poems increases in the lower half as they come toward their ending. Since both poems give importance to the benumbing aspect of the landscape, it is necessary to explore it at a deeper level, otherwise the poems' interpretation stand a better chance of remaining in limbo, leaving the critic himself benumbed. The speaker of "Snow Man" regards—as Stevens makes it explicit in the first six and a half lines—everything that is there; the 'listener, however, beholds "nothing that is not there." There is a lot of difference between 'regarding' everything that is there and 'beholding' "nothing that is not there." The speaker's love or desire for the details of the landscape can be readily seen here, but the double negative in "nothing that is not there"—at first reading—seems to reflect the listener's lack of desire for the details and the landscape. Where do we locate the roots of Realism if not in the lack of desire for the external (even the internal) world?⁶ This lack of desire itself seems responsible for the loneliness of Frost's speaker too; it "includes [him] unawares;" unawares, because it is not a consciously felt lack of desire but unconsciously experienced. Of course, the unconscious would cease to have any significance if it did not affect the conscious. Thus, Frost's speaker feels "absent-spirited;" lack of desire, therefore, means absence of the spirit or lack of being itself. Stevens' listener also seems to be going through the same experience, which must be a terrifying experience—the reason why Frost's speaker feels scared.

If 'being' is the pinnacle of the whole of human experience, its crass absence—the 'nothing'—would be the nadir. Though 'being' and 'nothing' are thus dependent on each other, it would be a mistake to define the 'nothing' simply as the lack of being since, like 'being,' it has its own phenomenology.⁷ If desire alone can procure 'being' for the human subject, complete lack of desire—or no-desire—procures the 'nothing.' In Lacanian thought, a hundred percent realization of 'being' is an impossibility; Fink therefore argues that one can "procure for him- or herself [only] some modicum" of 'being,' the reason why he calls the realization of that modicum a "second-order *jouissance*" (Fink 60-61). If the realization of whatever amount of 'being' yields *jouissance*, the realization of any amount of 'nothing' would produce the Heideggerian Angst, the Dread. Lacan treats 'being' as the cause of our desire and as an object per se; it should be possible to treat 'nothing' in much the same way. Perhaps, that is precisely what Stevens intends in differentiating the two occurrences of the word in the final line; in the first instance, it is clearly a pronoun whereas in the second it is a noun preceded by the definite article and followed by the emphatic "that is." If, as in Lacanian thought, the always sought-after object (*a*) is ever receding, substituting surrogate objects in its place, so must the 'nothing' be never finally or completely accomplished. For this, the 'nothing' must keep substituting surrogate objects in its stead. The wintry landscape is that substitute in the two poems.

Even though 'being' and 'nothing' may be called objects as such, how do we get to know them if they can never be fully realized? Obviously through those very words, with which we symbolize them and, without which, neither would the poets be able to communicate them to us nor could we 'see' them. The words are their signifiers; it is those words that bring them into existence for us. As Stevens says elsewhere, "the word is the making of the world" (345); Lacan holds the same view in saying that words create the world that we possess (*Écrits* 65). Like these words, the surrogate objects that 'being' and 'nothing' substitute in their place also mediate between them and us. Since the surrogate objects of 'being' can yield *jouissance*, these objects partake of the original 'being'-as-object; so must the surrogate objects of 'nothing' create Angst and partake of the original 'nothing'-as-object. It is this partaking that allows us the experience and knowledge of what Lacan calls the Real. And, as Lacan maintains, since we cannot have full knowledge of the Real, the words with which we symbolize the Real are merely signifiers—even the surrogate objects, due to their function merely as surrogate objects, must be treated as signifiers. Hence, all our formulations of 'being' and 'nothing' can never go beyond the level of signifiers. In fact, these signifiers play with us, control us. What we can

do at best is to dialectize or verbalize them, as Lacan would say. Lacan, therefore, aptly uses a signifier to represent what he calls the cause of being and object of desire: object (*a*), the parentheses here suggesting its veiled and inaccessible nature; and, insofar as its meaning is concerned, Lacan keeps it shifting throughout his work owing to its illusive nature. It must be possible to use a similar signifier for the 'nothing;' let object () be that signifier, to be read as 'object blank.' The modern poets have been shifting its meaning through their works in their attempts to define and describe it, as Lee Zimmerman shows us in his essay.

Of particular interest in the same article by Zimmerman are two quite useful glosses on 'nothing.' One is suggested by one of D. W. Winnicott's patients who exclaimed, "Wouldn't it be awful if the child looked into the mirror and saw nothing!" (83). In Lacan's terminology, it is the loss of mirror-stage *jouissance*, or the loss of the process of identification, the basis of which is Narcissism. One's identification with the external world, or the 'other' (with small 'o'), precipitates the sense of 'self' or 'being' in that the desire achieves some measure of satisfaction. One expects the return of or for what one gives out. If there is no such echo, there is nothing; the nothing still *comes back* (i.e. in Heidegger's words, the nothing "noths" or it does noth-ing). The two poems under consideration here do create this effect. The other gloss in Zimmerman suggests the interrelation between 'being' and 'nothing.' Though Zimmerman does not state this explicitly, he does have some remarks that point to this aspect; to quote a terse representative comment, he argues that "just as Bishop slips into 'cold, blue-black space,' Eisely loses his grip on being" (87), where 'being' and 'nothing' are almost conflated. In Stevens' words, they function like "point A / In a perspective that begins again / At B: the origin of the mango's rind" (528). Just as the beginning of a circle, at any given point on the circumference, coincides with its end with its beginning with its end . . . so do 'nothing' and 'being' coincide, coexist. This is precisely what Sartre suggests in one of the most difficult passages:

It follows therefore that there must exist a Being [...] of which the property is to nihilate Nothingness [that is, to *produce* it, to turn it into nothingness], to support it in its being, to sustain it perpetually in its very existence, *a being by which nothingness comes to things* [...] The being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness. (57-58; parentheses mine)⁸

Yet, it is we humans who have formed the two categories of 'nothing' and 'being,' which are just names given by us, like Stevens' 'A' and 'B', to what is

actually without ruptures like the “mango’s rind” in the Stevens poem; perhaps they belong to the One or the Absolute that cannot be divided into parts or categories as we do by availing of our ability or inevitability of using signifiers; or, conversely, it must be the signifiers’ potential to use us to that effect. Stevens’ symbol of the “mango’s rind” gives us the idea of that One, which goes by the name of the Real in Lacan. The Real, in Lacan, is without break or fissure: “Le reel est sans fissure;” “It has no cracks, gaps, or holes; it is unrent;” “By definition, the Real is full” (Fink 182). In Seminar II, Lacan says, “There is no absence in the Real. There is only absence if you suggest that there may be a presence there when there isn’t one. In the in principio, I am proposing to locate the word insofar as it creates the opposition, the contrast. It is the original contradiction of 0 and 1” (313). Thus, we declare the presence of either ‘being’ or ‘nothing,’ depending upon our momentary experience of the Real. The presence of one of them anticipates an opposition or contrastive position regarding the other, as between linguistic signs; in short, it anticipates the existence of the other as absent. The Real is, therefore, to be conceived as the “presymbolic or prelinguistic moment in the development of homo sapiens or in our own individual development (Fink 24). I would also venture to call it the pre-experiential and having nothing to do with human beings. And why not? Think of the time before the advent of life on earth—that continuum. The formation of rocks and soil, the emergence of life etc could be viewed as disturbances in that continuum, that blankness. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, therefore, defines the blankness as the “space without incident, its temporal equivalent time without change (inflection or interruption), that is, time without incident” (160). The question is whether those disturbances, inflections, or interruptions filled the whole of the blankness or left spaces between. Perhaps they did not fill the whole of it, since the earth itself could be viewed as an interruption, an incident; and whatever of the prior vast blankness it filled is, as we know, a very small part. All the stars and satellites have thus filled the blankness but left what Frost calls “empty spaces / Between.” Besides, the earth itself still has at its core that part or aspect of its Real that existed before it cooled down and became our earth. That is why, despite the formation of rocks, soil, life and so on, there must be blank spaces between them, the reason why Frost’s speaker sees the “blanker whiteness” and Stevens’ listener beholds “the nothing that is” on the earth itself.

Two propositions can be readily formed from this discussion, which has also suggested how the (surrogate) object and the signifier are similar, if not identical: *i*) (Since the earth did not fill the whole of blankness,) no signifier, word, or language can replace the whole of the ‘nothing’ or ‘being’ — rather, of the Real; *ii*) Yet, (like the

earth containing that hottest fluid at its core), each signifier contains some part of the Real. What Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe refers to as blankness, thus, is very close to Lacan's Real. But, as one can see from the title of his essay, he must treat it as signifier, for the whole of the blankness is not available to us; like an animated object, it recedes further and further back. What he is left with is nothing but surrogates as blanknesses as signifiers. What his essay must do, in fact, is to keep circumventing the blankness, playing around it, as if—to use Frost's lines—“We dance round in a ring and suppose, / But the Secret sits in the middle and knows” (495).

The signifier, however, cannot be underestimated; it has its own potential. In fact, the rise of what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order,⁹ cannot be called unnatural; there is no specific moment traceable of its origin, just as there is no specific moment when the earth cooled down and became our earth. If the inflections or interruptions like the rocks, soil, vegetation, life etc are thus untraceable back to a point in time, and if these—being surrogate objects that came to replace the Real *before*—are similar to the advent of signs, signifiers, words, language and so on, then the Symbolic may be viewed as continuous with the Real. Also, if the earth contains the lava, so each signifier ‘contains’—in both senses of the word—the Real. This is the signifier's catachrestic movement into the Real, perforating and renting it, making holes into it. This is the reason why Lacan said that “the letter kills, but we learn this from the letter itself” (qtd. in Fink 24).

We will have to go some way to see how the letter kills the subject,¹⁰ so that we can see why Frost's speaker is scared and Stevens' ‘listener’ benumbed. Fink tells us about an anecdote that is “a purely fictitious account” (but useful as illustration) related with Albert Einstein, who overheard his father saying, “He will never amount to anything,” and the mother conceding, “That's right; he is lazy like his father” (see Fink 10). These ‘letters’ were purloined by young Albert and were stored in his unconscious. The fact that he failed mathematics test in the high school allows Fink to imagine two situations: in the first, Albert consciously remembering his parents' words, distracting him, not allowing him to answer any of the questions on the test. The second situation, in which the parents' talk would not be consciously remembered, would still have the same effect on him; circulating in his unconscious, the words overheard short-circuiting his consciousness, upon which he would see the question paper on the desk but would be ‘dazed,’ suddenly, himself having no clue to the happening. Why would the words pester him so much? Precisely because he kept thinking, consciously and/or unconsciously, about the ‘he’ of the parents' conversation, who is the Real of that conversation. Had Albert known for sure that

the 'he' was himself, it would still have had the same disturbing effect but he would have decided to prove it false sooner or later. There would have been no problem if he knew that the parents were talking about, say, the neighbor's son. Here, the parents did symbolize the Real of 'he,' but for Albert the 'he' has no meaning or sense. This is how the 'he' became a master signifier for him.¹¹ Of course, the other words too are important here, but not as much as the 'he' since Albert would have forgotten everything had the 'he' been someone else. Even if the 'he' had been known to be himself, he could have thought about why the parents felt the way they did—in this case, the other words would have made up to the master signifier, but would not have the same sting as the 'he' since Albert might have found himself in the position to aspire for the parental Other's desire, to 'amount' to something worthy of notice, to be the Other's desire. However, since he did not know the 'he,' the recognition of his desire remained suspended and his desire for recognition lost its path.

This is exactly what happens with the 'nothing.' If it connotes death or extinction, then it is the only thing that is outside of human experience; it is the only experience that one can never have while at the same time preserving subjectivity. In fact, one cannot preserve subjectivity even at the moment of the experience of 'being;' hence this moment in Lacan is also called as the "subject in the Real" (Fink 72). The return to subjectivity soon follows the experience of 'being;' death, however, does not allow such a return—neither of the subject nor of his person. Therefore the 'nothing' is never the experience of *it* as such but merely a reflection or an expression of *it*. Though Frost speaks of *it* having "no expression, nothing to express," the speaker could not have felt scared without that. And, insofar as *it* 'expresses' or gives of the blankness, it is not the *ding an sich*, but its signifier, even the master signifier. Gilbert-Rolfe suggests a term that sums up the problem: "a blank expression . . . : it implies communication through noncommunication, the recognition of incomprehension [of the expression]" (164). The master signifier, thus, does communicate, but the subject fails to grasp it, as in Albert's case. So, when Frost's speaker says it will be "more lonely" (more incomprehensible), he is also hopeful that "it will be less"—when? when he dies or when "it" gains a comprehensible expression. The master signifier's oppression of the subject scales down when it is dialectized, by bringing it into a relationship with other, binary, signifiers.¹² The final stanza in Frost's poem seems to attempt such dialectization. The first of these attempts is involved in the breaking of the One subjugating outer blankness or nothingness into several ("empty spaces"), as if it is filled between like the cosmic space by the stars. The speaker also realizes that it is "so much nearer

home" it has slid into him ("I have it in me"). This second attempt juxtaposes, brings into relation, the outer and the internal nothingnesses. In the breaking up of the total blankness, it is filled between; here the filled fields—of the internal or external blankness, or of both—act as binary signifiers. Though he earlier feels "too absent-spirited to count," he succeeds in staying aloof in the end, whereby he is able to preserve his subjectivity as may be seen in the proliferation of the first person singular pronoun and its other forms. Yet, he must be scared after all, for the blankness is not completely dialectized or dialectizable, like Lacan's Real.

Stevens' "Snow Man," on the contrary, is an experience in the loss of subjectivity. There is no speaker *in* the poem, but outside it; he does not exist except for the voice and the senses. The poem's dialectic does not allow us to clearly see who is speaking. He is almost nothing. The poem also precludes speculations whether someone has a "mind of winter" or merely desires to have it. However, it suggests that the act of seeing ("behold") is more contagious (hence the emotive "regard") than that of listening; yet, paradoxically, it is the 'listener' in the poem who cannot "regard" the landscape that carries the ailment. Endowed with a more acute sense of hearing, he fails to utilize the sense of sight for his cure and is engaged in a perpetual conflict between "Nothing that is not there" and "the nothing that is," between the real world around and the Real, thus short-circuiting the loop of desire and freezing him. He beholds what masters him, subjugates him, which he fails to "regard" or dialectize. This puts an end to the associations that the speaking voice manifests as capable of in the first six and a half lines. The poem, therefore, must come to its end.

Both the poems display the 'nothing' or blankness as a potentiality, as a master, as a depth, as an eschatological *horror vacui*. Gilbert-Rolfe presents his arguments suggesting that the nothingness or blankness *was* so. He sees the Victorian inclination for maximum decoration as an attempt to cover over *it* as opposed to the modern desire for transparency as an attempt to uncover *it*—for example, the highly decorative facades of Victorian buildings and the modern glass-paned facades. In painting, he points out, where the cave-man painted on the unformed blank wall, the modern painter needs a made up, uniform blank surface. After such suggestions, he concludes that the nothingness has not remained a *horror vacui*, but has condescended to a potentiality "waiting to be ordered, as opposed to the emptiness waiting to be filled" (163). He further argues, "In contemporary context blankness is eloquent rather than the absence of a message . . . is neither communicative nor incommunicative but rather brings the two as close together as

they can get," a kind of communicative incommunicativeness (166). All this is true, I think, when it is *not* a question of the subject's life and death; throughout the essay Gilbert-Rolfe does not take up this question. Nothingness or blankness remains a *horror vacui* even today insofar as it is a question of extinction or death, is a thousand times oppressive than the 'he' in Einstein's case.

The above observation could also be made from the two poems under consideration here. The speaking voice in "Snow Man," in the first six and a half lines, and the supposed 'listener'—if the two are believed to be different from each other—do exhibit different attitudes to the same landscape. The speaking voice, in those lines, does not use a single word of emotion or feeling; yet the ambiguity of "regard," added with the description of the wintry landscape, suggests that he finds the nothingness eloquent. It is not an absence for him, not a *horror vacui*. However, the 'listener' not only confronts it, as the words "beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" would suggest, but he must cease at the very moment. It puts an end, unlike in the first six and a half lines, to *his* communication, freezes and petrifies him so much as not to allow him to speak throughout the poem. Frost's speaker, on the contrary, is in a better situation than the 'listener' of "Snow Man." He is scared, but the very fact that he thinks of an expression on the face, as it were, of the nothingness indicates what Gilbert-Rolfe would call its communicative incommunicativeness. Yet, it could be said that Frost's speaker is not as better off as the speaker in the six and a half lines of the Stevens poem because of the element of fear present in Frost. One could even argue, in a complete opposition to this, that Frost's speaker is in a better situation than Stevens' speaker (considering that only one person is involved throughout the Stevens poem), for he stays aloof, as a defence mechanism, from the blankness and thus preserves his subjectivity,¹³ while Stevens' speaker does betray a desire for the 'nothing.' His desire, therefore, may be viewed as his death instinct. Indeed, the poem has no speaking person within the poem except as a voice. Unlike in Frost's poem, Stevens' "Snow Man" does not use the first person singular pronoun, at least not directly; it does not assert the speaking voice's identity the way Frost's speaker does. In "Snow Man," even the 'listener' is enveloped and exists within the speaking voice. And the 'snow man,' who has or would have a "mind of winter" simply ex-sists,¹⁴ i.e. stands apart from the body of the poem, in the title. However, the poem's crass impersonal style allows no room for speculations of a single subject; in fact, the desire of having a "mind of winter" and the tone of misery that begins to be felt from the middle of the seventh line onwards seem to divide even the speaking voice. Or, one could say, the speaker changes from the middle of the seventh line though the voice remains the same. This

'subversion of the subject' during and at the cost of discourse speaks of the dominance of the signifier. In fact, the poem viewed as an accumulation of binary signifiers seems an attempt at the dialectization of the 'nothing,' the master signifier that has the last word and remains undialectized. This could be one of the reasons why the act of criticism and interpretation of the poem, even after so many years of its publication, has been experiencing a benumbing effect as the avid readers of Stevens know.

ENDNOTES:

¹ This desire is manifest in the final lines of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," where the audience is evoked in the phrase "all who heard" (l. 48) as well as in Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" where he exhorts, "Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know, / Such harmonious madness / From my lips would flow / The world would listen then—as I am listening now" (ll. 101-105). It is not a coincidence that in both the poems the poet-audience relationship has the last words; it speaks for the ultimate desire for that confidence and ability in the self which would win the audience completely.

² As K. Narayan Chandran explains, the Greek term *métoikos* means "a resident alien" (54).

³ Booker observes that this inner speech cannot be equated with the Other in Lacan; however, in glossing it as the "murmuring of fantasy that supports desire" he again equates it with the Other. His comment would be appropriate if the inner speech is described as characteristic of the decentred subject and that it is properly equated with the 'other' with small 'o.' In short, it lays bare the otherness of one's own speech.

⁴ The uncertainty of the speaker and listener led to the uncertainty of the self. Although Stevens provides a sort of solution to the problem, he raises it to another level in his poetry where the self is both the speaker and the listener while the speaking voice itself may not be of who we usually refer to as the speaker.

⁵ See Chapter 2 in Deshmane below for a detailed discussion of the problem of the speaking subject, the 'listener,' and the speaking voice in Stevens. The discussion divides the human subject in Stevens' poetry into the speaking subject (Lacan's *je*), the listener (Lacan's *moi*), and the real subject as the unconscious or the Other. Following Lacan, it also shows Stevens' awareness of Lacan's thought about the otherness of the speaking voice (see Lacan's *Écrits* 141, for his comment on the problematic of the speaking voice).

⁶ See Ellmann and Feidelson (365–66) where they have a sample passage from Robbe-Grillet, whose description is extremely accurate, but it kills the reader's interest in and seriously harms the faculty of creating the same picture in his mind. The passage describes a room with a cup of coffee on a table. The coffee in the cup cools down in the first four or five sentences and freezes by the end of the next half-dozen lines, and by the middle of the

passage the reader himself freezes and becomes indifferent to what is being read by him or is before his eyes.

⁷ Although both Heidegger and Sartre agree that being and nothingness are complementary to each other, yet Sartre rejects Heidegger's idea that nothingness is an active force since being is established within nothingness, from which being establishes its outlines (See Sartre 16-18).

⁸ Sartre's argument as a whole is intended to show that nothingness would not exist if there were no being; however, man is nevertheless afraid of nothingness and thus nothingness does wield a kind of control over being. Perhaps, the chief reason behind this is that both being and nothingness are experienced, individually, as feelings (highest and intensest forms of feelings) and not as facts. One can change the facts of life ("human reality" as Sartre would say), but it is very difficult to get rid of such high forms of feelings.

⁹ The Symbolic order in Lacan is basically the sphere of language; however, by language he suggests all the regulatory communications that inscribe the human subject, making him part of the human society. More conspicuous of these communications are Law and Religion. For Lacan, all these regulatory forms of communication function to control the subject's desire for the Real (which includes the desire for the mother). For a more explanatory yet crisp definitions of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real orders in Lacan, see Felluga below.

¹⁰ The child's entry into the Symbolic order ensures its severance from the Real and the Imaginary. This happens as the child's psyche and body is overwritten with the Symbolic, which is in a way its metaphorical death. However, this process does not stop but continues to "kill" the subject even after being fully immersed into the Symbolic order; and this is what concerns us here.

¹¹ The master signifier is usually defined as an "empty signifier" or a "signifier without a signified." Lacan distinguishes a master signifier, which has lost its meaning for the subject through repression and wields authority over him/her, from any other signifier or signifying element, which does mean something to the subject. The 'master signifier,' writes Fink, "designates a signifier which is isolated from the rest of discourse (or, as Freud says in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which is cut off from the psychical chain of the person's conscious thought)," and "is often recognizable in analysis by the fact that the analysand repeatedly butts up against [it]; it may be a term like 'death,' for instance, or any other term that seems opaque to the analysand and that always seems to put an end to associations instead of opening things up. Here the analysand is, in a sense, encountering a total opacity of meaning; he or she may well know what the word[.] *mean[s]* in his or her mother tongue, remaining ignorant, however, of what [it] means *to him or her*" (77). According to Lacan, this is symptomatic of neurosis.

¹² 'Dialectization' of a master signifier is to bring the 'master signifier' into "the movement of language" (Fink 75; also see Fink 77-78 for more discussion), into the subject's speech, to make him/her use it meaningfully; this is possible if the subject is able to form a relationship (of opposition or difference as between two linguistic signs) between the master signifier and any other signifier(s) he/she uses meaningfully.

¹³ Sartre argues, "Man's relation with being is that he can modify it. For man to put a particular existent out of circuit is to put himself out of the circuit in relation to that existent. In this case he is not subject to it; he is out of reach; it cannot act on him, for he has retired *beyond a nothingness*" (24). For Sartre, this condition is the true nature of transcendence. In a way, Frost's speaker achieves this transcendence toward the poem's end.

¹⁴ As Fink explains, the term "ex-sistence" was derived from the Greek *ekstasis* and the German *Ekstase*. It means something that stands "outside of" or "apart from," or is "extimate" to something (122).

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