CADUCITY

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Philip Larkin's verses and John Gale's commentary reminded me of Rilke and his summer walk in the Dolomites with Freud (and the silent Lou Salome). The poet cannot enjoy the beauty of the landscape because he knows that all that beauty will end. Nor is he heartened by Freud's seemingly naive comment: it is precisely their caducity that makes things precious. According to Freud, Rilke fails to mourn from his own desire for eternity, mourning held back by the interference of the thought of caducity that does not allow him to disinvest old objects and invest new ones. This is the Freudian conception of mourning. Freud's comment is far from naïve; it is not mere optimism toward life, it is instead another version of what is enunciated far more articulately in *Thoughts for the times of war and death* coeval with Caducity (1915), i.e., that human beings (and we assume their unconscious as well) must begin to come to terms with the fact that death exists, war further testifies to it. *Si vis vitam para mortem*, in short, continuing to feed on illusions of eternity jeopardizes the possibility of truly living. What Freud said to Rilke could therefore be formulated like this: take advantage of all this beauty because tomorrow it might vanish and you would not have experienced it therefore you would not have lived. Evidently this Freudian perspective implies the introduction of a limit to jouissance, but it is also the exhortation to make new investments after the catastrophe of war to build a less illusory and perhaps for that reason more solid and lasting. Which will not happen and certainly is not happening in our present.

The theme of caducity runs entirely through the Duino Elegies:

> And how dismayed anything is that has to fly,
> and leave the womb. As if it were
> terrified of itself, zig-zagging through the air, as a crack
> runs through a cup. As the track
> of a bat rends the porcelain of evening (the Eight Elegy).
> And yet:
>
> Who has turned us round like this, so that,
> whatever we do, we always have the aspect
> of one who leaves? Just as they
> will turn, stop, linger, for one last time,
> on the last hill, that shows them all their valley - ,
> so we live, and are always taking leave (ivi).

Although Freud read Rilkean melancholy as a symptom, it seems rather an emblematic *position* of the knowledge of a mourning to be accomplished and/or already taking place. Rilke is a lucid witness to the transit from modernity to an age of fewer certainties (Freud would have said illusions), in which caducity inhabits us and inhabits all things. It is no longer time to exercise illusory mastery over life (the Freudian indication) and yet the price to be paid for renouncing the illusion of eternity is high if living is a continual taking leave of life itself. On the other hand, this renunciation of rootedness (which is nothing but the renunciation of the Thing) perhaps opens up other horizons.

> The creature gazes into openness with all
> its eyes. But our eyes are
> as if they were reversed, and surround it,
> everywhere, like barriers against its free passage.
> We know what is outside us from the animal's
> face alone: since we already turn
> the young child round and make it look
> backwards at what is settled, not that openness
> that is so deep in the animal's vision. Free from death (ivi).

The animal is free from death because it does not speak, we would say, because it has no name, Derrida would say polemically. The word kills the Thing but we know that this is not really the case, that mourning from the Thing is always going on because alongside the centrifugal drive is always alive the desire for reunion. It is to that open animal gaze that it is necessary to refer, to identify, for us who fly coming from a womb, to that unaware transience that looks outward, for Rilkian equilibrium to be less resigned and nostalgic for a whole. For humans to find some (ecstatic?) enjoyment in daring surrender to the inebriation of the 'outside.'.