



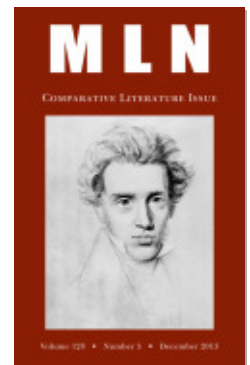
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Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov by Martin Hägglund (review)

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sciences, Jewett's book amplifies a wave of scholarship recovering an easily forgotten yet salvageable vision of their symbiosis.

The Johns Hopkins University

LARRY S. McGRATH

Martin Hägglund. *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov.*
Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012. Print. 197 pp.

Rethinking Trauma, “Reckoning” with Loss: Martin Hägglund’s *Dying for Time*

Broadly speaking, *Dying for Time* is about temporal finitude, particularly how canonical modernist writers negotiate anxieties about transience and mortality. Hägglund's reading takes issue with a dominant critical tendency to read modernist fiction's pervasive concern with *time* as testifying to a desire for immortality, permanence, and stability in an age of increasing vulnerability. In Hägglund's account, Proust, Woolf, and Nabokov have been misread in terms of a “desire to transcend mortal life – whether through an epiphany of memory, an immanent moment of being, or a transcendent afterlife” (14). But the apparent impulse to transcend time, he argues, evinces a deeper commitment to transience and impermanence as the very conditions for desire in the first place. Desire is fundamentally ambivalent because of the “double bind” and co-implication of *chronophobia* and *chronophilia*: we fear time because we are bound to what can be lost, but at the same time, we love *because* we can lose. Not only is the possibility of loss the necessary (but not sufficient) condition of possibility for care and love; the passage of time, the threat of decay, and the potential for loss is *internal* to the things we love and desire. Central to these claims is a distinction Hägglund makes between *survival* and *immortality*. Rather than read desire as motivated by some sense of a lost plenitude of being, Hägglund recasts it as part of a dynamic of *survival*, the temporal process of living on, not the perpetuation of a timeless, immortal state in which there is no change and in which the desired object is exempt from threat. Since desire is chronophobic and chronophilic, since it depends both on the attempted preservation of something one might lose and the fact that the attempt at preservation might fail, it can neither be satisfied by a fleeting moment of fulfillment nor by a timeless state of immortality.

Hägglund spends roughly the first half of the book meticulously elucidating this argument through close readings of Proust, Woolf, and Nabokov's novels. These chapters, which offer a thematic focus on memory, trauma, and writing, respectively, provide the framework for the final two chapters, which

offer a fuller theoretical discussion of Hägglund's theory of chronolibido. In his chapter on Proust, Hägglund convincingly repudiates two dominant interpretations of the *Recherche*: one in which involuntary memory is read as proof of "timeless being," and one in which Marcel's reflections on art and writing are purported to advance an aesthetics that offers redemption from the condition of time. On the contrary, what emerges from Marcel's discussions of time, self, and memory, Hägglund argues, is a desire for the temporal dynamic of survival, not the timeless state of immortality. Rather than gesture to a "realm that is exempt from time" (22), involuntary memory *intensifies* the experience of temporal succession, in which the present moment is annihilated in the very instant of its becoming present, and in which the "dream of an immortal paradise" is subverted by the fact that any paradise *must be* potentially compromised or threatened by loss in order to be desired in the first place. This threat of loss is part of what Hägglund comes to characterize in the Woolf chapter as the "undecidability of survival," the way in which temporal experience is characterized by the interplay of delayed recognition and deferred expectation. Although many of Woolf's critics have interpreted her "aesthetics of the moment" as related to a timeless presence, an act of rendering the moment eternal, Hägglund explains how even the crystallized moment cannot be "immune from alteration." Crucially, in Hägglund's account, the threat of alteration or destruction does not impinge on experience from outside; it constitutes experience from within. This is the case for experience as well as for writing, as he explains in his chapter on Nabokov. The very material on which memory/time is traced is *also* subject to decay.

Hägglund elegantly clarifies this argument by examining how a valorization of temporal finitude is at the very heart of Proust, Woolf, and Nabokov's work; Hägglund's theory of chronolibido simultaneously structures his interpretation of these authors as it emerges from his close readings of their work. The novels, he suggests, reveal the ways in which the trauma of loss is indissociably bound to the bliss of experiencing the chronophilic, something to which psychoanalysis, like literature, testifies. In his chapter on Freud, Lacan, and Derrida, Hägglund takes issue with the "logic of lack" at the heart of psychoanalytic theories of desire, namely the notion that chronophobia "derives from the desire for a timeless, eternal being" (111). Tracing "the constitutive difference of desire" to temporal succession rather than ontological lack, Hägglund offers an insightful reconsideration of Freud's death drive and pleasure principle as theories based on the same logic of *lack* that attributes temporal being to a lack of being and frames the goal of desire as *the end of all desire*. Fundamentally, Hägglund argues, neither pleasure nor destructive behavior is teleologically oriented toward a state of "absolute repose" and even "the desire for death presupposes the investment in survival" (127). Hägglund offers a major intervention into psychoanalytic theory here, showing how destructive behavior (including the repetition compulsion) is not attributable to the death drive, but is implicated, paradoxically, in an investment in survival. Pleasure, in a similar vein, "is not oriented toward a *telos* of absolute repose,"

but “depends on temporal succession, which divides the very experience of presence from its inception and entails that unpleasure is intrinsic to pleasure as such” (131). In this account, the propensity for trauma is actually part of the investment in survival: “it is an essential possibility of the condition of survival that it can become unbearable” (128). This realization is not about overcoming chronophobia, but recognizing that the fear of death and loss is the very condition for our investment in what we wish not to lose. Libidinal being as such is *traumatic* because the possibility of unexpected loss and suffering is essential to any libidinal attachment.

In Hägglund’s chronolibidinal account, “the threat of trauma and the possibility of mourning are inscribed at the core of life and resonate even in the most affirmative experience of happiness” (17). Furthermore, the propensity for traumatization is a necessary condition of *living on*. This is precisely why Hägglund aims not to replace the death drive with a “survival drive,” but to rethink the traumatic nature of “the excitation of life.” Trauma theorists might take issue with Hägglund’s focus on the “structural link between the possibility of trauma and the constitution of time” (61), a move that figures the structure of traumatic experience as, in some sense, a magnified version of the general, universal experience of temporality. In the Woolf chapter, Hägglund explores the parallels between the way trauma has been defined (as an experience that comes too soon and too late) and the generalized condition of temporal experience which is structured in much the same way as one only experiences the “present” moment in anticipation or retrospection. Even if it risks diminishing the force and gravity of specific traumatic experiences by likening them to our everyday experience as temporal beings, Hägglund’s analysis of “the structural link between the possibility of trauma and the constitution of time” (61) offers a significant and necessary way of rethinking recent trends in trauma studies, notably a recurring impulse to “depathologize” melancholia and perpetuate the post-traumatic condition.

In his Woolf chapter, Hägglund identifies Tammy Clewell as one such critic whose work has attempted to recuperate a non-pathological reading of melancholia vis-à-vis modernist fiction. Flipping the normative distinction between mourning (a finite process of recollection culminating in an act of substitution, in which the mourner eventually comes to sever his/her attachments to the lost other and redirect libidinal ties to new objects) and melancholia, (in which the process of redirection and reattachment misfires, and fixes on the ego itself), Clewell frames melancholia as the preferable response to loss. This reading is part of a much larger body of recent criticism that has produced a similar injunction against mourning, repudiating a pathological understanding of melancholia in favor of a valorized idea of endless grieving in which the mourner tends endlessly to a wound that must remain perpetually open. Melancholia, the argument goes, constitutes a refusal to “turn the page” of history; ostensibly pathological fixation on the past has been recoded as a way to remain in a dialogic relationship with past traumas. Rather than view melancholia as a depressive stance, it is transmuted into a political and

ethical *refusal* to accept a certain status-quo, a refusal to accept the ways in which society has accepted the loss and moved on. Significantly, Häggglund's mode of reading problematizes this rigid opposition between mourning and melancholia that sees mourning as radically totalizing and melancholia as categorical openness, both by elucidating Derrida's articulation of the "double bind" of mourning and by challenging the now conventional understanding of melancholia as fidelity to the lost other or traumatic experience.

Melancholia, in this model, has come to be figured as a quasi-eternal state that, like immortality, would put an end to all desire. What Häggglund's chronolibidial account reveals is that there could be no space in which trauma and loss are purely preserved, and no static position from which it might impinge, unaltered, upon the present. Any argument that advocates for the preservation of an unchanging post-traumatic condition is, in a sense, a negative version of the same eternal plenitude that Häggglund critiques: it evokes a space in which, likewise, there can be no differentiation. The melancholic stance in which a mourner "refuses" to lose his or her loss is another iteration of Derrida's impossible fidelity. But the possibility of forgetting – the possibility that one's memory of an event is subject to alteration and destruction – is the condition of possibility for desire and remembrance in the first place. As Häggglund argues, one must remain open to mourning, open to forgetting because the destructibility of the memory is what enables one to care enough to *want to remember*. Though this is not the primary focus of *Dying for Time*, it has far-reaching stakes for trauma theory inasmuch as it urges a rethinking of the problem of binding so central to Häggglund's re-reading of Freud. The problem with the overly rigid opposition between mourning and melancholia is that it presents two symmetrical ways of dealing with loss: one which attempts to unbind completely and one which binds so completely as to render that bond unalterable.

Häggglund, by contrast, is interested in "the complex interplay of melancholia and mourning in the response to trauma" (68). In Häggglund's model, mourning is something that is never finished, that *can* never finish, not because of some kind of militant fixation on loss or impossible *a priori* ethics, but because of the changing nature (which is also, crucially, a *survival*) of that loss in memory. Loss does not reside in an enduring archive, a Bergsonian "eternity of a pure past" (38); rather, the very material on which loss is inscribed (the body, the mind) is also mutable. Häggglund thus provides arguments that can be deployed against any theory that pits an ethical, devout, perpetual melancholia against a totalizing mourning. The very idea that mourning could ever be "melancholic," could ever stay *fixed* on a loss, is impossible given the tracing of time. That loss is always changing as it moves *through* time; accordingly, it could never get "incorporated" and stay the same. But by the same logic, the very idea that mourning could complete, could fully suture the past's wound, is equally impossible. It is through revelations like these that Häggglund offers a model of trauma that neither prescribes nor restricts the possibilities for ethical remembrance, replacing a static binary of "working

through” vs. “acting out” with a provisional reckoning, invested not in trauma’s endless repetition but its surviving, shifting legacy.

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Zachary Sng. *The Rhetoric of Error from Locke to Kleist.*
Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010. 202 pp.

The Rhetoric of Error is a precisely articulated, insightful look into the figure of error, defined as the slippage between language and thought, in eighteenth century literary and philosophical texts from Britain and Germany. This potentially vast inquiry makes for an ample text that tackles canonical works with a rare rhetorical verve. Sng’s attentive readings of Locke, Leibniz, Kant, Goethe, and Kleist comprise a rigorous exposition of error’s many forms, while also brimming with comparisons to classical accounts (as in Herodotus, Quintilian, and Aristotle) and contemporary modes of reading (of the likes of Derrida and de Man). Even if the scope is illimitable, Sng’s work is no less precise: dubbing as *errance* the potentially productive wandering and, conversely, defeating movement that error’s etymology entails, the author aims to account for the rhetorical strategies that develop the idea of “error” as well as the ways in which they are undercut by it. It may be needless to emphasize that Sng’s text often confronts the possibility of a near-constant doubling and self-criticism, yet preempts this threat by arguing that the work aspires “to trace the irresolvable contradictions that constitute these texts” (5) rather than offering a systematic account. Sng’s modest “tracing” shies away from absolutes in favor of nuanced articulations of textual ambivalence in these works.

The first chapter of the book examines John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, describes the philosopher’s view of the complex interrelationship between thought, words, and objects, and notes the ambiguity of Locke’s position with respect to language. Locke is fearful of the possibility of corruption contained within language’s circulation and exchange; as such, Sng argues that the *Essay* offers a rhetorical performance that narrates the work’s own composition in order to give an impression of origination, which putatively secures the epistemological integrity of the *Essay* according to its own standard. By identifying Locke’s figurative associations between the origination and circulation of language and fountains and pipes, as well as gold and coinage, Sng represents the epistemological structure of Locke’s notion of language’s relationship to truth: namely, that the source cannot be corrupted and circulation is to blame for error. Unfortunately for Locke, this system cannot hold. Sng draws on Locke’s economic pamphlets to substantiate the figurative connection between language and coinage, signaling Locke’s