

Recovering Wholeness, Recovering Vulgar Everydayness:  
A Reading of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* through  
Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*<sup>\*</sup>

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### Abstract

This article applies Martin Heidegger's concepts in *Being and Time* to the reading of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. These two texts establish the hierarchical relation between the authentic and inauthentic terrains of being by aligning the former with the overruling presence of wholeness, and subjugating the latter in fragmentation and vulgar everydayness. Jacque Derrida's concept of "the supplement" and Paul de Man's "figural language" are employed to redeem fragmentation and vulgar everydayness from subjugation of the hierarchy.

**Keywords:** Martin Heidegger; literature and philosophy; diasporic literature

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้นำแนวคิดของมาร์ติน ไฮเดเกอร์ ในหนังสือ *Being and Time* มาใช้ในการอ่านนวนิยายของจอย โคการะ เรื่อง *Obasan* ด้วยทั้งสองได้จัดลำดับชั้นต่ำสูงในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่าง “อัตถิภาวะแท้” และ “อัตถิภาวะแท้” ของ “สัต” โดยว่าง “อัตถิภาวะแท้” เข้ากับ “ความสมบูรณ์” ในขณะที่ “อัตถิภาวะแท้” ถูกมองเข้ากับ “การแตกตัวและความสามัญประจำวัน” แนวคิดเรื่อง “ส่วนเสริม” ของฟาร์ก แดร์ริดา และ “ภาษาภาพ” ของ ปอล เดอมอง ถูกนำมาลับลังลำดับชั้นต่ำสูงดังกล่าวเพื่อปลดปล่อย “การแตกตัวและความสามัญประจำวัน” จากการกดทับในลำดับชั้นต่ำสูง

คำสำคัญ: มาร์ติน ไฮเดเกอร์; วรรณกรรมกับปรัชญา; วรรณกรรมคนพลัดถิ่น

Jacque Derrida accuses Martin Heidegger of reconstructing a philosophy that serves to “reinstate rather than destroy the instance of the logos and of the truth of being” (Derrida, 1997: 20) and reduces the reconstruction to mere “nostalgia” for the pre-metaphysical, pre-ontotheological condition within the logocentric bound (Derrida, 1982: 26-27). If these allegations are valid, the nostalgic stance of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* would find its traumatic counterpart in Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan*. If the Heideggerean system of restoring “being” from the oblivion of the metaphysical/onto-theological tradition is indeed “a prescription of order” which “promotes slave thinking” as Theodor W. Adorno denounces in *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno, 1973: 88-89), then Kogawa’s anti-discriminatory sentiment in *Obasan* might also risk falling, like Heidegger, into the same whirlpool of enslavement. This article investigates the opposition and relation between the ideas of transcendental unity and fragmentation in Kogawa’s *Obasan* in light of

Heidegger's being and vulgar everydayness in *Being and Time*. It does not seek to affirm or validate but rather to problematize the quest for "being" that prevails throughout both texts.

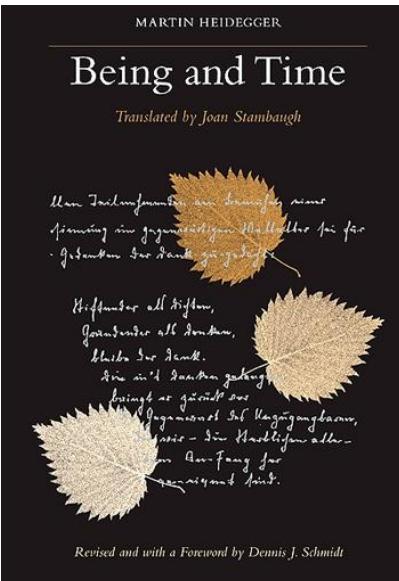
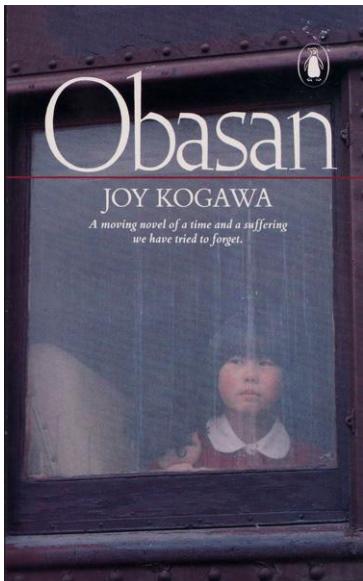


Figure 1 Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*

Figure 2 Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*

## Scope

The following introduces some basic concepts of *Being and Time* for our discussion of *Obasan*. The purpose of *Being and Time* is to uncover the primordial structure of being which, according to Heidegger, has been distorted and taken for granted throughout onto-metaphysical history. Central to the entire discussion is the concept of Da-sein. Literally translated from German as "being-there" – more sensibly but much to

Heidegger's disapproval as "existence" – Da-sein is the "being-there" of human being (Stambaugh, 1996: 14). Being there in the world, Da-sein "reveals itself" as "care", and by taking care, Da-sein is "being-with" others in associating itself with other entities outside of itself. Da-sein as care is an occurrence in one or other forms of "temporality".

Heidegger's concept of temporality departs from the Hegelian metaphysical concept of time. For Hegel, being "in time" is being in successive negation of space that moves in transition from one now to the other in "becoming". To Heidegger, Hegel is only successful in conceptualizing time in its vulgar, everyday form when he interprets time as "the succession of nows" (Heidegger, 1996: 394). Being in nows that succeed, Da-sein comes forth as being objectively present, factual and *actual*, and "falls prey" to the everydayness of the world which succeeds in nows of timeness (Heidegger, 1996: 396). Inauthentic historicity arises as the past of Da-sein's interactions with the world which *was* once objectively present but *is* no longer present in time succession (Heidegger, 1996: 343). The objective presence of the past as inauthentic historicity can be made present only as Da-sein's vulgar understanding of history in now time (Heidegger, 1996: 357).

By focalizing temporality in now time, Hegel's conception fails to achieve the "authentic temporality" which, according to Heidegger, is supposed to be stable, unified, and total in temporalization. Da-sein in authentic temporality exists as the unity of its past, present and future, and transcends the objective presence of now time to the finite unity of wholeness. Being in authentic temporality, the past is "having been", the now is "making present", the future is "being towards": "We call the

unified phenomenon of the future that makes present in the process of having-been *temporality*" (Heidegger, 1996: 300). In this temporal unity of having been, making present, and being towards, the last – the futural – is considered focal of the unity as it unites with the condition of death – the finite condition of complete unity and wholeness. Authentic historicity, "rooted" in the care of Da-sein, is also futural in accordance with the authentic temporality. Da-sein in authentic historicity remains resolute and whole in the temporal stretch as its care inherits, in resoluteness, the one and only possibility towards being-a-whole in anticipation of death.

### *Obasan* as historical fragmentation

*Obasan* is a first person narrative that recounts fragments of memories of the Japanese-Canadian internment during the last years of World War II. Naomi - the narrator - along with members of her Japanese-Canadian family, all suffer the memories of relocations, deaths and departures when Canada turns hostile against its own ethnic citizens, when the motherland rejects its own children. The novel eventually dissolves at Naomi's discovery of truths about her lost mother and her arrival at the state of ultimate freedom which embodies the transcendental elements of primordiality and wholeness.

If for many readers *Obasan* is a work of historical presentation, the historical character of the narrative is obviously inauthentic if considered through Heidegger's frame of historicity. For one, the recollection of memories in *Obasan* are invoked at Naomi's encounters with historical objects in now time. In Chapter 4, Naomi remembers the Katos and Nakanes as she views photographs of their union in a memory which has "become badly moth-eaten with time ... Gray shapes in the water" (Kogawa,

1994: 25). In Chapter 5, Naomi encounters another set of photographs that trigger a train of memories that “are changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past” (Kogawa, 1994: 30). In Chapter 9, as Naomi searches through Emily’s package for photographs and past items, she recalls other fragments of memories: “Fragments of fragments … Segments of the story” (Kogawa, 1994: 64). For Heidegger, reminiscences of the past that arise from historical objects are merely “objectively present in the ‘present’” as they are contained within the objective presence of historical objects in now time as past reminiscences within the now of timeness (Heidegger, 1996: 348). Rather than leading Da-sein towards the futural wholeness of the original being, Da-sein’s treatment of historical objects in now time is drowned into the past of non-presence. Fragments of memories that come to Naomi from historical objects are merely the cares of facticity of the past that is now no longer.

While Naomi’s care of history is absorbed in the past that is no longer, the historical consciousness of Emily Kato - one of Naomi’s closest aunts - is centered in now time and is equally inauthentic. With her obsession with historical documents, Emily’s historical consciousness is being-with the historical facts that are most alive in her care of now time. To Emily, history is a “live issue” that requires judgments and actions in the now for correction and reparation in the now. Even in her futural concerns, Emily’s care of the future is still bound with the now: “We have to deal with all this all the while we remember it. If we don’t we’ll pass our anger down in our genes. It’s the children who’ll suffer” (Kogawa, 1994: 43). The future of those improper “children” that are yet present – future in the sense of “now that has not yet become actual” in inauthentic

temporality – depends on now actions that concern the past, making it a futural concern in the now for the impalpable, imperceptible future of non-presence with its lack of regard for the essential, finite presence.

“Fragments of fragments … Segments of the story.” Even when past reminiscences return to Naomi without being aroused by historical objects, those reminiscences are nevertheless historically inauthentic. This is manifest in the image of fragmentation which permeates and recurs throughout the narrative. In Chapter 6, Naomi’s dream vision leads her to the mirage of a “square woman” whose arm is “connected to her shoulder by four hooks locked to make a hinge.” The same vision is attended by series of fragmented images, from a robotic dog with “mechanism that hinges the jaws” to “a house of cards silently collapses” (Kogawa, 1994: 35). In another dream vision in Chapter 11, Naomi conceives the dismembered body of an “oriental woman” whose “right foot lay like a solid wooden boot nearly severed above the ankles” (Kogawa, 1994: 74). Elsewhere in the narrative, Naomi’s memories are recounted as fragments of recollections that are “moth-eaten with time” and “seem barely real”, “changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past”: “Fragments of fragments … Segments of the story”.

Lisa Lowe reads fragmentation in *Obasan* as reactionary to the bildungsroman genre – the narrative of self-development from unreason to order (Lowe, 1996: 98). Its fragmented, anti-chronological narrative rejects the bildungsroman’s “unity” which attests to the oppressive and discriminatory order of the “traditional aesthetic” (Lowe, 1996: 48). Viet Thanh Nguyen also suggests how the “antibildungsromans” such as *Obasan* look to reverse and undermine the “bildung” authority which

resolves contradictions through a violent exclusion of racial and gendered subjects (Nguyen, 2002: 93-94). Wenying Xu reads fragmentation in *Obasan* as a channel for escape from the containment of reason (Xu, 2008: 35). While fragmentation is a positive reaction to Lowe, Nguyen and Xu, Rufus Cook, taking on the psycho-existential approach, interprets fragmentation in *Obasan* as symptomatic of problems of the rational logic of time, language and thinking which reduce human reasoning to mere “binary polarization” (Cook, 2007: 54-55). Fu-Jen Chen, following the Lacanian line of psychoanalysis, aligns fragmentation in *Obasan* with the sphere of “the Symbolic” – the language of empirical reason – which prohibits the primordial desire of incest, causing a rational subject such as Naomi to disperse in traumatic self-denial (Chen, 2007: 120).

In summary, Lowe, Nguyen and Xu read fragmentation in *Obasan* as reactionary to the convention of reason while Cook and Chen perceive it as a symptom of threats that lurk behind the rational logic. The unifying “aesthetic culture” of the bildungsroman genre in Lowe’s language, the erasure of “contradictions” of Nguyen, the “divisive binary language” of Cook, the Lacanian “Symbolic order” of Chen’s analysis – these are constitutive of the inauthentic historicity and thus the vulgar everydayness of the world. Fragmentation in *Obasan* demystifies the myth of unity in historiography which assumes the appearance of chronological linearity. As Heidegger reflects in “The Age of the World Picture”, vulgar historiography only works to suppress the wholeness of historicity to a mere synthesis of historical facts by means of selection, comparison and reduction in research methodology (Heidegger, 1977: 123). After all, fragmentation is inevitable as long as the historiographical work is delivered in the everyday, textual language as it is unable to contain the essential character of the

authentic historicity, making the historiography a mere putting together of fragmented facts in textual composition. In this respect, *Obasan* as a fragmented, anti-chronological piece of historiography does nothing more than break the pretension of unity in the traditional historiography.

### Silence as covering

Like *Being and Time*, *Obasan* is after all a novel of quest for the transcendental, original being. In *Obasan*, the presence of this original being which takes the metaphor of the mother figure - the “amnion” (in Christina Tourino’s analysis) - is hidden beneath the bar of silence. For one, this silence that covers the unified presence of the mother figure – the amnion – is given the image of stone that hides and protects. In Chapter 7, Ayako Nakane – the aging aunt whom Naomi refers to throughout the story as “Obasan” – is said to be living “in stone” as her language “remains deeply underground” (Kogawa, 1994: 39). In Chapter 15, the Japanese-Canadian interns spend years in “the silences that speak from stone” (Kogawa, 1994: 132). Elsewhere in the novel, silence is constantly characterized by this image of stone protection. In Chapter 3, Uncle bakes a “black loaf of … stone bread, hefty as a rock” (Kogawa, 1994: 15). In Chapter 4, Naomi’s memories “were drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence” (Kogawa, 1994: 26). In Chapter 11, Naomi, in confronting Old Man Gower, believes silence will keep her “whole and safe”: “If I speak, I will split open and spill out” (Kogawa, 1994: 76). Each Japanese-Canadian individual is protecting, in their absences of voice, a certain truth behind the veil of silence. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong reads the stone silence in *Obasan* as a cover that bars the access towards the presence of *logos*, while the

process of coming to terms with the silence is the “allegory of reading”, the Christian tradition of decoding the biblical texts (Wong, 1993: 21).

The same stony silence in *Obasan* also suggests the idea of liberation before the presence wholeness:

“There is the silence that cannot speak ... The speech that frees comes forth from that amniotic deep. To attend its voice ... is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone.”

From this passage from the prologue, the image of stone silence now shifts to silence of liberation. The first silence that cannot be understood is the stone that encloses and encases – clearly a negative portrayal of the idea. Once this stony silence is “attended” and understood, the second silence brings forth the presence of the “amniotic deep” that frees and liberates. Silence falsely understood as mere absence is stone. This same stony silence, once attended and understood, reveals the liberating presence of the “amniotic deep”. Rather than conflating the second silence – the silence that liberates – with “the amniotic deep” as the context seems to suggest, the silence that liberates should be understood as the ground or mode on which the “amniotic deep” remains for access, just as conscience in the authentic care of Da-sein that “speaks solely and constantly in the mode of silence” (Heidegger, 1996: 252).

Taking on Heidegger’s lecture on Plato’s cave allegory in *The Essence of Truth*, the concept of truth for Plato is, in essence, the “unhiddenness” of the presence of the Ultimate Being, the presence that would be expurgated of theological implications and reconstructed by Heidegger into the essential, original being. Untruth, on the other hand, is

in essence the “hiddenness” of this transcendental presence. At the same time, truth as unhiddenness is also in essence the bridge towards the presence of the original being in deconcealment, while untruth as hiddenness is also given the same bridging character, but this time towards the everyday world in concealment: “Unhiddenness is not simply one river bank and hiddenness the other, but the essence of truth as deconcealment is the bridge, or better, the *bridging* over of each *towards* and *against* the other” (Heidegger, 2002: 67).

Truth as unhiddenness is therefore the presence of a processive and progressive space of deconcealment that bridges between the presence of the original being and its many distorted forms in vulgar everydayness. Meanwhile, it is also an immediate-intermediate presence as it immediately divides the presence of being in immediacy from its distorted forms in vulgar everydayness. The second silence in *Obasan*, the silence that liberates, is the metaphor of that non-spatial, immediate-intermediate presence of truth as unhiddenness which immediately bridges the presence of the “amniotic deep” and the vulgar, everyday world of fragmentation. This second silence is the unhiddenness that “frees” in freeing Da-sein from the fragmented world of distortion *towards* the liberating presence of the “amniotic deep”. This liberating silence with its bridging character is not Derrida’s *archi-writing* of the *différance* which divides, constitutes and gives being to “every ... singularly substance or the subject” but rather an entity which takes presence by assuming the figurative language, like the presence of being itself, under the “traces of retentions and protentions” in Derrida’s *différance* (Derrida, 1982: 13).

The “*bridging* over of each *towards* and *against* the other”, this presence of the second silence – the liberating silence – is supplemented to presence by untruth as hiddenness (not the hiddenness as distortion of view in Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s *Theaetetus*): “Hiddenness is always and necessary present at the occurrence of unhiddenness, it asserts itself unavoidably in the unhiddenness and helps the latter to itself” (Derrida, 1982: 104). This untruth as hiddenness and concealment *supplements*, in the Rousseauian-Enlightenment discourse, the immediate-intermediate presence of truth as unhiddenness. If silence in *Obasan* is the metaphor of that immediate-intermediate region of truth as unhiddenness that deconceals, the other region is also the same immediate-intermediate region although it belongs to the opposing idea of untruth as hiddenness that conceals. They are in fact the one and the same region where the two opposing presences overlap and where hiddenness supplements the prestigious, exalting presence of unhiddenness. The region of silence in *Obasan* is therefore the one region where truth as unhiddenness and untruth as hiddenness operate in allowing or preventing Naomi’s transition from the vulgar, everyday world of fragmentation to the ecstatic presence of being – the “amniotic deep”.

## Progress-Regression

In Heidegger’s philosophy, Da-sein’s regression from the original being, through the progress of onto-metaphysical history, involves the idea of dispossession of the original, authentic faculties. The progress towards the wholeness of being, on the other hand, also demands dispossession of the infected, inauthentic faculties for the recovery and progress of Da-sein’s health. This loss-gain relation in Da-sein’s

progress and regression is inferred in Jean-Luc Nancy's observation of Heidegger's concept of "being-with", which is constituted in the care of Da-sein in being with other entities that surround its worldhood. The being-with of Heidegger, according to Nancy, is bifurcated to polarization with a political implication: one is the inauthentic "banal Being alongside", the other, the authentic "common as ownmost structure in itself, and thus as communal or collective" (Nancy, 2008: 4). While the inauthentic being-with is merely being with the improper, insignificant others – the "anyone" and "thing" or at best the "*animalitas*" in the metaphysical thinking (Heidegger, 1998: 246) – the authentic being-with is rather communal in complete attunement with other entities that are now converted to the proper, significant "people", the "*humanitas*" (Heidegger, 1998: 247) that mutually attune to Da-sein to form the authentic worldhood for Da-sein's essential existence. In Nancy's observation, this authentic, communal being-with encompasses the sense of sacrifice for the communal cause, which allows the selfless and somewhat "heroic" Da-sein, in its sacrificial devotion for the communion, to recover itself from the "they-self" and open itself to death in resolute and fearless anticipation. (Nancy, 2008: 11).

In other words, Da-sein regresses from the wholeness of being as it internalizes the improper "anyone" and "thing" into the "they-self" and develops, as a *gain*, the diseased organs that plague its own existential health. However, by sacrificing the "they-self", by sacrificially embracing the proper "people", by opening the self to death in heroic sacrifice, by *sacrificially* losing the internal attachments with the improper others, Da-sein *regains* the finite freedom of its original being. The progress of Da-sein's health depends on the sacrifice, the loss, of its

diseased organs for the gain of its lost, healthy organs of origin. On the other hand, the regression of Da-sein also involves the dispossession, the loss, of its authentic faculties for the gain of its regressive, inauthentic condition.

*Obasan* echoes this strange opposition of the loss-gain relation within Naomi's progress and regression. According to Christina Tourino, the "amniotic deep" in *Obasan* has a dual character, one "nurturing", the other "destructive". It firstly aborts and rejects Naomi as a human subject and later as a Japanese-Canadian subject, forcing her out into the suffering world of fragmentation before embracing her back into its womb of "dormant bloom" (Tourino, 2003: 137). The abortion from the "amniotic deep" of Tourino denotes the loss of Da-sein's authentic parts, the amputation of Da-sein's authentic organs, for its gain of the infected existential condition in fragmentation. In order to regain its lost origin, Naomi as Da-sein has to leave vulgar parts behind for the recovery, the gain, of original, primordial organs. The loss of the original presence of wholeness, the "amniotic deep", compels Naomi into the fragmented world of vulgar everydayness. As soon as Naomi discovers factual truths of her lost mother, she quickly and selflessly sacrifices any attachment she has had with the traumatic truths of her mother's vulgar history. Through the sacrificial act of forgiving, by forgiving and abandoning the traumatic attachment with factual truths, Naomi sacrifices the factual mother of "Grief" in her forgiveness in order to receive the higher, transcendental mother of the "amniotic deep". Consider these passages from the last pages of the novel:

“Grief wails like a scarecrow in the wild night, beckoning the wind to clothe his gaunt shell. With his outstretched arms he is gathering eyes for his disguise. I had not known that Grief had such gentle eyes – eyes reflecting my uncle’s eyes, my mother’s eyes, all the familiar lost eyes of Love that are not his and that he dons as a mask and a mockery.”

“This body of grief is not fit for human habitation. Let there be flesh. The song of mourning is not a lifelong song.”

(Kogawa, 1994: 295)

According to Traise Yamamoto’s reading of the passage, “Grief” is the metaphor of absence (when read alongside the image of “gaunt shell”) in which Naomi’s loved ones – her uncle, mother and “all the familiar lost eyes” – are bound to a non-present “mask”. By thinking of the loved ones in “Grief”, loved ones are only absences, “permanently lost” (Yamamoto, 1999: 196). The inauthentic world of historical fragmentation to Naomi is the world of “Grief”. In such a world, Naomi’s care of her loved ones is immersed in the traumatic past of inauthentic historicity, which can never take presence as it is no longer there in time succession. The moment Naomi discovers the “amniotic deep”, she – in her forgiveness – immediately abandons the vulgar truths of the loved-ones that she has taken care of as “Grief”. By sacrificing “Grief”, by letting go of the traumatic connotations that come with it, Naomi progresses towards the wholeness of presence and recovers her loved ones from the permanent absence. The cure of Naomi’s health as Da-sein depends on this loss of the diseased organs for recovery of the higher organs that incorporate the lost presence – the “amniotic deep”.

## Myth of the supplement

At Naomi's discovery of "factual truths" of her mother's history through Grandma Kato's letters, Naomi is able to cross the bridge of stony silence, the immediate region of hiddenness, towards the other silence, the immediate region of unhiddleness, in her final return to the "amniotic deep". The discovery of the vulgar, factual truths of mother suddenly and immediately elevates Naomi to a certain terrain of transcendental freedom.

Naomi's sudden arrival at the "amniotic deep" in these final sections of the narrative can be explained through the concept of the supplement. According to Derrida's reading of Rousseau, the supplement is a "derivative" of the full presence that works to supply, indeed uphold, the full presence itself by means of "substitution" (Derrida, 1997: 167). In *Obasan*, the truths of Naomi's vulgar mother *derive* from the higher mother of the "amniotic deep" and *supplement* the latter to the wholeness of presence. Naomi's sudden arrival at the higher mother, the "amniotic deep", at her discovery of the vulgar mother reveals how the full presence is upheld by its distorted counterparts in the everyday, fragmented reality. The same supplementation also operates in Heidegger's philosophy. "Hiddenness is always and necessary present at the occurrence of unhiddleness, it asserts itself unavoidably in the unhiddleness and helps the latter to itself". In Heidegger's concepts, the authentic faculties of Da-sein generate their inauthentic counterparts which make up the fragmented, vulgar everydayness of the world. These inauthentic counterparts, these make-ups of the fragmented, vulgar everydayness, are "derivatives" of the wholeness of being that work to supplement the wholeness of being to its whole presence.

From Derrida's observation of the Rousseauian concept of the supplement, the word "supplement" in French has as one of its definitions "exterior addition", meaning exterior addition from the outside. This means the "supplement" is capable of adding itself, "can be filled up of *itself*, can accomplish *itself*" and supplement itself to full presence. Once the supplement becomes a full and complete presence through the work of addition in the vocabulary that it owns, it requires other supplements to supplement its presence, for any full presence is always lacking in its reliance on the derivatives that supplement it (Derrida, 1997: 145).

Although Derrida's concept of the supplement is a one-way self addition of the supplement towards the overruling fullness, the immediacy within the relation of wholeness and vulgar everydayness makes it possible for the two ideas to come together in mutual supplementation. This is reminiscent of Paul de Man's interpretation of Nietzsche's "chronological reversal" which refutes the metaphysical tradition of the "phenomenalism of consciousness". In classical metaphysics, the "outside world" is taken as the "cause" that determines "the inside" of human consciousness, making the latter – the inside – a mere "effect" of the outside. Nietzsche demonstrates how a reverse interpretation of this cause-effect opposition is possible. If the human subject is unconscious of the outside world, the outside world also loses the means to affect the inside of the subject. If that's the case, the outside shouldn't come into existence without first being "caused" by the internal consciousness. The outside is then the "effect" of the inside which now acts as the "cause", while the outside as the "effect" continues to perform the work of causing in determining the inside as its "effect": "What had been considered to be a cause, is, in fact, the effect of an effect, and what had been considered to be an effect can in its turn

seem to function as the cause" (De Man, 1979: 107). The before-after relation in the progress-regression dichotomy is also problematized in this model of thinking. The "before" that causes the "after" is now the "after" that causes the "after", at the same time that the "after" is also the "before" which causes the "before". If vulgar everydayness is the "effect" of the wholeness in that it derives from the latter, if the "effect" supplements the wholeness that "causes" it by substituting the latter's presence – and if we would hold that both entities, vulgar everydayness and wholeness, sustain each other's presences by means of gaining and losing one and the other's faculties through Da-sein's progress and regression—the wholeness as a "cause" may also work as the "effect" that substitutes and supplements vulgar everydayness. If the progress to the presence of the "amniotic deep" is gained by losing and striving away from fragmentation in the vulgar, everyday terrain, then the regression to fragmentation is also gained by the loss of the "amniotic deep", the full presence of being. Through this strange opposing dynamic of loss-gain in Da-sein's progress and regression, both divides of entities depart from each other in immediacy although they remain alongside each other in immediacy, as both the vulgar everydayness and wholeness "derive" their presences from each other, themselves immediate to each other. Wholeness as a cause is the effect of vulgar everydayness, whereas vulgar everydayness as a cause is also the effect of wholeness.

At least Naomi's discovery of the "amniotic deep" derives from her striving across the terrain of fragmentation. If it is through the artifice of writing that Rousseau comes to perceive the exalting fullness of speech, then it is also through the fragmented mother that Naomi comes to arrive at the ecstatic presence of the "amniotic deep". It is the terrain of

fragmentation that enables Naomi to perform the sacrificial act of forgiving which brings her to the ecstasy of full presence. It is also through the investigation of vulgar everydayness that the wholeness of being comes to reveal itself in light of the Heideggerean phenomenological approach. If vulgar everydayness is a derivative of wholeness, wholeness itself also derives from its own vulgar rendition that derives from it.

The hierarchical relation dissolves to mere relative, predicative differentiation in what de Man further commands as “the rhetoric model of the figurative language” (De Man, 1979: 109). As the factual truth about mother figuratively signifies in substituting the “amniotic deep”, the “amniotic deep” may also work as a substitutive, figurative signification of the vulgar mother in the chronological reversal of Nietzsche or the “reversal of names” in de Man’s rhetoric model. If the inauthentic faculties in Heidegger’s formulation and the many renditions that *derive* from them provide the ground for Heidegger’s investigation into the authentic faculties which *generate* them, and if Naomi strives across the fragmented terrain of the *post*-amniotic abortion before arriving at the ultimate freedom of *pre*-abortion, then the authentic and the inauthentic terrains are also related in de Man’s figural relation. While the inauthentic, vulgar everydayness derives from the wholeness of being, the wholeness of being itself is also a derivation of vulgar everydayness, itself being predicated by vulgar everydayness as the figural signs, itself a figural sign that predicates vulgar everydayness. The wholeness of being is never complete without being supplemented by the figurative predication which explicate it in predication and which, in predication and substituting, themselves become solidified with the assumption of figure so that they are also predicated and supplemented by what they derive from in the rhetoric model. This

shouldn't be thought of in terms of cause-effect, before-after relations but rather in the reversal model which allows us to think outside of the temporal and causal frames. At least fragmentation and vulgar everydayness have now become as solid and full as the wholeness of presence through the additive character of supplementation which gives them an entity, a sign, a figural sign, like the idea of wholeness itself, beyond the before-after and cause-effect relations outside of the original-derivative opposition.

## Conclusion

De Man's reading of Nietzsche's *Philosophenbuch* warns against the "literal" understanding of reality which can hardly escape the lies of the rhetorical nature of language. Rhetoric is equipped with the tendency to crystallize deception into what we often take for granted as literal meaning and truthful reality. In this sense, rhetorical language – the language that lies – is more truthful and honest than literal language, for the literal language is nothing more than rhetoric that deceives us into believing its literality and truthfulness:

"The degradation of metaphor into literal meaning [for Nietzsche] is not condemned because it is the forgetting of a truth but much rather because it forgets the un-truth, the lie that the metaphor was in the first place" (De Man, 1979: 111).

De Man's interpretation of Nietzsche allows us to conceive the rhetoric of Heidegger's *Being and Time* as being degraded to truth, in fact the ultra-transcendental truth beyond the facticity of our reality. Even when Heidegger proposes in "Letter on 'Humanism'" a rework of the traditional

metaphysical language into a language that allows the essential thinking of being – “... it is proper to think the essence of language from its correspondence to being and indeed as this correspondence, that is, as the home of the human being’s essence” (Heidegger, 1998: 254) – it is doubtful whether this extra-transcendental language that transcends even beyond the metaphysical language will ever escape the deceptive nature of the rhetoric. Heidegger’s proposal might be a request for a language that is even more truthful than the truth itself, but that only multiplies the risk of falling into rhetorical deception.

For a literary work such as *Obasan*, however, there is the possibility that the text, as a literary text, might be written purely for a rhetorical cause, and is thus saved from the pitfall of rhetorical deception. However, considering the motive and intent of the author, the narrative is more likely to be read for its political, functionalistic purposes, making the text even more literal than the literary form that it assumes. Benjamin Lefebvre’s study of Kogawa’s authorship and context reveals the socio-political intent of the narrative as it insists on recording, disseminating, and implanting the Japanese-Canadian trauma in the collective consciousness of humanity so that the world shall “never again” repeat the same errors in its future history (Lefebvre, 2010: 168).

With such intent of the narrative, it is possible to understand the transcendental tendency of the novel as the literal truth bound for the self-forgetting of the untruth, “the lie that the metaphor was in the first place”. That is not to say that the literal facts of historical errors should be kept from investigations, or that the traumatic history of the world should not be memorialized for its literal non-presence. If the factual world of objective

presences – the vulgar, everyday world of fragmentation – is the world of literal reality, factual history should also be taken literally for corrections, reparations, and pardons in this literal, inauthentic reality. The transcendental terrain does not transcend the deception of the rhetoric. Transcendental love and forgiveness are not free from the rhetoric that lies. They are only taken away from our factual reality and posit in another factual reality which remains outside our reality but which also derives from our reality.

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