Tracing a tacit correspondence between Denis Thériault's *Le facteur émotif* and, through the work of Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, this essay considers how a speculative treatise published in 1920 and a Québécois novel released in 2005 echo and elucidate one another in their *lifedeath*, prostheses, and epistolarity.

"Courriers de la mort": Denis Thériault, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Derrida

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With its focus on dreams, doubles, and desire, and a protagonist with the sobriquet "Libido," the novel *Le facteur émotif* by Denis Thériault nods to the work of Sigmund Freud and lends itself to a psychoanalytic approach. This essay proposes a reading of *Le facteur émotif* with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but rather than espousing a purely psychoanalytic methodology, I propose a comparative literary interrogation of Thériault's and Freud's texts through and with Jacques Derrida's "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'." Derrida's text (which constitutes part two of his three-part work *La carte postale. De Socrate à Freud et au-delà* and offers a close reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that deeply informs my own) will provide a deconstructionist theoretical apparatus for my reading, while *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* will serve as an object of comparative literary analysis as I chart the paths of pleasure, *lifedeath*, the epistolary, and the prosthetic in *Le facteur émotif*. Seizing upon

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a critical gesture of Derrida's in *La carte postale*, in which he proposes an anachronistic correspondence between the writings of Freud and Plato or Freud and Heidegger, I tease out a tacit correspondence between Freud and Thériault to consider how a speculative treatise published in 1920 and a Québécois novel released in 2005 echo and elucidate one another through *différance*.

Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has often been set apart from the rest of his oeuvre on account of its speculative nature and the ways in which it seemingly contradicts well-established tenets of psychoanalysis, Freud's own earlier writings, and even itself as it advances and retracts its stated hypotheses.[1] The brief essay seeks to explore tendencies that might be considered "independent of" and "more primitive than" the pleasure principle (Freud 17). At the time of its publication, in 1920, psychoanalysis held the pleasure principle to be the undisputed dominant tendency in mental life and its processes. Freud questions its status and authority by suggesting that the pleasure principle is "opposed by certain other forces" (6) such as the reality principle and repression, as well as the compulsion to repeat and a newly-thought death instinct.

However, Freud's notion of opposition quickly gives way to one of replacement as he details the operation of the reality principle in the opening chapter of his essay. Freud explains that external forces can incite the reality principle to temporarily replace the pleasure principle in the interest of self-preservation, postponing pleasure without "abandon[ing] the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure." Working toward pleasure rather than against it, the reality principle becomes "a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (7). The phrase in German, *"auf dem langen Umwege zur Lust"* (qtd. in Derrida, *Carte* 301), leads Derrida to dub the reality principle the *Umweg*, that is, the detour (or literally, the "around way"), where the pleasure principle is the *Weg*, the way. Both the *Weg* and the *Umweg* lead to pleasure, and Derrida is quick to undermine a relationship of opposition or inferiority: "Pas de *Weg* sans *Umweg*: le détour ne survient pas au chemin, il le constitue, même il le fraye" (304). The detour is neither the opposite of the path nor a derivative of it; it is the path, it clears the path, or, as English allows us to succinctly state, *it makes way*.

If Derrida needs the original German to stake this claim, Freud turns to the French language for his description of the death instinct. In his fifth chapter, he presents the death drive as the primal instinct of all living things to return to an inorganic state and, in Freud's estimation, this instinct offers another instance of opposition to the pleasure principle as it can neither be accounted for nor comfortably reconciled with the path to pleasure. With death as the primordial desire of all organisms, Freud recasts all of the instincts that would seem to work to preserve life and resist death as

a series of "*détours*" (Freud employs the French word in his German text) on the way to a death of one's own choosing ("ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death" [46]). Recalling Freud's earlier description of the reality principle as a "long détour" (301), Derrida reads the death drive as another *Umweg*. Understood as one more detour, a *Weg* experienced as *Umweg*, the death instinct, like the reality principle before it, enters into a non-oppositional relationship with the way of the pleasure principle.

In the impossibility of opposition, Derrida makes his pronouncement of *lifedeath*—a logic uniting pleasure, reality, death, and *différance*. By the time Derrida pens "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'," he has identified and elaborated *différance* quite extensively in other texts. *Différance* plays on the French verb *différer*, which means both "to differ" and "to defer," and its pronunciation in French is identical to that of *différence*, meaning simply "difference." Derrida develops his homonym into an economy of trace, where language is understood only by placing words in relationship to other words (past and future), thereby suspending meaning and creating, as he puts it in *Margins of Philosophy*, "an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning [. . .] to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others" (3). *Différance* acknowledges alterity while troubling opposition by calling attention to the slippages that occur whenever terms are presented as mutually exclusive.

In "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'," Derrida advances that the reality principle, with and through *différance*, is but the effect of a modifiable pleasure principle. As such, reality, pleasure, and *différance* function within a single economy and constitute a triune term ("Les trois termes — deux principes plus ou moins la différance — n'en font qu'un, le même divisé, puisque le second principe (de réalité) et la différance ne sont que des 'effets' du principe de plaisir modifiable" [304-05]). As Derrida pursues his analysis, the death instinct finds its place in this triad or triune structure, too: "Mais par quelque *bout* que l'on prenne cette structure à un-deux-trois termes, c'est la mort. [. . .] et cette mort n'est pas opposable, elle n'est pas différente, dans le sens de l'opposition, des deux principes et de leur différance" (305, emph. Derrida's). Death resides in the principles and their *différance*, and it cannot be opposed to them.

Neither can death be opposed to life. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes of the detours of the death instinct as "circuitous paths to death, faithfully kept to by the conservative instincts," that "present us to-day with the picture of the phenomena of life" (46). Life itself becomes a death detour and, as a result, life and death are no longer opposing ends of a spectrum, but a common outcome on a shared path. The idea of an "unopposable" death makes way for Derrida's declaration of *lifedeath*:' "Si la mort n'est pas opposable, elle est, déjà, *la vie la mort*" (*Carte* 305, emph. Derrida's). *Lifedeath* sig-

nals the interconnectedness and complementarity of death, life, reality, pleasure, and unpleasure; it functions as and is a function of the *différance* at work in the *Weg* and its *Umwegs*.

Questions of pleasure, reality, death, and *lifedeath* are equally at stake in *Le facteur émotif*. As paths and detours offer fertile terrain for Freud's speculations and Derrida's interventions, literal and figurative paths pepper the pages of Thériault's novel and similarly point the way to pleasure, death, and, ultimately, *lifedeath*. The novel opens with a description of the daily path postal worker and protagonist Bilodo follows on his delivery route. The first page of the first chapter details the rue des Hêtres in Saint-Janvier-des-Âmes where Bilodo makes his rounds, a road lined with the exterior staircases so characteristic of Montreal's streetscapes: "Ces escaliers, la rue en alignait cent quinze, pour un total de mille quatre cent quatre-vingt-quinze marches. Bilodo le savait car il les avait comptées et recomptées, ces marches, car il les gravissait chaque matin, ces escaliers, l'un après l'autre. Mille quatre cent quatre-vingt-quinze marches d'une hauteur moyenne de vingt centimètres, pour un total de deux cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf mètres" (11). Bilodo knows his route, his "way," intimately; each step is carefully counted and calculated, and he performs his deliveries swiftly and with ease.

However, Bilodo's predictable path and steady step are troubled shortly into the novel when he witnesses the death of one of his clients, Gaston Grandpré, who is fatally struck by an oncoming vehicle while rushing across the street to post a letter before the day's final pick-up. Bilodo is deeply affected by this accident, not only because he has seen an acquaintance die a violent and untimely death, but because Bilodo understands that it will bring an end to his most treasured correspondence. Bilodo has been secretly intercepting Grandpré's incoming mail for two years, along with that of numerous other individuals. His criminal habit involves sifting out personal letters from the stacks of "soul-less" junk mail on his route, then reading and resealing them in his apartment before delivering them with a one-day delay. Bilodo's favourite letters are the short, delightful poems (he later learns they are haikus) that a woman named Ségolène in Guadeloupe regularly mails to Grandpré. The narration twice describes Ségolène's letters as Bilodo's greatest source of "plaisir" (19) and Bilodo considers it a benediction that Ségolène has been placed on his path ("il remerciait la vie de le favoriser ainsi, d'avoir mis la belle Guadeloupéenne *sur sa route*" [24, emph. mine]). With Grandpré's passing, however, Bilodo's routine route can no longer afford him access to Ségolène and the pleasure her letters bring.

Where the calculated steps on the novel's opening page present Bilodo's unfaltering stride, the day after Grandpré's death, Bilodo is unable to finish his deliveries

or to dismiss the haunting image of Ségolène before her empty mailbox, waiting for a reply from Grandpré that will never arrive. As the well-trod *Weg* of Bilodo's route no longer grants him the pleasure of Ségolène's beautiful verse, he begins to consider another way. That evening, he schemes to break and enter into Grandpré's uninhabited apartment to pilfer his writings and search for an earlier draft of the most recent letter to Ségolène, the one that Bilodo saw slip from Grandpré's grasp and wash into the gutter in the heavy storm on the day of his death. The idea of prolonging the correspondence with Ségolène in this way both excites and terrifies Bilodo, and he concludes that "S'il restait une chance de renouer le fil et de *retrouver le chemin* menant à Ségolène, c'était sans doute celle-là" (38, emph. mine). Through this new clandestine foray, Bilodo believes he will recover the route to Ségolène and to his preferred poetry.

The metaphor of following a path resurges as Bilodo resolves to "aller jusqu'au bout" (42) and pursue the epistolary exchange with Ségolène himself by meticulously feigning Grandpré's writing. As Bilodo rereads his first attempt at an original composition, he has "l'impression d'être dans la bonne voie" (47). The idea of being "on the right track" is repeated as Bilodo decides to assume various gestures and habits of Grandpré so that he might better understand and imitate him, musing, "N'y avait-il pas là une piste prometteuse?" (49). Entering not only into Grandpré's apartment, but also into his psyche and his craft, Bilodo is reassured in his bold behaviours by the impression that he is on a promising path. With these techniques, he successfully insinuates himself into the poetic correspondence and into Grandpré's apartment, which Bilodo begins renting—fully furnished—shortly after the death of its former tenant.

As Bilodo more fully adopts and adapts to Grandpre's life, "slipping into the skin" of the deceased poet by donning his silk kimono, imbibing his supply of saké, and producing a steady stream of haikus "d'une main qu'on aurait juré être celle de Grandpré" (62), the two characters become increasingly indistinguishable. In what might be attributed to an editorial oversight, when Bilodo discovers that Grandpré kept "une quantité phénoménale de bas dépareillés dans les tiroirs de la commode, de même que dans le panier à linge sale," the surrounding narration reads, "*Bilodo* volait-il des chaussettes dans les buanderies? En faisait-il une collection? Se transformait-il en mille-pattes à la pleine lune?" (53, emph. mine). Context makes clear that Bilodo is pondering the sock-related habits of *Grandpré*; therefore the question should be whether Grandpré was their thief and/or collector. This apparent slip (Freudian slip?) gestures to the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that Bilodo steadily replaces Grandpré as the novel progresses.

After nearly a year of Bilodo's successful epistolary impersonation, Ségolène proposes in one of her letters a trip to see him in the fall. Remembering that Grandpré

sent her a photograph earlier in their exchange, Bilodo fears being be discovered as an imposter. Not knowing how to dissuade her from coming, Bilodo opens a manuscript of Grandpré's haikus to a page at random, hoping for revelation. He reads:

> Percer l'horizon
> voir derrière le décor
> embrasser la Mort. (108)

Inspired by the haiku's concluding line, Bilodo determines that suicide offers his only exit: "C'était bien *la voie* qu'il fallait emprunter" (108, emph. mine). Once again, the image of a path is evoked. However, rather than advancing toward Ségolène and the pleasure she brings, here Bilodo finds himself driven to die.

Bilodo attaches one end of his kimono's cord to the ceiling and the other, in a slip knot, around his neck, but his would-be suicide is interrupted by an unexpected visit from a server at the café Bilodo frequents. The paragraphs that follow are full of foreshadowing as Bilodo unwittingly continues on the path to death and *lifedeath*. The brief exchange causes Bilodo to reconsider his choice to end his life, and he wonders whether the possibility of life after death truly exists, or whether there might even be life before death ("Existait-il réellement une possibilité de vie après la mort ou, mieux encore, avant?" [111]). Overcome with emotion, Bilodo dashes to the bathroom to vomit, then, looking into the mirror for the first time in months, sees "la tête échevelée et barbue de Gaston Grandpré » (112). Bilodo experiences a brutal "choc visuel" (114) in finding the face of a dead man where he should see his own reflection. After closer examination, Bilodo concludes that it is in fact himself in the mirror, though months of hygienic neglect have radically transformed his appearance and made him to uncannily resemble the deceased Grandpré.

Newly confident that Ségolène will believe him to be Grandpré if they meet in person, Bilodo hurries to mail the haiku that tells Ségolène autumn awaits her arrival. He rushes from his apartment into a storm to bring his letter to the mail van where his colleague Robert and another postal carrier are gathering the day's post. As he runs toward the two, there is the piercing cry of a car horn, "et ce fût le choc." He flies through the air, "puis il y eut un second choc" as his body slams against the pavement. Bilodo looks up from where he lies crushed on the street to see the familiar face of Robert and then "celui du facteur, également familier mais pour une tout autre raison: c'était le sien. Le facteur portait son visage d'ancien Bilodo, le Bilodo d'avant la métamorphose, ce Bilodo aux joues glabres et au regard clair qu'il avait été autrefois" (116). The physical shocks of contact with the car and then the road recall the recent

visual shock of Grandpré's reflection in place of Bilodo's and, indeed, as though looking into a mirror again, Bilodo-as-Grandpré faces Bilodo the familiar *facteur*.

As he comes face to face with himself and the reality that he is caught in a "vie en forme de boucle" (117), Bilodo realizes that his imminent death will bring no consolation, no liberation, for "le film n'allait pas s'arrêter là." He knows that for Bilodo who has just witnessed this accident, "son tour viendrait et [. . .] la boucle se perpétuerait, l'entraînant lui aussi vers sa propre fin, puis celui qui viendrait ensuite, et l'autre encore qui lui succéderait, et ainsi à jamais" (118). The Bilodo who still stands on the street will in turn meet his end, and then another, and another, as this death is revealed to be a reprise of the death near the opening of the novel and is bound to repeat again.

Even before Bilodo becomes fully aware of how his destiny is tied to Grandpré's life and death, he acknowledges that the one-year anniversary of Grandpré's passing is more a marker of the start of a life than an end to one: "Bien plus qu'un décès, ce serait une naissance que marquerait cet anniversaire, une seconde naissance, la sienne, et aussi le début de sa tendre relation épistolaire avec Ségolène" (103). *Lifedeath* is at work well before the closing scene of *Le facteur émotif*, but it isn't until the book's final pages that Grandpré and Bilodo and life and death are revealed to be so inextricably bound. The conclusion of Thériault's novel sends the story back to its start, to the earlier iteration of the death scene and the events that steadily lead Bilodo down the path to *lifedeath*.

In Derrida's estimation, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* refers back to its starting point and ends where it begins, too. "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'" offers a close reading of each of Freud's chapters in succession, yet rather than tracing any sort of progression, Derrida perceives within each chapter and across chapters "le retour à l'immobilité du point de départ" (*Carte* 297). Despite Freud's insistent inkling that there is something "beyond the pleasure principle," chapter after chapter concludes with a return to the pleasure principle as the dominant tendency of mental life. Near the conclusion of his treatise, Freud writes, "It may be asked whether and how far I am myself convinced of the truth of the hypotheses that have been set out in these pages. My answer would be that I am not convinced myself and that I do not seek to persuade other people to believe in them. Or, more precisely, that I do not know how far I believe in them" (71). Such retractions and disavowals prevent Freud's hypotheses from firmly taking hold and Derrida identifies a key quality of Freud's text as "l'impossibilité essentielle de s'y arrêter à une thèse, à une conclusion posée dans [. . .] le type théorique en général" (279). Freud tentatively sets forth a series of hypotheses, but it is impossible to locate or, to be more faithful to Derrida's wording, to "stop (oneself) at" a thesis.

In lieu of a thesis, Derrida proposes an athesis, an "*a-thèse*," for *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in its "*dé-monstration*." A *dé-monstration*, Derrida explains, does not have an available thesis; it proves without showing, without putting forward a conclusion. Rather, it proves "en marchant de son pas de démonstration" (*Carte* 317) by transforming itself into its process, by folding into itself everything it is explaining. Derrida uses *dé-monstration* to describe the performativity of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—the profound correlation between what Freud says (the content of his writing) and what he does (the writing itself)—as a persistent movement. His play on the terms *marcher* ("walk" and also "work") and *pas* ("step" and "not") join a broader lexicon of paths, detours, walking, and wandering used to characterize the *marche* and *démarche* of Freud's writing, and to frame *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a walking/working text. There is much fodder within Freud's work to describe his speculative endeavour as ambulatory. In addition to the evocations of paths and detours we have already referenced, expressions in the order of "taking another step" or "going a step further" recur repeatedly as Freud narrates his speculative process. Derrida carefully tracks these steps, announcing, "À la piste nous suivrons tous les pas, pas à pas et pas sans pas, qui conduisent *Au-delà*. . . dans le singulier chemin de la spéculation" (287, emph. Derrida's).

Derrida makes much of Freud's repeated steps and by the time he analyzes the concluding chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud's is not just a walking text, but a limping text. The final line of Freud's book is a citation of Rückert (translated into French as): "Ce qu'on ne peut gagner en volant, il faut le gagner en boitant. . . . L'écriture dit que boiter n'est pas un péché." My English edition of Freud's essay, translated by James Strachey, cites this quote in the original German, allowing me to remark upon the resemblance between the word for "Scripture," *Schrift* (translated by Strachey as "Book"; *Écriture* in French), and the word for "step," *Schritt*, that Derrida cites in German on multiple occasions. Here again, the affinity between writing and walking is suggested, albeit through the ironic echo of perfect, holy writings with faulty, limping steps.

From limping, Derrida imagines a prosthesis, suggesting that Freud's limping seventh and final chapter is akin to a prosthetic leg that consoles and compensates, and that feasibly could be removed. Derrida justifies his reach for prosthesis by citing Freud's own reference in an earlier chapter (Chapter 5) to detachable members of certain animals who can regenerate a severed tail, as well as Freud's prosthesis of the palate, allowing him to eat and speak in the wake of mouth cancer. Though Derrida does not link them explicitly, his prosthesis seems to be yet another play on the (lack of) thesis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It is productive and appropriate to group

prothèse together with *athèse* and *hypothèse* as, in early usage, the word "prosthesis" was understood to mean "the addition of a syllable to the beginning of a word" (Wills 218).[3] The legacy of prosthesis, then, is that it effects a prefix, modifying what follows by preceding it. I cannot help but hear pre-fix (or *pré-fixe*) as "prior to fixed meaning," an indefinite suspension of significance not unlike the effect of *différance*. Playing with different prefixes for "thesis," Derrida evokes *athèse, hypothèse, parenthèses,* and *prothèse*, and all of these *-thèses* are examples or results of prosthesis, just as *Umweg* is *Weg* "prosthetized" and *déplaisir* is *plaisir*.

Reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*'s apparent antonyms as prosthesis reaffirms a movement away from or beyond (*au-delà de. . .*) opposition and toward replacement. We recall that Freud first portrays the reality principle as opposing the pleasure principle, but as he elaborates its function, the framework of opposition cedes to one of replacement ("the replacement of the pleasure principle by the *reality principle*," and again "the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle" [7, emph. Freud's]). Through Derrida's intervention of *différance* and the etymological lens of prosthesis, we understand the replacement of the *pleasure principle* (*Weg*) to be a *modification* of the pleasure principle (*Umweg*). Whether it modifies a word or a body, prosthesis supplements and redefines, as the reality principle complements the pleasure principle while complicating questions of where the pleasure principle begins and ends, and whether it constitutes an independent or even isolatable entity.

The etymological legacy of prosthesis might also help elucidate a complicated Freudian legacy that Derrida sets forth in "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'." In part one of *La carte postale*, which serves as an unconventional preface to the book, Derrida muses that "Le livre s'appellera sans doute *Legs de Freud* à cause de la marche et des jambes, du *pas* de Freud qui n'avance jamais dans *Au-delà*, et dont je suis toute la démarche" (59, emph. Derrida's). Though "Legs de Freud" is not ultimately chosen as the book's title, it is the name of one of its chapters, and the locution and the concept represent a recurring theme of *La carte postale*. Derrida very intentionally plays upon a *double entendre* of "legs" that relies upon a French-English bilingual pun and, through it, he layers "*leg*acy" upon the paths, steps, and prosthesis of Freud's speculation. With the question of inheritance, Derrida brings Freud's writing into conversation with unacknowledged philosophical predecessors such as Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Socrates as well as Freud's firstborn grandson, Ernst, who is referenced at length in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for his "child's game" *fort/da* and the analysis of the compulsion to repeat that it affords, without ever being named or identified as Freud's own kin. Crossing or collapsing "Freud" with philosophers that predate him by millennia or with his daughter's child, Derrida disrupts a linear model of inheritance. Thinking

through "legs" as prosthesis, we can more readily follow the detachments and unexpected reattachments Derrida effectuates in his analysis of inheritance and its reversals, exchanges, and anachronistic correspondences.

The notion of a linear inheritance is, of course, also untenable in *Le facteur émotif*, where Grandpré's legacy is, quite literally, a loop. When Bilodo is first able to study Grandpré's writings at length, he notices an unfamiliar O-shaped symbol decorating many pages of Grandpré's script: "L'examen approfondi des écrits du défunt fit bientôt ressortir un détail insolite: un peu partout sur les feuillets, et parfois même en plein milieu d'un poème, se trouvait dessiné un symbole particulier; il s'agissait d'un cercle plus ou moins orné de fioritures — peut-être était-ce un 'O' stylisé? — que l'auteur semblait avoir eu la manie de griffonner ici et là" (43). Bilodo perhaps unwittingly retains this mysterious "O" as he struggles to compose his first haiku by transforming it into its homophone: "Quand l'aube pointa, il n'était parvenu à écrire que 'l'eau'." Neither the word nor the symbol is adequate to itself, and Bilodo spends all morning entertaining potential modifiers and additions to *eau* in order to arrive at the seventeen syllables of a haiku: "Il passa l'avant-midi dans un état second, s'efforçant d'ajouter à son 'eau' quelque chose qui la transcende" (44). The need to add syllables evokes or invokes prosthesis, and indeed a syllable is added to its beginning as Grandpré's "O" blossoms into its guiding philosophy, *Ens*-O.

Bilodo first becomes familiar with the term *Enso* when a rejected manuscript of Grandpré's haikus with *Enso* as its title is returned to the apartment Bilodo has come to occupy. Bilodo researches its meaning and learns that *Enso* is a Zen circle used for a meditative spiritual exercise that symbolizes "la boucle, la nature cyclique de l'univers, l'éternel recommencement, le perpétuel retour au point de départ." Fittingly, the book Grandpré intended for publication begins and ends with the same poem:

> Tourbillant comme l'eau
> contre le rocher
> le temps fait des boucles. (76)

As Bilodo reads Grandpré's closing haiku, he remarks, "Ce retour au poème du début, qui lui-même évoquait la boucle, c'était Enso, [. . .] le perpétuel recommencement du livre" (76). Bilodo seizes upon the evocation of the "boucle" at the poem's conclusion and the textual performance it enacts but fails to make note of the equally important mention of water in the haiku's opening line.

Water accompanies and assists *Enso* at each turn, governing the fate of Grandpré and Bilodo and guiding the letters that link them. When Bilodo witnesses Grandpré's death early in the novel, water (evoked as "pluie torrentielle" [29], "une rivière en

crue," "l'averse," and "la friture de la pluie" [30]) inundates the scene and, as Grandpré expires, rainwater floods his still-open eyes: "Les yeux de Grandpré s'emplirent de pluie, formant des lacs minuscules, tandis que ses dernières paroles continuaient de planer entre les oreilles de Bilodo, énigmatiques" (31). The "last words" of the dying man that continue to echo in Bilodo's mind were (mis)heard as "en-dessous" or perhaps "grand saut." It is only as Bilodo murmurs the phrase himself on the novel's final page that he and the reader understand that Grandpré's parting word, accompanied by relentlessly falling waters, is *Enso*.

As he lays dying in the novel's closing scene, Bilodo believes that he might be able to break the cycle of *Enso* and escape an endless *lifedeath* if he can "retenir la lettre? L'empêcher de glisser dans le caniveau? La retenir assez longtemps pour que l'Autre s'en empare, et la lise sans doute, et décide peut-être de la poster, aiguillant ainsi sa vie sur une autre voie du temps." Willing himself to hold onto the letter for Ségolène so that the living Bilodo might grasp it, Bilodo on the pavement closes his eyes, only to see on the screen of his eyelids a ring turning upon itself. He reflects, "Toujours la boucle maudite" (118) and realizes that the letter will slip from his hands and that the *lifedeath* of *Enso* will continue, uninterrupted. In the first iteration of the scene, the loss of this letter is clearly attributed to water: "La lettre avait glissé dans le caniveau, aussitôt entrainée par le courant rapide. Bilodo la vit filer en aval entre les pieds des badauds, aspirée hors du cercle funèbre par *l'eau tourbillonnante* qui se précipitait vers la cascade d'une grille d'égout" (32, emph. mine). The formulation "l'eau tourbillonnante" recalls the haiku ("Tourbillant comme l'eau") that both describes and performs *Enso* at the opening and closing of Grandpré's manuscript. This same poem appears at the beginning and near the end of *Le facteur émotif*, revealing the novel as a whole to be governed by the "eau" and the "boucle" of *Enso* that send Grandpré, Bilodo, their fateful letter, and, indeed, their entire correspondence swirling into *lifedeath*.

The place of the postal in *Le facteur émotif* is immediately apparent through its title, protagonist, and plot. Freud, on the other hand, neither alludes to postcards, nor letters, nor postal carriers anywhere in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Nevertheless, an epistolary imaginary permeates Derrida's interpretation of Freud's essay, serving as an extended metaphor and methodology as well as concrete objects of analysis.[4] Derrida introduces his most abstract but also most insistent constitution of the epistolary in response to the very first words of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud's book opens with "In the theory of psycho-analysis we." Derrida reads in this phrase an assertion, presented as a given, that psychoanalytic theory exists. This statement would be unremarkable if Freud were a theorist in any other field of study, but the fact that Freud is

the founder of the theory of psychoanalysis turns his opening phrase into a self-affirming message Freud sends to himself: "*Il se serait écrit.* À lui-même, comme si quelqu'un s'envoyait un message, s'informant par lettre recommandée, sur papier timbré, de l'existence attestée d'une histoire théorique dont il a lui-même, tel est le contenu du message, donné le coup d'envoi" (*Carte* 293, emph. Derrida's). Freud is at once the letter-writer and the addressee, the author and the audience of the message proclaiming that psychoanalytic theory exists.

The epistolary serves a similar function in "courriers de la mort" when Derrida describes how the organism, subject to the death drive, seeks to assure that it dies according to its own terms ("de sa propre mort" [*Carte* 378]) or, as Freud puts it, that it would die "only in its own fashion" (47). Like Freud writing a letter to himself, the organism self-addresses its death note, but now a third position is assumed. In addition to being the letter-writer and addressee, the organism is also the courier, guarding itself against any death "qu'il ne se serait pas annoncée, signifiée d'un arrêt, d'une lettre ou d'un faire-part plus ou moins télégraphique dont il serait à la fois l'émetteur, le récepteur et le transmetteur, d'un bout à l'autre du trajet et *en tous sens le facteur*" (379, emph. mine). In Derrida's imagining of the death drive's operation, the organism acts as author, addressee, and postman as it sends itself word of its death, becoming a "facteur" in every sense.

Taking seriously Derrida's suggestion of a *facteur* "en tous sens" and examining other possible meanings of the term, we learn that the word derives from the Latin "factor" of *factum* and of the verb *facere*, meaning *faire*, "to do" or "to make." A *facteur* was therefore first understood to be one who creates; *Le Grand Robert* even suggests *auteur*, "author," as a denotation. With the subsequent definitions of the term, *facteur* assumes a secondary, even deferential role as one "*qui fait le commerce pour le compte d'un autre*"—who does business for another, on another's behalf—as an agent or intermediary. Finally, we see the common understanding of *facteur* as one who carries and distributes letters, packages, etc. sent by way of the post.

In *Le facteur émotif*, we can see protagonist Bilodo fulfilling each of these different roles of the *facteur*. He is, of course, first and foremost the *facteur* who delivers letters on the rue des Hêtres at both the opening and close of the novel. Yet even when he takes his leave of absence from this role to pursue the correspondence with Ségolène, Bilodo continues to function as a *facteur*. He throws himself into the research of haikus, he meticulously practices his calligraphy to be not only a reader and deliverer, but an author in the poetic correspondence, the one who crafts the messages to be mailed. At the same time, however, Grandpré's legacy dominates Bilodo's creation. He does not write as and for himself, but as and for another. The first time

he succeeds in writing a haiku worthy of sending to Ségolène, it is as if he has been possessed by Grandpré's ghost. "Obéissant à une impulsion," he sits down before the blank page and then "le miracle se produisit. La bille du stylo se mit à rouler sur le papier, y traçant un sismographique chapelet de mots" (62). Channeling Grandpré's spirit and words, Bilodo *fait le commerce pour le compte d'un autre*, and this is only further emphasized by the fact that Bilodo pays Grandpré's rent, cares for his belongings, and orders Grandpré's preferred meal at the corner café. As Bilodo replaces Grandpré in his apartment and his poetic correspondence with Ségolène, he becomes a *facteur* in another capacity, and even when Bilodo takes leave from delivering letters with Canada Post, he remains a *facteur* by authoring letters on behalf of another.

A final definition of "facteur" that finds its cognate with English is not generally applied to people, but understood as an element, an agent, a "factor" contributing to a result. A factor is necessarily partial and relational; it must be considered in concert with other factors. It is this sense of "factor" that constantly points to its plurality, that insists upon interconnectedness. Derrida declares that death, not *lifedeath*, but death, is only found in following a single term, in isolation, to its end, in refusing to see its link, its connection, its *différance* with other terms. He warns that "Chaque fois que l'un des 'termes,' des pseudo-termes ou pseudopodes, marche et va *au-bout* de lui-même [. . .] sans négocier, sans spéculer, sans passer par la médiation du tiers, c'est la mort, l'entorse mortelle qui met fin au retors du calcul" (*Carte* 305, emph. Derrida's). Taking a stand, declaring a single, unmovable concept, would equate to coming to a dead stop (*arrêt de mort*) and arriving at death. But as its title's adjective insists, *Le facteur émotif* is the story of a *facteur* in movement. Both "the emotive postman" and "the emotional factor" can be heard in *Le facteur émotif*, but a more significant word play resides in the "motion" at the heart of "emotional." An equivalent *calembour* can be found in the French's *émotionnel*, or the verb from which it derives, *émouvoir*, meaning "to put into motion."

Freud's text is in movement, too, and this is why Derrida insists upon "l'impossibilité essentielle de s'y arrêter à une thèse" (279). Just because one cannot *stop* at a thesis does not mean there is no thesis to be found in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In his analysis of Freud's final chapter, Derrida almost off-handedly remarks, "Voilà une thèse" (*Carte* 420). Despite this clear declaration, it is difficult to discern just what this thesis might be. Allying his writing to Freud's, perhaps, Derrida avoids taking a stand; he buries the thesis in the middle of a paragraph near the end of a chapter within his wandering commentary thereof. What is clear is that it has to do with connection, connectedness, binding, banding, linking, or at least "l'effet de liaison," and it is embedded within a discussion of displacement, replacement, detachment, posing,

and posting. The convoluted thesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* resides in the entanglement of *différance*, prosthesis, and the postal in its performative prose, and through *lifedeath*, *Enso*, and the epistolary, a corresponding thesis moves throughout *Le facteur émotif*.

If, in conclusion, we return to the start, we can retrace multiple points of correspondence among Thériault's, Freud's, and Derrida's writings. From the paths to pleasure and death to the *lifedeath* of their textual performance, from the prostheses of *Umweg* and *Enso* to the *facteurs en tous sens*, Thériault's and Freud's texts unite in and through a "long, indirect" Derridean inheritance. In the section of *La carte postale*[5] that follows "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'," Derrida insists that a letter, through *destinerrance*,[6] can always *not* arrive at its destination. Some of Freud's send-offs (to himself) seem to make their way, through Derrida, to Thériault's novel, where an unlikely correspondence can emerge.

NOTES

1/ See Gregory Zilboorg's introduction to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as well as *On Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle,"* edited by Salman Akhtar and Mary Kay O'Neil.

2/ The centrality of this concept to Derrida's overall interpretation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is made clear in the fact that "Lifedeath" serves as the title to a ten-session seminar Derrida delivers on Freud's book. It is under the name "Spéculer — sur 'Freud'" that the seminar is later published in *La carte postale*.

3/ See also Sarah S. Jain's "The Prosthetic Imagination."

4/ As when Derrida reads Freud's letters to Eitingon or Wittels.

5/ This section is on Jacques Lacan's "Seminaire sur *La lettre volée*."

6/ J. Hillis Miller offers a helpful account of the concept in "Derrida's Destinerrance."

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