

# The Notebook and the Gun: Performative Witnessing in *Goodness*

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“**H**OW DOES IT FEEL?” “HOW DOES IT *FEEL*?” (11). In an early scene of the play *Goodness* by Canadian playwright Michael Redhill,<sup>1</sup> one character asks, “How does it feel?” to which another replies with the same question with a different intonation, “How does it *feel*?” In repetition, the question turns the object of interrogation from a direct experience “How does it feel?” to a metaexperience of the experience: “What does feeling feel like?” and “What does it feel like to be asked the question how does it feel?” The main action of the play revolves around an encounter between a genocide survivor who tells her story and the initially reluctant listener who becomes a witness to that story. In that light, this question “How does it feel?” characterizes the play’s central attitude toward storytelling and listening, an attitude which privileges affect over knowledge and which employs a marked theatricality to translate that affective power of response-ability generated by a survivor-storyteller into an engaged

<sup>1</sup> *Goodness* premiered in Toronto at Tarragon Theatre in October 2005, directed by Ross Manson as a Volcano/Tarragon co-production. The cast featured Victor Ertmanis as Mathias Todd, Lili Francks as Althea, Tara Hughes as Young Althea, J.D. Nichol森 as Stephen, Jordan Pettle as Michael Redhill, and Bernadetta Wrobel as Julia. This same production with a couple of cast changes (Gordon Rand as Michael Redhill and Amy Rutherford as Julia) toured to Edinburgh

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moral responsibility for that story taken up by a listening witness. As Kelly Oliver writes, "Just as the various parts of the body cannot function without the circulation of blood and oxygen, the psyche cannot function without the circulation of affective energy ... We have an ethical and social responsibility to be vigilant in our attempts to open up the circulation and flow of affective energy in all of our relationships" (20). In this paper, I will demonstrate the way in which *Goodness* models the circulation of affect through dramatic creation. The play advocates for an active and ethically responsible audience witness—what I am calling a performative witness—generating a hopeful witnessing strategy arising directly out of the play's looped metatheatrical structure of stories within stories.

When dealing with retelling significant traumatic events through drama, one approach is to adopt a style of documentary realism in the conviction that a strongly mimetic technique has the strongest claim to communicating truth. The more the presentation can deliver details, both factual and emotional, pertaining to the original event, the more convincing and moving it will be. Communicating the truth of an experience through an imitative imaginative re-enactment, however, can have a peculiar disconcerting effect. Julie Salverson, who writes extensively on the witnessing of trauma through drama and storytelling, recounts her audiencing experience to one such retelling of a traumatic past: "What disturbed me was a sense that [the performers] were not present in the performance, were not noticing themselves in the picture, and consequently, that we as audience members were neither asked nor able to implicate ourselves. Audience and actors together were looking out at some exoticized and deliberately tragic other" ("Change" 122). Salverson argues that this emotionally submerged attitude and passive or effaced sense of self, which she names an "erotics of injury" ("Change" 119), comes out of a naturalistic performance style and circumvents real engagement with the story at hand. Placing an emphasis on the obligation of the audience to become responsible witnesses to trauma, Salverson challenges us to find

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(August 2006), New York (March 2007), Vancouver (June 2008), and Ottawa (June 2009). In the fall of 2009, the production underwent more cast changes for a brief run in Toronto followed by a tour to Huye, Rwanda. See [www.volcano.ca](http://www.volcano.ca) for the most recent information on current production plans. In addition to *Goodness*, Michael Redhill's other plays include *Building Jerusalem* (2001) and *Heretics* (1993). Beyond plays, Redhill also has three works of fiction: *Consolation* (2006) which was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize, *Fidelity* (2003), and *Martin Sloane* (2001). He has produced several books of poetry and is the current publisher and editor of the literary magazine *Brick*.

alternative performance modes and alternative dramatic styles and forms which promote active engagement for both performers and audience.

Considering the aesthetic component of art in relation to its content, Theodor Adorno famously condemned the writing of poetry in the aftermath of the Holocaust as “barbaric” insofar as works of art generate aesthetic pleasure, and in this way such works antithetically offer pain and horror clothed in beauty (Adorno 125–27). To see healing rather than horror in such art works, we might reread that word “barbaric.” When we say something is barbaric, it is savage, cruel, or inhuman. However, this denotation of savagery comes out of a prior meaning: from the Greek word βάρβαρος (bárbaros) probably a reference to the stammering “bar-bar” speech of foreigners, thus Barbarians (*OED*). So, likewise, something barbaric is foreign or alien to civilization. In this second mode, poetry of the Holocaust is barbaric in the sense that it is unfamiliar or strange. Such an approach may remake an unspeakable history, rendering trauma again speakable through an aesthetic of strangeness or defamiliarization.<sup>2</sup>

Consistent with the search for an artistic form which captures this aesthetic barbarity, there has been a concerted move away from documentary realism and toward modes of heightened theatricality through the use of clown, melodrama, irony, and parody (Forché, Salverson, Holden). Operating within this tradition, *Goodness* also seeks to testify and recount a history of genocide using a heightened theatricality. In this case, that theatricality is produced by metatheatrical play-within-a-play structures, relating to the creation of a multiplicity of nested fictional worlds and the solidity of the boundaries of those worlds. One way of arranging multiple worlds within is to maintain world boundaries as solid, keeping each world ontologically distinct, and producing “neat” metatheatres (Gaggi 15). In another pattern, the neat hierarchical arrangement of nested worlds is compromised through metalepsis as the barriers between the worlds are breached and characters from different worlds incongruously cross over and exert influence on the other play worlds in progress (Genette 234–35).<sup>3</sup> This is the messy metatheatres produced by *Goodness*. This ontological messiness compromises potential access to any kind of authentic truth

2 My thanks to my colleague Jill Scott for reminding me of the etymology of this word and connecting it to Adorno.

3 “Any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse (as in Cortázar), produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical or fantastic.” Genette refers to the Julio Cortázar story “Continuadad de los parques” (“Continuity of Parks”), in which a man is assassinated by a character in the book he is reading.

through its layered looped narrative structure in two ways. First, the meta-theatrical layering of worlds focuses awareness on the core process of engendering theatricality by reiterating the creation of fictional worlds. By drawing attention to the theatricality of the story being told, metatheatres serves to remind us that the act of telling history is just that; it is an act of telling. Any account of a past event lives at one remove from the original event, separated from it by time and inevitably tinted by an individual view. Distanced from the original event, history is necessarily a construction of the teller, and as such it offers no direct objective verification. Second, the persistent disruption of these looped worlds leads to competition between those sometimes divergent worlds for authenticity, resulting in a fundamental uncertainty about the story itself.

This ambiguity, the opening to doubt, introduced by metatheatrical and metaleptic structures, seems to pose a particular problem for a play concerned with genocide. A central feature of Holocaust narratives is the exhortation to listeners to remember the past. Desire to avoid the pain inherent in retelling of horrific personal history is offset by a communal need to document that experience, to be fortified against deniers—accurate memory being a sure preventative measure against future horrors. As George Santayana said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the recent and ongoing horrors of genocide in Cambodia, Bangladesh, East Timor, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Darfur put the lie to this admonition. Simply remembering is not good enough. What is required is a move from an overwhelmed sympathetic passivity to a barbaric estranged engagement, from a concrete truth to an affective truth. Testimony to genocide lies at the core of *Goodness*. However, the play purposely dispenses with its duty to historical accuracy by sidestepping history altogether. Although one character presses for this information, he is continually deflected. Beyond the reluctance of characters to divulge specific details, the play itself is silent, avoiding placing itself in time and space but also purposely taking note of this silence. The worlds of *Goodness* are aggressively indeterminate in the way that Roman Ingarden reserves for fictional worlds, self-consciously contrasting these lacunae-riddled worlds with the fully determinate actual world. *Goodness* is a play about an unnamed genocide, occurring in an

4 *The Columbia World of Quotations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. [www.bartleby.com/66](http://www.bartleby.com/66). 27 March 2007. The specific association of this quotation with genocide and with the Holocaust in particular comes from its use by William L. Shirer as the epigraph to *The Rise and the Fall of the Third Reich* (1959).

unspecified county, which might be in Europe or it might be in Africa, at some time in the not-too-distant past. There is even disagreement between characters in different play worlds as to how many people were killed. In this way, *Goodness* overtly sheds its obligations to a rational objective truth of what happened, embracing rather a contingent affective truth, posed in the central question, “How does it feel?”

Dori Laub, a Holocaust survivor, a psychologist, and one of the founders of the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University tells this story about the importance of the affective aspect of bearing witness:

A woman was relating her memories as an eyewitness of the Auschwitz uprising; a sudden intensity, passion and colour were infused into the narrative. She was fully there. “All of a sudden,” she said, “we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky, people were running. It was unbelievable.” There was a silence in the room, a fixed silence against which the woman’s words reverberated loudly, as though carrying along an echo of the jubilant sounds exploding from behind barbed wires, a stampede of people breaking loose, screams, shots, battle cries, explosions ... The woman fell silent and the tumults of the moment faded. She became subdued again and her voice resumed the uneventful, almost monotonous and lamenting tone. (Laub 59)

Some time later, Dr Laub shared this woman’s testimony at a conference with a group of historians. The historians claimed that this woman’s memories were inaccurate—only one chimney had been destroyed in the uprising, not four. And because this detail was not accurate, the whole of her testimony must be discounted: “It was utterly important to remain accurate, lest the revisionists in history discredit everything” (60). Laub contests this dismissal, arguing that this testimony offers a more potent truth beyond simple facts. He calls this affective shift in the tenor of the testimony “breaking the frame.” Speaking about this experience is itself part of the experience, Laub writes, since “She was testifying not simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination ... The woman’s testimony ... is breaking the frame of the concentration camp by and through her very testimony: she is breaking out of Auschwitz even by her very talking” (62).

This temporal folding of the original event into its telling is a feature particular to trauma. With respect to how the past is retained and recalled, events marked by trauma are different than those which are sim-

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ply remembered. Memories are narrative representations of past events. Memories repeat a previous lived experience. Trauma, on the other hand, causes the original experience to be effaced; that is, the emotional toll of the original experience overwhelms the subject and the experience cannot be fully experienced even as it is happening. And without the imprint of the original experience that event cannot later be recalled as memory (Caruth, Tal). The telling of past trauma allows the event to come into being. Telling and living coincide. The representation is the event (Van Alphen 36). Thus, testimony by a direct witness is not a reliving of the event but actually the original experience of the event for the first time. More than this, by recounting a strong affective truth, the testimony of this survivor has a real effect on her original experience. She breaks the frame of Auschwitz and performs her hope and freedom in the telling of this exceptional moment coloured by the indelible emotional mark left by that moment. Thus, breaking the frame is not just a metaphor in the reliving of the experience, but actually, in these particular moments when time folds in on itself, we see the performative power of language at work and present-day speech has the ability to rewrite past experience.

Theatre shares this seemingly paradoxical characteristic pattern of reiteration as creation. It is an innate feature of performance that stories rooted in the past—stories already written, already published, and already rehearsed—are (re)presented as spontaneous experience. Performance is a vehicle whereby the past is transmuted into the present. Theatre, like trauma, paradoxically generates primary experience through repetition of an obscured or missing past. This pattern of intrusion by present storytelling into a past story is the central feature of the metaleptic organization (or disorganization) of *Goodness*, which presents the same historical kernel in four distinct layers, ranging from world<sup>a</sup>—the actual world we now occupy, through a series of fictional worlds <sup>b</sup>, <sup>c</sup>, and <sup>d</sup>: Working from the inside out, world<sup>d</sup> contains the initial set of occurrences surrounding the incarceration of Mathias Todd. It is now ten years after the purges, and Todd has been repatriated from Geneva to stand trial as an accused instigator of the genocide. However, rather than try him for genocide, the court decides instead to charge him with a single murder, the murder of a woman named Helena Sonnen, who belonged to the minority ethnic group and with whom Todd had had an affair. World<sup>c</sup> consists of the telling of this story by Althea—Todd's prison guard—to Michael. In world<sup>b</sup>—Michael, that is, Michael Redhill, the playwright, writes about his meeting with Althea. The product of his writing is the script for *Goodness*. And the outermost

world, world<sup>a</sup>, features the play *Goodness* as an immediate performance event, which stages within its frame each of these three repetitions.<sup>5</sup>

Typically, the layering of multiple worlds is figured as a spatial arrangement, described as worlds within worlds or as nested boxes. The worlds of *Goodness*, however, are characterized primarily by time rather than space, as each layer repeats the same elemental story. Metalepsis, then, as it operates to breach the boundaries of these worlds, not only disrupts space allowing crossovers between here and there but, more disturbingly, time is disrupted and the past and sometimes the future merge in the ongoing immutable now of the performance in progress. By bringing two or more disparate times together into a shared now, this temporally blended metaleptic structure of the play repeats and complicates the relation between a play and its audience, between a story and its witness. Levinas describes witnessing in these terms as a feature of time: “[Witnessing is] the disjointed conjunction of two different temporalities, [an event in which] the other’s time disrupts mine ... It is a new time, an interstitial time, neither mine nor yours; an extraordinary disjuncture of I and other, an experience of proximity that initiates an infinite distance without distance” (Cohen 147–49).

In a small way, the dominant world of *Goodness* (world<sup>c</sup>) is carved out from ordinary time in just this way. Michael enters into this interstitial time when he meets Althea, when he bears witness to the story of her past. He is in London awaiting his flight back to Canada, held over in a third country which is neither destination nor home, when a man in a pub directs him to Althea. It is in this pause in his primary journey that Michael falls down the metaphorical rabbit hole. As he says, “I had seven hours to catch my plane. I could have gone to a movie and had a nice long dinner, but ...” (22). The time spent with Althea in the isolation of her darkened apartment is very much a time out of the ordinary. As her dead are conjured and embodied in a ghostly performance which is past memory and present performance, the encounter between Michael’s time and Althea’s does initiate through a disjunctive juxtaposition between these two temporal threads a distance across time which cannot be bridged but which is also distance without distance as those past lives again in the present, close enough to touch. And Michael does interact with these apparitions:

5 A note about the names: Althea in Greek means wholesome or healing. Alethea (a close cognate) means truth. Both are weighty associations to make with this character, associations which are invited particularly by the uncommonness of the name. Likewise, from the name Mathias Todd, we might read Todd as tōd, in German—death. In performance, it was pronounced with a short o sound.

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He grabs a deposition from Stephen and reads it. Julia argues with him. Todd drinks Michael's tea. The environment of Althea's apartment evokes the experience of theatregoing as also a similar interstitial time, in this respect creating infinite distance without distance, as we too sit in isolated darkness. Theatre augments this sense of the conflation of time as past events are re-enacted with seeming spontaneity. The impression of the story retold competes with the sense that we have been transported to bear invisible witness to the original event.

As a lived theatre event, *Goodness* fragments our phenomenological experience of time right from the outset. When the lights come up, we are surprised to find the playwright kneeling on the floor scratching down his thoughts in a notebook:

MICHAEL. That was it. Sorry, I just have to get this down. I'm trying to write a play ... although if you can hear me, I guess it's finished. Even though I could throw it through a window. (*pause, realizing*) You're sitting in a theatre right at this very moment, aren't you? Somewhere, in the future, you're in a dark room and it just got quiet, and you have no idea what's going to happen to you. (9–10)

The notebook is the focal point for multiple synchronous interleaved timelines. In the present, Michael—Michael Redhill—is writing a play called *Goodness*. In his future (but our present), we are in a theatre watching the play he has written. The play the fictional Michael has written is autobiographical and so stands properly in the past, the foundation of the present writing experience. However, theatrical performance as a reifying of past experience, and also as an embodied creation from a text also fixed in the past, disrupts this orderly temporal relation. In the act of writing his past, a past which now includes the writing of this play, Michael casts himself forward into the future, where his past will unspool again. The notebook records Michael's experience in each of these timelines. It contains both a journal of Michael's encounter with Althea and it contains the doubled text of *Goodness*, running in parallel first as a printed pre-performance document and secondly as an underscore to its own performed repetition. Michael tells the audience, anticipating the play still to come, "We have no idea what is going to happen to us." In his capacity as the writer and narrator of that play, this Michael knows what will happen, but his temporal alter ego that Michael—a character in this story—does not have that same omniscience.

Just as this device of staging of the playwright drives a wedge between the writer himself and his representation as a character, *Goodness* further fragments this persona again using metalepsis to detach the actor from the character, and present through this overt division alternate Michaels double-voiced with different levels of prescience and power. Michael continues, “[Y]ou’re staring at the playwright. Although it’s not me, I have to say. I’m being played tonight by Jordan Pettle. That’s a little lie in the form of a person. You’re in good hands with Jordan, by the way. He’s an excellent actor ... You probably saw him in *Waiting for Godot*. A Jewish Estragon—imagine. *For Godot, We’re Waiting*” (10).<sup>6</sup> This confession exposes the primal theatrical lie—an actor speaks the playwright’s words and both the actor and the playwright are pretending to voice a third fictional person. Here the usual performative ventriloquism of the actor is brought to the fore with surreal effect as Pettle as Redhill speaks about himself in the third person. The result is a uniquely discomfiting blend, reminding us that the playwright channeling the character speaks in the actor’s body. This “lie in the form of person” is metalepsis personified, collapsing again the time of writing with the time of performance and letting both temporally absent Michaels speak to us simultaneously, channeled by the physically present actor.

By foregrounding the divisions and amalgamations between the playwright and his temporally distinct doppelgänger within the play, *Goodness* underlines the causal relationships between lived time, knowledge gained from that experience, and the power that comes from that knowledge. As different retellings of the principal story repeat and overlap, what the characters and the various temporal incarnations of those characters know or do not know about how the story turns out has a significant impact on the capability of a character to be a responsible witness. On the most basic level, willingness to subject oneself to the experience of the story is connected to time via knowledge of the outcome, as the listener may quite naturally wish to resist exposure to the difficult re-experience of trauma. Laub asserts that “the task of the listener is to be *unobtrusively present*” (71). However, he notes that although the listener needs to fully partake

6 In subsequent productions, this role of Michael was played by Gordon Rand. The text was changed accordingly to substitute one name for the other. However, rather than substituting for *Godot* a recent credit by Rand, that is, instead of telling a real-world truth, Redhill fabricates, “He’s an excellent actor, a trained actor, who’s been in many Canadian plays of repute ... but the most successful was an all-Jewish *Waiting for Godot*” (*Goodness* New York 3). Recognition of this fabrication undermines the strong reality effect at work when we identify Jordan Pettle and confirm his real-world status.

of the experience of the trauma survivor the listener is also a discrete individual who struggles with what he hears. The second witness faces the hazards of listening to horror, triggering his own existential worries, and opening himself to question his core beliefs and world view. Under these challenging conditions, listening witnesses may employ defensive strategies to protect themselves. Laub lists some of these usual defences, noting that these tendencies need to be controlled and overcome for authentic witnessing to occur. This question of how to be an authentic witness is central to *Goodness*. In this context, the question “How does it feel?” is not primarily directed at Althea as a surviving witness but, rather, to Michael as a secondary, listening witness, emotionally exposed but also inevitably distanced and restricted in terms of his agency over the story.

However, significantly in *Goodness*, Michael in his capacity as a witness is not definitively restricted in this way. Because time is folded and characters live and interact across multiple iterations of the same story, knowledge can be carried across worlds. The looped temporal structure of the play permits characters to wield power over the story—both over its retelling and paradoxically over the original happenings themselves, so the defensive desire to avoid or deflect the story’s emotional effects and moral reverberations can manifest in more than simple passive not listening. A witness can break through the world-frames to exert performative agency and to change the story itself. Michael Redhill, in his trebled capacity as playwright, narrator, and character, is that performative witness.

The main action of the first act traces Michael’s journey through various stages of resistance and avoidance as his defences are eroded and he learns to become the required witness without which Althea’s story and with it her truth cannot emerge. Michael’s struggles with the witnessing stance become entangled with the normal prescience and performative power of being an author. At first, the writer in Michael inhibits his ability to give himself over to Althea’s story, to be fully engaged with listening. Later, to become a morally responsible witness, Michael again takes up the power of words to exert agency. Through a key performative act, he moves beyond listening to accepting a certain culpability in the events he witnesses.

Even before one can be a witness, one must agree to enter into the contract of testimony (Laub 72). Marital betrayal is the catalyst for Michael’s first foray into witnessing. Wanting to gain access to his own family’s historical trauma as Polish Jews murdered by the *Einstatzgruppen*, he travels to Poland in a misguided attempt to recover first-hand testimony from present-day Poles:

THERAPIST. You marry a non-Jew, she leaves you for a non-Jew. Any connection here to the sudden interest in the history of your people?

MICHAEL. Oh. You mean am I displacing my anger at my gentile ex-wife by trying to take it out on a bunch of Jew-killing Poles?

THERAPIST. Are you?

MICHAEL. I know what I'm doing, okay? (14)

Faced with this combination of righteousness and foreign naïveté, the Poles he encounters are understandably not forthcoming. They are not hostile but are likewise not interested in Michael's quest, and this preliminary and entirely wrongheaded gesture toward witnessing trauma is an unconditional failure. Significantly, Michael does not couch this endeavour as witnessing. His intent in going to Poland was not to truly listen but, rather, he arrived knowing the story already, seeking confirmation of the already known story. After this debacle, when Michael again becomes aware of the audience, he exercises his authorial power to end the story: "I took a train from Warsaw through the green green fields to Berlin, and from there went to London to wait for my plane home. Annnnd ... you know what? That's the end of the play! Thank you for coming. Good night" (14). This closing declaration is followed by a blackout. When this first attempt at bearing witness fails, he takes action not as Michael<sup>c</sup> the character, but rather as Michael<sup>b</sup> the playwright within. Defensively, he closes off that piece of his past experience and aborts the fictional world which housed its repetition. But in addition to his awkward experience in Poland, this is the narrative world that in his dual capacity as narrator of his own past and as playwright of *Goodness* he knows will lead to Althea and a second and more painful witnessing situation—a situation which he refuses. The story then starts again, seemingly without his permission: "I said: good night" (15). In this moment, the temporal tensions between the character Michael's actual lived experience and the playwright Redhill's already written drama bubble up. Although Michael<sup>b</sup> balks, god-like Michael<sup>a</sup> exerts his performative power and presses the story forward, compelling Michael to circle back into the past, to become again Michael<sup>c</sup> and accept the path which leads to a new contract of testimony. In performance, the music swells again "Yonana, Yo" and the other actors (characters?) take hold of Michael and force him into a chair, propelling him into the next scene. From one perspective, it is the play *Goodness* and Michael<sup>a</sup> that restart the plot from their superior vantage. But from another not mutu-

ally exclusive perspective, it is the characters themselves from the inferior nested worlds that demand that their story be told. Michael does then capitulate and consents to participate, reactivating the story, addressing the audience and introducing us to a man in a pub—the man who will send him to Althea.

The notebook is Michael's constant prop. It is rarely out of his hands. And following his nature as a writer, Michael initially performs witnessing as a writer and begins to take notes on what Althea is saying. When she sees him writing, she tells him to put the notebook away: "You will not write about me" (28). Throughout the play, in the interplay between Althea and Michael, there are repeated contestations around his recording her words. In other moments, Althea uses the notebook as a way to affirm her authorial control over the story, saying to Michael, "Why don't you take some notes ... Put this down" (40). Power inheres in writing through the possibility of mediation; as the story moves from the oral delivery by one person to the recording in writing by another there is the opportunity and threat of change, of editing, and of interpolation. Writing also exemplifies power as it facilitates the translation of story into property; the words of the story are now material objects, objects to be possessed and controlled through possession. Last, power is exercised through writing as it solidifies and fixes the fluid oral history. The story becomes fixed in the space of the page but also in time at the moment of its recording. In this way, the notebook seems to offer a certain kind of temporal security. All these characteristics associated with writing as a means of control are concretized by the key prop of Michael's notebook. However, the notebook, which at first seems to offer a bulwark against narrative instability in the looped worlds, itself is caught up in one of these paradoxical loops. Ultimately, at the very end—and I will discuss this important exchange in more detail later—Michael surrenders the notebook to Althea when he leaves her apartment, returning his knowledge of the story to her as a kind of property. However, this renunciation of the written narrative is problematic due to the plural ontology of the notebook and its contents. Although in one world the notebook contains Michael's recording of Althea's story, in another world it contains the script for *Goodness*—another iteration of Michael's recording of Althea's story. Watching the play, we are made aware of the play as a scripted object; holding the published text in our hands, the future iteration of the story is even more palpable. Further, the notebook is caught in a temporal paradox, appearing at the beginning of the play as the complete script but also traveling with Michael to meet Althea, a meeting in which Michael the playwright/narrator knows

the notebook will be relinquished. Yet, through the temporally folded structure of the play, the notebook is both lost and retained. Michael both surrenders control of the story to Althea and steals it back when he writes it again as *Goodness*.

When stripped of his notebook and so unable to capture and control Althea's story that way, Michael tries to exert a different kind of control over Althea's story. Instead of pinning it down and gathering it to himself, he pushes and probes. He asks questions, presses for clarification of facts, and tries to interpose his own opinions and expertise. A skirmish occurs when Michael compares the moral question of trying Mathias Todd to the 1993 case of East German leader Erich Honecker, who was already dying of liver cancer when he was indicted for treason. Objecting to this interpolation, Althea tries to regain control of her story: "This has nothing to do with that." When Michael continues to argue with her, she becomes defensive and threatens to discontinue the story:

ALTHEA. Would you like me to write this all down on the back of an envelope and then you can call me if you have any questions?

MICHAEL. I'd just like to be completely clear about what it is you are telling me.

ALTHEA. Let's just say the situation was ambiguous. You do know what "ambiguous" means?

MICHAEL. Fine. Go on, then. (33)

Althea forces Michael to accept a less than complete narrative. The ambiguity surrounding certain aspects of the story and the factual holes pertaining to experience beyond Althea's knowledge mark the story as distinctively hers but also contests the omniscience of the playwright as the god of this fictional world. In this move away from a need to confirm each detail and fill in every gap, Michael takes small steps toward accepting the story Althea is telling.

Having been repulsed in world<sup>c</sup> by Althea the gatekeeper in the defence of her story, Michael goes around her and crosses into world<sup>d</sup>. Due to the metaleptic arrangement of these fictional worlds evinced by the otherworldly embodied presence of Todd, Julia, Stephen, and the young Althea, Michael is able to bypass the intermediary of the storyteller and engage the characters of her past directly. At one point, Michael reaches in to take the coroner's report on Helena Sonnen out of Stephen's hands. Looking at it he muses, "So this is the woman ... She probably betrayed him" (40). This personal interpellation, overlaying his own thoughts and feelings about

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his ex-wife Joanna onto Todd's mistress Helena, breaks communion with Althea's story world and the characters "all back off, like an image fading" (40). This inappropriate imposition of his concerns onto the story is a kind of mutiny. He breaks faith as a witness and displaces Althea at the centre of her own story, substituting his own selfish and—from Althea's perspective—irrelevant concerns. Althea chastises him: "Did I say that?" Michael: "No, no. I'm sorry—please keep going" (40). In response to this first foray, the characters simply dissipate and retreat from Michael's interference. But the next time, with Michael again intruding into their world, the lower-order characters take action to protect their narrative interests in the story at this new inset level. There is a break in Althea's story when one thread pertaining to Julia and Stephen passes out of her direct experience. Michael tries to pursue this subplot: "There's more here. Remember when she followed Stephen out of the room? You said you didn't know what happened next" (58). The stage directions indicate that Michael moves Stephen and Julia into the scene, writing dialogue for them, filling the gap in Althea's experience. In Michael's version, Julia negotiates with Stephen; she proposes that he let her father go and instead arrest her for sheltering a suspected war criminal. As this newly written scene develops, Althea interjects "Excuse me. What are you doing?" When Althea regains control of the dialogue, she uses it to mock Michael's imagined version of events, staging a scene in which Julia and Stephen fall in love (60). Julia, Young Althea, and Stephen then turn on Michael, accusing him of manipulating them: "You don't get to reinvent your world using me." "Using us." "User." (61). Then on their own initiative, they perform a third even more exaggerated parodic version of the imagined scene with Julia vampishly seducing Stephen, who agrees to let her father go in exchange for sex.

This final uprising in which the characters themselves not only refuse to be written but take up the authorial mantle marks the lowest point of Michael's journey to becoming a responsible witness. Michael's efforts to control the story and to impose his own narrative organization on it are effectively countered by these other playwrights who apply the same strategy. To defend the story against elaboration and clarification, the characters exercise performative power to call into question the authenticity of any story. They offer a series of alternatives. By playfully tinkering with the story, these denizens of the primary core fictional world who embody the story itself teach Michael that this is a game he cannot win.

MICHAEL. All right, enough. Why don't you just cut to the chase then, okay?

Todd stood trial or he didn't. He went to jail, he hanged, he's living in a condo in Argentina. I have a plane to catch.

ALTHEA. So go catch it ... You think it's easy for me to tell you this story?

MICHAEL. I know it isn't.

ALTHEA. I don't care if you want a tidy, happy ending.

MICHAEL. I'm not interested in an easy— (61–62)

Then Althea deliberately shocks him, telling him not what happens to Todd but that this story ends with the murder of Julia. This revelation overwhelms him:

MICHAEL. My god ... Why does everything keep—... GOING TO HELL! GOING TO SHIT! I can't fucking stand it. I am not going to put myself through— This is not heading in any direction that interests me, okay? I'm sorry, I apologize, but I can't—

[...]

MICHAEL. Please. Let me go now. Okay?

ALTHEA. Touch me. (*Beat*) DO IT.

He begins to tentatively reach out to her. Althea grabs his hand and presses it to her face.

ALTHEA. Am I real?

MICHAEL. Yes.

ALTHEA. I live and breathe?

MICHAEL. Yes!

ALTHEA. Good ... You sit down. And listen to my story. (63–64)

Helpless, he collapses into the only chair, and this is the end of the first act. It is finally at this point that Michael abandons his defensive writerly attempts to control the narrative. He surrenders to Althea's story. He is ready to listen and to accept the story as her story.

Having brought Michael to this submissive position as a respectful listener and setting up Althea's story as a privileged narrative, *Goodness* through its looped structure challenges this relation by juxtaposing two timelines. In each of the episodes outlined, Michael is progressively discouraged from recording the story, from asking questions, from elaborating details. Under this construction, to be a good witness is to be empathetic but passive. However, the metatheatrical arrangement of time in the

play calls this view into question. Although the earlier Michael, Michael<sup>c</sup>, is a witness in that way—at least initially—the later and ontologically superior Michael, Michael<sup>a</sup> the playwright, takes a less deferential approach. Not only does the play as play explicitly run counter to the lessons of the first act by retelling and re-imagining Althea’s story, it goes further, repositioning her story in the overall narrative. *Goodness* decentres her story and reframes it through Michael’s own experience of her story. Inside the fictional world, the play foregrounds Michael’s questioning, manipulating, and interfering as he attempts to insert himself into the story, exercising his skills as writer. Outside in the actual world, Michael<sup>a</sup> succeeds where Michael<sup>c</sup> fails; the writing of *Goodness* itself permits him to insert himself into the story and to perform witnessing as an author. The paradox which allows these opposing strategies to coexist is elaborated in the second act and becomes central to the engendering of a performative witness. The second part of Michael’s journey is a rebuilding process, bringing about responsibility and a renewed agency in the witness. Through metalepsis, Michael as witness will again be caught up in this productive paradox which enables both acceptance and action. On one hand, this is an agency that does not interfere or seek to reshape. But also through an engaged participation, by inserting oneself into the story, the performative witness comes to accept a moral responsibility for that story.

Even though the library catalogue lists *Goodness* under “Genocide—drama,” a story about genocide is not the main narrative thread. Althea does tell the Michael about the purges and the horrific story of the execution of her family—her sister and her brother-in-law and particularly her young nephew, Domenic. She is spared by the murderous gangs, she thinks, to tell of their power. However, the principal story Althea tells is not about her experience of witnessing genocide as a survivor but is, instead, about the culpability of being witness to a single murder and how one lives with the effects of one’s choice to act or not to act, to speak or not to speak. It begins ostensibly as the story of the incarceration and the trial of Todd, but as she speaks, it becomes clear that the story she has chosen to tell Michael—the story that the man in the pub clearly intended her to tell—is the story of the murder of Todd’s daughter Julia. After some deliberation, the court declares Todd to be non compos mentis by virtue of Alzheimer’s disease and so unfit to stand trial. As Todd and Julia are preparing for his release, Stephen Part enters the holding area with Todd’s effects. Item by item, he hurls the mimed objects at Todd: “Wallet” “Keys” “Lighter” (91). Then in a display of pure performative power, Stephen says

“Pistol” (93). The gun is made of words, coming into being in the moment that it is spoken.

JULIA: He didn’t have a gun!

STEPHEN: But he still has a mouth. (93)

The juxtaposition of gun with mouth bridges time to connect this moment of Julia’s future murder to the past genocide. Todd was not a soldier or even a political leader in his country. Rather, he was a professor, an intellectual. His role in the genocide is attributed directly to the power of speech, to incite hate through words. This moment then brings together Todd and Stephen as two men who exploit the performative power of language to effect real-world change. They are two men who kill with words. In another moment, in what I argue is the pivotal moment of the play, Michael will make a third.

In an impassioned attempt to shake Todd out of what he believes to be his amnesiac performance, Stephen grabs Julia, holding the gun to her head and demanding that Todd tell the truth. Here again the gun is connected with words, specifically to the concept of a narrative which is unspeakable. The story that Stephen wants to hear is unspeakable. Just as trauma manifests as a gap in experience, a hole in the middle of a larger narrative, Alzheimer’s disease creates a similar kind of hole. Althea says, “When the disease progresses, it is as if a sheet of paper with your life written on it has begun burning right in the middle. You are a baby at the top of the page and it is today at the bottom, and the flame is slowly eating everything in between—” (36). This image of an expanding burn hole in a sheet of paper appears on the cover of the published text of *Goodness*. Notably, the cover image diverges from Althea’s description of Alzheimer’s disease in one important way. In Althea’s description, the burning text is the story of one’s life, a complete biography from birth to the present. Specifically in that context it is Todd’s life story that is being destroyed by the flame of Alzheimer’s. On the cover, however, the burning text is taken from Althea’s testimony regarding the purges and murder of her family and her neighbours (66–67). This transfer of the point of reference speaks specifically to the destructive side effect of Todd’s memory loss on Althea’s story.

Looking at the cover, I am also struck by how the ragged hole looks like what I imagine a bullet hole might look like. Three characters in the play are shot in the head—Julia, but also in two other narrated histories: Todd’s wife Margaret and Althea’s nephew Domenic. The thematic association arising out of the parallel damage to brain, memory, and story caused

Despite this  
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by Alzheimer's disease and a bullet in the head is inescapable. All these holes—suddenly violent or slowly degenerative—debilitate speech. But also, these attacks comment ironically on imperatives to speak. In each case, paradoxically, the silencing action itself is heavily invested in a desire for testimony. Like Julia, Margaret is also killed to compel confession of a past truth. When Todd's affair with Helena Sonnen was discovered, her kinsmen invaded his house and threatened Margaret, forcing Todd to admit the affair. Even after having evinced his anguished confession, they still kill her. In her story, Althea tells how during the purges, she and her sister, her brother-in-law, and their young son Domenic were rounded up with their neighbours. From fear and in the face such surreal horror, Domenic began to laugh: "They took him out of the line and put the gun in his mouth and told him to laugh some more and they would spare him. And out of him came this unworldly laughter, as if the sun and the moon were laughing at the stupidity of being human. It was a real laugh, a deep, deep, laugh. And they shot out the back of his head and he stopped" (67). For all three victims, the gun is aligned with forced speech. For Margaret and Domenic, the result is a truth brought to the surface. In Julia's case, the result is silence as two holes overlap. Despite this show of power, the unspeakable remains unspoken, because the truth is already gone. Her father cannot speak his lost past. Compounding this pervasive silence, yet another hole is created in the narrative when no witnesses come forward to fill that first hole with words. Stephen murders Julia and makes a hole in the world. Althea assents to this rent and adds another dimension of loss by not testifying. She fails to perform here as a responsible witness, failing to reify the lost event by becoming its storyteller. She is the only witness; and when her words do not materialize Julia is erased.

Stephen begins to count to three: "One—" (95). In shock, Michael turns to Althea watching Young Althea: "What's wrong with you? You're just standing there ... You didn't do anything?" To which Althea replies, "I did. I watched" (95). Stephen continues counting: "Two—" (95). Before he gets to three, Michael can no longer simply watch and he yells "STOP!" The scene freezes and is silent (95). Julia steps out of the tableau to confront Michael. She is openly disdainful:

JULIA: Stop? Why? Are you going to rescue me?

MICHAEL: He's going to—

JULIA: What, Michael? What's he going to do?

MICHAEL: You know what he's going to do.

[...]

JULIA: This is what happened.

Then the scene gradually starts into action again.

STEPHEN: SAY IT!

JULIA: (*to Todd*) Don't tell him anything. (*to Michael*) It's going to be such a relief to be free of you.

STEPHEN: Tell her the truth, or so help me—

MICHAEL: Three. (*Instant blackout and gunshot.*) (95–96)

This is the key moment which breaks the frame. It is Michael who says “Three.” The consequences of this moment cannot be overstated. With this word, Michael fully accepts Althea’s testimony. Earlier in the play when Michael stepped in to manipulate the imagined offstage scene between Julia and Stephen, he was motivated by curiosity, by a desire for a more complete and comprehensible story. Then, he exercised authorial power to tinker, to smooth out the wrinkles and fill in the holes. Here, he does not redirect the story so much as he actively chooses to accept the story on its own terms. He lets it simply be itself in all its ugliness, allowing the story to go forward to follow its original path unimpeded to its predetermined end. It is not a good ending, but it is Althea’s ending.

Uttering that word “Three,” Michael displays a marked passivity. He does not change the past. He does not move to stop Julia’s murder, aligning himself with Althea: “You didn’t do anything.” “I did. I watched” (95). To watch is to do something. Here, simply watching, simple witnessing is an action of import, carrying a moral weight. The breaking of the frame which allows Michael to be witness at first hand to Julia’s murder, to stand there as someone with the potential to prevent that murder, also restricts that potential through temporal looping. It situates the tragedy both in the future where it can be deflected and in the past where it cannot. Like these doubled temporal streams, Michael’s stance as a watcher is morally divided. As a past event, Julia’s murder is inevitable. It must happen. To watch this event unfold in the past tense is to watch over it, somehow to sanctify the story, protect its coherence and continued existence as a story. However, to watch the event in the present tense carries a different moral obligation. From this position, Michael, again aligned with Althea, tacitly sanctions the murder. He does not stop it. This later scene is contrasted by an earlier parallel; Julia visits her father in his cell. In his delusion, Todd seems to mistake his daughter for Helena Sonnen, shouting at her “Bloody people!... Swarming our ... the places we built!... Get the fuck off my lake!” (54–55).

He grabs her by the throat and tries to strangle her. Michael and Althea watch from the future. Young Althea watches from outside the cell.

MICHAEL: And you just watched?

*Young Althea remains inactive, watching.*

ALTHEA: I stopped him. (*on Michael's look*) I did. (55)

This time, the watcher steps in to act and to change the course of events. Young Althea (possibly prompted by her older self in the future) moves from passive bystander to active participant, and this time she saves Julia's life. The moral burden to take action, to stop it, connects Todd to Althea and Michael, binding together the perpetrator of genocide with those who listen to genocide's stories. Michael accuses Todd of just watching and doing nothing: "It doesn't matter if he didn't actually do anything, he certainly didn't try to stop it ... Your father either goaded a country of stupid farmers—into murdering thousands of people, or he sat back and enjoyed watching it!" (70). Althea points the same accusation at Michael: "Where were you with your notebook when we needed a witness? Bathing in milk and writing cheques for charity, that's where you were: one dollar a day—buy a village a goat" (99). Todd did nothing. Althea did nothing. Michael did nothing. The world stands by and does nothing.

Yet in speaking that word—"Three"—Michael does do something. By voicing Stephen, caught in the temporal folds between worlds, Michael enters into that past. He acts and thus is doubly culpable in Julia's murder. Aligned with Althea he is culpable as the witness who does nothing to stop the violence. But aligned with Stephen, he himself has killed Julia. Not only does Michael assent to the story allowing it to move forward to its fixed end, but Michael actually causes it to happen. Just as Jordan Pettle, the actor, is an intermediary between Michael the character and Michael the playwright, the same kind of cross-world ventriloquism is at work here. Through Stephen, Michael bridges his roles as character-within and playwright-without. Stephen here is only the conduit and Michael is responsible for Julia's death as an author who has killed his own creation. A playwright who kills with a word. To protect the integrity of the story, the watching witness who becomes a storyteller sacrifices a character in that story.

When Michael meets the man in the pub, a man he realizes in retrospect was Stephen Part, the man challenges him to go to Althea to have his questions answered. "Why do good people rush to do evil? And what do they become?" (21). This is what Stephen says, but Althea presses this further: "He wanted to see what you were going to turn into ... A lone-

some fuck-up who can't live with what he's done" (99). But, what has Michael done? What crimes has he committed? Reading Joanna's diary? Succumbing to a depression when she leaves him? Behaving like a rude foreigner and failing to make meaningful contact in Poland? No, these are the errors of the past. Stephen wanted to see what would become of Michael in the future, in light of his experience of (and *in*) Althea's story. His crime is that he has killed Julia. But it is his passivity which speaks to his larger crime. Julia's murder functions as a synecdoche to all the other murders ringing Todd's jail cell. Insofar as Michael did nothing to stop her murder, he is guilty by extension of doing nothing to stop the genocide. The folding of time which structures the worlds of the play makes this paradox of responsibility possible, he is guilty both for acting and for not acting. Nevertheless in this ugly ending, there is, paradoxically, a strong sense that both by watching and by speaking Michael has done the right thing. Michael has become a performative witness.

Struck by the epiphany that Stephen was the man in the pub, Michael also realizes what Stephen wants: "Jesus, how long has he been sitting there? Waiting for someone to ... You still have it." (98) "[I]t" is the gun. Apart from Althea herself, it is the only other witness to Stephen's killing of Julia. Stephen may not actually need the gun per se. He only needs Althea to tell her story, and he needs Michael to hear it. Through storytelling, the same performative power that is endowed in testimony—the power that reifies the past, actualizing it in the present—transforms the gun from a word to a thing, bringing it into the present. Having finished her story, Althea unfolds the cloth where she has hidden Stephen's mimed gun to reveal a real gun. The play's central props, the notebook and the gun, come together at this point. Both the notebook and the gun perform as physical witness to the story, containing the story coded into the material object. As a result of being invested with the story, both objects also bring freedom through performative agency. Michael realizes that Stephen wants the gun so he can be free—free of the ghosts of his past. Julia, by her death, is free of the control of the playwright, the control of the story itself. As she says to Michael just before her death, "It's going to be such a relief to be free of you" (96). Through testimony, she is freed again as the story fills in the hole generated by the lack of witnesses. In two iterations, first Althea and then Michael take up Julia's story. And although their testimony recaptures Julia through scripting and performance, it also brings her embodied into the present and she can be released.

Fused by performative language, the gun created by words and the notebook with the power to kill share a chiastic relationship. Subject to

Julia's murder  
functions as a  
synecdoche to  
all the other  
murders ringing  
Todd's jail cell.

the metaleptic structure of the worlds of *Goodness*, time folds to allow the notebook and the gun to be synchronously both the cause and the result of the story. In the moment referred to earlier, Althea tries to reclaim control over her story. She gives the gun to Michael and wants his notebook in exchange, calling it “spiritual collateral” (101). “Now we’re back where we started. I’m harmless and you know nothing. I’ve turned back time” (101). In this exchange, just as the gun came into being out of Althea’s story, the notebook is reabsorbed, folded back into the story, lost in Althea’s world. Yet, at the beginning of the play, Michael has it again in the future as he writes her story, carrying it with him as he circles back to their first meeting. The notebook being made of words transcends barriers between worlds to reify the story again in Michael’s recording of it as the script for *Goodness*. Claiming the notebook, Althea tries to erase her telling, reclaiming Michael’s experience of the story. But as it slips between worlds, the notebook—and with it Michael’s version of the story—defies capture. In a note appended to the published text of *Goodness*, Redhill flags this moment for future productions. He states that he had originally written that Althea would destroy the notebook, observing that “obviously this changes the temperature of the scene significantly.” And he invites future productions to experiment with the alternate resolution (105).<sup>7</sup> Certainly burning the notebook would create meaningful resonance with the image of Alzheimer’s disease as a flame consuming biography.

When Michael walks away with the gun, the fate of the gun is also ambiguous. In the stage directions, Redhill presents several options: Michael throws it in the trash. He keeps it. He points it at other characters, at himself, at the audience. Or he just looks at it (102).<sup>8</sup> Among these printed alternatives, the gun also slips from Althea’s world and dissolves back into words. When she gives him the gun, Althea challenges Michael

7 As noted above, *Goodness* has had only one production to date, so in light of this single interpretation, there has not yet been a comparative opportunity to evaluate this suggested alternate staging in performance.

8 In performance, Michael points the gun at Julia/Joanna, at the older Althea, and at his own temple. A directorial choice offered in performance, which adds significantly to the tension of this action and which is not suggested in the text, is that Michael chambers the bullet. Since we have just witnessed a gunshot at the moment of Julia’s murder, the presence of another loaded and cocked gun raises the level of tension in this scene. From a static object as a repository of the memory of a past murder, the gun is made active and we are reminded that the gun retains the potential for future murder. What is lost in performance is that, unlike a printed text, actual-world performance is resolutely singular and will not accommodate the proliferation of multiple possible worlds generated by the word “or.”

to pick up the gun anytime he thinks he can make a better world, taunting him with the threnodic question, “How does it feel?” (100). Michael’s answer to that question, his gesture toward that better world, is through another exercise of performative language, through another cycle of storytelling. *Goodness* is his answer to that question. In this new alchemical iteration, the gun becomes the play, it is absorbed into the text as words, and the notebook re-emerges, taking material form.

Metalepsis blends borders between fictional worlds and allows Michael to fulfil his obligations as performative witness to Althea’s story and to Julia. Michael<sup>c</sup> as a fictional character crosses the border into world<sup>d</sup> to exercise performative agency and influence the story of Julia’s murder. Likewise, Michael<sup>a</sup> the playwright is a substitute divinity and shapes the fictional world<sup>b</sup> of *Goodness*. But, the actual world is not permeable from a higher order world in this same way. And so the potential for similar real-world interventions is negated. However, the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*—the world as stage—offers an equivalent arrangement with regard to the actual world of world<sup>a</sup>, positing God as a superior playwright-witness in world<sup>o</sup>. Although *Goodness* establishes the potential power of the divine performative witness, the play simultaneously figures this witness as markedly absent. In the closing lines, the characters reprise an earlier Zimbabwean song:

*Horiyatsa* (Look around / pay attention)

*Hamuzani waka* (To what is happening)

*Tobela* (Pray)

*Ayitobela*— (O pray to—) (103).

Having heard this song earlier, we are primed on this third repetition for the completion of the line with the word “*Murena*”—“*Ayitobela Murena*” (O pray to God). When the music line is cut short, the expected but missing cadence fills the space and the silence is pronounced. So although Michael becomes a performative witness through the metaleptic structures of looped theatricality, the play’s ending reminds us that the same divine salvation is denied to us. We must find recourse in more human and necessarily more flawed alternatives.

Although the ontological terms have shifted from fictional worlds to the actual world, the play nevertheless does offer another path. Part of Michael’s agency as a performative witness is to continue the chain of witnessing and to become the playwright-storyteller who passes that story on to us. But Michael is chastised by Todd, who taunts him: “All those people—real people—died for you, and the best you can manage

is a little play?” (76). Even to the end, the act of witnessing is caught in a performative paradox, where the story is both preserved and threatened by metalepsis, and a character from deep within the fictional worlds over which Michael himself exercises dominion can rise up and criticize the vehicle of his own existence. Recovering the past and filling holes through storytelling is hopeful but insufficient. It is something, but it is not the right thing. Even if there can be no moral absolution, we are called to enter into the story, through an engaged theatricality to become an affective witness, to feel. *Goodness*, as part of the chain of witnessing, passes that question on to the audience: “How does it feel to be out there in the dark? Just watching. Invisible, but still a part of everything. A part of *this*. How does that feel?” (102).

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