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Time comes into it. / Say it. Say it. / The universe is made of stories, not of atoms. (Muriel Rukeyser, from The Speed of Darkness)

The question of time rarely enters into a conversation between a spiritual director and a spiritual directee unless it is about how much time they will spend together for each session, the length of a particular consultation, or marking on a calendar the various days they will meet. Yet time is an essential cornerstone to the practice of spiritual direction that is rarely acknowledged because it is so often misunderstood.

In what follows, I will take as my working definition of spiritual direction “the constant reconciliation of relationships.” These relationships are threefold: one with God, the natural world and the cosmos; a relationship with the self and others through a project of self-discovery; and a relationship of transcendence of the normal social consciousness of everyday life (Barbour, 4ff).

As I will try to elucidate, this clarification of relationships is facilitated by numerous invisible themes that underpin spiritual direction, two of which will be addressed here, namely, time and language, with specific reference to the importance of narrative.¹

To flesh out this seemingly odd claim that time is the cornerstone of spiritual direction, I will thread my way through a small excursus on time, narrative, and identity with an example taken from Saint Augustine’s Confessions. I will conclude with some remarks about why the mystery of time makes spiritual direction a lifelong process.

Stories of Cosmic and Mortal Time

Historically, time has been a philosophical conundrum haunting the thoughts of philosophers, theologians, poets, and artists. Metaphysically, we cannot think time; there is no place to step out of time to observe its qualities and characteristics objectively. For this reason, Simone Weil once remarked, “Time is the most profound and the most tragic subject which human beings can think about. One might even say: the only thing that is tragic” (197). The literature since the time of the pre-Socratics is filled with debate, for example, about whether time really exists or whether it is merely an aspect of our experience. More specific questions arise about why physical time is directional and if there really is a “time’s arrow.” There is also the question of whether time had a beginning and whether it has an end.

Each of us holds some notion of time. We learned to tell time in childhood, associating time with numbers as an anonymous measure. In school, we used time to help solve mathematical or physics equations and learned that we use time to measure the differences between seasons, semesters, and birthdays. On the other hand, as we matured, we understood that time could pass quickly or painfully slowly, regardless of such a measure. Besides becoming perplexed over the differences in time zones and the arbitrariness of calendars, we learned the serious lesson that we have a limited life span and that our time with our bodies and consciousness will come to an end. Mixed with these divergent understandings were cultural messages such as “Time is money,” “Idle time is the work of the devil,” and “Time is a thief.”

So what is time? Many of us live with a confused and unclear understanding of time and its meaning. Is it the anonymous measure of passage or the inner experience of life’s expiration?

For the sake of simplicity, let us take these two vastly different stories of time—one that I call cosmic time and the other mortal time—in order to seek a solution to their incommensurability that will lead us to the heart of spiritual direction.

The notion of time as being something “out there” that surrounds and encases us and through which we

Human beings are storytelling animals. We always have been and always will be.
plod is the story we tell about time as being objective, self-existent, and autonomous. This sense of time is often considered to be a fundamental property of the physical world. It cannot be perceived directly; its presence can only be mediated through our perception of physical, chemical, and biological changes in space. One might say that change itself is physical time. Here, time is harnessed for the sake of making sense of change—as a tool in which the present is considered a marker to measure movement by counting successive instances or “now points” to denote motion and serial order. According to this representation, time is constituted by relations of simultaneity and succession between abstract “nows” demarcated by “before” and “after.” It is the *chronos* we impart to nature and employ to describe the causal connections we observe to be occurring. We thereby have some measuring stick to say “how fast” or “how slow.”

Whether we call it *natural time, scientific time, mathematical time,* or *physical time* or conflate it to include the vast times dealt with in astronomy and geology, time as measurement is always employed as an anonymous parameter that seems to exist in its own dimension outside of ourselves. I generally refer to all of these as *cosmic time.*

In contrast to cosmic time, there is *mortal time.* By *mortal time* I mean the felt sense of life’s temporariness, the true *temporalis* of our transitory and ephemeral existence. While this time can be stated as the average mean age of men and women living under certain environmental contingencies calculated statistically, each of us feels deeply at some point the brevity of our individual human existence. In comparison to the geological age of the earth, the calculated age of stars in our galaxy, and the seemingly endless font of cosmic time, mortal time is extremely short. How often have I visited old ruins and churches and looked at artifacts that date back hundreds if not thousands of years, only to feel the sting of time’s shortness and the insignificant length of my own life?

The stark contrast between cosmic time and mortal time is what defines us as *being-toward-death.* Being confronted by the impersonal face of cosmic time has given rise to so many elegies and lamentations that sing of the contrast between the time that remains and us who are merely passing. It is little wonder that “time has been portrayed in a thousand forms (as a god devouring his young, a wizened graybeard turning the hourglass of centuries, a dancing skeleton threshing skulls on a field of corpses), hypostatized in a thousand metaphors, imprisoned or described in a thousand symbols (the shape-shifter, the eternal reaper of sorrow)” (Wood, 1).

The existential crisis of time owes itself to the fact that no matter how cleverly we plummet the depths of mortal time psychologically, cosmic time stands apart and indifferent to such human cleverness. As human beings we cannot think time in order to master it. We cannot constitute time *per se*—we can only submit to its passage. Mortal time is the eroding power of time that haunts Ecclesiastes in bidding souls to not only remember that all is vanity but also be aware of what they “do under heaven during the few days of their life” (2:3).

### Historical Time and the Self

Our destiny as mortals seems condemned to consciousness of this fissure between the cosmic span of time and the limited existential duration of a mortal life. This fissure, however, finds some reconciliation in what is classically called *historical time.* By means of certain procedures, human beings have been able to negotiate, ever so imprecisely, some form of mediation between mortal time and the immensity of cosmic time using connectors such as calendars, succession of generations, archive documents, and traces of the past. All such procedures attempt to inscribe lived time on the immensity of cosmic time that escapes us.

Take for example the calendar. A calendar’s construction is a universal one. In every form of human culture and in every epoch, there is an attempt to objectify time. It is a necessary condition for societies and the citizens who live in them. In their construction, some founding event, or axial moment, such as the birth of Jesus or the emigration of the prophet Muhammad to Madinah, acts as the zero point from which every other event is dated. This axial moment allows our lives to be part of events that our minds pass over in going from the past to the present and vice versa, thereby allowing every event the possibility of being dated.

Much more could be stated about such connectors as the calendar, documents, monuments, and historical traces that go into constructing historical time, but let me emphasize two central points.
First, it is only within historical time that the need for human memory becomes paramount, and notions of “the past” and “the future” are seen as specifically human attributes. With the idea of “the past” and memory arises the demand to give the past meaning and to interpret it. Human language becomes a fundamental prerequisite and storytelling, from the strict viewpoint of the narrative formation of discourse, makes its appearance. An artifact, for example, passed on from generation to generation, documented and stored, summons us to address the past—to recount it. To recount the past is to begin to understand the narrative embodiment of our temporal experience.

It was the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur who delineated clearly this connection between time and narrative in stating that “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (52).³

Another way of expressing Ricoeur’s thesis is that every story told expresses something of our temporal being as historical agents. Nothing else is historical in the same way as a human being. No culture can refer to its conception of time without referring to its narrative of legends, myths, epics, and stories, which sets the stage for a cosmic understanding of how time began and perhaps how we see it ending.

When we discuss Saint Augustine shortly, we shall see that only a human self lives in the present while being conscious of a past and future that are replete with memories, regrets, wishes, and hope. Every time we formulate a story, either true or fictional, we are in the process of transmuting natural time into specifically human time, irreducible to mathematical, chronological clock time.

This is how cosmic time is historicized and given a human dimension. In the written or oral description of human action, time’s passage becomes the recognizable birth, life, and death of someone in which both tragedy and triumph might occur. In historical, human time, the search for meaning erupts and the demand to recall the past and anticipate the future takes on force. Time is a more meaningful reality when we understand that at any one time, we are situated in a present that is thoroughly
historical. This historical present is always mediated through the narratives we both embrace and reject.

Spiritual direction, to be sure, always begins in the historical present of someone who is telling his story in a particular fashion. Time has taken on meaning for that spiritual directee because he is telling his story as he understands it. However, as a human life becomes narrated, we can begin to identify the fissures, the fixations, the gaps, and the denials that remain less than conscious unless they are recounted.

The second point in discussing historical time has to do with the virtual explosion in the literature of the role of narrative in almost every facet of our lives. This is true not only for the humanities such as philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and historiography but also for the sciences and caring professions as well. The impetus behind this preoccupation with the narrative form has been the growing realization that language is not a mere tool for mirroring reality but a formative part of that reality. In fact, language is constitutive of what we come to call the real.

Perhaps the most contentious development of this “linguistic turn” has been the idea that what we call the self is not something that exists as an extralinguistic and immutable substance. The self, rather, arises as a by-product of our narrative practices. It is through narrative practices of all types that we eventually discern the character of our own “self,” gain self-understanding, and forge the meaning of our temporal lives.

What a growing body of literature points out is that the narrative function is the superior medium for understanding human experience; narrative doesn’t merely describe the self and meaning but actually forms them. Our narrative identity, as Ricoeur states, takes shape by the stories we tell and exchange with one another. These stories are rooted in national, religious, and familial traditions, offering meta-narratives that consciously and unconsciously serve as models for our own story. F. E. Peters reminds us that followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are “People of the Book” in that, if we are born into any of these traditions, we become involved in a central meta-narrative that mediates our life of faith. These meta-narratives, all purporting to be in some sense the words of the one true God, are by no means identical, nor are they thought to be such by the three communities; nonetheless, the meta-narratives offer a complete worldview, including a cosmology, ethos, instructional wisdom, and the promise of an afterlife.

Without our ability to construct stories, there would not be the notion of self as we know it today. Human beings are storytelling animals. We always have been and always will be. The narrative mode has been one of the traditional ways human beings have tamed the cavalcade of endless incidents and flux of events into a manageable whole with a beginning, middle, and end. It is how we impose order on chaos, pass on tradition and wisdom, and embody our common morality. From our earliest ability to speak, we learned the vast number of temporal terms to connect one event to another—then, after, later, before, since, until, while, during, each time that, now that—often reflecting how we heard others relate their own tales of tragedy and triumph. Whether it is called narrative reasoning or the logic of fabulation, human beings are able to take heterogeneous segments of lived time and events and plot out a story that anticipates a completion. This is true from the smallest incident in daily life to autobiography. The result is not just a story per se but the clarification or the coming into focus of the storyteller, the self, that recognizes a set of characteristics that are uniquely mine as I reflect on the narratives I continually tell.

Two examples make the point clear. First, most people will recognize the strong narrative component in the “working through” process of a psychoanalytical experience. The possibility of a cure resides in the hope of substituting a coherent and acceptable story for the fragments of memories and facts that are unintelligible and often the source of unbearable anxieties. If we accept the premise that subjects recognize themselves in the stories they tell about themselves, then we can see how in psy-
choanalysis the story of one’s life comes to be constituted through a series of rectifications applied to narratives we’ve accepted without critical reflection. A second example—already alluded to above—is the close fit of identity with history in the founding narratives of biblical Israel. Here, narratives of a certain people concerning the events of its history eventually form the collective identity of the historical community called the Jewish people.

Caught, therefore, between the time of our mortal bodies and the infinity of the cosmos, we find meaning in the plot that unfolds as our historical narrative finds variations of interpretations and refi gured horizons in what we read and hear. In our reading and listening, the plot thickens, thereby allowing us to continu- ally reestimate and reevaluate our actions, allegiances, beliefs, hopes, fears, joys, miseries, and desires—that is, to take stock of the very threads that weave our identity. Who has not been inspired by novels, biographies, autobiographies, film plots, and the story of bards and loved ones to act differently and make different decisions about the course of one’s life?

Richard Kearney adds an important aspect to this dynamic among time, narrative, and self when he argues that our lives are already stories before we are conscious of our narrative identities.

Every human existence is a life in search of a narrative. This is not simply because it strives to discover a pattern to cope with the experience of chaos and confusion. It is also because each human life is always already an implicit story. Our very finitude constitutes us as beings who, to put it baldly, are born at the beginning and die at the end. And this gives a temporal structure to our lives which seek some kind of significance in terms of referrals back to our past (memory) and forward to our future (projection). So that we might say that our lives are constantly interpret- ing themselves—pre-reflectively and pre-consciously—in terms of beginnings, middles and ends (though not necessarily in that order). In short, our existence is already to some extent pre-plotted before we ever consciously seek out a narrative in which to reinscribe our life as life-history. (129)

No one is born without being implicated in one story or another (be it the story of family, community, culture, nation, or religion). Each of us belongs to an entangle- ment or “living imbrication” of stories (Ricoeur, 175). This imbrication or enmeshment is a “prehistory” that binds every other story into a background or a tradition. The historical present is a hinge-point between accepting this background in a precritical manner and acquiring a historical consciousness. It is in the historical present that the past comes alive in that each member of a community, each storyteller, borrows from the past, works with it, and anticipates the future. It is the time when the weight of history that has already been made and deposited is interrupted—awak- ened—by decision and action in the present.

After a short interlude with Saint Augustine, I will return to the theme of spiritual direction and the constant need to be awakened.

Augustine’s Story

Saint Augustine’s Confessions is an exemplary text in which the triple themes of time, narrative, and self are closely intertwined. The bishop of Hippo never dissoci- ates his discussion of time from language. His goal is to understand his union with God. Augustine is convinced that the self or soul is irrevocably different in kind from its Creator, yet the same self never betrays its ultimate relationship and desire to unite in the Creator.

In the first half of Book 11, he is perplexed by the disparity between the eternity of God and the mere time of our humanity, as well as the creative word of God (verbum) and the mere transitory words of human beings. In other words, the gap between God and our humanity, mediated by time and language, seems too great for him to fathom and conceive.

In this early part of Book 11, Augustine is enmeshed
The significance of time for Augustine isn’t that it separates us from God; rather, it is the medium we journey through to seek a reunion with the Creator. Discursive speech isn’t a punishment but the art that allows us to explore the many facets and historical possibilities of such a union.

In concentrating on the articulation of words and utterances, Augustine moves from relating time to a movement or motion outside of himself to what he himself is doing. In uttering a sentence, there is the constant dispersal and integration going on in the mind. He takes this as a paradigm of the self before God. We are constantly picking up the scattered past episodes of our lives (distension) and integrating them with the present, in vision of the future. Our identity over time, therefore, lives in a tension between discordance and concordance—disorder and order—that finds momentary cohesion in the present. What ties the present together is the very thing that Augustine was doing: writing the narrative of his life in the Confessions, setting down his autobiography in search of its ultimate author. For Augustine, this is God.

As such, Augustine realizes that the self is constantly under threat of dispersion (distention) and disorder. As mortal beings, we are constantly dispersed among mortal things, and our relationship with the Creator falls victim to this disorder. This constant tension toward dispersal must constantly be reigned in, as Cosmos must reign over chaos. Augustine was perceptive enough to see that life is an ordering process centered in the self. Time, movement, change, and disorder are certainly real. In every verbal or written utterance lies the thread that can weave a path from disorder to order. The significance of time for Augustine isn’t that it separates us from God; rather, it is the medium we journey through to seek a reunion with the Creator. Discursive speech isn’t a punishment but the art that...
Spiritual Direction

It would be erroneous to believe that the triple themes of time, narrative, and self answer the essential questions of spiritual direction. On the surface, these nested themes doubtlessly look functionalistic, offering a quasi-technique to a process that is more finesse than formula. Spiritual direction, ultimately, is fuelled by human desire. It is religious desire, specifically, that propels the spiritual directee to seek guidance and to cultivate an honest rapport with a living God.

Religious desire, however, is not a distinct force oriented toward some beneficial and universally good end. Religious desire must be wrestled from the cruel war of all human desires that plays out in the psychosexual development of our humanity—provoked and often tortured by competing cultural, political, and media inscriptions and images of all sorts.

Religious desire would remain silent and unheard if it did not find its expression in language. Language constitutes us as subjects of desire, positing ourselves as the I in an act of speaking or writing. Without language, there would be no testimony, no witness in the first person to the message of salvation or enlightenment heralded in such meta-narratives as the Christian Gospels, the Qur’an, the Dhammapada, or Vedic texts. Such testimony and witness generate stories and legends that in turn become the narratives of faith, infusing time with meaning, the significance and relevance of which persist from generation to generation.
Through such narratives of faith, riveted with and fuelled by desire, time is once again graced with meaning—nudging aside the overbearing weight of cosmic time. Narratives of faith not only etch out the historical time of the believer but also, beyond and despite the production of words for entertainment, information, and analysis, endow time with meaning beyond history and experience. This brings us to the heart of the matter.

Though not addressing spiritual direction, Sam Keen nonetheless hits the mark when he argues that the task of a life is to exchange an unconscious myth for a conscious autobiography. This autobiographical task is precisely what spiritual direction is in the business of having us acknowledge. In asking us to take stock of our histories through prayer, reflection, and journaling, spiritual direction helps us awaken to our stories as spiritual pilgrims. In exploiting reason, imagination, intuition, contemplation, meditation, writing, poetry, art, and song, spiritual direction draws us into the construction of our own autobiographical accounts of encountering the Divine in ourselves. The spiritual director does this by helping us work through the constant conflicts that erupt between our identities (sense of self), desires, and allegiances to shared beliefs found in the various meta-narratives of faith.

All such autobiographical work helps to make our individual world more general or universal because it becomes part of history. As the philosopher Mary Warnock tells us, autobiographical writing of all sorts strives to make time immaterial, as it is to all universal truths. This happens because in autobiographical work we become aware of something more impervious to time than our own individual selves.

Our sense of continuity with the past, and with the future, carries with it an obscure sense of timelessness, past, present, and future amalgamated into one. Simply to be able imaginatively to embrace the past and the future from the perspective of the present has this consequence. We ourselves will not survive, and except in the most superficial sense would not, probably, want to, but we feel ourselves to be part of something that has survived and will survive, and which we value as we value our lives. (Warnock, 128)

If I turn specifically to the theological intention behind Christian spiritual direction, I see how the spiritual director helps me to discover God present and working with me in both my tragedies and triumphs under the signs of the Alpha and Omega in Jesus Christ. My historical present finds itself laden with a different gravity beyond the chronos of secular time. Rather, time is thereby enriched with the eschatological promise of scripture. Jürgen Moltmann reminds us that a temporal concept of eternity rests on the shoulder of historical time, giving it a new depth dimension. “This presence of eternity in the historical moment is not the eternity of ‘wholly other’ God, but the analogous, relative, participative eternity of God’s image on earth” (33).

Here we come upon the mystery of belief and hope in things not yet seen, when the historical present becomes swollen with fullness, making us thirsty and hungry for the eternal “fullness of life.” The cleft between cosmic time and mortal time ceases to elicit fear. Rather, … the experience of temporal life appears totally different if the exit from time—death—is experienced in the fulfilled moment of present eternity, one that has been tasted in the temporal mode (Moltmann 34). Instead of dreading death as the exit from time into some dark eternal nothingness, we experience death as the fulfillment of that transformation into eternal life that began here, in the transitory experience of our daily life. The work of spiritual autobiography—to recount moments of kairos, ecstatic experiences of fullness and presence, and the unsolicited instants of peace and confidence beyond present contingencies—rivets our temporal sense of time with the promise of things not yet seen. As such, the sting of time, the sting of death, and any negative theory of time are swallowed up into a larger vision of life that becomes threaded into a narrative of faith that is at once personal and communal and that

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exists outside any one individual’s mortal time.

Let me make one final point about why spiritual direction can never tie everything up into a neat package and why spiritual direction is a lifelong process that must strive to transcend the social consciousness of everyday life.

In his essay “The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room,” Thomas Merton succinctly reminds us that in every era, every generation, there is a struggle to seek meaning in time because meaning is never captured definitively. Our hold on meaning, like faith, is slippery. It is undermined and dissolved often by the forces of culture, progress, and the vagaries of desire. In our present generation, Merton laments our obsession with the “lack of time, lack of space, with saving time, conquering space, projecting into time and space the anguish produced within them by the technological furies of size, volume, quantity, speed, number, price and acceleration” (49).

Such a lament is about how a cultural narrative of progress can denude the historical time of the person, reducing it to some technological calculation in which stories of individual bravery, courage, and hope are drowned out by the whining perfection of computational efficiency. What is forgotten and buried, Merton writes, is exactly what the Gospels fearlessly proclaim, an eschatology that is beyond the negative eschatology of human foreboding. “The Evangelists … remind us that the fullness of time has come. Now is the time of final decision, the time of mercy, the ‘acceptable time,’ the time of settlement, the time of the end. It is the time of repentance, the time for the fulfillment of all promises, for the Promised One has come” (45).

It is precisely the task of spiritual direction and the spiritual life to act as a type of countercultural ballast to the cultural reduction of time. As Merton implores, each generation must rescue time—and hence ourselves—from the crushing effects of the dominant culture that defines the perfection of time in the absence of meaning. This means that the tension of discernment between living a life based on faith in what is yet to come and one based on the here and now never ceases. Overwhelmed as we are by a dominant culture that reduces time to a basic function of measurement, the need to de-center and re-center ourselves in the hope of things not yet seen is endless.

Christian spiritual direction employs numerous techniques and methods to achieve this de-centering and re-centering. In Jesuit John Veltri’s guide on spiritual direction, Orientations, for example, several of the traditional techniques and methods are summarized. These include lectio divina, the healing of memories, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, writing a blessed personal history, and, of course, the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

On close reading of any of these processes, one sees the general acknowledgment, so clearly stated in the first exercise of Saint Ignatius, that we initially take stock of the persuasive sense of disorder that permeates our thoughts, conduct, and wills. This acknowledgment recognizes the self’s general dispersal among mortal things, as noted by Saint Augustine. In New Seeds of Contemplation, Merton wrote that each self “must be drawn up like a jewel from the bottom of the sea, rescued from confusion, from indistinction, from immersion in the common, the nondescript, the trivial, the sordid, the evanescent” (38). This drawing up is the practical work of spiritual direction that over time reinscribes time with meaning for the spiritual directee. It is never a smooth, intentional program. Rather, it takes time to get the story straight; it is an arduous task of trial and error to be honest with ourselves. The sense of self we have today will have to be reevaluated tomorrow because every sense of self that is conjured from the myriad of stories told and recounted is only temporarily embraced before something we hold as true and solid about ourselves retreats into a shadow. Yearnings that lead us to a fullness of life must be discerned from those that lead to a spiritual somnambulism. Unless we admit the need to theologize on our
experience and center our narrative in one that is stronger than time, we risk the constant dread that is the promise of the nonspiritual leveling inherent in our dominant culture.

What I have tried to show is that cosmic time may have the stronger hand in terms of duration, but that does not undermine our search for meaning. If I have failed to make myself clear on many points, then permit me to finish poetically. Time is God’s garden where the seeds of our spirits germinate. We grow into the stories we are by listening to and reading the stories that grace the garden in so many forms and styles. Some of our stories will find resonance in older stories as ancient and wise as the oaks we grow under. In our maturing, we may even sense and feel the love of the Gardener and intuit the mystery of the garden itself in the telling of our own story. Others will find resonance in stories that make little sense to us. Yet, we are all children of time and stories. To be sure, no one story dissolves our ignorance about the garden we find ourselves growing in, but each story helps us to situate our identities in relationship with the great Gardener in the heart of mystery.

Notes
1. The reader should be aware from the beginning that I’m writing from a philosophical point of view leading to some theological reflections on spiritual direction. My method will be easily detected by many as a postmodern hermeneutical one. This means that an emphasis will be put on the self as constructed and that self-knowledge is an interpretation through narrative. This replaces the older notion of identity based on something essential but inaccessible (e.g., an immutable unchanging substance such as the soul or mind).

2. In his famous Principia Mathematica, Sir Isaac Newton captured this sense of time when he stated, “Absolute, true, mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equally without relation to anything external” (6).

3. For Ricoeur, time and narrative are inseparable dynamics that drive the search for meaning. Cosmic time can be reinscribed into historical time because we act and suffer in time. To the degree we understand how we plot our acting and suffering into stories, we will understand how the ordinary experience of time (our daily action and suffering) is refashioned by its passage through the grid of narrative.

4. Classical psychoanalysis plays on the serious struggle between the timelessness of the unconscious and the ego’s need to reestablish the dominance of chronological time in order to prevent the unconscious from acting on the adult ego. For this reason, our ability to tell our stories well without too much repression and suppression demands an ongoing retelling in order to integrate the past and unconscious material. An autobiography only “gives the illusion of permanence but is in fact unstable; it is a permanence constantly in need of redoing” (Pike, 339). I will return shortly to this topic of our stories’ instability in time for sociological reasons.

5. The I posited grammatically, however, is not yet a self. We cannot grasp ourselves directly. Human consciousness is not transparent. The self is always implied reflexively. That is, it must be recovered by deciphering and reflecting on the signs, symbols, and narratives deposited and scattered in the spatiotemporal world.

6. Despite its modern commercialization, some would argue that autobiographical work is by its very nature a spiritual narrative, acting in most cases as “a gateway into the interior life” (Gilmour, 550).

7. That we are all spiritual pilgrims I have no doubt. That we pilgrim with the same image or metaphor in mind is another question. Do models of spiritual development differ between the genders? See Ray and McFadden.

8. This argument is made forcefully in part 2 of Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 65ff.

References


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**The Three Goldfinches**

Did not grace the winter branches this morning

Though they had lured me from my bed

Instead black crow crossed the street with twig in beak about a task of nest-building

I yearn for the ideal warmth of companionship oneness of being

While bleak reality often palms the treasure shadows an inner space tantalises the vision another dawn revealed.

*Suzanne Ryder*