

Body and Time in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*

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Abstract This research looks at Don DeLillo's shortest novel by considering body and time as the two factors that are essential in order to understand the existential path that the book outlines. The aim is to provide a new interpretation of the novel, able to highlight its real-life concern for traumatic mourning, particularly in response to the suicide of an intimate. The literary study focuses on the journey started by the protagonist, the body artist Lauren Hartke, after the suicide of her husband, a journey that goes through the uncanny spaces which shape our existence as human beings. In fact, in *The Body Artist* DeLillo registers the impact of loss as the 'ghostin' of the living, not the dead, who are on their own, with whatever arts are at their disposal to live what cannot be explained or shown, discovered or imagined – only known. The analysis of the novel examines how and why does the work of addressing trauma go through the body, as much as the mind, and investigates how time comes to be the spatial dimension where our inner self moves in order to re-gain possession of itself. As a result, it is no surprising that *Body Time* is also the title of Lauren's latest performance: that is, 'Body' and 'Time' are the two elements she needs to renew herself, the two places she must travel through if she wants to live again. Two places that end up in being one only.

Summary 1 Inner Landscapes. – 2 The Shape of Time. – 3 The Body of an Artist, an Artist of the Body. – 4 How Far is Forever?

Keywords Don DeLillo's shortest novel. Body and time. Real-life concern for traumatic mourning. Time as spatial dimension.

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.
(T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*)

It's awfully considerate of you to think of me here
And I'm much obliged to you for making it clear
That I'm not here.
(Pink Floyd, *Jugband Blues*)

1 Inner Landscapes

Where are we when we are not 'here'? And how can we make clear our condition to a world whose only point of view of us is from the outside? How can we show what cannot be explained?

Don DeLillo's shortest novel, *The Body Artist*, deals exactly with this, the uncanny space of our inner time, thus placing itself close to those American stories and poems that leave the open road aside in order to explore the immensities of our unknown interior beings. Lauren Hartke, the body artist of the title, finds herself suddenly thrown into an unexpected and devastating universe of pain the morning her husband, the movie director Rey Robles, commits suicide, and from that moment on she will start a journey through the wilderness of time and self that will lead her to gain a new awareness of these categories in order to cope with the difficult process of grieving. Her companion on this journey is the phantom-like creature named Mr. Tuttle, a man who appears right after Rey's death and who disappears at the end of the story. He may be a real person or a product of Lauren's imagination but this is not really important; what is important is that he is the only interlocutor she needs in order to speak to herself. In fact, Mr. Tuttle speaks only with Rey and Lauren's words (and voices), as if he has always lived in that house without their knowledge, and listened to their conversations from behind the walls.¹

At first, such a discovery seems overwhelming: after finding him in that bedroom on the third floor, after hearing him talk without understanding what is happening or how, Lauren feels the urgency to run away, perhaps to hide, to find a place where she can hear her own thoughts. It is raining and she goes outside, she sits in the car and waits for images of Rey to take shape from the rain. «How much time is a long time? Could be this, could be that» (DeLillo 2011, p. 53), she contemplates. She is desperate, but her body proves to be stronger than the painful emotions in her mind and «[f]inally she pushed open the door and walked back to the house, holding the coat aloft» (p. 53).

What is interesting is the fact that, even though Rey's death remains a central event in the narration, everything in it is focused not on remembering him but on picturing Lauren's condition instead. She is the center of attention, with her torn-apart and displaced self, her firm decision to stay alone, out of time and out of place, until she finds new self-knowledge. The readers are told that she and Rey had rented a house for six months in a town by the sea called Little Moon, not far from New York City. After Rey's death, Lauren decides to remain there until the end of the contract, probably in order to avoid staying in New York, seeing people and feeling somehow forced to do things she does not want to think about for the time being. Two months can flow either as quickly as one day only or as slowly as an entire life and, in this case, the narrator manages to make us feel both sensations at the same time.

1 For a specific analysis concerning the function of language in *The Body Artist*, cf. Atchely 2004.

Day by day, Lauren regains possession of herself through her 'body-work': she exercises constantly and painstakingly, as if in repetition and pain she can find the balance she has lost and needs. She enters an unknown area of time, in which she is the one who measures out her life «with coffee spoons» (Eliot 2002, p. 160), not directed towards some existential disillusion, but carefully heading towards creation.

The result of this period of isolation will be the latest Lauren Hartke body-art performance, *Body Time*.² That is, Body and Time are the two elements Lauren needs to renew herself, the two places she must travel through if she wants to live again: two places that end up being one.

2 The Shape of Time

Time is the key; time is not only a temporal distance but also a spatial one in the complicated process represented by grief.³ Time, in fact, is the invisible but resistant wall that separates Lauren from the rest of the world. Because Lauren's personal flow of time has somehow deviated from its established course, it is as if she were also physically unreachable.

She decides to stay in the house, where else? The house rented four months previously is the personal nowhere in which she can see where her new self is located. She cannot be in New York because she is already too far away. As Mr. Tuttle says during one of their first meetings, she is «alone by the sea» (DeLillo 2011, p. 48), which in America means by the ocean, that infinite nowhere which can take you everywhere. At the same time, by watching the 24-hour documentary on her television, she is as far away as Kotka, Finland, standing on the road waiting for cars to come and go.

At the end of the novel, opening the window onto the outside world, Lauren eventually comes to know who she is, and her new self includes the enclosed inner space which contains her recent experience. This place is her own and no one else's, but it has to be left inaccessible in order to let Lauren return to living her life. It is a place reminiscent of the Derridean crypt,⁴ a crypt she will carry within her from now on. That crypt, being

2 In Laura Di Prete's words, it is through this performance that «Lauren stages a narrative in which the body speaks the otherwise ineffable language of trauma» (2005, p. 505).

3 As Jesse Kavadlo points out, «[t]aking time and loss together, the book is about the way in which time passes differently when one loves than when one mourns» (2004, p. 149), and we may add that this different passing creates a different space too, the space where grief lives and that Lauren explores during her mourning process. In this regard Davide Barbuscia correctly noted that this novel is not about the time that passes but about the time that *is* (2012, p. 290), thus examining the ambiguity of time categories through the protagonist's story, a story that is both about time and is inside time.

4 Cf. Derrida 1986.

the ultimate 'infinite nowhere', is her personal ocean and it is only at this point, after having acknowledged its existence and depth, that she will be able to «live again» (DeLillo 2011, p. 36). Our intent is to explore some 'crypt aspects' present in Lauren's process of mourning, with regards to the novel's relationship both with time and its immaterial but powerful presence, and with a self which tries to fill the gap now existing between it and the world outside.

The concept of 'crypt' according to Derrida is well illustrated by Stefano Agosti in a paragraph which may also tell us something about DeLillo's character:

Spazio allogeno incluso nel Soggetto, incorporato e non introiettato, vale a dire presente nell'Io ma sottratto al metabolismo dell'inconscio, inclusivo non tanto del rimosso quanto dei 'resti' non assimilabili all'elaborazione inconscia (resti paragonabili alle pietre, ai calcoli, presenti nell'organismo somatico), la cripta si identifica, sostanzialmente, come un esterno, un'esteriorità (inassimilabile, irreprensibile), racchiusa in un'interiorità, nell'interiorità dell'Io, di cui costituisce, all'interno, lo spazio e il 'resto' di un'eterogeneità che resterà sempre tale. (2004, pp. 57-58)

At first, Lauren does not know what to do; the rational devices she tries to enact immediately prove unsuccessful: «the world was lost inside her» (pp. 57-58). Then, as time goes by, she gradually learns that she will always be inhabited by a foreign body (and Mr. Tuttle may well represent such a body), something she holds inside herself but which she cannot fully control. This impossible place, where the inner and outer self meet without merging, is the crypt of which Derrida declares: «its rightful place is the other's. The crypt keeps an undiscoverable place, with reasons» (1986, p. XII), and therefore,

[c]onstructing a system of partitions, with their inner and outer surfaces, the cryptic enclave produces a cleft in space, in the assembled system of various places, in the architectonics of the open square within space, itself delimited by a generalized closure, in the *forum*. Within this forum, a place where the free circulation and exchange of objects and speeches can occur, the crypt constructs another, more inward forum like a closed rostrum or speaker's box, a *safe*: sealed and thus internal to itself, a secret interior within the public square, but, by the same token, outside it, external to the interior. (p. XIV)

Lauren's condition is profoundly determined by the experience of the crypt. In the last pages of the novel, in fact, she finally owns herself again; she has managed to put back together those pieces which seemed lost forever, to re-shape them, and to give a new meaning to that human being named

Lauren. And yet it does not seem possible to convey this meaning in its entirety to the external world: there is always something which remains hidden and unreachable, because «[n]o crypt presents itself. The grounds [*lieux*] are so disposed as to disguise and to hide: something, always a body in some way. But also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds» (p. XIV).

This raises a significant question, which is: how could you even be allowed to explain your personal crypt?⁵ How can you communicate something that is located so deeply inside your own self that you yourself cannot touch it? Yet it is something you cannot do without either: it shapes the very essence of your being and thus tells you who you are. As Joseph Dewey writes, «Lauren is finally alone and at last alive – to borrow from her earlier diagnosis, she is Lauren, but now more and more» (2006, p. 138). Her sorrow has reached a point of intensity so deep that it may seem unbearable, but Lauren has been patient and strong in her weakness. She has managed to make that sorrow become the womb where life has eventually grown again. Because the novel is not about Rey, it is about Lauren; it is not about remembering the one who is gone but about what and who is left. Rey was, and he is not anymore, nor anywhere. Only Lauren remains. And time.

At this point, it can be said that time is the true main character of the novel: DeLillo plays with it, squeezes and stretches it, creating a flow that is not always constant but is still somehow continuous.

Rey and Lauren had rented a house for six months and, upon Rey's suicide, there are still two months left that Lauren decides to spend alone in this place: the first days back after the funeral are «days that moved so slow they ached» (DeLillo 2011, p. 30) and they do. We as readers can feel the pain of their passing, even if they are narrated within few pages. What aches, DeLillo writes, is being aware of the fact that the ordinary codes of communication are of no help when it comes to representing grief. The narration itself seems to declare its own inability to picture Lauren's state of mind by simply telling her story: describing what she does in the first days back is clearly not enough. We see Lauren cleaning the kitchen and

5 Lauren's ultimate condition, then, is the one presented by Grace Paley in one of her untitled poems:

before I was nobody
I was me after
I was nobody I
was me I wish
I could have rested
in me a little longer
there was something
I was supposed to tell
but it isn't allowed. (2008, p. 54)

the pantry, polishing the porcelain and the tiles. She cleans everything that can be cleaned and does everything she is supposed to do: she decides the things that will be important from that moment on, what to do with Rey's belongings and clothes, she feels him as an invisible but somehow consistent presence (she was not ready for his absence and she needs to get used to it), she tries and fails to cope with her everyday duties, she does not answer the phone, she nearly collapses while getting out of the car. Every sentence depicts a perfectly reasonable report of the daily routine of a person undergoing the loss of a loved one. Interestingly enough, the more every piece of information is detailed, the more useless it is at providing a true depiction of such sorrow. Recounted thus, Lauren's experience apparently does not add anything to our understanding nor to our perception of the long process of grieving. Actually, what the description of those first days is doing is making us conscious that there are certain experiences in life that cannot be fully grasped by looking at them from the outside and which therefore cannot be explained by a linear narration. In these pages, the narrator is somehow placing himself close to us: he seems to be 'just an observer' too, but he is the observer who registers the events for us. However, instead of trying to explain that it is not possible to describe Lauren's sorrow the way we normally register a significant event in someone's life, he makes us feel the dissatisfaction of not having a language suitable for such a state. Similarly, in *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis had recognized the impossibility of writing a conclusive story when writing about sorrow:

I thought I could describe a *state*; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history, and if I don't stop writing that history at some quite arbitrary point, there's no reason why I should ever stop. (1976, p. 68)

There are stories that pertain to an area of time words fail to comprehend, stories that need either a different language or at least the search for one, in order to construct the place where they can be told. It is a process lying not in the visible manifestations of the affliction but in apparently insignificant details, as in a dream, linked together without worrying about the classic human conception of order that requires the present to be followed by the future and preceded by the past. This does not mean that these pieces live in chaos but that they follow rules that are beyond our control, paths where our senses are unable to find their way. In such a story, no map can help us because there is no West to reach in order to feel safe. The path is not illuminated by a setting sun. On the contrary, it starts behind a door where everything is dark already, as in Mark Strand's *Seven Poems*:

I have a key
so I open the door and walk in.
It is dark and I walk in.
It is darker and I walk in. (2014, p. 110)

Our authority is very limited beyond that door, yet we are the sole owners of the keys: only we can enter, and we have no choice but to do so.

Curiously enough, in DeLillo's novel darkness seems to be perceived only from the outside world (Lauren's friends in New York, for instance, who want her to walk «out» of the pain, and not into it). Instead, once Lauren enters that door, she discovers a landscape enlightened by whiteness, a whiteness so complete that she can hardly bear it. This whiteness resembles a blank slate, and represents the apparently colorless environment she must pass through in order to incorporate her sorrow into the new self taking shape within her.

«Time seems to pass. The world happens, unrolling into moments» (DeLillo 2011, p. 3). The use of that «seems» warns us from the beginning: we are entering a wilderness of time, where moments do not really follow the conventional rhythm of seconds and minutes, hours and days, but their way of existing in our minds depends on how the narrator, through Lauren, makes us perceive them. It is neither our or DeLillo's story, it never will be, it is Lauren's only: we are not here to understand fully but only to witness what we cannot experience.

The house by the sea thus becomes the artist's stage on which to create her performance. This is not home but to Lauren «it felt like home, being here» (2011, p. 30): the narrator emphasizes the woman's dislocated self by registering the events in the past tense but putting them in the here and now. Everything has already happened and yet everything still happens, it keeps happening over and over again, like the words pronounced months before and now spoken again, reproduced mechanically by the human tape-recorder that is Mr. Tuttle.

Everything happens in the closed space of the house, in front of us but as if we were watching it from far away, on a TV screen, while Lauren perceives the 24-hour video of Kotka, Finland as if it were happening right out of her window. Together in the same place narrator, protagonist and readers share the same story but their positions and roles overlap disturbingly. The atmosphere is similar to what we get in a theater during a play or a performance. We may say then that in this story DeLillo acts as an expert stage director and succeeds in the difficult task of placing himself both on the side of the protagonist and on that of the readers, while at the same time managing to keep a formal distance from both by means of the prevalent use of the third-person narrative.

As noted by several scholars, even if DeLillo is one of the most important postmodernist writers in America, this novel shows an interesting con-

nection to the modernist stream of consciousness (Coward 2002, p. 202; Kavadlo 2003, p. 150) in the way it structures thoughts and approaches time, especially if we compare it to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (Coward 2002, p. 202). In *The Body Artist*, DeLillo relates to his story with the techniques and intents expressed by Paul Ricoeur when he states:

The rhetorical procedures by which the author sacrifices his presence dissimulate his artifice by means of the verisimilitude of a story that appears to narrate itself and to let life speak, whether this be called social reality, individual behavior, or the stream of consciousness. (1990, p. 161)

Thus, we are not looking for some evidence of the narrator's reliability because such reliability lies in the story itself. When the novelist is unable to reproduce the woman's pain in the days after her husband's death, as a writer he is close to her, the body artist who is unable to use her main instrument of work, her body, as she used to in order to express her new reality. And he is close to us too, readers/spectators disoriented by an event that we come to see from the inside but without knowing where and when all its voices and movements and images come from, as will happen in Lauren's public performance. Unlike Lauren, we are trapped and we do not know where.

Significantly placed at the beginning of the novel, the 'final' breakfast scene, the last meal which Lauren and Rey have together before his death, carries us away from the conventional course of time, with its exasperated description of what normally would be just a daily routine in a couple's life. Yet this is the day when everything changes. We follow the invisible thread moving inside Lauren's area of time, moment after moment, articulated by her daily routine and her bodywork exercises, where a hair in the mouth can be reminiscent of an apparition that has not yet occurred, and that «Don't touch it. I'll clean it up later» spoken by Mr. Tuttle (DeLillo 2011, p. 90) sounds so familiar, as if it were an echo from a remote past, but instead, a few pages on, will turn out to have been an echo from the future (cf. pp. 99-100), since Mr. Tuttle is indeed «a man who remembers the future» (p. 107). This is not what Lauren thinks she wants; she is an artist who «wanted to create her future, not enter a state already shaped to her outline» (p. 106) as she is used to doing with her art. Through Mr. Tuttle, this phantom not shaped by the language human beings need in order to give some consistency to their perception of past, present and future, and to place them in a 'where' and 'when', she learns «the rule of time» (p. 106).⁶ This rule is as obvious as it is hard to bear and declares that time «is

6 Philip Nel reads *The Body Artist* as «a lyrical meditation on language, memory, and the modernist (and romantic) project of bridging the gap between word and world»; the novel then, in his words, is DeLillo's «homage to modernist poetics» (2002, p. 736).

the thing you know nothing about» (p. 106). «Time is supposed to pass» (p. 81), men have always needed to believe in such a truth to go on with their everyday lives, but not here, not now, not for Mr. Tuttle. After all, her mind created him to allow her to explore differently and challenge such a truth in the light of her loss. She is the artist who tries to relate with the implications that her 'creature' conveys, especially those she is not able to control directly. She looks at him and seems to understand, finally:

He hasn't learned the language. There has to be an imaginary point, a non-place where language intersects with our perceptions of time and space, and he is a stranger at this crossing, without words or bearings. (2011, p. 106)

Here we are then, in front of a woman in the process of re-building her asynchronous self, becoming increasingly aware of the fact that we are allowed to see only the result of such a process, which is taking place somewhere else, perhaps in another time. The impression is that throughout the novel we come to know her very well, yet we cannot reach her. Lauren wants to be alone, and indeed she is: DeLillo has no intention of disturbing her mourning by giving the readers the slightest possibility to believe they can access her inner world and empathize with her.

3 The Body of an Artist, an Artist of the Body

Lauren is making her preparations to go on stage: «The plan was to organize time until she could live again» (DeLillo 2011, p. 36). Being alone is not only her will, but above all a deep necessity: there is a lot of work to do on herself that cannot be done the way she used to do it before. At first, «[h]er body felt different to her in ways she did not understand. Tight, framed, she didn't know exactly. Slightly foreign and unfamiliar. Different, thinner, didn't matter» (p. 31).

After all, in this house she is also reconstructing her identity as an artist: all the movements and exercises that constitute what she calls her 'body-work' and that were such familiar, essential parts of her daily life, are now to be performed as if for the first time, carefully, slowly, in order to let them be faithful expressions of the self-knowledge she is painfully achieving.

In his book *Traité de funambulisme*, the famous French tightrope walker Philippe Petit uses these words when he writes about the first time you try a walk on the wire, alone:

Agrippé des deux mains à la passerelle devant ce câble horizontal sur lequel il n'ose poser le pied, on croirait qu'il boit avec paresse le soleil tombant.

Il n'en est rien. Il gagne du temps.

Il mesure l'espace, palpe le vide, pèse les distances, surveille l'état des choses, en fixe la place. Il savoure sa solitude en tremblant: il sera funambule s'il passe, il le sait. (1985, p. 91)

In these terms, funambulism is a form of body art, being an art which needs the same solitude and total commitment we can recognize in Lauren's state. In funambulism, citing Paul Auster's words about Philippe Petit's work, «[t]he art is the thing itself, a life in its most naked delineation» (1992, p. 251).

«Reste celui dont le spectacle semole jeu de hasard. Celui qui est fier de sa peur» (Petit 1985, p. 39). Even if Lauren does not work physically suspended in space, metaphorically the tightrope walker may well represent her actual condition, as becomes clear when, close to the end of the novel, she says: «Why shouldn't the death of a person you love bring you into lurid ruin?» (DeLillo 2011, p. 122). It takes just a few words to convey how conscious she is of the importance of her fear, of her total despair and vulnerability when faced with such incurable sorrow.

Like a tightrope walker, she works not to defeat death but parallel to it, because there is no other way to keep walking, no other way to tell her story. So she starts training:

Over the days she worked her body hard. There were always states to reach that surpassed previous extremes. She could take a thing to an endurable extreme as measured by breath or strength or length of time or force of will and then resolve to extend the limit.

I think you are making your own little totalitarian society, Rey told her once, where you are the dictator, absolutely, and also the oppressed people, he said, perhaps admiringly, one artist to another.

Her bodywork made everything transparent. She saw and thought clearly, which might only mean there was little that needed seeing and not a lot to think about. But maybe it went deeper, the poses she assumed and held for prolonged periods, the gyrate exaggerations, the snake shapes and flower bends, the prayerful spans of systematic breathing, life lived irreducibly as sheer respiration. First breathe, then pant, then gasp. It made her go taut and saucer-eyed, arteries flaring in her neck, these hours of breathing so urgent and absurd that she came out the other end in a kind of pristine light, feeling what it means to be alive.

She began to work naked in a cold room. She did her crossovers on the bare floor, and her pelvic stretches, which were mockingly erotic and erotic both, and her slow-motion repetitions of everyday gestures, checking the time on your wrist or turning to hail a cab, actions quoted by rote in another conceptual frame, many times over and now slower and over, with your mouth open in astonishment and your eyes shut tight against the intensity of passing awareness. (2011, pp. 59-69)

A lot of what will become her next performance, *Body Time*, is already there,⁷ in Lauren's slow movements taken to the extreme, in the way she breathes, in the way she checks the time or pretends to hail a cab, just as the female character she portrays in her performance will do repetitively during the piece, most of all in the way she lets herself be dragged along by time. Yet a lot more is happening in that house which is an integral part of the performance which cannot be reproduced on stage, a leftover that cannot be discarded but cannot be performed in front of an audience either. There will always be a gap that cannot be filled. It is here worth quoting Amelia Jones on body art:

The self is inexorably embodied, body art tells us. [...] [T]his does not mean that the performed body/self is ever completely legible or fixed in its effects. Body art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body/self (or the body-as-subject) and its inability to deliver itself fully (whether to the subject-in-performance herself or himself or to the one who engages with this body). (1998, p. 34)

Feeding the birds, driving to town, watching the video of Kotka, Finland, talking to Mr. Tuttle, taking care of him, watching him sleep, answering the phone or not, listening to the tape recorder, these elements are also part of her bodywork, in a slightly different way. The residue that cannot be reproduced in any way, the story that cannot be told other than by living it, is made out of all these repetitive actions she performs every day while carrying on with her life.

Lauren's dispersed self, torn apart and fragmented, challenges her body constantly in order to regain full control of it, to learn how to read the same message that the birds can feel in the air. All her movements are part of her awakening, different steps of the same dance.⁸

The outcome of all these careful efforts is *Body Time*, a piece of body art hard to watch: it is so slow, spare and altogether painful that some of the spectators walk out before the end. But this is what Lauren needs: a performance dealing with the passing of time in a visceral and aching way and yet she is still not satisfied. After all, she is her own dictator, the one who takes things to unendurable extremes and, after having done so, wants to extend the limit. It will become slower, it will become sparer and longer, this is just the beginning; there is still a lot of work that can be done.

7 As Laura Di Prete notes, Lauren's body is now «an empty page, a clean canvas on which to project a new self» (2005, p. 504).

8 Kavado 2003: «through *The Body Artist*, DeLillo demonstrates how the body allows us to understand the inner workings of the human spirit» (p. 154), and such understanding is essential to Lauren's life, both as an artist and as a human being.

Lauren Hartke, contrary to what her friends have told her, has directed herself into her pain and from there she is walking somewhere out of it, sometimes taking a deep breath to rest a little bit: slowly, carefully, painfully. Lauren's bodywork resembles the difficult but necessary training of the tightrope walker described by Philippe Petit. In particular, the chapter entitled *Le repos du funambole* aptly expresses the importance of achieving a special relationship with pain, which becomes an integral part of the tightrope walker's rest. This is the same relationship Lauren establishes with her own sorrow, in a painful but necessary balance, the same achieved by Petit:

Vous vouliez sentir l'axe du fil. Celui-ci va devenir votre épine dorsale. Claque seconde râpe comme une pierre à aiguiser. Une douleur interminable s'empare de votre corps pour le réduire muscle après muscle. Si l'on résiste et passe le seuil de l'intenable, alors le supplice s'étendra aux os qui vont se briser un à un traversés par le fil.

Vous serez un squelette en équilibre sur une lame. (1985, p. 96)

4 How Far is Forever?

Body and time: the entire book represents a meditation on these two elements. It explores the way we perceive time and, consequently, perceive our lives inside it. It declares that death may throw us into despair and, in doing so, it will force us to deal with what we cannot explain, what we can never grasp completely, even in the moment we are experiencing it. It is a novel about the living and not about the remembering of the dead, about the effort to find a new language for a new self in the same time, in the same body.

It is so easy to get lost in a book like this. What we can learn by means of our privilege, as readers, of re-reading is never enough to make us able to fully understand what the woman is experiencing. We are in a favored position, yet we must acknowledge the fact that we remain mere spectators: the mourning process always takes place elsewhere, even when Lauren stands right in front of us.

And here she is: like a tightrope walker, Lauren measures her steps, faces her fears and establishes a deeper connection with her inner time. Suspended between life and time, she leaves her own self behind and walks on to meet it again. Similarly, like the spectators of a tightrope performance, we cannot know what it means to be there, to be her, but we are allowed to watch what is happening, we have before us a life which reveals itself for what it is, completely bare, our senses detecting that there is a place somewhere we cannot reach, up there where time either passes differently or just *seems to pass*.

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