Deadlines (literally)

REBECCA COMAY

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Deadlines (literally)

It is an enormous honour and a pleasure to be here to pay tribute to Gillian Rose. Thank you so much for inviting me.[1] I am moved to be at Kingston with so many of Gillian's friends and students, and to meet her family. I never had the chance to meet Gillian in person, and I am feeling a little overwhelmed in the proximity of this second-degree aura.

I will never forget the first time I read Gillian Rose. I was languishing in graduate school when I stumbled upon her first book in a bookstore in New Haven.[2] I can't remember why I picked it up; I suspect it was the word 'melancholy' in the title that drew me like a moth to a flame. I knew nothing about Adorno or Hegel and had become disaffected with philosophy and graduate school generally, but when I opened the book I felt a jolt of electricity. I didn't know that philosophy could be like that. I didn't know writing could be like that. It was her brilliance, of course, but it was also her unshakeable seriousness of purpose, the energy and urgency pulsing through her pages. I fell into the magnetic force field of her writing and never wanted to leave. Over the

years, I have watched my students discovering Gillian Rose, falling in love with Hegel all over again, going through the same experience that I continue to have whenever I pick up her books – exhilaration, shock, disorientation, trepidation and a renewed sense of engagement. Seeing them discovering this keeps me going too. Gillian Rose continues to remind us all why philosophy matters so much, why it can be so vexing and exhausting, but also how the difficulty of philosophy is just the difficulty of being alive.

Today, I am going to present four short instalments of an ongoing project that has been threatening to run away.[3]

REBECCA COMAY
23 May 2019

Men are continuously going up to the dead line and getting shot.

They do not get much sympathy as they should know better.

JOHN L. RANSOM,
POW at Andersonville Prison, Georgia[4]

I have been thinking lately about the strange temporality of deadlines. Is there more than a superficial family resemblance between the emergencies we suffer on a daily, yearly and epochal basis – due dates, expiration dates, foreclosure dates, biological clocks, execution dates, revolutionary crisis points, environmental tipping points, pandemic turning points, messianic end-times? There is something off-putting and tone-deaf about the bland capaciousness of this list, and I am finding it hard to find a way to address this.

These thoughts were triggered by a pair of counter-intuitive observations and a puzzlement. First observation: the deadline seems to speak of the implacable indifference of measured time but it imposes itself in anything but a homogeneous manner. The deadline demonstrates precisely why Marx was right to emphasize that political economy is always a political economy of time. Time jerks at differential rates; like all emergency measures, deadlines are coercive institutions that distribute privilege unevenly – time limits are set, extensions are granted, penalties are enforced.

Time runs out faster, and hangs more heavily, for the disenfranchised. In other words, the deadline (like death itself) is a 'real abstraction'. It universalizes itself in a palpably discrepant fashion. The deadline marks the place where the homogeneous continuum of time erupts into a minefield of exceptions.

But the reverse is equally true, and this brings me to my second observation. Kierkegaard dwells on the paradox of Christianity: eternity enters time. In the leap of faith, in the act of grace, in the incarnation, the continuum of time is interrupted. Psychoanalysis alerts us to the opposite paradox: time enters eternity. This is what happens when the timelessness of the unconscious is invaded by the exigencies of schedule. As Freud will never stop reminding us, there is 'no time' in the unconscious. Impervious to chronology, indifferent to causal and temporal sequence, oblivious of developmental milestones, disrespectful of generational differences (think of Oedipus), intransigent, inefficient, rudely sabotaging the schedule of family, school and workplace, the unconscious can be nonetheless preternaturally sensitive to the ticking and rustling of clock and calendar. This is demonstrated at the end of every analysis, at the end of every session, and even at the end of every sentence. We can discern here a simultaneous resistance to the demands of modern administrative reason and a mobilization of its core devices.

My puzzlement concerns the rhetoric of hyperbole. *Dead tired, sick to death, deadly serious, dead and gone,*

done to death, dead in the water, drop dead... When does the literal flip into the most portentously symbolic? Why does exaggeration become a mode of trivialization? Why do we always say 'literally' when we mean the opposite?

THE LINE OF DEATH

Real writers, says Karl Kraus – and he means by this not hacks or journalists – are the ones who need no deadlines. A chastening thought. Anyway, I was startled to discover that this terrible word 'deadline' was coined in the prisoner-of-war camps of the American Civil War. The deadline was the distillation of architectural terror in its starkest form. Sometimes the deadline was a flimsy railing, sometimes a ditch, a rope, a row of stakes, sometimes even an invisible or imaginary line of demarcation – a fragile, inconspicuous marker, placed some 20 feet within the prison wall, as menacing as it was intangible. The deadline served to redouble physical enclosure with symbolic terror. Ineffective and unnecessary as a material barrier, the deadline was all the more overwhelming in its performative impact. It transformed a space of physical confinement into a scene of negative interpellation: it marked the fragile zone where the impossible became the prohibited and where space and time converged. If you crossed the deadline, if you put your toe beyond it, if you brushed against the railing, your fate was sealed. The guards, perched in high watchtowers all around the camp's perimeter, were rewarded with extra furlough leave for every prisoner shot.

The prisoner-of-war camps, like all camps, were unwieldy spaces of exception – temporary places that had suddenly become permanent, overflowing their capacity almost as soon as they had been constructed.[5] The most notorious of these camps was called Andersonville, a Confederate camp in southern Georgia, far from the front lines, from the border states and from state borders. Andersonville was architecture at its most rudimentary – nothing more than an open field cordoned off by a double row of high and impenetrable wooden stockade walls. Without time or materials to build barracks or even enough tents to protect the prisoners from the blazing summer sun or the freezing winter rain, the camp had been set up almost overnight about a year before the war's end to contain the swelling number of captives after the collapse of the Dix–Hill prisoner exchange cartel in 1863. That exchange had come to an abrupt halt

after Lincoln starting conscripting African-American soldiers into the Union Army. The Confederacy refused to recognize captured black soldiers as prisoners of war or even to confirm their status as captives; even to acknowledge them as enemies would already be to concede too much.[6] Denied both military and civilian status, unqualified to be quantified – according to the calculus of the original prisoner exchange, each captive was to be assigned a precise numerical value according to rank: a corporal was worth two privates, a captain worth six, a colonel fifteen, a major-general forty – these soldiers would be classified as fugitive slaves and summarily shot on capture, 'returned' to their putative owners or drafted into forced labour for the Confederate Army. Some of these freshly minted slaves were immediately put to work constructing the prison camps from which they would, on principle, be excluded: clearing the forest, hewing the timber and building the stockade walls that would confine the expanding population of their former fellow-soldiers. From the outset, then, the deadline would be marked as a kind of white man's privilege. (I will come back at a later date to this historical irony and to its ongoing afterlife.)

The collapse of the prisoner exchange produced a sudden surge in the camp population. By the war's end the population of Andersonville had swollen to three times its capacity, making the camp equivalent to the fifth largest city in the Confederacy, and by far the densest; at its peak period, the average living space was 20 square feet per person.

During the last year of the war, almost a third of the camp's population (13,000 out of approximately 45,000) died of disease or starvation. Andersonville would become the emblem of Confederate atrocity, the subject of innumerable eyewitness accounts, photojournalist reportage, propaganda, reports from the US Sanitation Commission and other investigations. The infamous commander of the camp, Captain Henry Wirz, would be convicted of war crimes and executed with fanfare in Washington immediately after the war's end. In 1909 a large monument in his honour was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in downtown Andersonville, not far from the prison site, in an attempt 'to rescue his name from the stigma attached to it by embittered prejudice'.[7] That memorial is still standing, apparently unperturbed by the *Bildersturm* that has recently swept through American campuses and cities. It continues to attract pilgrims and tourists. Andersonville would remain an essential point of reference in the memory politics of Reconstruction and beyond.

After the war, the diaries and memoirs proliferated.[8] Everyone kept talking about the deadline. Survivors drew maps and diagrams; they drew pictures of the deadline; they recounted the daily dramas that kept erupting in its vicinity.[9] The deadline marked out the edges of an imaginary proscenium stage on which would be enacted the spectacle of life *in extremis*. There was the story of the starving prisoner who was shot when he leaned over the deadline to grab a mouldy scrap of bread. The prisoner

who reached over the line to scoop a cup of water from the stream just on the other side. The prisoner who put his hand under the line to pick up a little piece of kindling. The prisoner who slipped on the mud not far from the deadline and lost his balance. The prisoner who lay down too close to the deadline (the camp was so overcrowded this was almost unavoidable), and while sleeping managed to stretch his fingers a few inches too far in the wrong direction. There was the story of the disabled man who stumbled and crashed into the railing. There was the story of the madman who kept lunging at the deadline, determined to get to the other side, screaming that death would be an improvement. There were tales of brinksmanship and bravado. There was a group of prisoners who kept up their morale by organizing nightly dances at the deadline. The dead bodies heaped up on the other side of the deadline; since there was usually no way for the prisoners to retrieve the corpses for burial, they would lie rotting in the blazing sun.

Overwrought tales of heroic escape only underscored the fact that the choice between staying and leaving was an empty one: it ultimately made no difference which side of the line you ended up on. Even if you were to tunnel your way out under the stockade walls without being detected (an almost unimaginable feat for starving prisoners trapped in an open field), the army dogs would track you down, you would get lost and starve to death in the thick surrounding forest, and even if you managed to find your way out the nearest city was so far away that the chance of blending into the local

surroundings was almost zero. Death had in any case already pervaded the compound: even when invisible, the deadline was just about the only discernible line of demarcation in this zone of exception where almost every distinguishing mark had been effaced. Both time and space had become disoriented and stagnant. Without any clear expectation of a date of release, without the regimen of work or the routine of regular mealtimes, the prisoners endured the amorphous, directionless time of slow starvation. Even the river flowed backwards: the camp was so overcrowded that the prisoners kept forgetting which end of the stream was to be used for drinking water and which end for the latrine.

The boundary between life and death had been eroded, as had the boundary between the human and the inhuman.[10] Witnesses and visitors compared the huddles of half-alive bodies to swarms of insects or to the maggots that would soon be feeding on them.[11] Photographers came to take pictures of the 'living skeletons' that crowded the camps, while the actual corpses heaped up and festered on the other side of the line. Some of these horrifying photographs (atrocity photography was one of the technological innovations bequeathed by the American Civil War, along with other inventions developed during this period, such as long-distance railroad, telegraph, etc.) would be circulated as collectible *cartes de visite*, published in popular magazines, used as evidence in congressional investigations, and disseminated as propaganda during the last years of the war and Reconstruction.[12]

The deadline itself, a little piece of wood, would eventually become a relic, remembered only by Civil War buffs and etymologists. But the drama of the deadline would continue to unfurl.

DIALECTIC OF THE UNDEAD

Although we often speak of deadlines as looming unpleasantly somewhere out there in the future, it strikes me that the real deadlines are usually in the past. We dread them, we ignore them, we anxiously leap up to meet them. Whatever happens the encounter is usually a violent one and the enemy is usually personified. Where the Grim Reaper once haunted our imagination, we tend now to cathect 'The Deadline' as the object of our fear and loathing. A deadline is something to wrangle or wrestle with, something to beat or hit or run smack up against like a brick wall. But, for the most part, by the time you confront a deadline, it is either useless or impossible to meet it. Like every ultimatum delivered by a desperate lover, the very compulsion to set a deadline usually involves a tacit confession that it is probably too late to make a difference. Think of global warming. Think of the so-called 'two-state solution'. Think of every 'I'm going to give you one last chance' blurted out by an exasperated parent.

This is why the proclamation of a deadline can pivot so easily between rallying call and resignation. The pressure of the deadline is not diminished by the fact that the window of opportunity has already closed. This is the sense in which Benjamin recycles Schlegel's description of the historian as

a prophet facing backwards: the urgency of the messenger is only heightened by the fact that the storm's damage (Benjamin's uncannily prescient image of global warming) has already been irreversibly inflicted.[13] This shows not only that prophecy has nothing to do with prediction but also that there's a Cassandra in every prophet. Prophesy is a failed speech act, not because its forecasts are hyperbolic, or even because its prognostications are disbelieved or discredited, but rather because its performative effect is hindered. It is too late to make a difference, the impending catastrophe has already happened, and prophesy itself has proved to be an opportunity for further prevarication. Like every emergency measure, the deadline is a temporal Trojan Horse – a line scratched in the quicksand of time.

The deadline is a Medusa: it paralyses you with the certainty of failure and it lulls you with the promise of yet another reprieve. Think of the catastrophizing discourse around global warming: it is not exactly that the doom-saying is disregarded or that it fails to stimulate, but the excitement has a peculiar soporific impact. In the deadline, time both contracts and stretches; it simultaneously quickens and thickens. It is either too late or too early to do anything; action becomes either impossible or unnecessary or both. The deadline is a futile retroactive performative. It is the deadline itself that prevents you from meeting it.

This is formalized in the many languages that testify to the inseparability of deadline and deferral. This is perhaps why so many languages have ended up defaulting to the

English loanword 'deadline' when it is actually a question of getting things done, for example in matters of law or business. *Le délai*, in French, is the ultimate stretching or dilation, the last possible moment beyond which no further delay will be tolerated. *Die Frist*, in German, etymologically akin to 'first', is the outer limit of a time span, the last extension beyond which time will extend no further. There's a hard-to-translate verb, *fristen*, which captures this paradoxical state of suspension at the border. *Ein jämmerliche Dasein fristen* – to live on the edge, to eke out a bare existence – is to inhabit the desperate zone where the distinction between life and death hangs in the balance.

Galgenfrist is the last minute just before the criminal is hanged; this can coincide with the *Gnadefrist*, the narrow window within which the penitent can still appeal to God for grace. This is the original meaning of *short shrift*: the term referred to the abbreviated penitential sacrament offered to the prisoner just before execution.[14] Shriving as the name suggests, is already a *Schrift,* an inscription or incision, a cut in time. The shortened shrift, a nick in time pronounced at the nick of time, is a nick in the nick – a speech act abridged to its absolute minimum duration. Far from indicating indifference or disregard, as we tend to use the term today, the 'short shrift' brings language to a pitch of intensity and efficacy; the sacramental shortcut contracts speech to an extreme of formulaic concision.

To speak of deadlines and their extension is not simply to make a formal dialectical point about limits and their

overstepping, as in Hegel's infamous refutation of the Kantian 'beyond' or *Jenseits* – namely, that to draw a boundary is already to have extended your reach beyond it; what appears to be an impermeable boundary (*Schranke*) turns out to be a mobile and porous border (*Grenze*); the limit generates its own surpassing; the law is constituted by its own transgression. This kind of argument (Hegel's signature move) has often been mobilized to advance a view of the Hegelian dialectic as a mechanism of compulsive overreaching – limits are drawn only to be swept aside, climaxes turn out to be anticlimaxes, goalposts are constantly being pushed back mid-game. Sometimes these descriptions are made admiringly, sometimes reproachfully, sometimes in an effort to convict Hegel of some kind of logical malfeasance. These descriptions are apt as far as they go, but they are one-sided (to use Hegel's language) in that they collapse the limit into a perpetual antinomy between obstacle and overpassing; they turn the dialectic into a bad infinite of empty deferral and represent time itself as a unidirectional linear advance.

The deadline reveals another side of the dialectic. It shows precisely how the compulsive or propulsive pressure – the sheer drive or drivenness – of the dialectic works simultaneously in *both* directions. The limit repulses you backwards with the same pressure as it propels you forwards. Every progression is also therefore a forcible relapse or retrogression (this is one reason why it is nearly impossible to get anything done, or to maintain or stabilize

any position gained, as Hegel keeps showing). Crossing the deadline is not enough to free you from the deadline's coercive pressure. Even missing the deadline, having the term expire, brings no relief from its looming pressure. The missed deadline charges all time with its retroactive power.

This is not only because the expiration of the deadline inevitably generates a new one. The 'hard' deadline turns out to have been a soft one; you must once more go through the humiliating ritual of apologies, excuses, negotiations for yet another extension. Or, they give you an extension even though you never asked for one and it is the last thing you really want or need. You sometimes need to be allowed your delinquency – to declare bankruptcy, to be done with contrition and punishment – but the debt keeps accumulating and the carrying costs mount. This happens when simply defaulting on loans is not an option: with student loans in the USA, for example, or when poor countries are forced to accept bailouts from larger ones, each deferral leading to a mounting spiral of refinancing, austerity measures and growing consumer debt, where the national debt is transferred to the citizens at large. In such cases, the penalty for missing the deadline exacts an ever more brutal one and implicates an ever greater number of victims. Deadlines breed and proliferate and exert a radioactive charge on everything and everyone in the vicinity and usually far beyond.

But this radioactivity is also unleashed even when you appear to meet your deadline. It is possible to do so only by

passing on the costs to others, who are forced to confront far more punishing deadlines of their own. Every drama of heroic brinksmanship enlists a large supporting cast, usually invisible and underpaid, and requires a supply chain of just-in-time delivery services on a global scale. Or, there are so many competing deadlines that they all short-circuit: the short-term deadlines take precedence over the long-term ones; you are obliged to make priorities, which invariably prove to be the wrong ones, and to take short cuts, which inevitably make you lose even more time; you put out the fire while the planet burns. Although his normative language can be off-putting, this is what Heidegger is talking about, I think, when he describes the temporality of everyday inauthentic Dasein (that would be us): we are so distracted by the ping of deadlines that we end up, like Hunter Gracchus, missing the hour of our own death. That this lapse is structural or constitutive (there are affinities with the temporal structure of trauma) does not mean that it is natural or fated, that it is suffered equally, or that its consequences are uniformly distributed. This is another way of saying that the deadline has the character of a 'real abstraction'.

Evocative as it sounds, then, this terrifying word turns out to be a misnomer. The deadline is not really a line at all (far from being an inert marker, it is a spreading capillary tangle) and it is anything but dead. The deadline grows: it swells, it breeds, it forks and fissures; it lives on long beyond its own expiration date. The deadline is the figure of the undead.

FAUSTIAN TIME

Only the Devil can fix a deadline, but he is the exception that proves the rule. This is the Faustian bargain: the scholar (as it happens) finally gets time for himself; to enjoy infinite control over his own time. Dr Faustus gets to *own* his time, on condition that its end point is contractually fixed – also, he goes straight to hell when the time's up. Paradoxically, it is the inexorable fixity of death that grants Faustus a kind of immortality within his own lifetime: within the precisely measured span of time allotted to him, the doctor will be immune from time's depredations. He gets to enjoy an eternity of 'quality time' uninterrupted by the contingencies of death and unconstrained by external impediments or internal inhibitions.[15] *As long as he lives* (this qualification only sounds oxymoronic), Faustus is immortal. No accident can befall him, nobody can get to him, nothing can impinge on him: his time is his own.[16] Laurence Rickels has argued, and this sounds right to me, that this is the basic difference between the Devil and the vampire. Unlike the vampire, who indefinitely pushes back the deadline by imposing an endless extension of life (but thereby effaces the boundary between the living and the dead), the Devil inscribes an indelible boundary between life and death (but thereby bestows on life its own deadly eternity).

For Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, this immortality is demonstrated in the fact that Faust himself gets to set the deadline: 24 years is a term of his own choosing. This creates the illusion that there is an end to time, that

time itself is something that can be surveyed, captured, controlled, and thereby ultimately defeated. By assigning his own expiration date, Faustus not only claims divine ownership over his allotted lifespan but he gets to *see* this end. Angus Fletcher has stressed the compelling modernity of Marlowe's vision.[17] In signing his own death warrant, Faustus simultaneously stages a demonic parody of Christ's sacrifice and establishes his own credentials as a man of modern industry and commerce.[18] Faust's secular experiment is to create the illusion of simultaneity – to capture time's ephemerality by segmenting time into a sequence of frozen moments.[19] Hence the insistent *visuality* of the Faustian quest, the protagonist's unbounded desire to see and to show everything – to have everything flash before his eyes in a moment of instantaneous total vision. Hence, too, the incessant production of pageantry, to the point of buffoonery. Theatre simultaneously affirms and struggles against its own temporal dilation by splintering into an accelerating series of discontinuous abbreviated tableaux.

Above all, the play stages a confrontation with the ineluctable 'curvature of theatrical time' whereby every character is doomed to fall into extinction when the curtain drops.[20] Marlowe turns the theatrical contract between player and spectator into a Faustian contract. More precisely, he demonstrates that all theatre is a kind of Faustian contract: for the price of a ticket, and for the fixed duration of the performance, ordinary time is suspended. (Theatre and psychoanalysis have this in common.) That

the contractual term is exactly 24 years neatly seals off the dramatic action within the unified circle of a single day. In allotting himself this precise lifespan Faustus pays superficial homage to the unity of time mandated by tragic convention. The other so-called 'Aristotelian unities' are flagrantly disregarded in this imperial cartographic drama that will span the globe, explore heaven and hell, and stretch out in all directions from the underworld to interstellar space.[21] But the idea of a 24-year 'day' already defines time as a continuum of uniform duration. It suggests that there is such a thing as a quantity of time, that time is something that can be mechanically measured, divided and distributed. *Dr Faustus* thus puts on stage the installation of the 'homogeneous empty time' – the modern 'merchant's time'[22] – that was in the course of smoothing out the lumpiness of medieval time, with its uneven distribution of prayer times, saint's days, holidays, anniversaries, 'dismal days' – the *dies mali*, literally the 'evil days', the untimely, unlucky, 'Egyptian' days – that still cluttered the Elizabethan calendar.[23] For Dr Faustus, time appears as an abstract commodity that can be bought and sold just like the soul that stands as legal tender. The Faustian contract is a secular commercial transaction, signed in sacramental blood but drafted in modern bureaucratic legalese and accompanied by a five-part scroll written in fine print. When Lucifer's henchman comes to collect Faustus at the play's end he appears not (only) as a 'medieval gargoyle' but as a functionary of the nascent capitalist state.[24]

Faustus wants to have control over temporality itself. The issue is not what he can buy or do with time or even what he can enjoy or experience in his allotted lifespan. This is why he wastes so much of the play asking Mephistopheles foolish questions, planning extravagant sightseeing trips and performing ridiculous parlour tricks. Even as Faustus keeps insisting on the intensity of his gluttonous appetite – his longing to be ravished, his insatiable thirst for 'profit and delight', his craving for 'power, honour, or omnipotence'[25] – all these objects prove to be vanishing approximations of something impossible and indefinable. The impossibility is not because the object of desire is an unattainable or other-worldly blue flower but rather because there is ultimately no object of desire: Faustus's ultimate desire is just... to desire. Which is to say, all he wants is time. Achievement, knowledge, enjoyment, recognition, even experience prove to be overrated commodities when time itself is for sale.

This is the subtle but crucial difference between Faust's deadline and Achilles'. When Achilles opts for a 'short, glorious life' – to die young in battle rather than to potter around getting fat and boring – he is trading in the limited longevity of a mortal lifespan for the more durable gratifications of heroic glory. There is thus for Achilles a non-temporal pay-off. Such a reward is both unavailable and irrelevant to Faustus. Faustus does not stake his immortality on the permanency of tangible achievements, fame or reputation. He does need an audience for his magic tricks, it is true, and he wants other men to share his lust

for Helen – he wants his desire to be desired – but this penumbra of recognition is ultimately more as a stage prop than for the purposes of real legitimation. It is not even the saturated intensity of the lived moment that Faustus is after. What is at stake for Faustus is time as such and not what he makes of it.

And here's the paradox: to experience the passage of pure time – time in its unsaturated emptiness – is to register time's fracture into a spray of vanishing instants. But to witness this passage you need something to happen, or at the very least you need to find a way to witness its non-happening. You need to turn the absence of event into a negative event – to convert a simple non-happening into an active un-happening, a determinate negation of happening. You need to see something, even a negative or a scotomized something, to see the nothing that makes it visible – that is, time itself. This is Faustian theatre: it is literally all about making (by marking) time. We often talk about the need to 'make time' to do things; we save the date, we set aside the time, we make a date – we make time to see a show. For Faustus, it's the other way around. He has to put on a show to make time, to make time appear.

This is also the difference between the Faustus story and all the superficially similar myths and fairy tales that seem likewise to revolve around deadlines. The miller's daughter must spin all that straw into gold by morning – *or else*... The lazy princess must spin all that thread within three days – *or else*... Hercules must finish all those chores on time

(he must clean up the Augean stables before sunset; he must kill the Nemean lion before the end of the month) – *or else*... These deadlines are all conditional: there are consequences for failing to meet them. In Kantian terms, such deadlines present a *hypothetical* rather than a *categorical* imperative – a threat masquerading as an injunction. All these down-to-the-wire races against time are premissed on the likelihood of Hercules losing the race, which is also why there is a lack of clarity about the terms of winning; the rules prove to be slippery and full of loopholes. Hercules' tormentor will feel no compunction about adding two supplementary labours as soon as the hero has against all odds completed his original roster of assignments: maybe he cheated (he got help, didn't he, cutting off the Hydra's heads); maybe that or that task shouldn't really count (he got paid, after all, for cleaning out the stables)... The Faustian deadline is categorical.

PAST DUE

For Thomas Mann's Dr Faustus, the immortality generated by the deadline springs from a deadly diagnosis: by deliberately contracting a terminal disease the composer Adrian Leverkühn finally manages to get his work done.[26] As his syphilis gestates, his genius incubates: he breaks through his artistic paralysis, he clears away the Western musical tradition, he undoes Beethoven, he invents twelve-tone music, he essentially becomes Arnold Schoenberg. All this with a little help from Adorno, who acted as 'private

councilor' to Mann, supplying the novelist with the theory, descriptions, and even snide philosophical commentary on Leverkühn's compositions. This was to the real Schoenberg's consternation, who was appalled to find his innovations not only baldly (and, as far as he was concerned, badly) plagiarized by a fictional persona, but travestied as an unsubtle allegory of totalitarian ideology. As his contractual term expires, Leverkühn finally completes the symphonic cantata that will revoke the triumph of Beethoven's Ninth, stripping art of its last shred of consolatory heroism. Dr Faustus rewrites the 'Ode to Joy' as an interminable lamentation.

The twist is not that Leverkühn fails to meet the deadline, that he doesn't finish his composition, or that the result is botched. It is rather that even though he succeeds, he fails: he is robbed of the opportunity to consummate his life's work at zero hour or for that matter even to have a zero hour. The tragedy is that the hero cannot enjoy the privilege of tragic closure. Although he meets the deadline, the composer is unable to perform his own swansong or even to die. Upon attacking the first piano chord at the public premiere of his cantata, Adrian Leverkühn collapses of a paralytic stroke and is condemned to while away the remaining decade of his life, Nietzsche-style, a 'burned out husk', consigned to the care of his mother.[27] The work thus remains irredeemably unfinished even though it is finished. Unperformed and unplayable, both within and beyond the composer's lifetime, the cantata lingers on as a spectral remainder, as does its author. Forced to outlive

his own deadline, Dr Faustus is refused even the torment of eternal damnation. Like the bombed-out cities and concentration camps of post-war Germany (Mann's somewhat heavy-handed analogy), he is delivered to the living hell of a posthumous existence.

revised March 2020

NOTES

1. My thanks, especially, to Tom Vaswani, Howard Caygill, Peter Osborne and Jacqueline Rose.
2. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (1978) (London and New York: Verso, 2014).
3. *Update, 23 March 2020*. As I correct the proofs of this essay, the topic – deadlines, emergencies, tipping points, countdowns – has taken on a whole new life. As the global Covid-19 crisis escalates, panic is mounting as the death count rises, and the sense of time and space is being transformed. My sentences from a year ago already feel like a missive from another century; by the time they appear in print they'll no doubt be that much more so.
4. John Ransom, *Andersonville Diary* (1881), available at archive.org/details/andersonvillediaoirans/page/n4/mode/2up.
5. On conditions in POW camps see J. Michael Martinez, *Life and Death in Civil War Prisons* (Nashville TN: Rutlidge Hill Press, 2004); William Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1972); Lonnie Speer, *Portals to Hell* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Press, 2007).
6. 'Negroes belonging to our citizens are not considered subjects of exchange.' General Lee's letter of 3 October, 1864 to Ulysses S. Grant laying out the terms for the exchange of prisoners. At www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Letter_from_Robert_E_Lee_to_Ulysses_S_Grant_October_3_1864. According to the official Andersonville website (of the US National Parks), some 100 African-American soldiers were admitted to the camp as POWs (out of the approximate 45,000 prisoners who passed through during its 14 months of operation). See www.nps.gov/ande/index.htm.
7. For a description of the monument and its inscriptions, see www.nps.gov/ande/learn/historyculture/wirz-mon.htm.
8. For a discussion of the memoir genre and its role in the construction of national memory during Reconstruction, see Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narrative in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).
9. In what follows, I draw from a large number of (mainly) self-published prisoner diaries and memoirs now in the public domain. Memoirs specifically of Andersonville include: John Ransom, *Anderson Diary* (see above n3); Ezra Hoyt Ripple, *Dancing Along the Deadline: The Anderson Memoir of a Prisoner of the* Confederacy (Novado CA: Presidio Press, 1996); Samuel Boggs, *Eighteen Months a Prisoner under the Rebel Flag* (1889), archive.org/details/eighteenmonthsaoobogggoog;

William Lyon, *In and Out of Andersonville Prison* (1905), archive.org/details/inandoutandersooolyongoog; Simon Dufur, *Over the Dead Line; or, Tracked by Blood-Hounds*, archive.org/details/overdeadlineortroodufu; John Maile, *Prison Life in Andersonville (*1912), archive.org/details/prisonlifeinande01mail; Willard Glazier, *The Capture, the Prison Pen, and the Escape* (1869), archive.org/details/captureprisonpenooglazuoft; Frank Smith, *Smith's 'Knapsack' of Facts and Figures, '61 to '65* (1884), archive.org/details/smithsknapsackofoosmit; M.V. Phillips, *Life and Death in Andersonville* (1887), archive.org/details/lifedeathinanderoophil.

10. Walt Whitman's reaction: 'Can those be *men* – those little livid brown, ash-streak'd, monkey-looking dwarfs? – are they really not mummied, dwindled corpses? They lay there, most of them, quite still, but with a horrible look in their eyes and skinny lips (often with not enough flesh on the lips to cover their teeth.) Probably no more appalling sight was ever seen on this earth. … The dead there are not to be pitied as much as some of the living that come from there – if they can be call'd living – many of them are mentally imbecile, and will never recuperate.' *The Portable Walt Whitman* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 542.
11. This species blurring was often associated with a blurring of racial difference, where the experience of captivity at the hands of Confederate guards was represented as a kind of enslavement and the prisoners' loss of humanity was registered as a (temporary) loss of whiteness. There is repeated reference in the memoirs to literal blackening – skin darkened by sunburn, bodies darkened by filth and faeces, limbs darkened by gangrene, faces sooty and unshaven. The trope vacillated between horror and comedy. In his memoir, Ezra Ripple presents a vaudeville version – a kind of ceremonial blackface gag – and provides drawings of himself 'before' and 'after' washing. See Ripple, *Dancing Along the Deadline,* p. 78. In any case, the identification with blackness would be short-lived, and conspicuously did not typically translate into solidarity with the actual victims of slavery or include an acknowledgement of the agency and experiences of black soldiers and civilians during the Civil War and after. See Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth,* for a discussion of the ways in which official and unofficial narratives of the Civil War focused overwhelmingly on white suffering even while repeatedly invoking tropes of blackness and black suffering to characterize this ordeal. Fabian suggests that the wide circulation of prisoners' accounts may have contributed to the ongoing marginalization of the experiences and claims of freed people during Reconstruction and after. The POW camp in this sense was the setting for a kind of baptism of suffering – a temporary identification with blackness from which the American nation would arise re-energized (and emphatically white). See also David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion:*

The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Benjamin G. Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2008); David Blight, '"For Something Beyond the Battlefield": Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War', *Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989), pp. 156–78.

12. Kathleen Collins, "Living Skeletons; *Carte-de-visite* Propaganda in the American Civil War, *History of Photography* 12 (1988), pp. 103–120.
13. Walter Benjamin, Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History', in *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 407 and 'On the Concept of History', ibid., p. 392.
14. Cf. *Richard III,* III.4: 'Make a short shrift; he longs to see your head.'
15. I am indebted to Laurence Rickels' observations in *The Devil Notebooks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and *The Vampire Lectures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
16. Christopher Ricks points out that a guarantee of twenty-four years of continued life is, in reality, no small security in the 'hell on earth' that was plague-ridden London (and where the play-house itself was linked both imaginatively and literally with the plague, as the near consonance conveniently suggests). For Ricks, therefore, the pact functions as a kind of health insurance policy – and the death sentence is a means of prolonging life. This certainty is what strips dramatic import from the shenanigans performed by Faustus in the middle parts of the play (for example the revenge scenes), where Faust's emphasis on his own unkillability removes any suspense from his performances. See Ricks, '*Doctor Faustus* and Hell on Earth', *Essays In Criticism* 35 (1985), pp. 101–121.
17. Angus Fletcher, *Time, Space, and Motion in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). See especially chapter 4, 'Marlowe Invents the Deadline', pp. 55–69.
18. The parody is underscored when Faustus concludes the pact with Christ's dying words, *consummatum est* (John xix.30). Christophe Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, I.1.53f., Norton Critical Edition, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), II.1.73.
19. This visual register will become even more pronounced in Goethe's *Faust*, with its montage-like juxtapositions and scene-switching; the implications were immediately grasped by early film-makers, such as Meliès and Murnau, who saw in *Faust* an unprecedented opportunity for cinematic invention.

20. I owe this lovely phrase to Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 200.
21. This spatial dispersion is underscored by Faustus' decision to return to Wittenberg for his final reckoning, as if to reinstate tragic unity by ending the play where it began. On travel in *Faustus* and Marlowe generally, see Garret Sullivan, 'Geography and Identity in Marlowe', in Patrick Cheney, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 231–44.
22. Cf. Jacques Le Goff, 'Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages', in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
23. See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 199. See also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 350.
24. Richard Wilson, 'Tragedy, Patronage, and Power', in *Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, p. 226. See also Daniel Yeager, 'Marlowe's Faustus: Contract as Metaphor?', *University of Chicago Law School Roundtable* 2 (1995). On the ambiguities of this secular/profane transaction, see Bronwyn Johnston 'Who the Devil is in Charge? Mastery and the Faustian Pact on the Early Modern Stage', in Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich, eds, *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 33–5.
25. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, I.1.53f.
26. The plague is no longer an external obstacle to be eliminated, as in Marlowe (following Christopher Ricks), where the pact provided temporary immunity from the threat of deadly disease. In Mann, mortal illness is itself now the devilish source of immortality.
27. Thomas Mann, *Dr Faustus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 485.

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Is there more than a superficial family resemblance between the emergencies we suffer on a daily and on an epochal basis – due dates, expiry dates, statutes of limitation, biological clocks, revolutionary crisis points, environmental tipping points, pandemic turning points, messianic end times? The deadline invokes the implacable indifference of measured time, but the manner in which it imposes itself is anything but uniform. Like all emergency measures, deadlines are coercive rituals that distribute privilege unevenly – limits are announced, extensions are granted, penalties are imposed, time runs out faster for the disenfranchised. The deadline (like death itself) is a 'real abstraction': it universalizes itself in a palpably discordant fashion.

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