ON GIVING UP

You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on.

Beckett, The Unnameable

'From a certain point there is no more turning back. That is the point that must be reached' Kafka writes in one of his Zurau aphorisms, written during the war – between 1917 and 1918 – just after receiving a diagnosis of the tuberculosis that would eventually kill him. 'From a certain point there is no turning back. That is the point that must be reached'. Why ? Because there is always the temptation to give up ? Or more suggestively, there is always the temptation to turn back, to turn round: to go back, say,to the past, to the place one started from, to retrace your steps; or simply turn back to the time when you can choose just to give up, or choose again what you really want to do ?; as though progress, or completion, or commitment depends upon reaching the point from where there is no more turning back, and turning back is no good thing.. At that point, it is implied, we have finally made our decision, the crisis of choice is over; we are no longer in search of exits and alibis; we are no longer seduced by alternatives and deferrals. It is the point at which, to

all intents and purposes, we know what we want; we are no longer the complicated conflicted creatures we were until this point. Our doubts are finally in abeyance. We are, in a certain sense,free. The point from which there is no more turning back, of course suggests, that there has been a certain amount of turning back, or a certain amount of wanting to turn back already. As though a desire to turn back is what we always have to contend with. As a temptation, or simply as a choice . As though we are also driven by a desire for uncompleted actions, by the pleasures of indecision and uncertainty, by the desire to give up. 'He has the feeling', Kafka writes in another of the Zurau aphorisms, 'that merely by being alive he is blocking his own way'.

Kafka clearly wants us to think about our relationship, so to speak, with the opportunity, with the option of giving up; or to the giving up that turning back, or blocking our own way, can sometimes entail. Of how the idea of giving up figures in our lives, as a perpetual lure, and an insistent fear. The giving up that is a leaving ourselves out of what we had wanted, or thought we had wanted. The giving up that is linked to a sense of impossibility, or of possibilities running out, of coming to the end of something. Of needing to exempt oneself. Excluding oneself - perhaps because one lacks the wherewithal or the know-how, or the courage, or the luck - from a project one had taken to be one's own. 'A courageous person', the philosopher Jonathan Lear writes in his book Radical Hope – which we will come back to – 'has a

proper orientation toward what is shameful and what is fearful'. We tend to think of giving up, in the ordinary way, as a lack of courage, as an improper or embarrassing orientation towards what is shameful and fearful. That is to say we tend to value, and even idealise the idea of seeing things through, of finishing things rather than abandoning them. Giving up, that is to say, has to be justified in a way that completion does not; giving up doesn't usually make us proud of ourselves; it is a falling short of our preferred selves; unless, of course, it is the sign of an ultimate and defining realism, of what we call 'knowing our limitations'. Giving up, in other words, is usually thought of as a failure rather than a way of succeeding at something else.It is worth wondering who we believe we have to justify ourselves to when we are giving up. Or when we are determinedly not giving up.

Of course turning back and giving up are not always the same thing, as the English translation of the aphorism draws our attention to.: turning back in a book one is reading is clearly quite different from giving up on the book. Turning back on a walk can be quite different from giving up on the walk. When we want to turn back the clock we are not giving up on time.Turning back, in short, may involve reconsideration, giving up suggests abandonment (and if we really give up there is no turning back). And both are reversals of a kind, doubts about progress and desire, or at least about direction and purpose. So it is essentially an anxiety about intention that Kafka is alerting us

to.; the intention we can all too easily have to sabotage our intentions, to doubt our desires, or our capacity to fulfil them.; as finite creatures, our intentions and desires and hopes coming without guarantees.The temptation to give up may sometimes be different from the temptation to turn back, but each temptation is an episode in how we feel about giving up, which is always a special case of changing our minds, of revising our intentions, of second thoughts, of destroying something. So I want to read Kafka's aphorism, for the sake of this paper, as, 'From a certain point there is no more giving up. That is the point that must be reached'; and to say that our relationship to giving up is as formative in our lives as, say, our relationship to being helped; and to suggest, by implication, that there can be a tyranny of completion, of finishing things, that can narrow our minds unduly('if a thing is worth doing it is worth doing badly', as Wilde said). The history of our relationship to giving up and the history of our relationship to help confront us with what we take our dependence to be ; our dependence on what we need, and need to do, and on what we need not do, or are unable to do. When we give up, or undermine our dependence on our ego-ideals – on our fantasies about the people we believe we should be - both our dependence is exposed and the nature and function of our ego-ideals. When our preferred versions of ourselves are not an inspiration, they are a tyranny(a tyranny we can use to humiliate ourselves with). Our history of giving up, that is to say, our attitude to it, our obsession with it, our disavowal of its significance, may

be a clue to something that we should really call our histories and not our selves. It is a clue to the beliefs, the sentences, that we have organised ourselves around. If giving up tends to be the catastrophe to be averted, what do we imagine giving up is actually like? Not to be impressed by giving up shows us what we do then value. We make a world out of it.

Heroes and heroines are people who don't give up; they may turn back sometimes but virtually by definition they never give up. And as we shall see, tragic heroes are our catastrophic examples of the inability to give up; and in that sense tragedy invites us to revalue certain versions of giving up.Kafka's heroes, we should remember, as heroes should be, are often extremely tenacious; they very rarely give up, despite the many inducements to do so(clearly what is heroic in heroism is precisely the resistance to giving up; or perhaps the phobia of giving up). To be arrested for no apparent reason, to wake up as a beetle – to take the more familiar Kafkaesque predicaments – would involve, one might think, at least a strong wish to give up. But what is striking about Kafka's heroes is how patient they are in their hopelessness and their helplessness, a patience summed up in his famous aphorism, 'there is hope but not for us'. Rather tantalisingly hope does exist, we just can't have it ourselves; and logically we can then ask in what sense does it exist? And what relationship can we have with it? And we can answer that it is something we want that eludes us:it exists only in our wanting it. Which may

or may not be good grounds for giving up on it. So to give up on hope would just mean to give up on wanting it; just as giving up is always giving up wanting something or someone or other, giving up wanting to be someone or other. What has always to be given up, in giving up, is the wanting.'There is a destination, but no way there', Kafka writes in another aphorism,'what we refer to as a way is hesitation'; we cant give up on wanting a destination.Hesitation is integral to wanting, a moment of reconsidering giving up. We cant give up, it seems, on having ego-ideals, on there being people we would like to be, places we would like to go ; on there being always an as-yet unattained self. There is something we want, or think we need – hope, destination, not turning back, satisfaction – but because we cannot give up wanting it we have to redescribe the process of wanting, how we go about wanting it(if there is hope but not for us we have to hope differently: if there is a destination but no way there we need a new approach to destinations). The hunger-artist never gives up on wanting to fast even though it is going out of fashion as a popular entertainment; but in order to go on fasting he must never die of hunger; to be a hunger-artist means to never complete one's starvation; just as in sado-masochistic relationships the sadist must never kill the masochist because he needs to go on torturing him.. It is better to travel hopefully than ever to arrive; but as it turns out you may have to travel hopelessly and never arrive. You will certainlyt never arrive at exactly what you had anticipated.

So Kafka's parable Before the Law begins – the title itself, in English translation, suggesting that there was a time before the law, and that we are all before the law by being subject to it:

'Before the law stands a doorkeeper. A man from the country walks up to the doorkeeper, and asks to be admiited to the law. The man considers and asks whether that means he will be admitted at some future time.'that's possible' says the doorkeeper, 'but not now''

The man, in an endless deferral of what he wants, sits there until he dies; but just before he dies the doorkeeper, '…to reach his failing ears,..bellows to him at the top of his voice, 'No one else could gain admission here, because this entrance was intended for you alone. Now I am going to shut it'. The man doesn't give up until he is given up on by the sadistic doorkeeper. What, then, is a resistance to giving up a resistance to ? It is a resistance to giving up wanting something, and to give up on wanting to be a certain kind of person. And we should notice that no thought is given to, there are never any descriptions in Kafka, of what the aftermath to giving up would be like, to what giving up would look. So there is often in the background of a Kafka story the promise of something, but of something that never happens; as though Kafka's theme is not what was once called existential dread, but tantalisation. The ordeal of desire that tests one's relationhip to, one's understanding of, giving up.The lure of foreclosed possibilities.The very real

freedom of being able to turn back, or to give up, seems to be a freedom Kafka fears; he wants to reach the point from where there is no turning back, no turning back from wanting whatever is wanted. And wanted at whatever cost. As though wanting for Kafka – and not only for Kafka - is akin to an addiction. The self-cure for having been tantalised is either to turn the tables and become the tantaliser, or to give up on wanting;two forms of revenge, two forms of cruelty to oneself.

In the aphorism I quoted in my last lecture, Leopards in the Temple – 'Leopards break into the temple and drink all the sacrificial vessels dry; it keeps happening; in the end, it can be calculated in advance and is incororated into the ritual' – the ritual is not abandoned, it is not given up. The ritual is so much wanted – is so much an ineluctable, or intractable object of desire – that it can even incorporate the very things that one would have thought could only violate it. Kafka who gave up all the women he thought of marrying could not, perhaps unsurprisingly, give up on the theme of giving up. So even when he writes about the perennial theme of finding a way of giving up on suffering – ones own and the suffering of others – he finds a way round it, that seems at once ingenious, profound and true:

'You can withdraw from the sufferings of the world – that possibility is open to you and accords with your nature – but perhaps that withdrawal is the only suffering you may be able to avoid'.

If we ask, in the pragmatic way – as Kafka would not have – for what purposes would it be useful to write that ? One purpose would be to try and work out where – in what situations - giving up doesn't work, or can't work.The suffering is in the giving up on suffering.You can turn away, turn your back on the sufferings of the world, but then that turning away, that version of giving up may be the only suffering you can genuinely avoid. We suffer from not acknowledging the suffering of others. So another useful reason for writing that particular aphorism is to warn people of the cost to themselves of ignoring , or wanting to avoid, the suffering of others. Once again in Kafka it is the giving up that has to be given up on, as though for Kafka the struggle was always to get to the point at which there was no turning back. As though the project for Kafka – that is the theme of many of his parables, and the desire of many of his heroes – is about the cost, the suffering involved in giving up; how not to give up is Kafka's obsession(in the language of Freud's late mythology of the instincts, Kafka was always trying to avert the triumph of the Death Instinct, but without affirming the Life Instinct). The sufferings of the world can be avoided; but avoiding them can also be avoided. We could construe it that giving up for Kafka was a forbidden pleasure; the allure of giving up, the joys of failure, had to be resisted. The having given up was the unthinkable, the unwriteable for Kafka But in the service of what ? Of not wanting to be the kind of person who gives

up? Or, in Freudian language, of betraying one's ego-ideal, the person one wants to be.

There are, we need to remember at least three salient meanings of giving up that recur in different forms, all at the heart of Kafka's preoccupations – defeatedness and sacrifice, or failure and compromise,or weakness and realism. The ambiguity of the phrase 'giving up' in English is, that is to say, instructive: to give up is always to give something up; something or someone is sacrificed. And sacrifice, whatever else it is, is a sadistic pleasure. Or to put it another way, perhaps we should not underestimate the pleasures of giving up, however forbidden or shameful they may seem to be. No-one writes in praise of giving up, anymore that people write in celebration of shame, and for similar reasons. So the question I want to broach in this talk is not why do we give up, but why don't we? Why are we less interested in having given up, than avoiding giving up? As though giving up mustn't be thought through, or that following it to its logical conclusion leads merely and solely to thoughts about suicide. What are we doing to ourselves and others, sometimes, by not giving up, something that tragedy is clearly there to help us think about ? Camus, wrote in 1942, during another war:

'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy'.

In this now famous passage from The Myth of Sisyphus – Sisyphus himself being, as it were, the absurd, tormented, exemplary master of not giving up – Camus proposes the ultimate or absolute form of giving up, suicide, as the one truly serious philosophical problem. And clearly everything depends upon – everything we believe we should be using our time to do, depends upon – the always contestable assumption(or conviction) that life is worth living; a question that never occurs to a child, except histrionically.,. It is, as we all know, that in adolescence – with the arrival of puberty – that the question begins to dawn(in adolescence we begin to wonder, is pleasure worth the trouble?).That life is worth living doesn't, of course, tend to present itself to us as a belief; we are more likely just to go on living as if it is true. So when we begin to question it as though it were a belief, something has happened to us; we have to all intents and purposes asked ourselves what is worth surviving for? Darwin's answer – which is somewhere between a riddle and a joke – is, survival is worth surviving for(survival optimally entailing reproduction, and so on ad infinitum). Freud's answer, which is more commonsensical and just as disturbing, is that pleasure is worth surviving for. Marx's answer is social justice, non-exploitative social relations, are worth surviving for. Though each of us, of course, may want or need to have our own answers;while also wondering why good reasons , or indeed any reasons at all are required to go on living, when no other animal seems to need them. Good reasons, of course, are made with language.

So good reasons – or what Winnicott calls, more interestingly, right reasons – and reason itself, are what suicide provokes us to think and talk about; what is it that sustains someone's wish to go on living, as opposed to giving up on or attacking that wish(and it is always worth considering what or who giving up is an attack on).Because there are always two perhaps obviously striking things about suicide:, though that they are obvious should also give us pause: it is always profoundly disturbing, and it makes everyone who knows the person who commits suicide obsessed by causality, about how and why it could have happened, and what anyone could have done to prevent it(when someone comes to me and tells me they want to kill themselves, Winnicott wrote, I never try and dissuade them I just try and insure that they do it for the right reasons). As though it is initially deemed virtually unintelligible – or merely someone's failure - that somebody could do such a thing; as though the ultimate wish to exempt oneself – to expel oneself, to leave ones self out, of one's own project – was a doubt, or a violence, too far. That life itself is something that can't be given up, or given up on(or that life had to be made sacred – rhetorically, as it were – to keep it valuable). And it is never clear to us – as the inheritors of a sacred cosmos – whether suicide is a triumph of individual agency, or the triumph of something other than this supposed agency(something, say, only a devil could tempt one with); whether suicide is what we call a choice, or the abrogation of choice – the choice, among other things, to give up choosing. Indeed once to be or not to be is the question

everything is in question, as Camus suggests. We are always left wondering, what might make someone kill themselves ? What, if anything, could predispose someone to suicide ? What could it be about a life, or supposedly about life itself, that could make this feel the unequivocal option ? And why, by the same token, might someone need to feel that suicide was not in their repertoire ?

And yet, of course, prior to any suicide is a history of more or less serious refusals, and avoidances, and supposed failures. Before suicide, the other minor forms of giving up. In the ordinary course of events when we give up, or give up on something or someone we are not ostensibly asking whether life is or is not worth living, we are asking either whether what we had wanted to do is worth doing, or whether we have the ability to do it. When I give up I am either admitting failure or acknowledging loss of desire, or seeking the pleasures of sabotage. But giving up, for whatever reason has become in this situation, what I want, what I want to do. Ordinary giving's up are overshadowed by the ultimate giving up.

Freud redescribed more dramatically one version of what I am calling here the wish to give up as the Death Instinct: 'we have been led to distinguish two kinds of instincts', he wrote in Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life'. Though what has led

Freud to this is never made clear, other than what appears to be a pervasive self-destructiveness in the people he treats. Why, Freud uses psychoanalysis to think about, are people addicted to their own suffering? What makes them give up on and attack their own enjoyment so enthusiastically and ingeniously ?What Freud called his 'mythology' of the Death Instinct describes one powerful part of ourselves that lives life as a slow, often unconscious suicide, and another part of ourselves – Eros, the Life Instinct – that contests and contends with this suicidal drive. Despite the fact that, as Freud himself wrote, 'Since the assumption of the existence of the[death] instinct is mainly based on theoretical grounds, we must also admit that it is not entirely proof against theoretical objections'(L&P,101); and as Freud's follower Ernest Jones wrote, 'no biological observation can be found to support the idea of a death instinct, which contradicts all biological principles'(Rycroft, Dictionary, 31), the death instinct, I want to suggest, was Freud's way of broaching the part of the self that wants, at its most extreme, less life rather than more life; the part of the self that wants to give up, to give up on, in this context, perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life. And in this version, once again, giving up is deemed to be unequivocally destructive;as though believing that life is not worth living can only be destructive, as opposed to being entirely plausible or convincing, or realistic, or even compelling. Freud can be seen to be delegating to a so-called instinct the part of oneself that loves, that desires giving up; and by calling it an

instinct – by giving it a quasi-biological status, by naturalising it - he avoids simply saying that there is a part of ourselves that has very good, convincing, alluring reasons to give up on life and that often doesn't really want to go on living. That there is a continual debate going on inside us – what Freud, rather upping the stakes, calls a war – about whether we really believe that life is worth living, whether life is worth the trouble. And it is easy to see – and certainly not irrelevant – why an émigré Jew in Vienna at the turn of the century may feel this, not to mention his other comparably exploited and oppressed contemporaries. Like alchoholics who need everyone to drink, the desire to live, the previously often divinely sanctioned desire to have more life and cherish it, is implicitly being described as something akin to an addiction, or an official order; as though it goes without saying that life is worth living, rather than it being any kind of question, or conflict.

When Freud suggests in his paper on Narcissism the 'hate is older than love'; when he proposes that the organism wants to 'die in its own way', and writes of the ';instinctual forces which seek to conduct life into death' he is writing not merely about the fact that, as it were, something inside us eventually kills us, but that there is a part of the self that actually desires death, that wants to kill off the so-called life-instincts.;that doesn't want survival at all costs, despite Darwin's preferred truth. Freud's two 'mythical' instincts Eros and Thanatos describe what Freud takes to be this constitutive

war inside us, according to psychoanalysis :'The aim of Eros', he writes,' is to establish even greater unities and to preserve them thus – in short to bind together; the aim of the destructive instincts is, on the contrary,to undo connections and destroy things'(L&P,103) .Indeed one of the reasons giving up has such a bad press – we never say,'she is really good at giving up', or 'giving up is good for you' – is that the giving up that occurs regularly in everyday life is felt to be an ominous foreshadowing of, or reminder of, the ultimate giving up that is suicide, or just of the milder version of living a kind of death-in-life; or in Freud's language, the insidious, 'silent', incremental triumph of the death instinct, the numbing of passion, the destruction of everything enlivening. As though giving up is a really bad sign. As though wanting to give up is the worst sign, and that the wish to give up is something we should be extremely wary of in ourselves. As though it were like a virus, or a contagion; a universal acid nothing could contain. And of course there were to be versions of psychoanalysis after Freud – most notably those of Melanie Klein – that were to be more or less about the working of the so-called Death Instinct, and about the working out of how it might be contested and managed.

When Freud writes of the 'silent working' of the Death Instinct he is then describing something insidiously and sometimes secretly undermining of our vitality, of our drive for the more life we call the future. And so the reason

Freud proposes something that is by his own admission 'theoretical' – that is to say , without empirical verification, neither verifiable nor falsifiable – and that has no obvious biological validity – how could there, in Darwinian terms(and Freud was a devout Darwinian) be an instinct to not survive – was, I think, Freud's way of addressing or acknowledging or finding a way of talking about a common, modern human experience, the wish to give up. The most secular wish of all, one might say. And we should note, in passing, that in describing Eros and Thanatos Freud makes no mention of the incest taboo; indeed his description of the project of Eros – 'to establish even greater unities' – might, at a stretch, seem to include incestuous desire. But the incest-taboo, our Freudian blue-print for the taboo and the transgressive , may be a pale shadow of the apparently most horrifying and disturbing taboo of suicide, of not wanting to live, of finding that the suffering of life is not worth the struggle. That life itself may be – can be, unbearable. Whether we pathologise it as depression or what psychiatrists call 'suicidal ideation' or any of the other devitalising, enervating illnesses we are prone to, giving up for some reason is the thing we must not do, and that seems, therefore, so difficult to do.So I want to suggest that we are, or may be, unduly terrorised and intimidated by the wish to give up; and that the daunting association of giving up with suicide has stopped us being able to think about the milder, more instructive, more promising, giving up of everyday life; and has stopped us thinking truthfully about suicide. If sex needs to be detraumatised

by uncoupling it from incestuous desire, giving up needs to be detraumatised by detaching it from suicide. The desire to up the stakes is a way of narrowing our minds. So if we need to talk about instincts in this context – and we don't need to – I want to redescribe Freud's Death Instinct as a Giving-Up Instinct, as a way of taking giving up more seriously; and that means simply not melodramatising it, not giving it an aura of too much earnest portentousness(like seeing Sisyphus as a comic turn). Giving up, which is somewhere in everybody's repertoire, should be taught in schools. We need to wonder, that is to say, what giving up would look like, would sound like, if suicide was not the paradigm , or the only paradigm, of giving up, and if it was not taken for granted in some quasi-religious sense, that life is essentially worth living. We are torturing people when we force people whose life is torture to go on living.

And so we need to bear in mind Johnson's various defintions of this all too familiar phrase, 'giving up', in his great Dictionary:' To resign;to quit;to yield;to abandon;to deliver'. As a list they are, apart from the word abandon, strikingly unpunishing words from a man who knew so much about what could make life unbearable, and indeed about self-punishment(Johnson defines suicide in the Dictionary as, 'the horrid crime of destroying oneself;self-murder'). It has been surprisingly difficult to de-criminalise giving up, in all its forms.

11

The choice to initiate something was not as meaningful, she said, as the choice to end it. Something beginning can mean anything. Something ending can only be what it has been.

Christine Smallwood, The Life of the Mind

So-called tragic heroes, as I mentioned earlier are, among other things, people who never give up; or rather, people who seem either unable or unwilling to give up. People for whom giving up, seemingly, is not really an option. And it could be said that what they suffer from is precisely the refusal to give up. There is something unrelenting about the way they conduct themselves; something omniscient about the tyranny they inflict. Lear, Othello, Macbeth, Timon – and Hamlet in a different way – cannot be deflected, or significantly dissuaded from their stated aims. Tragedy – when it doesn't, as I say, result in remarkable and sometimes heroic achievements - is what is created by people who refuse to give up. And by the same token

tragedy explores, often by implication, what it is, what it might be at any given moment, to give up. What giving up feels like, and what it might lead to; what, in giving up, it feels like one is doing. It makes us wonder what the catastrophe is that is being averted by not giving up; and for the tragic hero giving up means a change of heart, or changing one's mind. It means giving up on an organising set of beliefs. The tragic hero – like the tyrant he is akin to -- is the extreme version of a person who needs to overly regulate the complexity of their own mind.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that our more common term for giving up is disillusionment, which of course always brings with it the possibility of either reillusionment, or of a greater realism. To be disillusioned, is to allow doubt, is supposedly to see something more clearly, whatever that may feel like, whatever the consequences(a love affair, a revolution, a religious commitment, a choice of job). So at one end of some imaginary spectrum there is giving up as a kind of enlightening disillusionment, which brings with it the possibility, the question of a future; and at the other end of the spectrum there is the terminal disillusionment leading to suicide. Giving up as a transitional state, or as an absolute and determinate ending; giving up as a making sense of an ending, or as a sabotaging of sense-making, and of all future endings. Giving up as the baring of loss, or as the abolition of loss. It is, after all, a question of where we get our ideas, our pictures about giving up

from; or what we imagine giving up to be like. Or of what we can use giving up to do. And this is where tragedy – in this case Shakesperean tragedy – can be instructive. Macbeth, after Hamlet, was the Shakespeare play that most obsessed Freud. And Macbeth is a play about ambition, sleep, and about not giving up.

If, for example – and Macbeth I think points us in this direction - suicide was not our model, our haunting paradigm for giving up, sleep might be. Every night, it could be said, we give up, and go to sleep:give up consciousness, give up thinking, give up vigilance, give up alertness and inertia, give up and give up on, waking life. In the terms of Johnson's dictionary definition, we yield (it could be said that we quit, that we abandon, and that we deliver ourselves over to unconsciousness). So at its most minimal we might think of sleep as the benign, nourishing, restorative version of giving up; as a rather more reassuring, indeed enlivening picture of what it might be to give up, than suicide tends to be. Sleep as the antidote and the clue to a more ample sense of giving up.Macbeth, it is worth remembering in this context, is a man who can't sleep, anymore than he can give up on the project of murdering and usurping Duncan once it is broached. He is notoriously unable to sleep after his murder of Duncan, and unable to give up on his project of becoming king. The two things,of course, going together.

Macbeth, it should be noted at the outset very quickly gets to what we might call Kafka's point:'From a certain point there is no more turning back. That is the point that must be reached'. One of the shocking things about Macbeth is the sheer velocity of his ambitious determination. 'It is in the nature of Macbeth to be swift and utterly single-minded', the critic Michael Long writes, '…readers and spectators of this marvellously compact, powerful play have regularly been struck by the fierce pace it generates'(Long, p.4). As though there must be no time for hesitation or revision or doubt. As though there is a danger that momentum might be lost. A change of heart – or even the possibility of giving up on the usurpation of Duncan must not, cannot be contemplated.

Only in Act 1, scene 7, very early in the play, does Macbeth momentarily broach a turning back : 'We will proceed no further in this business', he says to Lady Macbeth, to which she replies, 'Was the hope drunk/wherein you dressed yourself?Hath it slept since?...Art thou afeard/ to be the same in thine own act and valour/as thou art in desire?'(1.,7,40). There is no consideration here of Macbeth's misgivings, there is only accusation of his cowardice and inconsistency; as if she is saying to Macbeth, why isn't your word your bond, why don't you have the courage of your convictions? Why is your ambition so frail? She humiliates him for his self-doubt, as though second thoughts are signs of weakness. And it should be noted, as it is to be a salient and

significant motif in the play(the word sleep is used more in Macbeth than any other of Shakespeare's plays), that sleep is invoked here, but as a kind of dereliction of duty: Macbeth's hope, his ambition seems to have slept, or like a drunk he has slept it off. There is no suggestion here that by sleeping on their shared decision to murder Duncan that Macbeth might have come to his senses. Self-doubt, and doubting itself has to be attacked – attacked through mockery – to create the conditions in which a change of plan or a giving up("We will proceed no further in this business') are rendered impossible, unimaginable, inconceivable. This is what the critic Wilbur Sanders refers to as 'the compelling energy of defiance' in the play, defiance and its energy being the heart of the matter of not giving up.

It is, of course, when Duncan is asleep that they plan to murder him – 'when Duncan is asleep -/whereto the rather shall his day's journey/soundly invite him'(1.7.60); they have invited him to murder him, sleep will soundly invite him as the natural completion of the day. Sleep offers Duncan a sound invitation, in a play full of horrifying noises, as a way of reminding us that there can be sound invitations, and sound sleep. And in a play full of thresholds and transitions, as many critics have remarked, it is the threshold of sleep, and of falling asleep – something Lady Macbeth cannot do – that is abolished in the play. 'Methought', Macbeth cries out early in the second act of the fateful plot, 'I heard a voice cry,'Sleep no more ! Macbeth doth murder

sleep – the innocent sleep/ sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,/the death of each day's life, sore labour's bath/balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,/chief nourisher in life's feast'(2.2.35). To make the case against the murder of Duncan – and the unnatural, illegitimate transfer and transition of power it entails – Macbeth has to make this wonderfully eloquent defence of sleep, and its restorative powers. Sleep is like a benign mother, something we entrust ourselves to by yielding to it; and if you murder sleep – in this case by murdering your king – you destroy your life-source; it is innocent, it knits up the ravelled sleeve of care, it is a bath, a comfort, and a provider of essential nourishment, 'chief nourisher in life's feast. It is, at the death of each days life – its natural death, not its murder or suicide - what we give in to, what we give ourselves up to. We relinquish the vigilence that is consciousness. Macbeth can now no longer give in to sleep, and Lady Macbeth sleepwalks as an emblem of her condition, on another threshold between sleeping and waking; as the doctor says, it is 'a great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching'(5.1.10); she is, he says, 'troubled with thick-coming fancies/that keep her from her rest'(5.3.40). For the Macbeths escalation sabotages, and insures against, the possibilities of revision; as though it were the most urgent necessity to reach that certain point from which there is no turning back. For the tragic hero – and heroine in this case – that is the point that must be reached, in which choice gives way to apparent or supposed inevitability.

In Macbeth sleep is celebrated and mourned – always returned to as some kind of measure or cure – as that restorative giving up in which consciousness and purpose and ambition are paused, relinquished. Sleep is presented as the natural benign parallel and antidote to the Macbeth's unrelenting determination to never give up, to never give up on what Lady Macbeth calls, in a telling inflection of the word, their 'Hope'. They cannot and will not, as Macbeth puts it, 'sleep in spite of thunder'(4.1.86). In sleep we naturally give up at the death of everyday – give ourselves up to powers and forces and energies beyond our conscious control – to make the birth of the new next day viable. In sleep we hesitate between one day and the next. Tragic heroes and heroines – as Macbeth makes so abundantly clear - are like people trying never to sleep. They are people who cannot interrupt themselves, or be interrupted. They are people who have refused the benefits of giving up, or even of hesitation; refused the balm of sleep.

Tragedies – and Macbeth, through its distinctive sleep-pattern, is the tragedy that most draws our attention to this – are about the inability of their heroes and heroines to give up; they are people for whom giving up feels like giving up everything. They are the people who do not believe, as Richard Ford's hero Frank Bascombe does in his novel The Sportswriter, that when you lose all hope you can always find some more. Not being able to give up, in short, is not to be able to allow for loss, for vulnerability; which, in short, is

not to be able to allow for the passing of time. Giving up means giving up on time as in and of itself a progress myth.

111

I believed in the plot of life, and its assurance that all our actions will be assigned a meaning one way and another, and that things will turn out – no matter how long it takes – for the best…and if nothing else it was what had stopped me from just sitting down in the road and giving up…

Rachel Cusk, Second Place

Giving up requires a sense of an ending; it is knowing, in so far as it is possible, when the business is finished. And a sense of an ending, of course,may not involve a sense of completion. Things can often end before they are finished; there are ruptures and abandonments and failures of nerve, loose ends that more or less haunt us. Plenty Coups, 'the last great chief of the Crow nation', the native American Indian tribe, told Frank B Lindeman, a local hunter and trapper, that after the Crow were confined to the reservation, and the buffalo they depended on, were decimated – along with the lives of other Native American Indians, with whom the Crow fought - the life of the tribe effectively came to an end. Their lives were ruptured. 'I have not told you of what happened when I was young', Plenty Coup told Lindeman,

‘ “I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere”’(Lear,p.2)

After this nothing happened. It is actually very difficult to begin to imagine this experience. Prior to this the Crow lived in a land they understood to be given them by God; once this was taken away by the white men there was effectively nothing they could do but give up on their lives. Everything their lives depended on – the preconditions for their way of living – was destroyed. Just as people tend not to be mad but to be driven mad, people tend not to give up but to be forced into giving up. It is this, one might say, that the tragic hero resists, and at great cost. The Crow indians, overpowered and outnumbered as they were by the white colonists, could neither resist nor, as American pragmatists might, could they redescribe their predicament in a way that could produce hope out of defeat. ‘Battle’, the psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear writes in his remarkable book about the Crow, Radical Hope, had been a means for protecting their way of life, first from other tribes and then from the white men. Before battle the Crow would do what they called the Sun Dance,’the Sun Dance being a prayer for revenge, was naturally saturated with military episodes’. ‘What is one to do with the Sun Dance’, Lear asks,

‘when it is no longer possible to fight?Roughly speaking, a culture faced with this kind of devastation has three choices:

1.Keep dancing even though the point of the dance has been lost.The ritual continues though no one can any longer say what the dance is for.

2.Invent a new aim for the dance. The dance continues, but now its purpose is, for example, to facilitate good negotiations with whites. Usher good weather for farming,or restore health to a sick relative.

3.Give up the dance.This is an implicit recognition that there is no longer any point in dancing the Sun Dance’(Lear, p.36)

The Crow in fact gave up their Sun Dance around 1875, about a decade after they were moved into their reservation. ‘One needs to recognise the destruction’, Lear writes more hopefully,’if one is to move beyond it. In the abstract there is no answer to the question:Is the Sun Dance the maintenance of a sacred tradition or is it a nostalgic evasion – a step or two away from a Disneyland imitation of “the Indian’ ?(P.152). We need to consider here briefly, as Lear begins to do, what the options were, and what not giving up would have entailed, and the options seems stark – mourning the Sun Dance(what Lear calls, as a psychoanalyst, recognising the destruction in order to move beyond it); or simply maintaining a sacred tradition – keeping a sacred history alive – even though the dance has lost its all too practical and

sacred function, and therefore runs the risk of degenerating into the self-parody that is nostalgia. A ritual ends when a world is lost. So why not give it up? If this was a quantitive question, which it is not, we might ask, how much can we bare to lose, or give up ? What is giving up like doing such that we seek ways round it, as though giving up itself is experienced as some kind of evasion. Or, more simply, how can giving up be redescribed, and with a view to what exactly ? There is pragmatism – redesription in the service of an appealing or at least viable future; or mourning – a felt relinquishing of the past in the hope of more life emerging. Pragmatism or mourning ?

Giving up as a version, a foreshadowing, an emblem of suicide; or giving up as going to sleep at the end of the day. The Crow did not, at least literally, kill themselves, and they cannot sleep off their predicament, nor, it seems, wholly renew themselves by revising the Sun Dance. They seem to be – at least in Lear's account - in a kind of suspended animation of submission, of defeatedness. Or to put it another way, the other way round, we should never underestimate the violent consequences of giving up; and of not wanting to know when to give up. Consequences, perhaps, in a far distant future.