

In the Throe of Wonder

What is wonder? According to Dr. Miller, wonder is “the point of departure par excellence, the beginning that is prior to and in that sense has priority over every other starting point.” It acts as “the hinge between ignorance and knowledge, between oblivion and insight, and perhaps for that reason the hinge between every past and future.” Or to put it in my own terms, it is the **point of no return**. To wonder is not the same **as thinking or to be in thought**. Wondering, in its radical sense, is to be magnetically pulled by the unknown. To be in its throe is to be in a state of devastating-joy or being in-love as Dr. Miller puts it. It is this experience of which a rupture which opens us towards the sacred. The sacred is that radiating center in which being is made accessible **and possible**.

There is never a time that being in-love does not strike first with a shock. It never knocks on your door or ring your doorbell or call you that it’s coming over to visit. It always strikes unexpectedly and turns your world, not upside-down, but inside-out. It strikes that mystifying longing in your deepest self and shatters your world as you new before. This rupture to fall in-love can probably be best described from the movie Titanic. When Rose jumped out of that lifeboat and back on to that sinking ship where her beloved, Jack, was handcuffed on the railing and left to die, is what I think Miller meant by the rupture of wonder. Rose did not weigh out the pros and cons of whether she should save her beloved, she doesn’t even know where he is in that boat, but she jumped and never in any moment did it seemed that she second guess her decision. At this moment of rupture, her future, her wealth, her duties that had ruled her world and perhaps, as it was then, what had constituted her being no longer mattered. It was as if these elements in her universe of being no longer existed.

Miller described **the turning itself, which is that after which rupture strikes, as the toward-which to the sacred**. This turning is characterized at face value as **horrifying, emotionally conflicting, and, from the spectator’s point-of-view,**

Comment [DP1]: Every point is a point of no return from the standpoint of temporality, right? It’s just that cleaving to the “ordinary” and the myth of the given, allows us to ignore this.

Comment [DP2]: What is this and what makes it possible?

Comment [DP3]: Being is made accessible , but not made possible by this... As Miller will say in the later chapters, the ultimate Other that makes possible the rupture of temporality and the experience we call wonder, is being itself. This is controversial, but it is Miller’s take. There are some thinkers, such as Marion, who say this is God beyond or without being.

Comment [DP4]: The turning is the rupture that opens us to the sacred other

absolutely terrifying. This condition is conveyed on Rose's expression as she hurriedly ran towards the sinking end of the Titanic in search of Jack. She desperately ran through the flooded halls yelling out his name, cold, shivering, and horrified, but not afraid. Despite her fear, she was courageous. This is exemplified at the moment that both she and Jack was at the edge of the sinking ship in which death is a few feet away. On that few seconds of being succumb by the icy waters, she looked calmly at her surroundings then softly tells Jack, "This is where we met." How it can be that in the face death, it is that what comes to her mind? And the answer to that is she is with Jack and he is the core of her universe. Jack, in this case, represents the Sacred. And to be with the Sacred means that nothing else matters, not even Death itself because dying is where we feel the most alive. The felt-sense of dying is true testament that things matter to us and it is only in that condition where we can possibly feel alive. Dying, itself, is the experience of devastating-joy.

Comment [DP6]: Minor issue, but this is contradictory. Avoid.

The Sacred in the ordinary sense is often associated with ideology or concept of God. In Miller's book, he described the Sacred as the Ultimate Other. It is that which presence can never possess and therefore it is the "Other". "To take sacred in its otherness from the profane seriously means precisely to recognize that it, and not the present-at-hand, is constitutive of [our] being." To Rose, Jack is Sacred. He is the core in her world, or the center in which all worlds in her universe are oriented. He is what constitutes her being.

Comment [DP7]: I get your point, but be careful to keep biological death, which she and Jack are facing here, with the actual and only sense in which we experience death, and that is the death of our meaning/world which is what you are really discussing here. ALSO: be careful to distinguish fear/terror, which is instinctive and meaning is suspended when this is most intense, from horror which is completely opposite where meaning is most vivid, where we are most alive. These two can occur in rapid succession, of course.

Comment [DP8]: Key and central insight of Miller.

Being is the sense of our presence. It is the abstraction we use to contain what is to be "I". I am a girl. I am a student. I was a Senior Financial Analyst. I am the daughter of my parents. I swim. All of which relates to what it is to be "I". But as Miller suggest, these statements are [based on and projections of] a myth of the given. To say "I" means to exist or to be present. But how could you exist without the sense of the sacred since it is through the sacred through which all things matters? Miller suggests that our sense of being is wholly connected to the sacred, and it is being caught in the throe of wonder and inquiry where we can ever have access to the sacred. If we are explorers caught in the throe of inquiry, the sacred is not the final destination but it is what moves us toward itself and a felt-sense of which we can never fully arrive or fulfill. With Rose, Jack is sacred, but it is not just a

Comment [DP9]: That is her experience and orientation. However, since Jack is actually himself constituted by temporality and the otherness of being, he is not the sacred, not being, but Rose experiences an intimation of the sacred through her love of Jack. But that love of Jack is mutable, can be lost, as Jack himself can be lost to her either in his no longer being a center or in his not being present to her either because he dies or because he no longer loves her. This is why Miller says love of the Absolute Other is the ultimate immutable love that cannot be lost. The absolute other or being is not derivative, is not subject to nothingness.

Comment [DP10]: Being is the source of our being, our sense of presence. Our felt sense can be that we ourselves are being, before we encounter our own nothingness as an intimation in horror or in a direct encounter in anguish.

Comment [DP11]: And anything that exists or is present could not-be, so is not an undeconstructible self.

person or the body. People die and Jack did, but his memory and the love that she felt has transformed her every being. No longer was she just moving mindless through the course of her aristocratic life. Seen through various photographs shows her adventurers and people she loved after Jack, and yet Jack is still alive in her memory and held sacred. With Jack's death, she could easily have recoiled and went back to the life she knew. Her former fiancée would have taken her back and she could have lived the life that the world set out for her. But that realization of her love for Jack transformed her. She realized that **she was nothing and loving Jack was everything.** And to be nothing, is to be vulnerable to everything because there is nothing you can control precisely because you are nothing.

This realization of nothingness of which our vulnerability stems from is the inevitable truth to our nature of being. Rose realized this nothingness when she was eventually saved, standing on the working class side of the ship seemingly lost in thought and broken by **anguish and destitute.** Her world was shattered when she **met Jack,** and shattered again **when Jack died.** But it was the rupture she experienced from Jack that transformed her forever. When the ship worker came to take her name, she, at a moment of insight, gave her name with Jack's last name – a new name, a wholly new identity and therefore, a whole new world, a world she would never have thought existed or possible prior to that moment. "If nothingness," Miller writes "is the final reality, this is the time to find it out and to be faithful in that way to what we have loved, if that is the only fidelity left us. Our hearts have never truly belonged to the world we ordinarily live in. They belong to another universe, which becomes **real in our ultimate moments.**" Nothingness became real to Rose at the moment she lost everything that is Jack.

We all want to fall-in love and therefore it means to be in a condition to be open to it. We cannot expect to find someone if we do not leave our room. We cannot meet other people to fall-in love with if there is no access to where people are. In the case of being in the throes of wonder, **the problem lies in our treatment of rupture.** Once we are ruptured, we have a natural tendency to revert back to ordinary and resist the possibility of the unknown. We close ourselves off from possibilities of the unknown. We sink back to practicality and either ignore and

Comment [DP12]: Loving is everything. Loving Jack is a finite manifestation of the vulnerability we are when it is oriented to a center of meaningfulness that itself is finite. What happens when this other is not finite, is eternity rupturing time in time, the rupture that gives rise to temporality and therefore any meaning at all? What is the source of vulnerability itself and to what is all love oriented? What is the toward-which of all loving, longing, yearning, desire for fulfillment that allows us to fall in love to begin with? Pickard: Absolute Mystery that can be known only as the unknown... with no judgment beyond this. Miller: The Absolute other that can be known as the absolute and unknown other but can be judged to be God. What is the relation and attitude to this Mystery or God and why? Why is it deep humility and reverence and even worship? What must we suffer to realize this? What must we have completely ruptured and given up?

Comment [DP13]: All meaning comes to an end. One is completely emptied out and left only with the experience from which awe and new vitality, new meaning can emerge. But the old world is no more.

Comment [DP14]: Wonder, new worlding, deconstruction of the old world and self

Comment [DP15]: Horror to anguish, deconstruction of her world. How would it be possible then for her to now open to the sacred, not just Jack as sacred. What realization is necessary out of nothingness and such deconstruction of the self? What new attitude emerges or can emerge if she really gives Jack and that world up understands that she possesses and controls nothing, is nothing, that her being is a gift that she is completely unworthy of?

Comment [DP16]: What is this capacity for something to mean the world to us where we are most alive? What does it open us to if we get to the point that we are no longer absorbed in the object of our love after its loss and confrontation with our nothingness? Rather than just a meaningful radiating center that means everything, you need to address the even deeper and more central issue of the illusion of an undeconstructible self that makes such a radiating center possible. What happens when that self that mistakenly is taken as being itself gets deconstructed by the experience of anguish? The will to be an undeconstructible self underlies and sustains the entire metaphysics of presence which is no longer sustainable once the self has this confrontation with its own illusions through the experience of horror and anguish.

simply go back to how things were before or view the rupture as an ordinary event in one's ordinary world. This would be the case if Rose decided to go back to her old life after she lost Jack. She would have just thought of him as someone that showed her a good time. But instead her experience with Jack made her realize that the life she had before did not matter and was not close to what her heart truly desired. And she did, what Miller suggest, is open herself up to the unknown and allow herself to be constantly ruptured by it. To open means to allow your self to experience new worlds and be ruptured by it.

It is important that we remain vulnerable because it is the only way where we could feel alive. It is the only way that rupture is possible can be felt. To not be vulnerable is almost as if locking oneself in your room and never going out. You would never know how it feels like to be under sun and feel the wind blow through your hair. We can never know truly what lies ahead; not in terms of being ahead of us, per se, but it is that which surrounds us and drives us to want to know, and nothing in the given can ever provide that because it is precisely from that 'other' where it originates. This not knowing condition is why suffer. We are so driven as natural inquisitors to know that which is unknown because knowing that something is unknown makes us vulnerable. We attempt to control this and believed the ultimate truth is found in what is present-at-hand like science for example. This then becomes an act of escape and denial of the true nature of our nothingness and vulnerability. We are like a dog chasing its own tail but can never get to it. If to be vulnerable is to be alive as I stated before, then there are only two options that we have – it is either to live or to die. To die is death, whereas to live is dying.

When the movie the Titanic came out, it was a worldwide hit. People from young and old have watched it at least more than once. The fact that the movie is a phenomenon in itself only testifies that all of us wants to be in-love and are capable of falling in-love. We can all sense what real dying means. How can you not? If one does not, then no story, no music, nothing can touch you and therefore, you must be dead. As to be touched by anything, or in Miller's terms, to be capable of rupture, is precisely what it means to be human. At the very end, the ultimate truth is that we

Comment [DP17]: Why do we do this?

Comment [DP18]: So where would this lead... beyond Jack, since Jack is not being? Is it possible to live completely in love with the source of one's own vulnerability which would not exclude Jack or anything else, but would no longer make Jack exclusively the center.

Comment [DP19]: Right. Your vulnerability is your core, is what makes everything possible in any meaningful world. You can either guard it and try to protect it out of which all fear and horror arises, or you can follow it to its source that at it most complete is to live in a state of awe, the most vital condition but the closest thing to not being a self, while still existing. This is the identity of Nirvana and Samsara in Buddhism or in Christianity, living in a state of ecstatic love of Christ where that love is oriented to the world. It is the condition in which we truly "judge not" and are so open that all "harm" passes through us. Death of our world is no longer possible, since we are completely oriented to a non finite center or meaning which we then radiate back into the so-called ordinary world where the ordinary motivations are still present to us but have no pull, we are *in* the world, but not *of* the world (meaning the ordinary desire driven "objective" world of the given). We do not want to give up the ordinary world even when we believe there is such a liberated state of being in which our love is no longer "disordered" as Augustine says.

Comment [DP20]: Science CAN be used as a way to try to control and hold on to the ordinary, the myth of the given. But it can also be liberating, break us free of dogmas, as long as we understand the limits of science, understand it as growing out of something far more central (vulnerability, meaning, interpretation) and do not get stuck in the dogma of scientism. It depends on the orientation and beliefs about science that one has. Science is science. Scientism is a poor reductive, control oriented, naive attempt at a philosophy of salvation. Nothing is going to save us from what we fundamentally are: our vulnerability. Not science, not religion, not common sense. Any attempt to do so, is an escapism that leads to dogma and/or self-deception about our vulnerability, all stems from deep insecurity, from a desire for security and control that closes off inquiry, only lets it go where we feel comfortable and safe enough.

Comment [DP21]: Need to clarify this. Does not work as you have stated it.

Comment [DP22]: State clearly what this is as opposed to biological death and as opposed to the death of merely living in the ordinary.

Comment [DP23]: What does non "gain" by such death? Why are we so prone to live like this?

are really nothing, and therefore, our being, or that which is makes us know we are alive, is only accessible from our ability to love, and without it, we are truly dead.

Comment [DP24]: In your next exam there will be an essay where you will have a chance to show how Miller reasons his way to this insight.

Comment [DP25]: Yes!

COMMENTS: Since this essay does not emphasize showing the reasoning steps Miller follows to arrive at the conclusion that we are nothing, that in turn, he uses to then show the necessity of a constituting Absolute Other, you have responded to the question reasonably well, and your use of the example of the movie works (though in some cases you expose some lack of understanding of Miller and that there are important issues you have yet to grasp). You did need to say a bit more about the throe of inquiry, the problem of truth, and why truth is something we cannot possess, but can only pursue. You do imply an answer in places, but the question asks you to state it. You could also have said more on the issue of our avoidances, though you do address it.

GRADE: A-