**Abstract**

The following dissertation is a textual comparative research which focuses on structures and figures of getting-lost. The thesis that was presented in this study seeks to challenge the commonplace perception of Western literature, which praises the sovereign subject – that which knows his way to his destination, and especially the way of return. Instead, it seeks to show that the course of return reveals moments of terror, remorse, amputations and withdrawal, which are not just arbitrary or unlucky incidents but a valid part of the construction of the subject and the narrative. Even on the journey of Odysseus – the paradigm of the modern subject as a sailor that knows his way home – there are hidden elements of loss, confusion and dissolution, which are inherent to his voyage. These are not merely unnecessary 'surplus' storylines, but rather elements which indicate that the maturation process of subject depends on those bypasses and shifts, that have both psychological and literary logic.

I have tried to argue that the subjective structure is dependent on procedures of getting-lost and reinstatement of the subject's sovereignty, which is realized in varying degrees: there are those who fail to return, there are those who return incorrectly, and there are those who return only partially. In any case, even in the most solid and stable subjectivity, remains evidence of getting-lost. The criticism of the subject through the thesis of *getting-lost* is productive in literary research exactly because Literature bears witness to the moments of loss that are inherent to the major course of return. In my analysis, I have pulled these moments out of their context in order to highlight them and expose their internal logic. I have shown this through readings of mythological texts such as the biblical myth of creation, Dante’s **Devine comedy** or the Greek myth of Ariadna's thread; in fairytales such as Rabbi Nachman’s *“Lost Princess”* or Grimm Brothers’ *“Hansel and Gretel”*; in theoretical writings like Freud's and Winnicott's; in Film and in Literature.

The concept of *getting-lost* marks a radical loss of orientation; a catastrophic disruption of the relationship between the subject and his spatial, human and symbolic environment. The term suggests a major epistemic crisis regarding the subject's ability to know his location, the way to his destination or back to his base. Getting-lost thus undermines a central narrative-pattern of Western literature – namely, the narrative of the subject that, through the process of his maturation, finds his way back home from his journey and makes a dwelling place for himself.

In common discourse, *getting-lost* is a ‘total’ signifier, which binds together a long list of signifiers associated with mental or existential states. It is an elastic concept (open, productive, multi-valued), that has extensive usage in literature and theory. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the term from other forms of non-presence, lack of attention, confusion, anxiety, abandonment, loneliness or despair. Moreover, it is essential to distinguish it from practices such as vagrancy, wandering, exile, asceticism, detachment and exclusion. With that in mind, I had drawn some lines for defining the concept and its environment. In due course the concept was also defined within the framework of psychoanalytic thought, and in the context of literature and film.

The motif of getting-lost is present in some of the foundational stories of civilization, and in the subject's private mythology. It reveals the ways in which mental states influence the poetics of the text; namely, it shows the poetic transformation in registers of consciousness and language, that can be observed in states of collapse and disappearance caused by getting-lost. We have examined the ways in which these states bear witness to threatened (*Unheimlich*) subjectivity on the one hand, and on the other hand, the ways in which the subject is constructed out of the rupture which occurs when he gets lost.

From the study of psychoanalytic literature and selected literary readings, we have tried to ask 'what is the reading of getting-lost?', or – 'what is the reading of Loss?'. Namely – is there hyperbolic usage of motifs of loss? Do the sentences get cut abruptly? Do they collapse or rather linger indefinitely? I have argued for the existence of a defining moment, which resonates in the writing of getting-lost, in which one stands in a world without coordinates or direction, and fails in his attempts to regain orientations. This moment of being lost is both productive and destructive: the subject disintegrates and then 'returns to himself', but getting-lost is not merely a ‘phase’ that the subject needs to traverse, but rather an independent mechanism that the subject cannot resolve or get rid of. It is a fundamental experience, a ‘stance' that builds the subject and at the same time persists in breaking it down. The initial experience becomes a conceptual pattern for future experiences – it shapes the way in which we experience our world. I have therefore tried to point out the independent logos of this process, which reveals an alternative formation of the subject. This discussion is very productive to the routes we call 'life' and it reflects on the horizon of thought about the human condition. The question of getting-lost thus involves an acute question about the fate of the subject, whose being-in-the-word is always already dependent on the continuity and inertia of the experience of loss.

In the first chapter of this research I have observed the mythical narrative-code of the getting-lost story. This code consists of two acts – *lost* and *found* – and it enfolds other narrative-codes such as departure and return, disappearing and re-appearing, falling-asleep and waking-up, being-hidden and being-found, disintegration and defragmentation, and more. This dialectical pattern enables the subject's transfiguration through cycles of departures and returns. The lost one comes back from his loss seemingly stronger and more developed, after he had found his authentic self and his proper place in the symbolic order.

The first chapter presented a series of readings in formative world-literature texts that touch the experience of getting-lost. I discussed the ways in which these texts dismantle the classic narrative structure – that of setting for a journey, getting lost, and successfully returning to the Father. The story of Hagar and Ishmael losing their way in the desert, with which I opened this work, presented an alternative scenario that undermines the narrative-code of ‘lost-and-found’: in this story, the act of leaving home and getting-lost in the wilderness does not achieve resolution in a complementary act of a joyful return. Similarly, each of the texts I discussed later in the first chapter undermines the possibility of returning; they bear witness to 'another' story, encoded in the prominent narrative-line that tells the story of the successful return course – that is, bears witness to the story of the failed return and of the non-recoverable loss, that are encapsulated in the successful-return story.

The readings that were presented in this chapter indicated that the anecdote of getting-lost is a scar in the narrative’s tissue, evident to the artificial patching-together of the torn narrative-thread. The interpretive approach that I adopted suspended the belief in the possibility of the successful return. It helped to remove the artificial narrative-prosthetic and observe the cracks in the pattern. The analysis of the tale *"Hansel and Gretel"* (Grimm Brothers, 1857) stressed that the return episode is foreign to the narrative; it appears as *deus-ex-machina*, a synthetic patch covering a deep split in the narrative. In the tale of *“The Lost Princess”* (Rabi Nachman of Breslov, 1816), the event of return appears arbitrary: even though it is reported laconically to the readers, it is not actually shown to them (*"[and how he got her out – that he never told] but finally he got her out"*). The return remains therefore to be a missing limb; the narrative remains severed and unresolved; the loss remains lost. This kind of 'amputated' narrative-format appears again in Rabbi Nachman's tale of *"The Seven Beggars"* (ibid): the story of the seventh beggar is left untold and so the tale remains an unsolved riddle. Even local cases of loss in this tale are left unresolved: the lost faith of the king's son does not return to him, and the two lost children do not return home but rather devote themselves to the wandering beggars.

In the last section of this chapter I examined Freud's autobiographical story from his well-known essay on *"The Uncanny"* (1919). In this essay, the return itself becomes distorted, treacherous, repeated incessantly. The linear route of the journey gets trapped into a closed circle, and the act of return becomes horrific. The analysis of Freud's text has helped clear the distinction between return (*Wiederkehr*), repetition (*Wiederholung*), and forced-return (*Wiederholungszwang*). There is the happy return to the mother's bosom; There is the terrifying forced return to the same place, or the repetition of the same; and there is the comic-grotesque or pervert repetition, which neutralizes the traumatic signifier. In Freud's text, the act of return is distorted by mechanic repetition, and thus becomes haunted and full of terror.

Over the course of this research I have reviewed certain moments in psychoanalytic theory that have dealt with the same question which I isolated: the question of the experience of loss, which is inherent in the structuring of the subject. The discussion regarding the psychoanalytic texts indicated that the particular register that we detected in stories of getting-lost that were presented in the previous chapter is supported by psychological logic: this register is not the place from which the subject is produced – it is the place in which the subject disperses and disintegrates. However, these processes of dissolution and disintegration are inherent the procedure of subjectivation and are essential to it: the subject is constructed ('finds itself') by way of getting-lost.

In the second chapter I have proposed a literary reading of a psychoanalytic text by Donald Winnicott – *"The Capacity to be Alone"* (1958) – which discusses the process of the formation of subjectivity. Winnicott's thesis points to an archaic moment in which the infant is lost in a scattered motion without direction or purpose, and only through this that he succeeds in 'finding himself' as a separate and independent being. In my analysis, I have tried to explore Winnicott's rhetoric when he writes about an experience which, in my opinion, is similar to the experience of getting-lost, and the ways in which the language he employs inserts these events of loss and disintegration into the text. This way I tried to mark a unique phenomenological register of being-lost, which appears in reflection and thought processes, in writing, and in theoretical practice.

The metaphor of getting-lost in Winnicott writing is used in some cases to mark a certain *movement* (diffused, wandering, searching) and in other cases to mark a *place* (the paradoxical intermediate space) or a *state* (relaxation, playing). All these concepts point to a space in which consciousness is suspended, wanders randomly, plays with dismantling, assembly, conversion and formation – which enables exploration and self-discovery. Winnicott distinguishes between 'positive' and 'negative' acts of dispersal: the first is called *unintegration* – it is loose, non-targeted, free and enriching movement, made possible only in proper environmental conditions, in which another person is present in order to maintain that the dispersion would be limited, that it will not deepen beyond tolerable, and that a place to return to will be available at all times. However, Winnicott warns that this process is prone to a catastrophic breakdown – he calls this second kind of dispersion *disintegration*, which is the traumatic configuration of *unintegration*. The term points to a catastrophic breakup, annihilating the subject and creating a rapture in his very sense of continuity.

I have used Winnicott's distinction to mark the difference between getting-lost (that is equivalent to the traumatic disintegration), and acts of wandering, daydreaming, reverie, or free-association (all belonging to the family of non-integrative phenomena). In this sense, disintegration is an experience of getting-lost that does not lead to 'finding' one's true-self, but rather to the formation of a false personality-structure. From these two alternatives in Winnicott's theory emerge two types of pathologies, that can be formulated as two modes of disruption of the narrative code that was presented in the first chapter: the first occurs when the subject lacks the conditions that will *allow* him to get-lost, and the second occurs when he is lost so severely that he can no longer return.

According to Winnicott, the subject is constructed through this back and forth movement between integration and unintegration: the unintegrated position is the subject's 'ground zero', and it is a *place* (to be precise: a *procedure* of dispersal and re-formation) he returns to in situations where he is able to drift and disperse. However, in cases where the subject's environmental support collapses, he stagnates and is unable to regain that wandering movement that is so crucial to the process of finding his 'true self'. Or alternatively, it breaks down and becomes disconnected, 'lost' to himself in the sense that parts of his self dissociate and become absent from his experience. Winnicott complicates this story even more: he argues that the disastrous disintegration is not actually experienced by the subject, but rather covered by psychotic defense mechanisms, and therefore it remains an unlived experience. Only through psychoanalytic treatment, when the patient can experience the breakdown that occurred to him but was not experienced at the time, only then, when his self encompasses those parts that where detached and hidden, can he become 'himself' for the first time. He returns home, to a place he has never visited before. This fundamental process is also evident in literary examples: only after the protagonist has left his place and gained substantial life experience through his encounters with others, can he become what he never was before – an 'I'.

The analysis of Winnicott's *"The Capacity to be Alone"* has shown that getting-lost is an imperative developmental phase, but – it is not merely a stage that the individual needs to advance, but a constant cycle in the subject's life; a recurring process of disintegration and re-integration of the subject (I had referred to Masood Khan, who examined the implications of Winnicott's theory in adulthood). This cycle causes constant panic in the construction process of the subject, as the subject, in a sense, is always 'there' – gets lost and then returns. My analysis of Winnicott's paper sought to emphasize this uncanny intensity inherent to these processes of personalization: the restless feeling of a coming disaster, the fear of loneliness, of abandonment, and of disintegration.

The third chapter focused on a psycho-linguistic reading of **Jerry** (Van Sant, 2002), a film that presents a case of getting-lost that is not followed by homecoming or correction. **Jerry** tells the story of a journey whose destination is arbitrary and meaningless from the start. It therefore strives under the well-known narrative-code regarding a protagonist that searches for his way, gains experiences and matures through the long journey back home. The objective of the journey described in the film is nothingness, emptiness and disappearance. Getting-lost is presented in the film literally as a walk-to-oblivion – a journey that arrives at its destination only at absolute loss, namely, at death. Unlike the familiar pattern of the initiation-story, this journey does not 'write' its subjects but rather deletes them.

The chapter discussed the ways in which the scenario of getting-lost is presented in a phenomenological manner, that is, as a phenomenon, an occurrence, as a thing in-itself which bears witness to an essential lack in the subject and the text. The importance of this film to this research is in the way it prolongs the fragmented state of being-lost, which enabled the examination of affective states that emerge from a loss that is extended beyond bearable limits. In the case shown in the film, the malfunction that occurred in the operation of the getting-lost-story is a loss of the signifier of *difference*, which leads to a breakdown of the possibility of Reading, and of the possibility of making the experience of the journey meaningful. Following the loss, both the subjectivity of the characters and narrative itself collapse. The film becomes monotonous and disenables any possibility of an occurrence of a real Event in the story-line.

The analysis of the film focused on the concept of *articulation*, which is common to the subject's existence in space and to its existence in language, and points to similarities between the conditions of possibility of geographical orientation and the conditions of language. Getting-lost was therefore reviewed as a case of disintegration of language or an expulsion from the symbolic Order. Hence, the analysis focused on examination of modes of representation of pre-linguistic and pre-subjective space: the autistic language-lacking bodily-experience, the silence, the empty spatiality of the wilderness, and the sound of marching feet walking on their own with no conscious direction.

In this linguistic context, I have pointed to two possible ways of getting-lost: the first occurs when a key signifier is lost – one that used to tie together the signifiers to a chain that carries meaning (a Master-signifier that gives the chain of signifiers a starting point, against which the remaining signifiers get their meaning). Losing the Master-signifier cancels the possibility of orientation because without it the subject cannot connect the surrounding geographical signifiers into a coherent and meaningful world view. The second scenario of getting-lost occurs when the ability to establish distinctions and differences between the signifiers themselves is lost. In this state, the subject is confronted with a world that cannot be articulated. The impossibility to define the signifier and separate it from the other signifiers leads to a loss of indexical function of the signifier: it is doubled or split from itself in a way that disables the possibility of signification, and subsequently all meaningful discourse is lost. The drama of the lost subject can thus be understood as the drama of the signifier, since the individual becomes a subject by his ability to signify. When the signifier is lost, the possibility of the signified is lost too; the symbolic network collapses and with it, it’s object – the subject.

The decline of subjectivity that characterizes the state of being-lost arises (among other things) because what is lost is the signifier of *difference*. This loss impairs the subject's ability to establish a difference from itself, which is crucial for the construction of the subjective space: the subject must be separated and alienated from itself in order to render possible the conditions of reflexivity, that are essential for the establishment of subjectivity. This insight has been pointed out also in the fourth chapter, in Winnicott’s discussion of the separation of the infant and the mother: according to Winnicott, this process becomes a template structure of the relationship between the 'self' (me) and the 'I', by which subjectivity is forms.

I had discussed the ways in which the poetics of the film refuse to fulfill their function of providing sense or meaning, and instead construct a crude lingual space that is unmarked and undifferentiated, which provides the reader/viewer with no point of reference for orientation and no clear route for interpretation. The implications of the noted poetics were exemplified using Wilfred Bion's psychoanalytic theory, which points to another variation of disruption in the 'lost-and-found' narrative, other than the two types presented by Winnicott: it is articulated paradoxically as a situation in which both the possibility of orientation and the possibility of getting-lost are blocked.

In the fourth chapter, we have discussed the game of hide-and-seek, which reveals the pleasure inherent to the operation of the repeated scenario of being-lost and prevailing. I had referred to the section in Freud's essay *"Beyond the Pleasure Principle"* (1920), which depicted a child's game of distancing and drawing-near. The game revolves around a gesture of scattering and gathering, disappearing and re-appearing, that Freud interpreted as a dramatization of a game of losing one's mother or one's self. The game of *fort-da* – like other variations of 'hide-and-seek' games, that are characterized by disappearance and appearance, separation and reunification, communications and disconnection – allows the child to process dependency, attachment and ratification of the self, and also separation, loss and grief, through which he learns to be himself and to live on his own. The chapter attempted to offer an 'Ishmaelite' interpretation of the *fort-da* game: it examined what happens when the departure-return pattern is disturbed or stuck – when the game of hide-and-seek gets out of hand, namely, when the mother that have gone missing returns too late or does not return at all.

Freud's famous interpretation of the spool-game scene stressed two distinct gestures: the first represented by an act of pulling the cord and retrieving the coil. In this gesture the child symbolically makes the absent mother return to him. The second gesture is represented by an act of scattering or dispersion of the object, which signifies a collapse of subjectivity. Freud's essay links together the pattern of disintegration and re-integration and the pattern of disappearance and re-appearance (absence and presence). Freud's subject is constructed as vanishing and appearing – a construction copied from the template of the disappearing-reappearing body of the mother. The game of *fort-da* demonstrates how the subject is constructed as a copy of its disappearing objects (the absent body of the mother, from which the boy deduces his own body), and how the pattern of his being-in-space is shaped as such always already in relation to his absence. The game should be understood, therefore, as a need of the baby, in the process of his becoming a subject, to project his disappearance (anxiety of death, experience of absence, lack of cohesion) onto the Other, as a projection of what he lacks, and simultaneously – as a remorseful process of constructing the self out of the experience of an absence of a significant other.

The game tells the drama of the construction of the subject through the game of disappearance and return. The playing child inscribes a series of differences to his surroundings, he begins to use signs, and through that he is introduced to language and becomes a subject that has the ability to give names. In my analysis, I tried to point to a radical register that exists in the game, that revolves around an experience of a loss that was not reinstated. In this case, the experience of loss turns the lost subject itself into an object, like that piece of wood in Freud's game, that gets tossed-away over and over again. When the mother does not return to the infant, or when her return is delayed for too long, the infant’s very sense of reality disintegrates: recognition capability is weakened to the point of loss of consciousness, and disorientation is one of the expressions of this state. Getting-lost thus creates a situation in which subjectivity is suspended and the individual enters a phase of being-object. We have mentioned, in this context, the connection between passivity, suffering, and endurance of the prolonged temporally of the state of loss. In the non-reflective state, there is no feeling of self; the individual gets transported passively by footsteps that seems to have been disconnected from the self that directed them. The passivity that characterizes this stage of being-lost is an expression of a decline of subjectivity itself, which takes place because the external loss is experienced phenomenologically as a loss of the self (as seen in Freud's essay: when the boy's mother disappears, he experiences his own disappearance as well).

The encounter with the absence of the Other is an essential element in the construction of the subject's inner world. The little boy who loses his parents is usually found after several minutes, and yet it seems that the registration of the experience of being-lost is not deleted. The intimate relations with Absence, articulated in those moments of lostness, is something that the child can continue to cultivate in secret. However, unlike Freud's *Fort-da* scene, in which the child could already play with his absence, my analysis sought to mark a moment in which the game is blocked and his operations are suspended. In that case, the child is pulled into the absence, becomes enslaved to it, becomes absent himself. The self is forced to complete the lack, and thereby turns into loss itself. Absence is then internalized and becomes an unconscious internal presence that attacks and annihilates any 'live' expression or existence; the nothingness becomes a death-force that dominates one's mind from within. As noted, the absence is something that should have been present but went missing (was lost). When the subject encounters an absence in a place where there should have been known identification and orientation marks, he is utterly lost: he loses his very existence as a subject.

The cases of loss-and-restitution that unfold in Freud's essay expose a radical subversive return-movement; one that repeats itself mechanically and does not allow the dialectic solution. This repetitious return keeps *repeating* itself instead of *coming back* to its proper place. We have encountered this repetitious movement in the first chapter, in the case of the 'stuck' narrative, which does not evolve but only revolve without change. This type of return eliminates the very possibility of returning; it neutralizes both the subject that was lost and his story. However, this movement reveals and realizes the primal destructive rhythm that beats in the back of the constructive processes of language and subjectivity.

Freud's essay introduced several instances in which the procedure of loss-and-restitution is operated successfully. The event of getting-lost appears in these cases as an embodiment of the dialectical movement that evolves historically and validates the subject. However, our analysis highlighted an additional movement that the text holds – a force that is opposed to the figurative repetition – a non-dialectic serial movement that cannot be deciphered in the figurative terms of the major Return stories. It is the Penelopian repetitious gesture that is utterly disconnected from Odysseus's homecoming. Unlike the cases of losing the mother or the self, which can easily be harnessed by the dialectics of self-reconstitution, the serial-return embodies something that is neither lost nor found. The subject does not lose himself and does not find himself again; instead he becomes an anonymous performer of a monotonous repetition that neutralizes subjectivity. The stories of loss-and-return in Freud’s essay were therefore interpreted as an expression of the endeavor to put a halt to the automatic return, to stabilize and harness it for the benefit of the proper dialectic return, to escape from the monotonous repetition of the same thing, to bring back a sense and meaning to the world, to re-establish the possibility of return.

I have argued that the automatic return movement is a textual element which exists 'beyond' all loss and return. It is a radical severe case of getting-lost, that disintegrates the narrative into fragmented rhythms and meaningless events, and yet it provides an escape route from subjectivity and from the possibility of returning. I have pointed out that the automatic repetition – detached, autonomous, taking place in 'another' dimension of the text – is the way by which the Freudian unconscious gets materializes in the essay. This repetitious beat belongs to the order of the Death Drive – a disconnected force, unintelligible and non-subjective, that never the less repeats itself persistently.

In the last chapter, we have discussed Yaakov Shabtai's novel **Past Perfect** (1984), which tells the story of a voyage of losing and being-lost. It undermines the familiar narrative-format of the protagonist that returns home from his search, after he has grown and gained life experience. The protagonist that is described by Shabtai does not develop throughout the story but rather falls apart, disintegrates and disappears. He lacks personal 'psychology'; his personality is lost and all that remains are bodily impulses that are occasionally satisfied until they are aroused again. Like a bucket that gets filled and emptied, he ranges from vitality, stimulation to emptiness, feelings of death and boredom. Unable to explain his behavior, as his personality is absent, he is left only to the process of emptying and filling up. The subject that is revealed in this reading is not an organic personality-potential that could be realized (a true-self that needs to be discovered), but a rhythm of opening and closing-up, breaking apart and regathering, becoming and diminishing, disappearance and re-appearance, departure and return.

The protagonist of **Past Perfect** seemingly succeeds in returning home, but this 'home' to which he returns is a place death dwells in as well. The home is thus quite 'unhomely'. It appears to be life's zero-point, the first and final place, a location that exists only in the regressive fantasy of a return to the womb or of actual death. The way the protagonist of the novel wanders in a foreign environment reveals an obscure drive that sabotages his traveling plans and leads him to absolute loss. As shown in **Jerry**, in this novel too, the protagonist's movement of departure erases his being as a subject that has direction and purpose in the world, while erasing his (ability to tell his) story as well – blackening his words and concealing them under a dark stain. Although it is tempting to interpret the moment of death in **Past Perfect** as a symbolic gate to a new life, our interpretation stressed the real and complete loss, and the impossibility to restore the life that was lost.

In our analysis, we have linked the unique poetics of the novel with the Freudian idea of the 'death drive' – that negative force which disintegrates, drains and denies subjectivity. The journey that this force dictates, as reflected in the Shabtai's novel, aims at nothingness (at emptiness, at disappearance) and is fulfilled only at absolute loss. Therefore, the process of homecoming brings the subject into the abode of death, or, alternatively, to the maternal womb in which he dwelled before he was born. We have argued that the procedure of return always passes through that point-zero, in which the signifiers that used to provide with identity, direction and purpose, 'reset' to allow themselves to be filled again with new meaning. However, in **Past Perfect**, this point is not merely a symbolic crossing gate that is forgotten and deserted after one is found again, but rather a place of real and valid loss, that is non-recoverable – a journey from which the return is forever incomplete.

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As noted in the first chapter, the prominent narrative-pattern in Western Literature is founded on the possibility to get-lost and then return: the situation of being-lost creates the anarchist literary-space in which the existing order disintegrates and the polarity that enables the evolving dialectical movement is created. The readings we presented in this study sought to uncover the latent story that is concealed in the manifested story – that is, the story of the failed return that is encoded in the successful-return story: the story of Ishmael, which was found again only after radical displacement to the Muslim text; the tale of Hansel and Gretel, who died in the forest and returned to their father only in the domain of fiction; Rabbi Nachman’s story of the king's son and the slave, who never got back to their kingdom; the story of the protagonist in **Jerry**, that have returned from his loss seemingly matured, after he has gained notable 'life experience' – and still, the completion of his journey does not result in making his existence transcend to a higher level; or – the Winnicottian story about the construction of the subject, of which the philological analysis of the theoretical texture reveals the disintegration that occurs in any attempt to tell it – namely, the way in which the theoretical thesis unravels and reveals elements of lostness, even when it tells the proper story of the joyful discovery of the true self.

Rabbi Nachman's tale – *"A King's Son and a Maid's Son Who Were Exchanged"* – subverts the customary narrative-format of departure-and-return in a different manner. This time, the return has been indeed fulfilled, but the episode of being-lost has already deepened and lengthened too much: After the two men in the tale had undergone such extreme conversions from one identity to another, after uprooted and thrown or taken by force from place to place – after all that, returning *home* is no longer possible. The dialectical movement is not realized because the synthesis has been delayed to the extent that the sublation (*aufheben*) has become impossible. This insight was shown also in the psychological context, especially in Winnicott's discussion of the dangers of excessive prolongation of states of disconnection of the mother from the infant. According to Winnicott, when the mother is absent for longer than the infant can bear ("x+y+z minutes"), the infant will be traumatized in an unrepairable way; he will experience a fracture in his very sense of continuity in life, an unimaginable anxiety resulting from the disintegration of the ego structure. **Jerry** illustrated these states of excessive delay by prolonging episodes in which the protagonists are confronted with Absence, and by making the viewers experience firsthand the difficulty of bearing this emptiness of the realm of lostness. This is also true for Winnicott’s rhetoric, making the reader to suffer concepts that were ‘emptied’ from their usual meaning and has not yet been loaded with a new one. The tales of Rabbi Nachman stressed the inability to come back since the return has been delayed for too long, in which case, the subject is no longer who he used to be and the home he has returned to is no longer his home. In fact, the home that the subject has returned to is a place he has never been to before. These are a few variations of cases in which the common model of ‘detachment-and-return’ gets subverted.

Throughout this study, we have stressed the ways in which the phenomenology of getting-lost is transferred to language and receives various textual expressions: the poetics of getting-lost is characterized by elements of dissociation and re-union. The syntax is loose, or broken, or unfinished, or it suspends dependencies between enslaved parts of the sentence to an unbearable length. The rhythms are fragmented, monotonous, or repetitious. The sentenced disintegrate, they wander helplessly, trying to return to the proper place, and the reader must often repeat his reading and carefully reassemble them. The narrative lines are often tangled, regressive, digressive, or determined by multiple factors that are difficult to orient in, or to trace their origin. In **Jerry**, we saw how the background melody refuses to return to the tonic (to the point of origin, to its 'home'), or absent from the start, leaving the reader/viewer with no directions for further interpretation. Signifiers appear, disappear, get consumed in and futile economy of exchange and compensation, organized around a fundamental loss. Speech regarding the loss fails to find effective signifiers, and therefore is doomed to be pronounced over and over again, that is, to keep pushing the drive-to-represent in a never-ending cycle. This repetition creates 'haunted' poetics, compulsive, starved, and at the same time excessive, unable to reach its destination and find its place. I have discussed these features at length in throughout this study.

However, beyond reading the ways in which getting-lost is embodied in the poetic characteristics of the text, we have stressed the ways in which getting-lost is a *textual* experience. The linguistic perspective suggests that the conditions of possibility of spatial orientation are homologous to the conditions of possibility of language itself: the crisis of orientation of the subject is therefore understood as caused by a loss of the environment’s 'readability' – that is, caused by the subject’s inability to locate signs and use them to produce meaning. At the opening chapter of this study I had referred to Kant's definition of the term 'orientation', which is conditioned by the possibility to create distinctions and differences (between inside and outside, left and right, north and south, far and near, and so on). According to this approach, the primary cause of getting-lost is the loss of a pure structural element – a loss of *differance* itself – which leads to the subject’s abolishment from the symbolic universe to the realm of Indifference.

If *differance* is what allows the procedure of orientation, getting-lost occurs in a domain that is absent from differences – a field of signifiers in which the subject is unable to be 'located'. The lost subject falls outside the realm of functional language (a language that can signify and carry meaning), and cannot find its way back to it. The geo-linguistic space of indifference is infinite (limitless, endless) and monolithic (smooth, devoid of signifiers). These are the despairing landscapes of lostness – blank space, illustrative of the phenomenology of alienation and absence. This space is perfectly lingual: it is a raw pre-linguistic being – a lingual-substance that has not yet been articulated, a tongue that does not maintain distinctions and differences and therefore disables the possibility of signification. As noted, this language betrays its position as a bearer of meaning and only makes repetitive rhythms and meaningless sounds. In this sense, the lost subject is radically abolished from all that is human, cultural, or significant.

We have encountered various literary and theoretical images for this space throughout this research: the spider-web, the labyrinth or the black hole – whose directions and structures are elusive, constructing an ensnaring space. These are complex signifiers that point to a loss of structure, of limit, of grip, and of orientation – and expose the primordial formless substrate from which all signifiers are made of and which they conceal. In addition, we have encountered the image of the thick wood, or the entangled maze of language, multiplying its objects to infinity. Or alternatively – the image of a limitless desert, absent of any marks to hang to. In another context, we encountered the image of the Winnicottian space of fantasizing, isolated and opaque, uninterpretable and devoid of symbolic value. Or Ogdan's realm of the 'undreamable-dream' – in which the possibility of unconscious processing of experience is blocked – an infinite hell of a never-changing present.

In this realm, of space that was disconnected from spatiality, and of tongue that was cut off from language, something is still discovered. First – a movement: the marching feet as a *perpetuum mobile*, a movement resulting from itself alone, that deviates from the subject's conscious intentions. Semiotic utterances appear with greater vigor in this space that exists outside of any human context: bodily rhythms and noises, moaning and breathing, an experience of the tongue-less autistic body, the modes of silence. What remains after the subject's breakdown is just gross physical remnants without language or consciousness; a headless corpus; legs marching on their own. Second – a rhythm is detected: like the ticking of the pendulum clock in E.A. Poe’s story (to which we referred in the third chapter), the footsteps of the lost subject set a repetitive, monotonous and continuous pulse; a rhythm of a language that was uprooted from meaning; a senseless repetition of the same thing.

This research held an on-going discussion regarding a unique pattern of losing and finding, disintegration and re-integration, dispersal and re-association. This pattern was shown in Freud's *fort-da* game of the spool and the string, in Ariadne's thread which stretches to the Other, to the socio-linguistic sphere, and to the emerging self. This movement of dispersing and re-gathering is inherent to the construction of subjectivity, which is a circular movement of dispersion and re-collection. *Getting lost* is one of the names of this movement, which is a *poetic* movement. In this research, I have discussed some of the manifestations of this pattern – both in literature and in praxis – in different variations of the non-integrative states, including wandering, automatic writing, free associations, and reverie.

In the positive figurative sense of getting-lost, the separation from home (from the paved road, from the environment of the mother) creates a gap, an alterity; it splits the subject from itself and creates a space for random wandering movement, with no direction or destination. Later on, the wound will be healed in an act of reunification of the disassembled elements. This double gesture allows the subject a space for reflection; it makes language functional and reinstates meaning in the world. Yet, we have seen that in this process there is also another story: that of a rupture whose reparation is never complete, and of exile that is not followed by any homecoming. That is, that of an experience of profound loss, disorientation and dislocation, that persists in the experience of life.

The lost subject is surely detached, disconnected, uprooted from his home. However, we have seen that in this state he is able to touch lost vivid life materials – the primordial substrate that was concealed under the ‘marked’ and ‘distinguished’ Being. In this sense, the lost subject 'returns home' in a far-reaching sense. This was wonderfully demonstrated in the ending of **Past Perfect**: in his moment of disappearance (engulfment, merging) the protagonist also finds his place in the world. He finds himself, but not as a subject who develops on a linear timeline, but as an object of a persistent and threatening repetitious return, which has no direction but rather *circularity*, that returns the subject again and again to its 'place'. The uncanny place is revealed to be the most ‘homely’ location. Just as the ‘place’ Winnicott refers to is not defined in geographical terms but rather within the spectrum of feelings, so is the place we return to, that is not a geographical location but rather a *process* of dismantling and reconstructing, that shows itself in varying degrees of cultural exposure.

The opening pages of Antoine de Saint-Exupé[ry’s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_de_Saint-Exup%C3%A9ry) **The Little Prince** (1943) describe a fictional meeting between a pilot, whose plane fell in the heart of the desert, and child from another planet. The planet which the child came from is as small as a room, and therefore one cannot get lost in it. Hence, the child wonders about the behavior of this human-being he has just met, who tries to find his way back from his lostness. When the pilot suggests that the child will tie the sheep he had drawn with a rope, or else it would get lost, the child has difficulty understanding him. The author's endeavor to teach his protagonist something about the human condition begins therefore with acquainting him with the mode of being lost, and this choice, in my opinion, is not accidental. Being lost is connected to one's being human, and as such, having been thrown into existence (as suggested by Heidegger). Getting-lost, wandering, searching, seeking, returning home – all of these are essential elements in what we call 'human life'.

I have argued that *getting-lost* cannot be reduced to the theory of loss or separation from the mother (although it involves these moments and is difficult to isolate from them), but rather holds an independent logic. Getting-lost cannot be defined in terms of the two major coordinates which Freud described in mourning and melancholy, and in respect of which the experience of loss is defined: the lost subject is not positioned in the hermetic private world of melancholy (a situation where the whole world becomes a reflection of melancholic modes of self), and not in the open world of mourning (of dialogue with the loss, the past and the memory). Instead, the subject becomes to be mimetic variations of loss itself. The subject does not merely collapse into nothingness but into searching – into *becoming*. From this perspective, the subject is defined in a phenomenological manner and not in an ontological one – that is, it is defined in its processes and through its experience of the world.

This study sought to say something about praxis – about wondering, searching, taking a course, undergoing a process – about a way of being-in-the-world. The phenomenological reading is not limited to the question of the perceived phenomena but asks about the ways in which the subject is *in* the world. It is an ethical question, not in the vulgar sense – of how to behave and what to do – but rather a question about the path; the 'way' of life. What the analysis of getting-lost uncovers is a way of being-in-the-world that is constituted upon an unraveled yarn, a discarded object, a body that was lost. To wit: from these states of embarrassment, ignorance, disengagement from one's being-a-subject – one finds his way in the world. Just as the separation from the mother becomes the template of any future departures, in this study I tried to argue that the experience of getting-lost becomes too a template (a *figura*); a repetitive cycle in the subject's life. The lost subject does not remain at home to mourn his loss, he follows it and as a result he *becomes* 'loss'; he returns to his early experiences, prior to his being a subject, and to the experience of his radical dependency on the (loss of the) other. As noted, this cycle, which is essential to the ongoing process by which one becomes in-the-world, is saturated with the grief of separation which cannot be reconciled, and of a loss that is non-recoverable.

The figure of Ishmael, which I presented at the preface of this study, diverges from the theoretical tradition of Literature studies that is centered on the figures of Isaac, Oedipus, Jesus and the like. It suggests a reading method that seeks to observe the expressions of pre-subjective, disintegrated, or 'lost' modes of being. Ishmael does not wish to rule, he does not return as a conqueror – his story is not just that of redemption, but also, and perhaps primarily, a story about breakdown, disappearance and loss. This figure makes it possible to touch a very 'live' corpus: Ishmael's cry still echoes and terrorizes us; it does not kill us but it is constantly breaking us apart; making us get lost.