

PARALLELS

are not what we think. They do not really exist except in a mathematical sense and except as an idea to play off. If it is difficult for anything in the real world to move in a true straight line, think of the impossibility of two things moving together in two parallel straight lines. In the human imagination a parallel world is not a world that replicates the one in which we live or that is its exact opposite but one that turns and flows through many other possibilities and dimensionalities; all the while keeping company and somehow referencing the one it shadows. The parallel life is as unpredictable and indeterminate as the one that supposedly gave it its life.

When we speak of parallels we speak therefore of accompanying possibilities, like a life or a partner we did not choose, the refusal of an uncertain other life influencing this certain and familiar, present life; we evolve as much with the parallel as we do with the present; as the years pass, our relationship to the path not taken or the person we did not pursue changes as much as it does with the one we did. There are many deathbeds where the path not taken is far more real and present than the one actually chosen; the man or the woman abandoned, far more real than the wife or husband dutifully lived with for years.

There is also the question of depth; we may have taken a certain path but only half-heartedly, without conviction, sacrifice, bravery or sincerity. The underlying depth below our surface approach waits for us like an invitation and a reproach, an ocean seen from a cliff, another life, informing this life, on the one hand, a spur to boldness and a deeper participation when we realize how much in this life the other life breathes, or on the other, if distanced into the abstract, a source of shame, a life un-braved un-lived, misunderstood, no matter how much it whispered conspiratorially in our ears. A parallel life we wished could be our own.

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