

Theologising with a Hammer: Deicide, the (W)hole of Creation, and Judeo-Christian *a*-Theism in *Thor: Love and Thunder*

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The most recent outing in the Marvel Cinematic Universe's Thor series, Thor: Love and Thunder, takes a surprising, indeed astonishing, 'spiritualising' turn, at once philosophical and theological. With the death-dealing character of Gorr, the film reprises the old Nietzschean chestnut that 'God is dead'—or will be soon enough, as one clapped-out deity after another is gruesomely dispatched, emptying the universe of their so-called 'enchantment'. That is, a twilight of the idols— but with feet of clay, each instantiating the worst excesses of what Walter Benjamin might call 'mythic violence'. By way of contrast, Gorr exemplifies, at least initially, a kind of Benjaminian 'divine violence', his deicidal rampage not only disrupting creation itself, but disclosing a hole in the fabric of the universe. In this sublime encounter with 'the Real', Thor: Love and Thunder offers us something more than just a choice between being and nothingness; indeed, it proffers the radical possibility of a being predicated on nothingness: in short, a w/hole that is barred, castrated, even crucified. In so doing, this supposedly 'escapist' movie may suggest not only how to philosophise with Thor's hammer, but to theologise with it as well: that is, as a transvalued (Judeo-Christian?) a-theism which sublates faith and doubt, belief and nihilism, being and nothingness in its embrace of a law spiritualised by love's sacrifice.

I. LOVE AND THUNDER'S PECULIAR PAGANISM: ALLEGORY, PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY

This article inhabits that most *pagan* of postmodernity's narrative spaces: specifically, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, its blockbuster films being populated by a host of gods and monsters, forever engaged in seemingly endless – Manichean? – struggle. Not that the MCU's wide fanbase would necessarily recognise this *as* paganism. Indeed, such recognition would imply not only a knowledge of sources beyond the graphic novel or video game – e.g., the *Poetic Edda*,¹ the *Theogony*² – but an awareness of paganism's most prevalent counter-narrative: that of Scriptural monotheism, especially (but not exclusively) its New Testament 'good news'. Yet, for all the *ignorantia Dei* that may characterise the MCU's reception, one of

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¹ Jackson Crawford (ed), *The Poetic Edda* (Hackett Publishing, 2015).

² Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, tr M.L. West (Oxford University Press, 2008).

the series' most recent outings, *Thor: Love and Thunder* (hereafter *Love and Thunder*),³ resonates with rich theological themes, *topoi*, and tropes that can only be described as Judeo-Christian: that of sacrifice, resurrection, and love.⁴

This paper will take up *Love and Thunder's* theological invitation to read it otherwise, exploring first its *peculiar* paganism. 'Peculiar', because, as in *The Lord of the Rings*⁵ or the 'Narnia' series,⁶ paganism here is a kind of fancy dress, masking – but, also, paradoxically, throwing into bold allegorical relief – the film's spiritual subtext. To that end, Section 1 of this paper will address the 'anti-road to Damascus' travelled by the deicide, Gorr, exploring the psychic turmoil – subjective destitution⁷ – which occasions not only his loss of faith, but his maniacal revenge against the gods. Section 2 will contextualise Gorr's deicidal rampage in terms of (largely, German) philosophy: that of Friedrich Nietzsche's (in)famous death of God thesis⁸ and Walter Benjamin's twin notions of 'mythic' and 'divine' violence.⁹ Section 3 returns this paper to its properly Judeo-Christian problematic, reading the film's dual sacrifices (Jane, Gorr) as quintessential acts of love, simultaneously Abrahamic and Christological. Section 4 will speculate on the consequences of this sacrifice, arguing that *Love and Thunder* may, *contra* Nietzsche,¹⁰ *theologise with a hammer* by dramatising a new theism; namely, an *a*-theism¹¹ which sublates and moves beyond binary logic of being and nothingness, of belief and nihilism, of faith and doubt in its embrace of a law spiritualised by the *objet petit a*¹² of love.

³ *Thor: Love and Thunder* (Marvel Studios, 2022) [hereinafter, '*Love & Thunder*']. The film is, in the main, based on an amalgamation of several story-lines – Gorr the Godbutcher; Jane Foster as 'Mighty Thor' – developed during Jason Aaron's outstanding tenure, throughout the 2010s, as writer of Marvel's 'Thor' comics. See Jason Aaron, *Thor by Jason Aaron: The Complete Collection* (Marvel Comics, 2019) vol 1; Jason Aaron, *Thor by Jason Aaron: The Complete Collection* (Marvel Comics, 2020) vol 2.

⁴ The internet has been quick to pick up on *Love and Thunder's* Christian thematics. For example, see Joel Hodge's thoughtful 'All you need is love: The theology of "Thor: Love and Thunder"', *ABC Religion & Ethics* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 27 July 2022) <<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/joel-hodge-thor-love-and-thunder-theology/13991298>>.

⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (HarperCollins, 2001).

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lions, 1980).

⁷ Slavoj Žižek, 'Love Beyond Law: A Review of Bruce Fink's *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*' (1996) 1 *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 160.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One' in Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (eds), *The Nietzsche Reader* (Blackwell, 2006) 245.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in Peter Demetz (ed), *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (Schocken Books, 1978) 297-300.

¹⁰ The full title of *Twilight of the Idols* being *Twilight of the Idols; Or How to Philosophise with a Hammer*. Friedrich Nietzsche, '*Twilight of the Idols*' with '*The AntiChrist*' and '*Ecce Homo*', tr Anthony Ludovici (Wordsworth, 2007).

¹¹ Although we may travel down different theological paths, I acknowledge a general indebtedness to the always thought-provoking Slavoj Žižek, especially his recent text, *Christian Atheism: How to be a Real Materialist* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

¹² Literally, the 'object little other', and to be distinguished from the Symbolic's *Grand Autre* or 'Big Other'. While this core term shifts and changes in Lacan's *oeuvre*, the *objet petit a* is linked, fundamentally, to the subject's desire. First, as desire's Imaginary part-object (principally, the phallus), being mathematised in the formula for fantasy as $\$ \leftrightarrow a$. Jacques Lacan, *Desire and Its Interpretation: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VI*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Bruce Fink (Polity Press, 2019) 95-110. Second, as desire's object-cause, triggering the choice of object around which the drives (and part-drives) circle. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Alan Sheridan (Hogarth Press, 1977) 177-186 ('Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*'). Third, as desire's left-over – that is, as a remainder of the *Real* and its *plus-de-jouir*, or a surplus *jouissance* – after Symbolic integration has occurred. Jacques Lacan, *From an Other to the other: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVI*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Bruce Fink (Polity Press, 2024). Fourth and finally, as desire's *semblant* that sits, as the *a*, at the centre of the Borromean knot, and its interlocking

II. LOVE AND THUNDER'S SCENE OF SUBJECTIVE DESTITUTION: DOUBT, DELUSION, DEICIDE

With its opening shot of a desiccated wasteland, a dying child, and a despairing parent desperate to have his prayers answered,¹³ is there in current popular culture a more tragic scene of subjective destitution¹⁴ than in the prologue of the most recent 'Thor' filmic offering,¹⁵ *Love and Thunder*? Unusually, in an *oeuvre* notable for its glibness of tone, here we, the audience, are confronted with two characterological subjects who are not only dead before the socio-Symbolic but, for whom, *the Symbolic is dead to them*, their prayers unanswered, their lives forfeit. No wonder this dissolution of his lifeworld, and the faith that sustains it, provokes in the parent, Gorr, what might be called, according to psychoanalysis, a *passage à l'acte*,¹⁶ namely, a psychotic break, dramatised in the susurrus of spectral voices he hears, urging him onto the lush oasis that awaits at a distance.¹⁷ There, a delusion takes hold that forestalls the collapse of Gorr's existence, one emboldened by that most castrative of instruments, the Necrosword,¹⁸ the *cut* of which will indeed slay *the* Father of all fathers, God.

Here, the pagan avatar of God is Rapu.¹⁹ Not just utterly indifferent to his worshippers, but gleefully contemptuous of them, this emptiest of Big Others is easily dispatched²⁰ – a crime of, seemingly, little cosmic significance (Rapu being but a 'low level' deity).²¹ But Zeus' later offhand dismissal to Thor of this deicide²² misreads its real import; for with Rapu's murder, Gorr constructs a new phallic phantasy that will provide purpose to his life and meaning to his world, transforming him from a true believer in the paternal signifier, the *Nom-du-Père*,²³ God the Father, into its greatest menace, as its principal agent of castration's *coupure* (or 'cut').²⁴ The development thus proves the truth of the Lacanian adage that with psychosis, what is foreclosed from the Symbolic (here the collapse of the paternal function, imaged in the death of the child and the attendant loss of faith in the God the Father, the *Nom-du-Père*) returns as delusion in the Real:²⁵ of 'Gorr the God-Butcher', who will destroy all 'fathers' – that is, the heavenly host – and *their* children, Asgardian or otherwise.²⁶

orders of Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real. Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Adrian Price (Polity Press, 2016) 57.

¹³ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 0:05-2:15.

¹⁴ Žižek (n 7).

¹⁵ Others include *Thor* (Marvel Studios, 2011); *Thor: The Dark World* (Marvel Studios, 2013); *Thor: Ragnarok* (Marvel Studios, 2017).

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Adrian Price (Polity Press, 2014) at 114-131; Geneviève Morel, 'Transgression et Identification dans le passage à l'acte' (2003) 3 *Savoirs et Clinique* 2, 19-26. Also, a term used in French criminology that constitutes something like a trigger of what the Anglo-Commonwealth common law might call the 'insanity defence'.

¹⁷ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 2:15-2:50.

¹⁸ *Ibid* 5:40-6:05.

¹⁹ *Ibid* 3:36-6:40.

²⁰ *Ibid* 5:45-6:40.

²¹ *Ibid* 58:11-1:03.

²² *Ibid* 58:11.

²³ Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Russell Grigg (Routledge, 1981) 96, 193 ('Lacan, *The Psychoses*'). Jacques Lacan, 'On Any Question Prior to the Treatment of Psychosis' in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, tr Bruce Fink (Norton & Co, 2002) 481-485.

²⁴ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* (n 12) 43, 153, 206, 237, 270.

²⁵ Lacan, *The Psychoses* (n 23) 13, 81, 85-86.

²⁶ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 35:20-37:50.

III. (POST)MODERNITY'S DEATH – AND ETERNAL RETURN? – OF GOD IN LOVE AND THUNDER: NIETZSCHE, BENJAMIN, VIOLENCE

This, of course, runs against the grain of a certain strain of theological nihilism that characterises (post)modernity. After all, isn't God always/already *dead*, famously proclaimed so, in the 19th century, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*,²⁷ a fictional philosophical dialogue by that child of the Lutheran manse and, later, committed atheist, philosopher of eternal recurrence, Friedrich Nietzsche?²⁸ If God is dead, what, then, is there to kill? Equally, if God is dead, then, surely, at one point, he must have been *alive* – even if only as an idea. And it is to this destruction of an idea, literalised here in *Love and Thunder*'s mythological pantheon, to which Gorr commits himself, becoming a serial killer of gods and, in turn, ironically, something of a god, himself – or, at least, its daemonic parody. What sort of parody of god is he? Surely, a god gone mad; not that this is unique, the history of religion being replete with gods whose wrath, be it vengeful or jealous, approaches the point of insanity. But, here, the specific nature of Gorr's divinity lies in not so much who he is – mad, bad, and dangerous to worship – but *what he does*. And what Gorr does is crystal clear: *he smashes idols*. Which is why his target is polytheism's innate iconicity, and a pantheon which, though global in sweep (e.g., Aztec Mexico's Quetzacoatl) and often satirical in form (e.g., Bao, the god of dumplings), is, largely, Hellenic in its aesthetic: e.g., the statue-like Greek gods of Minerva, Dionysos, and, above all, Zeus.²⁹

Mid-century German-Jewish cultural critic and jurist Walter Benjamin had a name for this sort of god-butchering *iconoclasm*: in a celebrated essay, he called it 'divine violence'.³⁰ According to French philosopher Jacques Derrida³¹ and American political theorist James Martel,³² divine violence aligns with the Hebraic tradition as distilled in the Mosaic Second Commandment: 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the water under the earth./Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them'.³³ Nowhere is that prohibition more flagrantly transgressed, in both spirit and letter, than in Omnipotence City, the home of the gods, the ostentatious vulgarity of which – all gold leaf and marble surfaces – resembles more a Las Vegas nightclub than an idol's temple.³⁴ And at its very centre, surrounded by his claque of toadies, sycophants, hangers-on, and eye-popping arm-candy is the king of the gods, Zeus

²⁷ Nietzsche (n 8) 255.

²⁸ See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* in Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (eds), *The Nietzsche Reader* (Blackwell, 2006) 219.

²⁹ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 53-55.

³⁰ Benjamin (n 9) 294-300.

³¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority', in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (eds), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (Routledge, 1992) 3-67.

³² James Martel, 'Waiting for Justice: Benjamin and Derrida on Sovereignty and Immanence' (2011) 2(2) *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 158-172.

³³ *Douay Rheims Bible* (TAN Books, 1989), Exod 20:4-5. Other versions in English include, for example, the King James Version of *The Holy Bible*, where this verse reads: 'Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the water under the earth./Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them'. *King James Version* (The World Publishing Co., 1957), Exod 20:4-5. For more contemporary versions, see first the *New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*: 'You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth./You shall not bow down to them or worship them'. *NRSV, Catholic Edition* (Thomas Nelson, 1995), Exod 20:4-5. Second, *The New Jerusalem Bible*: 'You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them'. *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1985), Exod 20:4-5.

³⁴ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 53:20-53:43.

himself, played to banal perfection by Russell Crowe as part Melbourne kebab-shop owner (with a comic caricature of the Graeco-Australian accent) and part Caesar's Palace headliner (*Cirque du Soleil?*), wielding Thunderbolt as if it were a baton in a *son et lumière* performance.³⁵

No wonder Gorr wants to destroy this ragtag lot who are all sizzle and no steak; idols who turn out to have, most definitely, feet of clay – and whom even Thor cannot rally to their own, let alone their worshippers', defence. For these gods are the film's most committed *atheists*, knowing full well – and, interestingly, erroneously, as Jane's post-scriptural appearance in Valhalla indicates³⁶ – that there is 'no Other to the Other': that is, no salvation, no redemption, no afterlife. Not that these theistic *poseurs* are incapable of what Benjamin would call 'mythic violence';³⁷ that is, policing and patrolling their realms, punishing any and all infractions, real and imagined. To that end, *Love and Thunder* concludes with a postscript in which a revived Zeus, restored to life (like the symptomatic return of the repressed?), is depicted plotting Thor's demise with son and accomplice, Hercules.³⁸ A scene and sentiment which, in its vindictiveness, functions like the counterpart to Gorr's divine violence, the two – Hellenic and Hebraic, iconoclastic and idolatrous, law-making and law-breaking – as two sides of the same juristic coin, pointing, as Benjamin reminds us, to an inherent 'rotten[ness]'³⁹ in the *means* of law itself.

IV. THE VIA DOLOROSA OF LOVE AND THUNDER: SACRIFICE, RESURRECTION, LOVE

What is missing here may very well be an 'end' – or even a stopper that will mediate between means and ends, preservation and destruction, law and justice, and all the other binaries Benjamin itemises⁴⁰ and the film dramatises. For a fracture, even a breach, undergirds *Love and Thunder*, installing a *non-rapport*, something like that of sexuation in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, ever divided between the masculine/feminine rift⁴¹ at its very centre. Which, in the film, amounts to an impasse only capable of saying 'My retribution for your wrong' – and *vice versa*. What will call a halt to the ever-intensifying spiral of tit-for-tat violence in *Love and Thunder*? What is its instrument or agent of suture here? The answer lies in the title of the film, nominating, with all due respect to my Byron Bay neighbour, Chris Hemsworth, that of its eponymous character: specifically, 'Love' (played, incidentally, by Hemsworth's daughter, India Rose), whose recall to life at the film's close by the gift of Eternity⁴² not only concludes Gorr's god-butchered rampage, but personifies the theme of love, lost and found, narrated in the Jane/Thor subplot.

What is it though that makes Love's recuperation – as both character and theme – possible? By what mechanism is love enabled? Here, the film takes a genuinely theological turn, complicating its hitherto nihilistic, Nietzschean atheism and plotting, instead, a narrative course which is distinctly *imitatio Christi*: a *via dolorosa* in pagan fancy-dress – the Stations, as it were, of the Hammer. For it is *sacrifice* that allows Love's restoration: a sacrifice that is made not once, but, in true typological fashion, twice: Gorr for his child, thereby recalling the Old

³⁵ Ibid 54:00-55:00.

³⁶ Ibid 1:57-1:58.

³⁷ Benjamin (n 9) 294-300.

³⁸ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 1:50-1:51.

³⁹ Benjamin (n 9) 286.

⁴⁰ Benjamin (n 9).

⁴¹ Jaques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed Joan Copjec, tr Dennis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Ann Michelson (W.W. Norton & Co, 1990) 8.

⁴² *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 1:41.

Testament's Abraham and Isaac; Jane for the community writ large, the 'ecclesia' of New Asgard, thereby evoking the Gospels' Crucifixion. This narrative doubling reveals what Slavoj Žižek⁴³ might call *Love and Thunder's* ideological core: a Judeo-Christian parable on the moral paramountcy of free will, its coal-face ethics predicated on choice. In each case here, sacrifice is based on a choice made freely. 'I chose love' says Thor to a dying Gorr,⁴⁴ opting to be with Jane in what remains of her life, the two tenderly renewing their vows of love.⁴⁵ An exchange which the viewer knows is only possible by reason of Jane's earlier choice to sacrifice herself by wielding, in her intervention in the final showdown with Gorr,⁴⁶ the energy-draining hammer, 'Mjölfnir', that saves Thor's life but ends her own, accelerating her Stage 4 cancer.⁴⁷

V. LOVE AND THUNDER'S CHRISTIAN A-THEISM: INFINITY, W/HOLE, OBJET PETIT A

What enables these choices? What vouchsafes free will? *Love and Thunder* provides us, the audience, with a highly unorthodox, even nihilistic version of theism. For it attributes both being and nothingness, and its corollaries, belief and scepticism, to a reconceived higher power, at once cataphatic (affirmative) and apophatic (negative). Consider the representative of that power in *Love and Thunder*: Eternity, the horned outline of which looks like any vaguely Asiatic idol, a deific 'orientalisation' if there ever was one.⁴⁸ Further, it is to this idol that Gorr petitions, making his wish – for Love's resuscitation – and, from which, his wish is granted.⁴⁹ So far, so *transactional*, with prayer as a kind of pagan *quid-pro-quo* between believer and idol. What elevates this exchange is the way in which Eternity is embodied – or not, as the case may be here. For beyond its serpentine outline, sharply carved into the background's *Simpsons*-esque fluffy clouds, infinity stretches.⁵⁰ An outline of a skull – Eternity's – can be espied, but it is transparent, and, through it, time-space looms in all its endless infinitude of nothingness, as if we are witnessing a rip in the very fabric of the universe, a hole as it were in 'the Real'.⁵¹

A rip or hole which is, as it turns out, creative, even *creationist*. For not only does it clear a space in which the film's characters are free to choose independent of divine *diktat*, this higher 'power of nothing'⁵² – as Italian philosopher Andrea Emo would put it – gifts the film's world with its principal *objet petit a*, Love.⁵³ It is this *a*-theism – the universe's theistic rip or hole as free will's *dio negativo*,⁵⁴ consubstantial with its (w)holistic agent of suture, Love-as-*objet petit a* – that will call forth from the Marvel Cinematic Universe a worthy bearer of the signifying Law that its (and our!) subjectivities need, and that the socio-Symbolic requires. For make no mistake about it: Gorr's death is not the end of violence in this world, be it divine or mythic; the violent onslaught continues, not only with Zeus and his scheming sidekick son,

⁴³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (Verso, 1997) 145.

⁴⁴ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 1:39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid* 1:42-1:43.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* 1:34-1:36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid* 1:43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 1:38-1:39.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* 1:38-1:39, 1:41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* 1:40-1:41.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

⁵² Luca Vigliani, 'Andrea Emo and the Metaphysics Notebooks: Interview with Massimo Donà' (2007) *Giornale di Filosofia* <<http://www.giornaledifilosofia.net/public/scheda.php?id=81>>.

⁵³ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 1:41.

⁵⁴ Andrea Emo, *Il Dio Negativo: Scritti Teoretici 1925-1981*, eds Massimo Donà and Romano Gasparotti (Marsilio, 1989).

Hercules,⁵⁵ but with the *daemonic* hordes that continue to attack New Asgard and which constitute the close of film's *diegesis* proper.⁵⁶

This is why Law – Thunder/Thor as law creator and law preserver – is needed so urgently here, but spiritualised by Love, so that Thor can not only ‘philosophise with a hammer’ – as Nietzsche claimed to do in *Twilight of the Idols*⁵⁷ – but *theologise* with it too. How, though, is this to be accomplished? Specifically, by converting the endless roundabout of divine/mythic violence into the regulated efficacy of law's *force*. That is the jurisprudential *potentia* Thor-as-Thunder, the bearer of ‘*Mjölnir*’, materialises. In so doing, he *fulfils* rather than ‘destroy(s)’ the Law.⁵⁸ Central to this fulfilment is the recognition and acceptance of Law's principal fiduciary obligation: in this case, the duty owed to Love, Thor's (and Gorr's) *object petit a* as *cestui que trust*. So, Thor's law is a Law of Love, the swing of his hammer ensuring her personal safety and guaranteeing her subjective flourishing. But equally operative here is its juridical inverse: a Love of Law that Love, herself, participates in, but also *exceeds* as Equity incarnate. Last seen, incidentally, joyfully (*Jouis*!?) repulsing the enemy with her adoptive uncle, a *prosopopoeia* of law's spirit (Love) abetting law's letter (Thor). The end-result: a Judeo-Christian *a*-theism that, structurally sublates and goes *beyond* binaries such as the transcendent and the immanent, the teleological and the contingent, the sacred and the secular.

That ‘beyond’, however, is not chaos. Instead, another structure intervenes, one which takes its shape along triangulated lines with each of its three points corresponding to the Lacanian orientation's Real-Symbolic-Imaginary triad. *Thor: Love and Thunder* can be precisely mapped onto this triadic structure: its impossible Real, instantiated in Eternity's rupture; its specular Imaginary, mirrored in Love-as-*objet petit a*; its legal Symbolic, signified in Thor's gavel-like hammer, with its colliding force rendering judgment over – and ruling out *ultra vires* – the ego's ‘looking glass’ lures. At the centre of this structural triad is *violence* itself – or, simply, *jouissance* of the most phallicised kind, emblematised, especially, in the ‘Necrosword’, but also in ‘Stormbreaker’ and ‘*Mjölnir*’. Within this phallic *jouissance*, warring oppositions obtain: first, ‘divine violence’ – Gorr, Jane – is at loggerheads with the gods' ‘mythic violence’; second, divine violence turns upon itself, as Jane does with Gorr, and *vice versa*. By the film's close, however, Jane and Gorr's mutual self-sacrifice not only annuls the *impasse* of mythic/divine violence but (re)activates the creative powers of the barred Big Other's negativity. For, paradoxically, it is precisely through this sacrifice-occasioned *bar* – God as a crucified sign, empty of content, *no*-thing – that Love is resurrected and Thor redeemed, the two becoming inextricably and juridically linked as ward and guardian, *cestui que trust* and trustee, *aequitas* and law, *jouissance* and desire.

So, *Thor: Love and Thunder* concludes with a vision of comic (and Christian) fusion, rather than tragic (and Classical/pagan) fission. In its final scene, the film vividly dramatises Law's desire as a desire for Law by figuring Thor-as-guardian: nurturing, caring for, and fighting in tandem with his equitable counterpart and ward, Love. A counterpart, now revealed as Law's inner core, in the law more than itself:⁵⁹ that is, Love as Law's Platonic *agalma*⁶⁰ vouchsafing its teleological purpose as well as pointing beyond the Law to the St Theresa-like mysticism

⁵⁵ *Love & Thunder* (n 3) 1:50-1:51.

⁵⁶ *Ibid* 1:47-1:48.

⁵⁷ Nietzsche (n 10).

⁵⁸ *Douay Rheims Bible* (n 33) Matt 5:17; see also, *King James Bible* (n 33), Matt 5:17.

⁵⁹ Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* (n 12) 263-276.

⁶⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Bruce Fink, (Polity Press, 2015) 135-148.

of feminine *jouissance*.⁶¹ Together, this interlinked ‘two’ of Law and Love – more ‘Il y a les deux’ than ‘Yadlun’⁶² – proclaim a double ukase that is as necessary in the film’s world as our own, both beset as they are by ever-intensifying conflict. Here, the film’s embattled, though resolute, New Asgard stands in for any number of current trouble spots: The Ukraine, Israel, The Palestinian Authority, Gaza, The Lebanon, Syria, and so on. Within this widening gyre of ‘forever wars’, what set of material and/or metaphysical conditions will finally, to quote John Lennon,⁶³ ‘give peace a chance’? To that end, *Love and Thunder*’s two-fisted juridicism takes up whole-heartedly, not only the Prince of Peace’s affective call – ‘love thy neighbour(s) as thyself’⁶⁴ – but, equally, its more thunderous corollary of law-*full* force: simply, ‘protect and defend’ them as well.

⁶¹ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973 Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Bruce Fink (W.W. Norton, 1998), 76.

⁶² Jacques Lacan, *...Or Worse, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XIX*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, tr Adrian Price (Polity Press, 2018) 35.

⁶³ Plastic Ono Band, ‘Give Peace a Chance’ (Apple Records, 1969).

⁶⁴ *Douay-Rheims Bible* (n 33), Lev 19:18 and Matt 22:39; see also *King James Bible* (n 33), Lev 19:18 and Matt 22:39.