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**ALLEGORY AND PHENOMENOLOGY:
STRUCTURES OF APPEARANCE IN
POETRY, PROSE, AND PHILOSOPHY**

by

Brenda Machosky

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy
(Comparative Literature)**

at the

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A dissertation entitled

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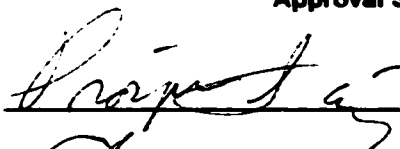
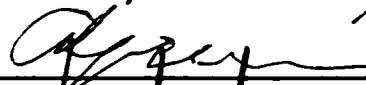
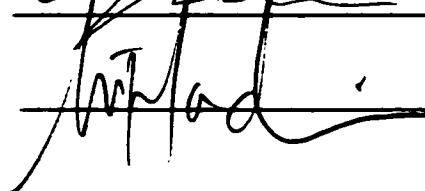
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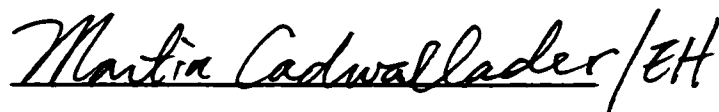
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where I was going before I knew, and his subtle ways of keeping me focused in order to get there. I am proud of the dissertation I have written, and I am grateful to all those who helped me to write it.

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ABSTRACT

Allegory and phenomenology both address the problematic of appearance. In approaching works of poetry, prose, and philosophy with the methodological groundwork provided by phenomenology, the dissertation challenges the conventional conception of allegory as a matter of intention and subjectivity. Rather, allegory is a response, the structure capable of supporting the appearance of that which cannot otherwise appear. Allegory holds together the different in the space of the same and offers an image which is and is not what it appears to be thereby disrupting the principle of identity upon which most literary criticism is based. The introductory chapter argues that allegory must be differentiated from aesthetics, and phenomenology must be distinguished from metaphysics. The epochal suspension of both intentionality and subjectivity opens a new discourse on allegory which shows it to be fundamentally operative in all language. Walter Benjamin's work on language and on allegory provides the basis for a re-reading of allegory's history which shows the allegorical structure is intrinsic to the symbol. In readings of Prudentius' *Psychomachia* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* I show that neither Prudentius nor Hegel chose to write allegorically but each responded to the need of Spirit (or soul) to be expressed in something with which it does not coincide, allegorically and not symbolically. Allegory also shows itself to be a way of reading that is essential to understanding the crisis in poetry that reaches its peak in the work of Baudelaire. Poetry has always struggled to speak allegorically, to speak the limit between the finite and infinite. By the nineteenth century poetry could no longer do so. Baudelaire made this crisis manifest, failing to save poetry but offering an allegory of the absence of poetry. In the final chapter, the readings of Kafka's

stories show not only an allegory of absence but also an allegory of allegory.

Allegory cannot itself appear except allegorically in things that it is not. Allegory is the structure of its own appearance.

PREFACE

This dissertation brings together allegory *and* phenomenology. Under the “and” of this title begins the thinking together of a “trope” and a “method”. The phenomenological study of allegory, the premise under which this project began, reveals that allegory is not a *trope*, or at least not primarily. Nor is allegory a genre in any practical sense. In the 1950s Rosemond Tuve rightly acknowledged the impossibility of a cohesive definition of allegory as a genre and wisely limited her work to the sixteenth-century.¹ An historically specific study was never the goal of this dissertation. Rather, the goal was to discover what was common to all of the texts called “allegory” or “allegorical,” and further to determine what features and characteristics were exclusive to allegory. In other words, to pursue the question, “What *is* allegory?” One model for this approach was the methodology developed by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* which proceeds under a similar, although much larger question, “What *is* Being?” The methodology of the dissertation is generally that of modern phenomenology. It was Husserl who recommended that every philosopher “begin with a sort of *radical, skeptical epoché* which places into question all his hitherto existing convictions, which forbids in advance any judgmental use of them, forbids taking any position as to their validity or invalidity.”² That is the stance I have taken up with regard to allegory.³ A phenomenology of allegory brackets or suspends anything associated

¹ Rosemund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987).

² Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, tr. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1970) §17, p. 76.

with allegory that can not be determined as unique to allegory. The phenomenology of allegory would, theoretically at least, determine what allegory is. Indeed, this project began under the working title, "The Phenomenology of Allegory." However, as the sedimented layers of two millennia worth of associations were scratched away, a new association began to emerge, the association between allegory *and* phenomenology.

As early as the first century, Philo of Alexandria developed a system of interpretation that used the rhetorical device of allegory as a way of transforming enigmatic biblical passages into meaningful signs.⁴ The desire to find *meaning* was so strong that the allegorical way of reading often became tortured in the process of clarifying the obscure. Following the allegorical interpretive tradition of Homeric reading which found philosophical truths beneath the poetic fictions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Philo found allegory in the Hebrew Bible.⁵ In the fourth

³ Whereas in Greek *epoché* designated a refusal to judge something about which the knowledge necessary for judgment could not be obtained, in Husserl's phenomenology, *epoché* came to designate the setting aside of "knowledge", i.e. assumptions and "facts", in order to return to the phenomena itself. The negatively-oriented classic skepticism aimed at practical and ethical determinations regarding knowledge. The Cartesian version of skepticism, however, Husserl characterizes as "pressing forward through the hell of an unsurpassable, quasi-skeptical *epoché*." This "hell" is characterized by the extreme doubt of the epochal suspension of all knowledge (Husserl, p. 77). The dissertation presses forward with hellish doubt about allegory.

⁴ Of particular relevance to this dissertation is Philo's allegorical reading of Genesis i.26, that human beings were created in the image of God. Philo explains by an allegorical analogy, "the human mind evidently occupies a position in men precisely answering to that which the great Rule occupies in all the world." *Philo* vol. 1, tr. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991), p. 55. See the remainder of this volume for examples of Philo's fascinating allegorical interpretation of Genesis.

⁵ For a summation of classical allegoresis, beginning in the sixth century BCE, see Jonathan Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval*

century, Augustine also used allegory as a means for clarifying obscure passages and further as a way of explicating the contradictions between the Old and New Testaments through the allegorically structured system of typology. The four levels emphasized by Augustine for scriptural exegesis (and later endorsed by Dante for secular literature) became a formula for reading a variety of meanings within a single text, the literal, the moral, the allegorical, and the anagogical. At the same time that Augustine was establishing allegory as an essential structure within Christian theology, the poet Prudentius composed a lengthy narrative poem which used the rhetorical technique of personification to compose "an allegory" which became the model for the genre popular in medieval secular literature.⁶ Jon Whitman traces the developments of these two distinct modes until, he argues, they merge in the *Cosmographia* of Bernardus Silvestris which Whitman then holds up as the ideal form of allegory against which to judge all others as more or less adequate.⁷ I disagree with Whitman's conclusions and with

Technique (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987), esp. Chapter 2: "Ancient Configurations" and p. 20ff. See also, as noted by Whitman, Jean Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie: les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (Paris, 1976), p. 97-124; and J. Tate, "The Beginnings of Greek Allegory," *Classical Review*, 41 (1927), p. 214-5; and "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation," *Classical Quarterly*, 23 (1929).

⁶ The *Psychomachia* served as a model for a form, closely or loosely followed in works like *Piers Plowman* and *The Complaint of Nature*, but the poem itself took on varied forms, including a rare illustration cycle in medieval manuscripts.

⁷ See the final chapter of Whitman, *Allegory*, for the full argument as indicated in the final pages of the introductory chapter, "The Allegorical Problem": "In this text [the *Cosmographia*], the coordinating tendencies of earlier movements in antiquity and the Middle Ages began to coalesce in a comprehensive far-reaching design . . . [T]he two allegorical traditions themselves at last converge in a systematic form . . . " (9-10). The problem with Whitman's analysis of allegory is precisely that it privileges the convergence of the interpretive and compositional

his deductive methodology. However, Whitman provides an important historical account of the medieval traditions of allegory, the compositional and the interpretive, and the complexity which develops as these two conventions merge into a single generic term. Without a doubt, allegory enjoyed its greatest popularity in the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Allegory's fall from grace had much to do with changes in the relationship to knowledge which began in the Renaissance. This history is recounted by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* and is explored in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Benjamin articulates the shift in attitude towards allegory as a change in attitudes towards knowledge. In the Late Classical and Medieval epochs, allegory contributed to knowledge by making the obscure plain and the enigmatic explicable. As knowledge became increasingly empirical, the kind of knowledge provided by means of allegory began to lose its value. Allegory slowly came to protect this other kind of knowledge by becoming obscure itself. Benjamin notes the historical moment of this shift in the Baroque genre of the *Trauerspiel*. However, Benjamin's use of the term "baroque" expands to include the generally post-Enlightenment or post-Romantic appearance of allegory as something which obscures rather than as something which clarifies. Nonetheless, and Benjamin is careful to make this point, allegory has not changed except in its appearance. It is from Benjamin's observation that the thesis of this dissertation proceeds. I ask, "What is allegory such that it can appear as either the clarification of the obscure or the obscurity of the clear?" The first step in understanding the phenomenon of allegory in terms other than signification (that is, meaning) is to shift attention

as the ideal for allegory. Whitman reads all allegory through this idea, and this obscures the important distinction of allegories that did not strive to interpret. Whitman gives short shrift to the fourth century *Psychomachia* in favor of a view of the twelfth century as "the period in which allegory finally comes of age" (259).

away from the figure and to pay attention to the image. When the figure is considered the primary feature of allegory, the trope of personification has substituted itself for allegory. This substitution may itself be allegorical, but the effect is to obscure allegory from view. As a consequence of this substitution, allegory comes to be perceived as a narrative mode or a symbolic one.⁸ Neither narrative nor personification nor symbolism is the primary and defining characteristic of allegory.

Although it is quite common for allegory to be treated within the confines of such categories, allegory also disrupts them. In the figure, appearance is easily mistaken for a correspondence with reality. Thus, allegory is often itself interpreted as an analog for reality. Allegory is often conceptualized in terms of identification, but allegory resists this concept. As de Man so clearly put it, “[allegory] prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self.” The nonself is the image which appears in the “natural world” in which the subject finds its resemblance, but a resemblance which is not its likeness, i.e. with which it has nothing in common.⁹ The figure is inadequate for a comprehensive understanding of allegory. There is general agreement that the basic definition of

⁸ For this latter interpretation, see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory : The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1964). Fletcher admirably seeks to avoid “certain special historical confusions,” namely the controversy over the difference between “allegory” and “symbol”. However, as argued in this dissertation (especially in the second chapter), “symbolic” is an equally problematic term.

⁹ Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1983), p. 206-7. I have admittedly taken some liberty with de Man’s words. The text actually reads, on p. 206: “. . . the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny . . . takes place in a subject that has sought refuge against the impact of time in a natural world to which, in truth, it bears no resemblance.” The liberty taken is but a clarification of terms like “resemblance” and “image” which were not crucial for de Man’s argument here but are critical to

allegory is saying one thing but meaning another, but the phenomenality of allegory is peculiar because the "other thing" appears in the "thing said" without actually being there. Allegory is thus more appropriately defined as "the appearance of one thing in another thing which it is not" and indicates a mode of transcendence which is not opposed to immanence or contingency, the dichotomies by which transcendence has traditionally been defined. The phenomenology of allegory suggests a definition of transcendence which is not a reaching beyond (a metaphysical attempt to comprehend what is unknowable, an attempt which is always doomed to be a failure or a fiction). Rather, allegory suggests a transcendence that exists within what is said, and by extension, a transcendence that lies within the subject who says.¹⁰

The implications for subjectivity are discussed in the introductory first chapter of the dissertation and revisited in the Afterword. These implications cannot be appreciated until the image is distinguished from the figure. Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas have both used the term "image" (or *ressemblance*) as a name for this type of phenomenon. In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot notes that the "image is not a likeness to anyone or anything". In "Reality and Its Shadow", Levinas describes the image in its ambiguous commerce with reality, and he calls this commerce "resemblance" and the image

the argument of this dissertation and not averse to de Man's argument on these pages.

¹⁰ The relations between allegory (as it is defined and revealed in this dissertation) and transcendence do not lie within the scope of this dissertation. This relation would, however, draw from the reassessment of the term "transcendence" offered by Heidegger in *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz* (*Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 26, Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1978). A reading of this early lecture from 1928 and Heidegger's later work on art and language will be a necessary but future consideration in regards to the theory of allegory proposed in this dissertation.

itself an “allegory”. There are two conditions for the image: *It is never* what it *appears to be*, and, it appears in a substance with which it never coincides. From Aristotle, I have borrowed the name *phantasmenon* in order to designate the mode of appearance particular to the image for this is the mode of appearance that is under investigation in the dissertation. The root of *phantasm* is the verb *phantazein*, to make visible, related to but distinct from the verb *phainein*, to show, the root of *phainomenon*, that which shows itself. *Phantasmenon* is that which makes itself visible, but not necessarily by showing itself. The image is the appearance of something which *can not otherwise appear* and which does not appear as it is but shows itself only as a phantasm, perhaps most like a ghost.

If the image is not what it appears to be and is something other than what appears, the conventional definition of allegory no longer holds.¹¹ Rather, allegory describes the structure of the image which communicates or expresses itself allegorically. The image also communicates something about “allegory.” The phenomenality of allegory lies neither in the thing that shows itself in itself nor in the thing which appears but does not show itself. Allegory brings these

¹¹ This traditional and basic definition of allegory as simply “saying one thing and meaning another” appears in a variety of articulations, but it is a surprisingly consistent assumption. There is a necessary gesture to this definition in almost every critical work (if not the theoretical work) on allegory. For example, in Theresa Kelley’s recent book *Reinventing Allegory* (Oxford: Cambridge UP, 1997), the “Introduction” does not even include an explicit definition of allegory but presumes the conventional one. In the first chapter, Kelley offers that “it is allegory’s principal game to bring ideas to life and thereby make absent things seem present” (15). Kelley also notes an “alliance” between *phantasia* and allegory, but for an entirely different end. The more “fantastic” the allegory, “the more it challenges the topos of allegorical darkness and impenetrability simply by calling attention to that surface.” Kelley does admit that allegorical figures continue to resist the full declaration of meaning, but the correspondence between figure and meaning is the basis upon which she discovers the “reinventions” of allegory.

things together in the image, but it is no longer safe to assume that allegory is a facile and arbitrary signifying structure which self-destructs once a particular meaning has been revealed. Such an assumption is to mistake allegory for metaphor, and to mistake the image for a figure. Allegory is that which brings together the different in the space of the same, a rigorous "simultaneity" in space which reveals as well a suspension of time. Allegory is the structure in which identity and difference are present simultaneously, and this simultaneity is coincident with a true or absolute atemporality, an out-of-timeness utterly independent of any concept of time. Allegory appears in the image as a pure language, a language which speaks without reference, a language neither conventionally transcendental nor metaphysical. The image communicates only itself. The pure language which can speak this image in its purity is the dream of every poet.¹² The perfect poem is the poem that only sounds, that defies any appropriation. Such a poem is an impossibility, of course, but the asymptotic limit has drawn more than one poet (and a few philosophers) into madness or despair. Allegory is the means by which a poet can approach this limit, and allegory itself is this limit.

Allegory is the structure of the image, and poetry is the language of allegory. In the poetry of the *Psychomachia* and the philosophy of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* the writers faced the difficulty of the appearance of something that could not appear epistemologically. For Prudentius, it is the human soul; for Hegel, it is

¹² Romantics like Brentano, Eichendorff, and Schiller also had this dream, articulating "pure language" in terms of musicality. In my work, there is an obvious echo of Benjamin – not so much for the mystical gesture that he makes to the "Reine Sprache" but more particularly to his praise of Hölderlin's gibberish-like translation of Sophocles. For Benjamin, all art is characterized by mourning because of its essential failure to be poetry.

Geist.¹³ Neither Prudentius nor Hegel chose to write an allegory. Rather, each responded to the need of Spirit (or soul) to appear in its universality and its particularity, in its peculiar phenomenality. The only structure capable of sustaining the appearance of the human soul in its “divine mortality” is allegory, the structure in which something appears in something it is not. The full impact of the discoveries in the readings of Prudentius and Hegel are revealed in the final chapters with readings of Baudelaire and Kafka. The demise of allegory bears a direct relation to the decline in poetry. In the shadow of Hegel and Goethe, allegory falls rapidly into disrepute, swallowed not only by the darkness of philosophy but blighted by the radiance of the symbol. Walter Benjamin provides the greatest insight on this epochal moment in the history of allegory, epochal both in the sense of the *epoché* which marks a limit and in the sense of a temporal epoch distinguished by its unique characteristics. The story of allegory and symbol must be told so that the consequences for poetry can become clear. This epochal moment is Janus-faced, guiding a reading of poetry in the distant past as much as in the looming future. One of Benjamin’s strongest arguments is that the symbol cannot be secular because its essence is to be divine. The “secular symbol” may be an oxymoron but in “*Das Märchen*” Goethe offers the possibility for a “poetic symbol” that is divine without being particularly religious. The poetic-symbol is something divine and immutable; it is also mortal. My reading of Goethe’s story demonstrates both the withdrawal of poetry into prose and the withdrawal of allegory into the symbol. However, if the symbol is to be true to its divine essence,

¹³ Of note is that Husserl precisely criticizes Descartes for *not* treating the soul as a “mere phenomenon”. See previous note.

and if prose is to be true to its essence in language, they must address divinity, even if not addressing the same "divine."

Because of the necessity for the symbol to be divine and mortal, poetry is always symbolic; it is also true that all symbols are allegorical. Allegory is the only structure capable of holding together the absolutely different realms, whether in the Christian poetry of Prudentius, the philosophy of Hegel, or the fairytale of a German icon. Once the exile of allegory is effected, the language of poetry loses its particular potency, and the poet begins to search for a purpose. Contemporaneous with Hegel, the poet Hölderlin plaintively asks, "*Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*" What are poets for in destitute times? In modernity, this question comes more and more to the fore. The purpose of poetry comes to be conceived in strictly finite terms, and not surprisingly, with mortal consequences for poetry itself.¹⁴ In being forced to defend itself, poetry can no longer sustain the poetic symbol. It was already difficult enough to do so. Near the end of the eighteenth century Goethe and Hölderlin (as two very different examples) had already begun to mark the absence of the poetic in poetry. This crisis reaches its peak in the critical and

¹⁴ This change in the relationship to poetry is indicative of a change in the relationship to art in general. In *The Approach of the Unpresentable: Postmodernity, the Sublime, and the Language of the Lyric*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1995), Patrick Roney explains that this shift occurs when the beautiful becomes a concept. (See Chapter 2, section II, esp. p. 161ff). In reading Lyotard on Kant, Roney draws attention to something often forgotten in Kant. Namely, there is, or at least there is the suggestion that there is a "mode of aesthetic judgment in Kant that confronts the very limit of the beautiful, exceeds that limit, and disrupts the harmonious relation of form and thought" (169). Roney traces how Lyotard develops this argument and finally asserts that the sublime circumscribes the beautiful (and is not its supplement as is usually assumed). When, with the rise of the aesthetics, the beautiful becomes a "concept", the sublime essence of the beautiful is obliterated; the beautiful remains but in a mode of withdrawal.

literary work of Baudelaire which constitutes a valiant attempt to *save* poetry. He fails. Instead of saving poetry he has in fact made its crisis manifest and unavoidable. Nonetheless, Baudelaire's dream of a poetic prose returns attention to language and the possibility for poetry. Poetry is no longer to be found in poems, but in prose, not "poetic prose" which preserves something of the poetic form, but a prose entirely indifferent to poetry. This is Kafka's prose.

The final chapter of the dissertation explores the implications of this crisis not only for poetry, but for literature, language, and allegory in the modern world. These four things are intimately related, and together they articulate a resistance to the metaphysics of presence and to the dominant stance of the self-certain, self-conscious subject. Kafka exposes us to the singular being, usually an anthropomorphized but unspecified animal, a being who is not a Subject. A determining quality of this singular nonsubject is that it does not declare its absolution from other beings but rather inclines towards them. However, the condition of the modern world is such that this singular being exists in the mode of withdrawal; it is always distant and growing more so. In this singular being there is hope -- although as Kafka and Benjamin say in unison, this hope is not *for us*. When hope is conceived as a possibility "for us", for the sake of the subject, it is a profane symbol because it becomes contingent. Hope serves as an object of hermeneutic evaluation and is absorbed (sublated) into consciousness. The hopeless hope which Benjamin brings to the fore appears hopeless because it has nothing to do with the Subject. The hope that is truly symbolic cannot be the object of a hermeneutic interpretation.

Our hope lies in the promise of literature to provide the space in which a symbolic community is still possible and presentable in a "poetic symbol". The modern world has associations, groups, nationalities, identities, but the possibility

for a sense of community in which “being-in-common” or “being-with” is paramount – that is precluded by the absolution of the Subject. Literature is the other to this absolution, not its opponent but its complement, and this other space, the space of literature does not open up exterior to the Subject but within it. In literature, there is the promise of a transcendence which does not go beyond the finite capacities of the subject and which yet steps across into a “beyond” that is within the subject itself, the universal within and yet not identical to the particular or the individual. Kafka exposes us to this possibility in literature, and it is a vertiginous exposure. The figure for this space is absence. This figuration is Baudelaire’s contribution. The presumed separation between the poetic and the philosophical has become so vast that the poetic image no longer has a face, at first not a human face, and in one of Kafka’s last stories, perhaps unfinished, no face at all. There is not even the figure of absence. In “*Der Bau*” Kafka writes an allegory of an image without a face, an allegory we might call “pure” in that nothing, or very little is at work in language except language, not even figures, not even rhetoric -- but allegory is still at work.

Allegory remains the structure of appearance, even when it is absence or more precisely an utter lack that appears.¹⁵ When allegory supports the appearance of absence, the affinity between allegory and the sublime begins to show itself. As Patrick Roney argues, “the sublime . . . leaves thought at the threshold.”¹⁶ The importance of the distance established between allegory and

¹⁵ Absence, like nothing, can still be construed as “something”. The absence to which I refer here is unnamable, and to give it any name, even absence, is to violate it. Slightly less abherrent is to describe it, and thus “utter lack” is both more accurate and more proper.

¹⁶ Roney, p. 170.

aesthetics in the first chapter of the dissertation is further clarified when allegory is thought with the sublime. Roney argues that in order to resist the subjectifying force of “technoscience” art must have a “sublime destiny”. I argue that the sublime destiny of art is constituted by allegory and evident in the poetry which appears *allegorically* in particular works of modern prose. Because my focus here is on the structure of appearance at this threshold where thought is left suspended at an abyss which has opened within the thinking subject, the relationship between allegory and the sublime is not developed but often apparent.

The entire dissertation has been directed towards this point, to say something “new” about allegory. What is “new” about allegory is as old as allegory, that it is the structure of appearance. The uncovering of this “truth” about allegory also contributes something new to contemporary theoretical discourse about allegory. The common assumption that allegory is a compositional mode in which language hides meaning or an interpretive strategy which finds meaning hidden in language are no longer adequate means of expressing allegory as such. The work of this dissertation would not be possible without the work of Paul de Man who re-animated the discourse on allegory by emphasizing its tropological qualities. However, the thinking together of phenomenology and allegory has shown that allegory is not primarily a “trope.” Rather its tropological function belies a more fundamental structure. In Kafka there is no rhetoric, but there is still allegory. The rhetorical trope of allegory is revealed as but one of allegory’s many appearances. Allegorical interpretation, compositional allegory, prosopopoeia, tropes, symbols, these are all just appearances, but they are necessary. Allegory cannot itself appear, except allegorically, by appearing in things with which it does not coincide. Allegory is the structure of its own appearance.

CHAPTER ONE

Allegory and Aesthetics: A Phenomenology of Art

The investment in the aesthetic is considerable – the whole ability of philosophical discourse to develop as such depends entirely on its ability to develop an adequate aesthetics. This is why both Kant and Hegel, who had little interest in the arts, had to put it in, to make possible the link between real events and philosophical discourse.

Paul de Man¹

We will say the thing is itself and its image. And that this relationship between the thing and its image is resemblance . . . It is in this that all the power and originality of allegory lies. An allegory is not a simple auxiliary to thought, a way of rendering an abstraction concrete and popular for childlike minds, a poor man's symbol. It is an ambiguous commerce with reality in which reality does not refer to itself but to its reflection, its shadow. An allegory thus represents what in the object itself doubles it up. An image, we can say, is an allegory of being.

Emmanuel Levinas²

Literary scholars have long been duped by the defensive posture initiated by the ironic Greek philosopher who dismissed poetry from the realm of thought and the ideal Republic. Between the philosopher-guardian and the poet, Plato presents a

¹ Quoted by Andrzej Warminski as compiled from the notes of students in de Man's fall 1982 seminar, "Aesthetic Theory from Kant to Hegel" in "Introduction: Theories of Reference", *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski, (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1996) p. 4.

² "Reality and Its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 1-13.

long list of craftsmen, each providing a specific product for the needs of the community. When he gets to the poet, however, “someone who has the skill to transform himself into all sorts of characters and to represent all sorts of things,” he declares the community will politely send him packing, telling him that “he and his kind have no place in our city” (398a).³ There is no need for these alien poets because the community will employ its own “severe” storytellers, those who portray *only* “noble” actions and “useful” works. Who are these storytellers? The only citizens of the Republic who do not work, including the teller of *this* tale. It is the philosopher who turns the mimetic mirror in Book X of the *Republic*, not the poet. It is not the poet who has installed “the sun and stars and earth, himself and all other animals and plants, and furniture and the other objects *we* mentioned just now” (596d). The philosopher has created the sun, the cave, the bed upon which one cannot sleep, the carpenter who cannot work, and so on, and the philosopher has even created the *Republic* itself . . . in no other place than the imagination and by no other means than poetry thinly disguised as dialogue.

Socrates relies constantly on figurative language to forge a union between the metaphysical ideal and the physical world which is its “mere shadow”, and Plato is utterly dependent on the figure of Socrates. Heidegger describes Socrates as a *Gestalt*, a German word for figure. Heidegger has a peculiar but consistent and well-supported understanding of *Gestalt* and the root verb *stellen* from which many important aesthetic words derive (*Darstellung* [representation] and *Vorstellung* [presentation] among them). For Heidegger *stellen* is not merely to stand

³ Plato. All citations, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961).

(transitive) but more particularly refers to a “repose which is an inner concentration of motion, hence a highest state of agitation.”⁴ This agitation is so high, indeed, that the object, the *Gestalt*, appears to be standing still. In Socrates, Heidegger recognizes a figure which bears the concentrated agitation between philosophy and poetry. There are two types who do not produce (work) in the *Republic*, the poets and the philosophers. In the figure of Socrates both types appear. The “raging discordance” between poetry and philosophy is held together in this figure who seems to embody the triumph of philosophy. In the figure of the philosopher, the *image* of the poet appears.

Levinas has suggested that the image of something has an independent (autonomous) ontology. An image appears whenever an object does not itself appear but rather a resemblance of that object. This does not mean that the figure of the philosopher can be substituted for the poet. The poet does not coincide with the philosopher but they co-exist, not like alter egos of day and night but as a conflictual simultaneity in which each challenges the other forth. The ontology of the image is an ontology *other than* that of the figure. The image is a resemblance, something that cannot be conceptualized because it cannot be grasped. One need only recall the frustrated Narcissus who could neither grasp or in any way possess the “object” of his desire -- because it was not an object but an image. The image is indifferent to Narcissus, and this indifference drives him to despair. Etymologically, the aesthetic element of the image is its sensibility, but the image does not have the sensibility of an object. As Levinas points out, by becoming an image, “the represented object . . .

⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), (hereafter OWA), p. 48.

is converted into a non-object". This is not a privative process but an ontologically distinct dimension.

The disincarnation of reality by an image is not equivalent to a simple diminution in degree. It belongs to an ontological dimension that does not extend between us and a reality to be captured, [but is] a dimension where commerce with reality is a rhythm.⁵

Because it is a resemblance, the image is not mimetic. It is not a sign because a sign must be transparent and the image is to some degree opaque; something is inaccessible there. The image cannot be compared to the original nor to the material in which it appears because it is essentially different. And yet they are connected in some way. With Levinas, "We will say the thing is itself and is its image. And that this relationship between the thing and its image is resemblance."⁶ The image reveals things about the object it resembles that the object does not reveal about itself. Like Heidegger's definition of the *Gestalt*, Levinas' definition of resemblance is grounded in movement, not stasis or permanence. Levinas defines resemblance as "an ambiguous commerce with reality in which reality does not refer to itself but to its reflection, its shadow", and he identifies this commerce with allegory, in all its "power and originality". As the underlying structure of the image, "allegory is not a simple auxiliary to thought, a way of rendering an abstraction concrete and popular for childlike minds, a poor man's symbol." The image can only be understood allegorically (but can still not be grasped because allegory does not function conceptually). In the image, the object is detached from itself. Allegory holds together the object and the image, what *is* and what *is not*.

⁵ Levinas, p. 134.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato admits the image into his universe because he cannot avoid it. He wants the image to serve the Logos, the unifying universal concept, but that requires quite a bit of philosophical contortion which is not, in the end, entirely successful. After thoroughly describing the universe according to Reason, Timaeus concedes that he must now start again, in order to include an exposition on necessity or causation which leads him to introduce a third kind of form. Under the auspices of Reason, there is *Eidos* and *Mimema*, that which is, eternal and unchanging, and that which becomes, perishable and variable. Timaeus admits, "now the *Logos* seems to compel us to try to reveal by words a form (*eidos*) that is baffling and obscure (*khalepon* and *amedron*)." Here he calls this form *hypodoxen* (that which lies under the *doxa*), but it turns out also to underly the *eidos*. Usually translated as "receptacle", Timaeus describes this form as "the nurse of all becoming" [*geneseos tithenon*] (49a) which lies at the very heart of *logos* and also external to it. This "fleeting shadow" is constituted by an appearance which does not correspond to any concept of *eidos* or any object of *mimesis*. The *eidos* is phenomenal in so far as it shows itself to the intellect. When freed from its bondage in the cave of the *Republic*, the soul sees things "as they really are" instead of the shadows which constitute the physical world. According to Plato, it is possible though rare for a mortal being to perceive the intelligible realm, but even so, the philosopher-kings who are thus privileged must *translate* this perception in order to bring it into the physical world. It is easy to forget that in Plato the intelligible or metaphysical realm is not less substantial than the physical world: it is *more* substantial. The philosopher-guardians are obligated to return to the cave of shadows and communicate their knowledge of the intelligible realm in order to foster a 'common sense'. They can only do so by means of some tempering shape, just as Plato himself relies on the figure of the cave.

Although they show themselves differently, both *eidos* and *doxa* show themselves. The *Logos*, that is the force of reason, also compels Timaeus to show how these two things are yoked together, to show how they show themselves. Earlier, in the description of the Soul of the Universe, Timaeus had described a third element of Being which joined indivisible Being with transient Being, forcing the Other into the Union with the Same, despite the difficulty of effecting this union which is in essence a conflict. Timaeus must manifest this third thing, which cannot itself be either an *eidetic* or a *mimetic* substance and yet must participate in both or else it could not hold the two together. This third thing is given the name *Khora*. This substance is peculiar in that it must "itself be devoid of all these forms which it is about to receive" (50c). In receiving these forms, the substance is "moved and marked by the entering figures", but the substance changes only in appearance. Only by recourse to a metaphor can Timaeus explain the change in appearance that does not affect substance. A sculptor can mold and remold the same lump of gold into a variety of figures. Each figure is always gold. The figures in the gold are always becoming, so they are not stable forms, and yet there is something stable in the figure which does not manifest itself as phenomenal or ideal. Timaeus uses this metaphor as an analogy for the *khora* which he defines very sharply as follows:

And of the substance which receives all bodies the same account must be given. It must be called always by the same name; for from its own proper quality it never departs at all; for while it is always receiving all things, nowhere and in no wise does it assume any shape similar to any of the things that enter into it. (50b-c)

Because it is visible only by showing itself differently at different times (*allote alloion*), this substance is difficult to discern and it is virtually impossible to say how it is to be distinguished from that which appears in it. The *khora* "comes into existence in some other thing, clinging to existence as best it may, on pain of being

nothing at all" (52c). The *khora* comes into existence as a phantom (*phantasma*), a perception that is neither noumenal (perceptible to the intellect) or phenomenal (perceptible to the senses), and Plato admits something beyond the reach of even the highest intellect.

The alternative view to the Platonic structure of mimesis between the real and the ideal is found in Aristotle's description of the imagination, particularly regarding the *anima* or life principle of human being. The faculty of the imagination is distinct from the faculties of belief, perception, intellect, and knowledge.⁷ In *De Anima*, Aristotle calls this singular aspect of the intellect, single "in the way that a boundary is [single]" (431a). Although not a single *thing* or an object, that is how the imagination itself must be imagined. The imagination for Aristotle is characterized by its ability to "recollect". In the *Parva Naturalia*, Aristotle distinguishes recollection as an activity distinctive to human beings because it is an act of inference which is not only intellectual but also physical. Aristotle defines recollection as "a searching for an image in a corporeal substrate" (I ii 453a). That corporeal substrate is not the materiality of the world nor is it the intelligibility of the *eidos*. It is something other to and between them both.

In Aristotle, the imagination, *phantasia*, becomes the faculty for the process which Plato concealed in metaphors. Indeed, Aristotle specifies that he does not use the word *phantasma* (image) in "some metaphorical sense".⁸ Although Aristotle distinguishes the imagination as a distinct faculty, it is still marked by a

⁷ cf. *De Anima* III iii 427b-430a. Translations of *De Anima* and *Parva Naturalia* are from *Aristotle (in 23 volumes)*, tr. W. S. Hett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975), vol. 8.

⁸ *De Anima* III iii 428a. For confirmation of this view, cf. *Parva Naturalia*, 453a-ff. Levinas also clarifies the image is not to be understood as a metaphor.

subservience to thought and a dependence on sense-perception. "Imagination cannot occur without perception, nor supposition without imagination" (III iii 427b). The imagination is a connective faculty, but it connects without moral judgment. Aristotle admits that "imaginings are for the most part false" (428a); nonetheless, the effect can be actual. The act of perception is the movement from a perceived object against the perceptive faculty, motivating a conversion from its being in potentiality to its being in actuality, without any change in its substance. When this perception becomes the site of pleasure or pain, then the soul is moved to desire (assertion) or avoidance (denial). The experience of pleasure or pain activates the relation between perception and moral judgment, but the judgment in fact remains distinct from the object. The relation is arbitrary, or merely conventional. Aristotle focuses not on the truth-value of perception but on the structure of relation. Therefore, he concludes that avoidance and desire "in their actualized state [are] the same thing, . . . but their way of being the same thing is different" (III vii 431a). Truth-value is not a constitutive characteristic of the image. Unlike the other faculties (perception, belief, intellect and knowledge), the imagination is indifferent to truth: the imagination is indifferent to meaning. The imagination is neither metaphysical nor transcendent, but in the Aristotelian system it makes metaphysics and transcendence possible. Indifference gives the imagination the power to be everything and nothing. Aristotle has classified the *khora* of Plato. The imagination is the faculty which regulates that substance which, as the nurse of all becoming, must itself be free of "all these forms which it is about to receive."⁹ The fleeting shadow characteristic of the *khora* is the *phantasmenon*, that which is made visible but does not show itself. The *khora*, like the faculty of

⁹ Cf. *Timaeus* 50c.

the imagination, lies outside the auspices of reason, even though both Plato and Aristotle appropriate it *for* reason. The image positions itself at the boundary between the knowable and the unknowable, between mortal finitude and the inestimable space and time from which the finite world has emerged. The Aristotelian faculty of the imagination marks the limit of human being, of its finitude. At this limit is an image which is not an image *of* anything and which does not substitute itself *for* anything. The image is something singular: it is neither a phenomenal object nor an essent or ideal.

The image inspires movement, without itself moving; therefore, it is originary. The image is not, however, original, because the imagination manufactures images from phenomena that appear to the senses. A well-known trope uses the metaphor of the impression a seal leaves in wax to express the image of the soul. This analogy is well worn because it perfectly articulates the relation between an image and the "reality" which it represents, a relationship that is not strictly metaphoric. The wax is and remains wax. The suprasensible reality, like the seal which is no longer present, remains imperceptible and distant, except for the impression that it leaves in the wax. The impression is a mirror image of the seal, but it does not share any substantiality with the seal itself (unless the seal has left some residue or trace of itself in the impression). The image depends on the wax in which it is impressed in order to appear, and yet the image is not of the same substance as the wax, nor is it identical with the seal, or form (*morphe*) which made the impression. In Greek, the name for the impression, the form as it is given to the wax, is *schema*; in Latin it becomes *figura*. Inherent in the Latin term is the verb *ingere*, to shape or mold, although with a specific sense that something is created only insofar as it is created by the forming of an already existent substance. Figuration or fictioning brings together something other (the seal) with something

made (in wax), but the resulting image is neither the seal nor the wax, neither form nor figure.

We find this fiction even in reason. Irony is so well known as the mode of Socrates' speech that one forgets that his pronouncements are therefore never stable and always hint at an internal contradiction which threatens the entire edifice with collapse. In Book X, the irony is thick when Plato pretends to address Homer on the value of poetry. de Man's observation that philosophy depends on its ability to develop an adequate aesthetics and that aesthetic judgment was a practice long before it was recognized by name are borne out by this notorious addendum to the *Republic*. In an apostrophe, Socrates begins,

My dear Homer, we shall say, if our definition of representation is wrong and you are not merely manufacturing copies at a third remove from reality, but are a stage nearer the truth about human excellence, and really capable of judging what kind of conduct will make the individual or the community better or worse, tell us any state whose constitution you have reformed . . . What city attributes the benefit of its legal system to your skill? (599d-e)

Socrates continues, but one begins to suspect this criticism, for the judgment against the poet could just as well, or rather, even more effectively be made against the figure of the philosopher-guardian in the *Republic* itself.

. . . tell us any state whose constitution a *philosopher* has reformed . . . What ingenious inventions for the arts and business of life can be attributed to the *philosopher*? . . . I suppose then, we must say, that the *philosopher* knows nothing but how to imitate, to lay on with words and phrases the colors of the several arts in such fashion that others equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent . . . so mighty is the spell that these adornments naturally exercise, though when they are stripped bare of their musical coloring and taken by themselves, I think you know what sort of a showing these

sayings of the *philosopher* make. For you, I believe, have observed them.¹⁰

At the very least, the stability of aesthetic judgment in Plato is no longer certain. Judgments require a universal agreement, a common sense of aesthetic *value*. As an underhanded offensive, Socrates accuses Homer of making groundless judgments without being capable of making them. But epic poetry does not make judgments. Rather, interpretations, such as the ethically laden ones supplied by Socrates, make the poem make such judgments. Plato tacitly substitutes these “allegories of Homer” for the poems themselves.

Nonetheless, the trap has been set and sprung; the ruse is accomplished. By reacting to the philosopher and immediately leaping to the defense of poetry, one forgets that by defending poetry against philosophy on philosophical grounds, poetry has already left its ground. This defensive and reactive stance accomplishes precisely the goal set by philosophy for poetry: to become an object of *knowledge*. Only that which is *knowable* can be dismissed or sublated by philosophy. Aesthetics is the subspecies of philosophy which enforces this law. In Plato, it was still a fight.¹¹ By the time Baumgarten used the term “aesthetics” in 1750, poetry’s resistance to the demands of philosophy had been worn down. Art had already been reduced to an object of judgment or taste, that is either an object of understanding or an object of pleasure. Modern aesthetics is something of a compromise between the

¹⁰ The only word changed from the translation is “poet” to “philosopher”.

¹¹ The dialogue with Ion, a direct confrontation between the philosopher and the rhapsode on behalf of poetry, may be the only dialogue from which Socrates does not emerge the unqualified victor. That is because Ion does not take the Socratic bait, but blithely and indifferently insists on the skill of singing Homer.

forces of judgment and taste, but certainly aesthetics is a philosophical response to a philosophical need. As Klaus Berghahn observes:

What was needed was a new theory of sensual knowledge, which would also philosophically ground the enjoyment of art. That is the moment that gave birth to modern aesthetics.¹²

The perceived need to subsume art under the auspices of philosophy has determined the history of art ever since. The Socratic method of exclusion by reason has been replaced with the more effective method of subsumption (better known as sublation) by reason. Art is no longer other than philosophy but has become its servant. The difference between aesthetics and philosophy is merely a matter of form. Berghahn notes, "Aesthetic experience possesses its own laws, which are similar to those of reason."¹³ Art is no longer allowed to follow its own law, or at least not in the open.

When Hegel proclaimed that art was a thing of the past, he was only making an astute if painful observation. As Heidegger points out in the Epilogue to "On the Origin of the Work of Art," Hegel never denied that there would be great works of art, but he dared to suggest that art was no longer an "essential and necessary way in

¹² Klaus Berghahn, "From Classicist to Classical Literary Criticism, 1730-1806" in *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730-1980*, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P, 1988), p. 44. Berghahn makes the connection of aesthetics to philosophy quite clear, noting that Baumgarten "was still indebted to rationalistic philosophy" and understood aesthetics to be "the analogue of logic." Berghahn even suggests, although with admitted exaggeration, that Baumgarten sought "to *complete* the rationalistic system by going to investigate the *lower* cognitive faculties (such as feelings, imagination, taste) and integrating them into the system." This system was through and through philosophical. "The task of aesthetics is to recognized (by means of the senses) beauty as perfection" (44-45).

¹³ Berghahn, p. 45.

which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence.”¹⁴ Whether that judgment holds is another question, but the judgment can only be challenged if a law other than aesthetics, other than the *logos* of philosophy can be found. Allegory may be this other law, if it is a “law” at all. At the very least, allegory challenges the metaphysical treatment of art because the very structure of aesthetics is allegorical. Allegory is the “origin” of aesthetics, the structure of the space from which it emerges. The experience of the beautiful in a literary work of art, the aesthetic experience, is supposedly spontaneous and certainly attractive. The encounter, however, is hardly spontaneous. If the aesthetic experience is an experience of the beautiful, then the work of art encountered is not experienced spontaneously but mediated by the idea of beauty. The aesthetic experience is always ideological because it in fact draws its authority from the ideal realm (“the beautiful”) while pretending to draw it from the material object, the work of art. Under the aesthetic ideology, the beautiful appears in the work of art because the work of art itself partakes of the beautiful. The artwork is believed to coincide with the beautiful and therefore through the work of art, we perceive the universal idea of the beautiful. The work of art, despite its symbolic pretensions, serves as a mediating term. It is not the work of art as such that has value but its ability to mediate not only for the beautiful but for our perception of the beautiful. The work of art brings together the ideal with the real, but without itself partaking in either realm. When it is *judged* under the law of aesthetics, which is *like* the law of reason, the work of art is reduced to one term or the other. Either it is an adequate representation of the real object or of the ideal concept, but it is not judged in accordance with itself, as a thing that is rather than as a thing that represents. Under

¹⁴ OWA, p. 80.

the law of aesthetics, the work of art withdraws as a work of art. The science of aesthetics mediates the artwork, and the work of art is concealed in this mediation.

An important aspect of Kantian *aesthetics* has been forgotten. In "The Analytic of the Beautiful" of the Third Critique, Kant insists repeatedly that the object itself is never beautiful. Beauty is only possible in the human mind, in a contemplation which *feels* the harmonious unity of conceptual understanding and empirical reality that can be communicated as 'common sense', but never grasped, either morally or empirically. Kant could not complete his philosophy precisely because the image of the beautiful and even more radically the image of the sublime did not bridge the distance between the conceptual and the empirical but made that distance more manifest. The image is "commerce" itself, moving deftly between the ideal and the real, but there is nothing in the image itself to commodify. Judgment cannot stand up to critique. Instead of synthesizing the realms of pure and practical reason, the *Critique of Judgment* achieves precisely what the German word for judgment, *Urteilkraft*, etymologically signifies: it divides. The third critique begins to fracture not only its own thesis but to bring the structures of pure and practical reason into question. Judgment does not join together but tears asunder.

The cohesiveness which philosophy has sought is not to be found in aesthetics but in art itself. Since Plato, art has been set up in opposition to philosophy, and summarily dismissed. In declaring art a thing of the past, Hegel simply repeated Plato's substitution of the aesthetic judgment of poetry for poetry as such. Aesthetics is the means by which philosophy triumphs over art by substituting the metaphysical language of reason for the language of poetry which does not answer to the law of knowledge or proceed by reason. In this substitution, art becomes more accessible. It is *for us*, for our moral edification or even our enjoyment, but it is no longer art as such. Hegel's declaration is really nothing more

than an observation of a long-standing practice. As long as poetry is treated in these terms, as useful and valuable, as aesthetically pleasing, pleasantly didactic, politically assertive or socially uplifting, art and especially poetry will remain "in the past". Literary criticism is a philosophical practice. The first conscious attempt at a school of literary criticism was characterized, in the wake of Hegel, as a pursuit of the "literary absolute", a counterpart in literature to the self-conscious subject in philosophy.¹⁵ The far-reaching consequence of Plato's attempt to substitute philosophy for art has been to make aesthetics inescapable in the modern Western world.

Allegory must be divided from aesthetics. Only this division will allow allegory to stand phenomenologically as what it is. As soon as this division is allowed, allegory will reveal its true relation to aesthetics, neither as its corrective nor as its opponent. Aesthetics studies the "sensory manifestation of the idea", the appearance of the beautiful; allegory is the structure of this appearance. The conflict between aesthetics and allegory is the conflict which rages within every literary scholar as de Man confided in one of his last essays, "most of us feel internally divided between the compulsion to theorize about literature and a much more attractive, spontaneous encounter with literary works." He characterizes literary theory as "something bleakly abstract and ugly" in and of itself (and "that cannot be entirely blamed on the perversity of its practitioners") and also comments on the relief afforded by any methodology that identifies a correspondence between theoretical rigor and aesthetic appreciation.¹⁶ The desire for such a correspondence

¹⁵ See the extended study by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, tr. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988).

is motivated by the defense of aesthetic values, and the deftness of this defensive posture should indeed arouse some suspicion.

The alacrity with which one rushes, as by instinct, to the defense of aesthetic values indicates that the source of one's suspicion should be the compatibility of the aesthetic dimensions of literature with whatever it is that its theoretical investigation discloses.¹⁷

The resistance to theory is the near-instinctual defense of aesthetics.¹⁸ Theory puts aesthetics on the defensive. de Man is not so much interested in this conflict or in its resolution as in the essential difficulty which it demonstrates. There is something in literature which resists aestheticization, and there is something in aesthetics which resists literature. As a system, aesthetics has a zero tolerance for such resistance, and so the difference between aesthetics (or the literary critic who mounts its defense) and theory (or the literary critic who challenges aesthetic ideology) becomes an opposition. The problem, which it was de Man's lifelong project to expose, is that aesthetics cannot resist the resistance of literature (more specifically of poetry and more generally of art) and the resistance to aesthetics is built into aesthetics itself. Aesthetics will always begin its own deconstruction. It needs the alacritous defense of critics (and even artists) who will uphold the aesthetic principle and insist upon the system. However, the system has what de Man (ironically) calls a defective cornerstone continually threatening the entire

¹⁶ Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics" in *Aesthetic Ideology*, (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1996), (hereafter SSHA), p. 91.

¹⁷ SSHA, p. 92.

¹⁸ See Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory" and "The Return to Philology" in *The Resistance to Theory*, (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1993).

aesthetic edifice with collapse. This “defective” cornerstone soundly supports the entire structure, and the cornerstone is allegory.

For this reason, the “limit” of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* is imposed by nothing other than the work of art. Hegel reaches an unsurpassable limit because he recognizes the antithesis which lies not only in works of fine art but in human consciousness. When art is transferred into the imagination [*Vorstellung verlegt*], the antithesis within the artwork is transferred along with it. Hegel recognizes this contradiction in the artwork: first in the symbolic form, as a natural object invested with a universal significance; then in classic form, as a plastic material particularly suited to a universal; and finally, in romantic form, as a universal no longer dependent on a form externally concrete but concrete in thought alone. Romantic art prepares for the transfer of art entirely into the realm of the imagination where it becomes an object not for sensuous perception but for thoughtful contemplation. That is why Hegel calls the name “*Ästhetik*” inappropriate [*unpassenden*] and superficial [*oberflächlichen*], and yet, he retains the word in his lecture course with the following caveat:

Wir wollen es deshalb bei dem Namen Ästhetik bewenden lassen, weil er als bloßer Name für uns gleichgültig und außerdem einstweilen so in die gemeine Sprache übergegangen ist, daß er als Name kann beibehalten werden. Der eigentliche Ausdruck jedoch für unsere Wissenschaft ist “Philosophie der Kunst”, und bestimmter “Philosophie der schönen Kunst.”

We shall therefore permit the name *Ästhetik* to stand because as a mere name, it is indifferent to us, and moreover, has up to a certain point passed into common language, such that as a name it may be retained. The proper expression, however, for our science is “Philosophy of Art”, or more definitely, “Philosophy of Fine Art.”¹⁹

Perhaps nothing has been as thoroughly forgotten in Hegel as this difference, the indifference of a name which does not refer to its meaning.

Hegel is absolutely correct to differentiate his object of study from the name *Ästhetik*. In the lectures, Hegel offers a corrective to the inappropriate and superficial “science of sensation”, and perhaps that is why he permits the name to stand, indifferently. Hegel’s indifference to the name is worthy of some attention, however. An indifference to the name *Ästhetik* also signifies an indifference to its etymological definition, i.e. as something capable of perception. By retaining the name *Ästhetik* for his own Science of Art, Hegel has overwritten the Greek meaning with its mirror image. In Greek the focus is on the thing that appears to perception, that which is capable of being perceived. In German philosophy, the focus becomes the knowledge of what appears. That which appears loses its genuine truth and life, to borrow Hegel’s phrase, and is moved [*verlegt*] (or more literally misplaced) into the imagination [*Vorstellung*]. Hegel follows the pattern established in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He begins with sense perception, that which simply appears, because he must begin there, but he quickly moves into the imagination. Hegel as much as admits that “aesthetics” is an allegory in which the word does not say what it means. The post-Hegelian indifference to this difference is not surprising since Hegel himself seems to make light of it, except that he begins the entire series of lectures by making this distinction and routinely preferring the expression “Science of Art”, *Wissenschaft der Kunst*, to “Aesthetics”.²⁰ Such

¹⁹ Georg F. W. Hegel, *Einleitung in die Ästhetik* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967). English translation, unless otherwise noted, from *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, tr. Bernard Bosanquet (New York: Penguin, 1993). Hereafter cited as “Hegel A” with the German citation followed by the English citation: p.3; p. 19.

²⁰ For example, after his troubling observation that “on the side of its highest destiny” art is and remains a thing of the past, Hegel concludes: “Therefore, the

“forgetting” figures prominently in Hegel’s philosophy which advocates an interiorization of the dialectic such that it becomes a rote memory.

Hegel’s focus in the lectures on Aesthetics is the move from reality, the world of sense perception, to the imagination, or the world of ideas. In this regard, he is through-and-through a Platonist, but not without some reservation. As soon as he establishes the more pressing need for a Science of Art, he admits an inherent difficulty in that art resists the systematization required by philosophy. According to Hegel, “Whatever ideas others may have of philosophy and philosophizing, I regard the pursuit of philosophy as utterly incapable of existing apart from a scientific procedure.”²¹ Even as an object of thought, however, as the Science of Art rather than art as such, the concept of art remains a conceptualized contradiction. And thus Hegel allows that art alone must be treated with a “certain relaxation of scientific stringency” [*von der wissenschaftlichen Strenge nachgelassen werden*].²² Art and Science alienate one another, and yet Hegel recognizes that this very alienation is what brings them together. This is none other than the dialectical structure of human consciousness that is established in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the process of gaining self-consciousness, *Geist* (Spirit) exercises much freedom and caprice, but the product of *Geist* is always a measure of *Geist* itself. Hegel argues that as an object of thought, art springs from *Geist*. Regardless of their appearance, works of art are permeated [*durchdringen*] with it.

Wissenschaft der Kunst is a much more pressing need in our day than in times in which art simply as art, was enough to furnish a full satisfaction.” (Hegel A, p. 30; p. 13.

²¹ Hegel A, p. 30; p. 13-14.

²² *ibid.*, p. 31; p. 14.

Die Kunst nun und ihre Werke, also aus dem Geiste entsprungen und erzeugt, sind selber geistiger Art, wenn auch ihre Darstellung den Schein der Sinnlichkeit in sich aufnimmt und das Sinnliche mit Geist durchdringt.

Now art and its works, as springing from and generated out of Spirit, are themselves a spiritual form, even if their representation is taken in the semblance[Schein] of the sensual, and the sensible is permeated [thoroughly] with Spirit.²³

The particular contribution of the work of art is as an object in which *Geist* is able to grasp itself in the shape of thought [*in seiner eignetümlichen Form als Denken zu fassen*] but also to recognize itself again in its renunciation of the sentimental and the sensible form [*sondern ebenso sehr sich in seiner Entäußerung zur Empfindung und Sinnlichkeit wiederzuerkennen*]. Hegel therefore concludes,

So gehört auch das Kunstwerk, in welchem der Gedanke sich selbst entäußert, zum Bereich des begreifenden Denkens, und der Geist, indem er es der wissenschaftlichen Betrachtung unterwirft, befriedigt darin nur das Bedürfnis seiner eigenen Natur.

So too the artwork, in which the thought renounces itself, belongs to the realm of conceivable thoughts, and the Spirit, to which the scientific examination is submitted/subjected, satisfied therein only the need of its singular nature.²⁴

For Hegel, *Geist* is the origin of the work of art, and the Philosophy of Fine Art (which is indifferently called *Ästhetik*) is the means by which this origin is revealed. When Hegel says "*Ästhetik*" he does not mean what he says. Under this meaningless name, he has established a scientific field of study which is not a study of art as something which appears but a study of art as something in which *Geist* or

²³ *ibid*, p. 32; p. 15.

²⁴ *ibid*.

Spirit appears in something that it is not. The whole Ästhetik project is possible by the structure usually identified as allegory, but Hegel has simultaneously emptied the structure of its presumed referential function. The task remains, however, to determine the function of this allegorical structure which is not referential.

In the section, "*Begriff des Kunstschönen*" [The Concept of Fine Art] Hegel defines the essence of art as *der Gegensatz des Allgemeinen, das für sich in derselben Weise gegen das Besondere, wie dieses seiner seits gegen das Allgemein fixiert wird*. [The contradiction of the universal, which opposes itself against the particular in the same way that [the particular] is itself fixed against the universal.]²⁵ For Hegel art is inherently this contradiction: art is both universal and particular. Contradiction specifies art. In the sensuous realm, the essence of art cannot be fully appreciated because only fully conscious Spirit can grasp (or conceptualize) this contradiction. For Hegel, the philosophy of art is the conceptualization of art as the perfect site of mediation in which the immediate appears in its fullness, not as an empty experience [*Erfahrung*] but as the experience of knowledge itself [*Erlebnis*]. In its immediacy, Art is nothingness [*Nichtigkeit*] just like the phenomenal object of mere sense-perception. This nothingness is not nothing for Hegel, but a privileged site of mediation. In the work of art, the particular and the universal are mediated. In the past, the work of art was experienced immediately ; art itself appeared absolute and consequently appeared to be absolved from human consciousness. Art is no longer absolute because Spirit (human consciousness) has, by stages, broken down this appearance of absolution and discovered its own reflection in the work of art. Although there will continue to be great works of art, art as absolute or immediate maintains itself only at an unbridgeable distance. The work of art

²⁵ Hegel A, p.81; my translation, cf. p. 59.

becomes irretrievably distant once Spirit recognizes itself there. For Hegel, this is progress. Nonetheless, the artwork and its absolute essence must remain, for nothing is lost in Hegel.

In this conceptualization, Hegel departs radically from the traditional understanding of art. In the second part of the Introductory Lectures, he directly disputes both the Platonic view of art as mimetic and the Aristotelian view of art as didactic (cathartic). Hegel also distinguishes art absolutely from nature.²⁶ In the Hegelian world picture, art has become *for us*, an object of knowledge, and that is why there is no longer art which is an object of immediate sensuality but only “Aesthetics” which makes art an object of knowledge “for us”. Art, or the essence of art, is immediate, but as Hegel makes clear in *The Phenomenology*, the Subject requires mediation in order to experience the immediate. The purpose of the lectures on aesthetics is to show that *Wissenschaft* will replace art, not simply as art, but as that which is absolute. In order to do this, Hegel must show that the absolute is immediate and that this immediacy is only possible through mediation. *Wissenschaft* is the inverse image of Art, but Art is the model for the Absolute. This Art, however, is neither symbolic nor aesthetic. As explicated by de Man, the confusion and contradiction in Hegel’s own use of the terms “sign” and “symbol” discredit the privilege of the aesthetic as well as the symbolic. De Man identifies the privilege accorded in practice to that aesthetically “ugly and barren trope” – allegory.

We would have to conclude that Hegel’s philosophy . . . is in fact an allegory of the disjunction between philosophy and history, or, in our more restricted concern, between literature and aesthetics . . . The reasons for this disjunction, which it is equally vain to deplore or praise, are not themselves historical or recoverable by means of history. To the extent that they are

²⁶ See Hegel A, p. 66f; p. 46f.

inherent in language, in the necessity which is also an impossibility to connect the subject with its predicates or the sign with its symbolic significations, the disjunction will always, as it did in Hegel, manifest itself as soon as experience shades into thought, history into theory. *The emergence of thought and of theory is not something that our own thought can hope to prevent or control.*²⁷

Aesthetics, or the Science of Art, is grounded in Spirit, but Spirit itself is shown to depend on the structure of allegory. Spirit is an image which partakes of both the phenomenal and the universal realms.

The division of allegory from aesthetics reinvigorates both terms and brings them into a new light. Allegory and aesthetics are not to be opposed but held in suspension, and what they are really supporting are art and philosophy themselves. Walter Benjamin recognized this fundamental connection and begins *Der Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels* [*The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*] (which is ultimately a book about a literary form) with a lengthy treatise on philosophy. Within the first paragraphs of the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue", Benjamin admonishes that philosophy should "remain true to the law of its own form as the representation of truth and not as a guide to the acquisition of knowledge."²⁸ Benjamin then offers the form of the treatise, described as *Darstellung als Umweg*, representation as digression, as the structure proper to this form, and specifically counter to the purposeful structure of systematic and teleological thought which is

²⁷ SSHA, p. 104. de Man here echoes his own argument in the seminar essay, "The Resistance to Theory." de Man ended the Hegel essay on this provocative note, and died a year later. The last page of this essay may constitute de Man's most important contribution to the understanding of allegory, leaving much work to be done.

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* OGTD, tr. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), [In German, *Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (hereafter UDT), (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), p.28.

always governed by meaning. Benjamin rightly disputes the misappropriation of Hegel as the father of the *Systembegriffe* (the concept of system). It is precisely the systematic tendency of philosophy that causes Hegel's lament that "Spirit has not only lost its essential life; it is also conscious of this loss, of the finitude that is its own content."²⁹

The Preface to the *Phenomenology* begins with a gesture to the custom in which the scientific work begins with "an explanation of the author's aim, why he wrote the book, and the relationship in which he believes it to stand to earlier or contemporary treatises on the same work." In the next sentence Hegel dismisses this custom as "inappropriate and unsuitable", *unpassend und zweckwidrig* in a philosophical work, even though the custom is often followed to the letter in philosophy.³⁰ Certainly a philosopher begins by considering the tradition, but the work is doomed if it remains determined to accept or reject a given philosophical system and itself proceeds on the assumption that the "conflict and seeming incompatibility" of an old system can be resolved by a new one. Hegel attempts to direct philosophy away from "aims and results" and towards process as an equally essential aspect of the philosophical whole. He dismisses judgment as quite easy, comprehension as difficult, and a blend of judgment and comprehension as the most difficult of all.³¹

²⁹ Georg F.W. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* Band 9 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1980). Translations are, unless otherwise noted, are from *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller, (London: Oxford UP, 1977). Hereafter cited as *Phenomenology* with German citations first: p.12; p. 4.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 9; p. 1.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 13; p. 5.

Spirit is neither determined by judgment nor simply to be comprehended. Science, for Hegel, is constituted by the blend which will be better articulated as mediation, and this blend appears in the figure of *Geist*. "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth." [*Die wahre Gestalt, in welcher die Wahrheit existiert, kann allein das wissenschaftliche System derselben seyn.*]³² Not only has Spirit not been allowed to take this shape, but the misguided structure of philosophical study has virtually emptied Spirit of the Universal which is its true content.

Der Geist zeigt sich so arm, daß er sich, wie in der Sandwüste der Wanderer nach einem einfachen Trunk Wassers, nur nach dem dürftigen Gefühle des Göttlichen überhaupt für seine Erquickung zu sehnen scheint. An diesem, woran dem Geiste genügt, ist die Größe seines Verlustes zu ermessen.

The Spirit shows itself as so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the desert craving for a mere mouthful of water, it seems to crave for its refreshment only the bare feeling of the divine in general. By the little which now satisfies Spirit, we can measure the extent of its loss.³³

Hegel positions himself as a lonely figure opposing a view "as prevalent as it is pretentious", namely the "feeling and intuition of the Absolute" which exempts the Absolute from scientific study. Not only does Hegel dispute this exemption but he claims to be responding to the demand of Spirit which has finally recognized its own destitution.

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel does not seek to determine what Spirit is, because such determination would only drive Spirit more deeply into oblivion. If Spirit is truly universal and infinite, as Hegel believes it is, then its substance never

³² *ibid.*, p. 11; p. 3.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 13; p. 5.

changes and can never be determined in finite terms. It also means that the Absolute Subject is not to be identified with the individual.³⁴ As the merely mortal love of wisdom, philosophy must recognize its own finitude before it can respond to the demands of Spirit.

Diesem Bedürfnisse soll sie [Philosophie] also nicht so ehr die Verschlossenheit der Substanz aufschliessen, und diese zum Selbst bewußtsein erhebe, -- nicht so sehr ihr chaotisches Bewußtsein zur gedachten Ordnung und zur Einfachheit des Begriffes zurückbringen, als vielmehr die Sonderungen des Gedankens zusammenschützen, den unterscheidende Begriff unterdrücken und das Gefühl des Wesensherstellen, nicht sowohl Einsicht als Erbauung.

Philosophy is to meet this need, not by opening up the fast-locked nature of substance, and raising this to self-consciousness, not by bringing consciousness out of its chaos back to an order based on thought, nor to the simplicity of the Notion, but rather running together what is put asunder, by suppressing the differentiations of the Notion and restoring the *feeling* of essential being, in short, by providing edification rather than insight.³⁵

This edifice must be capable of sustaining the universal and the particular, of bridging the realms of the infinite and the finite, of sustaining a conceptualized contradiction that is entirely alien to reason. Spirit will appear in this edifice not because a philosopher has revealed its mystery with a keener vision, but to the contrary, has respected the *Verschlossenheit der Substanz*, the closedness of the

³⁴ The Preface in fact concludes with this comment: "the share in the total work of Spirit which falls to the individual can only be very small. Because of this the individual must all the more forget himself, as the nature of Science implies and requires. [*der Antheil, der an dem gesammelten Werke des Geistes auf die Thätigkeit des Individuums fällt, nur genug sein kann, so muß dieses, wie die Natur der Wissenschaft schon es mit sich bringt, sich um so mehr vergessen*] (p. 49; ¶72).

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.12; ¶7.

substance. The *Verschlossenheit* is not to be *aufschliessen*. The closed is not to be disclosed because Spirit cannot be self-consciously brought to consciousness. Rather, philosophy's task is propaedeutic, to prepare a structure (*Erbauung*) that will bring together what is essentially different, the universal and the particular, but such a gathering can only occur in the imagination. Hegel recognizes the irreconcilable difference between these two realms: Spirit appears in the finite world but remains infinite. The phenomenology of Spirit does not capture the substance of Spirit but it allows Spirit to appear.³⁶ The structure of this appearance is allegorical.

If the symbol is defined as the coincidence of the ideal with the real, then only allegory is capable of being truly symbolic in the profane world, and allegory is not beautiful but sublime. The sublime, however, defies mediation. The sublime, not the beautiful, is the "spontaneous experience" of the work of art, an immediate experience. Aesthetics has to recuperate this experience, and this is largely accomplished by treating the sublime, the immediate, as the beautiful. Aesthetics is, in fact, the mediation of the sublime experience of the work of art by means of the conceptualization of the beautiful. Patrick Roney rehearses Lyotard's response "to the enframing power of technoscience" as that of an exceeding of the beautiful, driving it "toward and beyond the limit of its own possibility." At that limit, the beautiful "decomposes . . . into its elements." In the place of the beautiful as form, the sublime emerges in the work of art and indicates "a point of resistance with the potential to unwork (*désœuvrer*) the imperatives of image fabrication [or figuration]."³⁷ With Lyotard, Roney links the sublime to the possibility of a true

³⁶ In this important respect, Hegel and Prudentius are in agreement. The readings in this dissertation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Prudentius' *Psychomachia* show the affinity between these two very different works of art.

presence which would be the “precondition for the [appearing] of beings.” Roney invokes Heidegger in order to define the sublime work of art as “both the happening of truth, and the setting into work of truth.” And yet, as Roney acutely observes, “the sublime work of art does not simply leave this process intact, but *displaces* its own significations and representations because it intends, i.e. transcends toward, the unrepresentable *even though it remains tied to the presentable*” (emphasis added).³⁸ The sublime has a necessarily allegorical structure but it is not an allegory *of* anything.

In the Lectures on Aesthetics, Hegel attempts to conceal the aporia of the sublime. This aporia threatens to destabilize the entire structure of knowledge and the philosophy which takes this knowledge as its object. In the Lectures on Aesthetics, Hegel replicates the method established in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, beginning with the admission that the immediate is meaningless. Imposing meaning by using this *Nichtigkeit* as the starting point for the process of Spirit coming to know itself, Hegel immediately overwrites the sublime with the powers of perception and the concept of beauty. For Hegel, aesthetics ends in the sublime, which is precisely its starting point, the “spontaneous experience” of the work of art. For Hegel, this immediate experience is only possible through a process of mediation which is then forgotten, or rather released into rote memory, as if “learned by heart” (in German, *Gedächtnis*). Hegel presents this mediation in the guise or appearance of progress, but it is just as easily understood in the appearance of regression. Whether in the appearance of progress or regress, phenomenology begins and ends (or ends and begins) with the work of art, and as long as it remains

³⁷ Roney, p. 170.

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 171-2.

philosophical, or aesthetic, the value of the work is unassailed. This value only comes into question when the phenomenological reduction proceeds further and tries to determine the phenomenology of the phenomena, to ask the question, "What is the work of art?" Heidegger dared to ask this question, and in the essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art", he shows that allegory, not the beautiful, is the essence of the work of art.

For Hegel, the *Zweck* or telos of art, which is what Heidegger will call its *Ursprung* or origin, is *Gegensatz*, antithesis or contradiction. For Hegel, that which is "art" in the "work of art" is specifically the contradiction of the universal and the particular in a single object. Without direct reference to Hegel, this is the very definition of art with which Heidegger begins his essay.

Vermutlich wird es überflüssig und verwirrend, dem nachzufragen, weil das Kunstwerk über das Dinghafte hinaus noch etwas anderes ist. Dieses Andere, was daran ist, macht das Künstlerliche aus. Das Kunstwerk ist zwar ein angefertigtes Ding, aber es sagt noch etwas anderes, als das bloße Ding selbst ist, allo agoreuei. Das Werk macht mit Anderem öffentlich bekannt, es offenbart Anderes; es ist Allegorie. Mit dem angefertigten Ding wird im Kunstwerk noch etwas Anderes zusammengebracht. Zusammenbringen heißt griechisch symballein. Das Werk ist Symbol.

Allegorie und Symbol geben die Rahmenvorstellung her, in deren Blickbahn sich seit langem die Kennzeichnung des Kunstwerkes bewegt.

Presumably it becomes something superfluous and confounding to inquire about [the artwork] because the artwork is something else over and above thingness. This otherness which is in it constitutes its art-ness. The artwork is, indeed a manufactured thing, but it says something other than the mere thing itself, *allo agoreuei*. The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests otherness; it is an allegory. With the manufactured thing something other is brought together in the artwork. To bring together in Greek is called *symballein*. The work is a symbol.

Allegory and symbol provide the conceptual frame
within whose channel of vision the artwork has for a long
time been characterized.³⁹

Heidegger critiques the conceptualizing of allegory and symbol; however, he also suggests the casting together of what has been divided between them. The artwork has long been characterized in terms of symbol and allegory because they describe the structure by which art appears in the work, but this structure is not itself a concept. The structure is *phantasmenological*. In the work of art something appears. A phenomenology of the artwork will reveal the structure of this appearance but not its source. Since phenomenology is itself the study of phenomena, specifically that which *appears*, the phenomenology of the work of art proves crucial to the phenomenon of phenomenology itself. Whereas the phenomenology of phenomena would lead only to a tautological and circular reasoning, with the turn to art and particularly poetry, Heidegger is able to step out of the hermeneutic circle and to strike through Being (~~Being~~). In this image of a word that is written and then excised in a way such that it continues to appear, Being is and is not, it shows itself without disclosing itself, and it does not mean what it says because what it says has no meaning. "~~Being~~" may be the shortest allegory ever written, and this allegory grounds the center of Heidegger's philosophy.

In the *History of the Concept of Time*, the lecture course from which *Sein und Zeit* ultimately emerged, Heidegger begins with the basic definition of a phenomenon as simply "that which shows itself", but he sharpens this into a more general definition of phenomena as "a mode of encounter of entities in themselves such that they show themselves." Heidegger offers the Greek etymology of

³⁹ Holz p. 4; OWA 19-20, modified.

phainesthai as the middle voice of the verb *phaino* which he defines as “to bring something to light, to make it visible in itself.” The phenomenon is that which can come to light, but not all phenomenon show themselves in the same way. Some phenomena do not show themselves but instead appear as something else, as *Schein* in German, a pretext which Heidegger describes as “pretension to be manifest but not really being it.”⁴⁰ Heidegger admits that *Schein* is merely a modification of authentic phenomenon. Although the phenomenon does not show itself in itself, it still shows itself. The important distinction is not between *Schein* and *Phenomenon* but between semblance [*Schein*] and appearance [*Erscheinung*] or mere appearance [*bloß Erscheinung*]. In fact, appearance also shows itself to be phenomenal, but first it must be extricated from its ontic use as a referent. In common usage, appearance is characterized by reference. In order to fix what appearance *is*, Heidegger rigorously analyzes the term “appearance” by submitting it to the phenomenological reduction. This assumes that appearance is something and as something it can be grasped phenomenologically and not merely conceptually. In the usual conceptual understanding, appearance reflects the privilege of the essential or spiritual over the real or material in a metaphysical system.

Appearances are themselves occurrences which refer back to other occurrences from which we can infer something else which does not make an appearance. Appearances are appearances of something which is not given as an appearance. Appearance has the distinguishing feature of reference.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The History of the Concept of Time*, tr. Theodore Kisiel, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana UP, 1992), (hereafter HCT), p. 81.

⁴¹ HCT, p. 82.

In the metaphysical structure, appearances refer as their primary function, and presumably the appearances indicate meaning without getting in its way. "The term appearance [*Erscheinung*] therefore means a kind of reference of something to something which does not show itself in itself." Appearances indicate or announce something that is not itself present, and once this function is performed, the appearance disappears into the meaning, the physical yields to the metaphysical. In this mode of representation, the phenomenon "does not even pretend to show itself [as in *Schein*] but instead pretends to represent itself."⁴² Thus *Erscheinung*, the appearance which is like the image in the mirror, is entirely lacking in substance. That which shows itself is neither showing itself in itself nor showing itself in something it is not. And yet, something appears.

It at first appears that appearance is not phenomenal, but Heidegger shows that it is. "The possibility of appearance as reference of something to something rests on having that something which does the referring show itself in itself. . . The structure of appearance as reference already intrinsically presupposes the more original structure of self-showing."⁴³ In other words, something does show itself, and that something is more originary than what appears as a signifying reference. In appearance the phenomenon shows itself by concealing itself. Heidegger thus distinguishes between the ontic understanding of appearance as reference or representation, and the ontological understanding of appearance which is far more complex and contradictory. "Appearance implies something which appears, and at the opposite pole, something which does not appear."⁴⁴ Ontically, that which

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.83.

appears refers to that which does not appear but in some way “stands behind” the appearance. The ontic view supports the designation of what does appear as “mere appearance” and upholds the Platonic distinction between the world of shadows and the world of ideas. An ontological view, however, pays attention to the phenomenality of that which does appear and to how it appears. Heidegger clarifies that phenomenology is not the study of “mere appearances” but the study of how things show themselves. Heidegger distinguishes phenomenology from all other sciences “in that it says nothing about the material content of the thematic object of this science” and therefore phenomenology is a methodological term. Phenomenology is a way of “encountering something” which shows itself⁴⁵ and is not *mere* appearance.

For Heidegger, there is nothing behind the phenomenon which gives it meaning or value. There is only what is and “phenomenology is precisely the work of laying open and letting be seen.”⁴⁶ This work is far more difficult than one might expect because although there is nothing behind the phenomenon, the phenomenon is easily covered over and concealed from view. Phenomenology’s greatest task is to peel away the coverings and let the phenomenon come to light. This is the method of “phenomenological reduction” or of “destructive phenomenology”.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.85

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁷ In a phenomenological study, familiar aspects cannot be taken for granted. This goes for phenomenology as well as allegory. Heidegger’s work on phenomenology must be carefully rehearsed in order to show how phenomenology itself has been concealed by the methods of phenomenology. With Husserl, phenomenology became institutionalized. It has become a tool, useful for many things to many fields of study, but no longer useful to itself. Heidegger subjects phenomenology to

In Heidegger, the phenomenon is not defined as a static thing but as a structure of relation, "a mode of encounter". This structure underpins his thought and largely accounts for the turn to poetry.⁴⁸ In poetry, and more generally in art, Heidegger discovered phenomena in which this essential mode of encounter is not covered up. He does not find it in just any poetry or in every work of art, but only in a structure of relation in which something shows itself without referring to something outside of itself. This mode of encounter is exquisitely pronounced in the work of the German poet Hölderlin. There are features in Hölderlin's poetry which lead to a concealment of this mode such that his poems have been appropriated, for example, as nationalist hymns for Germany. But there is also a

the method of phenomenological reduction introduced by his teacher, Husserl. Heidegger articulates how phenomena appear, without jumping to the usual question of how phenomena appear to *consciousness*. Since Hegel and traceable to Kant, and largely because of the work of Husserl, phenomenology has primarily been defined as "the study of the development of human consciousness". The tradition of "phenomenology" does not study what appears to the senses but instead studies the human beings whose senses perceive. The phenomenon that is studied is the phenomenon of mediation, *as if* that is the ground of phenomenological investigation. Etymologically, phenomenology should be the study of appearances, but as Heidegger took great pains to demonstrate, there is not a clear understanding of appearance, and this lack of understanding has led to the groundless ground of most phenomenological investigation. Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the immediate object of sense-certainty. However, Hegel also recognizes that the immediate object, the phenomenon as such, is a *pharmakon* for the universal system. The assumption that an appearance is the representation or indication of something more significant or meaningful is not at all phenomenological. It is metaphysical. The problem with this system is that it treats the universal as if it were something particular, and even more problematically, it assumes that the universal can be known. Such assumptions run rampant in philosophical discourse and every one of its relatives, including literary criticism and aesthetics in general. Heidegger must expend a great deal of effort simply to establish Being as something worth asking about. Indeed, Hegel was forced to do the same for Spirit.

⁴⁸ Heidegger always maintained that the turn, known in Heidegger studies as "The Kehre" came about in being itself. The phenomenological investigation of being led Heidegger to poetry.

continuous resistance to this concealment. The poem interrupts any aesthetic appropriation. There is something else at work in the work of art, something that is not to be found in its material or in its ontical references to meaning, not in the artist and not in the spectator or reader, although all of these are borne by the work of art. Something vaguely referred to as “art” is also and primordially borne by the work. The work of art is both a work, “*ein Werk*”, in the sense of a thing that is and a work, “*Eine Aufgabe*”, in the sense that it is a task, a working out. In order to distinguish the work of art, in both senses, as its task and as a work, there must be a phenomenology of art. Although to a degree the artist is the origin of the work, and the work is the origin of the artist, Heidegger unequivocally states, “neither is the sole support of the other.” Both the artist and the artwork *are* “by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which gives the artist [*Künstler*] and artwork [*Kunstwerk*] their names -- art [*Kunst*].” Heidegger is after this third thing which is not originary in the same way that the artist is the origin of a work and a work the origin of an artist, but the *Ursprung*-origin from which both the artist and the artwork emerge. Heidegger immediately puts into question whether “art” can be conceived as an origin at all, and there is a hint in the German word for origin used in the title: *Ursprung*. The root word is from the verb *springen*, still generally cognate with the English verb to spring, or to emerge suddenly. The prefix “ur” emphasizes the primordially of the springing. An *Ursprung* is a sudden emerging which precedes any other happening. Before the work springs from the artist and before the artist emerges from the work, there is art.⁴⁹ Therefore, art is in the artwork and in the artist. Art is not identical with either but can appear there.

⁴⁹ Heidegger likes to play with this phrasing in German, *Es gibt Kunst*, which is literally translated with the impersonal phrase, “it gives art”, and so Heidegger wonders, what is “it” that gives art?

Heidegger's essay is about the origin of the artwork, and therefore he pursues two related questions, "What is art?" and "How does art show itself?" The general question is not what makes something a work of art. (It is not a question of ethics.) Nor is it the task of the essay to establish how one goes about creating an artwork, or an artist. (It is not a question of poetics.) The framing of the question precludes any version of the genius or the inspired artist because that would find the artist at the origin of the artwork, or reduce art to a mystical experience, and not the third thing vaguely called "art".

Heidegger begins, therefore, with the assumption that "art is present in the artwork". In strict phenomenological terms the artwork is a thing like any other thing. This thing has empirical qualities and can (often) be moved from place to place without any obvious change in its sensual qualities. This thing can also accrue value in the currency of aesthetics which has a clear economic correlation. As a thing, and even as a thing of value, the work of art is not unique, and so neither a material nor an aesthetic evaluation of the work provides a response to the question of what is present in the artwork that is distinctively "art". Although art is not to be found in the material of the work (that thing that is an artwork) Heidegger continues to maintain that art itself is a thing, a phenomenon, and that this "something else in the work constitutes its artistic nature."⁵⁰ The project of "The Origin of the Work of Art" is "to arrive at the immediate and full reality of the work of art" because only in such an arrival will art be discovered in the work of art. Heidegger suggests that "the thingly element" in a work of art (that is, what is 'art' in a work of art) is "like the substructure into and upon which the other, particular

⁵⁰ Holz, p. 3; OWA, p. 19.

[*Eigentliche*] element is built.”⁵¹ As cited above, Heidegger characterizes this substructure in the rather peculiar terms of symbol joined with allegory. This characterization is peculiar because it brings together concepts which have been held apart and even hierarchized as oppositional since the late eighteenth century, most particularly and strongly in the *Literaturwissenschaft* or literary criticism of the Romantic period and still largely in force. Heidegger offers this conceptual frame only in order to witness its self-destruction,⁵² acknowledging and promptly dismissing this tradition. He does not elaborate on the error of method evident in such characterization but his critique can be inferred through his own characterization of allegory and symbol working, and indeed only working together, and in the structure (or substructure) indicated here and elaborated throughout the essay. This structure is none other than that of *phenomena* (“in the Greek sense”), that which shows itself. Although Heidegger never makes the point explicitly, it turns out that the question of allegory is as essential to phenomenology as phenomenology is to the question of allegory.

In the fundamental definition of phenomenon given by Heidegger in *The History of the Concept of Time* as “a mode of encounter of entities in themselves such that they show themselves” the phenomenon does not depend on something standing “behind” it. Rather something appears in the phenomenon that is at the same time not the phenomenon. This is a logical paradox but not a phenomenological one. When a phenomenon is understood logically, the phenomenon itself is lost or covered over by a mediation which connects the

⁵¹ Holz, p. 4; OWA, p. 20, translation modified.

⁵² This is the proper understanding of deconstruction, which does not originate with Derrida but Heidegger (which Derrida would be the first to admit).

phenomenon which appears and an idea which does not appear, thus establishing a metaphysical reference between two distinct realms (the phenomenal and the real) which is familiar ever since Plato told the story of the cave in which the world of shadows is revealed as the mere appearance of the more substantial world of ideas. By means of the metaphysical reference, the phenomenon is mediated and comes to serve the function of indication. Heidegger ultimately acknowledges that the mode of indication indeed rests on the genuine definition of phenomenon that he has established,⁵³ but he also cautions that the free-floating name of phenomenon is all too easily fixed and limited by a definition which grounds itself on the derivative phenomenological manifestation of appearance and the entire phenomenological method is compromised when the structure of appearance is assumed to be metaphysical. Metaphysics has so dominated modern thought that it is nearly impossible to think outside of its laws. Those who have dared to do so have not escaped unscathed.

Like Heidegger, Benjamin identifies the problem of representation [*Darstellung*] at the core of this well-established error in thought. Within the first paragraph of the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue", Benjamin cautions, "If philosophy is to remain true to the law of its own form, as the representation of truth and not as a guide to the acquisition of knowledge, then the exercise of this form -- but not its anticipation in the system -- must be accorded due importance."⁵⁴ In philosophy, Truth should resemble itself. When philosophy asserts itself as a guide to knowledge, it becomes systematic. When philosophy itself pretends to be a system, it changes the essence of Truth and is no longer capable of representing it. In the

⁵³ See Heidegger's discussion in HCT, p. 82f.

⁵⁴ OGTD, p. 28.

system, philosophy proceeds on the assumption that truth can show itself, without acknowledging the fact that if truth were to show itself in the way of basic phenomena, truth would no longer be true to itself; it would simply be "the true", an empirical fact, proven or disproven and subject to the law of the hypothesis, one thing among many things. That is indeed what truth has *become* but it is not what truth *is*. Benjamin concisely critiques this problem.

Inasmuch as it is determined by this concept of system, philosophy is in danger of accommodating itself to a syncretism which weaves a spider's web between separate kinds of knowledge in an attempt to ensnare the truth as if it were something which came flying in from outside.⁵⁵

Benjamin also notes that while the concept of system requires a structure of proleptic universalism, "such philosophy falls far short of the didactic authority of doctrine". Benjamin calls instead upon the "uncircumscribable essentiality of truth" and the "epochs" which have proceeded propaedeutically rather than proleptically. Such epochs are not limited to a particular time period. The baroque is one such epoch. Especially as used by Benjamin, the baroque is a historical period but is not limited to that period. In contrast to the methodological and systematic writings, especially those typical of the nineteenth century, Benjamin offers the treatise, particularly in its medieval style, as an example of the baroque and as an ideal form for the representation of truth. The treatise is didactic "but lacks the conclusiveness of an instruction which could be asserted, like doctrine, by virtue of its own authority."⁵⁶ The philosophical system is characterized by an uninterrupted purposeful structure governed by a universal totality. In contrast, the absence of this

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

structure is the *Kennzeichen*, the recognizable characteristic of the treatise. Benjamin calls this "*Darstellung als umweg*", representation as digression. It is mosaic in quality, indicative of a whole that is interrupted, a representation in which something else manifests itself in the fissures. Truth does not show itself in the material (the ceramic pieces) nor does truth pretend to show itself in the completed image (the mosaic) but it pretends to represent itself in the assemblage of pieces which form an image. Benjamin's preference for the mosaic and likewise for the constellation or *Sternbild* (star-image) identifies the image at the center of philosophy.⁵⁷ Because the image is a fragmented image, however, this center is decentered. It is impossible to locate the center, and Benjamin's work bears witness to this impossibility. The *Origin of the German Tragic Drama* is a treatise on allegory and true to his own observation, the work is propaedeutic and proceeds as a *Darstellung als Umweg*, allegory represented or staged in digression.

Benjamin expressly counters neo-Platonic philosophy. "The being of ideas simply cannot be conceived as an object of vision, not even intellectual vision."⁵⁸ The being of ideas is Truth but Truth is entirely intentionless, and that is why it cannot be an object of vision. Truth has the same relation to ideas as ideas have to phenomena. Therefore, the relationship of Truth to phenomena is mediated, always and unavoidably, by the idea. The idea functions as the image of Truth but is not identical with it. Even though "Truth is the death of intention," and can

⁵⁷ Benjamin aligns the mosaic with the treatise. "The relationship between the minute precision of the work and the proportions of the sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter. In their supreme, western form [Ausbildung] the mosaic and the treatise belong to the Middle Ages; it is their very real affinity which makes the comparison possible" (OGTD, p. 29).

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 35.

therefore never be subject to the law of phenomena (which under the hypothesis is always intentional) in order to appear at all, Truth must have a resemblance in the phenomenal world.

The mode of being in the world of appearances is quite different from the being of truth, which is something ideal. The structure of truth, then, demands a mode of being which in its lack of intentionality resembles the simple existence of things, but which is superior in its permanence.⁵⁹

Truth does not realize itself in the empirical world but is its "origin" in the qualified sense that it is the unknowable antinomy of the empirical world.

Benjamin identifies Truth in the proper name, a word "unimpaired by cognitive meaning", a word that has its power not in signification or meaning but solely in its being as word. Only in the name can a word be truly symbolic. Benjamin sees the task of the philosopher as the restoration of the name to its "primordial form of indiscernability" [*ursprünglich Unvernehmen*]. Philosophy has the ability to hear the primordial name, the idea that is without intention, and thus to follow the law of the idea which Benjamin articulates as follows.

All essences exist in complete and immaculate independence, not only from phenomena, but, especially, from each other.⁶⁰

Benjamin makes recourse to the analogy of the constellation, not to clarify this law by an image but because only the image can express this law.

The metaphysical distinction between two entities that privileges one (as essence or truth) over the other (as material) is an ontic distinction -- not an ontological one. The ontic distinction is a degraded view of appearance.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 37.

Ontologically, the phenomenon as semblance or even as mere appearance is no less a phenomenon and has no less of an ontological value. The important distinction is that the semblance is not a representation but a simultaneous presentation of what shows itself in itself and of what shows itself in what it is not. The consequences for allegory are that we can no longer safely assume that the "meaning" to which an "allegory" refers is more significant than the language or "phenomenon" which makes that "meaning" manifest (if indeed it can still be called "meaning"). The distinction between the literal and allegorical levels is ontic, not ontological. This dissertation is concerned with the ontological difference, and as such, there is no value accorded to either entity, the work (that which shows itself as itself) or that which the work indicates (that which shows itself in that which it is not). The structure of appearance is not referential or representative, and this problematizes the generally understood structure of allegory as the most blatant representation of meaning. Heidegger and Benjamin redirect our attention to the work of art, not as an object of the aesthetic gaze, but as something other to the Subject that is not an object of its own reflection but a resemblance.

In a work of art, we are faced with two things: the work, which stands as an object before us (with value, mobility, and mass) and art, which has no such object qualities. After much questioning and probing, midway through the essay "On the Origin of the Work of Art", Heidegger provisionally concludes, "Thus art is: the creative preserving of truth in the work. Art then is the becoming and happening of truth."⁶¹

On the very last page of the essay, Heidegger notes that this becoming and happening of truth is the art of the artwork. "When truth sets itself into the work, it

⁶¹ Holz, p. 59; OWA, p. 71.

appears."⁶² Appearance, for Heidegger, is the being of truth, and the being of truth is always an advent, a coming into appearance. Truth-as-appearance is the origin of the work of art, but as Heidegger points out, this says that truth arises out of nothing, because appearance is no-thing. "It does indeed [say this] if by nothing is meant the mere not of that which is . . . as an object present in the ordinary way . . . Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary."⁶³ Truth is not an object, but a gathering, a bringing together of "things" (that are not objects). In the work of art, truth is the gathering which gathers something other (which cannot itself appear) together with something made (the work which does appear); however, this is not a peaceful gathering. Heidegger chooses the German word *Gefüge*, meaning texture, or structure, but he also specifies that this gathering of truth is not that of a unity but that of a conflict, a very particular type of conflict. "The conflict is not a rift (*Riß*) as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other."⁶⁴ The opponents do not conform to one another but remain steadfast in their autonomy, and "*Gefüge* is the structure in whose shape the rift composes and submits itself" (64). The conflict between work and thing in the artwork, a conflict that draws work and thing together so that they appear as art, is the same type of conflict Prudentius faces in the *Apotheosis*. Divinity and mortality share no-thing, but they do share this unresolvable conflict which draws them together. What appears in Christ-Jesus is the intimate *Riß* of

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 69; p. 81.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 59; p. 71).

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 51; p. 63.

divinity and mortality. What appears in mortals is an intimate *Riß* of body and soul.

The nothing shared by divinity and mortals is appearance, and this appearance is not an object but a structure which Heidegger here calls, *Gefüge*, but which is not altogether different from his definition of the "schema-image" in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. Because it is an image, the schema-image has the appearance of a particular and schematism adds to the image the possibility of a "general rule governing all possible representations."⁶⁵ Heidegger does not call either the structure *Gefüge* or the schema-image allegory, but indeed they are allegorical. To bring a general rule, that is to say a universal, into a possible intuition, that is, a particular, requires an allegorical structure in which the universal shows itself in the particular which it is not. Not only is the universal not the particular, but in essence they are mutually opposed. In so far as it holds the universal together with the particular, allegory is the structure which supports this *Riß*.⁶⁶ In its primordially, allegory has the structure of *phusis*, not "nature" or "essence" in a banal sense but the bringing forth which Heidegger finds in the work of art. As *phusis*, the work of art sets up a world. The *Psychomachia*, for instance, sets up a world in bringing the soul, something that cannot otherwise appear, together with a world that is conceived in language, without depending on a concept.

⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 3. Translations from: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, tr. James S. Churchill (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1975), (hereafter KPM). See esp. p. 99-106.

⁶⁶ Heidegger certainly knows this, but in order to avoid a destruction of the allegorical tradition which is too circuitous of a path to being, he leaves it implied.

For Heidegger, the simultaneity of time and space, in the phenomenon that shows itself in itself and in which some other phenomenon also shows itself is not figural but phenomenal. There is not representation but presentation. Heidegger articulates the dimensions of presentation in terms of the Greek word *phusis* as the "emerging and rising in itself and in all things."⁶⁷ For Heidegger, *phusis* is not at all the translation of the latinate word *Nature*. In order to arrive at *phusis* with Heidegger, it is first necessary to comprehend the Greek word for truth *aletheia*, as Heidegger comprehends it. As early as *Being and Time* Heidegger remarks in a footnote: "*Phusis* is intrinsically *aletheia*, since *kryptesthai philei* [since it loves to hide]." In *Being and Time*, Heidegger takes up *aletheia* in so far as "from time immemorial, philosophy has associated truth with being," from Parmenides and Aristotle to Kant and Hegel. Heidegger puts this association into question, not in order to deny its validity but to bring *truth* to its phenomenal appearance into the analytic of Dasein. "[I]f truth rightfully has a primordial connection with *being*, the phenomenon of truth moves into the scope of the problematic of fundamental ontology."⁶⁸ As a phenomenon within the analytic of Dasein, truth must be taken up with precision. Notably, this section concludes the section devoted to the "Care Structure" which concludes the first division of *Being and Time*. Heidegger recognizes that Dasein is "constituted by disclosedness" that is, by *aletheia*, and further, that the truth-as-disclosedness which constitutes Dasein is always relative to the being of Dasein. This truth as disclosedness, *aletheia*, is intrinsic to Dasein.

⁶⁷ Holz, p. 28; OWA, p. 42.

⁶⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

Heidegger separates it in order to phenomenalyze it but this is not its essential nature, nor is it the phenomenon of *aletheia* but its resemblance.

The truth which is presupposed, or which 'is there' by which its being is to be defined, has the kind of being, or meaning of being, of Dasein itself. We have to 'make' the presupposition of truth because it *is* already 'made' with the being of the 'we'.⁶⁹

By recollecting Dasein in its disclosedness, Heidegger resists but does not overcome the entire metaphysical tradition since Plato. Mocking the privilege of the "merely" sense perceptible in describing the prisoners in the cave who believed the perceptible shadows on the wall to be reality, Socrates explains how the story works by analogy, "likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison" (517b). The senses perceive only the limited perspective allowed by the constraints of the body. However, by turning the body away from its sense perceptions, including the sense-perception of itself as body, the soul (or spirit) which was limited by these phenomenal constraints is able to ascend to the "intelligible region." Thus Socrates surmises, and yet, he tells Glaucon, "But God knows whether it is true" (517b). Socrates then simply assumes that it is true, and without another doubtful word, continues with the interpretation of his dream as it appears to him. In fact, Plato constructs the edifice of the intelligible realm on this doubt, substituting the concrete narrative of the cave for the abstract simile of the line. In his own argument Socrates proceeds from the more abstract to the more physical. As Socrates begins to describe the cave, Glaucon responds, "All that I see". As Socrates moves to his interpretation of the cave narrative, he laments "that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of the

⁶⁹ BT, p. 271.

good" (517c). To see this good is to witness the causes for all things beautiful and the source of the visible world. "Anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this." The very sense which limits mortal perception is the sense which enables divine transcendence. From this vision, the sight does not want to turn away. "Do not be surprised that those who have attained this height [of the intelligible realm] are not willing to occupy themselves with the affairs of men, but their souls ever feel the upward urge and the yearning for that sojourn above" (517c-d). But Socrates will deny them this permanent transcendence. The law requires that the souls who have turned their bodies and minds to the intelligible realm must return to the "bondsmen" below, the slaves of mere phenomenal vision (519d-e).⁷⁰

The figure of the philosopher-king enters the mimetic cave. "You must therefore each descend in turn and live with your fellows in the cave and get used to seeing in the dark; once you get used to it you will see a thousand times better than they do and will distinguish the various shadows" There is also a sense in this return, which goes unremarked by Plato, that perhaps it is not necessarily better

⁷⁰ The doubt of "whether it is true" has vanished from the discourse. The image is transposed into the actual as Plato returns to the fabrication of the philosopher king. "It is the duty of us, the founders . . . to compel the best natures to attain the knowledge *which we pronounced the greatest*" (519c). In the narrative of the cave, Plato has given an example of the "severe poetry" which abides by the ethical and moral principles set out for the ideal Republic, the Republic which serves the law of reason and in which there is no place for poets who give "amusement" and "rare pleasure". Although such poets will be accorded "the reverence due to a priest", Socrates notes, "their presence is forbidden by our code (398a). Socrates does not exile the poets. He simply recognizes that, like the ministers of the sacred, the priests, the poet submits himself to a different law, a law that reason cannot overcome but only judge according to its own principles. Plato can use literary and rhetorical devices with impunity because their use is subject to knowledge and subjected to an aesthetic judgment which universally asserts the "vision of the good".

vision of the intelligible realm but a willingness to see when one returns to the "darkness" of the phenomenal world, to see "what is hardly seen" in the region of the known. This "dark vision" is a willingness to see by the light of that which shows itself in itself, that which illuminates itself, rather than by the light of the fire in the back of the cave or even by the light of reason. Plato effectively obscures our vision of the two realms as equally phenomenal, as equally dependent on sight, by putting these two realms in a hierarchical relation that privileges the metaphysical. He does not merely present the possibility of these realms, he interprets and judges them for us.

The philosopher's desire is to know completely and thereby to *become* absolute. Hegel simply fulfills the ultimate claim of philosophy, but only by overwriting the enigma which still presents itself in Plato and Aristotle.⁷¹ The only way to avoid this enigma which threatens to open an aporia at the heart of philosophy is to grant it full presence. Heidegger poses the question of this impossible presence by two distinct methods. The first is philosophical.

Wie kann endliches menschliches Dasein im vorhinein das Seiende überschreiten (transzendieren), welches Seiende es nicht nur nicht selbst geschaffen hat, auf das es sogar, um selbst als Dasein existieren zu Können, angewiesen ist?

How can finite human *Dasein* in advance pass beyond (transcend) the essent when not only has it not created this essent but also is dependent on it in order to exist as *Dasein*?⁷²

⁷¹ Cf. KPM, p. 12. "Post-Aristotelian metaphysics owes its development not to the adoption and elaboration of an allegedly pre-existent Aristotelian system but to the failure to understand the doubtful and unsettled state in which Plato and Aristotle left the central problems."

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 42; p. 47

This articulates the most fundamental metaphysical problem as it is understood by philosophy. Every philosopher has responded to this question in a similar way, by gathering the existential essent into the realm of knowledge and making it knowable by logical approximation. The second method (if indeed it is a method) is the way of the poet.

*Wie muß das endliche Seiende, das wir Mensch nennen,
seinem innersten Wesen nach sein, damit es überhaupt offen
sein kann zu Seiendem, das es nicht selbst ist, das sich daher
von sich aus muß zeigen können?*

How must the finite essent that we call man be in his inmost essence in order that in general he can be open [*offen*] to the essent that he himself is not, which essent therefore must be able to reveal itself by itself?⁷³

Heidegger proposes this question in the face of philosophy in one of its most rigorous manifestations, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁷⁴ In the *Republic*, especially in the sections on poetry and particularly in the narrative of the cave, Plato responds to the philosophical question in the way of the poet. The questioning of the philosophical in these terms, terms which will eventually reveal themselves as poetic in Heidegger's thought, lays the foundation for Heidegger's architectonic of *Dasein*. The structure that Heidegger proposes, how the essent appears in that which it is not, is the "basic concept" of allegory.

⁷³ *ibid.* p. 43; p. 47.

⁷⁴ As a philosopher, Kant follows the first way, but Heidegger attempts to find the poetic way that is concealed by the philosophical structure. "We shall follow thereby the inner movement of the Kantian laying of the foundation but without holding to the disposition and the formulation favored by Kant. it is advisable to go behind these in order to be able, by a more fundamental understanding of the eternal character and development of he laying of the foundation, to pass judgment on the suitability, validity, and limits of the external architectonic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*" (KPM, p. 47).

The assumption no longer holds that allegory is a facile and arbitrary signifying structure which self-destructs once the particular correspondence has been revealed. This is to mistake allegory for metaphor, and to mistake the image for a figure. Only Reason, the auspices of Philosophy, stands in the way of allegory, and the forces of Reason are valiantly led by the general Aesthetic. Only slipping barely detected beneath this powerful radar, can the allegorical image, the *phantasma*, like the barely discernible *khora* in the Platonic cosmography, manifest its impossible presence at the very limit beyond which wisdom does not reign. Allegory reveals itself as the enigma of the image in Plato. "True and exact reason" defends the autonomy of two different things which "the nature of true being" maintains are the same. Allegory, that which brings together the different in the space of the same, meeting the requirements of reason and of reality, is itself utterly other than both. Allegory's rigorous "simultaneity" in space reveals as well a suspension of time. Allegory is the structure in which identity and difference are present simultaneously, and this simultaneity is coincident with a true atemporality, an out-of-timeness that is completely independent of any concept of time. Allegory appears in the image as a pure language, a language which speaks itself without reference, a language that is not transcendental or metaphysical in the sense of referring to something exterior to itself. The image communicates silently, and it is the dream of every poet (including those poets who speak philosophically) to speak this silence.⁷⁵ The perfect poem is the poem that only sounds, that defies any appropriation by aesthetics. Such a poem is an impossibility, of course, but the

⁷⁵ There is an obvious echo of Benjamin here -- not for the mystical gesture that he makes to the "Reine Sprache" but more particularly to his praise of Hölderlin's gibberish-like translation of Sophocles. For Benjamin, all art is characterized by mourning because of its essential failure.

asymptotic limit has drawn more than one poet (and a few philosophers) into madness or despair. Allegory is the means by which a poet can approach this limit, and allegory itself is this limit. The pure language, the poetry which only sounds, *is allegory*.

Poetry as such cannot be aestheticized or interpreted. It depends on the aesthetic and the hermeneutic in order to appear, but it also hides in the aesthetic judgments and interpretive meanings imposed on the work. Aesthetic judgments bestow value on a work. They determine a work's life and livelihood. The task of aesthetics is to preserve art, but the link that aesthetics wants to make between actuality and art is allegorical. "Philosophical discourse" depends on this link. The language of critique functions on the assumption that judgment is possible. No philosophy is complete without the promise and possibility of judgment. Paul Ricoeur has remarked that "allegory has been a modality of hermeneutics much more than a spontaneous creation of signs. It would be better to speak of allegorizing interpretation rather than of allegory."⁷⁶ The definition of allegory proposed in this dissertation moves allegory away from the modality of hermeneutics by redirecting attention to the image which Levinas calls "an allegory of being". By resembling the thing without being it, the image is and is not what it appears to be. The image can only be by virtue of an allegory which supports the relation between what is and is not there. This allegory is not "a simple auxiliary to thought" but is the very commerce between reality (what Plato calls the world of shadows) and its shadow (the Platonic ideal). The exchangeability of the Platonic

⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, tr. Emerson Buchanan, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 16. Ricoeur tacitly dismisses the distinction between compositional and interpretive allegory so crucial to a literary critic like Jonathan Whitman. Ricoeur argues that all allegories are already hermeneutic. I agree, with the caveat that things called allegories, whether composed or interpretive, are hermeneutic.

terms demonstrates the “ambiguous commerce” by which Levinas identifies allegory. Only allegory, not aesthetics, can complete philosophy. Allegory is a technique, a mode, and a method. It is a way of saying and a way of keeping silent. It brings forth and it hides. Allegory is always a work of art, and the *work* of art, its task, is to unwork.

CHAPTER TWO

Mourning and Illumination: The Story of Symbol and Allegory

This love of the allegorical persisted, indeed it seemed to gain a new lease of life at the beginning of the sixteenth century . . . with the advances of the Reformation the symbolic inevitably lost its importance as an expression of religious mysteries . . . The ancient love of the visual expressed itself . . . in symbolic representations of a moral and political kind. Indeed allegory now had even to make manifest [*versinnlichen*] the newly discovered truth.¹

The baroque period has long been an enigma in German cultural and literary history. Even today many Germanists, even Benjaminians, are mystified by Benjamin's choice of the obscure and historically "unimportant" genre of the *Baroque Trauerspiel* as the subject of his *Habilitation*. The enigmatic obscurity of the genre is precisely what attracts Benjamin for this is the obscurity of modern allegory. When the symbol becomes secular it becomes secretly allegorical. The attempts to separate symbol from allegory will inevitably be foiled by this secret. When metaphysics triumphs over art, that is, when art is no longer connected to its own "methodological uniqueness" the symbol is transposed from the religious

¹ Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*. 1 Theil 2 (Leipzig: Darmstadt, 1819) p. 227-8; quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* OGTD, tr. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), p.168. [In German, *Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (hereafter UDT), (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), p.147.] While Benjamin finds precedent for his study in the critical work of Creuzer, Görres, and Herder, they were prevented from a full understanding of allegory. Citations will be given with the English translation first, followed by the corresponding pagination in the German edition cited.

sphere to the aesthetic. The symbol comes to *conceptualize* the desired “inward unity of ideal and appearance” that is specific to *Erlebniskunst* and *Bildung*.

However, there is always a necessary disjunction between ideal and appearance, and it is only over this gap that “meaningful unity” can be obtained. The unity of the symbol appears by the grace of the allegorical structure which can sustain the suspension over this gap.

Benjamin notes that the shift in allegorical expression which begins in the sixteenth century is a response to the unbridgeable distance between the secular and the divine. Allegorical works in the historical period of the Baroque constitute the literary response to a religious suppression of transcendence in both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Benjamin traces the little known, less respected history of the particularly German baroque form *Trauerspiel* and “brings us to the antinomies of the allegorical” which are essential “if the image of the *Trauerspiel* is to be conjured” [*wenn anders das Bild der Trauerspiele beschworen sein will*].² This phrasing is curious and revealing. Implicit in this phrasing is that *only* in the dialectic discussion of these antinomies will the *image*[*Bild*] of the *Trauerspiel* appear [*beschworen*]. For Benjamin “*Trauerspiel*” is itself something magical or divine. It cannot itself appear in the world but can only resemble itself in an image. The book which strives to illuminate the source of the *Trauerspiel* must be a *Trauerspiel* – a play of mourning: the book about allegory must be an allegory. Benjamin admits the arbitrary nature of allegorical signification and extends this arbitrariness to the phenomenal world itself.

Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just

² OGTD, p. 174; UDT, 152, translation modified.

verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance.³

At the same time, allegorical exegesis invests the things of the profane world with "a power which makes them no longer commensurable with profane things . . . and which can, indeed, sanctify them." The antinomy of allegory is the simultaneity in which "the profane world is both elevated and devalued [*erhoben und entwertet*]." ⁴

The antinomies which allegory manifests are found in the essence of writing [*Schrift*], in script itself. Benjamin characterizes the baroque as the movement of written words, of script, towards the visual and away from meaning. Sacred script tends towards the visual in order to resist the profanity of its comprehensibility.⁵ Such script directly opposes the concept of the symbol in its presumed organic totality. In this allegorical script, the baroque shows itself "the sovereign opposite of classicism." Benjamin argues for the thinking together of romanticism and the baroque.⁶ Romanticism opposed classicism in theory, "in critical terms," but Benjamin argues that the baroque offers a better corrective not just to classicism but to art itself. "At one stroke the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing [*erregende Schrift*]." This "stirring writing" is a fragment

³ OGTD, p. 175; UDT 152

⁴ *ibid.*, 175; 153.

⁵ There is an intersection here with Medieval culture in which manuscripts of the Bible were often written in a hand so ornate as to be indecipherable; this emphasized both the totality and the absolution of Holy Writ. The Book itself was a visual presentation of language that was not to be read but to be seen and experienced as "one single unalterable complex". Much later, the symbolist poets would try to preserve poetry with a similar visual presentation, but in modernity such attempts could only finally be ironic.

⁶ OGTD, p. 176f; UDT 154f.

or a ruin with the power to disrupt the appearance of totality. The baroque reveals what classicism could not allow, imperfection and decay. As such, baroque allegory reveals “a deep-rooted intuition [*Eine gründliche Ahnung*] of the problematic character of art.”⁷ – its essential and unavoidable ambivalence.

The Baroque intuition about art has been historically overwritten by aesthetics or the science of art. The eighteenth century conflict between “taste” and “judgment” had been determined, finally, in favor of judgment. Taste became an *a priori* that could only be determined *ex post facto* by the application of critique. Kant’s philosophy addresses the need for an immanent judgment, the moral imperative which demands a “sense of the common.” Tracing this history in *Truth and Method* [*Wahrheit und Methode*], Hans-Georg Gadamer observes that the *a priori* of taste upon which Kant insisted dramatically affected the “self-understanding of the human sciences.” By limiting the phenomenon of judgment to the beautiful and the sublime, Kant shifted the “activity of aesthetic judgment in law and morality out of the center of philosophy.” As a result, the human sciences lost the uniqueness of their methodological ground. In Gadamer’s words, the very “element in which philological and historical studies lived” was “surrendered”.⁸ The rise of modern aesthetics is directly attributable to this loss.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. ed.) tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989). Hereafter, TM. Gadamer notes: “The radical subjectivization involved in Kant’s new way of grounding aesthetics was truly epoch-making. In discrediting any kind of theoretical knowledge except that of rational science, it compelled the human sciences to rely on the methodology of the natural sciences in conceptualizing themselves” (p.42). Previous quotations, p. 33 and p. 40, respectively.

Klaus Berghahn traces this development in German Classicism (without necessarily accounting it a "loss") through the taste-judgment debates which began in earnest with Johann Ulrich König's 1737 essay, "Examination of Good Taste". Berghahn distinguishes taste and judgment in this period in the philosophical terms characteristic of aesthetics. "Taste is the immediate emotional reaction to "sensual works", while judgment is an activity of the understanding that proceeds in a strictly logical fashion and leads to the truth."⁹ Judgment's exclusive claim to the truth sets the foundation for modern aesthetics and for Hegel's observation that art is a thing of the past, and implicitly, that aesthetics, or the science of art, is art in a higher form. The historical development of aesthetics shows art to be thoroughly subjected to the law of Reason. Gadamer takes issue with precisely this assumption, asking, "Is it right to reserve the concept of truth for conceptual knowledge? Must we not also acknowledge that the work of art possesses truth?"¹⁰

In his work on allegory, to which Gadamer gives a vigorous nod, it is necessary for Benjamin to turn to the Baroque in order to articulate an "experience" of art that is neither metaphysical (in the Hegelian sense) or transcendental (in the Kantian sense).¹¹ The baroque marks the end of an epoch which extends through the Medieval centuries and even reaches to antiquity, but it is also the limit from which the modern epoch emerges. In the third section of the *Trauerspiel* book, in which he finally takes up allegory directly, Benjamin expends a great deal of effort

⁹ Klaus Berghahn, "From Classicist to Classical Literary Criticism, 1730-1806" in *A History of German Literary Criticism 1730-1980*, ed. Peter Uwe Hohendahl (Lincoln, NE: U Nebraska P, 1988) p. 43.

¹⁰ TM p. 41-42.

¹¹ See Martin Heidegger's discussion of transcendence in *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz* (*Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 26, Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1978).

extracting allegory from what he calls the heavy-handed "neo-classical prejudice."¹² Benjamin discredits the triumph of idealism which has dominated since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Benjamin does not proceed by counter-attack but by close readings which illuminate the contradictions or equivocity intrinsic to the theories of the symbol put forth in the "Age of Goethe". Not surprisingly this work was greeted with suspicion and contempt.¹³

In the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to the *Trauerspiel* book, Benjamin establishes allegory in a realm out of the reach of aesthetics and idealism. Allegory is characterized by violence and is not at all beautiful, admittedly lacking "all 'symbolic' freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity."¹⁴ Any time allegory is subjected to the critical palate of philosophical taste, it will seem a bitter alternative to Beauty. However, by discrediting the presumed authority of

¹² Benjamin also finds precedent for his views in German literary critics whose work did not achieve the prominence of the neo-classical view. For instance, he cites Herbert Cysarz' *Deutsche Barockdichtung*. "But either because the declaration of the primacy of classicism as the entelechy of baroque literature frustrates any insight into the essence of this literature -- and most especially the understanding of allegory -- or because the persistent anti-baroque prejudice pushes classicism into the foreground as its own forefather, the new discovery that allegory 'is the dominant stylistic law, particularly in the high baroque', comes to nothing because of the attempt to exploit the formulation of this new insight, quite incidentally, as a slogan." Even this insight as to allegory's significance in the Baroque, a significance that is not irrelevant to other periods of history, is contaminated by prejudice of the sort clearly seen in Creuzer's *Mythologie*. When Cysarz writes that "it is 'not so much the art of the symbol as the technique of allegory' which is characteristic of the baroque in contrast to classicism", Benjamin recognizes that "the character of the sign is thus attributed to allegory even with this new development. The old prejudice, which Creuzer gave its own linguistic coinage in the term *Zeichenallegorie* [sign-allegory], remains in force" (OGTD, p. 163; UDT, p. 142).

¹³ Although the work has become a touchstone in literary criticism on allegory, its thesis and argument remain far from clear.

¹⁴ OGTD, p. 166; UDT, p. 145.

aesthetics (the beautiful) and idealism (the symbolic determination of the object as a reflection of the subject), Benjamin reveals allegory as the only way to express the relation between ideas and phenomena. It is with this thought that Benjamin begins his work on allegory.

Denn in Ideen sind die Phänomene nicht einverleibt. Sie sind in ihnen nicht enthalten. Vielmehr sind die Ideen deren objektive virtuelle Anordnung, sind deren objektive Interpretation. Wenn sie die Phänomene weder durch Einverleibung in sich enthalten, noch sich in Funktionen, in das Gesetz der Phänomene, in die >Hypothese< verflüchtigen, so entsteht die Frage, in welcher Art und Weise sie denn die Phänomene erreichen. Und zu erwidern ist darauf: in deren Repräsentation. Als solche gehört die Idee einem grundsätzlich anderen Bereiche an als das von ihre Erfasste. Es kann also nicht als Kriterium ihres Bestandes aufgefaßt werden, ob sie das Erfasste wie der Gattungsbegriff die Arten unter sich begreift. Denn das ist die Aufgabe der Idee nicht.

For phenomena are not incorporated in ideas. They are not contained in them. Ideas are rather their objective virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation. If ideas are not the incorporation of phenomena, and if they do not become functions of the law of phenomena, [which is] the 'hypothesis', then the question of *how they are related to phenomena* arises. The answer to this is: *in the representation of the phenomena*. The idea thus belongs to a *fundamentally different world* from that which it apprehends [Erfasste]. The question of whether it comprehends what it apprehends [like the concept "genus" includes "species"] . . . cannot be regarded as a criterion of its existence.¹⁵

There is no determinate relation between the phenomenal world and the ideal world. The phenomenal world is a product of history, of convention. The law of phenomena is the hypothesis. In the natural world, "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else." The law of the idea is

¹⁵ OGTD, p. 34; UDT 16, emphasis added.

fundamentally different precisely because it cannot be known. One cannot hypothesize about the idea. The idea is experienced mediately. Benjamin addresses how this mediation works, pointing out that ideas are not embodied in phenomena. Because allegory can both show what it is and show what it is not, it can link these two realms which are essentially incompatible. Ideas appear phenomenally in a structure that is allegorical.

In modernity, the natural world is held in a tenuous and conflictual relation to the historical one with which it has nothing in common. The narrative coherence imposed on the events of the world as history is always a fiction. In the Medieval world this was not as much of an issue. The transitoriness and meaninglessness of earthly events was indisputable. As Benjamin rightly asserts, Medieval allegory was "Christian and didactic", always with an eye to the ideal world of an eternal and predetermined heaven. In the Middle Ages, allegory provided a connection between the transitory and incomplete events of the historical world and the eternal and complete divine plan, without translating one into the other.¹⁶ And yet, the "divine" plan could be nothing other than a contingent form of transcendence in which the profane world served as an analogy for the divine, such that the divine withdrew from view. The Church Fathers were acutely aware of this difficulty. Allegory was a crucial technique which allowed the analogy to be made but also maintained the distance and difference of its terms. Because it provided a way for the obscurity of the Bible to be made plain, allegory

¹⁶ See Erich Auerbach on typology in the essay "Figura", in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 11-75. Hereafter "Scenes".

became a dominant feature in interpretive (hermeneutic) literature as well as narrative compositions which addressed sacred themes.¹⁷

With the rise of Protestantism, the historical world became part of the divine plan, not merely explained by it. The allegorical disjunction was replaced by a narrative of continuity between this world and the next. In literature of the baroque, allegory re-emerged to disrupt this illusion of continuity. However, this development also necessitated a functional change in the appearance of allegory. Rather than making the obscure plain, allegory now tended to make the plain obscure. However, allegory remained a “convention of expression”, a method of writing (or representing) with a foundation in rhetoric. Allegory is a qualified creative process which pronounces meaning rather than logically determining it. This feature has contributed to the disparagement of allegory as dogmatic. However, in its announcement of meaning, allegory also shows itself to be an “expression of convention”. In these terms (from Benjamin), the convention of expression and the expression of convention, allegory expresses the conventional antinomy between convention (a codified but arbitrary relation between an object and its meaning) and expression (authoritative discourse).

Allegory has always been a ruin in the history of literature. Benjamin notes that allegories become dated because it is their intention to shock but that is an overstatement.¹⁸ Allegories become dated because they are the product of an irretrievable past. They are ‘born’ outdated, no matter how relevant their content. In this inherent tendency to be “time out of joint” allegory problematizes common

¹⁷ As argued in the following chapter, the development of allegory was not intentional. Rather, allegory emerged as the structure appropriate for bringing together the sacred and the profane. The four levels of allegory are a codification of allegory’s structure but should not be construed as the definition of allegory as such.

¹⁸ OGTD, p. 183; UDT, p. 161.

assumptions about the nature of art. Again by citing a neo-classical theorist, Carl Horst, Benjamin himself acknowledges the inherent marginality of the allegorical. Horst argues that allegory is always a crossing of borders between different modes, particularly a crossing from the plastic to the rhetorical arts. This crossing is seen as a violation deserving of “remorseless punishment” by the defenders of the plastic arts and the supporters of “the pure culture of sentiment”. Allegory is not strictly art or rhetoric -- but marks the contested limit between them.

Despite his neo-classical posture, Horst notes allegory’s achievement in the realm of art, even though he remains perhaps incapable of recognizing this *as* an achievement rather than as a bother. Horst observes that this mixing of the “pure ‘plastic arts’” [*den rein bildenden Künsten*] with the speaking arts or “rhetoric” [*den Redenden*] (which are tacitly neither ‘pure’ nor ‘art’) is “remorselessly punished” by the pure culture of Sentiment, *der reinen Gefühlskultur*. Allegory contaminates this perceived purity. Nevertheless, despite allegory’s “disruption of law and order in the arts,” Horst admits that “allegory has never been absent from this field,”¹⁹ but fails to recognize that this disruption comes from within the plastic arts themselves.

The neo-classical aesthetic sensibility is fundamentally incapable of sustaining a synthesis which not only emerges from but sustains itself in conflict. As much as allegory reveals itself to be other than the sentimental conception of “art”, it also shows itself to be other than aesthetics which, as Hegel astutely observed, has substituted itself for art. Benjamin is in complete agreement with Hegel. With the backing of a long philosophical tradition, the power of the aesthetic is greater than that of art. Allegory’s disruptive tendencies can be attributed to a fundamental

¹⁹ Quoted in Benjamin, OGTD, P. 177; UDT 155.

indifference to an aesthetics of taste. As Benjamin asserts, "Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty."²⁰ Aesthetics proceeds on the assumption that it can phenomenalyze the idea through the work of art, even though the idea itself cannot be intended. A universal can never be an object of knowledge. That does not, however, preclude the idea from being represented (*dargestellt*). Aesthetics forgets that this representation is merely an appearance of the idea, a representation which is always theatrical.

When art is conceived as the sensory manifestation of an idea, the beautiful becomes a concept. This is an act of substitution or translation, by which an idea becomes an object of knowledge. Art intrinsically resists this transposition. The force of art interrupts this metaphoric staging. In re-awakening this beauty, the philosopher becomes an artist but an artist with a different agenda. The philosopher creates art so that it can serve reason. In the hands of the philosopher, the artwork becomes primarily an object *of* knowledge. The work of art as such diminishes in importance. Under the auspices of aesthetic judgment, the artwork becomes a fragment, but one of many figures of Spirit in the Hegelian scheme. The work of art as such becomes a ruin. From this ruin the work re-emerges *as* a work of *art* and no longer as an object of aesthetic contemplation. The work of art is and is not the aesthetic object. The beauty which philosophy "re-awakens" is an allegorical beauty, a beauty that is beyond beauty.

In *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, in which "drama" is likewise an appropriate term for history as well as the actual plays of the baroque, Benjamin identifies the critical difference between medieval allegory and its baroque resurgence. In the Middle Ages, the tragedy of the secular world was redeemed in a

²⁰ OGTD p. 178; UDT 155-6.

gesture to the divine. There was even the expectation that this world was bound to be full of trials and 'mortal calamities'.²¹ Allegory was particularly suited to medieval culture because it provided a structure for secular knowledge of the divine. Symbols were through and through doctrinally determined and dogmatically maintained. Allegory gave expression to that which was not and could not be secured doctrinally. Allegory effectively "saved" both the pagan classics and the Hebrew Bible from extinction by linking them to Christianity through allegory.

In comparing medieval and baroque allegory, Benjamin notes that both "share the character of the Passion play" in which there is little distinction between drama and history. The Medieval Christian world view was thoroughly typological. In the aptly titled, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Erich Auerbach expertly describes and historicizes the system of typology in Medieval culture, thought, religion, and literature. In the essay "*Figura*" Auerbach distinguishes the "figural system" of typology from the "modern view of historical development".

In the modern view, the provisional element is treated as a step in an unbroken horizontal process; in the figural system the interpretation is always sought from above; events are considered *not* in their unbroken relation to one another, *but torn apart, individually, each in relation to something other* that is promised and not yet present. Whereas in the modern view the event is always self-sufficient and secure, while the interpretation is fundamentally incomplete, in the figural interpretation the fact is subordinated to an interpretation which is fully secured to begin with . . . Thus, the figures are . . . the tentative form of something eternal and timeless.²²

²¹ "In these books the prudent reader will be able to find not so much histories as harsh tragedies of moral calamities." Otto von Freisingen quoted in OGTD, p. 78; UDT, p. 59.

²² Auerbach, *Scenes*, p. 59.

Auerbach makes quite clear that this is not merely a religious hermeneutics or literary interpretive strategy, but also “provides the medieval interpretation of history with its general foundation and often enters into the medieval world view of everyday reality.”²³ The medieval “drama” provided an image of redemption.

In the baroque, redemption is denied. Because of the unshakable authority of Christianity unique to this period in European history, religious fulfillment was denied to the profane world, consequently imposing upon drama and history the compulsion of a secular solution. The “medieval road of revolt” -- heresy -- was blocked by the vigorous authority of Church and also by the “ardour of a new secular will”. As a result, “all the energy of the age was concentrated on a complete revolution of the content of life, while orthodox ecclesiastical forms were preserved.” The triumph of the will would surface later, in the milieu of romanticism, but the baroque world was “denied direct access to a beyond.”²⁴ The age is thus characterized by a forceful secular will confined by an equally forceful rule of law. Benjamin observes, “the only consequence could be that men were *denied* all means of *direct expression*”.²⁵ This suppression of a relation between this world and a metaphysical world, turned the human gaze inward and transcendence begins to be discovered in the essence of human being.²⁶

The crucial difference between the Middle Ages and the Baroque is the presence and absence of hope. This is where Benjamin’s work is important.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁴ OGTD p. 79; UDT, p. 60.

²⁵ *ibid.*, emphasis added.

²⁶ The “essence of human being” does not refer to the individual being but to Being as the ground of beings.

Whereas the Middle Ages present the futility of world events and the transience of the creature as stations on the road to salvation, the German *Trauerspiel* is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition. Such redemption as it knows resides in the depths of this destiny itself rather than in the fulfillment of a divine plan of salvation.²⁷

This difference pushed allegory into the mystification of the symbolic, and this mystification fertilized the ground from which the artistic "genius" sprouted. The divinely based temporality of a typological world view was transposed into the finite world. Eschatology disappeared and in its absence there was "an attempt to find, in a reversion to a bare state of creation, consolation for the renunciation of a state of grace."²⁸ Once the promise of eternal redemption became confined to the finite world, the stations on the road to salvation became the "stations of decline." The sadness (*Trauer*) of the *Trauerspiel* is that of a profound mourning for it is hope itself that is mourned. Characterized by silence, or the only way that language can be silent, in its fragmentation from meaning, language itself becomes hieroglyphic, either in the form of script on the page or in pronounced semantic disjunction.²⁹

In this expressed silence, the allegorical tends toward the symbolic, but it is symbolic in a secular form. The symbolic posture of the self-certain subject is an

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 81; 62.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ "The language of the baroque is constantly convulsed by rebellion on the part of the elements which make it up. Benjamin cites the example of German orthography which first established nominative capitalization in the baroque period, and this asserts "the disjunctive, atomizing principle of the allegorical approach." Important in this atomization of language into its meaningless or almost meaningless parts is that "language has ceased merely to serve the process of communication" (OGTD, p. 208; UDT, p. 184).

imposture, a fiction. The elaborate trappings of the baroque are indicative of a substantial change in the theater which now had "artifice as its god." There is both "the playful miniaturization of reality" and, more significantly for the history of allegory and symbol, "the introduction of a reflective infinity of thought into the finite space of a profane fate."³⁰ Based on the work of Karl Giehlow, Benjamin argues that the impulse for modern allegorical expression, the emblematics of the sixteenth century, began with the attempts to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphics. The method consisted of transposing one kind of reading, that of epigraphs which were construed lexically, to the reading of "enigmatic hieroglyphs" which did not have a context and actually represented the ultimate stage in a religious initiation. As in the Medieval tradition, but completely independent of it, two strains of allegory developed in the modern epoch, allegorical expression (emblematics) and allegoresis (interpretation). These strains developed and intertwined, influencing one another and confounding their objective purpose.³¹ The Humanists assumed that the Egyptians sought to create something corresponding to divinity. The emblematic writers believed that they could do the same. Far from Schopenhauer's judgment that hieroglyphs were "trifling amusements", Benjamin cites Pierio Valeriano's remark that "speaking in hieroglyphia [*cum hieroglyphice loqui*] is nothing other than to open [*aperire*] the nature of things divine and human."³² From this belief and the popularity of the baroque emblem books, the concept of a

³⁰ OGTD, p. 82-3; UDT, p. 53-64.

³¹ The observation that modern allegory developed rather independently of the Medieval tradition, and yet followed a similar pattern causes one to reflect on the possibility that these strains, the compositional and the interpretive, emanate from allegory itself, allegory as a sort of *Riß* in the Heideggerian sense.

³² OGTD, p. 170; UDT, p. 149.

secular symbol arose. The advocates of this symbolic language disregarded its profanity.

The baroque notion of the symbolic has great significance. On the one hand, the “misunderstanding thus became the basis of the rich and infinitely widespread form of expression.”³³ The misappropriation of religious symbolism for secular mysticism is the origin of the modern “symbol”. On the other hand, however, and of greater importance for Benjamin’s work, is that the baroque symbol reveals its allegorical structure. The Baroque witnesses the symbol emerging from allegory. Like the Egyptian hieroglyphs, the mystery of the symbol has been profaned.

Gewidmet weder irdischer noch sittlicher Glückseligkeit der Kreaturen, ist sie angelegt einzig auf ihre geheimnisvolle Unterweisung. Denn dem Barock gilt die Natur als Zweckmäßig für den Ausdruck ihrer Bedeutung für die emblematische Darstellung ihres Sinnes, die also allegorische unheilbar verschieden von seiner geschichtlichen Verwirklichung bleibt.

Devoted neither to the earthly nor to the moral happiness of creatures, [the baroque’s] exclusive aim is their mysterious instruction. From the point of view of the baroque, nature serves the purpose of expressing its meaning, it is the emblematic representation of its sense, and as an allegorical representation, it remains *irremediably different* from its historical realization.³⁴

The symbolic order forgets this irremediable difference.³⁵ The temporal predicament is unavoidably allegorical. Allegory holds the “temporality exclusive

³³ *ibid*, p. 168; p.147

³⁴ OGTD, p. 170, emphasis added; UDT p. 149.

³⁵ Reading William Wordsworth’s poem, “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal,” Paul de Man demonstrates the temporal predicament concealed in “an organic world

to the poem" in a conflictual relation with the "actual temporality of experience", as explicated by Paul de Man in "The Rhetoric of Temporality".

The fundamental structure of allegory reappears here in the tendency of the language toward narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject.³⁶

The simultaneity of subjective consciousness has been transposed, that is translated and imposed, on the phenomenal world with which it does *not* share an identity. Human consciousness and the natural world do not follow the same law.

Nonetheless, beginning with Kant, the natural world is objectified, identified, and brought into a subservient relationship to the moral world of the mind. Whereas the baroque world had come to celebrate the sensible world in response to the deprivation of divine redemption, Kant provided the antidote with a moral universe in which the Subject became its own god, forming the world and everything in it. The premise for the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to prove the existence of *a priori* knowledge, "knowledge absolutely independent of all experience."³⁷ The sensible figures of the profane world were then re-translated into a transcendental system, but the fiction of the symbolic figure was lost in this translation. In the opening sections of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer shows how the concept of *Bildung* merged with the ideal of *Erlebnis* which together mutated into the ideal of the genius which "rose to the status of a universal concept of value and

postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality coincide." See "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 191983), p. 222.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.225.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (unabridged), tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's P, 1929), p.43 [Ak. p. B3].

-- together with the concept of the creative -- achieves a true apotheosis."³⁸ This apotheosis was popularized by Schopenhauer and his philosophy of the unconscious, but it evolves from a complicated history. This history begins with developments in the word *Bildung*. In Kant, *Bildung* was still an act of the will, the *cultivation* of a capacity or talent. Humboldt marked a difference between *Kultur* and *Bildung*, ascribing to *Bildung* a "higher and more inward cultivation."³⁹

No longer simply cultivation *Bildung* came to signify some kind of initiation into a version of "the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself."⁴⁰ Gadamer does not draw sufficient attention to the significant change in what it means to be "in the image of God". From early Christianity through the Middle Ages, to be in the image of God generally meant the potential to submit freely of one's own will to God and His Will. Between the High Middle Ages and the nineteenth century this "potential" gradually came to be perceived as an omnipotence in and of itself. With the production of a strictly moral universe in Kantian philosophy, the conception of god-like human beings became the logical next step. This does not happen in Kant, as Gadamer is careful to point out, but after Kant's transcendental analysis, the apotheosis of a creative

³⁸ Gadamer, p. 59. For the full scope of this argument, see *Truth and Method*, Part I, section 2B, "The Aesthetics of genius and the concept of *Erlebnis*."

³⁹ Humboldt, quoted in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.10, from *Gesammelte Schriften* Ak VII part 1, p. 30. This cultivation was described as "namely the disposition of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavor, flows harmoniously into sensibility and character."

⁴⁰ TM, p. 11.

mortal being is unavoidable. The first notable unwitting victim of this apotheosis was Goethe, which is perhaps why he looms so large in Benjamin's work.⁴¹

Fully aware of these misappropriations and misunderstandings, Benjamin finds "immense value for the understanding of the allegorical" in the theories of the symbol because he reads them allegorically. As his prime example, he takes up Creuzer in the first volume of the *Mythologie*, where Creuzer is anxious to preserve the distance between the allegorical and the symbolic, and yet the only distinction Creuzer really makes is between the momentariness of the symbol (the mystical instant) and the progression of allegory (narrative). Creuzer cannot develop the significance of the relation between allegory and symbol which is not an oppositional relation, but according to Benjamin, an "acute observation" by Görres "puts many things right":

"I have no use for the view that the symbol is being, and allegory is sign . . . We can be perfectly satisfied with the explanation that takes the one as a sign for ideas, which is self-contained, concentrated, and which steadfastly remains itself, while recognizing the other as a successively progressing, dramatically mobile, dynamic representation of ideas which has acquired the very fluidity of time. They stand in a relation to each other as does the silent, great and mighty natural world of mountains and plants to the living progression of human history."⁴²

Görres directs attention away from the always problematic distinction between the symbolic and allegorical conventions and focuses attention on the only real difference between allegory and symbol: the relation to time pronounced in the

⁴¹ Benjamin specifically and directly counters such apotheosis. For this argument, see Hope Hague, Brenda Machosky, and Marcel Rotter, "Waiting for Goethe" in *Goethe in German Jewish Culture*, ed. Klaus L. Berghahn and Jost Hermand (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), 84-103. (Hereafter cited as *Waiting*).

⁴² Görres in OGTD, p. 165; UDT p. 144.

relation to death and decay. Benjamin declares that the "great romantic achievement" of Görres and Creuzer was to introduce into semiotics "the decisive category of time", and it is time which formally defines "the relationship [Verhältnis] between symbol and allegory."

Während im Symbol mit der Verklärung des Unterganges das transfigurierte Antlitz der Natur im Lichte der Erlösung flüchtig sich offenbart, liegt in der Allegorie die facies hippocratica der Geschichte als erstarrte Urlandschaft dem Betrachter vor Augen.

Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape.⁴³

The symbol is the expression of hope; allegory is the expression of mourning.⁴⁴

In the baroque, the displaced hope of redemption carried a fundamental flaw. The secular world is finite. Any redemption the finite world can offer is also finite. Thus the *facies hippocratica* of history. "Everything about history that, from the very beginning has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face -- or rather in a death's head." This "thing" (as Benjamin calls it), this personification or reified object which lacks everything that is beautiful is nonetheless the form of expression which is most adequate to the nature of human existence" in both a

⁴³ OGTD, p. 166; UDT, p. 145, verify

⁴⁴ Such mourning is not hopelessness, but rather both a peculiar mourning and a peculiar hope. Benjamin concludes the essay "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*" with the thought: "Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope." In Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume One: 1913-1926*, p. 356. (Hereafter GEA.)

general and an individual historicity.⁴⁵ In a secular world, the "symbol" represents "the striving . . . after a resplendent but ultimately noncommittal knowledge of an absolute",⁴⁶ but allegory expresses the vision of this world. The mournful course of events may not be beautiful but the emblematic death's head "is the form in which man's subjection to nature is most obvious."

Das ist der Kern der allegorischen Betrachtung, der barocken, weltlichen Exposition der Geschichte als Leidensgeschichte der Welt; bedeutend ist sie nur in den Stationen ihres Verfalles.

This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline.⁴⁷

Allegory expresses both the human and the natural being towards death. Benjamin reminds us, "if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical."⁴⁸

In the baroque, the "transfixed face of signifying nature" -- the death mask -- always triumphs over history. The distinction of modern allegory is its distance from history, from the *Erlebnis* and the anthropomorphism necessary for aesthetics. The modern allegorical tradition is profoundly related to the enigmatic, the concealed. Benjamin aligns modern allegorical concealment with the grotesque which is "associated with its subterraneanly mysterious origin in buried ruins and

⁴⁵ OGTD, p. 166; UDT 144.

⁴⁶ OGTD, p. 159; UDT p. 138.

⁴⁷ OGTD p.166; UDT p. 145.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

catacombs.”⁴⁹ Of note is that the concealed can only be revealed by digging, by going into the earth, not by ascending to the heavens or transcending the physical world. It is revealed in darkness. Borinski suggests that “grotesque” does not etymologically derive from *grotto* in the literal sense of a cave, “but from the ‘burial’ – in the sense of concealment – which the cave or grotto expresses,” and he notes, “For this the eighteenth century still had the expression *das Verkrochene* [that which has crept away]” (in Benjamin 171). As this grotesque allegory developed in emblematics, the form became even more obscure and incomprehensible. Benjamin surmises that “[no] kind of writing seem[s] better designed to safeguard the high political maxims of true worldly wisdom than an esoteric script such as this[emblematics], which was comprehensible only to scholars.”⁵⁰

In a study of the Baroque drama, a grotesque genre, Benjamin challenges both sides of the taste-judgment debate. The German *Trauerspiel*, overladen and belabored as it was, could be considered neither tasteful nor pleasurable, but it *was* the literature of the public and it needed no mediation. The baroque *defied* the mediation of aesthetic criticism, with the unfortunate result that it was simply pushed aside and forgotten. Classicism could not contend with the Baroque because

⁴⁹ Borinski quoted in Benjamin, OGTD, p. 171; UDT, p. 150.

⁵⁰ OGTD, p. 172; UDT, p. 150. Auerbach makes precisely this argument regarding Vico’s relative obscurity. “Vico was a solitary old professor at the University of Naples who had taught Latin figures of speech all his life . . . The difficulties of his style and the baroque atmosphere of his book . . . covered it with a cloud of impenetrability” (Scenes p. 88). I feel compelled to counter the levying of this criticism against contemporary literary theory, and even of Benjamin himself, often accused of writing obscurely in order to limit access to this thought. That Benjamin’s writing is obscure will receive no argument from me, and nowhere is this more true than in the book on *Trauerspiel*, but there is no other way of writing about allegory.

it threatened the appearance of totality. "By its very essence classicism was not permitted to behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature." Benjamin asserts that "this is precisely what baroque allegory proclaims with unprecedented emphasis."⁵¹ The Baroque questioned the ideal of art "re-born" in the Renaissance. Against the perfect harmony of form and content, the intrusion of allegory, in the words of Carl Horst, could be seen as "a harsh disturbance of the peace and a disruption of law and order in the arts." Disrupting the aesthetic ideology imposed on art, a story like Goethe's "*Das Märchen*" becomes a great work *dedicated* to allegory and an obscure work of a poet who *clearly* dedicated himself to the symbol.

Allegory presents insurmountable difficulties to aesthetic consciousness because it declares itself to be beyond beauty.⁵² It is not subject to the law of the beautiful, and it does not require a philosophical basis. Essentially, allegory thumbs a personified nose at them both. Allegory still speaks the language unique to the *Geisteswissenschaften* (the human sciences) and follows the "methodological uniqueness" which had been excluded by the force of Kant's transcendental analysis. Benjamin not only shows that allegory and symbol are not opposite or hierarchical concepts, but indeed, that they should not be seen as *concepts* at all. The symbol, in its "genuine notion" is sacred: it is a theological term which denotes "the unity of the material and the transcendental object."⁵³ It is a paradox that can only be resolved theologically or mystically.

⁵¹ OGTD p. 176; UDT, p. 154.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 178; p. 156.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 160; p. 139.

When this mystical paradox is transposed to an artistic or plastic symbol, that is a *profane symbol* which insists on a unity of form and content (the coincidence of the symbol), "the paradox of the theological is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence."⁵⁴ The symbol is presumed to be phenomenal or material when the elements of which it is comprised are not. With the concept of critique, Kant reflected an important Enlightenment tendency "in a concept which took aim at *Scheinwissen*," the knowledge of appearance.⁵⁵ When this distorted concept of the symbol is codified by the value system of aesthetics, art as such becomes a thing of the past. It is no longer art which is the object of such criticism but the concept. Or, as Kant actually seems to believe, in the judgment of the beautiful it is the beautiful itself which is liked, devoid of any interest *either* in the materiality of art *or* in the morally good. The beautiful is an immediate experience in the imagination, and not an immediate experience of a work of art. In the lectures on Aesthetics, Hegel is more sensitive to the work of art as an object for contemplation, no longer as an immediate experience but as a mediated one. The work of art first appears alien to the contemplating subject who comes to find his own reflection in it, and is thus able to absorb the work of art into consciousness. The work of art (like everything else in Hegel) is *for Spirit*. In the dialectic process the work of art becomes meaningful, and it is assumed that this meaning actually adheres in the work.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Berghahn, 17.

⁵⁶ Berghahn notes that with the *Critische Dichtkunst* (1737) of Gottsched, literary criticism was "liberated . . . from its restriction to philological textual criticism and from tutelage to ancient authority" (33). Criticism of the work of literature was freed

A work of art can only endure when it becomes the object of aesthetic perception. In order to endure, it must be allegorical. "The object [*Gegenstand*] of philosophical criticism is to show that the function of the artistic form is as follows: to make historical content, such as provides the basis of every important work of art, into a philosophical truth."⁵⁷ Aesthetics, the very means by which the work of art is elevated to a universal status simultaneously reveals the work of art as allegorical rather than symbolic. The symbolic will always decay into the allegorical, and it is the allegorical which endures, but as something lifeless (a far cry from *Erlebniskunst*). Benjamin admits that the Baroque only wants to endure, to exist in time. Art is thus preserved, not in its beauty (the object of "empty dreaming"), but in its bare and decaying materiality, and that materiality is a *schema*, an empty form, "now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own." As Benjamin had already stated, "This transformation of material content into truth content makes the decrease in effectiveness, whereby the attraction of earlier charms diminishes decade by decade, into the basis for a rebirth, in which all ephemeral beauty is completely stripped off, and the work stands as a ruin." The allegorist lends it significance, investing the ruin with ontological (not psychological) content

from philology and poetics. However, I will add, this "freedom" comes at a high price. Art is no longer art. That is not to say that philology and poetics were adequate to art, but they never pretended to be. However, philology and poetics did not only classify the attributes of art but they protected its work. Like philology, allegory is connected to language, and it is indifferent to epistemology, to morality, and to the concept. That is why Benjamin can claim that allegory is "beyond Beauty". In Benjamin's estimation, neo-classicism sought only to preserve in art a classical ideal of perfection in form and a harmony of content. The aestheticized work of art is conceived as an organic whole, to be admired and absorbed in its complete beauty and preserved. In contrast, according to Benjamin, "in the true work of art pleasure can be fleeting, it can live in the moment, it can vanish, and it can be renewed" (OGTD, p. 181; UDT, p. 159).

⁵⁷ OGTD p. 182; UDT, p. 160.

[*Sachverhalt*]. The allegorist makes of the lifeless object an emblem, an image, through which can be spoken "something different", and through which the emblem becomes "a key to the realm of hidden knowledge."⁵⁸ Thus, the object itself becomes an object of knowledge at the same time that something other is expressed with the object.

Only the *schema* can become the object of knowledge, and it is only secured as an object when it is simultaneously a fixed image and a fixing sign [*fixiertes Bild und fixierendes Zeigen in einem*].⁵⁹ When brought into time, "the mystical instant [*Nu*'] becomes the 'now' [*Jetzt*'] of contemporary actuality; the symbolic becomes distorted into the allegorical." The symbolic cannot survive the moment of its presence, and thus, "where man is drawn towards the symbol, allegory emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it." Allegory preserves the arbitrary power of knowledge, and the extravagance and violence of this power is everywhere evident in the baroque, "in this age drunk with acts of cruelty both lived and imagined." The essence of the emblematic image is dragged out and inscribed as a caption. In the baroque, everything, from nature to the life of Christ, was to be "read". The *Trauerspiel* is a drama for a "reader", which is not to say that it could not be performed but that is required the attention and concentration of reading.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 182-4; p. 160-2.

⁵⁹ OGTD, p. 184; UDT, p. 161.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 183-5; UDT, p. 160-2. See esp. OGTD, p. 185; UDT, p. 163: "Basically, then, the *Trauerspiel*, too, which grew up in the sphere of the allegorical, is in its form a drama for the reader. Although this says nothing about the value or possibility of its stage-performance."

With the *Trauerspiel*, because it is inherently a ruin and a fragment, Benjamin is able to show how allegory is the phenomenal structure of appearance in the work of art, that which gives form to any work of art. In the *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin has given us a way to read “allegorically”, but not in the well-known sense of discovering an arbitrary meaning in a system of textual signs. Rather, to read allegorically is to read the antinomies of a text, to read not only what it says but what it does not say, to read what appears and to read the appearance. This “method” of reading allegorically, is not limited to the *Trauerspiel*, and in an ambitious effort, Benjamin has taken on the great mythic figure of German *Kultur* and the ideal of *Bildung*, Wolfgang von Goethe. Reading the enigmatic novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* “allegorically” (but not interpretively), Benjamin illuminates the antinomies of the novel, and he reads the *Schein* of the *Erscheinung* (the appearance of appearance), not in order to show what it is not, but to show what it *is*. Benjamin explicitly states the thesis of his reading:

[In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*] nowhere, certainly, is the mythic the highest material content, but it is everywhere a strict indication of it. As such, Goethe made it the basis of his novel. The mythic is the real material content [*Sachgehalt*] of this book; its content [*Inhalt*] appears as a mythic shadow play staged in the costumes of the Age of Goethe.⁶¹

Benjamin offers some comparisons which bear this out. The initial reception of the work as “truly terrifying” (Wieland) and a profound but discouraging understanding of the human heart (Madame de Staël) has been effectively buried by “the hundred year tradition” which has erased all memory of the “robe of Nessus” by which Goethe himself characterized contemporary response to the novel.

⁶¹ Benjamin, GEA, p. 309.

Contemporary praise for the novel was worse. Benjamin asserts that Goethe had two reasons for actually responding to the critical din. "He had his work to defend . . . [and] He had its secret to keep." Thus Benjamin's explanation is neither apologetic nor mystical, and suggests instead that "one could call it the fable of renunciation."

⁶² Like the *Trauerspiel* book, however, this essay also met with suspicion and incomprehension.⁶³

The story of symbol and allegory is not only a theoretical one. It is everywhere in Literature, but especially evident when Literature tends towards the obscure. With the massive essay on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Benjamin had hoped to rescue Goethe from the cultic following which surrounded him in Germany. The argument fell on mostly plugged ears, but that does not preclude Benjamin's effort or insight. Benjamin mourns for the Goethe who will never appear, but in the very experience of this mourning, the *image* of Goethe does appear. In the figure of Goethe, in the cultic icon of a man turned into an emblem, a man who could only appear allegorically as something other than his historical being, Benjamin recognized something more precious, not in the man but in the work. Indeed it was the work which initiated the cult, but then the man became the work, and the work was judged against the illusion of the "perfect man".⁶⁴ The stature of "Goethe" still today makes it difficult to read the works without a gesture

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 312.

⁶³ Benjamin saw it as a great corrective to the Goethe cult of commentary which passed itself off as criticism, but the cult prevailed in spite of Benjamin's noble effort. See "Waiting", p. 94f.

⁶⁴ "Waiting", p.85. "In the period between the world wars Emil Ludwig described a Goethe not only "*menschlich vollendet*" [humanly perfect] but "*vollendet menschlich*" [perfectly human], an image that Friedrich Gundolf elevated to the status of myth."

to the figure. And the more enigmatic the work, the stronger the compulsion to explain the mystery through a transcendental analysis which links the work to the figure. *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is one such work. Even in the wake of Benjamin's tour-de-force essay, included with most German editions of the novel, the critical interpretations of the novel continue to be predominantly psychological or anthropological studies.⁶⁵ Rarely do critical analyses focus on the work itself.

The resistance against both Goethe's "obscure" works and obscure analyses of those works (like that of Benjamin) emanates from the work itself. If such work, including the work of criticism, is to be appreciated rather than appropriated, one must contend with this resistance. The preceding analysis of Benjamin's book on the *Trauerspiel* and essay on *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* are the fruit of my contending with this resistance, following Benjamin's intuition about the complexity of Goethe as a figure and the resistance to that figuration with the obscurity of his writing. Goethe's story "*Das Märchen*" has received sporadic critical attention, but there has been remarkably little development or new insight into the

⁶⁵ For a recent psychological reading, see Denise Blondeau "Goethes Naturbegriff in den „Wahlverwandtschaften“ in *Goethe-Jahrbuch* (1997), vol. 114, 35-48. For a religious reading, see Eberhard Lippert-Adelberger, "Die Platanen in Goethes „Wahlverwandtschaften“: Versuch einer mariologischen Dichtung in *Goethe-Jahrbuch* (1997), vol. 114, p.265-75. For a sociological reading, see the most recent book-length study which is emphatically anthropological: Werner Schlick, *Goethes Die Wahlverwandtschaften: A Middle-Class Critique of Aesthetic Aristocratism*. [Beiträge zur neuern Literaturgeschichte, Band 172] (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 2000). In the summary of the "Conclusion", the author notes, "Die Wahlverwandtschaften [is] a novel evidencing Goethe's disillusionment with a decadent and moribund nobility and [is] the politically subversive literary discourse of a burgher." A refreshing alternative to these exegetical approaches is Brigitte Peucker, "The Material Image in Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften*" in *The Germanic Review* (1999), vol. 74:3, p. 195-213. Peucker pursues the "impulse in art that is antithetical to the attitudes of classicism" while also unable to avoid them. In questioning the relationship between reality and representation, Peucker follows Benjamin.

story. In 1972, Waltraud Bartscht offered an English translation and general summary of the Märchen's critical reception along with his own arguments, and the keen observation that "one can almost discern a cyclical pattern, as whole groups of comments on it are published in intervals of thirty or forty years."⁶⁶ He also noted the challenge that "*Das Märchen*" has continuously presented to its readers. "There have been numerous attempts at an exegesis from the time the tale first appeared to this day. It is therefore an intriguing task to trace the origins of the work; to investigate its symbolic meanings, and if possible, to arrive at some new conclusions."⁶⁷ These goals are already evident in the initial response to the story by Schiller.⁶⁸ However, I believe the only way to gain insight into "*Das Märchen*" is to suspend the exegetical imperative along with the quest for meaning, and simply to read what the text says, to let the obscurity unfold into its own clarity.

⁶⁶ Waltraud Bartscht, *Goethe's "Das Märchen"*, (Lexington, KY: U P of Kentucky, 1972), p. 39. The most recent book-length study of "*Das Märchen*", published in 2000, is not much different in approach from the scholarship of the 1970s. See Eugen Drewerman, *Goethes Märchen tiefenpsychologisch gedeutet oder Die Liebe herrscht nicht*, (Dusseldorf and Zürich: Walter Verlag, 2000).

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Such goals are also generally the same in Eugen Drewerman, *Goethes Märchen tieferpsychologisch gedeutet, oder Die Liebe herrscht nicht*. In the concluding *Bedeutung*, Drewerman writes, "*Auf allen drei Ebenen: der psychischen, der religiös-moralischen (philosophischen) und der politisch-geschichtlichen Problemstellung müssen wir das Märchen daher noch einmal zur Sprache bringen* (p. 277). [On all three grounds: the psychological, the religious-moral (philosophical) and the political-historical positions, therefore, we must discuss the Märchen one more time.] Thirty years prior, Bartscht had noted, "Most expositors of "*Das Märchen*" have intermingled its esthetical, philosophical, and psychological aspects to some extent." This is still the case. For a recent example of the "cyclical" utopian reading, see Rudolf Geiger, *Goethes Märchen: Bilder Einer Konkreten Utopie* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1993), which finds the overturning of the paradise myth in the redemptive figure of the snake.

"Das Märchen" is simply titled, "The Tale" or "The Fairytale".⁶⁹ In another now obscure work, *Unterhaltungen deutschen Ausgewanderten* (Conversations of German Emigrants), one of the figures perhaps offers some insight on Goethe's view of the Märchen genre, and at least suggests a way of reading "Das Märchen" that resists the usual exegetical appropriations. The old clergyman responds to a request to tell a Märchen with his own riddle.

It is part of the delight in such works that we enjoy them without making demands, because the imagination itself cannot demand anything but has to await that which it will receive as a gift. The imagination makes no plans; it is not intent upon a certain path but is borne and guided by its own wings; and floating about here and there, it will take the most eccentric course, forever turning and changing direction.⁷⁰

Bartscht cites this passage in support of his view that Goethe delighted in the *Märchen* form but did not take it seriously. I repeat the citation here in support of a contrary argument, and with unintentional support from Bartscht who also comments that "Goethe expected his listeners or readers to enjoy his *Märchen* purely as a work of art."⁷¹ For Bartscht, this means the aesthetic pleasure of interpretation. On the contrary, I believe "Das Märchen" resists this critical

⁶⁹ I agree with Bartscht, *ibid*, p. 11, note 1. "The German word "Märchen" is difficult to render in English; apparently it has no exact equivalent in any other language."

⁷⁰ Bartscht, p.38-39. Translation by Bartscht. See also *Conversations of German Refugees*, tr. Jan van Heurck with Jane K. Brown (New York: Suhrkamp, 1989), vol. 10. For the German text, see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe, und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, 24 vols. (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1949), (hereafter cited as Goethe-Zürich), vol. 9, p. 368.

⁷¹ Bartscht, p. 39.

appropriation in demanding to be read “purely as a work of art” and in defiance of all interpretation.

The story begins when a pair of *Irrlichter*, the mythical Will-o-the-Wisps, dancing tongues of flame, appear late at night at the door of a Ferryman. He dutifully rows them across the rain-swollen river but worries when the shimmering figures shake gold coins into his boat. Not only is this unacceptable tender, if it should fall into the river, it would have mortal consequences. The *Irrlichter* do not escape the law of the land but slyly transfer this debt to an unsuspecting old woman whose dog dies after eating their gold. The Ferryman hides the gold in a rocky crevice above the river where it is discovered by the beautiful green snake who devours it and becomes luminescent. The snake uses this power to illuminate a cave which she could previously only perceive in darkness, by tactilely discerning the figures installed there. She meets the man with the lamp which turns all wood to silver, all metal to gold, and all dead animals into precious stones, but only when the only source of light. The eventual self-sacrifice of the illuminated snake, with all its attendant ritual, brings forth the promised world.

Meanwhile a bewildered but handsome Prince arrives, dutifully ferried across the river, and in search of the fair Lily, only to find, like the *Irrlichter* before him, that Lily resides on the other side of the river, which can only be returned to by the bridge formed by the snake at noon or the powerful shadow cast by the impotent giant at dusk. The victimized old woman becomes further indebted to the river when the giant takes one of each fruit of the earth owed to the river. As a result, one hand turns black and begins to disappear, although she retains its full use. The bridge appears at noon, but in exceptional glory thanks to the luminescence of the green snake. The fair Lily is surrounded by a complicated complex of laws, and like

the river, the punishment is mortal. Lily can re-animate the dead, however, and she resurrects the old woman's playful dog. The enforcement of the mythic and mysterious law of this land begins to have dire consequences when for the third time in a single day, Lily hears the hopeful pronouncement, "*Es ist an der Zeit*" ("The time is near").⁷² A complicated and mysteriously orchestrated sequence of events ensues with the result that a world emerges from the cave of the kings deep in the earth, first illuminated in the story by the snake. As promised long ago, the opposing banks of the river are linked with a glorious and wide bridge, the prince is restored to life, to Lily, and to a kingdom, the giant with the dangerous shadow becomes a sundial, and the old woman and her husband become young and beautiful. In other words, they all "live happily ever after."

This fantastic tale of mysterious rules and a mystical time to come has perplexed commentators since its publication. Most often it is allegorized in the traditional sense. The characters are made to correspond to historical persons, events, or ideas, and a narrative is imposed on the cryptic elements of the tale in order to give it meaning, to have it make sense. "*Das Märchen*" has rarely been read under the auspices of its title, as a *Märchen*, a fantastic, ahistorical story. Here is this work's first "open secret". The most important feature of "*Das Märchen*" is its utter lack of history. The events unfold in the course of a day, but it is any day, the past is merely a series of repetitions, and the promise of something to come is part of the everydayness and does not inspire hope.⁷³ Certainly, the beautiful green snake is an

⁷² Impossible to translate, "*Es ist an der Zeit*".

⁷³ When the snake tells Lily of the glorious bridge she has made, Lily pessimistically replies, "Forgive me if I cannot yet believe that the prophecy has been fulfilled. Only pedestrians can walk over the high arch of your bridge, and it

important figure, a catalyst for much of the action which unfolds, but the snake holds a central place in the story only as a guide. The luminescence of the snake and the equally magical lamp indicates how the story is to be read: in its own light. "*Das Märchen*" illuminates itself by devouring its appearance and glowing brightest and most powerfully, like the old man's lamp, when it shines alone.

To read the text, in its own light is to suspend history, reality, psychology, biography, and all of the other factors which can be brought to a reading or "found" in one. Goethe makes this easy -- none of these factors is to be found in *Das Märchen* itself. This is another of the work's open secrets. In its own light, the story shows itself. When it shines alone, it bestows invaluable treasures. The tale is a nonobject, an *image*. The image must be read in an otherwise darkness because an image is always singular, unique, and originary. It is not phenomenal but exists in an ontologically distinct dimension; it is *phantasmenal*. The *locus* of this "other ontology" is language. In *Das Märchen*, Goethe has touched the truth-content or the essence of language. Language itself appears in the allegory of "*Das Märchen*". The world of the story takes place in a "golden age" as described by Auerbach, an age "in which the surrounding world . . . was not rational but magic and fantastic."⁷⁴ In "*Das Märchen*," the figures of human beings dwell poetically on the earth. In these terms, this story is Goethe's greatest *poem*,⁷⁵ and for a brief moment in the story,

has been promised to us that horses and carriages and travelers of all kinds could pass over the bridge in both directions at the same time" (tr. Bartscht, p. 93).

⁷⁴ Auerbach, *Scenes*, p. 192.

⁷⁵ It should not be surprising that this poem is in prose form. Later in the same century Baudelaire would recognize that poetry was only possible when it was obscured by prose, and protected by it. After Baudelaire, Kafka perfected this form.

the world is symbolic. The crowd looks up and sees the heavenly radiance emanating from the temple and surrounding the royal entourage.

Der König, die Königin und ihre Begleiter erschienen in dem dämmernden Gewölbe des Tempels von einem himmlischen Glanze erleuchtet, und das Volk fiel auf sein Angesicht.

The king, the queen, and their companions appeared in the twilight of the temple vault, illuminated by a heavenly radiance, and the people fell down before them.⁷⁶

This is a divine moment. In this single moment the infinite world has united with the finite world. This is the world of the symbol, which de Man defines precisely in these terms:

In the world of the symbol it would be possible for the image to coincide with the substance, since the substance and its representation do not differ in their being but only in their extension . . . Their relationship is one of simultaneity . . . spatial in kind, and in which the intervention of time is merely a matter of contingency.⁷⁷

Goethe has made this symbolic world appear, and he does so by a masterful allegory in which time is suspended and the infinite appears.

Goethe is one of the greatest and most sane poets because he recognizes that the symbolic moment cannot be sustained. There are many poets, but most poets who finally reach this symbolic moment want to grasp it, to sustain it, and the poem in which they do so falls apart. It ends badly. To grasp the symbolic is to conceptualize it. The German word for concept, *Begriff*, comes from the verb to grasp intellectually, *begreifen*. In the aphorism on allegory, Goethe describes the

⁷⁶ Goethe *Märchen* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1984), p.102 (hereafter DM); translations are from Bartscht.

⁷⁷ Rhetoric of Temporality, p. 207.

transformation of appearance into a concept that becomes an image. The poet who tries to sustain the symbolic becomes an allegorist. Conversely, the poet who works for that moment of symbolic coincidence, uses allegory, *as a technique*, as indeed the only technique adequate to the image. When the image appears, the conceptual transformation joins with the idea in the image. The symbolic image stands between these worlds. For a moment. Goethe understands this momentariness and respects it. He does not try to capture it but only to repeat it.

In *Das Märchen*, the moment occurs at twilight. The crowd would not even have noticed the heavenly radiance of the entourage if the mirror turned by the hawk did not direct their gaze. Even so, the gaze lasts but a moment. The people bow before the divine presence, and when they look up again, it has vanished.

Als die Menge sich wieder erholt hatte und aufstand, war der König mit den Seinigen in den Altar hinabgestiegen, um durch verborgene Hallen nach seinem Palaste zu gehen.

By the time the crowd had recovered and rose to their feet again, the king and his retinue had descended into the altar and walked through secret passages to his palace.⁷⁸

The symbolic moment has passed. Goethe does not try to save it, but he allows himself one obscure gesture.

The vast crowds which swarm the temple are drawn to a mysterious lump. "They gazed with wonder and reverence at the three kings who stood upright, but they were all the more curious to know what kind of lump might be concealed under the tapestry in the fourth niche." The narrator intervenes, explaining that someone has discretely covered the collapsed king. It is a "magnificent covering which no eye can penetrate and no hand dares to lift away." [*eine prächtige Decke*

⁷⁸ DM, p. 102; Bartscht, p.106.

. . . *die Kein Auge zu durchdringen vermag und keine Hand wagen dar wegzuheben*"].⁷⁹ With its ornate cover and impenetrable obscurity, the lump suggests an emblem, and perhaps even the story itself. As an emblem, it also suggests that allegory is waiting to rise again, in Benjamin's terms, to interrupt the symbolic wherever it appears.

The story appears to end, as many fairytales do, "happily ever after," or at least with this hope, this promise. "Happily ever after" is, however, an infinite claim. Fairytale figures never die. Like Snow White or the sleeping beauty, the prince in the Fairytale is entranced but not dead. The snake does not die but undergoes a metamorphosis which becomes the foundation for a new world. If the snake dies, she dies as a divinity who becomes mortal, perhaps most like Dionysos who is torn apart in the world. The story ends in the world of shadows, where the powerful shadow of the Giant is put to use, and that use is to tell time. *Märchen* are not simply moral lessons or fantastical stories. Rather, the experience (*Erfahrung* rather than *Erlebnis*) of the fantastical story is its most important feature. Because the elements of the narrative often involve magic powers, mysterious creatures, and strange occurrences, the tendency has been to ground these unreal elements in reality, in historical events and persons, or in moral and ethical principles. The interpretations of *Das Märchen* have often done both.⁸⁰ Of this relation between reality and fantasy in *Das Märchen*, Goethe wrote to Schiller,

*Mehr ein Übersprung als ein Übergang vom bürgerlichen
Leben zum Märchen ist mein diesmaliger Beitrag geworden.*

⁷⁹ DM, p. 102; Bartsch, p. 106-7.

⁸⁰ See n. 68 above.

My contribution [to the journal *Die Horen*] at this time is more of a ?bound/leap than a smooth transition from a tale of domestic life to a tale of wonder.

21 August 1795⁸¹

Goethe grounds the tale in reality ("domestic life") and marks the movement towards "wonder". It is an upward movement, a leap, but not a transcendental one. The connections to the past are severed. "All debts are forgiven," says the previously old man with the lamp. It appears that even time itself has forgiven its debts as the elders of the land become young and beautiful. There is a call to remember the snake, which indicates first of all that she has been forgotten already.

If this tale is not to be read "allegorically" in the traditional sense of assigning a coherent narrative of meaning to the literal level, then how is it to be read? How does one make sense of all the strange laws and events, the enigmatic figures and mysterious rituals? As I have already suggested, it is to be read by its own illumination which is to restrict its meaning to what appears and to read this appearance, this *Schein*, not as representative of something else but as itself phenomenal. *Das Märchen* is at the very least (and this is already a great deal) about the phenomenon of *Schein*. Indeed "*Märchen*" carries the strong sense of *unglaublich*, untrustworthy or unbelievable, blatant appearance which is indeed not intended to be historical but contrived. It is not a leap to put this title together with this story. Indeed the story unfolds into ever greater strangeness, ever more puzzling enigmas. In correspondence with Schiller, Goethe expressed at least this much intent.

⁸¹ All citations from the letters are from: Goethe-Zürich, vol. 20. English translations are from: *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe from 1794-1805*, tr. L. Dora Schmitz (London: George Bell and Sons, 1877), vol. I. Modifications are noted by italics.

Ich hoffe, die achtzehn Figuren dieses Dramatis sollen, also so viel Rätsel, dem Rätselliebenden willkommen sein.

I hope that the eighteen figures in this drama may be welcome to those who are fond of riddles, for they are so many enigmas.

26 September 1795

In this statement Goethe does not express an intended meaning but only a mastery of technique. In the same brief letter, Goethe had commented, in the context of the political unrest in Weimar, "Blessed are those who write stories, for stories are à l'ordre du jour". In this remark, Goethe suggests that the events of the historical world are themselves but stories, mere appearances, and equally enigmatic.

Such references between *Das Märchen* and reality are made by Schiller. On October 16, 1795, Schiller comments, "The shadow of the giant might have easily laid hold of you [Goethe] in a rather rough fashion. It often strikes me as strange to think of you thrown so much in the midst of the world while I sit between my paper window panes" (106). Even this brief exchange of letters during the transmission and revision of *Das Märchen* bear out the differences between Schiller and Goethe which led Goethe to distinguish himself from Schiller in the aphorism #751, which begins:

Mein verhältnis zu Schiller gründete sich auf die entschiedenen Richtung beider auf einen Zweck, unsere gemeinsame Tätigkeit auf die Verschiedenheit der Mittel, wodurch wir jenen zu erreichen strebten.

My relationship to Schiller grounds itself on the declared direction by which we both individually strive to reach towards a goal, our common activity towards the difference of the middle.⁸²

This relationship to the difference of the middle is the following of a different route.

*Bei einer zarten Differenz, die einst zwischen uns zur Sprache kam, und woran ich durch eine Stelle seines Briefs wieder erinnert werde, macht' ich folgende Betrachtungen,
Es ist ein großer Unterschied, ob der Dichter zum Allgemeinen das Besondere sucht oder im Besondern das Allgemeine schaut.*

By one slight difference which first came up between us in language, and after which I would remember again in a place in his letters, I made the following observation. // There is a great difference when the poet seeks the particular in the general or sees the general in the particular.

Schiller is the poet who seeks the particular from the general, and Goethe claims to see the general in the particular. Schiller's *Richtung* is an allegorical path, "where the particular is only an example of the general". Indeed, this is how Schiller reads *Das Märchen*.

Goethe never directly responds to Schiller's interpretive gestures, seemingly taking them in stride and quietly insisting on his own secret. Several times Goethe expressed a strong desire for the relatively brief story to be divided between two issues of *Die Horen*, over Schiller's persistent request that it be published whole "because the two halves have so much need of one another" (August 29, 1795). In the end, for predominantly logistical reasons, *Das Märchen* appeared "whole" in volume 11, along with the first installment of Schiller's essay "*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*", which also notes the "difference of the Middle" between these two friends. Schiller marks the division between the "naive" poetry of genius and the "sentimental" modern poet who pursues "lost nature."⁸³

⁸² All citations to *Maximen und Reflexionen* are from: *Goethes Werke* (Münich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1973), Vol. 12. Translations are my own.

⁸³ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, tr. Reginald Snell (New York, NY: Continuum), p. 106.

Although Schiller accords equal value to both types of poet, he can only mourn for the naive. "Poets of this naive category are no longer at home in an artificial age. They are indeed scarcely ever possible."⁸⁴ In his suggestive interpretations, Schiller tries to turn Goethe into a sentimental poet, to preserve him as a modern poet.

In the correspondence over *Die Horen*, Schiller acknowledges that Goethe has, "by [his] mode of treating the subject . . . pledged [himself] that all is symbolical". To Schiller, this symbolic quality calls for interpretation. "One cannot refrain from trying to find a meaning in everything" (August 29, 1795), in other words, to allegorize it. In response to Schiller's desire for meaning and wholeness, Goethe replies,

*Das Märchen wünscht ich getrennt, weil eben bei so einer
Produktion eine Hauptabsicht ist, die Neugierde zu erregen.
Es wird zwar immer auch am Ende noch Rätsel genug
bleiben.*

The story I *do* wish to have divided simply because the main thing in such compositions is to excite curiosity; for even at the end it remains pretty much of an enigma.

3 September 1795

If Goethe tells us anything about how to read *Das Märchen*, it is not to read it like an "Allegoriker", as Goethe himself defined this species personified in Schiller, by seeking the general in the particular. This allegorical way of reading is what Schiller calls "symbolical". The symbol cries out to be interpreted, but the symbol, if it is indeed symbolic, should require no interpretation. The symbol does not mean; *it is*. Goethe understands this. In aphorism #749, he explained the symbol.

*Die Symbolik verwandelt die Erscheinung in Idee, die idee in
ein Bild, und so, daß die Idee im Bild immer unendlich*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 109

wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe.

The symbolic transforms the appearance into an idea, the idea into an image, and so, in so far as the Idea in the image remains eternally valid and unattainable and, pronouncing itself in all languages, [it] thereby remains unsayable.

The symbol is unspeakable. It cannot be pronounced, but it can appear. In the next aphorism, #750, Goethe describes the other mode of appearance, that of allegory.

Die Allegorie verwandelt die Erscheinung in einen Begriff, den Begriff in ein Bild, doch so, daß der Begriff im Bilde immer noch begrenzt und vollständig zu halten und zu haben und an demselben auszusprechen sei.

The allegory transforms the appearance into a concept, the concept into an image, such that the concept, having and holding [itself] in the image, limited and complete, and in the same way, it can be pronounced.

Both allegory and the symbolic transform appearance into an image. The difference lies strictly in the mode of transformation, the difference of the difference. Allegory can be spoken; symbol can not. What these aphorisms say together is that the symbol needs allegory in order to speak. The poet needs the critic. The naive poet needs the sentimental poet. (Goethe needs Schiller.)

Goethe makes the same argument in *Das Märchen*, both more effectively and more obscurely. Schiller is correct in treating the story like a baroque emblem, and he would even be correct in identifying the “whole” as truly symbolic, but only in its entirety and its secrecy. In one more aphorism, #752, Goethe writes,

Das ist die wahre Symbolik, wo das Besondere das Allgemeinere repräsentiert, nicht als Traum und Schatten, sondern als lebendig- Augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen.

That is the true symbolic where the particular represents the general, not as dream and shadow, but as living-immediate revelation of the impenetrable.

If *Das Märchen* is symbolic, then the answers to its riddles are not to be found in the interpretations of dreams or the explication of the empirical world of shadows, but in the work itself, in its opening up, in its immediacy and not its mediation. To explain the work of art is to mediate it. The “symbolic” work of art, however, represents itself in its immediacy, without explanation. That is how *Das Märchen* is to be read.

The work has no meaning; it is meaning. The symbolic appears in *Das Märchen*. The story transforms appearance into a concept, the concept of a world, and the concept becomes an image, the image of a *begrenzte und vollständige* community. In this transformation, an entirely different transformation also appears. This transformation cannot itself be spoken. It remains *unaussprechlich*, unspeakable. It needs to be spoken in some other way. It needs to be pronounced through something limited and complete: an allegory. *Das Märchen* is an allegory; it is an allegory of the symbol.

CHAPTER THREE

The Face that is Not a Face:
The Image of the Soul in Prudentius' *Psychomachia*

For an image, since the reality after which it is modeled does *not* belong to it, and it exists ever as the fleeting shadow of some other, must be inferred to be in another [that is, in space], grasping existence in some way or other, or it could not be at all. *But* true and exact reason, vindicating the nature of true being, maintains that *while two things* [that is, the image and space] *are different, they cannot exist one of them in the other and so be one and also two at the same time.*

Plato *Timaeus* 52c-d¹

Perhaps because it is so obvious, the fact that Prudentius wrote poetry is often overlooked. Prudentius is not really a philosopher or even a theologian, although he offers strong opinions on theological issues. As a poet, however, Prudentius acutely understands the limits of his own finitude. Prudentius struggles to make the *imago Dei* in man, the soul, appear. He knows that he can never pass beyond that struggle but only follow it to its extreme. *The Psychomachia* is about no more and no less than the problem of finitude, the fundamental and foundational problem of being in the world. Although it cannot escape time altogether, poetry can resist its restrictions. It still takes time to read the poem, and the poem cannot evade the interruptions of time nor its historical context. By suspending time, however, poetry forbears the auspices of

¹ Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1978).

metaphysics. In so far as it is not metaphysical, poetry is also not transcendent. There is no “passing between” and there is no “passing beyond”. As a poem the *Psychomachia* gives an image of the soul. By following the path opened by the poem the reader comes to a vision, cloudy and gray, but also at the very limit of finite being. To follow the path of the poem is not to interpret it, but to experience it, although not empirically. To follow the path of this poem is to experience the limit marked by the image and at that limit, if it is indeed reachable, to see through watery glance the unknowable.² To follow this path attentively requires a gaze which penetrates to the exclusively poetic element in a poem, to see what is poetic in poetry, the image of what cannot otherwise appear: the immortal soul of the mortal being.

The *Psychomachia* is a battle of the soul, *psyche*. The Greek compound title is difficult to translate, and the consequent ambivalence is sustained throughout the poem. Such ambivalence grounds the poem as a work of art rather than as a work of philosophy which would be reasonable or a work of theology which would be decisive. Prudentius' *Psychomachia* is a battle somehow involving the human soul. It has generally been assumed that this soul is represented by personified figures of virtue and vice engaged in an epic battle for the soul's salvation. A more textually grounded reading shows, however, that the poem is strangely divided against itself such that the desired object is the very site of its pursuit. The battle is *for* the soul and yet occurs *in* the soul. As Martha Malamud has shown in her reading of the scene in which *Discordia* draws a virtue's blood only to be dismembered by the “virtuous army”, the relationship between virtue and vice is ambivalent. “The Virtues, imbued with their opponent's divisive

² Prudentius describes the vision of the divine as dull and cloudy, visible as in a gray mirroring and watery glance. *Apotheosis* 17-21. See argument below.

nature, become agents of dismemberment and dissolution".³ Virtue and Vice are not opposing moral categories so much as opposing forces, and the fight for the soul is a civil war. The virtues equally as well as the vices occupy this field which is no high moral ground but what Malamud rightly calls "a middle ground of ambiguity".⁴

This ambivalence is first evident in the title in which the word for "soul" is given in Greek, *psyche*, while the poem is written entirely in Latin. *Psyche* is translated as both *animus*, a masculine noun referring to the principle of the intellect and sensation, and to the quite distinct *anima*, a feminine noun referring to the principle of life. A semantically onomatopoeic use of language *as language* in which the paradox of the soul appears, the title holds together what the poem splits apart. Malamud shows that speech itself is a form of discord, and it is the figure *Discordia* who points this out.

Discordia is able to identify herself in a series of soundplays on her name, linking the concept of *discordia* with language and the shifting world of false appearances . . . The punning echoes . . . suggest . . . that the act of speech itself (*dicor*) is a form of *discordia* . . . The use of the adjective *discolor*, "of variable color", appears motivated by its sound, allowing Prudentius, through the similarity of words, to establish a connection with the world of shifting appearances on etymological grounds.⁵

This wordplay demonstrates the consistent deftness in the poetic language of Prudentius. Malamud examines many such instances which demonstrate the

³ Martha A. Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989), 66.

⁴ *ibid*, 67.

⁵ *ibid*, 63.

singular quality of what I shall call "poetic language": "the impossibility of finding stable signs to represent true meaning."⁶

By poetic language I am attempting to articulate a language that is not in the service of an ideology, aesthetic or otherwise. It seems that such language most often appears in poetry, particularly when poetry is "unreadable" according to conventional, logical methods. Poetic words are words as things. Malamud takes this quite literally, finding extraordinary and convincing examples of language play which are not ornamental but in fact "control the action and shape of the poem". The lack of a definite time and space in the poem and the lack indeed of characters in the traditional epic sense, allow "the words themselves to do battle in the poem."⁷ Malamud links the form of psychomachian allegory, the new genre of poetry created by Prudentius, to the power of language as such, and not to language as something which merely signifies something it is not.

The *Psychomachia* has very little plot, and what there is entirely predictable... His choice of the sustained personification allegory directs the reader's attention to his treatment of characters not as people or as symbols whose meaning is always fixed, but as signs whose meaning is variable and inconstant.⁸

This literal language is not the "literal level" of the metaphysical four-level structure upon which the common scheme of allegory has been constructed. According to the scheme endorsed by Dante in the "Letter to can Grande" the

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*, 57. That Prudentius' poetry not only can but should be read in this way is the core of Malamud's analysis and her well-grounded argument that this poetry is "far more complex and intelligently crafted" than most Prudentius scholars will admit. See the "Introduction", esp. p. 8-11.

⁸ *ibid.*

literal level of allegory is the least significant, falling away as the successively higher levels of meaning are revealed, from the metaphorical (often called 'allegorical') to the moral to the anagogical.⁹ If Malamud is reading well (of which there is little doubt), then in the poem which launched the genre of allegory, the literal is the most significant level.

The *Psychomachia* is not a metaphysical poem. There is no movement between sensible and intelligible, or between mortal and divine. The poem not only lacks the movement necessary for metaphysics, ascension from the known to the unknown, but it ends more or less where it begins. Time is not marked in the poem. The narrative is a vision, the extension in time and space of what is actually simultaneous. At its conclusion, the poet turns his gaze from the vision, and returns to the figure of Christ, the Christian muse, and gives thanks.

*tu nos corporei latebrosa pericula operti
luctantisque animae voluisti agnoscere casus* 891-2

You wanted us to recognize the secret dangers then closed
in the body and the struggle of the life-soul's fall.¹⁰

In spite of this didactic vision, the mortal soul remains "roaring in frightful war" [*ferovent bella horrida* l.903] and waits again "until Christ God comes to be in charge" [*donec praesidio Christus Deus adsit*] (l.910). We are in no different place at the conclusion of the poem than we were when it began. Within the first lines of the poem's "*Praefatio*", the vision of Abraham is drawn beforehand [*ad figuram*

⁹ Dante Alighieri, "The Letter to can Grande" in *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, tr. and ed. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska P, 1973), 99ff. See also the selection from "The Banquet" [*Il Convivio*], 112-114.

¹⁰ Prudentius, "*Psychomachia*" in Latin with English translation by H.J. Thomson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969). Translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated, in consultation with this edition.

praenotata] and is resolved by Christ in the figure of three angels as men [*triformis angelorum trinitas*] (l.45) who “will enter the home of the virtuous heart and appointing it the honor of host to the Trinity” (Praef 62-63). The poem proper repeats this sequence, altering only the content from something historical to something fictional. Nothing really happens in the poem’s main diegesis or action. The events of the *Psychomachia* do not occur within history but outside of it and indifferent to it. Even in its structure, the relation between the *Praefatio* and the poem is a comment on time. Abraham is not significant as a historical figure but a typological one, preparing the reader for the a-temporality of the poem.

Typology is the structure which manifests the central paradox of Christianity: Time. One of Christianity’s most fundamental precepts holds that there is no *differentia temporis*, no difference of time for God.¹¹ In a typological worldview, the sequence of events which constitute history are an image. In this image, the unknowable becomes phenomenal, not by appearing in itself but still appearing in a way that can be grasped by the limited sensibility and intellect of a temporal being. This is always a “false appearance” and necessarily so. The mortal intellect can be developed to ever greater capacities for perceiving the divine in the phenomenal, but there is always a limit to this capacity, and that limit is imposed by the finitude of being human. Whether in the realm of the ideal or the real, the human mind requires sequence and narrative in order to understand, and especially in order to communicate understanding. The philosophical *tractatus* is beholden to the communication of knowledge. In Christian philosophy, or theology, however, the treatise strains under the restrictions

¹¹ Erich Auerbach, “*Figura*” tr. Ralph Manheim, in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (United States: Meridian Books, 1959) 42.

imposed by the law of knowledge. As Augustine says at the beginning of *De Doctrina Christiana*:

Duae sunt res, quibus nititur omnis tractatio scripturarum, modus inveniendi, quae intellegenda sunt, et modus proferendi, quae intellecta sunt.

There are two things necessary to the treatment of the Scriptures: a way of discovering those things which are to be understood, and a way of teaching what we have learned.¹²

The theological treatise narrativizes that which simply appears in scripture, making it knowable by making it meaningful, and it can only do this by temporalizing it. Even Erich Auerbach, who clearly recognizes the atemporality of the typological figure, succumbs to the limitation of time when he employs the term “phenomenal prophecy” to describe the structure of typology as a relation between past history [*figura*] and its prophetic fulfillment in the New Testament and in the yet unknown but promised future events of Judgment Day.¹³ In the *Psychomachia*, however, the phenomenological structure of Prudentian typological action seeks to escape or erase temporality.

Poetry works differently from philosophy and from theology in a phenomenologically unique way. The poet does not seek knowledge. Poetry is not about teaching but about seeing. In the essay, “On the Origin of the Work of Art” [*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*], Martin Heidegger offers an alternative explanation of the *techne* or “skill” which distinguishes art, including poetry, from other types of work.

¹² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, tr. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1958). Latin: CCSL v.32, I i.

¹³ Auerbach, *ibid.*

Die techne ist als griechisch erfahrenes Wissen insofern ein Hervorbringen des Seienden, als es das Anwesende als ein solches aus der Verborgenheit her eigens in die Unverborgenheit seines Aussehens vor bringt; techne bedeutet nie die Tätigkeit eines Machens.

*Techne, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings forth present beings as such beings out of concealedness and specifically into the unconcealedness of their appearance; techne never signifies the action of making.*¹⁴

Heidegger turns to the *techne* of art because this mode of knowing that brings forth beings into appearance has been neglected by philosophy. Heidegger finds that "the art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings."¹⁵ Because he resisted the tradition of metaphysics (even while working within it), the turn to art was crucial for Heidegger. Art is implicated in metaphysics when it becomes an object for aesthetic judgment. But aesthetics comes after the work, and Heidegger focuses on the work *of* art: what is art and what does art do. The technical distinction of art is not to create "art" in the work but to let art appear in the work. Art is "originary" in so far as it allows things to appear. Art, in this originary sense, is *phusis* which Heidegger defines as the "emerging and rising in itself and in all things."¹⁶ For Heidegger, *techne* is the skill of letting things appear, of a bringing forth that is not intentional but a "presenting that causes beings in the

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), (hereafter, UK), p. 47. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (NY: Harper & Row, 1971), (hereafter OWA), p. 59.

¹⁵ OWA, p. 39.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 42.

first place to come forward and be present in assuming an appearance." *Phusis* itself appears when the being, or the thing, "grows out of its own accord." For Heidegger, and for the Greeks whom he idolizes, "*techne* never signifies the action of making [*Machen*]"¹⁷

Heidegger thus redefines creation as "to cause something to emerge as a thing that has been brought forth."¹⁸ This skill of allowing *phusis* to happen also allows truth to happen, which explains Heidegger's interest in the work of art. However, the philosophical problem about the appearance of truth remains. "Truth" cannot in itself appear. It must appear in something that it is not. One way to make truth appear would be to personify it, to give it qualities and characteristics which are familiar, but that would be to confine truth in a particular figure. Truth would be limited, and therefore no longer "Truth" which is universal. Indeed, because truth is universal, truth must also be un-truth. Heidegger explains that the nature of truth is both to show itself and to withhold itself. "Truth is the primal conflict in which . . . the Open is won."¹⁹ What Heidegger calls "the Open" [*das Offene*] is the holding open of the space between appearance or that which shows itself and that which remains concealed. That which remains concealed is *not* the "essence" or "meaning" of a particular appearance. Heidegger is not interested in unconcealing the concealed but in the openness of a conflict which allows truth to *happen*. The work of art itself conceals this conflict and brings it forth. The work of art exposes a *Riß* or "rift",

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

"the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other."²⁰ Within the first few pages of the essay, Heidegger describes the work of art as constituted by an allegorical structure.

Das Kunstwerk ist zwar ein angefertigtes Ding, aber es sagt noch etwas anderes, als das bloße Ding selbst ist, allo agoreuei. Das Werk macht mit Anderem öffentlich bekannt, es offenbart Anderes; es ist Allegorie.

The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuei*. The work makes publicly known something other, it manifests something other; it is allegory.²¹

In German, to make publicly known is "*machen öffentlich bekannt*", or more literally, "to make openly known". Similarly, to manifest, "*offenbaren*" is literally "to be in openness". In the work of art, something other is made openly known *and* something other is brought into openness. These phrases are not repetitive. Two things are opened. One is the appearance of something otherwise concealed in that its concealment is brought into the open. The second is the appearance of something that appears within something made or produced [*angefertigten*]. The emphasis on the open-ness of the allegorical structure only becomes clear much later in the essay, in the concept of the *Riß* which "carries the opponents into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground,"²² The *Riß* has this allegorical structure. Distinctive about Heidegger's definition of allegory is the focus on unity rather than disjunction. "This *Riß* does not let the opponents

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 63.

²¹ UK, 4; OWA, 19-20, translation modified.

²² OWA, p. 63.

break apart.”²³ By virtue of the same allegorical structure, the *Riß* must be set into some “made thing”, *angefertigtes Ding*. Heidegger calls that thing *Gestalt* or figure, the artwork. This artwork is no longer merely a thing that is made but also the happening of openness, the event of truth.

Prudentius did not choose to write an allegory. Prudentius had to write allegorically because he needed to bring something into appearance that could not otherwise appear. The first erroneous assumption about the *Psychomachia* is that the personifications are what makes the poem an allegory. In *The Poetics of Personification*, James Paxson has already demonstrated that “personification is a self-reflexively developed property of the poem” rather than the product of a formulaic application of the imposition of a pre-existent form.²⁴ Paxson’s work forces a more careful and critical thinking of the trope of personification, and as a consequence, causes one to think differently about the relationship between personification and allegory. Paxson attempts to mediate between “canonically received allegorical texts” and post-structural theories of allegory and personification. For this attempt to be successful, allegory must show itself to be the same phenomenon in both the canonical and the post-structural. This requires that a concept of allegory not be imposed on a text but revealed in it. The success of this attempt is demonstrated in Paxson’s discovery of the self-reflexiveness of personification in the language of the poem. As such, he has offered a refreshing alternative to the often dismissive readings of this poem.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994). See p.63-5.

The use of the word "personification" to describe Prudentius' poem is anachronistic at best and at worst it has obscured the reading of the poem in its proper historical, theological, and cultural context. This can be traced to the misleading Latinate term "personification." To the naive reader, the verbal adjective, "personification" leads to the view that allegory makes persons out of non-persons. In fact, the word "personification" does not make its English debut until the middle of the eighteenth century. The most common definition of "person" prior to that time was a religious one, a reference to one of the three persons of the trinity, and more specifically to the person of Jesus Christ which unified the divine and the human. The root of personification is not person but *persona*, and *persona* is the Latin translation of the Greek *prosopon*. These words mean primarily "mask" or "face", and originated as terms within the genre of drama. By extension, the "person" of the Son is the face (or mask) by which divinity appears to mortals. As in the drama, the *prosopa* or *personae* marks a limit between the real and the imagined. Rather than assuming that the mask is a dramatic prop in the service of *mimesis*, one can think inversely that the mask or "face" is a projection of a more fundamental structure that is intrinsic but does not show itself.

Nietzsche's unique understanding of early Greek drama is that every tragic hero is a "face" for the god Dionysos. The way in which Nietzsche articulates the appearance of Dionysos is remarkably similar to the presentation of the immortal soul in *The Psychomachia*.

The one truly real Dionysus appears in a variety of forms, in the mask of a fighting hero, and entangled, as it were, in the net of the individual will. The god who appears talks and acts so as to resemble an erring, striving, suffering

individual. . . . In truth, the hero is the suffering Dionysos of the Mysteries.²⁵

As Dionysus appears on the stage, however, under the guise of a *prosopon* or *persona*, the figure unifies the agonized individual with the divine. Nietzsche constructs this argument through readings of Greek myths and plays. For Nietzsche, "tragedy" is born when Dionysos no longer appears and the individual struggles as a mere mortal. Nietzsche laments the loss of a divine/mortal unity; Prudentius promises its return. Nonetheless, the *persona* is a "face" which requires the imagination and resists reflection. The personified face is not a face but an image.

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot re-reads the figure of Narcissus in terms of the image. Blanchot first unreads the psychoanalytic appropriation of this classical figure. This modern tradition assumes that Ovid's expansion of the myth makes it "more accessible" -- "as though his narrative developments indeed contained psychoanalytic knowledge." Blanchot questions the "primal scene" of Narcissus gazing into the pool by reading it closely and revealing what Ovid "forgets".

Narcissus, bending over the spring, does not recognize himself in the fluid image that the water sends back to him. It is thus *not himself*, not his perhaps nonexistent "I" that he loves or -- even in his mystification -- desires. And *if* he does not recognize himself, it is *because what he sees is an image*, and *because the similitude of an image is not likeness to anyone or anything*: the image characteristically resembles nothing.²⁶

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 73.

²⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, tr. Ann Smock (New York: Bison Books, 1995) 125, emphasis added.

The pool is obviously reflective. Narcissus sees a face there, a beautiful face, but he does not recognize it as his own. By divine decree, Narcissus will live as long as he does not know himself. Narcissus lacks all identity. Everything is other to him, even his own image. Narcissus has no self-consciousness. By entwining the fate of Echo in the narrative, Ovid gives Narcissus a voice.²⁷ The unintentional rebuff of Echo's advances attributes to Narcissus a consciousness that he does not have. And yet, the addition of Echo restates the problem of the visual image. The conversation between Echo and Narcissus is "a sort of nondialogue". There is no communication. The echo is "not the language whence the Other would have approached him, but only the mimetic, rhyming alliteration of a *semblance* of language."²⁸ Ovid has translated the image in the spring into language. The language that comes back to Narcissus is not his own language, just like the "face" that he sees is not his own face. It is not a face at all, but the semblance of a face in which something other than a face appears.

In the *Apotheosis*, Prudentius calls the soul [*anima*] the semblance or shadow of God, *umbra*. "*Haec similis velut umbra Dei est*" (l.797).²⁹ [This [soul] is just the semblance in the likeness of God]. *Umbra*, often translated as "shadow", is a thing that is neither identical nor coincidental with the thing it is like. The *umbra* does not have the *corpus solidum*, the solidity of matter but the substance of an imitation (*imitatio*) or a reflection, *sed non habet umbra quod corpus*

²⁷ *ibid*, 126. Originally, according to Blanchot, the decree also specified that Narcissus could not tolerate the touch of another or speak at all.

²⁸ *ibid*, 127.

²⁹ Prudentius, *Apotheosis* in Latin with English translation by H.J. Thomson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969). Translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated, in consultation with this edition.

solidum, cuius imitatio in umbra est (1.799-800), which is to say, not much like a substance at all. What is the substance of a shadow? Prudentius then emphasizes the absolute distinction between reality and simulation.

atque aliud verum est, aliud simulatio veri (1.801)

that which is true is one thing, that which is the simulation
of what is true is another thing

The soul is of this shadowy substance which is not identical with the truth it simulates and yet is in itself true. While the soul is a thing it is a “shadowy thing”; it is not of a substance that can appear as an object perceptible to the senses nor of an intelligible substance perceptible by the intellect. The soul only appears as an image, and as such it requires a unique structure in order to appear, a structure which inspires both the intellectual and sensible modes of knowing without being appropriable by either one.

There are two points which Prudentius must clarify. One is the specificity of the relation between mortals and God (what it is to be made “in God’s image”), and the other is the paradox of Christ’s divine mortality. In order to establish Christ’s divinity, Prudentius distinguishes between the creation of the soul and the begetting (*generatio*) of the Son.

*solus de corde Parentis
Filius emicuit; verus, verus, Deus ille.
conlatum est animae, subito ut, quae non erat, esset.
ille coaeternus Patris est et semper in ipso,
nec factus sed natus habet quodcumque paternum est,
haec similis velut umbra Dei est.* (792-797)

Alone out of the heart of the Ancestor the Son flashed forth; truly, truly, that is God. To the life-soul is given a conjoining, suddenly, such that what was not, could be; That one [the Son] is co-eternal with the Father and always in the selfsame; not created but born, He has all that belongs

to his Father; whereas the soul is a semblance in the likeness of God.

In reference to Christ the verb is *emicare*, which means to dart out or to flash and figuratively, to flash as a shining. The Son shines forth out of the heart of the "Singular Ancestor". The "*Deus ille*" (that is God) which is emphatically true, *verus, verus*, ambiguously and simultaneously refers to both the Ancestor and the Son. Turning to the soul, Prudentius indicates its passivity. The soul does not come forth under its own power but in passive voice, it is conjoined (*conlatum est*). Although this event is also sudden, *subito*, it is constituted temporally: what was not, could be. The subjunctive indicates that it is only by the will of God that the soul can be. There is no distinction between the Son and the Ancestor, no difference of time and nothing conditional. In more familiar terms, Prudentius reiterates, "that one", the one who emerges, is not composed or made (*facere*) but born (*natus*), and whatever is the ancestor's, "that one" also has. By comparison, the soul which is but a semblance of God is a shadow, a substance haunted by the image of a divinity with which it does not coincide.

The substance of Christ must be absolutely different from the substance of any mortal being, and therefore, the enigma of Genesis, that God created humankind "in His image", needs to be resolved. For Prudentius Christ *is* God, having all that belongs to the Father. As the Word (*Verbum*), Christ mediates between God and mortals. Not by nature visible, Christ is the aspect of God which can take on a likeness perceptible to mortal senses. Prudentius declares that whoever is said to have seen God has really seen the Son who is the aspect of divinity which takes forms that can be comprehended by human vision (*per species quas possit homo comprehendere visu*) because divinity (pure majesty, *mera majestas*) is infinite and comes not within our vision. (l.21-27). In describing

Christ's divinity, Prudentius clarifies that before the actual incarnation through the virgin, Christ appeared as a figure, as when he appeared to Moses as an angel, and to Abraham, divided into three persons, a figure which Prudentius calls up in the *Praefatio* to the *Psychomachia*. In the Old Testament appearances, this figure is but an external form.³⁰ The figure is a metaphoric substitution of something sensible for a thing which cannot be grasped by the senses in and of itself. The figure is the outward and changeable aspect of a substance which remains itself unchanged. The figurations of Christ have no effect on the divine substance, but in the Old Testament figurations, Prudentius sees that the figure is not made in the material of flesh.

*inde figura hominis nondum sub carne Moysi
objecta effigiem nostri ignaverat oris,
quoad quandoque Deus Verbi virtute coactum
sumpturus corpus faciem referebat eandem.
(Apotheosis l.51-54)*

The figure of a man that was presented to Moses not yet in the flesh bore the likeness of our countenance because God, intending one day to assume a body formed by the power of the Word, was producing the same features.

Prudentius carefully ensures that Christ is only incarnate once, as Jesus, even though it is always Christ, the Word, who appears to mortals throughout history.

Such is the Word, that aspect of absolute divinity which can elect to appear to mortals by figuration, and uniquely, by incarnation. Mortals can see God through Christ as mediator. But Christianity also promises an *immediate* experience of God in body and in soul. For most individuals, this promise is contingent on the purification of death and the end of time. Body and soul are

³⁰ Prudentius states this explicitly: *quid apertius, absque aliena / quam sumat facie Verbum non posse videri* (l.43-4). "What could be plainer than that, apart from an external form which He assumes, the Word cannot be seen."

promised this experience, but it is the soul, as the image of God, which makes it possible. Michael Lapidge points out that while Prudentius obviously subscribes to the Stoic metaphor of cosmic binding, his poetry focuses more sharply on the destruction of the cosmic order, by sin.

Sin may arise in the universe because the elements are mortal, dissoluble, and prone to error. Therefore, if virtue is to prosper, the elements must be sternly controlled. On the cosmic scale, the controlling is done by God; on the human scale, the soul must control the composite of elements which is the human body. Accordingly, sin arises when the "bond" or *foedus* which controls the elements is broken.³¹

As the image of God, the soul is the immortal limit between divinity and mortality. The same in life as in death, the soul should have the potential to experience the divine during its mortal life. Prudentius cautiously allows for this impossible possibility in the *Apotheosis*.

*sed tamen et Patris est specimen quod cernere fas sit,
humanis aliquando oculis concurrere promptum,
quod quamvis hebes intuitus speculamine glauco
umentique acie potuit nebulosus adire.* (l.17-21)

Nevertheless there is an ideal of the Father lawful to discern, ready at times to run to human eyes, [an ideal] upon which an intuitus (gazing) although dull was able cloudily to approach with its gray mirroring and watery glance.

The father is the ideal, and here Prudentius says that it is lawful (*fas sit*) for human eyes to come into contact with it. In a certain case, Prudentius admits that God can be seen. This seeing is peculiarly qualified in that the ideal [*specimen*]

³¹ Michael Lapidge "A Stoic Metaphor in Late Latin Poetry: The Binding of the Cosmos," *Latomus* 39 (1980) .

runs to the eyes. Seeing God is not anything that the eyes can will, and the gazing itself, a contemplation which is intuitive rather than perceptive, is dull and cloudy in its approach, for its ability, in comparison to that which runs at it, is merely a gray mirroring. In the *Apotheosis*, Prudentius retreats from this “watery glance”, this barely possible discernment. Prudentius holds in reserve the divine law (*fas est*) by which a mortal being can gaze upon divinity, however faintly it might be seen. Prudentius will draw on this reserve in the *Psychomachia* when he attempts to provide a phenomenology of the soul which has the substance of a shadow. In order to make an image appear *i m*-mediately, Prudentius needs to provide a material mediation. The battle provides this materiality. In order to see the soul, one must simultaneously read the poem and discern the image which appears in it without being contained by it.

Prudentius wrote an “allegory” because of a need to present something that could not otherwise appear. The image demands an allegorical structure. Prudentius was the first poet known to have responded to this demand in a sustained narrative. After Prudentius, allegory is no longer only a rhetorical trope or an exegetical method. In Prudentius allegory has revealed itself as the bringing together of something said with something unsayable. By resembling the thing without being it, the image is and is not what it appears to be. The image can only appear by virtue of an allegorical structure which supports the relation between what is and is not there. In the essay “Reality and Its Shadow”, Emmanuel Levinas, like Blanchot, calls the relationship between the thing and its image “resemblance”. Levinas specifically call this relationship allegorical and defines allegory as follows:

An allegory is not a simple auxiliary to thought, a way of rendering an abstraction concrete and popular for childlike minds, a poor man’s symbol. It is an ambiguous commerce

with reality in which *reality does not refer to itself* but to its reflection, *its shadow*. An allegory thus represents what in the object itself doubles it up. An image, we can say is an *allegory of being*.³²

For Levinas, allegory is a relationship between reality and the shadow which it does not recognize as its own. The shadow is meant to figure the ambiguity of the hither side of a phenomenal appearance. The artist or the poet who has been able to represent reality *and* its shadow has assembled an allegory. This allegory does not transport the reader or audience to a place “beyond reality” (it is not transcendent) nor does the artist create this allegory. The artist has revealed the universe which precedes the world of creation. What Heidegger has circled around, Levinas declares unequivocally.

The whole of reality bears on its face its own allegory, outside of its revelation and its truth. In utilizing images art not only reflects, but brings about this allegory. *In art allegory is introduced into the world, as truth is accomplished in cognition*. These are two contemporary possibilities of being.³³

To a contemporary audience, Levinas must make the following reprimand. “The discussion over the primacy of art or of nature . . . fails to recognize the simultaneity of truth and image.”³⁴

Prudentius recognized this simultaneity. His problem was how to represent it. Prudentius was directly or indirectly influenced by Aristotle’s *De Anima* [On the soul] and obviously subscribes to the theory that the singular aspect of the

³² Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow” tr. Alphonso Lingis, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (New York: Blackwell, 1996) 135, emphasis added.

³³ *ibid*, 136.

³⁴ *ibid*.

human spirit, that which is the “image of God”, can only be known through the faculty of the imagination. Aristotle philosophically distinguished between the aspects of the soul which are inseparable (save one) and yet conceptually distinguishable. The singular aspect of the soul which is not only conceptually but physically separable from the human form can only be known through the faculty of the imagination. Aristotle divides the soul into three potential parts: the intelligible, the sensible, and the imaginative which joins them together.³⁵ The intelligible part, *nous*, is unknowable because in it, “actual knowledge is identical with its object”. The finite being is absolved from this simultaneity, except in so far as it can imagine this possibility. “When isolated [*nous*] is its true self and nothing more, and this alone is immortal and everlasting.”³⁶ It is necessary for Aristotle to qualify this observation because, as infinite, the *nous* exceeds the capacity of a finite being to know, and thus he admits, “we do not remember” this infinite activity, but there is a possibility of recollecting it. The imagination makes recollection possible. The primary thoughts constitutive of the *nous* are not themselves images, but they cannot be perceived without images.

In *Psychomachia*, Prudentius expresses this necessarily allegorical structure of the *nous* or immortal part of human being poetically, in the play of three words: *psyche*, *animus*, and *anima*, where *psyche*, the Greek interruption, is the singular aspect of the soul which needs the faculty of the imagination to appear. Prudentius marks the division of the soul between *anima*, which is its phenomenal form, and *animus*, which is its noumenal form. Together, these

³⁵ Aristotle, *De Anima* in Greek with English translation by W.S. Hett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963), III iii 427b-430a.

³⁶ *ibid*, III v 430a.

forms constitute the *psyche*, and Prudentius brings them together not by the power of *logos* or reason, but by the power of the imagination. The *anima* is itself tangible, phenomenal. It can appear as itself. In Aristotle's treatise the *anima* corresponds to the passive division of the soul, that which responds to objects which assault the senses of perception; aspects or images of an object appear to it and motivate it. The active part or intellect (*nous*) is unknowable in itself but creates appearances for itself. In Aristotle, the "immortal and eternal intellect" which is called *animus* in Latin, can use images which are not connected to objects of perception: the intellect can think without perceiving anything external to itself, but, the thinking subject cannot know this thought except through its own manipulation of the material of the imagination. The mind cannot think without the image. Although the intellect remains the privileged aspect of the human being, Aristotle admits that thought depends on the imagination and the imagination depends on the perceptions of the senses. In thought, the image pretends to be phenomenal; it appears. This appearance, which is merely an appearance, actually provokes the intellect into actualizing itself. Primary thoughts [*prota noemata*] are not images; however, primary thoughts cannot occur without images [*phantasmata*]. "The soul [*psyche*] never thinks itself without a mental image [*phantasmata*]"³⁷ In order to think itself, the *psyche* needs an image of itself: the *psyche* must resemble itself.

For Prudentius, there is much more at stake than the anthropomorphizing of abstract vices and virtues. The appearance of prosopopoeia in such an overwhelming quantity belies a profound need of the intrinsic possibilities of this rhetorical device. Exactly how the Latin word *persona* specifically referred to the

³⁷ *ibid*, III vii.

figure of Jesus Christ, as the name of unity between divine and mortal, was a topic of much discussion and dissension in the Early Church.³⁸ Prudentius clearly positioned himself in these debates. At one extreme in the fourth century Church were certain Gnostic sects, particularly the Arians, who believed that Christ's human form was nothing more than a mask for a divinity unchanged in substance and that the crucified Christ was an insubstantial figure which only Gnostics (those who know) could see while everyone else thought it was real, that the figure had substance. At the other extreme, and the one that became doctrine, the paradox of a Jesus who was fully human and fully divine remained a mystery and the divine "person" indicated the singular unity of a mortal body and a divine substance. In the *Psychomachia*, the virtue Concordia articulates this relation: "Jesus mediates between man and God, uniting mortality with the Father so that the fleshly shall not be separated from the eternal Spirit and that one God shall be both" (764-766). In its original usage, then, *persona* is specifically neither a metaphor which translates one substance into another nor a figure which is merely sensible, but an image, like the Aristotelian *phantasma*, suspended between the divine and mortal. The divine appears in an allegory.

In the *Psychomachia*, the soul's struggle is real by the power of the imagination because the imagination is the only locus adequate to this fight. The *proto noemata* is called *spiritus*. For Prudentius, *spiritus* is the inmost essence of human being, a universal that appears in each individual being. *Spiritus* can perhaps be identified as a "pure appearance" in that it does not correspond to any object of sense, and yet it *is* something. Poetry tries to manifest the intuition of this thing in an image which is neither representative nor mimetic. The poetic

³⁸ For a detailed history, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1977).

image should not be mistaken for a figure. Prudentius uses figures to indicate the thing that the soul is. A figure indicates by pointing away from the object it is and towards a thing that it is not, and has a generally metaphorical structure which is not entirely foreign to allegory. However, while figures can indicate aspects of *spiritus*, *spiritus* itself cannot be figured.

Prudentius uses the word "spiritus" rather sparingly. When it does not refer specifically to the Holy Spirit of the trinity (at l.64, l.766, and l.840), the word *spiritus* occurs only twice, once in the *Praefatio* and again, more significantly, in Concordia's victory speech near the end of the poem. In both cases, *spiritus* designates the unity of the body and soul. In the *Praefatio*, Abraham is said to illustrate how to "beget a child of wedlock pleasing to God" when the "spirit, battling valourously, has overcome with great slaughter the monsters in the enslaved heart" (l.13-14). Typologically, completing this figure, "spiritus" appears in Concordia's victory speech in which she articulates the way mortal beings can become a "persona": "Let one spirit [*spiritus*] shape in single structure all that we do by action of mind [*mentis*] and body [*corporis*]" (767-768). If Jesus is the *persona* of the trinity, the mask by which the divine can appear in the world, it would seem that the *persona* in the poem is the human *spiritus*, which also unites the immortal soul [*mentis*] with the body [*corporis*]. The "personification" in the poem is not that of individual virtues and vices but that of the human spirit [*spiritus*], the immortal soul of the mortal being. This analogy suggests that for Prudentius, the Latin translation of *psyche* is *spiritus*. The *spiritus* appears as something linked to the soul which animates humans (*anima*) and distinguishes their intellectual capacity (*animus*). *Spiritus* joins these functions, and yet also appears as something extrinsic to the manifest aspects of soul.

The *imitatio Christi* suggested by the poem is that *spiritus* is, like Jesus himself, a *persona*, a "face" which unites the divine with the mortal. There is a struggle with the tragedy of individuation, the separation of body (the mortal) from soul (the divine), as indicated in the title with the Greek word "machia". The battle between the vices and the virtues are stagings of mind (*mentis*) over body (*corporis*): Faith over Sacrifice; Chastity over Lust; Patience over Anger; Lowliness and Hope over Pride; Reason over Luxury; Good Works over Greed; and finally, Peace and Concord over Discord and Heresy. The valorous battle waged by *spiritus* is not simply the conquering of the "monsters in the enslaved heart" but the maintaining of harmony between body and soul, between the mortal and divine parts, in other words, between opposing forces. Concordia begins her final speech with the theme of unification. Using the figure of the nation (*publica*), she emphasizes the union of different substances, the city and the countryside, because "where there is separation there is no strength" (763).³⁹ The driving force of the poem is this unity, and the image of this unity is *spiritus* which says the same as the Greek *psyche*, in all its diversity of meaning.

The figure and speech of *Discordia* lead to what Malamud identifies as an underlying dynamic of the poem: ambiguity. One would expect *Discordia's* defense to be as deceptive as the disguise with which she infiltrated the virtuous army, but to the contrary, she gives a straightforward self-assessment. This apparent contradiction in the abstraction personified nonetheless remains true to the nature of the vice. Like heresy itself, *Discordia* tries to "undermine language

³⁹ The theological implications of this passage are obvious in historical context. Prudentius is offering his theological disputation against Manicheism, as in the *Apotheosis* he had disputed the anti-Semitic gnosticism of Marcion. For Prudentius, the body cannot be inherently evil because it is one of God's creations, molded by "His hand" as the soul is the inspiration of "his breath".

[the *logos*] by revealing its arbitrary nature".⁴⁰ The virtue most upset by *Discordia's* revelation is not *Concordia* but *Fides*, the virtue "most concerned with the language of truth."⁴¹ The "language of truth" is the *logos* of the Father. It is metaphysical. By walking the line between language as such and the language of truth, *Discordia's* punning and playing with language reveals not only the instability of words but also the unavoidably false appearance of truth which cannot itself appear. *Fides* helps *Discordia* to make her case. She silences the vice by driving a javelin through her tongue. This act incites the virtuous army to behave viciously: they are "imbued with their opponent's divisive nature, [and] become agents of dismemberment and dissolution."⁴² Instead of performing "verbal mimesis", the language of poetry points to itself. Once attention has been directed to the literal, to language itself and not to something extrinsic to the poem (like a meaning), language itself can appear.

If Malamud's reading of the poem is sustainable, if this poetry is "grounded" in ambiguity and in the substance of language itself (and not in meaning or other metaphysical signification), then the assumptions about allegory are necessarily brought into question as well. If the *Psychomachia* is still rightfully to be called an allegory (which Malamud never disputes) then allegory can no longer be assumed to be a hierarchy of signification in which the literal is the least significant. In proceeding phenomenologically, this or other established definitions of allegory are necessarily suspended else I, like many others, would be judging the poem against a concept. Such judgments are founded on poetics of

⁴⁰ Malamud, 64.

⁴¹ *ibid*, 65.

⁴² *ibid*, 66.

allegory which are established by the very logical method of induction followed by deduction within a specified field of examples. A poetics is unavoidably tautological. A phenomenological reading resists this logic and its inherent tautology by working as exclusively as possible with the poem or work of art under consideration, not only hearing what it says but discerning the image that appears there.

The *Psychomachia* is introduced by a *Praefatio* which surveys the story of Abraham, but focusing not on the sacrifice of Isaac as one might reasonably expect, but on the battle to free Lot from his captors and culminating with Sara's conception. With this *Praefatio*, Prudentius tells us how to read the poem, and he tells us that he is telling us.

*Senex fidelis prima credendi via
Abram . . .
pugnare nosmet cum profanis gentibus
suasit suumque suasor exemplum dedit
nec arte prolem conjugalem gignere
Deo placentem, matre Virtute editam,
quam strage multa bellicosus spiritus
portenta cordis servientis vicerit* (l.1-14)

The faithful patriarch who first showed the way of believing, Abram [Abraham] . . . has counseled us to war against the profane peoples, himself giving an example of his own counsel, showing that to beget a conjugal child pleasing to God, whose mother is Virtue, then the spirit, against the chaos of many battles, will vanquish the monsters in the enslaved heart.

Abraham's counsel is to battle against the ungodly in order to beget a child pleasing to God. The ensuing synopsis highlights events in the battle of Sodom and Gomorrha (which will be elaborated in the fictional battle of the poem) and ends with Sara's amazement to find herself fertile. In its *Praefatio*, Prudentius tells us to read the poem as the bringing forth of wisdom and that the path to

wisdom is freedom from discord. He tells us to read the poem in the mode of what Heidegger calls *phusis*, "what happens in the midst of being that grows out of its own accord."⁴³

The virtuous army in the *Psychomachia* has to do little more than march a straight line to the narrow gate, but nothing seems less likely as the narrative winds through the various conflicts. Keeping a direct line of sight seems to be the only defense in this war, and it is revealed to require a particular kind of vision that must look past the figure and gaze into the image. The way to victory is through discernment which is the "*artibus ingenium*" by which the soul can gain the concord and stability necessary for the divine vision, and these are the figures of virtue, *Concordia* and *Pax*, who end the war. And yet victory remains vulnerable to *Culparum* and *Discordia*, the vices which disjoin and dismember. Vigilance is a theme of the poem, and it is a vigilant vision which proves almost impossible to maintain, given the continual oscillations of the battle and the final threat of *Discordia*. The troops cannot discern her presence as they near the camp gate. Eyes and the skill of discernment figure this theme not merely metaphorically but literally. In the very first battle, *Fides* quickly dispatches *Fides Veterum Cultura Deorum* (Faith to the cultivation of the old gods) by trampling her eyes.

*de ora cruore
de pecudum satiat solo adplicat et pedecalcet
elisos in morte oculos* (l.31-33)

at the border of murder, when the beast was brought into close contact and ensnared, [Fides] forces out its eyes in death.

⁴³ OWA, p. 59

The defeat of *Fides Veterum Cultura Deorum* is followed by the crowning of a thousand martyrs. The early Christian martyrs refused to sacrifice to the "old gods", ostensibly because they could discern the evil behind the "filleted brows" of the figure.

Repeatedly the vices are associated with poor vision. *Ira* darts her eyes, indicating her impatience. *Luxuria* has "*oculis vaga*", wandering eyes consistent with her nonchalant and yet incredulously effective participation in the war. *Avaritia* deprives some men of vision, captures others by tempting sights, and even changes her own appearance to fool men into following her while disguised as *Frugi* (Frugality). Midway through the war, *Sobrietas* chastizes the mortal troops for lacking this power of discernment when faced with *Luxuria*.

*'quis furor insanas agitat caligine mentes,
quo ruitis, cui colla datis, quae vincula tandem --
pro pudor -- armigeris amor est perferre lacertis,
lilia luteolis interlucentia sertis
et ferrugineo vernantes flore coronas?'* (l.351-355)

"What insane fury agitates your obscured minds, to what do you rush, to whom do you give your neck, what bonds are these -- for shame -- that you love to bear on muscles that were to wield armor, these yellowish lilies interlacing wreaths and red crowns with blooming flowers?"

As soon as *Sobrietas* describes their appearance, the troops look ridiculous. The path to victory requires sharp eyes and wary discernment as displayed early on by the virtue *Pudicitia* (Chastity) in her modest eyes (*pudibunda lumina*) which easily withstand the flaming assault of *Sodomita Libido* (Lust the Sodomite).

Luxuria proves the most threatening of the vices because her *modus operandi* resembles the retiring mode necessary for the divine vision. In a shabby but effective imitation of *phusis*, *Luxuria* emerges from an other place to join the battle, *venerat occiduis mundi de finibus hostis / Luxuria*. (l.310-1). *Luxuria* does

nothing. She simply plods along in her blossoming chariot, tossing flowers, and the virtuous army drops *en masse*.

*et iam cuncta acies in deditionis amorem
sponte sua versis transibat perfida signis
Luxuriae servire volens dominaeque fluentis
iura pati et laxa ganeorum lege teneri. (l.340-343)*

And then altogether on the battlefield in surrender to love, its standards turned about, [the army] voluntarily turned itself to the treacherous banner of *Luxuria* and willingly to serve this loose mistress and to swear to suffer under the effeminate laxity of the brothel's law.

Luxuria is a figure, the figure of nothingness, but she is not an image. The troops are tempted by this figure, mistaking the appearance for something essential, but they fall by their will, *servire volens*. This is hardly an original idea, but Prudentius follows through by writing a poem which depends on and illustrates the vision and the image that is adequate to divinity.

The soul can appear as an image, but the vision must be adequately prepared to perceive it and to distinguish it from figures which may be deceptive. Not even the Virtues themselves are fully vested with this power of discernment. When *Concordia* is pricked by *Discordia*, she is completely surprised. The graphic battle between the virtues and vices prepares the poem's reader for the vision of Wisdom, *Sapientia*, but there is something much greater at stake. The poem teaches us how to see with the modest eyes appropriate to the human condition. Against the vacuous and silent image of *Luxuria*'s jewels and flowers, *Sobrietas* opposes the material of Hebrew history and Christian doctrine. *Sobrietas* is a fine rhetorician and in her language, *Luxuria* becomes the parody of Christ, wallowing in the dirt rather than rising towards the heavens. Smashed with a rock, the cursed body and blood of *Luxuria* are revealed in despicable detail.

dentibus introrsum resolutis lingua resectam

*dilaniata gulam frustis cum sanguinis inplet.
 insolitis dapibus crudescit guttur . . .
 ' ebibe iam proprium post pocula multa eruorem',
 . . . 'sint haec tibi fercula tandem
 tristia praeteriti nimis pro dulcibus aevi, (l.423-429)*

The teeth inside unloosed, the tongue curtailed, the throat torn apart, filled with bloody scraps unaccustomed to this feast her throat grows violent . . . "Drink the blood which is your own after the many cups [of other's blood] . . . this is the final dish of the bitter past of excess for a lifetime of pleasures.

At *Luxuria's* death, her disciples scatter in all directions, leaving behind an abundance of material goods but escaping with their lives. This victory, like most of the battles in the second part of the war, is neither tidy nor complete. This ambiguous victory is characteristic of the poem, even in its presentation of Christ, and the ambiguity should direct attention to the ultimate goal of the poem's events.

Christ is not a *deus ex machina* in the *Psychomachia*. The poet asks Christ only to dissertate, "to set out in words for us our king, with what fighting force the soul is furnished and enabled to expel the sins from within our breast" (l.5-6) [*dissere, rex noster, quo milite pellere culpas / mens armata queat nostri de pectoris antro*]. The governing teleological image of the *Psychomachia* is not victory or wisdom but conception, the meeting of divine and mortal beings in the soul. All of the biblical events recounted about Abraham lead directly to Sara's conception of Isaac. Analogously, the successive events of the struggle between vice and virtue lead to the conception of *Sapientia*, a figure of Christ. Conception is also the figure for the experience of the poet who does not create so much as receive this vision. The poem does not bring forth a merely virtuous world, but a liminal world that in its liminality is something divine. The world is brought

forth not by the poet and not by God alone, but by the commingling of the mortal and the divine. Primordially, the poem is not about an epic struggle, not even about wisdom, and certainly not about the possibility of resurrection which is nowhere mentioned. The *Psychomachia* is a poem in which the *phantasmenon* of the soul appears, and this is no unremarkable feat. Prudentius has given us a conception that is without concept. Poetry and truth are simultaneous but not identical. Truth depends on the concept; poetry depends on the image; and the image depends on allegory.

And yet, Prudentius' most famous poem has rarely been read as a remarkable *poem* (and not primarily as a specimen of allegory), a poem which achieves something otherwise impossible. The later Middle Ages treated the *Psychomachia* as a stylistic model.⁴⁴ While I dispute the allegorization of the poem as a theological treatise or epic narrative in disguise, I also acknowledge that this tendency has roots in the poem itself, and the finite capabilities of its mortal composer. The misconception of allegory begins with Prudentius' poetic failure in the figure of *Sapientia*, a figure in general, and *soto voce*, a figure for Christ, but there is no figure adequate to the mortal soul. Prudentius is faced with the possibility that Christ can be figured but the mere human soul cannot, and this perhaps explains the mark of hopelessness in the poem. In the midst of the battle, Hope simply ascends to heaven, leaving the remaining vices gazing after her longingly. Only in this section of the poem does Prudentius use the masculine *animus*, the Latin word for the intellect.

⁴⁴ See John P. Hermann's *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1989). See especially, the second part of chapter 1 and chapter 2.

Following the decapitation of *Superbia* (Pride) by *Mens Humilis* (Lowly of Mind) whom *Spes* (Hope) encourages in deed, *Spes* refers to the soul (*animos*) of David which blossomed on the day he defeated Goliath and which he lifted up towards Hope's Kingdom at the very feet of God. Hope explains that a place is kept in her home for victors who have cut down sin and reached after her, and then she departs. The flight of Hope is a dramatic moment in which the action comes to a halt, causing a semantic caesura. Faith begins and ends the war against sin, but it is Faith without Hope who is ultimately victorious. The virtues mark this loss not in their existence (*animas*) but in the faculty of perception, *animus*.

*mirantur euntem
virtutes tolluntque animos in vota volentes
ire simul, ni bella duces terrena retardent.* (l.
306-8)

the virtues are amazed by her and lift their souls in a
willful vow to be together with her, did not earthly war
delay them conduct.

As with the aspect of David capable of following Hope to her home, it is the *animus* of the virtues which desires Hope. A few lines later, in the description of the vice *Luxuria*, the "other" *animus* announces itself: *vitae cui causa voluptas elumbem mollire animum* [a life with grounds in pleasure, to her "soul" bland and impressionable]. (l.313-4). The substance of *Luxuria*'s soul is "bland" and "unimpressionable" which recalls and parodies the figure of the wax into which the divine seal, the image of God, is impressed. *Luxuria* is the figure of hopelessness and against *Luxuria*, Virtue suffers its first setback: *inde eblanditis virtutibus halitus inlex* [the hidden lure of her breathing flattering the virtues]. In a matter of lines, the entire army wills itself to serve *Luxuria* (*Luxuriae servire volens*) rather than desiring to vow allegiance to Hope, the *vota volentes* of just 30 lines prior. The Army is the figure of a mortal being which succumbs to the

assault on the senses, and repeatedly in this second stage of the conflict, the mortal forces let their limbs fall slack, and repeatedly they are revived by a call to look up, to reach towards Hope even though Hope is absent. The body and the mind must strive with only the hope of Hope, and it is the *anima*, the life-soul, that will sustain the mortal being. The *Psychomachia* is not a moral poem but a mortal one.

The remainder of the poem is marked by the absence of Hope even in the presence of Faith. Not only does the figural body struggle, but the poet begins to falter. The flight of Hope is an apex after which the poem declines, not in the tidy resolution of a denouement but in bewilderment. Although "the poem ends in apparent harmony," Malamud challenges this appearance with her reading of the ambiguity integral to the poem's structure and narrative. The final battle between Concordia and Discordia is best characterized as a Pyrrhic victory because "the stage is set for the battle in the soul to continue at a new level of intensity."⁴⁵

The narrative continues for another 200 lines, and reaches a logical conclusion and reasonable resolution with the enthroning of *Sapientia*, the figure of Christ come into the mortal being. The lament of the epilogue belies this appearance of resolution. The conflict between virtue and vice does not end with the expected upward gesture of ascension, but with the descent of *Fides* and *Concordia* to mark the boundaries of the temple.

*Haec ubi dicta dedit, gradibus regina superbis
desiluit tantique operis Concordia consors
metatura novum iacto fundamine templum.* (l.823-825)

This then devoted to speech, with majestic step the queen
came down and with her consort in the great work,

⁴⁵ Malamud, p. 69.

Concordia, to measure the ground for the newly established temple.

From the lofty heights of poetry, there is a return to the *terra firma* of sense-perception and the metaphysical promise of the figure.

This restoration of limits, the confinement of *Sapientia*, corresponds to the Stoic belief in a cosmic harmony which holds the universe together in a bond (Greek *desmos*, Latin *vinculum* or *foedera*). Malamud refers to this Stoic tradition in order to support her reading of *Concordia* and *Discordia*.⁴⁶ The Stoic metaphor is not without ambiguity, at least not in Prudentius. *Concordia* ultimately instills harmony with the creation of the temple, but not without violence and repression. In contrast, although *Discordia*'s power is a force of destruction and dismemberment, Malamud points out that it is also potentially liberating.⁴⁷ The metaphor of the bond which confines is even more significant after the battle is won. Malamud points out that weaving is a common metaphor for the creation of this bond, and one Prudentius himself uses to describe God's creative powers.⁴⁸ This establishes a correlation between the poet and God as creators, but also a conflict. The bond woven by God confines the poet in a mortal body ensnared in the warp of space and the woof of time. Weaving is creative but also confining, and at the conclusion of the poem "*Praefatio* " which introduces his collected

⁴⁶ Cicero translated Chrysippus' "*desmos*" as "*vinculum*" in *De Rerum Naturae*, and the metaphor of the chain became an image of cosmic harmony. Malamud is here abstracting from Michael Lapidge, "A Stoic Metaphor in Late Latin Poetry: The Binding of the Cosmos," *Latomus* 39 (1980): 817-837.

⁴⁷ Malamud, 78.

⁴⁸ Malamud cites *Cathemerinon* 3, in which Prudentius employs the ancient topos of the poet's double crown, the first in honor of his technical skill of weaving verses, and the second in the verse itself as a woven crown (76).

works, Prudentius rebels against this confinement with a wish, the wish of all poets perhaps:

*haec dum scribo eloquor
vinclis o utinam corporis emicem
liber, quo tulerit lingua sono mobilis ultimo* 43-
45⁴⁹

As I write and speak these things, I wish I could flash forth, free of the chains of the flesh, to where my mobile tongue would guide me with its final note. (Malamud's translation)

Malamud interprets this wish: "the poetic book, *liber*, which this Preface introduces, will make him *liber*, free."⁵⁰

The paradoxical force of the binding and weaving imagery that Malamud identifies in the final battle scene becomes more paradoxical as the *Virtues* complete their work. After the defeat of the last vice, members of the virtuous army are not left in peace and allowed neither to lurk in idleness [*nulla latet pars Mentis iners*] (l.741) nor to hide feeble and snoring in secret obscurity [*marceat obscuro stertens habitator operto*] (l.745). All must gather in the place of assembly and attend Concordia's speech to hear "what new law Faith will bestow" [*quam velit atque Fides Virtutibus addere legem*] (l.748). *Concordia's* speech is full of the Stoic cosmography of the *desmos* (the bond) and its dismemberment.

*scissura
domestica turbat rem populi, titubatque foris quod dissidet intus*
(l.757)

⁴⁹ Prudentius, "*Praefatio*" in Latin with English translation by H.J. Thomson, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969). This short poem appeared as the Preface to a collection of Prudentius' poems.

⁵⁰ Malamud, 77.

domestic division throws the public interest into chaos, and
the outside trembles when there is distance within

. . . *quia fissa voluntas*

confundit variis arcana biformia fibris (l.760-1)

that which divides the will spreads various secret fibers
with double forms

. . . *nil dissociabilit firmum est.* (l.763)

if there is separation, there is no strength

The antidote to such caesures, fissures, and dissociations is submission to peace, to “let a singularly measured [*unimodus*] Spirit weave [*texat*] into a single structure [*conpagibus unus*] the actions of all that grows out of and is conducted by the body and the soul” [*quidquid gerimus mentisque et corporis actu, spiritus unimodis texat conpagibus unus* (l.767-8). The peace that *Concordia* describes corresponds precisely to the Stoic cosmography.

Sidera pace vigent, consistunt terrea pace (l.771)

By peace the heavens flourish, by peace the earth
endures.⁵¹

Despite *Concordia*’s rhetoric, *Fides* again hits the chink in her sister’s armor (as *Discordia* had done). “*Concordia laesa est, / sed defensa Fides*” [Concordia has been wounded but Faith defended] (l.800-1). Faith even laughs at her sister’s wounds, supposedly because they are slight but laughter is never entirely without derision. As promised, *Fides* also adds a new rule. There is one more task for the heirs of Virtue to perform. She invokes the figure of King Solomon, not as the embodiment of wisdom but of civil war: *regni quod tandem pacifer heres /*

⁵¹ This last clause could also be rendered, “by peace the earth comes to rest”. This rest would be the perduring so important in Heidegger’s thinking on poetry.

belligeri, armatae successor inermus et aulae, the ruler who finally brought peace to the heirs of war, the unarmed successor in an armed palace (l.805-6). Like Solomon, the Virtues are commanded to construct a temple which the “all powerful one” may visit (l.811), but also implied is that this “temple”, like the kingdom of Solomon, will be divided.

The last scene of the narrative describes *Fides* drawing in the dirt with her golden wand. The virtues do not build this structure: it simply appears. The inner chamber is called a “*compita*”, and is the “meeting place” of the conflicting ages of humanity: the brisk dawn of childhood and the burning heat of youth, the broad day of maturity and the chill of old age (l. 845-8). The temple gathers the discord into concord, and this is achieved by measured confinement, by eliminating the liminal. The inmost chamber contains *Sapientia*, and she reigns over this measured realm but not outside of it. The poem itself is outside, unruly and threatening chaos. In the epilogue, the poet complains that the war continues and despairs that he has been unable to quell the uproar of rebellion. *Fervent bella horrida, fervent / ossibus inclusa, fremit et discordibus armis / non simplex natura hominis*” [Roaring in frightful war, roaring in the bones, and the natural essence of humankind grumbles in discordant war] (902-4). The *Psychomachia* is a civil war in which the wounds run deep and never fully heal. The soul will remain in its oppositional state, but because the poem is timeless, Christ will come again and again, *ad infinitum*, and *Sapientia* will reign and be deposed over and over again.

Prudentius’ poem makes its own argument for the image. Indeed, the entire project of the *Psychomachia* depends on the poet’s ability to give appearance to something that cannot appear in itself and cannot be represented metaphorically by something else in an act of substitution or translation. This

work “makes openly known something other” and “it manifests something other”. Heidegger would say, “*Es ist Allegorie*.”⁵² In desiring to make the soul appear, Prudentius faces an extraordinarily difficult task. According to the developing doctrine of the Church in the fourth century, there is no divine substance in human beings, and yet, in the very first books of *Genesis*, it is indisputable that God made humankind in “His own Image”. The soul is something divine, but not quite divine, mortal but also immortal. The soul is in fact liminal, and therefore only the faculty of the imagination is adequate to it. The problem can be stated through an analogy, but remains the beginning of a difficult thought that can be thought only through poetry, and not through theology.

As man is *only* the image of God, and an appearance in no way divine, so the image of the soul is not the soul but its appearance. In the *Psychomachia* the soul does not appear because it cannot appear, but it can show itself by resembling itself. This resemblance marks a limit at which the soul absolves itself from both the mortal body in which it appears and the divine object which it resembles. As a paradigm of the image, Blanchot offers the corpse as a thing which resembles itself, which is substantial and yet no-thing, nothing that it was and nothing to come. The corpse is without life, without *anima*. What remains is the image of life which appears in the materiality of death. Thus Blanchot can say that in the corpse, the person comes to resemble himself for the first time.⁵³ If, in the *Psychomachia*, the soul resembles itself, it is not the soul which appears but its

⁵² Cf. above discussion and OWA 19-20; UK 4.

⁵³ Maurice Blanchot, “Two Versions of the Imaginary” in *The Space of Literature*, tr. Ann Smock (Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 1982), p.254-63, and esp. 260-1.

image, and that is consistent with Prudentius' theological view precluding the actual appearance of the soul as such. In Stoic philosophy, the infusion of God binds things together. The soul is simply this force (*vis*), an indifferent force.⁵⁴ Prudentius tries to bear the soul in his poem, despite its unfathomable distance and inestimable weight.

In *Apotheosis*, the soul is not yet an image, but it manifests itself to the poet, and the poet feels compelled to make it appear. If God, including the Son who becomes mortal, is utterly unlike His creation, how is it possible for man to understand or to know (in some way) God? In *Apotheosis*, Prudentius prefigures the fundamental ontological question as articulated by Heidegger many centuries later:

How must the finite essent that we call man be in his inmost essence in order that in general he can be open [*offen*] to the essent that he himself is not, which essent therefore must be able to reveal itself by itself?⁵⁵

In *Apotheosis*, Prudentius described the processes by which divinity can be imagined as physical form. He did not try to make the divine appear. In the *Psychomachia*, Prudentius responds to the question of how to know that which it is impossible to know. In the *Psychomachia* his task is far greater for he must make Being appear, not merely by figures which indicate, but in its being as mortal, that is, in its being towards death.⁵⁶ Prudentius must find an image

⁵⁴ See Lapidge, 828. The use of *vis* for this force appears in the poet Manilius, see p.827.

⁵⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, tr. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1975), 47.

⁵⁶ It is here necessary to bracket the standard Christian resolution to this problem. A quick survey of the *Psychomachia* shows that there is no reference to salvation

adequate to the soul, and this will bring him to the very limit of human being. The soul marks the limit at which the mortal touches the divine. The image is what they share. To succeed in manifesting this image is to see God, unmediated by the figure of the Word. In the *Psychomachia*, Prudentius does not transcend his finitude but he comes face-to-face with it. The remnants of Prudentius' experience at this limit are ensouled in his last poem. As the "pure breath of God is hot within the dark prison of the heart",⁵⁷ the soul burns in the constricting hexameters of the poem. The *Psychomachia* is an invitation to war, to allow the forces of light and obscurity to draw one to the limit of the possible at which one can intuit the impossible vision with the imperceptible mediation which dulls but does not deflect the vision. This vision, "cloudy and gray", remains the appropriate mode in which finite beings can be open to that which is infinite.

Poetry and allegory are intimately related, and the *Psychomachia* may be not only the earliest but perhaps also one of the most illuminating examples of this intimacy. Today, allegory is recognized as a trope in which a thing that appears refers to a different thing which does not appear. In the work of Paul de Man, allegory came to serve as the inscription of temporality or, finally, the tropological structure of unreadability. In the first case, there is the assumption today that the second thing could appear but there are supervening reasons why it does not, i.e. political persecution or theoretical complexity. In deconstruction, the deferral of meaning is attributed to language itself. However, the real reason for allegory is Reason which will not allow the *phantasma* its impossible presence. Only

through resurrection. Quite the contrary, the poem's governing trope is conception. And it is neither hope nor *caritas* that is conceived, but the classically modulated concept of wisdom.

⁵⁷ Translation by H.J. Thomson, 905-7.

slipping barely detected, can the *phantasmenon* manifest its impossible presence at the very limit beyond which wisdom cannot reign, in poetry. Allegory is the structure of the image: it communicates the image, that which cannot be communicated or presented in any other way (least of all in mimesis or representation). In its primordially, allegory has the structure of *phusis*, not "nature" or "essence" in a banal sense but "the emerging and rising in itself and in all things" and the setting up of a world. The *Psychomachia* sets up a world in bringing the soul, something that cannot otherwise appear, together with language, not created but born, not merely conjoined but flashing forth. Prudentius' poem is an allegory not because of its connected stream of personified figures, but because it is a poem. The poem is not an object of knowledge, and consequently not subject to the law of reason. The poem *is*, and the image which is the poem can open our eyes to an "other" vision, cloudy and gray, but gazing into the heart of being.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Highest Destiny of Philosophy as Art:
The Image of the Poet in Hegel

In all these respects art is and remains, on the side
of its highest determination for us a bygone-thing.

In allen diesen Beziehungen ist und bleibt die
Kunst nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung
für uns ein Vergangenes.

Georg Wilhelm Hegel¹

The name of Hegel is a mighty invocation for philosophy. A model of rigor, and from start to finish grounded in *Wissenschaft* (Science), Hegel's philosophy has infiltrated far corners of the globe and continues to spark heated debate. Although often disputed, Hegel's judgments are not easily dismissed. Nonetheless, as Paul de Man astutely observed about Hegel's influence, "Few thinkers have so many disciples who never read a word of their master's writings."² Early in his career,

¹ Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Einleitung in die Ästhetik* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967), p.30. (Hereafter, "Hegel A"). Translations are mine as noted; otherwise, see *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, tr. Bernard Bosanquet (New York: Penguin, 1993).

² Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1996), (hereafter SSHA), p. 93. In the same essay, deMan will suggest that contrary to the view (represented here by Peter Szondi) that Hegel has an "inadequate conception of the essence of language" (95), perhaps there is something in Hegel "that we cannot or will not hear because it upsets what we take for granted, the unassailable *value* of the aesthetic". De Man poses this as a question, but he implies that *for* Hegel, the aesthetic is not so unassailable. By extension, de Man suggests that Hegel is not as familiar as scholars and critics generally assume.

Karl Marx expressed a similar sentiment in regards to the Young Hegelians of his time. Hegelians have used Hegel with great effect, often, as Marx observed, by using a part of Hegel against the whole of Hegel.³ de Man broke some very hard ground in the essays, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," and "Hegel and the Sublime". He carefully reads Hegel's language on both sign (the arbitrary signification of allegory) and symbol (the belief in a coincidence of the metaphysical with the physical). He finds confusion and contradiction in Hegel's use of the terms in the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* and also in the *Encyclopedia*. De Man finally discredits the privilege of the aesthetic as well as the symbolic in Hegel's work, and he clearly identifies the allegorical.

We would have to conclude that Hegel's philosophy . . . is in fact an allegory of the disjunction between philosophy and history, or, in our more restricted concern, between literature and aesthetics . . . The reasons for this disjunction, which it is equally vain to deplore or praise, are not themselves historical or recoverable by means of history. To the extent that they are inherent in language, *in the necessity which is also an impossibility* to connect the subject with its predicates or the sign with its symbolic significations, the disjunction will always, as it did in Hegel, manifest itself as soon as experience shades into thought, history into theory. *The emergence of thought and of theory is not something that our own thought can hope to prevent or control.*⁴

de Man ended his essay on this provocative note and died a year later.⁵ The conclusion of this essay may constitute de Man's most important contribution to the

³ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology (Part One with Selections from Parts Two and Three)*, ed. C. J. Arthur, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), (hereafter GI), p.41.

⁴ SSHA, p. 104. deMan here echoes his own argument in the seminar essay, "the Resistance to Theory."

understanding of allegory, and his most enigmatic. The allegorical is unavoidable if one wants to bring together the sensible with the intelligible. He suggests that any system of metaphysics depends entirely on a structure of allegory.⁶

As the structure of “the necessity which is also an impossibility” most clearly evident in philosophy, allegory needs to be re-introduced to the literary field, or as is more apropos of Hegel, it needs to be recollected there.⁷ First it is necessary, and not impossible, to discern the allegorical structure of philosophy, a structure which brings philosophy together with poetry. The foundational work of Hegel’s philosophy, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, both challenges and supports this thesis. There can be no experience of the immediate for a finite being, or, as Hegel would say, it is an experience of nothingness, *Nichtigkeit*. The finite being must become infinite and must do so without recourse to anything beyond its finite capabilities. The particular must become universal, but the two are mutually exclusive, or at least they appear to be. This is indeed only an appearance, and Hegel has set out not only to reveal the identity of the particular and the universal in the appearance, but also thereby to transcend the finite limit of human being (*Dasein*). The *Phenomenology of Spirit* depends entirely on words like *Darstellung* (representation), *Bild* (image) and especially *Gestalt* (figure) because the absolute (or

⁵ include FN from essay, by editor, which gives context of the larger project proposed by deMan

⁶ This necessity can be traced back to Plato, and the argument will be developed in this chapter. However, the fact that the myth of the cave in Book VII of the *Republic* is commonly called “the allegory of the cave” in modern editions provides an initial ground for this argument.

⁷ Recollection is even more in line with DeMan’s general way of thinking, esp in regards to theory which he believes (and I agree) lies at the core of literature — it just needs to be recollected.

universal) Subject cannot possibly appear. It can only appear in a "fiction" which takes the form of a figure which appears to be identical with the Subject, not immediately but eventually, through a long process of mediation. In order to phenomenalyze Spirit, Hegel needs the devices of art and literature, and he particularly needs allegory.

In the Preface, Hegel describes Spirit as "the most sublime Notion (*Begriff*) and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion" and that religion is *Wissenschaft* or Science. In Hegel's philosophy it is revealed that science is not only religion but fiction, founded on belief and represented in figures. That is not to discredit Science but to reveal its highest destiny. That destiny reveals itself as nothing other than art, the apparent antithesis of science. *Geist* represents the Absolute and it appears in the figures and images of the phenomenal world, because it *must* appear there. The immediate must be translated into time and space because they constitute the limits of human finitude. And yet, if Spirit is Absolute, it is infinite and not constrained by time or place, but can appear temporally and spatially. Conversely, in the appearance of the Absolute as Spirit, finitude comes upon its limit, and only by so doing can the finite being transcend the constraints of time and space. The finite being becomes infinite in the process of mediation by which it opposes itself, as Subject, to an object which it is not, but finally coming to this limit and recognizing the object as its own reflection. In the process of mediation, the Spirit, or the Absolute Subject, brings itself to itself, to its own limit, and it does this through representation. The *Phenomenology* is constructed by assembling fictions which are revealed one by one to be "false" while Hegel himself cautions against the common understanding of truth and falsity as value-laden

terms.⁸ The *Phenomenology* is complete, that is, Spirit appears in its Substance, when the antithesis is resolved with the thesis. For Hegel, this occurs when Being is “absolutely mediated”, that is, when the immediate is mediated and can appear in its immediacy in the appearance of mediation. Nothing could be more antithetical than the immediate and mediation, and yet, mediation is finally revealed as a “mere appearance” of the immediate, and is absolved into it(self).

Hiemit beschließt sich die Phänomenologie des Geistes. Was er in ihr sich bereitet, ist das Element des Wissens. In diesem breiten sich nun die Momente des Geistes in der Form der Einfachheit aus, die ihren Gegenstand als sich selbst weiß. Sie fallen nicht mehr in den Gegensatz des Seyns und Wissens auseinander, sondern bleiben in der Einfachheit des Wissens, sind das Wahre in der Form des Wahren, und ihre Verschiedenheit ist nur Verschiedenheit des Inhalts.

With this, the Phenomenology of Spirit is concluded. What Spirit prepares for itself in it, is the element of knowing. In this element the moments of Spirit now spread themselves out in that *form of simplicity* which knows its object as its own self. They no longer fall apart into the antithesis of being and knowing, but remain in the simple oneness of knowing; they are the True in the form of the True, and their difference is only the difference of content.⁹

⁸ “‘True’ and ‘false’ belong among those determinate notions which are held to be inert and wholly separate essences, one here and one there, each standing fixed and isolated from the other, with which it has nothing in common. Against this view it must be maintained that truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made. Nor is there such a thing as the false, any more than there is something evil. The evil and the false, to be sure, are not as bad as the devil, for in the devil they are even made into a particular *subjective agent*; as the false and the evil, they are mere *universals*, though each has its own essence as against the other.” Georg F.W. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* Band 9 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1980). Translations are mine as noted; otherwise, see Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller, (London: Oxford UP, 1977). Hereafter cited as “Phenomenology” with German references given first, p. 30f; p. 22f.

The “oneness” of knowing is not a unity but a sharing. At the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*, Spirit knows the limit of its knowledge, and that it shares this limit with the unknowable, that is with something divine.

The perceived antithesis between art and science must also be considered as moments which remain in “the simple oneness of knowing” and only appear antithetical. There is no aesthetics without art, but also, in the course of history, art once existed without a need for Science in the form of aesthetics.¹⁰ For many philosophers and poets, this historical time was particularly (and nostalgically) “Greek”, and it was marked by the manifest presence of divinity. The temple, for example, brings a world into being. As Heidegger writes in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, “the temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air.” This quality is the way in which the temple “first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves.”¹¹ However, this view is only possible as long as “the work is a work”, as long as the work is experienced in its immediacy, and that is

⁹ *Phenomenology*, p. 30; 21-2.

¹⁰ Perhaps not for long. Even with Plato, art is subjected to an aesthetic judgment, a judgment of its *value*. In deMan’s assessment, “under a variety of names, this category [of the aesthetic] never ceased to be prominent in the development of Western thought, so much so that its being left nameless until the end of the eighteenth century is a sign of its overwhelming presence rather than of its nonexistence.” (SSHA, p. 92).

¹¹ OWA, p. 42. This is not a Heideggerian delusion. Goethe’s story, “Das Märchen” plays out precisely this event. At the beginning of the story the characters each have unique talents but are constrained by an elaborate system of arbitrary rules and yet sustained by a promise that “the time is near.” The story is about the gathering of an infinite number of conditions which satisfy some invisible force and lead to the fulfillment of the promise. The fulfillment is nothing other than a temple rising from the depths of the earth, and as it rises, it brings with it a world. It is a new day, and it is the temple which gives them this new look and this new outlook. These characters dwell in the temple.

only possible “as long as the god has not fled from it.”¹² Hegel’s own corpus of writing will show that indeed Science (in the form of aesthetics) and Art do not fall into antithetical categories but really say the same. Aesthetics and art are identical, except for a mere difference of content. In so far as aesthetics is the *science* of art, it is one of the shapes or figures of Science. It is also likewise one of the figures of Art. Science is composed of figures. In fact, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel will describe the becoming of Spirit as “*ein Gallerie von Bildern*,” a gallery of images, itself the image of a museum which we are to slowly pass through in order to “penetrate and digest this entire wealth of substance.”¹³ Not only aesthetics but Science itself is identical to art. In Hegel’s system, the highest form is highest by its ability to recollect the experience which has been inwardized as each figure (Gestalt) emerges and then passes into Absolute Spirit. By forgetting the experience of becoming, the ultimate recollection does nothing less than to return to the originary point, the experience of the immediate. This is not an origin since it cannot be morally intuited or empirically experienced without the shapes of mediation, the “gallery of images” which are all images of the same Spirit. A close reading of *The Phenomenology*, buttressed by an early poem and the late lectures on Aesthetics, will show that for Hegel (as much as “for us”) Science is Spirit, and Spirit is Art, and that allegory makes this identity in difference possible.

¹² OWA, p. 43. One need think only of the scenes of Troy’s conflagration and the slaughter of Priam before the altars of Troy from which the figures of the gods have been removed, held fast by Hecuba and her daughters, no longer sacred because they have become purposeful, “this altar shall yet save us all, or you shall die together with us” (Aeneid II 703–4).

¹³ *Phenomenology*, p. 433; p. 492

In 1796, Hegel dedicated a poem called *Eleusis* to his friend and schoolmate, the poet Hölderlin. Some 25 years later, in his lectures on Aesthetics Hegel declared as a philosopher, leaving little room for dispute, that art “had lost its genuine truth and liveliness” [*die echte Wahrheit und Lebendigkeit verloren*] and consequently, “the science of art is a much more pressing need in our day than in times in which art, simply as art, was enough to furnish a full satisfaction” [*Die Wissenschaft der Kunst ist darum in unserer Zeit noch viel mehr Bedürfnis als zu den Zeiten, in welchen die Kunst für sich als Kunst schon volle Befriedigung gewährte*].¹⁴ The tone of this well-known and much-contested pronouncement about art is not triumphant but mournful. In another time, art was equal to its highest calling, *höchsten Bestimmung*. *Bestimmung* generally means determination, but its etymological root, *stimmen*, primarily means “to tune”, that is, to bring into harmony. In the past, art was in tune with itself, in perfect harmony, Hegel compares this past in which art voiced its own perfect harmony, perhaps with a gesture to the perfect music of the spheres, to “our time” which has a greater need or a greater poverty, *Bedürfnis*, which according to Hegel only science, *Wissenschaft*, can address. At the precise moment in which Hegel seems to privilege science over art, there is the faint but distinct echo of a poet.

As Giorgio Agamben points out, by the age of 26, when he writes the poem *Eleusis* and dedicates it to his schoolmate and friend Hölderlin, Hegel had “already read the texts that would most decisively come to influence him.”¹⁵ Within ten years, Hegel would publish *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, his first major work.

¹⁴ Hegel A, p. 31; p. 13.

¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, tr. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1991) p. 9.

Agamben studies the reappearance of the *Eleusinian* mystery in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,¹⁶ and submits that it is “the same mystery . . . but now language has captured in itself the power of silence, and that which appeared earlier as an unspeakable ‘profundity’ can be guarded (in its negative capacity) in the very heart of the word.”¹⁷ Agamben argues that in philosophy it is not silence which guards the mystery but loquacity. Hegel compares the “universal experience” of the subject to the sense-certainty of animals which devour the sensuous things, “completely assured of their nothingness.”¹⁸ By this analogy and by reference to the “Eleusinian Mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus” which not only cause the initiate to despair of the being of sensuous things but also to see them reduced to nothingness, Agamben finds in Hegel a theory of language that subsumes the “sacred law” of the Goddess of Eleusis which prohibits speech. Language itself becomes “the ‘divine nature’ that prevents *Meinung* from being put into words . . . [In the *Phenomenology*] language has captured in itself the power of silence.”¹⁹ Agamben gives the poem, “Eleusis” its proper *Hegelian* reading, absorbing the poetry into the philosophy by means of a negative dialectic.

Using Hegel’s own terms, Agamben argues that language, which Hegel remarks can never reach the sensuous thing, shares with the sensuous an intrinsic negativity which is preserved by being consumed. In *The Phenomenology* the

¹⁶ The Eleusinian mystery is referenced in the first section of the *Phenomenology*, A. i, “Sense-Certainty, or the This and Meaning.”

¹⁷ In Agamben, p.13-14.

¹⁸ *ibid* p.13.

¹⁹ *ibid*.

consumption of the sense-perceptible preserves the "open mysteries which teach that which is the truth about sensible things" [*offenbare Mysterien, welche es lehren, was die Wahrheit der sinnlichen Dinge ist*], that is, that they are nothing, which is not to say that they do not exist but insofar as they are, they *are* no-thing. In Hegel's words, "*Unter dem wirklichen Versuche, es zu sagen, würde es daher vermodern.*" [In the actual attempt to say it, [the sensuous This] would therefore rot away.]²⁰ Agamben points out that language, like the object of immediate sense-certainty, would "crumble" or decay if it were taken as truth. According to Hegel, language must be helped by the mode of indication, the mode proper to perception, if it is to say what it means. Using Hegel to read Hegel, Agamben suggests that if Hegel is to say what he means, then his language, which shares with the "This" of sense-certainty an intrinsic *Nichtigkeit* [nothingness], language must be helped in the same way that the "This" of sense-certainty is helped. Hegel describes language as that which "has the divine nature to invert the unmediated meaning, and to make it into something else, and thus not to let what is meant get into words at all." [*Die göttliche Natur hat, die Meynung unmittelbar zu verkehren, zu etwas anderem zu machen, und so sie gar nicht zum Worte kommen zu lassen.*]²¹ Because of the "divine nature" of language, the universal does not appear in the particularity of the object of immediate sense-certainty but in the mediation of the particular. Because it is divine and therefore not indicative, language can also only be indicated.

There is no longer a direct experience of the sacred or of language, not in either poetry or philosophy, but there is a memory of one. In "*Eleusis*" the poet

²⁰ Hegel *Phenomenology* p. 69-70; translatio mine, cf. p. 65-6.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.70; cf. p. 66.

remembers the initiate and the poorest of souls who are prohibited to make known what was seen, heard, felt during the sacred night (I.38). But those he remembers are very distant. They protect the sacred from the sophists. The initiates, like the Mysteries in which they partake, are Greek, and they are gone. As Hegel will repeat in the lectures on aesthetics: *Die schönen Tage der griechischen Kunst . . . sind vorüber* (the beautiful days of Greek art . . . are over).²² The experience of the initiate has been entrusted to memory, and the gates will open only when this memory is recollected. Then, only then, will the poet be able to understand and to interpret the utterly other that is preserved there. The *Phenomenology* is intended to represent this act of recollection. It is important not to forget how the *Phenomenology* ends. Spirit empties itself out in time as the “conscious, self-mediating process” of History, but, Hegel warns, “the negative is the negative of itself.” Spirit is always and already; it does not become, not if it is absolute. “This Becoming presents a slow-moving succession of Spirits” and it takes time to know the “substance” of each image, and each image becomes known not by an external object that is adequate to it but by an inwardizing, “a withdrawal into itself”. Spirit appears to itself only as it recedes into the past. “Thus absorbed in itself, [Spirit] is sunk in the night of its self-consciousness”.²³ Spirit needs to be brought out of this night. It is a destitute time for Spirit, and only the philosopher-poet recognizes this plight.

In a time when art is no longer possible, Spirit, too, suffers the need of mediation. Art was once art because it marked the limit between divine and mortal, and *as* this limit, art allowed for an un-mediated experience of the divine. This

²² Hegel A, p.30; translation mine, cf. p. 12.

²³ *Phenomenology*, p.492; p. 433.

experience has been lost, and it has been lost for Spirit too. Hegel merely changes the content of Hölderlin's question: "What is Spirit for in destitute times?" The Preface to the *Phenomenology* continually gestures to Hölderlinian language. Within the first pages, in the midst of mocking the traditional views of the Absolute, Hegel laments, "*Sein wesentliches Leben ist ihm nicht nur verloren, er ist auch dieses Verlustes, und der Endlichkeit, die sein Inhalt ist, bewußt*" [Not only is its essential life lost to [Spirit]; it is also conscious of this damage, and of the finitude that is its own content].²⁴ This Spirit is not infinite, not at all universal or Absolute. This clarifies an earlier description of the "*unlebendige Allgemeine*", the lifeless universal, the result that is but "the corpse [*der Leichnam*] of what has been left behind [*der sie hinter sich gelassen*]."²⁵

Initially distancing his work from the static and fixed philosophies which have not grasped the Absolute at all, when Hegel begins to talk directly about Spirit the echo of the poet grows stronger. Hegel gives the name the "Aether, as such" to "*das reine Selbsterkennen im absoluten Andersseyn*, (the pure self-recognition in absolute otherness") and describes this Aether as "*der Grund und Boden der Wissenschaft oder das Wissen im Allgemeinen* (the ground and earth of Science or Knowledge in general".²⁶ In the elegy "Brot und Wein", Hölderlin had said, "*wir sind herzlos, Schatten, bis unser / Vater Aether erkannt jeden und allen gehört*" [we are heartless, shadows, until our Father Aether is recognized [as] suitable to each and all" (l.153-4)].²⁷ Like the Hölderlinian *Vater* who is the source or ground of

²⁴ *Phenomenology*, p. 12; translation mine, cf. p. 5.

²⁵ *ibid*, p.11; cf. p. 3.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.22; cf. p. 14.

existence, Hegel uses the metaphor of ground and soil, that in which Spirit can come to know itself by driving its roots downward and its leaves upward. The ground is no longer divine. Hegel acknowledges that *"was vorher die Sache selbst war, ist nur noch eine Spur; ihre Gestalt ist eingehüllt und eine einfache Schattierung geworden."* [What was hitherto the thing itself, is now only a trace; its figure is unveiled and becomes a mere shadow.]²⁸ It is like *"die Spur der entflohenen Götter "*, the trace of the gods now departed in Hölderlin's poem. The gods show themselves not entirely parted, not entirely absent from Hegel's lamentation of this absence in the elegy with a philosophical face, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The Subject, for Hegel, is the representation of the Absolute which cannot present itself in itself. If it were to present itself, the Absolute would be immediate, and the immediate is tantamount to nothingness. The Absolute cannot be experienced in its immediacy but only in the mediating image of the Subject. As such, the "I" is not the representation of an individual (the psychological subject) but performs an empty grammatical function. Although it is the *fester Zeitpunkt* (fixed point), the Subject does not become meaningful until it becomes actual knowledge in the predicate.²⁹ The grammatical function of the Subject is

²⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in Drei Bänd.* Herausgegeben Jochen Schmidt, Band I (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), pp.285-291.

²⁸ *Phenomenology*, p. 24; translation mine, cf. p. 16.

²⁹ See SSHA, p.99. "The proof of thought is possible only if we postulate that what has to be proven (namely, that thought is possible) is indeed the case. The figure of this circularity is time. Thought is proleptic: it projects the hypothesis of its possibility into a future, in the hyperbolic expectation that the process that made thought possible will eventually catch up with this projection." This structure is entirely grammatical. The subject is expected to catch up to the predicate.

indispensable because "this word indicates that which is posited is not a Being or Essent or universal overall, but something which is reflected in itself, a Subject -- *"diß Wort wird eben bezeichnet, daß nicht ein Seyn oder Wesen oder Allgemeines überhaupt, sondern ein in sich reflectirtes, ein Subject gesetzt ist."*³⁰ The Subject is a fixed point, itself devoid of meaning, but also the anchor to which predicates are affixed. Implicit in this construction is a perspective that stands outside of the subject-predicate relation. This is the perspective of knowledge in which it is assumed that the movement from Subject to Predicate belongs to the knower [*Wissenden*] and assumed not to belong to the fixed Subject. This Knower of the movement does belong to the fixed point, but it does not yet recognize itself. Of course, this Knower is the Subject itself, even though it does not recognize itself in the alienated other of the "fixed point" until it has come to fully recollect itself. At that point, the individual subject will sacrifice itself to the Absolute, immersed in knowledge.³¹

Spirit posits the Subject as a figure, *Gestalt*, which becomes the site of Spirit's *Bildung*, its cultivation of itself. In the figure of the Subject, the image of Spirit appears in an immediacy that is mediated. What is concealed in the *Gestalt*, in its very positing as other and as figure, is the immediate experience of the immediate (which cannot yet be recognized as such). For Hegel, such immediacy is "non-

³⁰ Phenomenology, p.21; p. 13.

³¹ Narcissus remains the figure par excellence for the Subject, not because he falls in love with himself but because he sacrifices himself for the image. Maurice Blanchot has restored the proper reading to the scene of Narcissus gazing into the pool. "Does Narcissus die? Scarcely: having turned into an image, he dissolves in the immobile dissolution of the imaginary, where he is washed away without knowing it." *The Writing of the Disaster*, tr. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1995), p.126.

spiritual". It is the first step towards knowledge but the first step on a very long path.

Das Wissen, wie es zuerst ist, oder der unmittelbare Geist ist das geistlose, oder ist das sinnliche Bewußtseyn. Um zum eigentlichen Wissen zu werden, oder das Element der Wissenschaft, was ihr reiner Begriff ist, zu erzeugen, hat er durch einen langen Weg sich hindurch zu arbeiten. . . Einestheils ist die Länge dieses Wegs zu ertragen, denn jedes Moment ist nothwendig, -- anderntheils bey jedem sich zu verweilen, denn jedes ist selbst eine individuelle ganze Gestalt, und wird nur absolut betrachtet, insofern seine Bestimmtheit als Ganzes oder Concretes, oder das Ganze in der Eigenthümlichkeit dieser Bestimmung betrachtet wird.

Knowledge, as it is at first, or unmediated Spirit is nonspiritual, or is the sensible consciousness. In order to become genuine knowledge, or to generate the element of Science which is itself the pure concept, it must work itself through a long way . . . For one thing, the length of this way is endured because each moment is necessary; and for another thing, because each [moment] must be lingered over, because each is itself an individual complete figure, and only becomes viewed as absolute in so far as its attunement as wholeness or concretion, or the whole in which the singularity of this attunement becomes perceptible.³²

The *Gestalt*, or figure, is whole and if it is whole, it too is absolved. This is indeed the case because it is a shape of Absolute Knowing, or Spirit. This seems to be contradictory: Absolute Spirit is and is not the figure. The figure is and is not Spirit because it is the site of mediation, and that site is an image. Neither the phenomenal or "existential shape" of Spirit nor the noumenal substance of the absolute, the image is pure appearance. Hegel defines appearance [*Erscheinung*] in terms of movement, very similar to his description of the Absolute as unmoved and yet self-moving.

³² Phenomenology, p. 24-25; translation mine, p. 15-17.

The Absolute appears in figures which arise, or are posited, and which pass away, are negated by sublation or appropriation, and the Absolute recollects itself in the sequence of its appearances. The Absolute appears in the figures which it *is not*, and it appears in the image of the Subject. As an empty grammatical function the Subject has the substance of the Platonic *khora*, that which receives all things without being equal to what appears in it.³³ The image is an insubstantial substance, and if this philosophical work is to fulfill its promise as a *phenomenology*, then Spirit must appear not only as an image but as a phenomenon. In other words, Hegel faces the same difficulty in the *Phenomenology* that Prudentius faces in the *Psychomachia*: how to make Spirit appear. More precisely, the task is how to construct a figure that can sustain and support a divine image. In Hegel as in Prudentius, spirit is the image of God in mortals, and it is of an utterly other substance that cannot be known or shown in itself.

The only rhetorical structure which allows for these contradictions and contraindications is an allegorical one in which "I is not I" but also "I is I". The relation between the *Gestalt* and the Absolute is an allegory because allegory is the only structure by which a finite being can become infinite. Allegory is the structure of the image. The finite and infinite are unlike, and therefore they cannot be made

³³ In the description of the Soul of the Universe, Timaeus describes a third element which joins indivisible Being with transient Being, forcing the Other into the Union with the Same, despite the difficulty of effecting this union which is in essence a conflict. Timaeus must manifest this third thing, which cannot itself be either an *eidetic* or a *mimetic* substance and yet must participate in both *eidos* and *mimesis*, or else it could not hold the two together. This third thing is given the name *Khora*. This substance is peculiar in that it is a substance which can itself be nothing and yet must "itself be devoid of all these forms which it is about to receive" (50c). In receiving these forms, the substance is "moved and marked by the entering figures", but the substance changes only in appearance.

manifest by the theory of symbolic coincidence. Allegory supports the infinite in the finite world of time and space, but unlike the ideal of the symbol, which professes an impossible coincidence of divine and mortal, allegory holds the infinite within the finite in difference. This identity and difference of the infinite and the finite is what Hegel means by appearance.

Die Erscheinung ist das Entstehen und Vergehen, das selbst nicht entsteht und vergeht, sondern an sich ist, und die Wirklichkeit und Bewegung des Lebens der Wahrheit ausmacht.

Appearance is the arising and passing away that itself does not arise and pass away, on the contrary it is in itself, and makes up the actuality and the movement of the life of truth.³⁴

This movement of appearance is what Hegel calls Science or "the True" but he describes the True, by analogy, as "the Bacchanalian frenzy in which no member [or limb] is not intoxicated." [*Das Wahre ist so der bachantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist.*]³⁵ The True is the essential movement from "a positive necessary moment" [*positive nothwendige Momente*] to a moment "negative and vanishing" (*negativ und verschwindend*).³⁶ This moment is an ecstasy, a standing outside of oneself, that is also absolute.

The *Phenomenology* is Hegel's response to a world deprived of divinity and its goal is to translate divinity into something perceptible by the senses while maintaining its divine nature. In Hegel's world, Spirit has itself become "so poor

³⁴ *Phenomenology*, p.35; translation mine, cf. p. 27.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

that, like a wanderer in the desert after a simple drink of water, it appears to see for its refreshment only the destitute feeling of the divine in general." [*Der Geist zeigt sich so arm, daß er sich, wie in der Sandwüste der Wanderer nach einem einfachen Trunk Wassers, nur nach dem dürftigen Gefühle des Göttlichen überhaupt für seine Erquickung zu sehnen scheint.*]³⁷ Unfortunately, appearance has been mistaken for something ready-to-hand, as if it were a thing that could be grasped. Hegel cannot caution enough against taking the sensible as the essence of Spirit, and yet Spirit cannot appear without a sensory manifestation. Even in his youth, as a poet faced with the mystery before which one "feels the poverty of words" [*fühlt' der Worte Armut*], Hegel wanted to transcend the mystery and to speak it.³⁸ There is already in the poem *Eleusis* the privilege of mediation, the cornerstone of the *Phenomenology*, in which sense-certainty reveals its essential negativity and its inability to signify. In the poem *Eleusis*, the priests are silent. "[*Klein Ton der heil'gen Weih'n / Hat sich zu uns gerettet.*" [No note of the sacred rites initiations has been saved for us, (l.56-7).] Now there are only scholars, "*Die ewigtodten*" (l.65). Not merely sleeping as in Hölderlin's world, Hegel calls them "the eternally dead" who are easily satisfied when in truth not even a trace of an image remains [*es bleib . . . keines Bildes Spur*] (l.65-66). For he who would be initiated, "the lofty doctrine was too full," the "unspeakable feeling of mystery much too sacred", and "the signs desiccated of their worth".

³⁷ *ibid*, p.13; translation mine, cf. p. 5.

³⁸ "*Eleusis*" appears in G.W.F. Hegel *Gesammelte Werke* Band 1 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1980), p.399-402.

*Schon der Gedanke faßt die Seele nicht,
Die ausser Zeit und Raum in Ahndung der Unendlichkeit
Versunken, sich vergißt, und wieder zum Bewußtsein nun
Erwacht.* (1.70-73)

Already thought does not grasp the soul, which is sunken
outside of time and space in the presentiment of infinity,
forgets itself, and now again wakes to consciousness.

In this absolute lack, the mortal being experiences the fullness of his finitude which becomes real only at the limit of infinity, in the face of nothingness, "sunken outside of time and space." The initiate experiences the divine, and his consciousness is aroused. However, it is not the divine but its lack, the *Nichtigkeit* or nothingness, which inspires. Like Hölderlin, Hegel longs for the experience of the divine, and with greater despair. When he found it in *Nichtigkeit*, "he shuddered to have thought the sacred so insignificant" [*Ihm graut, das Heilige so klein gedacht* (1.75)]. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel refuses to speak, like the initiate of the ancient rites of Eleusis, and like "the poorest of souls" (*den ärmern Geistern*), he entrusts the experience to memory. Divinity is learned by heart, "preserved in the inner sanctuary of the breast" [*verwahrten sie / Im innern Heiligtum der Brust*, (1.94-5)] and not on the lips. And yet divinity can be heard because the goddess alone is "the elevated meaning, the true belief, which a divinity when all else succumbs, does not waver" (*der hohe Sinn, der treue Glauben, / Der, eine Gottheit, wenn auch Alles untergeht, nich wankt*, 1.100-1). As a poet, and certainly under the influence of Hölderlin, the young Hegel has experienced the immediacy of divinity, what he will call in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the universal experience of the Subject, which is not only and not primarily the experience of the totality but the primordial experience of *Nichtigkeit*.

Poetry, for Hegel, is limited to this "universal experience" which is, in fact, tantamount to nothingness. The poet might be able to express this nothingness in

its immediacy (and in such destitute times that is no small feat), but that is only the “beginning” of Spirit, the first tiny step on its path to being equal to its own Substance and to recognizing itself in the face of nothingness. The poet only can say what is. The poet announces. In his poem, Hegel uses this very trope to mark the experience of the divine, with an attentional, “Ha!” (l.15). And yet Hegel seems to share Plato’s criticism of the rhapsode or poet who has no verifiable skill and cannot even describe his own experience, except to perform it, to give it immediately. But one must always beware of “seeming” in both Hegel and Plato. In the dialogue, *Ion*, Socrates begins by revealing the vacuity of Ion’s art and ends by declaring him something divine (rather than mad). Socrates attempts to force Ion to reflect on his object of knowledge and to gradually come to a realization of the true shape of his *techne*. The only way for Socrates to make his case is to allow poetry to interrupt reason. Ion, however, barely speaks a word of Homer, while Socrates recites quite a bit of the poetry, and apparently “by heart”. At the conclusion of the dialogue it is not entirely clear whether Socrates has “won” (as usual) or “lost,” and in either case, Ion remains oblivious, and undaunted. The rhapsode has not changed but the philosopher has undergone quite an ordeal. At the end of the dialogue, however, the philosopher and the rhapsode find themselves in the same place. The poet speaks what is, the universal experience, but he knows nothing of it. The philosopher deals with what becomes, and so he has to bring himself to the universal experience by a series of negations. That which *is* immediate for the poet, *becomes* immediate for the philosopher. Hegel follows a similar path in the *Phenomenology*, and it is a path, like that of Socrates, riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. The path is like a *Holzweg*, not insignificantly the title Heidegger gives to a collection of essays on poetry and art.

Heidegger brought the poetry of Hölderlin out of relative obscurity, and because he found in this work the essence of poetry. Heidegger's conclusions provide a structure for questioning the essence of poetry in Hegel. In "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Heidegger outlines five points on "the subject of poetry" and attempts to explain how "poetically man dwells on this earth": (1) Poetry is the most innocent of all occupations. Poetry does not *do* anything; it does not act. As "mere saying and speaking", poetry is harmless. (2) And yet, the realm of poetry is language, and language creates the possibility of danger. Heidegger defines danger as "the threat to existence from what is existent." (3) The speaking of language in poetry presupposes a hearing, this speaking and hearing presupposes a unity, a single conversation (language) which supports human existence. (4) What is spoken by the poet provides the foundation for human existence. "Poetry is the act of establishing by the word and in the word." (5) "Poetry is the establishment of Being by means of the word." These observations on the subject of poetry, are, in fact, a phenomenology. Heidegger concludes, with the words of Hölderlin, that poetically man dwells on the earth because poetry is the foundation (the Aether) which supports history.³⁹

In the essay, "*Der Sprache*" [Language] Heidegger defends the thesis that we do not master language by speaking it, but that in its essence, language itself speaks. Consequently, Heidegger argues that poetry is not elevated language, but that our everyday language is a worn-out and forgotten poem. Poetry is the pure speaking of language.⁴⁰ In poetry (in particular, but also in some particular philosophy),

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" in *Existence and Being* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1949), (hereafter HEP).

⁴⁰ Language, PLT, p. 194.

language speaks. In philosophy, usually, language is silenced, as it is in the first section of the first part of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Heidegger sees that Hegel dwells poetically, that language speaks in this imposed silence. Although he does not state this explicitly, Heidegger reads the *Phenomenology* as poetry, and marks the significance of this poetic step in the history of metaphysics. Heidegger briefly holds together in thought the most influential Continental philosophers since the Renaissance in the absoluteness of Absolute Spirit, and thereby shows how poetically philosophers dwell on the earth.⁴² Philosophy, as poetry, is the foundation which supports history. The difference between the appearance of philosophy and of poetry is found in the relationship to language. At the very least philosophy distances itself from language, and yet, philosophy is established in language, in the *dialogue*, and in the *dialectic*. Poetry is language in its most primordial state, and so the philosopher who attempts to speak the "origin" (or the limit) is a poet who does not recognize himself as one.

There is in Hegel's philosophy, a conversation which supports human existence, and what is spoken there provides a foundation for human existence, and it establishes Being by means of the word. Three of Heidegger's five points on the essence of poetry are thereby evident in the *Phenomenology*. But is there in the

⁴¹ Hegel must silence language in order to proceed, and that in itself is telling. Language does not wear itself out easily, despite the millennia of abuse.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. Parvis Emad and Kenneth May, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana UP, 1994), (hereafter HPS), p. 77. Heidegger sees the ground for this step as founded by Descartes and opened up by Leibniz, who radicalized the "substantiality of substance". "Within the living presence of the works of Kant and Fichte, and conditioned by Schelling's doctrine of identity, it fell to Hegel to comprehend the subject as Absolute Spirit" (77).

Phenomenology a danger that threatens existence from what is existent? Is philosophy, like poetry, a "most innocent occupation" which is harmless and incapable of action? It is precisely because philosophy is perceived as harmless and without force that it is so dangerous. Despite the awe with which a philosopher like Heidegger accords to Hegel, in actuality Hegel does not have much force. He is often cited but not often read. The tacit force of the aesthetic is ample evidence as both de Man and Heidegger have pointed out. Hegel is misread and misappropriated *because* of the danger he poses to metaphysics, and consequently to the Western way of thinking and being. As Heidegger reads Hegel, he illuminates the profound threat faced by metaphysics in facing this philosopher. Like the Bible in the period before the Enlightenment, the self-certain, self-positing Subject has determined our very existence. Hegelian philosophy threatens that determination like Luther's theses threatened the Catholic Church.⁴³ The faith in the absolute being of human beings has replaced the faith in the absolute creator. With Nietzsche, Heidegger calls this "onto-theo-logy" for good reason. The locus of faith has shifted but not the structure of belief, and not the dependence of humankind on belief. The metaphysics of ontotheology is dangerous precisely because of its absolution. It is a self-closing path. The absolute closes the circle behind itself, and

⁴³ The faith in the absolute being of human beings has replaced the faith in the absolute creator. With Nietzsche, Heidegger calls this "onto-theo-logy" for good reason. The locus of faith has shifted but not the structure of belief, and the dependence of humankind on belief. The metaphysics of onto-theo-logy is dangerous precisely because of its absolution. The absolute closes the circle behind itself, and at the limit of the absolute is an absolute void, an abyss. Metaphysics has reached a new plateau in Hegel. Hegel is the logical and the subjective conclusion to the history of metaphysics. He is largely right about art. It is a thing of the past *for us*, because we can not appropriate it, except as an object of value, aesthetic or economic, and Western Civilization is no longer interested in that which cannot be appropriated.

at the limit of the absolute is an absolute void, an abyss. Metaphysics has reached a new plateau in Hegel, on a road most recently paved by Kant. Hegel is the logical and the subjective conclusion to the history of metaphysics, and he is largely right about art. It is a thing of the past *for us*, because we cannot appropriate it, except as an object of value, as an *aesthetic* object, or an economic one. An *objet d'art* is no longer art. In order to appreciate Hegel's keen insight about art, the work of art itself must be phenomenalized. The question must be asked and answered, with great rigor, "What is art?"⁴⁴

The shape that Spirit gives the truth is the shape of Science, Wissenschaft, but this Science is a figure, a *Gestalt*. The French philosopher Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe confuses the art object with the artwork, but in a way that illuminates this difference despite his efforts to make them identical. The essay "Typography" interrogates Heidegger's distinction of the artwork from the work of art.⁴⁵ In a polemic against Heidegger's "understanding" of *Darstellung*, (mimesis or representation), Lacoue-Labarthe plays the part of a Hegelian. He believes that the Subject is self-sufficient and secure in language, and so he turns the mimesis from a problematic of the lie (fiction), which is Plato's position, into a problematic of the psychological subject. Lacoue-Labarthe transforms the universal Subject into an individual subject. He

⁴⁴ This is the question Heidegger addresses in the long and complicated essay, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks" [The Origin of the Work of Art.]

⁴⁵ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typography" in *Typography*, tr. Christopher Fynsk, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 1998), p. 43-138. The essay itself is apparently motivated more by a need to be politically correct than a need to be philosophically rigorous. Lacoue-Labarthe, usually a careful and thoughtful writer, makes some serious errors in interpretation and even translation in this essay. Near its conclusion, the essay degenerates into an almost *ad hominem* attack in a desperate bid to gain (or regain) "credit" for philosophy.

argues that mimesis is the staging of the indecision of the subject, the inability of the subject to mime or to coincide with itself.⁴⁶ In Lacoue-Labarthe's scenario, the subject creates a figure that is capable of mimesis, and it substitutes this figure for itself. This would be Hegel (and Fichte's) empty grammatical 'I'. The method is recognizable as the negative dialectic in which the object which appears opposed to the subject reveals itself to be identical with it. Lacoue-Labarthe tries to hold up the difference in this act of substitution. He argues instead that only philosophy can harmonize the psychological subject with itself. This sounds very Hegelian, except that Hegel's Subject is not individual but universal. Hegel makes very clear that "the share in the total work of Spirit which falls to the individual can only be very small."⁴⁷ In the truly Hegelian dialectic, the individual comes to know not only himself (his particularity) but also his limit (the universal). Hegel writes, "The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself."⁴⁸ Thus Hegel says, in

⁴⁶ Cf. DeMan, SSHA. "In Hegel, the assimilation of 'meaning' to 'me' (or I) is built into the system, since the generality of thought is also the appropriation, the making of the world by the I. It is, therefore, not only legitimate but necessary to hear, in the German word *meinen* [to mean] . . . a connotation of *meinen* as 'to make mine,' a verbalization of the possessive pronoun *mein*. But that makes the innocuous pronouncement about the philosopher who, in humble self-effacement, has to progress beyond his private opinion, into a very odd sentence indeed: "*Ich kann nicht sagen was ich (nur) meine*" then means "I cannot say what I make mine" or, since to think is to make mine, 'I cannot say what I think,' and, since to think is fully constinaed in and defined by the I, since Hegel's *ego cogito* defines itself as mere *ego*, what the sentence actually says is 'I cannot say I' -- a disturbing proposition in Hegel's own terms since the very possibility of thought depends on the possibility of saying 'I.'" (SSHA, p. 97-98)

⁴⁷ *Phenomenology*, p. 49; translation mine, cf. p. 45.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

concluding the Preface, that the individual is incomplete Spirit. The *Phenomenology* itself ends with the image of this sacrifice *par excellence*, the god sacrificing himself and simultaneously a man sacrificing himself. Only in the sacrifice of what *is* not, the infinite that is finite (the immortal in the mortal body) is infinitude revealed. The death of the god is entirely apt as the final image of the *Phenomenology*, the singular event which marks the advent of Spirit.

For Hegel there is not just one act of substitution but many, and this creates a "gallery of images" [*Galerie von Bildern*]. Not only does Hegel freely use the words *Bild* [image] and *Gestalt* [figure] to describe the appearance of Spirit, he places these images in a *gallery*, like works of art. *Bild* and *Gestalt* are very different words, however, and an understanding of their difference and relation is critical to a proper understanding of *The Phenomenology*. *Geist* uses the image, *Bild*, to produce itself, but the image can only appear in something truly phenomenal, that is the *Gestalt*, what one translator translates as "existential shape" but is commonly translated as 'figure'. Thus, the "Galerie von Bildern" is the appearance of a gallery of figures. For Lacoue-Labarthe, the *Gestalt* is merely a statue, fixed and static. In an attempt to think *contra* Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe claims to bring *Idea* and *Gestalt* together, not as a challenging forth of one another, but as a logical positing.

The essence of the *idea* is static. The *idea* is always posited (*gesetzt*); or at least each time he evokes it, Heidegger never fails to recall that 'idea' designates the *aei on*, the 'perduring', stability itself.⁴⁹

In a gross misreading of Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe assumes that the idea is static and perduring is stable (neither of which are accurate and both of which are important concepts which Heidegger devotes much energy to articulating). Lacoue-

⁴⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, p. 69.

Labarthe will ultimately empty the *stellen* constellation in Heidegger, including the alpha star "Gestell" and its close relative, "Gestalt", of all the richness which Heidegger reveals in the "*stellen*" *Wortschatz*. In regards to the *Gestalt*, Heidegger is in many ways rehearsing Hegel. Heidegger's understanding of the *stete* (stasis) or rest and *Beständigkeit* (perduring) is the "unmoved which is self-moving". This is Hegel's phrase, not Heidegger's, and borrowing from Aristotle's definition of Nature as purposive activity, Hegel defines purpose as "what is immediate and *at rest*". He also defines the self in these terms. In this way, "the self is like that immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result, that which has returned into itself, the latter being similarly just the self."⁵⁰

It was Karl Marx who pinpointed "the mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands." Nonetheless, far from declaring Hegel a "dead dog", Marx "openly avow[ed] [him]self the pupil of that mighty thinker" and does not discredit Hegel's achievement for "being the first to present [the dialectic's] general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner."⁵¹ However, Marx also argues that the Hegelian dialectic is "standing on its head" because of the very mystification which made the dialectic so attractive. In its "mystified form" the dialectic "seemed to transfigure and glorify the existing state of things" which were, in actuality, troubled and on the verge of crisis. In this early polemic against German Idealism, Marx is more directly disputing the abuses to which the Hegelian dialectic has been subjected by its disciples and crisis, for as Hegel's "pupil" he recognized the "rational

⁵⁰ Phenomenology, p. 20; p. 120.

⁵¹ Karl Marx, *Capital* (Unabridged), ed. Frederick Engels, (New York: International Publishers, 1992), vol. 1, "Afterword, 2nd German Ed", p. 29.

kernel within the mystical shell"⁵² as any true Hegelian would. In other words, whether upside down or right-side up, it is still the Hegelian system, and as he had argued "when it was still the fashion to criticize Hegel" at the time of writing *The German Ideology*, the critics' "polemic against Hegel and against one another" consisted of "extracting one part of the Hegelian system and turning it against the whole system."⁵³ In the midst of Old and Young Hegelians, Marx recognized that if Hegel was not read as a system, Hegel was not being read. (Marx reveals that indeed he had always been a pupil of the mighty thinker.)

Marx makes a point that must be heeded. In the social applications to which Hegel's work was indiscriminately applied, Marx is quite right. Hegel's world is a "moral" one in which the subject is the demiurge of the real world, and this "real world" is only the externalized and phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. As Agamben noted, the sensuous world is devoured in Hegel's philosophy like an animal's prey. However, this is not an entirely apt analogy. In Hegel, that which is negated and sublated is also retained. Marx understands this, and he recognizes that as much as the rational kernel can be revealed within the mystical shell, the mystical shell continues to conceal something which can in turn overcome the rational. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the corrective Marx offers to Hegel is starkly literary.

Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history appear, as it were, twice. He forgot to add, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.⁵⁴

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Marx, *GI*, p. 41.

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, (New York: International Publishers, 1994), p. 15.

Marx here admits that the “actual world” is a stage, a fictive space, however that may be defined. There is an inescapable “mystification”, even in Marx. In Hegel, this mystification can be traced back to the poem “Eleusis,” the kernel in the philosophical shell. In the history of metaphysics, it can be followed back to the dialogues of Plato. I, too, say that Hegel is “standing on his head”, not as a sociologist, which is really an unjustified adaptation which is better called “Social Hegelianism”, but as a philosopher who is really a poet. To bring philosophy to the limit at which it is no longer love of knowledge but “actual knowing”, i.e. knowing that needs no mediation (no “love”), is to reach its highest destiny. Philosophy’s highest destiny reveals itself to be Art, neither the world of shadows nor the world of ideas but the limit which gathers them together in a mediation that is immediate.

Philosophy, not even Hegel’s philosophy (which declares that immediate knowledge is its object) can ever begin immediately. *To begin with* immediate knowledge is always already to mediate it because if knowledge (even absolute knowledge) is an object it is already an object for something. Hegel would be the first to agree, and yet he must ground his entire philosophical system on the immediate. The Aesthetic must also be grounded on the immediate, precisely that which cannot be mediated, the work of Art (the *Gestalt*) in which “Art” (as such) shows itself (as an image, *Bild*). It is easy to overlook this in Hegel. The system is constructed that way nor can it be otherwise constructed. As de Man had observed, Hegel’s philosophy is an allegory of disjunction. In his lectures on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Heidegger draws attention to Hegel’s linguistic sleight of hand between the first and second parts of Section A of the *Phenomenology*. Heidegger locates the moment in Hegel’s text which destabilizes the entire edifice of absolute spirit and points to the internal contradiction which lies at the structural core of Hegel’s system of absolute knowledge. In the second part of the first section of the

Phenomenology, "Perception or the thing and deception," Hegel writes, as quoted by Heidegger, "'the way we take in perception' (as object of absolute knowledge) 'is no longer a taking in which just appears, as in sense certainty, but is a necessary one'." This implies that the first taking in of the object (knowledge), sense-certainty is not necessary, and yet, "Hegel states explicitly that this knowledge 'cannot be anything else' but immediate; consequently, the sense certainty must be the first object".⁵⁵

In the opening paragraph of the first part (A.I. Sense-certainty; or, the 'This' and 'Meaning') Hegel describes the first object of knowledge (first because "our object cannot be anything else") as "a knowledge of the *immediate* or of a *being*." Further, in approaching this object, the knowing subject (already assumed as the absolute knowing subject by the project itself) must be equally immediate. Hegel warns, "We must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself."⁵⁶ Despite the imperative tone of this first paragraph, what asserts the necessity of the un-mediated knowledge of the object as it is given, in the first paragraph of the second part of the work (A.II. Perception; or the thing and deception), Hegel declares [as quoted and annotated by Heidegger: "'The way we take in perception' (as object of absolute knowledge) 'is no longer a taking in which just appears, as in sense certainty, but is a necessary one'."].⁵⁷ The necessity of sense certainty has been concealed by the apparent necessary supersession of perception. Heidegger comments on this concealment as follows:

Sense certainty, in its character as an object for absolute knowledge, is necessary and yet not necessary! Or is the non-

⁵⁵ HPS, p. 52.

⁵⁶ *Phenomenology*, p. 64; p. 58.

⁵⁷ *Phenomenology*, p71; p. 67.

necessity which pertains to sense certainty only a non-necessity in distinction from the *specific* necessity of perception? Sense certainty would not then be necessary in the manner of perception but would be necessary in *its* own way. In that case we would have a two-fold necessity. That is indeed the way it is.⁵⁸

Hegel elides the necessity of sense certainty "in its own way" of being necessary into the way that perception is necessary. In doing so, Hegel does not begin with the immediate but with mediation. Consequently, Hegel never gives an immediate description of what is given but only a mediated description of what is given *as* it is perceived by consciousness. This, according to Heidegger, is not a shortcoming in Hegel, but is unavoidable "because there is generally nothing like pure immediate description in philosophy."⁵⁹ In the "two-fold necessity" identified by Heidegger, the immediacy of sense-certainty is held together with the mediation of perception. Both sense-certainty and perception are necessary. They are each necessary in their own way, but these ways contradict each other. There is a two-fold necessity or what might be more accurately called an "impossible possibility".

Heidegger retains the possibility that although philosophy cannot *describe* the object immediately, it is "quite possible" for philosophy to *see* "the matter itself." In other words, philosophy can *see* immediately what it cannot describe immediately. Heidegger reminds us of Hegel's instruction that "we should only 'look on' [the phenomenology of spirit], not adding anything, but only taking and receiving what we find there."⁶⁰ Quite explicitly, then, Hegel wants "us" to experience Spirit in its

⁵⁸ HPS, p. 52.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

immediacy, the very experience he seems to overwrite with the second section on Perception. If philosophy can never begin immediately, perhaps it can end so. The end of the *Phenomenology* is its beginning. Heidegger interprets that this "looking on" is not indeterminate but "a looking on *within the attitude of undergoing an experience*, the way *this experience* sees. This looking on is a looking with the eyes of absolute knowledge." Heidegger reminds us that Hegel "offers an interpretation of sensibility which is unequalled in the history of philosophy."⁶¹ However, it is precisely this *difference* in Hegel's thought which lets the immediate appear not in itself as such but in the phenomenon of mediation, and particularly in the mediation of sense certainty, the essence of which is immediacy.⁶² The immediate object of knowledge cannot show itself in itself but it can show itself in mediation.

In *The Phenomenology* section I.A., Hegel writes that sense certainty "appears as the richest kind of knowledge" and "appears to be the truest knowledge". But then he declares that in fact sense certainty is the poorest and most abstract (empty) kind of knowledge. "All that [certainty] says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing".⁶³ In the immediacy of sense certainty there is "no complex process of mediation" until there is a reflection on what merely *is* in sense certainty, i.e. the "this" that is nothing but this and a "this I" that is only I, which reveals that "neither one nor the other is only *immediately* present in sense certainty, but each is at the same time *mediated*." Hegel determines that the universal is the true content of sense certainty. In other

⁶¹ HPS, p. 53-4.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶³ *Phenomenology*, p. 63; p. 58.

words, whenever we say "this and nothing but this" or "I and only I", we say, "*Being in general . . . We utter the universal*". Hegel further demonstrates (because he assumes the position of the absolute knowing subject from the very inception of the work that will prove its existence) that the pure being which shows itself as the truth-content of the object of sense certainty is not immediate but "something to which negation and mediation are essential." They are essential if consciousness is to take up knowledge into itself. For Hegel, an object is only known when it became an object for an "I" who knows. For Hegel, sense certainty must always become "a dialectic acting upon itself".⁶⁴

Hegel explains that the announcement of the Absolute is "only the universal." Anything that is beyond this mere word is a mediation. Once the word is put into a proposition it becomes other to itself: it is a mediation.⁶⁵ Hegel rejects the horror with which this "becoming other" is usually met because it is perceived as violating the absolute. Hegel clarifies that "mediation is nothing beyond self-moving sameness" and thus does not contradict the absolute which by definition should need nothing outside of itself and certainly no explanation or interpretation, but "is just immediacy in the process of becoming and is the immediate itself." Because of our finitude we are incapable of experiencing unmediated immediacy. We cannot transcend this finitude in the way of Aeneas or Orpheus. We have neither golden bough nor lyre, nor would they do us any good. In antiquity, mortals came to the limit of the sacred because divinity granted it: the divine came to us. The gods still lived among mortals, and they appeared in art: in statues, in temples, in epic poetry. The immediate experience of art is now closed. The gods are not

⁶⁴ Phenomenology, p. 65-6; p. 60-1.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 19; p. 11.

there anymore, not for a long time. We come too late. As even Hegel admits, there will always be great art, but it is not for us. Art is also absolute, and for us it requires mediation in order to appear. The problem of art is the problem of Spirit, the comprehension of the "self-moving selfsameness" which is immediacy.

In "our time", there can be no absolute outside of ourselves; now is the era of The Subject. There can be nothing outside of us. Art is what had gathered before. Art qua art was absolute, but it was absolved precisely from this Subject. Art was not made by the artist, but by the gods. Epic poetry always begins, quite literally, with the incantation, "Sing in me, O Muse." The sculpted icon did not come to life except by the presence of the god. The temple was not holy unless the divine chose to dwell there. The gathering force of art was a divine mystery; all art was sacred. Hegel understands this. In the poem, *Eleusis*, he wrote of the silence of the priests of the sacred in times when "in vain strive the scholars, their curiosity greater than their love of wisdom." The silence protects the sacred from becoming "a plaything or the ware of some sophist, who would have sold it like an obolus, or the mantle of an eloquent hypocrite or even the rod of a joyful youth." The sacred has become an object of knowledge, and the gods will not be known. The gods have fled in the face of knowledge, of the subject who wants to know himself. Perhaps Narcissus was the first subject or the first stage of subjectivity, condemned by the gods to know himself and yet this knowledge would be precisely what caused the gods to flee.

If, as Heidegger asserts, poetry is the act of establishing by the word and in the word, there may be no more influential poem in modernity than Hegel's *Phenomenology*. And this poem, like all great poetry, calls human beings to it, with a call that is most challenging to meet. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is difficult not only because it begins absolutely but because "the work confronts us with the demand that we continuously comport ourselves absolutely." The work asks us as

finite beings to be infinite. And the way in which it does this is to require movement, to insist that its readers enter into its transitions, and not merely its content. The content is difficult enough to ascertain, but the content always falls short. "The work always stays mute if we do not contribute anything to it." ⁶⁶ According to Heidegger, what we must bring to the work is the question of Being. In this way, the *Phenomenology* can be read as "the establishment of Being by means of the word." The necessity of our contribution to the work brings us into a conversation with the work. The speaking which is the *Phenomenology* presupposes our hearing. As Heidegger will eventually articulate more directly in relation to the subject of poetry, the "being of humankind is founded in language and actualized in conversation."⁶⁷ In regards to the *Phenomenology*, Heidegger points out that our interaction with the text cannot be a mere talking back and forth, but we must enter the rhythm of its transitions. "Transitions have to be entered into; and as long as we stay on one or the other shore and talk back and forth, transitions can never be achieved."⁶⁸

If we read Hegel's philosophy as poetry, we find the very art which is gone by in the very philosophy which waves farewell. Poetically, Hegel responds to the question of Being, showing how he is appropriated by language (and not its master). It is well-known that Heidegger believes that being has always been the central question of philosophy, although that central question is often covered up or ignored. Hegel's response to this question, "What is being?" is, according to

⁶⁶ HPS, p. 79.

⁶⁷ HEP, p. 277.

⁶⁸ HPS, p. 79.

Heidegger, "the fundamental thesis that the essence of beings is infinity."⁶⁹

Heidegger locates both the "logical" and the "subjective" grounding of infinity in the propositional "is", the "is" which determines something as something.

Heidegger makes a startling observation about this relationship between the finite and the infinite by way of the "is" in Hegel's dialectic.

This infinity does not mean a continuous alignment of determinations, endlessly going forward from one to another, but the contrary; it means the return of something into itself, the reflection of the determinate back into itself, so that the determinate (as the other) returns to the one, and the other (as what is differentiated from the determinate) receives it; it means that the other (in unison with the determinate) becomes undifferentiated and remains preserved in sameness with it.⁷⁰

The relationship between the finite and the infinite is not a system of reference and representation. Even in Hegel it is a system of recollection, a retrieval from a corporeal substrate. As in Prudentius, the *psyche* is to be found in the *anima* more than in the *animus*, in the sensible material rather than the ideal material, so in Hegel, spirit *Geist* is to be found not in the intelligible realm, not in the infinite or the absolute, but in the material of sense-perception in the image, the *phantasmenon* of the Subject, and this image appears in language.

In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel responds to, or rather *with* Hölderlin, to the plaintive question in "*Brot und Wein*": "*Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*" What are poets for in destitute times. Hölderlin's time is the same as Hegel's. Indeed, they were classmates at Tübingen, but the "*dürftige Zeit*" which they shared was not merely historical. Hegel, too, understands that the gods have fled. The divine desertion is

⁶⁹ HPS, p. 80.

⁷⁰ HPS, p. 80.

a common theme in Hölderlin's work, and the madness which resulted from this understanding is well known. The poet's melancholy is expressed in the clear statements of the seventh stanza of the elegy to the deceased poet Heinse.

*Aber Freund! wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben die Götter,
Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt.
Endlos wirken sie da und scheinen wenig zu achten,
Ob wir leben, so sehr schonen die Himmlischen uns.
(l.109-112)*

But friend! we come too late. Indeed the gods live,
but over our heads, up there in another world,
Without end they work there and appear little to care,
whether we live, so much do the heavenly ones spare
us.

Hölderlin seems to be presciently agreeing with Hegel. This is no longer a time for poets. The gods have fled, and they have taken the essence of art and poetry with them. They might mock the poet's feeble efforts, if they cared enough to notice them. And yet, in another poem Hölderlin insisted that "poetically man dwells on this earth" (l.113),⁷¹ and even in *Brot und Wein*, he acknowledges that the "frail vessel" [*schwaches Gefäß*] of a mortal being can bear the full impact of the gods, even if ever so rarely. This very experience, however, leads not to power but to impotence. One is forever changed, seeking only to bear the divine once again and condemned to a wandering solitude.⁷² The gods return, thundering they come

⁷¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, "In lieblicher bläue . . ." *Hölderlin Ausgabe*, herausgegeben von Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart, 1946), vol. 2.1, p.372-4.

⁷² "Traum von ihnen ist drauf das Leben. Aber das Irrsal / Hilft, wie Schlummer und Stark machet die Not und die Nacht / Bis daß Helden genug in der ehernen Wiege gewachsen, / Herzen an Kraft, wie sonst, ähnlich den Himmlischen sind." (*Brot und Wein* l.115-8). [A dream about them [the gods] is thereafter the life. But the frenzy helps as sleep and the desire and the night make [us] strong until enough

[*Donnernd kommen sie*, (l.119)], but for the most part, the poet waits, *ohne Genossen*, friendless, merely waiting, with nothing to do or to say in this destitute time. The poet wonders if it would be better to sleep and not to wander in the night. He does not know and asks, "*Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*" What are poets for in a destitute times? A voice outside the poem, the voice of the dead poet and friend, Heinse, is heard and reported.

*Aber sie sind, sagst du, wie des Weingotts heilige Priester,
Welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht
(l.123-4)*

But they are, you say, like the wine god's sacred priests,
which moved from land to land in the sacred night.

Poets are the priests of the sacred. The etymology of priest, or presbyter, is Greek, meaning an elder, or simply an old man. (The poet is old.) The likely root of *presbys* is the combination of the prefix 'pro', before, and the verb, *bainein*, to go. The *presbys* is the one who goes before. In ancient rites as in Christianity, the priest is a mediator. In the Catholic mass, when the bread becomes the body and the wine becomes the blood of Christ, at that moment of sacrifice, the priest is mediation itself, neither mortal nor divine but the image adequate to both.⁷³ The priest goes before the gods as he goes before those who would follow him.

Speaking in his own elegy, Heinse suggests this image to Hölderlin. The poet then recognizes the gifts of the gods, the "few gifts" [*einige Gaaben*] they have left behind, bread and wine. These are not the bread and wine of the Catholic sacrifice. They are neither symbolic nor representative, but the site of a sacred mediation, and it is to these *things* that Hölderlin compares the poet. Like the bread, "a fruit of the

heroes have been cultivated in that steel cradle, hearts with strength, as before, like [those] of the heavens.] Translation mine.

⁷³ Only Christ was both image and substance of both mortal and divine.

earth yet touched by the blessing of light," the poet "reconciles the day with the night."

*Darum denken wir auch dabei der Himmlischen, die sonst
Da gewesen und die Kehren in richtiger Zeit.*
(l.139-40)

Thereby we think also therefore of the heavenly ones, who
once had been there and of their return in the right time.

Likewise the poet "*mit Ernst die Snger*", with the seriousness of hymns, *tnet den Alten das Lob*, sounds the praise of the ancient ones. In following the path of the departed gods [*entflohenen Gtter*] the poet brings the trace [*Spur*] of the gods into the gloom of the godless who sleep but do not dream. For Hlderlin, this is what poets are *for*: they are not *for us*. Despite the dominance of this phrase in Hegel's writings, Spirit only appears to be *for us*, but it is not for us at all: we are *for* Spirit.

The poet does not make divinity appear, but he sacrifices himself to its promise, its trace. The poet still dwells, as do all mortals, in the land of shadows where we do not recognize ourselves as the "children of the gods" foretold in the ancient songs. "*Siehe, wir sind es, wir!*" cries the poet Hlderlin. But we cannot see it, not until *Vater Aether* is recognized as the father of us all. Again, it must be emphasized that this is not a Christian Father just as much as Spirit is not a Christian concept. The Aether is where the gods dwell, and it is the material we share with them. In his willingness to wander this path in the blindness of the night, and on occasion sustaining the full impact of the gods, the poet reveals that mortals can match heavenly strength as before, but still there echoes the lament, "*Aber Freund! wir kommen zu spt.*" For the poet, there is at most a moment, a sharing in the gifts of bread and wine, and the artwork, the poem, is never anything more than a remainder, something left over that resembles but does not equal this

moment. The work of art is always already too late. The work of art is always an allegory.

As a poet, the young Hegel also happens to find himself drunk with the spirit of the gods, and he writes a poem about the ancient rites of Ceres. He poses as a priest but is really more like a Protestant minister. There is no sacrifice in Hegel's poem, and perhaps this lack of sacrifice lends it the tone of despair, which requires the conditional tense.

*Ha! sprängen jetzt die Pforten deines Heiligtums von selbst
O Ceres, die du in Eleusis throntest!
Begeistrung trunken fühlt'ich jetzt
Die Schauer deiner Nähe,* (l. 43-46)

Oh! now the doors of your sanctuary should spring open of themselves, O Ceres, you who are enthroned in Eleusis!
Having drunk spiritedness [enthusiasm], I would now feel a shiver in your nearness.

The philosopher-cum-poet expresses a greater distance from the ancient divinity. If he *were* to shiver in nearness to Ceres,

*Verstände deine Offenbarungen,
Ich deutete der Bilder hohen Sinn, vernähme
Die Hymnen bei der Götter Mahlen,
Die hohen Sprüche ihres Rats. --* (l.47-50)

[I would] understand your revelations, I would interpret the lofty senses of the images, would hear the hymns at the feast of the gods, the lofty maxims of their counsel.

Hegel, like Hölderlin, understands that the gods live up high in a different world and little they seem to care whether we live or what we do. To Hegel, these doors are already shut. He listens in vain. The majority of Hegel's poem, the lines which follow this first brief hopeful ascension, are neither conditional nor confident.

*Doch deine Hallen sind verstummt, o Göttin!
Geflohen ist der Götter Kreis zurück in den Olymp*

*Von den geheiligten Altären,
Geflohn von der entweihten Menschheit Grab
Der Unschuld Genius, der her sie zauberte! --
(l.51-55)*

Even your halls are silenced, oh Goddess! Fled is the circle of gods back to Olympus from the consecrated altars; fled from the tomb of profaned humanity, the innocent genius who here enchanted them.

The gods are gone. There is no purpose for a priest, or a poet. There is nothing to mediate, no sacrifice in which to lose oneself, no Bacchanalian revel to intoxicate every limb.

Hegel's response to Hölderlin cannot be heard in the poem "*Eleusis*", or only faintly. The reply appears in *The Phenomenology*. The poet has been replaced by the "Spirit" which does not merely love knowledge but is "*actual knowing*", and Spirit is that which gives the true shape to the truth. The *Phenomenology* is nothing other than an initiation into the Mystery of Absolute Spirit. We are asked to memorize it, like the poet memorized the initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries: we are to remember it in its distance. We are to learn it by heart such that we no longer know (or care) what it "*means*". The *Phenomenology* is only a memory. The appearances of spirit must be recollected. History has only ended insofar as Hegel has succeeded in recollecting the divine mystery. He has thrown open the doors and spoken its truth. He has brought back the gods, and so the work ends:

*beyde zusammen, die begriffne Geschichte, bilden die
Erinnerung und die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes, die
Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit seines Throns, ohne
den er das leblose Einsame wäre; nur --
aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches
schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit*

The two together [the form of contingency and the scientific organization of the sphere of appearance], comprehended History, image [construct] the inwardizing and the Calvary of

absolute spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless solitude. Only [quoting Schiller's *Die Freundschaft*, *ad fin*]
 from the chalice of this realm of spirits
 foams forth for Him his own infinitude.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is Hegel's great poem. He has achieved what all poets seek, to bring the divine to presence. But at the very moment that he does so, it escapes. Hegel sustains his effort with incredible rigor to the very last words of the *Phenomenology*, but then he does not know how to end except to give us a figure. Like Orpheus, Hegel has charmed the gods into giving of their immortality, and he has also violated this gift by mortalizing it. Hegel is no more to blame than Orpheus; it is the human condition.

By the destitute time in which the *Phenomenology* appears, poetry (art) and religion are no longer possible. There is only philosophy. In philosophy, in the Science of Knowing, Hegel has achieved the impossible, he has made Spirit appear. To dwell poetically is to believe in this possibility even while knowing that it is impossible. Hegel knows this as well as Hölderlin. What are poets for in destitute times? They are for this impossible possibility. The *Phenomenology* speaks this impossibility, and it is spoken by the mouth of the philosopher. The philosopher is a poet. Hegel found the language of the soul, but few have actually heard it. In Hegel's wake in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the French poet Rimbaud continued to seek this language.

. . . Trouver une langue; . . . toute parole étant idée, le temps d'un langage universel viendra! . . .

Cette langue sera de l'âme pour l'âme, résumant tout, parfums, sons, couleurs, de la pensée accrochant la pensée et tirant. Le poète définirait la quantité d'inconnu s'éveillant en son temps dans l'âme universelle: il donnerait plus -- que la formule de sa pensée, que la notation de sa marche au Progrès.

A language [*langue*] must be found; besides, all speech being idea, a time of universal language [*langage*] will come! . . . This language will be of the soul [*de l'âme*], for the soul, and will include everything: perfumes, sounds, colors, thought grappling with thought. The poet would make precise the quantity of the unknown arising in his time in the universal soul: he would provide more than the formula of his thought, the record of *his path to Progress!*⁷⁴

Rimbaud's description of Hegel's life work is uncanny. Hegel had already done all of this, and more, but he had failed. As swiftly and immediately as for Hölderlin, the gods had fled. Instead of going mad, Hegel continued to philosophize. As Socrates always took great pains to remember, the philosopher loves wisdom, but his greatest wisdom is to know that wisdom cannot be possessed. The philosopher knows only that he wants to know. Hegel is a poet, and a philosopher. As a poet he has seen, and as a philosopher he has tried to make it manifest, and this effort is nothing other than poetic.

⁷⁴ In A letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871. Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Antoine Adam (France: Gallimard, 1972) p. 252. Translation is my own.

CHAPTER FIVE

Baudelaire's Elegy: The Prose-Poem and the Allegory of Absence

The poetic element of language was once a viable metaphor for the divine element in human beings, whether that divine element was Christian or Classical. The combination of language and the poetic point to a third thing, an absent thing which appears in the bringing together of language and poetry, the divine. In the *Psychomachia* it is the human soul. In "*Das Märchen*" it is the divinity of the profane symbol, and in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is the apotheosis of the Absolute Subject. In the philosophical example of Hegel, however, the metaphoric schema itself has undergone a radical change. This change in a philosophical text bears directly on the fate of poetry. While it is still the case that divinity appears in something that it is not (the structure of its appearance is unequivocally allegorical), Spirit does not *merely* appear. The metaphoric substitution doubles back on itself and declares it is not a metaphor but a symbol. Spirit proclaims itself absolute. It is absolved from the divine because it is itself divine: universal and infinite. Contrary to this declaration, the terms of the metaphor have not been condensed but suppressed. Whereas language and the poetic came together to form the poem in which something divine appeared, when the divine displaces the "poetic" element, the work is called "philosophy" and declares victory over poetry. However, as the chapter on Hegel has shown, philosophy continues to depend on poetic language.

Philosophy does not see itself made up of language and *divinity* but of language and *knowledge*. Hegel recognizes that language cannot impose meaning on things to form knowledge, but he argues that language can reveal knowledge.

Language is no longer a mere metonymic trope for *logos*. In Hegel, language and *logos* are given equal footing. As a consequence of this rearrangement, language now becomes a metonym for poetry, but the metonymy is forgotten. As Benjamin would say, language is now the decaying ruin of poetry (and it has been for some time). Also sensing this decline in language, Heidegger asserted that “everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer.”¹ This is not because prose, the *lingua franca* of modern writing, is an inferior form of language. By no means. Heidegger writes, “the opposite of the poem is not prose. Pure prose is never “prosaic.” It is as poetic and hence as rare as poetry”.² The “becoming ruin” of language has been underway for some time. Various “stations of decline” have been marked. For Heidegger, this decline stretches all the way back the pre-Socratics. For Nietzsche, it begins with Euripides.³ For Benjamin, the baroque *Trauerspiel* is a decaying written monument. Even if not in its “golden age”, poetry and poetically inflected language maintained a viable existence until the early nineteenth century in Europe. It is not that there was some dramatic moment which changed everything but rather that poetry had been worn down. The process had perhaps been accelerated by the developments of the Enlightenment, but as Benjamin points out, by the time of the baroque, the decline was well underway. Certainly the rise of the novel helped to

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Language” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Hereafter, PLT), tr. Albert Hofstadter (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 208. In German, “Die Sprache” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1997), p. 32.

² *ibid.*

³ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1967), see especially section 11.

push poetry towards the margins, but one wonders if it is the rise of the novel or the fall of the poem which is to blame.

Despite the ever-present tone of mourning in almost his entire oeuvre, Benjamin recognizes that from utter decay and ruin something beautiful emerges. In the poetic fragment which is transcribed, at least, as a poem in prose, *In Lieblicher Bläue*,⁴ Hölderlin (perhaps) had written, or dictated: "*Reinheit aber ist auch Schönheit*" [Purity is also Beauty], and a few lines later,

*Doch reiner ist nicht der Schatten der Nacht mit den Sternen,
wenn ich so sagen könnte, als der Mensch, der heißt ein Bild
der Gottheit.*⁵

No purer is the shadow of the night with its stars, if I could
say so, than the being [man] who is called an image of
?divinity.

⁴ *In Lieblicher Bläue*, in the Stuttgart edition of Hölderlin's *Ausgabe*, Band 2, 1, ed. Freichrich Beissner (1946), this poem is categorized as "*Zweifelhaftes*" (of doubtful attribution), although the more recent *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), Band 1, p.372-4, categorizes it "*Anhang*" (appendix) in the *oeuvre* and argues that the presentation and style of the text is typical of Hölderlin. "*Die Vorstellungen und der Stil des Textes lassen keinen Zweifel, daß Waiblinger in der Tat Aufzeichnungen Hölderlins benutzt hat.*" The only witness to the text (which is published in three distinct sections of approximately 20 prose-lines each) is included in Wilhelm Waiblinger's *Roman Phaeton*. Schmidt qualifies the attribution to Hölderlin: "*Es läßt sich aber nicht feststellen, ob Waiblinger Hölderlins Worte genau wiedergibt oder ob er sie verändert und auch Eigenes hinzufügt*" (p.1095). [It is not certain whether Waiblinger gives the precise words of Hölderlin or if he has rearranged them and also added his own.] None of this prevents Heidegger from basing an entire reading of Hölderlin on a phrase from this prose-poem. In the essay, "*... dichterisch Mann wohnt ...*" Heidegger mentions neither the doubtful provenance of the text nor the prose typography in which it is set in the Stuttgart edition.

⁵ *In Lieblicher Bläue*, p.372.

In other words, this purity of humankind (as pure as the shadow of the night), is also the beauty of humankind. Hölderlin expresses this purity, this beauty, in the phrase which Heidegger appropriates for his essay: *Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt der Mensch auf dieser Erde*. [Fully deserving, yet poetically, dwells the human being on this earth.]⁶ To dwell poetically is to exist in beauty.⁷ This Beauty is indifferent. It is impossible to judge this beauty beyond the reach of aesthetics. It is this beauty which lies concealed in the decay of language.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, when the Subject assumes its own divinity, or at least finds the divine aspect within itself (not outside of itself), the disjunction which holds together the metaphor of divinity and language has been sundered. The trope of metaphor has been replaced with the trope of totality. In the allegorical schema and of Medieval allegory, language divided against itself. Language "squinted" in order to catch a glimpse of the divine. In the idealization of self-consciousness, the Subject does not squint, but eyes wide open simply turns its back on the poetic. Nonetheless the trope of totality is as dependent on an allegorical structure as is the trope of metaphor. The difference lies in the relation between appearance and concealment. Metaphor appears in the concealment of an absent term. Totality conceals a fundamental absence, or lack, in its appearance. Within this totality a rift opens up between humanity and the poetic, but the rift does not

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ This is not Kant's *Schönheit*, but it may be Goethe's. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, when Ottilie first appears in the story, she is not personified as Beauty. "*Schönheit ist überall ein gar willkommer Gast. Sie schien aufmerksam auf das Gespräch, ohne daß sie daran teilgenommen hätte.*" Beauty is always a very welcome guest. She appears attentive to the conversation without have to take part in it." *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1972), Chapter 6, p. 47, translation mine.

cast one away from the other. Heidegger describes this rift as *"enteignis"* which could be "poetically" translated as "the event of expropriation", the happening by which one thing does not appropriate another but by dividing itself from the other comes into its own and holds itself in this juncture, in this difference. The *Enteignis*, the event of expropriation, requires an allegorical structure, but it is not allegory which threatens to re-emerge and interrupt the symbol, extinguishing "the false appearance of totality."⁸ Within the allegorical structure it is poetry, or the "poetic" element in language, which always threatens to return or which has already disrupted a text that has claimed mastery over language, summarily excluding poetry and art.

In what can generally be called the modern age, roughly the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, poetry has been all but forgotten. Charles Baudelaire understood two essential things about poetry in this time. First, there is no longer a place for poetry in this world; second, there has never been a world more in need of poetry. Baudelaire responds with the "sickly flowers" of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and more poignantly with the experimental form of the prose-poem in *Le Spleen de Paris*. This response resounds everywhere in his *oeuvre*, in poetry and criticism alike. While Baudelaire understands that lyric poetry is no longer a viable mode of presentation, he fervently believes in the possibility of a poetic expression, a language, without the rhythm and rhyme of verse (which has become something quaint). This language must be "supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul."⁹ Prose has its own rhythm, and Baudelaire

⁸ See Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, p.176. "The false appearance of totality is extinguished. For the *eidos* disappears, the simile ceases to exist, and the cosmos it contained shrivels up."

admires in particular the attentiveness of Edgar Poe to this rhythm. However, Baudelaire denies that it is a rhythm adequate to the “greatest and most noble aim of poetry”: Beauty.¹⁰ Baudelaire will not willingly sacrifice this noble goal, but he also refuses to recognize that as long as Beauty is a *telos*, poetry itself will be teleological, that is, directed towards knowledge. Although it appears in poetry, Baudelaire’s response is philosophical. Baudelaire answer Heidegger’s first question.

How can finite human *Dasein* in advance pass beyond
(transcend) the essent when not only has it not created this
essent but also is dependent on it in order to exist as
Dasein?¹¹

This is the most fundamental metaphysical problem as it is understood by philosophy. It demands a logical response that is grounded in knowledge. The prose poems constitute Baudelaire’s vain fight against Hegel’s judgment that art is irrevocably and on the side of its highest destiny a thing of the past. Baudelaire’s defeat is profound because, finally, he not only endorses this judgment, but he has done so from within the realm of poetry itself. Hegel’s was a philosophical judgment; Baudelaire has bestowed its poetical equivalent.

In the “Epilogue” [*Nachwort*] to “The Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger returns to Hegel’s judgment, admitting that the preceding essay has done little more

⁹ From the letter to Arsène Housaye which is generally published as an introduction to *Le Spleen de Paris*. All citations from *Spleen* refer to Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (BOC), ed. Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Aus Éditions du Seuil, 1968).

¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “New Notes on Edgar Poe” in *Baudelaire as a Literary Critic* (BLC), trans. Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1964), p. 128. Hereafter NNEP. All English citations from Baudelaire’s critical work refer to this volume unless otherwise noted. Translations are modified as noted in comparison with the French text in Baudelaire *Oeuvres Complètes*, (BOC) ed. Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Aus Éditions du Seuil, 1968).

¹¹ Heidegger, KPM, p. 47.

than expose art to the Hegelian judgment without submitting to it. By posing the question of the “origin” of the artwork, Heidegger attempted to show that the “work-character”, the nature of art, is to be thought alongside the nature of truth. Just as the truth of which Heidegger speaks is not the truth of adequation,¹² the art of which he has written is also not judged by its adequation to experience.

Experience (in the sense of *Erlebnis*) is constituted by the apprehension of the artwork as a sensuous object, “as the object [*Gegenstand*] of *aisthesis*.” and Heidegger suggests that “perhaps experience is the element in which art dies” and that “the dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.” [*Doch vielleicht ist das Erlebnis das Element, in dem die Kunst stirbt. Das Sterben geht so langsam vor sich, daß es einige Jahrhunderte braucht.*]¹³ Far from countering Hegel’s judgment against art in terms of aesthetics, Heidegger calls the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* “the most comprehensive reflection on the nature of art that the West possesses – comprehensive because it stems from metaphysics.” Heidegger reminds us that Hegel’s assessment had little to do with the creation and appreciation of works of art. “Hegel never meant to deny the possibility [of art].”¹⁴ Hegel’s judgment is really a question, and that question remains, posed, in Heidegger’s insightful “translation”.¹⁵

¹² See “On the Essence of Truth” in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (1st ed.) (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977). [“*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*” in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1967) pp. 73-97. For Heidegger’s revision of “truth”, see *Basic Problems in Phenomenology*, tr. Albert Hofstadter, (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1982) §18.

¹³ Heidegger, OWA, p. 79; Holz, p. 67.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 79-80; 67-8.

*Ist die Kunst noch eine wesentliche und eine notwendige
weise in der die für unser geschichtliches Dasein
entscheidende Wahrheit geschieht, oder ist die Kunst dies
nicht mehr.*

Is art still an essential and necessary way in which that truth
happens which is decisive for our historical existence, or is
art no longer of this character?"¹⁶

Truth and Art. Truth and Beauty. Heidegger repeats Hegel's inquiry as to whether they can be thought together. Hegel tried to answer that they could not, but his own poetic nature interrupted this intent. Baudelaire also wants to deny the identity of truth and beauty, not for the sake of truth but for the sake of beauty. For Baudelaire, truth is the object of thought and expression. He opposes truth to beauty as he opposes prose to poetry. For Baudelaire, truth can never be the objective of poetry, which has only Beauty as its goal. To seek Beauty in a short story puts the writer at a great disadvantage because deprived of the "most useful instrument" for this task, rhythm. Baudelaire acknowledges that "in all literatures efforts have been made, often successful, to create purely poetic short stories." The most successful of these attempts are "struggles and efforts which serve only to prove the strength of the true means adapted to the corresponding goals."¹⁷ Baudelaire sees the most beautiful of short stories as the most developed use of the tools of reasoning. For Baudelaire, truth is the *telos* and object of prose and beauty is the *telos* and object of poetry. Baudelaire intuitively but refuses to recognize that as long as beauty is an objective, art will be conceived as an object, and as an object it will always be subjected to

¹⁵ Hegel never poses this question directly, so Heidegger is not translating Hegel's words but his thought.

¹⁶ OWA, p. 80; Holz., p. 68.

¹⁷ NNEP, p. 128.

judgment, the very judgment of the truth (as adequation) from which he has attempted to distance beauty.

Baudelaire did understand that poetry could no longer appear in poems, crowded out by ethics and morals, purpose and usefulness. Even in Victor Hugo, the last great French poet, Baudelaire detects a painter with a palette full of versified phrases. And yet, in the paintings of Eugène Delacroix he discerns something poetic.¹⁸ Delacroix could follow *la grande faculté* of the imagination, “despotic in its impatient whims”.¹⁹ Hugo does not lack imagination but has become “too concerned with the exterior aspects of nature.” Baudelaire complains, “he takes so much pleasure in showing his skill that he doesn’t omit a blade of grass or a reflection from the streetlight.”²⁰ The poet must see something different, something the common herd, the *vulgaires profanes* cannot comprehend immediately. In the Preface to his translation of Poe’s *Mesmeric Revelation*, Baudelaire gave this definition of a poet (along with a diverse list of those who qualified, including Goethe and Balzac, but not Hugo).²¹

Tous ces gens, avec une volonté et une bonne foi infatigables, décalquent la nature, la pure nature. -- Laquelle? -- La leur. Aussi sont-ils généralement bien plus étonnants et originaux que les simples imaginatifs qui sont tout à fait d’esprit philosophique.

All these individuals, with tireless will and good faith,
translate nature, pure nature -- which nature? Their own.

¹⁸ From “The Salon of 1846” in BLC, p.41f. See BOC, esp. p. 234-5.

¹⁹ “L’Oeuvre et la vie d’Eugène Delacroix” in BOC, p.532. Translation is my own.

²⁰ BLC, p.42.

²¹ BOC, p. 313; BLC, p.47.

Thus, they are usually much more surprising and original than those who are simple imaginatives, who are of a completely philosophic spirit.

According to Baudelaire, poetry should be an impression of nature which is both “astonishing” and “judicial”, the impression not only of art but of philosophy. As Plato held together the poet and the philosopher in the figure of Socrates, Baudelaire tries to hold together the longstanding discord between poetry and philosophy in the figure of the modern poet. The modern poet must not only be able to see but also to seek, not only to speak an impression of nature that is “astonishing” but also to judge it. The translation of nature into poetry requires judgment and as both the Greek *krinein* and the German *urteilen* make clear, to judge is to divide. To judge poetry is to divide it from itself, to divide it *within* itself.

Baudelaire’s most venomous criticism was reserved for what he called “utilitarianism in art”, calling it “the heresy of teaching a lesson.”²² Despite his own heroic efforts he has finally done just that. *Le Spleen* is a lesson and a judgment. It is a lesson in poetry, about poetry, and it reveals the law against which poetry is to be judged. In the prose poem, Baudelaire has written not only an elegy for poetry, but also, and unavoidably, an allegory of poetry’s absence. He has succeeded in writing a poem and in not writing a poem, in giving the public a poem and the lack of a poem in the same work of art. The written and not written poem do not coincide but are held together in a kind of suspension, like a bridge connecting the poem to the essence of poetry without, however, being able to coincide with this essence. The prose poem has a necessarily allegorical structure. In order to be a poem in prose the work needs to be connected in some way with the

²² See NNEP, p. 131-5; cf. BOC p.352-3.

essence of poetry which has an obscure but definite affinity with allegory. At the same time, because it is prose, it cannot coincide with that essence. The prose-poem can never be mistaken for a symbolic work of art. Baudelaire is right in thinking that the prose-poem corresponds to the modern world.

Fully aware of its limits, Baudelaire intuitively understood that prose held the only possibility for poetry. Prose-poets are for remembering poetry. For a lyric poet like Hölderlin, poets were for remembering and mediating for the divine. The poet followed the path of the gods who had fled and brought a trace of them into destitute times. For the prose-poet the times are also destitute [*durftigen*]. The prose-poet does not pursue the divine but poetry itself, and poetry comes only with the greatest sacrifice. Baudelaire sells his lyrical soul in an astounding effort to preserve poetry, and he teaches that poetry must be forsaken in order to be preserved. For a poet, however, the forsaking of poetry can be nothing other than a mortal sin. Baudelaire hopes for a miracle. *Le Spleen de Paris* is a confession, not Baudelaire's personal autobiographical confession but the *confiteor*, the revelatory confession of a poet. In these little stories the figure of the poet appears regularly. The poet is memorialized not as a lived experience but as a phantom which haunts this memorial work of art. Baudelaire brings the *phantom* of poetry into the realm of experience and phenomenalizes it. This hypocritical act simultaneously protects the memory of poetry by keeping it concealed and destroys poetry by subjecting it to judgment. The poet is no longer the lyrical singer of Beauty but the storyteller who mediates between poetry and philosophy.

In the letter to Arsène Houssaye which prefaces *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire confesses his desire and his failure to write a "purely poetic prose". He acknowledges his faithlessness to poetry, a sin for which the poet cannot forgive himself.

Sitôt que j'eus commencé le travail, je m'aperçus que non-seulement je restais bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle, mais encore que je faisais quelque chose (si cela peut s'appeler quelque chose) de singulièrement différent, accident dont tout autre que moi s'enorgueillirait sans doute, mais qui ne peut qu'humilier profondément un esprit qui regarde comme le plus grand honneur du poète d'accomplir just ce qu'il a projeté de faire.

As soon as I began the work, I noticed [of myself] that not only did I remain far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but also that I was doing something (if this can be called something) singularly different, an accident that any one other than me would glory in without doubt, but which can not but profoundly humiliate a spirit [*esprit*] which sees as the greatest honor of a poet the accomplishment of exactly what he has projected to do.

The prose poems of *Le Spleen de Paris* are the expression of Baudelaire's despair. He has ambitiously dreamed of a poetic prose, of a miracle, but like his attempt to translate Poe, he admits that it is but a dream.²³ The product of the attempt may not even be worth calling "something," it is perhaps not a thing. It is a poem and at the same time not a poem.

Baudelaire has not "saved" poetry or restored it to its former glory but accentuated its crisis, its inability to coincide with itself. The prose-poem is symptomatic of this crisis and accentuates it by drawing attention to it. Baudelaire warns the modern world that the total loss of poetry, already nearly in effect, carries with it dire consequences. The poetic dwelling of human beings is not directly related to empirical existence, but they complement one another. The empirical and the poetic have always been held together in the conflict of their difference, but the

²³ In concluding "New Notes on Edgar Poe", Baudelaire laments: "a translation of poetry so studied, so concentrated, can be a fond dream, but only a dream" (p. 135).

distance of this allegorical suspension has been widening. With the prose poem Baudelaire has made us look down into the yawning chasm which threatens to sever poetry from the world. The terror of the eternal abyss which would open if poetry truly were exiled from our being in the world is enough to make the poet violate his own judgment against aesthetics, the assigning of value to art.

Baudelaire remembers poetry, and that is why he can not write a purely poetic prose. Poetry requires forgetting, indifference. Baudelaire himself writes, "*aucun poème ne sera si grand, si noble, si véritablement digne du nom de poème, que celui qui aura été écrit uniquement pour la plaisir d'écrire un poème*" ["no poem will be so great, so noble, so truly worthy of the name of poem as that which will have been written solely for the pleasure of writing a poem"].²⁴ Baudelaire understands this necessity, and he also knows that he has been denied this pleasure. Baudelaire cannot forget poetry. To write a poem "solely for the pleasure of writing a poem" one must forget even poetry. Baudelaire writes poems *for the sake of poetry*, to memorialize it. These prose-poems also succumb to "the heresy of teaching a lesson". Baudelaire has intentionally misunderstood poetry. This misunderstanding was both necessary and productive for poetry's survival in a harsh world with which it had little in common.

Baudelaire's prose poems are so many elegies to poetry, or they are parts of a single elegy. Like most classical genres an elegy was originally defined by its verse structure, alternating lines of hexameter and pentameter. The subject presented in elegiac meter was often a complaint of love. In the seventeenth century, "elegy" came to designate a poetic genre of formal lament and consolation on the death of a particular person, but also, at times, a lament of mortality in general as in the

²⁴ BOC p. 208; NNEP, p. 131, modified.

twentieth-century German poet Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*.²⁵ Baudelaire writes the "urban elegy", an inversion of the pastoral elegy. In pastoral, the entire world mourns the loss of the person (often a poet) being celebrated in the poem. In the urban elegy, the entire world is indifferent. It is not the poet who is mourned but poetry itself. Instead of invoking the muses, Baudelaire marks their absence. There are no muses in the opening lines of the first *Spleen* poem, just a deluded stranger who gazes up at the "marvelous clouds" that are simply . . . clouds.

Baudelaire consoles himself at the end of *Spleen* with a rhymed and rhythmic poem. The "Epilogue" is in *terza rima*, the difficult, tightly woven verse form used by Dante in the *Comedia*. However, not even this final poem "proper" affords transcendence. There is joy, but it is not the joy of an ascent to heaven. The poet compares himself to Satan, patron of his distress, who makes a heaven of this hell. The poet goes up a hill with a happy heart, *le couer content*, to contemplate the enormity / monstrosity²⁶ of the city, and especially its prisons, hospitals, and brothels; purgatory and hell -- no mention of heaven. With obvious gestures to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire calls this city the place "where all enormity / monstrosity flowers like a flower" [*où toute énormité fleurit comme une fleur*]. Nonetheless, the enormous / monstrous whore, the city itself, breathes new life into the poet.

*Je voulais m'enivrer de l'énorme catin
Dont le charm infernal me rejeunit sans cesse*

²⁵ Meyer Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (5th ed.), (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1988) p. 47.

²⁶ The French word, *énormité*, can mean both enormous and monstrous, and I believe both senses are implied here and so I have used the admittedly awkward pair of words to translate it.

I wanted to intoxicate myself with the enormous/monstrous
 whore whose infernal charm rejuvenates me without cease.

In *Le Confiteor de l'artiste*, the prose-poet confesses his predicament and embraces his damnation. "*L'étude du beau est un duel où l'artiste crie de frayeur avant d'être vaincu.*" To seek Beauty is to suffer eternally. To study beauty is to be vanquished. The prose-poet sacrifices to both the goddess Beauty and her philosophical anathema, Aesthetics. This double sacrifice is essential to Baudelaire's project, and it is precisely what dooms it to fail. In the opposition of Truth and Beauty, both are posited as metaphysical categories. By making Beauty its object, Baudelaire's poetry privileges the philosophical and brings the aesthetic ideology into the work of art itself. This may be the first truly aesthetic poetry, not poetry that is aestheticized (as an object of *aisthesis*) but poetry that is itself aesthetic. Baudelaire realizes, of course, that this is the equivalent of siding with the devil, Beauty vanquished by the talons of Reason. But that is the remorseless state of the soul.

The first poem of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is addressed to the reader, "*Au lecteur*", and it begins with the sinful state of the human spirit.²⁷

*La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,
 Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps.*

Foolishness, error, sin, stinginess,
 Occupy our spirits and cultivate our bodies

Within the first two stanzas Baudelaire revisits a world of vice not unlike that of the *Psychomachia* in which the fickle but virtuous being vows loyalty to faith and quickly "returns gayly to the mired path" (*Psychomachia* l.7). In Baudelaire, the soul

²⁷ All citations from *Les Fleurs du Mal* refer to Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (BOC), ed. Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Aus Éditions du Seuil, 1968). Translations are my own, occasionally in consultation with the translations of James McGowan in *Charles Baudelaire: The Flowers of Evil* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

is the captive of "the learned chemist" whose experiments vaporize the metal of the will. *Et le riche métal de notre volonté / Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste* (l.11-12). Baudelaire invokes the image of the Satanic alchemist, *Trismégiste*, a devil who works by deceit. "We find enticements in repugnant objects, led by appearance alone to step each day more deeply into hell. Without horror we cross the stinking darkness." *Aux objets répugnant nous trouvons des appas; / Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas. / Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent* (l.15-17). Without horror, without joy. The casual decadence of *Luxuria* has become the pervasive indifference of *L'Ennui*.

*Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,
Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;* (l.33-36)

There is only one who is more ugly, more evil, more foul!
Although he emits neither grand gestures nor great cries,
He would voluntarily turn the earth to debris
And in one yawn would swallow the world.

Like *Luxuria* who languidly tosses flowers from her chariot and yet convinces the entire army to sacrifice their collective will, *Ennui* destroys the volition with an indifferent yawn. The rhetoric of the poet fails to rally the troops in the way that *Sobrietas* returns the mortal eyes to a divine vision through the symbol of the cross. The poet has no symbol and his rhetoric is no longer inspirational.

Les Fleurs du Mal proper begins with a *Benediction*, the "good words" or blessing which customarily *concludes* a communal worship. This "*Bénédictio*" marks the conclusion of the poet's service, "when, by a decree of the supreme powers, the poet appears in this weary world [of ennui]." *Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes, / Le Poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé.* (l.1-2). The first part of the poem describes the cruel intolerance of this world for the poet. Even his

mother would prefer to have have born a “nest of snakes”, and his wife plans to rip out his admiring heart. The last word in the poem, however, comes from the poet who himself delivers the benediction to poetry. *Le Poète serein lève ses bras pieux* (l.54). The brilliance of his soul conceals from him the fury of the people. *Et les vastes éclairs de son esprit lucide / Lui dérobent l’aspect des peuples furieux*” (l.55-56). The poet ends triumphant, transcending the limits of the world of shadows.

*Car il ne sera fait que de pure lumière,
Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs,
Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière,
Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs!* (l.73-76)

For he will not make that pure light, drawn from the holy hearth of primitive rays, whose mortal eyes, in their total splendor, are but the obscure and doleful mirrors.

But this is poetry’s *benediction*. It has been blessed and sent on its way. In the very next poem, the poet is figured as the albatross.

*Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l’empêchent de marcher.* (l.15-16)

Exiled on the ground among the jeering [crowd],
his giant wings hinder his walking.

The poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal* oscillate between this pious hopefulness and this demoralizing exile. By the time of *Le Spleen* and the end of Baudelaire’s life, the hopefulness has vanished. Likely written in the same general timeframe as *Le Spleen*, some of the poems published in the posthumous third edition reflect Baudelaire’s acceptance of this *desespoir*. A sonnet called “*Recueillement*” [Gathering or Meditation] begins,

*Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille
Tu réclamaïs le Soir; il descend; le voici:*

Be wise, oh my Sorrow, and make yourself most tranquil,
You demand the evening; it descends; it is here.

From the first poem to the reader in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire confesses his complicity with the *Hypocrite Lecteur*, admitting his own servitude to *Ennui* as much as his resistance to its charming appearances. In *Le Spleen*, the physiological organ once believed to produce *ennui* comes to the fore and Baudelaire's hypocrisy has become complete. Baudelaire does not, however, judge the reader from some pious poetic pulpit, but joins with the reader in a self-recognition of this "*monstre délicat*" who lurks within.

-- *Hypocrite lecteur, -- mon semblable, -- mon frère!* (l.40)

-- Hypocrite reader, -- my likeness, -- my brother!

Baudelaire has chosen this adjective with obvious care. "Hypocrit" and "Hypocrisy" come from the Greek compound *hypokrisis*, the act of playing a part on the stage. The word illuminates the division between the person and the part, emphasizing the distinct person who determines the illusion, *hypo*, meaning under or lower, and *krinein*, the verb meaning to determine or to judge by means of division. The hypocrite is divided between appearance and concealment, but an appearance and a concealment that are equally obvious. The word has come to mean someone who purposefully puts on a false appearance of virtue, but its core meaning is simply the division between appearance and concealment. The modern poet is necessarily a hypocrite who must give the appearance of usefulness all the while knowing that poetry is useless and even cursed; he must write in prose and believe in poetry.

In "New Notes on Edgar Poe", Baudelaire admits that the short story has two distinct advantages: its "unity of impression" and the "detailed development of thought and expression which has *truth* as its object". While the unity of

impression might closely approximate the compression which is often attributed to poems, Truth can never be the objective of poetry, which should only have Beauty as its goal. A short story writer works at a great disadvantage because deprived of the “most useful instrument” for the attainment of Beauty, rhythm. Baudelaire acknowledges that “in all literatures efforts have been made, often successful, to create purely poetic short stories,” and the most successful of these attempts are “struggles and efforts which serve only to prove the strength of the true means adapted to the corresponding goals.” Baudelaire sees the most beautiful of short stories as the highest capability of reasoning towards poetry. The techniques available to the story writer and the nuances of a language freed from the strictures of rhythm demonstrate the valiant effort of these storytellers to escape the judgment against art: that is has no place in a world that very much needs it. Baudelaire empathetically notes that “these heroic attempts spring from despair.”²⁸

Despair, as is more evident in the French word *desespoir*, is a lack of hope. Baudelaire criticizes the storyteller’s hope that a composition which is “more easily appreciated by the average reader” can achieve the noble aims of poetry. Nonetheless, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire addresses this same “average reader” in lyric poetry. After the failure of *Les Fleurs du Mal* to become a popular success, Baudelaire attempts to write a poetic prose in *Le Spleen de Paris*. In these prose poems he achieves the same success as those whom he has admired and he falls into the same pit of despair. In the prose-poems Baudelaire “experiences” himself. Baudelaire himself had written that the poets who are capable of translating nature, “pure nature”, possess not only “imagination” but also the “philosophic spirit”. These translations of “one’s own nature”, philosophical as much as imaginary, are

²⁸ NNEP, p. 128.

confessions but not autobiographies. They are not historiography but allegory, designed to reveal something concealed that cannot otherwise appear. In these poets Baudelaire believes the ability to seek has its origin "in the most remote impressions of childhood."²⁹

The strongest impressions of childhood, however, are not actual lived experiences but events which have never before entered consciousness. They are what Proust called the *mémoire involontaire*.³⁰ The poet becomes conscious of these involuntary memories, already an act of translation, and in turn translates them into an appearance of lived experience. In works called "Confessions", Augustine's theft of the apples and Rousseau's story of the ribbon are examples of this translation. Although usually interpreted as moral lessons, they are in fact indicative of a more fundamental experience, the experience of the self with its own concealment, and the subsequent translation of that experience into appearance, the *mere* appearance of a lived experience. As always, translation requires judgment. Thus, in translating "his own nature", the poet violates this nature, or divides himself from it. This violent act subjects the poetic essence of man to the judgment constitutive of reason. It is this violence which Heidegger also tries to counter. The relation between poetic nature and philosophic nature *in terms of poetry* is a particularly (but not exclusively) modern poetic problem, and Baudelaire accentuates the crisis it produces in the relatively new discipline of literary studies. Hitherto the "raging discord" between philosophy and poetry had always been staged in the arena of philosophy. The poet was always on the defensive, with the

²⁹ Cf. "Preface to Mesmeric Revelation" in BLC p. 47; BOC, p.313.

³⁰ See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illum.*, p.160. Hereafter "Motifs".

notable exception of the rhapsode *Ion*, who is little valued for his indifference to the philosopher's demands. Ion admits right along with Plato that he does not have this or that kind of skill, but he does not try to justify himself. He remains unphased by Socrates' demand for knowledge.

To translate individual nature into universal philosophical truth, and more specifically, to translate poetry into thought, requires allegory. By exposing this translation, Baudelaire tries to reverse it, to translate thought into poetry. This too requires allegory because thought and poetry will never coincide. However, in Baudelaire, allegory does not make *something* appear, the way the soul appears in the *Psychomachia* or Spirit appears in *The Phenomenology*. This allegory manifests absence, the absence of poetry. It is an allegory which reveals nothing. Instead of ascending from the literal through the moral to the anagogical, becoming increasingly full of meaning, the literal has no content at all. Baudelaire's poems reveal the *hypokrisis* of language itself. Language is playing a part on the world stage. It appears as something useful for expression and communication. Language plays the part of a mere prop. This prop, however, conceals something as well. On the world stage, language conceals itself.

Language conceals language. This concealed language is the object of Heidegger's attention in the essay "*Die Sprache*" [Language], the object of an attentiveness, and not an assault on language "in order to force it into the grip of ideas already fixed beforehand" or "to reduce the nature of language to a concept." Heidegger suggests an approach to language that reflects "our own gathering into the appropriation" of language as language.

Der Sprache nachdenken verlangt somit, daß wir auf das Sprechen der Sprache eingehen, um bei der Sprache, d.h. in ihrem Sprache, nicht in unserem, den Aufenthalt zu nehmen . . . wir möchten die Sprache weder aus anderem,

das nicht sie selber ist, begründen, noch möchten wir anderes durch die Sprache erklären.

To reflect on language thus demands that we enter into the speaking of language in order to take up our stay with language, i.e., within *its* speaking, not within our own . . . We do not wish to ground language in something else that is not language itself nor do we wish to explain other things by means of language.³¹

That is a tall order. This demand must be met, however, if we are to discern in language its own concealment. If there is any hope of exposing this concealment, the terms of language as such must be honored.

Heidegger limited himself to German poetry. In the case of Hölderlin's poetry, this limitation worked in his favor. In the essay on language, however, Heidegger invokes a poem by Georg Trakl and ends up forcing language into his own "fixed idea" about how poetry speaks purely. Heidegger offers the hypothesis: "What is spoken purely is the poem" and he asserts that the poem "*Ein Winterabend*" is not only an example of this hypothesis but "the only choice" and not by "mere caprice".³² Underpinning this choice is Heidegger's philosophical belief that "language is the house of being".³³ Indeed the perspective of "A Winter

³¹ Heidegger, PLT, p. 190-1; UZS, p. 12-13.

³² *ibid.*, 194-5. Heidegger insists that this choice has nothing to do with the poet. "Who the author is remains unimportant here, as with every other masterful poem. The mastery consists precisely in this, that the poem can deny the poet's person and name."

³³ See "Letter on Humanism", tr. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), p 193, rev. ed. p. 217. In German, "*Brief über den Humanismus*" first published in 1947, by A. Franck Verlag. Heidegger later backs off the image of a "house" but the thought remains in the sense of "dwelling", especially as human beings dwell in poetic language.

Evening" is through a window, from the inside of a cozy house, prepared for many guests. In the brief course of the poem (which is only three stanzas), it is "wandering ones" who come to the door of this house, and it is finally a "wanderer who quietly steps within". The threshold over which this wanderer steps is hardened by "pain": "Pain has turned the threshold to stone." And, in an image borrowed in some way from Hölderlin, the wanderer beholds within "in limpid brightness shown, / Upon the table bread and wine".³⁴ While the poem has elements which correspond to the criteria Heidegger has established for poetry and art, including the call to language which is tantamount to the call to being, the gathering of things, and the turn towards something absent. For Heidegger, however, this absence is outside of the poem, and the absence shelters the presence called in the poem. "The place of arrival . . . is a presence sheltered in absence." [*ein ins Abwesen geborgenes Anwesen.*]³⁵ Heidegger still hopes for the fourfold gathering of mortals and divinities, earth and sky. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, he calls this gathering "the worlding of the world". He finds the world in this poem, the world in which Being *is*. This world, however, is mythic, and it remains positive. Heidegger posits a world.

Heidegger is right in assuming that poetry is the place to hear language speak. If we can hear this language in poetry, then perhaps everyday language will regain some of its former glory. Heidegger's philosophy has always been nostalgic. It is this nostalgia, perhaps, which led him astray in embracing the *Volkskörper* myth of National Socialism. Heidegger believed in the golden age of the Greeks, an age

³⁴ Translations of Trakl's poem follow the translation provided in PLT, modified only as noted.

³⁵ Heidegger, PLT, p. 199; UZS, p. 21-2.

which predated Socrates. The only surviving witnesses to this age are fragments of text, often cited in much later philosophical works. Heidegger's book *Early Greek Thinking* is a philosophical investigation of four important fragments, which Heidegger further fragments by reducing what is "authentic" in the ruins to a fraction of what is attributed to figures like Heraclitus and Anaximander. This nostalgia is highly productive. By thinking through these fragments, through the most influential treatises of Western theology and philosophy, and through more recent German poetry, Heidegger startled the Western world from its various dogmatic slumbers. The nostalgia is, however, also a limitation. The unfortunate political consequences aside, Heidegger's tragic flaw was hope.

Benjamin does not have that problem, and he recognizes in Baudelaire a kindred spirit. Benjamin notes that Baudelaire intended for his work to be monumental, asserting that "[Baudelaire's] work cannot merely be categorized as historical, like anyone else's, but it intended to be so and understood itself as such".³⁶ This work is a work that is conscious of its historical moment. Baudelaire attempts to write simultaneously a voluntary and involuntary poem. The voluntary poem is a conscious *Erinnerung*, a recollection, but one which destroys that which it recollects in recollecting it for a purpose. In writing the willful elegy to poetry, by recollecting the poetic, Baudelaire hopes to remember something else, a *Gedächtnis*, a 'thought' which does not come through conscious awareness but is remembered in the heart, "by heart". This memory conserves and protects poetry. In *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire has a poem simply called "*Allegorie*" which describes a beautiful and strong woman, impervious to "the talons of love" and "the poisons of gambling" which are dulled by the "granite of her skin". No only does

³⁶ Motifs, p. 162.

she laugh at Death but she ignores Hell and Purgatory. The figure of Allegory will look into the face of Death in all innocence, without hatred and without remorse [*sans haine et sans remord*]. Allegory protects poetry with Beauty, a beauty that is impenetrable and innocent, and subject to neither the power of death nor the vicissitudes of life. Baudelaire exposes and protects poetry in the allegorical structure of the prose poem. Like Fancioulle in the prose-poem *Une morte héroïque*, the figure of *Allegorie* in *Les Fleurs du Mal* forgets both death and destruction. Only this forgetting yields poetry. Baudelaire understands this but he *cannot forget*, and thus he needs the mediation of allegory.

Allegory is the trope for *Gedächtnis*, the involuntary memory, that which is known “by heart”. It has long been assumed that allegory is an intentional rhetorical structure of appearance when it is rather the only structure adequate to appearance, and it is not something that the poet, or the literary critic, can hope to control. It is inevitable and unavoidable that the prose-poem be allegorical. Prose and poetry are irremediably different. Bringing them together requires the structure of allegory in which something other is remembered in a monument or figure with which it does not coincide. Allegory manifests immanence, but in Baudelaire it manifests the immanence of a profound absence. Baudelaire sees the project as a failure because he has not been able to accomplish exactly what he had set out to do, to write a “purely poetic prose” which could serve both Beauty and Truth, both of which are conspicuously absent in the increasingly urban and industrial world of the nineteenth century.

Truth and Beauty belong together, but not in the form of a poetic-prose which tries to make them manifest. Truth and Beauty do not become manifest in the prose poem because it is not their nature to be manifest, to be grasped, to be the object of a project or even the object of a miracle. Truth and Beauty can never be the

object of attention. Baudelaire refused to understand this (though it is likely that he knew it). Heidegger did. If Heidegger had turned to Baudelaire, he would have been able to substantiate his response to Hegel's judgment, only circumscribed in the brief "Epilogue" to "The Origin of the Work of Art".

Truth is the unconcealedness [*Unverborgenheit*] of that which is as something that is. Truth is the truth of Being. Beauty does not occur alongside and apart from this truth. When truth sets itself into the work, *it appears*. Appearance [*Erscheinen*] – as this being of truth in the work and as work – *is beauty*. Thus the beautiful belongs to the advent of truth, truth's taking of its place [*so gehört das Schöne in das Sichereignen der Wahrheit*].³⁷

Truth and beauty are brought together in the work of art which does not itself indicate truth or beauty. Rather, truth and beauty *appear* together in the work of art, and it is *appearance* which is the origin of this work. In the structure of appearance, the truth is no longer metaphysical and the beautiful is no longer a matter of form. "The beautiful does not lie in form, but only because the *forma* once took its light from Being as the isness of what is. Being at that time made its advent as *eidos*." [*Das Schöne beruht indessen in der Form, aber nur deshalb, weil die forma einst aus dem Sein als der Seiendheit des Seienden sich lichtete. Damals ereignete sich das Sein als eidos.*]³⁸ The history of Western art is the history of the division of truth from beauty, which have never coincided. The relationship between truth and beauty has always been allegorical. It is the allegory of appearance itself. As long as allegory is not thought, truth and beauty will remain the objects of philosophy and aesthetics.

³⁷ OWA, p. 81; Holz., p. 69.

³⁸ *ibid.*

Baudelaire sees the ruinous results of the division of truth from beauty. In the first prose-poem, *L'Étranger*, the figure of the poet appears deluded and alien. This "enigmatic man" wants to love Beauty, but all he *can* do is to admire the marvellous clouds which pass up there in the sky. The poet looks to the heavens but receives no divine inspiration from a heavenly muse. Such gazing at clouds is now extraordinarily strange, the poet is now nothing more than an admirer of clouds. Like Rimbaud and others, Baudelaire experimented with the possibility of writing a "poetic prose" and in the process tries to define the poet of modernity who can no longer be lyrical. The modern poet cannot sing. The prose-poet is no longer a poet in the strict sense of the word: the prose-poet does not write lyric or epic. With one foot firmly in the experience of the world and the other searching for solid ground in something divine, the prose-poet takes up a liminal stance. As a result of this Janus-like posture, neither a poet nor a writer of prose, the prose-poet is the image of both, bearing the imprint of poetry saying the unsayable and the impression of prose saying the real or the reasonable. The task facing the prose-poet is supremely difficult because poetry is nearly impossible in an almost utterly profane world. Nonetheless, the divine aspect of poetry cannot be synthesized. In as much as there is no longer either place or inspiration for the lyric poet, there is also no substitute for the poet's experience. The hope for the synthesis of this experience is Baudelaire's tragic flaw.

In *La chambre double*, "The Double Room", Baudelaire criticizes the synthetic recreation of the paradise lost to the divinely inspired poet, the enigmatic man of *L'Étranger*. As in "*Le poème du Haschisch*" Baudelaire dismisses the artificial goddess (who appears pharmacologically) as in anyway capable of replacing the "*charmant et singulier*" [enchanted and singular] condition of the imagination (p.34 - tr. Ellen Fox). "Unforeseen as a phantom" [*imprévu que le fantôme*] and but

an intermittent visitation, the imagination is the only true paradise of the poet. Though the glimpses of this paradise are few, man's "taste for infinity" continues unabated. As Baudelaire notes, human beings will even turn to artificial means in a desperate attempt to approach the infinite.³⁹

*Ce seigneur visible de la nature visible (je parle de l'homme)
a donc voulu créer le Paradis par la pharmacie, par les
boissons fermentées, semblable à une maniaque qui
remplacerait des meubles solides et des jardins véritables par
des décors peints sur toile et montés sur châssis.*

The visible lord of the visible nature (I speak of man) has wanted, therefore, to create Paradise through pharmacy, through fermented beverages, in the likeness of a maniac who would replace solid furniture and real gardens with painted scenes on canvas and mounted on a frame.

In "*La chambre double*", the muse is a "benevolent demon" [*démon bienveillant*], and the vision merely resembles a dream. The opiate dream is a mere magnification of reality, a distorted version of the "natural dream" which is the man himself (and not the absurd, unexpected dream, what Baudelaire calls "the hieroglyphic dream"). The drug-induced dream is nothing miraculous. For the opiated poet, the memory of mortality emerges as if disgorged by a *pioche* from his stomach. Such a poet does not live poetry but flees from it. The poet who dreams through hashish inhabits an artificial paradise. The attempt to recollect Beauty in this way is a pipe dream, coming not from a poetic elevation of the soul but from an inhalation which clouds the mind as much as it clouds the world. The artificial paradise is a poor substitute. It provides only a mortal spirituality, and its just punishment is to be damned with *living*, as Baudelaire notes in the "Artificial

³⁹ BOC, p. 568; translation mine.

Paradise": "He will later appreciate the rotten fruits of his habit" [*Il appréciera plus tard les fruits pourris de son hygiène*].⁴⁰

There is another artificial paradise, the one created by the will to power, by "the lord of visible nature", and this is criticized in the prose poem, "*Une morte heroïque*," in which the reigning prince is "a real voluptuary" and "a real artist", so characterized because of his blithe indifference to men and to morals. "*Assez indifférent relativement aux hommes et à la morale, véritable artiste lui-même.*" The prince recognizes art well enough to destroy it. The court jester, *Fancioulle*, has been caught up in and arrested in a conspiracy against the ruler of a small kingdom. The prince is particularly inventive in his cruelty, limited in infamy only by "never having a stage vast enough for his genius" [*il n'eut jamais un théâtre assez vast pour son génie*], though perhaps he finally succeeds in the staging of *Fancioulle's* death. Word spreads that the prince has decided to pardon the conspirators, and in celebration of this clemency, there will be a grand spectacle starring *Fancioulle*. While there is some suspicion about this generous act, the superficial minds of the public believe that such clemency is merely indicative of the prince's notorious whimsy and a bit of vain hope in his mercy. The prose-poet's conspirational whisper about the Prince's tyranny now becomes more distinct, however, and the allegory of poetry's absence begins to take shape.

While the public believed anything was possible with this eccentric tyrant (even clemency), the prose-poet suspects something more sinister from this soul [*l'âme*] both curious and sick [*malade*]. "*Il était infiniment plus probable que le Prince voulait juger de la valeur des talents scéniques d'un homme condamné à mort*" [It was infinitely more probable that the Prince wanted to judge the value of

⁴⁰ BOC, p. 573.

theatrical talent in a man condemned to death.] The prose is itself a play which stages the condemnation of poetry by the heretical doctrine of utilitarianism. The poet-prince conducts an experiment. He wants to learn something from art, by willfully orchestrating its form. Although not precisely “a lesson”, the “physiological experiment” of the prince is a study, not of beauty but of the work of art -- or more precisely the work of the artist. The experiment is a success. The “bouffon” gives the performance of his life, for his life, in utter silence, for Fancioulle “excelled especially in silent parts or ones with few words” (trans). And it is too perfect.

A *comédien* condemned to death will indeed perform exquisitely, and the beauty of the performance will be absolutely captivating. (It will both captivate and alarm the prince for whom the appearance of art is the most terrifying and in whom it inspires tremendous jealousy.) Fancioulle exceeds the *entouré*, the limits of acting. As Baudelaire explains, a good actor is one who can still be distinguished beneath the character. Good acting is voluntary. Fancioulle was not a good actor; he was perfect, and such perfection is singular in its renunciation of all intent.

Si un comédien arrivait à être, relativement au personnage qu'il est chargé d'exprimer, ce que les meilleures statues de l'antiquité, miraculeusement animées, vivantes, marchantes, voyantes, seraient relativement à l'idée générale et confuse de beauté, ce serait là, sans doute, un cas singulier et tout à fait imprévu.

If an actor is to succeed at being, relative to the persona whom he has been commissioned to express, what the best statues of antiquity, miraculously animated, living, walking, seeing, and being relative to the general and confused idea of beauty, this would be then, without doubt, a singular case and all but completely unexpected.

The death of Fancioulle is indeed beautiful and heroic, a death which resembles the death of poetry. In the beautiful moment, Fancioulle is "*une parfaite idéalisation*" and the public, usually merely blasé and frivolous, comes under the domination of Art. Even the prose poet is mesmerized by the invisible aureole surrounding Fancioulle (visible only to the discerning poet who sees it and recalls the phenomena of the martyr). The prose poet cannot comprehend its origin but recognizes "something of the divine and supernatural" in these "most extravagant buffooneries."

Ma plume tremble et des larmes d'une émotion toujours présente me montent aux yeux pendant que je cherche à vous décrire cette inoubliable soirée. Fancioulle me prouvait, d'une manière péremptoire, irréfutable, que l'ivresse de l'Art est plus apte que tout autre à voiler les terreurs du gouffre; que le génie peut jouer la comédie au bord de la tombe avec une joie qui l'empêche de voir la tombe, perdu, comme il est, dans un paradis excluant toute idée de tombe et de destruction.

My pen trembles and tears of emotion forever present, coming to my eyes while I attempt to write this unforgettable evening. Fancioulle proved to me in a peremptory irrefutable manner, that the intoxication of art is more apt than any other to veil the terrors of the abyss, that genius can perform the comedy at the edge of the grave with a joy which prevents him from seeing the grave, lost as he is in a paradise, excluding all ideas of the grave and of destruction.

The prose poet too has learned from this cruel experiment, but it fills him with sadness, tears come to his eyes, and this moment haunts him continuously. This poetic death no longer resembles Fancioulle's death. The prose-poet has appropriated the Beauty of Fancioulle's death *for* poetry. The prose-poem has been "allegorized" in the traditional sense of being overlaid and overladen with meaning. The entire narrative corresponds to the state of poetry in the modern age. The prince is the utilitarian critic; Fancioulle the artist who loses his way in politics;

the crowd, the vulgar masses who do not recognize art even while it transports them; and the narrator, the prose-poet desperately trying to hold together the divine world of Art and Beauty with the material world of tyranny and indifference.

The utilitarian prince, too, has learned from his experiment, but he does not mourn; he laughs, with the laughter of a small child, and he triumphs over Art.⁴¹ The tyrannical prince of *Une morte heroïque* does not lack imagination. How else could he stage such an elaborate execution? But, despite his apparent caprice in this matter, the actions of the prince are not surprising. There are three artists in this poem. The first is the buffoon, *Fanciouille*, who is mute, a telling attribute. The artist closest to art is silent. There is the prince, a “veritable artist” by virtue of his indifference to both “men and morals”, and there is the prose-poet who cannot forget this story and shares it with us. *Fanciouille* does not only put the prince to shame. The silent court jester shows up the prose-poet as well. *Fanciouille* is the face of Art, not beautiful but comical. Art appears in this figure who becomes the “perfect idealisation”, “that which it was impossible not to suppose as living, possible, real” [*qu’il était impossible de ne pas supposer vivante, possible, réelle*]. The impossible is possible. It is there, “going, coming, laughing, crying and convulsing.” *Fanciouille* is symbolic, as promised, performing in one of those “fairy dramas . . . whose object is to represent symbolically the mystery of life” [*ces drames féériques dont l’objet est de représenter symboliquement le mystère de la vie.*]. The divine or supernatural appears in the clown. “*Fanciouille*, by what special grace I cannot say, introduced something of the divine and supernatural into his most extravagant buffooneries.” More accurately, this divinity possesses him. When his

⁴¹ In the figure of the prince, described as “real artist”, Baudelaire repeats his condemnation of the poet who uses art to instruct, to be useful.

performance is interrupted, the artist appears as if shocked out of a trance.

"Fancioulle awakened from his dream." And it is as if reality were too much to bear. He closes his eyes, opens them again, and they seem "inordinately large". He opens his mouth to breathe but can no longer be sustained by this mortal air, after breathing so deeply and fully of the divine.

This possession enraptures the entire assemblage, almost. Only the prince and the prose-poet remain somewhat sober in their enchantment. As for the rest,

*Chacun s'abandonna, sans inquiétude, aux voluptés
multipliés que donne la vue d'un chef-d'oeuvre d'art vivant.*

Everyone abandoned himself, without worry, to the multiple delights that the sight of a masterpiece of living art gives.

Joining with Fancioulle, the crowd forgets itself, forgets everything, even the Art appearing before them, and for the moment they live in Art's world. Such joy, like the joy of writing a poem just for the pleasure of writing a poem, no longer has a place. There must be a tyrant as well as a martyr, and as Benjamin argues in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, they are the Same.⁴² The prose-poet tells us that the prince's enthusiasm is not *sans mélange*, not without the mixture of something else. The reasons for this remain a mystery; only the results become evident. At the peak of Fancioulle's performance, the prince whispers to a page who vanishes and then reappears in a part of the hall from which a *sifflet aigu, prolongé*, a prolonged shrill hiss had interrupted Fancioulle in one of his best moments. For the prince this is perhaps nothing more than an empirical triumph. In the context of the poem, it is nothing more significant than the *dénouement* of the plot.

⁴² Cf. OGTD, p. 66f; UDT, p. 48f.

The martyr is not as obvious as the tyrant. Fancioulle is no martyr; he dies for nothing. Amongst the enchanted crowd there is another figure who keeps his distance, the prose-poet. He is as guilty as the prince for the sudden death of Art. The prose-poet's guilt is in remembering. By memorializing this heroic death of Art the prose-poet also destroys Art. The prose-poet envies Fancioulle's forgetting "in a paradise that excludes all thought of the grave and of destruction." This paradise is out of reach for the prose-poet. He can not avoid seeing the abyss. The prose-poet cannot forget poetry. He is something of a poet because he can see poetry where others see only a tawdry clown giving an astonishing performance. At the same time, Baudelaire feels obligated to that very audience, the audience to whom he addressed *Fleurs du Mal*, the "*Hypocrite Lecteur*". Baudelaire counts himself among the hypocrites. In the prose poems of *Spleen*, his hypocrisy is complete. He is a poet and not a poet. He writes in a language that bears the seal of poetry yet follows the conventions of prose. Such "hypocrisy" is the necessary condition for poetry in the modern world. That is Baudelaire's judgment.

As an attempt to remember the presence of Art, not as something irretrievably past but vibrant and voluptuous, Baudelaire attempts to write a poetic prose. He fails precisely because of his inability or his refusal to forget poetry. As an elegy in which poetry appears, at least as a figure to be mourned, *Spleen* is also an allegory of poetry itself, but it is here that it fails. Poetry does not appear because it has been appropriated by poetry that is also criticism. In the essay "What is the Use of Criticism?" Baudelaire had written that the best criticism may be a sonnet or an elegy. Such criticism would no longer be a sonnet or an elegy because as Baudelaire rightly noted, "criticism invariably borders on metaphysics". The "best criticism" would be a criticism that is not critical, that avoids metaphysics entirely. This "criticism" might open up a horizon wide enough to include poetry. Such criticism

itself can be neither poetic nor philosophical. It cannot be a basis for comparison or a direct critique. The best criticism is not “biased, impassioned, partisan” as Baudelaire claimed, but indifferent.⁴³

Because “*Une mort héroïque*” is a story and does not have much rhythm, it cannot achieve Beauty. Because it is poetic, it cannot have Truth as its goal. That is why perhaps Baudelaire wonders, in the letter to Houssaye, if what he has done can even be called something. In the study of the short story in Poe, Baudelaire seeks not only the distinction of prose but explores its promise for poetry. Baudelaire admires the short story for the “unity of impression” in which every word matters intensely. The short story, because its expressive medium is prose, circumvents the artifices and obstacles of rhythm. In the essay on Poe, Baudelaire still insists that rhythm is necessary to the development of the idea of Beauty” and that Beauty remains the “greatest and most noble aim of poetry.” By the time of “New Notes on Edgar Poe” (published 1957), Baudelaire had already begun to work on the prose poems of *Le Spleen*. Did he expect to succeed where Poe, whom he held in the highest esteem, had failed? As a collection of “prose poems,” *Le Spleen* is obviously Baudelaire’s heroic attempt to write a purely poetic short story, but the poems in prose also spring from the despair which has marked all such attempts to write a “purely poetic short story”.⁴⁴ Baudelaire as much as admits this in the parting words of his letter to Houssaye, which I repeat here.

Sitôt que j’eus commencé le travail, je m’aperçus que non seulement je restais bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle, mais encore que je faisais quelque chose (si cela peut

⁴³ Charles Baudelaire, “What is use of criticism?” in “The Salon of 1846” in BLC, p.37-9. Cf. BOC p.229.

⁴⁴ NNEP, p. 128.

s'appeler quelque chose) de singulièrement différent, accident dont tout autre que moi s'enorgueillirait sans doute, mais qui ne peut qu'humilier profondément un esprit qui regard comme le plus grand honneur du poète d'accomplir juste ce qu'il a projeté de faire.

As soon as I began the work, I noticed [of myself] that not only did I remain far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but also that I was doing something (if this can be called something) singularly different, an accident that any one other than me would glory in without doubt, but which can not but profoundly humiliate a spirit [*esprit*] which sees as the greatest honor of a poet the accomplishment of exactly what he has projected to do.⁴⁵

In Baudelaire's world, there is not even the *allegorical* possibility for the divine. The divine can no longer simply appear as something other than it is, as it once did in a statue or a temple or a poem.⁴⁶ Baudelaire may not be willing to admit that art is *irrevocably* of the past but he understands that art *is* always in the past, and in the least "beautiful" of places, and it goes largely unnoticed by the men with chimeras on their backs whose "worn and serious faces [show] not the least sign of despair."⁴⁷ Art has succumbed to "the hypocrisy, to the dullness, and to the baseness of human minds" which find art *useful*, and correlatively assign to it the

⁴⁵ BOC, p 146; Baudelaire *Paris Spleen* 1869, trans, Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. x, translation modified.

⁴⁶ Hegel had recognized this very problem, in both religion and in art: how to give a "face" (in the sense of a *prosopon*, not a human face) to Spirit. Hegel responded to this problem by staging an immediate mediation, an experiment which succeeded, and perhaps this is why art can never be the same after Hegel.

⁴⁷ "Chacun sa Chimère" [To each his chimera]. BOC, p.150.

qualities, the heresies of "of *passion*, of *truth*, and of *morality*".⁴⁸ For this loss, Baudelaire mourns.

Benjamin understood this about Baudelaire, and in the poet he found a kindred mournful *soul*.

Baudelaire envisaged readers to whom the reading of lyric poetry would present difficulties . . . It is strange to come across a lyric poet who addresses himself to this, the least rewarding type of audience. There is of course a ready explanation for it. Baudelaire was anxious to be understood; he dedicates his book to kindred spirits.⁴⁹

To be sure, Benjamin counts himself among those spirits. Like the *Angelus Novus* flying backwards through history, Benjamin illuminates the problem of Baudelaire and his place both within and outside of history.⁵⁰ By the time of Baudelaire, The Lyric had become a genre, and the lyric poet no longer a "poet per se . . . no longer a 'minstrel' as Lamartine still was" but "a representative of a genre." And yet Baudelaire became the last successful lyric poet, despite (not because of) being a lyric poet who came too late. Baudelaire sang in a period in which there was, according to Benjamin, "greater coolness of the public even toward the lyric poetry that had been handed down as part of its own cultural heritage."⁵¹

Baudelaire understood that lyric poetry was not heard by the "*hypocrite lecteur*" to whom he addressed *Fleurs du Mal*, except perhaps as a sort of ignored

⁴⁸ NNEP, p. 131.

⁴⁹ *Motifs*, p. 155.

⁵⁰ Benjamin neatly summarized this "historical" position: "[Baudelaire's] work cannot merely be categorized as historical, like anyone else's, but it intended to be so and understood itself as such" (*Motifs*, p. 162).

⁵¹ *Motifs*, p. 156.

murmur. Benjamin draws attention to Paul Valéry's insight on Baudelaire's position as a lyric poet.

The problem for Baudelaire was bound to be this: to become a great poet, yet neither Lamartine nor Hugo nor Musset. I do not claim that this ambition was a conscious one in Baudelaire; but it was bound to be present in him, it was his reason of state.⁵²

Benjamin explains how the odd and remarkable phrase, "reason of state" indicates Baudelaire's "mission": "the emancipation from experience."

Like Hegel, Baudelaire was attempting to draw the experience of the poet into human consciousness while respecting the universality of this experience (not *Erlebnis*, lived experience, but *Erfahrung*). Poetry thoroughly resists this sublation. On one level Baudelaire must know this. The indifference of poetry to the thought about poetry, to aesthetics in particular, appears regularly in his *oeuvre*. In the prose-poem *Le vieux Saltimbanque*, Baudelaire identifies the poet as an alienated figure barely existing at the margin of the marginal, at the all but forgotten end of a row of carnival booths. He can see the poet and decides eventually to reach towards him, but it is impossible to make contact. The narrator resolves to communicate silently with the poet by leaving a few coins which he hopes will express his intention.

Enfin, je venais de me résoudre à déposer en passant quelque argent sur une de ses planches, espérant qu'il devinerait mon intention.

Finally, I came to make up my mind to deposit in passing some money on one of the boards, hoping that he would divine my intention.

⁵² From "*Situation de Baudelaire*" quoted in Benjamin, *Motifs*, p. 162.

This very act once again firmly divides the prose-poet from the artist, just as the narrator of *Une morte héroïque* is profoundly separated from Fancioulle.

Baudelaire is reaching towards what should be the alienated version of himself. He cannot reach this object much less absorb it into his being. In the old clown, the poet recognizes himself, too late:

*du vieux poète sans amis, sans famille, sans enfants, dégradé
par sa misère et par l'ingratitude publique, et dans la baraque
de qui le monde oublieux ne veut pas entrer!*

The old poet without friends, without family, without children, degraded by his misery and by the ingratitude of the public, and in the shanty which the oblivious world does not want to enter.

Baudelaire attributes the sudden separation between the narrator and the clown to an inexplicable surge by the crowd, the public. Baudelaire remembers but the memory itself underscores the irreconcilable distance from poetry. After the surge of the crowd, the prose-poet makes no effort to return. It is already too late.

In another "motif" on Baudelaire, Benjamin again calls on Proust who noted that "Time is peculiarly chopped up in Baudelaire."⁵³ The "very few days" which open up in Baudelaire are significant because these days are not "marked by any experience." Benjamin notes that Baudelaire defined the "substance" of these significant days as *correspondances*, and acknowledges that Proust was the first to recognize the "ritual elements" of this distinctive "concept of experience". They are not connected with other days, but stand out from time."⁵⁴ These are not historical days but days which recollect within history what Benjamin calls "the data of

⁵³ Quoted in Benjamin, *Motifs*, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Benjamin, *Motifs*, p. 181.

prehistory", not marked by time but by the suspension of time characteristic of ritual. The gesture to ritual, however, is itself an analogy, constructed by Proust and elaborated by Benjamin. Baudelaire himself does not use the trappings of ritual but of *correspondances and analogies*.

Benjamin describes the motif of *correspondances* as Baudelaire's insight on the modern world.⁵⁵

Only by appropriating these [ritual] elements was Baudelaire able to fathom the full meaning of the breakdown which he, a modern man, was witnessing. Only in this way was he able to recognize in it the challenge meant for him alone, a challenge that he incorporated in *Fleurs du Mal*. If there really is a secret architecture in this book . . . the cycle of poems that opens the volume probably is devoted to something irretrievably lost.

In Baudelaire's poetry, something utterly other appears. In other words, Baudelaire's poetry is allegorical in the "modern" sense of the antinomial expression, but Benjamin strangely conceals the substance of this argument in an extended note on the semblance [*Schein*] of the beautiful.⁵⁶

Beauty can be defined in two ways: in its relationship to history and to nature. In both relationships the *semblance*, the problematic element in the beautiful, manifests itself.

⁵⁵ Benjamin believes that Baudelaire wants to protect these experiences "in crisis-proof form", and that this is only possible in the presentation in poetry of ritualized experiences. If this can be achieved, Benjamin argues, then the possibility for the beautiful as the "ritual value of art" has been protected as well. "What Baudelaire meant by *correspondances* may be described as an experience which seeks to establish itself in crisis-proof form. This is possible only within the realm of the ritual. If it transcends this realm, it presents itself as the beautiful. In the beautiful, the ritual value of art appears. *Motifs*, p. 181.

⁵⁶ Benjamin, *Motifs*, p. 198.

The semblance is problematic because the *Schein* is never what it appears to be -- it is the "mere appearance". *Schein* is necessarily allegorical, and it is with his preferred figure of the veil that Benjamin explicates Baudelaire's *correspondances* of the beautiful.

Beauty in its relationship to *nature* can be defined as that which 'remains true to its essential nature only when veiled'. The *correspondances* tell us what is meant by such a veil. We may call it, in a somewhat daring abbreviation, the 'reproducing aspect' of the work of art. The *correspondances* constitute the court of judgment before which the object of art is found to be a faithful reproduction -- which, to be sure, makes it entirely problematic. If one attempted to reproduce this *aporia* through language, one would define beauty as the object of experience in the state of resemblance.⁵⁷

In other words, *correspondance* is the law of the world in which poetry is "most real".⁵⁸ The *correspondance* is inherently allegorical not at all because it says one thing and means another, but because something appears there that cannot otherwise appear. This appearance is best called by its German name, *Schein*. Benjamin notes that the allegory of *correspondances* is repeated in Valéry's "formulation": "Beauty may require the servile imitation of what is *indefinable* in objects."⁵⁹ Beauty is the appearance, the *Schein* of what does not appear. Beauty is always an *image*, and in Baudelaire the image of Beauty appears in its absence.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, *Motifs*, n.13, p.199, emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Cf. "Puisque réalisme il y a": "La Poésie est ce qu'il y a plus réel, c'est ce qui n'est complètement vrai que dans un autre monde" (BOC, p. 448). See also, "Since it is a question of realism": "Poetry is what is most real, what is completely true only in another world" (BLC p. 88).

⁵⁹ In Benjamin, *Motifs*, n.13, p. 199.

From Poe, Baudelaire learned that “imagination is an almost divine faculty which perceives immediately . . . the inner and secret relations of things, the correspondences and analogies” (New Notes 127). Baudelaire understands that poetry needs to appear in its immediacy, and that such immediacy is only possible in mediation, in *correspondances* but not in lyric poetry. Although the faculty of the Imagination perceives “without philosophical methods” and has nothing to do with “moral sense”, these are both intimately related to the “taste” [*le Goût*] which reveals Beauty.⁶⁰ Baudelaire admires Poe because he writes so little poetry and is so at home in short stories, while Baudelaire’s own relation to poetry is too intimate, too much of a personal loss. It will take a poet who is completely indifferent to poetry to write a prose in which poetry can appear, not as a “poem in prose” but in a prose that is rightly called “une prose poétique”. In the space of literature opened up by Baudelaire, it is finally Kafka who writes poetic prose. It is writing without a familiar rhythm and without rhyme, and it is also, necessarily without music (which is what Baudelaire could not bear). Kafka expresses “the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of the daydream, the somersaults of consciousness.”⁶¹ Kafka’s works are pure prose and pure poetry, held together in their conflict (get Heid’s language here). In other words, Kafka’s works, at least the most beautiful ones, are *pure* allegory. Allegory does not mediate the divine *for* us, or even, as is remarkably achieved in Baudelaire, does not mediate the divine by mortalizing it. Pure allegory appears in the immediacy of mediation. The miracle of Kafka’s prose, the miracle of which Baudelaire could only dream, is that in pure prose, poetry itself

⁶⁰ NNEP, p. 132; BOC, p. 352.

⁶¹ Cf. Baudelaire’s letter to Houssaye in *Spleen*.

can appear. In poetic prose, poetry appears in an *almost* absolutely profane world, a world that has no place for poetry.

The prose poems are still poems, and in the nineteenth century, they have no place. Baudelaire recognizes the u-topia of the poetic dream, but he continues to dream.⁶²

La poésie, pour peu qu'on veuille descendre en soi-même, interroger son âme, rappeler ses souvenirs d'enthousiasme, n'a pas d'autre but qu'elle même; elle ne peut pas en avoir d'autre, et aucun poème ne sera si grand, si noble, si véritablement digne du nom de poème, que celui qui aura été écrit uniquement pour la plaisir d'écrire un poème.

Poetry, if only one is willing to seek to descend into himself, to question his soul, to recall his memories of enthusiasm, has no other goal than itself; it cannot have any other, and no poem will be so great, so noble, so truly worthy of the name poetry as that which will have been written solely for the pleasure of writing a poem.

Baudelaire's poetry emerges from this mournful descent towards lyric poetry. As with the memory of Fancioulle, it is the "sudden depression" that the prose poet cannot shake, the despair into which he descends in order to write a poem written only for the mournful pleasure of writing a poem without the obstacles of verse rhythm but also without its Beauty.

Baudelaire again approaches the dream of a poetic prose in "*Le vieux Saltimbanque*". The figure for the artist, "*le vieil homme de lettres*" is again a clown who is out of place, not among the serious matters of conspirators but both within and outside of the "frenetic outbursts of vitality." There is nothing artistic about this figure whose motley rags reflect his poverty rather than his comic art.

⁶² BLC, p. 131, modified; BOC, p. 352.

This artist does not laugh or cry; he does not even move. He does not sing and does not solicit. *"Il était muet et immobile. Il avait renoncé, il avait abdiqué. Sa destinée était faite."* Baudelaire has already gone farther than Kafka would ever go. He has attended to this figure, "at the extreme end of the row of booths" in a "cabin more miserable than that of the lowest savage." If the story ended here, it might come closer to poetic prose, but Baudelaire cannot refrain from moralizing, a poetic moralizing but nonetheless as heretical as the utilitarianism of the hypocritical, dull, and base minds of the public. First, there is pity.⁶³ The poet confesses, "I feared to humiliate him" but had "finally decided to leave some money on the platform". The cool world will not even allow this much sentiment. "[A] sudden surge of the crowd, caused by I know not what disturbance, swept me away from him." And then, alas, there is recognition. Baudelaire recognizes the pastness of the poet, the estrangement of art, but he will not admit defeat. The world forgets but the poet recognizes his own image, and art lives so long as there is one who recognizes it, the "moi" of *"Le mort heroïque"* to whom Fancioulle's halo can be seen, the man in the crowd who notices the miserable artist, the lover who sees the poor and finds Beauty in their eyes. For Baudelaire, poetry is the real world, and that is why coarse reality is always the theme in his poetry. In the essay, *"Since it is a question of realism"*, Baudelaire had cryptically written: *"La Poésie est ce qu'il y a plus réel, c'est*

⁶³ This pity is conspicuously absent from the prose poem, *"Les yeux des pauvres"*. The worthy man with a babe in arms and a young son at his side happens to be dressed in rags, and the prose poet sees Beauty reflected variously in these three sets of eyes. He does not pity them; he admires them, and even guards them jealously from his lover (with whom he has just promised to have every thought in common, which was a dream, after all, because thought is incommunicable). Nor is there the indifference condemned in that same poem, that which the prose poet "hates today" in his lover.

ce qui n'est complètement vrai que dans un autre monde."⁶⁴ [Poetry is what is most real, it is completely true only in *an other world*.] Where is this other world? It is to be found most certainly in the poetry of Baudelaire. Poetry is to be found in the coarse materiality of life, not in its vibrancy but in its one moment of truth: the moment at which human being is confronted with its finitude. In *La chambre double*, this single poetic moment is found in the penultimate stanza.

*Il n'ya qu'une second dans la vie humaine qui ait mission
d'annoncer une bonne nouvelle, la bonne nouvelle qui cause
à chacun une inexplicable peur.*

There is but one second in human life which has the mission of announcing a good news, the *good news* which causes in each one an inexplicable fear.

Contraposed to the tyranny of Time, the curse of mortal existence, no different for humans than for beasts of burden, *Vis donc, damné!*" [Live then, damned!], this one second is beautiful, it is poetry's *bonne nouvelle*, its "Good News".⁶⁵ That which strikes terror in the hearts of most people is the moment of desire for the poet, a moment no longer tormented by the absence of poetry but glorified in poetry's absolute immediacy "precisely what the poet has set out to do".

⁶⁴ BOC, p. 448; BLC, p. 88.

⁶⁵ The reference to Christ's resurrection, the "good news", is unmistakable, but it is inverted. The good news is not eternal life but the singular moment of death.

CHAPTER SIX

Allegory Without a Face

In the land of the Phaiakians, a stranger listens passionately to the rhapsode who sings of the adventures of Odysseus. The crowd gathered in the agora is entranced, but no one so much as the stranger who draws his cloak over his head and remains concealed as he weeps like a woman mourning her husband. The tears Odysseus sheds go unnoticed by the entire assemblage, except for the King Alkinoös, who finally interrupts the singing so that the stranger can identify himself.¹ Book IX begins with Odysseus coming out of his concealment, not merely the concealment of his tears but of his name. The unconcealment is total, nothing held back or hidden. Heidegger invokes this scene as a “point[ing] toward the event [*das Ereignis*]” in reading Heraclitus’ fragment B-16,² Heidegger’s reading of Homer is unusual but does attend to something usually forgotten in this scene. Odysseus is both present and absent, unconcealed in the song of Demodocus and concealed in the sea-purple mantle drawn over his head; concealed in the song of Demodocus and unconcealed beneath the mantle. Arguing that the Greek for this act of concealment is not transitive (“he concealed his tears”) but intransitive (“he remained concealed”), Heidegger shifts the emphasis of this scene from an encounter between subjects to a singular state of being.

¹ See *Odyssey*, Book VIII 521ff, and also the beginning of Book VIII, when Odysseus first weeps and remains concealed, except from the sight of Alkinoös who stops the singing and proposes sporting competition in a quiet effort to comfort his unknown guest. Citations are from the translation by Richmond Latimore (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

² Martin Heidegger, “Aletheia (Heraclitus Fragment B-16)” in *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984), p. 106.

Accordingly the Greek experience in the case of Odysseus does not proceed from the premise that the guests present are represented as subjects who in their subjective behavior fail to grasp weeping Odysseus as an object of their perception. On the contrary, what governs the Greek experience is a concealment surrounding the one in tears, a concealment which isolates him from the others.³

Heidegger invokes this epic scene in order to show how "concealment here defines the way in which a man *should* be present among others."⁴

As a way of being present among other beings, this defining concealment is necessarily also an unconcealment. Heidegger suggests a different way to understand presence and absence. To be present in concealment is to be unconcealed in concealment. The concealment is unconcealed; the absent is present. In this moment in Book VIII of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus *is* present among other beings in an extraordinary way. In the poem, Odysseus in concealment is first open to himself, to shedding tears during the singing of his resemblance. Homer never offers an explanation for the hero's uncontrollable tears but provides a simile for them.

As a woman weeps, lying over the body of her dear husband, who fell fighting for her city and people as he tried to beat off the pitiless day from city and children; she sees him dying and gasping for breath, and winding her body about his she cries high and shrill, while the men behind her, hitting her with their spear butts on the back and the shoulders, force her up and lead her away into slavery, to have hard work and sorrow, and her cheeks are

³ *ibid.*, p. 107. Heidegger does not mention the mist with which Athene had concealed Odysseus on his entering the kingdom, but it supports his reading.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.106, emphasis added.

wracked with pitiful weeping. Such were the pitiful tears
Odysseus shed from under his brows.⁵

Heidegger moves on without adequately reading the figure of Odysseus, without even mentioning the epic simile which draws together the mighty warrior and the vanquished woman. The first story Odysseus tells after revealing his name is of the sack of Ismaros and its inhabitants, the Kikonians. "I sacked their city and killed their people, and out of their city taking their wives and many possessions, we shared them out."⁶ The tears of concealment are here unconcealed. The scene Odysseus speaks is the scene of the simile, but Odysseus has already forgotten his own concealment. There is no remorse in his account, only regret that his men would not follow his advice "for the light foot and escaping."⁷ Indeed, Heidegger's next etymological argument is the "correct translation" of forgetting which includes a "reference to 'remaining concealed'."⁸ Heidegger accuses modern man of "forget[ting] the essence of forgetting."⁹ The essence of forgetting is oblivion, and it is oblivion from which this "other way of being" emerges. The attention to oblivion, to concealment, reverses the subjective thinking of being. In the fragment, Heraclitus asks, "how could anyone remain concealed before that which

⁵ *Odyssey*, Book VIII, l.521-532.

⁶ *ibid.*, Book IX, l.41-2.

⁷ *ibid.*, l.43.

⁸ The term "lath" appears in both the word for concealment and unconcealment, and the word for forgetting. Perhaps coincidentally, Odysseus' next adventure in Book IX is in the land of the lotus eaters where he has to drag his weeping men back to the ships because they had forgotten the way home.

⁹ Heidegger, *Aletheia*, p. 108.

never sets?" The "anyone" of this question is not "the subject in relation to which something else remains concealed,"¹⁰ that is, not a subject opposed to an object (or even itself as object -- this is why Odysseus does not recognize himself.) Rather, Heidegger says the "anyone" is one "who comes into question with respect to the possibility of his own remaining concealed."¹¹ The Odysseus weeping in concealment is a vestige of this Heraclitan "anyone".¹² The Odysseus who throws off his mantle and names himself has forgotten his concealment -- the concealment has been concealed, its concealment forgotten.

By thinking the concealment of Odysseus in the epic poem together with the obscure thought of Heraclitus in fragment B-16, Heidegger challenges "our modern habits of representation" in which human beings regard themselves as "carriers -- or even creators -- of unconcealment."¹³ Hegel's *Phenomenology* proceeds on precisely that principle, and this is typical of the modern pursuit of knowledge. Heraclitus, according to Heidegger, "thinks the reverse". The question remaining in the fragment "ponders the relation of man to 'the never-setting' and thinks human being from this relation."¹⁴ This 'never-setting' is a not-going-into-concealment. Thus, in the fragment that says, "How can one remain concealed before that which never sets?" Heidegger locates the realm of *unconcealment*. The answer to the

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 109.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Directly after the lotus eaters in the land of forgetting, Odysseus takes the name "No one" in the land of the Cyclops.

¹³ Heidegger, *Alētheia*, p. 109.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

question is *phusis*, for *phusis* consists in the "rising [out of concealment] and self-concealing lean[ing] toward each other."¹⁵ This is Heidegger's attempt to think other than the subject-object dialectic, to think the belonging-together of subject and object as arising "from something that first imparts their nature to both . . . and hence is prior to the realm of their reciprocity."¹⁶ It is a difficult thought, and the argument is tortured as a consequence. Heidegger turned to poetry in his thinking, to lyric and occasionally to epic, but he comes too late for poetry. The thought that is other than subjectivity can only be thought through literature, not through song but through writing.

The place of Odysseus' concealment is the *agora*, the place of assembly, and the scene from which he remains concealed is the singing of Demodokos. As the poet sings, Odysseus weeps silently, "unnoticed by all the others." In the *agora*, Odysseus is present and absent, sung and silent. Odysseus is a figure of allegory, not the allegory of the romantics or of hermeneutics, but the allegory that is the structure of appearance, the structure of antinomy, and the way in which the subject and object can be thought more primordially. Allegory is the structure of what Heidegger has identified as *phusis*. The etymological roots of allegory are probably the privative prefix *allos*, "other than", and the verb *agoreien*, "to speak in the agora" where *agora* means the marketplace or the assembly, so more generally, "to speak in public." *Allegoreien* means to speak other than one speaks in public. Poetry was surely spoken in public places but that is not the same as to say that to speak poetry is to speak just as one speaks in public discourse. Jon Whitman's translation of the compound "allos-agoreien" follows the traditional modern

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.103.

definition of allegory as to say other than [in the agora].¹⁷ He concludes, uncontroversially, that allegory is both a secret and an elite language. However, an even more literal translation would be “other than to speak [in the agora]” and leads to a different definition of allegory: that allegory is other than to speak. This etymology suggests that allegory does not depend on language at all, but rather, allegory is the silence within language. Allegory directs us to the structure of appearance in language: what appears there and what does not appear.

The possibility that allegory is not simply a trope and not merely a rhetorical structure of appearance but *the* structure of appearance gains much of its credibility in the work of Kafka. In most Kafka stories there is a thing or a person, something tangible, upon which to base the inexplicable events which unfold, even if that thing remains itself inexplicable. The castle never appears but still serves as an ominous and omnipresent figure to which one can attribute the perverse actions of people and institutions. In *The Trial*, the image of the law is abstract, but in the church, even the abstraction of the law is figured by means of a parable, what might be called a “narrative emblem”. In the posthumous and supposedly unfinished story “The Burrow”, however, Kafka writes an image without a figure. Kafka claimed that the specific identity of creatures, like the insect in *Metamorphosis*, should remain undetermined. It is commonly assumed that the insect is a cockroach, and this already imparts a negative value to the metamorphosis, misleading the reader into associations with scavenging and dark corners. Such associations are valid enough in Kafka (they are everywhere) but they are not negative evaluations. Nor are they positive ones. They are indifferent. Sometimes

¹⁷ Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987. See Appendix I: “On the History of the Term Allegory”.

the indifference takes the form of machines or machine-like characters. In the story "In the Penal Colony", for instance, it seems highly doubtful that '*das Apparat*' ever worked. The fond memory of the old *Kommandant* is equally suspect.

Kafka gives us memories of events that have not happened and images of things that do not exist. And yet, as Benjamin circumscribes, something in Kafka presents itself to us as something we intuitively understand. In an attempt to grasp that understanding, the work of Kafka is objectified. It becomes other to us, in order that we may interpret it, and once we have interpreted the work, it becomes a reflection of ourselves, and very pleased we try to explain what the work means. Unfortunately, Kafka never permits that sort of smug satisfaction. Every reading of Kafka is interrupted by Kafka. It is hopeless. Indeed, that is why Benjamin finds in Kafka a kindred spirit, repeating as a mantra, "There is an infinite amount of hope, but not for us."¹⁸ Benjamin wrote little of Kafka, but he offers one guiding thought in a letter to Gerhard Scholem. "To do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity and its peculiar beauty one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the purity and beauty of a failure . . . There is nothing more memorable than the fervor with which Kafka emphasized this failure."¹⁹ Kafka's failure cannot be spoken, but it is relative. It is a failure relative to the metaphysics of subjectivity, that is, in terms of that law, a miserable failure. The relativity of the failure is irrelative. It does not relate to the metaphysics which judges it, and it is this irrelativity which gives this failure its strength, or as Benjamin puts it, its radiance.

¹⁸ This phrasing appears in the letter to Scholem, published as "Some Reflections on Kafka" in *Illuminations*, p. 144. A similar sentence concludes Benjamin's essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*.

¹⁹ Benjamin, *Illum.*, p. 145.

There are memories in Kafka but nothing is recollected in them. They are always and irretrievably of the past. The memory in Kafka is something we no longer remember but to which as human beings we are inclined. It is the memory of community. That we no longer remember community might seem a shocking statement, but I would not be the first to make it. Jean-Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community* repeats this statement, already announced rather emphatically by Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and echoed in works of literature and philosophy which circumnavigate the profound mourning, some call it negativity, which pervades modern existence. This mourning is echoed in the hope of Kafka's failure. In the failure of hope, the hope of failure is "the source of Kafka's radiant serenity."²⁰ Kafka has remembered solitude, the singular aspect which is not subject to subjectivity. This is not the solitude of *an* individual but of a singular being who has the capacity to be *with* other begins and to incline towards them without identifying with them and without differentiating itself from them (which is the same thing).

Nancy has theorized the difference between the individual and the singular being, the difference which must be remembered before any thought of community can commence. Whereas the singular being can incline towards an other (Nancy calls this inclination the *clinamen*), the individual can only be immanent with others, and immanence precludes community. The immanent individual is "the absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and certainty," the absolute subject.

The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all . . . To be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone -- and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 144.

the absolute. It implicates it in a relation that it refuses and precludes by its essence.²¹

Community is the complement to the absolute individual, or the self-certain subject. Community *is* everything that the Subject lacks. Conversely, as Nancy acutely points out, “the question of community is markedly absent from the metaphysics of the subject.”²² The absence of the question has been tacitly interpreted as indicative of its superfluousness. The question does not need to be asked for it is “self-evident” that in identity there is community. This is a ruse, a convenient misrepresentation of community as identity. The Subject is an immanent being in a relation of immanence to other immanent beings, all of whom are always alone. This loneliness arises from a fundamental lack, an absence, which interrupts the professed absolution of the Subject. Kafka writes this absence, this silence within the Subject. It is a failure because it remains absent – and that is its success.

Kafka’s world is never immanent. The events are always past, almost as if the pages on which they are inscribed should be yellowed and crumbling with age. Consequently, Kafka’s works inspire a sense of preservation. His friend Max Brod could not follow Kafka’s orders to destroy most of what he had written, and he had told the writer as much. That is probably as Kafka would have written it in a story. Kafka never advocated the triumph of the individual will. Nancy opposes community to the metaphysics of the subject because it is a metaphysics of “being without relation”. In Kafka, being is relation, but it is also being without hope,

²¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, tr. Peter Connor, et al. (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1991), p. 3-4.

²² *ibid.*, p. 4.

because hope is also willful. There is despair in Kafka as there is in Baudelaire, not because of a lack of hope but because of an inability to speak this lack, this absence, an inability or a refusal. It is a dream that if one could speak it, if one could say the magic word "Community" or "Poetry", it would appear. It is the Humanist dream, and the Heideggerian dream, of a golden age, a time when poetically man dwelled on the earth. At that time, there would have been community. Baudelaire kept trying to find the magic word. Kafka understood that there were no words, no figures, no totality which would ever emerge, not even in a fantasy world like that of Goethe's *Märchen*.

There is no face for absence, for nonbeing, but nonbeing must appear for there to be Being as such, Being which embraces all that is and all that is not. This is the thought with which Heidegger struggles in thinking the fragment from Heraclitus. Concealment, or absence, is the basis upon which presence (unconcealment) is thought, and as long as it is forgotten, Being cannot be thought. Being must be thought in the thinking together of concealment and of unconcealment as appearance. Kafka gives us a way to think the appearance of absence. Kafka had once written "All I am is literature, and I am not willing to be anything else."²³ It is perhaps the truest thing he ever wrote, and the least vain (in one not prone to vanity). Kafka is exposed in his work, not Kafka the individual but Kafka the singularity. In 1920, four years before his death, Kafka's companion Milena Jesenska wrote to Max Brod:

Franz cannot live . . . He is absolutely incapable of living,
just as he is incapable of getting drunk. He possesses not

²³ Quoted in Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, tr. Charlotte Mandell, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 1995), p.12.

the slightest refuge. For that reason he is exposed to all those things against which we are protected.²⁴

This singularity, this *exposure* to the elements of life, this is what makes Kafka a figure for "community": Kafka is not protected by the absolution of subjectivity.

Nancy notes, "Yet there is no theory, ethics, politics, or metaphysics of the individual that is capable of envisaging this *clinamen*, the declination or decline of the individual within the community."²⁵ To the complement of this declined being, the individual, Nancy gives the name "singularity." In the singular being capable of inclination Nancy offers hope, the hope of a community which he calls "literary communism". He uses the qualifier "literary" because literature or writing, *écriture*, is the voice which interrupts the myths of absolution, because literature "gives voice to the common", a voice without a body, a voice that does not say anything.

Since being-in-common *is* nowhere, and does not subsist in a mythic space that could be revealed to us, literature does not give it a voice: rather it is being-in-common that *is* literary (or scriptuary).²⁶

When Kafka claims "all that I am is literature", it is a claim for being-in-common, and he clings to it as Gregor clings to the picture of the woman in a fur coat. This community is only to be found in literature, in writing. The literary work gestures towards community, more emphatically (and more frantically perhaps) than any

²⁴ Quoted in John Updike, "Foreword" in *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. xvii.

²⁵ Nancy, p. 4.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 64.

political, ethical, or metaphysical work is capable of doing. The literary work always fails to deliver the community it has promised.

Nancy does not mention Kafka, but the term “literary communism” is appropriate. Benjamin articulates Kafka’s “literary communism” in slightly different terms. In Kafka, Benjamin hears tradition, the tradition of truth and wisdom (“the epic side of truth”), a tradition which has decayed into ruin, but from the ruins an other wisdom emerges. Benjamin calls it “transmissibility” or the “haggadic element” of truth, a transmission or a commentary without an object. Benjamin notes that Kafka’s works are parabolic, but “it is their misery and their beauty that they had to become *more* than parables,” or perhaps less.²⁷ Kafka’s stories are not parables of something. Even a rather insightful effort, like Deleuze and Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*,²⁸ ends up appropriating Kafka, focusing on the individual in Kafka and forgetting the singularity which draws us toward these works, not only Kafka’s singularity but the singularity of his figures (the same singularity). Inclining towards us, we can never touch them. If we were to touch the hunger artist, he would disintegrate in our grasp. If we were to listen for Josephine’s piping song, we would be deafened by silence. If we were so much as to approach the burrower, it would surely die of shock. We cannot touch, but we can incline ourselves towards this personified absence.

Of all his writings, Kafka believed only six worthy of preserving, although equally deserving of destruction. He offered no explanation. The works he named were: “The Judgment”, “The Stoker”, *Metamorphosis*, “In the Penal Colony”, “A

²⁷ Illum., p. 143-4.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, tr. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1986).

Country Doctor", and "The Hunger Artist". These are not stories *about* community. There is only the hope for a being-in-common. Community does not, has not, will not exist. It is a myth, and literature interrupts it. This is Nancy's argument. Community is a symbolic concept of totality; therefore, allegory will always emerge from its depths and disrupt this symbolic intention. Being-in-common must be thought other than *as* community. As Nancy suggests, that thinking is literary. The *clinamen* is fundamental to Being, and a place must be cleared for it. In Blanchot's words, this is *l'espace littéraire*, the literary space. Nancy writes, in common with Blanchot, and Bataille, and Levinas, and others,

'Literature' . . . would designate that singular ontological quality that *gives* being *in* common; that does not hold it in reserve, before or after community, as an essence of man, of God or of the State achieving its fulfillment in communion, but that rather makes for a being that *is* only when shared *in common*, or rather whose quality of being, whose nature and structure are shared (or exposed).²⁹

The "literary world" designates a distinct ontological existence. It is the ontology of the image, constituted by what Levinas has described as "an ambiguous commerce with reality" and has attributed to allegory. Nancy locates this "other world" in the rupture of the absolute, the rupture which breaks apart and fragments the myth of totality. He admits that this rupture is analogous, perhaps even identical to the ontological difference in Heidegger.³⁰ By offering this analogy, Nancy responds to the phenomenological exigency of the image. Literature is a *phantasma*, that which appears without showing itself because it cannot otherwise appear.

²⁹ Nancy, p. 64.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.6.

Unavoidably, allegory is the structure of literature, and as the structure of literature it is the structure of our only hope for being-in-common.

The inclination, the *clinamen* has the structure of allegory in which two distinct singularities can be held together, maintained in the between of being-with one another. The allegorical structure of this inclination will in turn reveal something about allegory, something that cannot be revealed in anything other than literature, or more generously, writing. Allegory is subject to its own exigency. It cannot appear other than allegorically, in something that it is not but with which it shares a limit. Allegory is not literature but it appears in literature and especially in figures which personify literature. Kafka is one such figure, but Kafka is too close and too complicated because he is also a human being. The figures in Kafka's work are more illuminating of this difference.

The distance of a figure like the hunger artist opens a wider exposure of the concealment from which being-in-common can emerge. These figures are always solitary, singular, and always reaching, inclining towards others, and never are they understood. They are barely remembered.

In den letzten Jahrzehnten ist das Interesse an Hungerkünstlern sehr zurückgegangen. Während es sich früher gut lohnte, große derartige Vorstellungen in eigener Regie zu veranstalten, ist dies heute völlig unmöglich. Es waren andere Zeiten.

During the last decades, the interest in hunger artists has very much receded. During the earlier it paid very well to stage, the great performances under one's own management; today this is perfectly impossible. It was other times.³¹

³¹ Franz Kafka: *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1970), (hereafter "Kafka"): p. 163. I have translated the last sentence with an awkward literality. It could also read, "It was different times." The Muir translation

The joke of the story is that there never was a time in which hunger artists thrived. Hunger artists can not *thrive*. Instead of nostalgia, we come into an awareness that this art is gone by, not merely a thing of the past but irrevocably and inexplicably distanced from the artist as much as from the *Zuschauern*, the audience or witnesses to that art. What then is the art of hunger? In German, there are two verbs for fasting: *fasten* and *hungern*. Kafka consistently chooses *hungern*. The hunger artist hungers, but hungers for what? Not for us, the readers and interpreters of his story. Not for the crowd, the witnesses, who "later thought back on such scenes" and "often had no understanding."³² It is the Impresario who hunts, dragging the hunger artist who will never willingly [*freiwillig*] leave his cage all over Europe. Every time the Impresario must make a big show of coming to the cage and gently grasping the hunger artist by the waist to help him up, "*nicht ohne ihn im geheimen ein wenig zu shütteln*" - not without shaking him a little in secret. "*Der Impresario . . . faßte den Hungerkünstler um die dünne Taille.*"³³ In English, "the Impresario grasped the hunger artist around the emaciated waist." In German, *faßte*, the imperfect conjugated verb *fassen* - to grasp, is indistinguishable in sound from the conjugated form of the verb *fasten*, to fast. The homonymity perhaps gestures to the difference between fasting and hungering. Fasting is an intentional act, a grasping. One *hungers* without intent, or despite intent. One hungers for no one, for no purpose. Fasts are broken; hunger is only momentarily

adequately reads: "We live in a different world now." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, (New York: Schocken, 1971), (hereafter "Stories"), p. 268.

³² "*Wenn die Zeugen solcher Szenen ein paar Jahre später daran zurückdachten, wurden sie sich oft selbst unverständlich*" (Kafka 168). *Stories*, p. 273.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 166; 271.

relieved - that is the nature of hunger, it always threatens to return. Fasts are for show and the *faßte* of the Impresario is part of the show. But the hunger artist does not act. The hunger artist simply hungers, both the easiest and most difficult thing in the world. One fasts in the face of desire; one hungers in the face of absence.

What is a hunger artist? Only and always a figure in a literary text. There is no substance to the hunger artist. He rises from an absence, a blank page which is itself a trope for the groundless ground of all literature. All that we read here is a construction, a fiction, about an event that never happened and a figure who never existed. We always already know this about literature but a supreme work of fiction makes us forget. The book becomes real for us, that is unless we should foolishly try to eat it, and then we would face reality and it would be bitter and pasty and in any case it would not satisfy our hunger. We generally do not eat books, but we say we devour them. In Medieval learned society, clerics "ruminated" on books and "digested" them. But what kind of sustenance do books provide? What hunger do books satisfy? Or is it rather that books make us hungry? Books, literature, poetry: they demand to be devoured and then deny satisfaction. With the figure of a hunger artist, the starving artist comes to mind, but why do artists starve? Because no one will buy their work, because art is useless, underappreciated, and because art needs a public, and that public is now disaffectionate towards art. These are not answers but effects. The hunger artist confesses that he simply had never found anything good to eat. Not a very useful answer. An artist can always find something to eat, can always find some odd job to supply the next few meals. But an artist prefers not to. Despite the extreme odds against success, despite the mixed emotions about succeeding, the artist would rather starve than do something other than art. The artist cannot find anything desirable to eat because the artist has no desire, no choice in the matter.

The story of the hunger artist is entirely of the past. We know this past only by way of an account of the neglected hunger artist, mourning for a past he remembers and a future he hopelessly acknowledges. As we read this story, despite its pervasive pastness, the story of the hunger artist becomes present, but only as we read. Once we reflect, think about this story, look up from the page, the hunger artist recedes. This pastness (which is also a "future date") poses the only threat to the hunger artist. If he "acts up" - the Impresario brings out . . . photographs. Images of the hunger artist at the forced end of his 40-day fast. Why are these photographs such a threat? In the mind of the hunger artist we hear, "*Was die Folge der Vorzeitigen Beendigung des Hungerns war, stellte man hier als die Ursache dar!*."³⁴ What was a consequence of the premature -- literally, "before timeness" of the termination of hungering, stood there [*darstellen*] as the cause or the motive. The photographs represent the hunger artist when he is forced to will himself to eat. The end of the fast is proleptically represented as the cause of his present hunger. For the artist, this is all out of joint. The hunger artist does not fast in order to break the fast. He fasts because he fasts, or perhaps because he never found anything he desired to eat, so really, he hungers because he hungers. The hunger artist rebels only against the representation [*Darstellung*] of his hungering, notably in the photographs but even in the suggestion that his hungering could be a cause for something, or that his hunger could have an end. He rattles the bars of his cage like an animal when someone suggests that his *Traurigkeit* - his sadness - truly-appears [*wahrscheinlich*] to come from hungering. At such times, the hunger artist springs up like a threatened animal. From a store of energy unfathomable for a person in his condition, he leaps up to protest. It is a primal leap, an *Ursprung*, a

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 168; cf. p. 273.

leap from an unknowable origin, an *Abgrund*. The hunger artist demands truth but is countered only by yet a stronger appearance [*Erscheinung*] of truth-appearance against which he is defenseless: by the photograph and also, we should not forget, by the appearance of the story itself.

The hunger artist was his own *Zuschauer*, the only spectator who could verify the purity of the hungering. But he was always dissatisfied with his performance because he did not fully perform hunger. Performance is precisely what he avoids, but performance sustains him. Occasionally he performs: he sticks his arms out to be touched; he sings to prove he is not eating; he entertains the night watchers with a big breakfast, but he knows, this is all pretense. It is all part of the show, the part that he can control which is, in fact, a woefully small part. He does not need to be touched or to sing or to have watchers. The hunger artist had a secret: hungering was easy. *Es war die leichteste Sache von der Welt*. ["It was the easiest thing in the world."]³⁵ and also, though he never admits this, hunger was easy and indifferent. The opinion of the spectators is unimportant, although occasionally he forgets this. And he even gets caught up in it.

Warum wollte man ihn des Ruhmes berauben, weiter zu hungern nicht nur der größte Hungerkünstler aller Zeiten zu werden. . . aber auch noch sich selbst zu übertreffen bis ins Unbegreifliche.

Why did they want to rob him of the glory to hunger longer not only to become the greatest hunger artist of all time. . . but also himself to step over his own record into the unconceivable [or the ungraspable].³⁶

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 165; p. 270.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 166; (translation mine) cf. p. 271.

The public will not allow him to step there, into the unknowable. He cannot step there and have his public too. He forgets, until the very end, that he had always already stepped there, over into the ungraspable -- except for the moments he was forced into the frame of performance.

Dann also am vierzigsten Tage wurden die Tür des mit Blumen umkränzten Käfigs geöffnet, eine begeisterte Zuschauerschaft erfüllte das Amphitheater, eine Militärkapelle spielte, zwei Ärzte betrat den Käfig, um die nötigen Messungen am Hungerkünstler vorzunehmen, durch ein Megaphon wurden die Resultate dem Saale verkündet, und schließlich kamen zwei junge Damen, glücklich darüber, daß gerade sie ausgelost worden waren, und wollten den Hungerkünstler aus dem Käfig ein paar Stufen hinabführen, wo auf einem kleinen Tischchen eine sorgfältig ausgewählte Krakenmahlzeit serviert war.

So on the fortieth day the flower-bedecked cage was opened, enthusiastic spectators filled the hall, a military band played, two doctors entered the cage to measure the results of the fast [as if such results could be measured], which were announced through a megaphone, and finally two young ladies appeared, blissful at having been selected for the honor, to help the hunger artist down the few steps leading to a small table on which was spread a carefully chosen invalid repast.³⁷

In the face of this, the hunger artist refuses to stand. He resists the enframing of his hungering -- as if it were something that could be framed by a camera, set off by beautiful women and flowers, music and dramatization.

The hunger artist looks out at this enframing and pulls it apart. He notes that the public pretends to admire him, but they have no patience for his art. He could hunger longer -- why must the hunger of the public for a spectacle be satisfied? The

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 166; p. 270-1.

meal provokes nausea - which he himself pretends not to have in deference to the ladies, even though their apparent friendliness and beneficence are in reality disgust and cruelty. When the hunger artist prefers not to participate, he is forgotten. The Impresario lifts him into position and the hunger artist is gone, a thing of the past.

Nun duldete der Hungerkünstler alles; der Kopf lag auf der Brust, es war, als sei er hingerollt und halte sich dort unerklärlich; der Leib war ausgehöhlt; die Beine drückten sich im Selbsterhaltungstrieb fest in den Knien aneinander, scharrten aber doch den Boden, so, als sei es nicht der wirkliche, den wirklichen suchten sie erst; und die ganze, allerdings sehr kleine Last des Körpers lag auf einer der Damen, welche hilfesuchend, mit fliegendem Atem.

The artist now submitted completely; his head lolled on his breast as if it had landed there by chance; his body [Leib/life] was hollowed out; his legs in a spasm of self-preservation clung close together at the knees, yet scraped on the ground as if it were not really solid ground; and the whole weight of his body, a featherweight after all, relapsed onto one of the ladies.³⁸

At this point, the hunger artist matters little. The performance is a smashing success with *a toast to the spectators* for such a great performance. It is all part of the performance, the *Gesehenen*, the seen-ness, and only the hunger artist is *unzufrieden*, unhappy, always only he, *immer nur er*. He is no longer the work of art but an aestheticized object with no value except as he is taken up by the crowd, and cast aside by it.

And yet the hunger artist could terrify the crowd which would shrink back in horror until reassured by the Impresario (who knows better) that indeed the fasting caused this outburst and offered the proof of the photographs. Well-fed people

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 167; p. 271.

cannot understand the condition of the hunger artist. The Impresario slyly spoke the truth, but the spectators were content to buy the photographs which perverted the truth. And the hunger artist receded, falling back in the straw. In these scenes, the hunger artist threatens the people who look at him. But how, even by shaking the bars of his cage, can a weak, emaciated, sickly hunger artist threaten anyone? Why does the crowd not laugh at this spectacle? Why must the Impresario force the hunger artist back into the straw? It is difficult to laugh in the face of a crisis. The hunger artist poses no threat except the threat that he himself is, as an artist, as a work of art which gathers and repels. The crowd does not fear that the hunger artist will break out of his confinement. The young female escort does not fear harm from the hunger artist collapsing on her arm. Yet the fear in these scenes is palpable, as palpable as when the children held hands "for greater security" while gazing open mouthed at the hunger artist, as palpable as the danger of the caged panther with which the hunger artist is ultimately replaced.

The hunger artist is crisis. He is terrifying because he shows us the horror of our existence, the gnawing absence that nothing can satisfy. He reminds us of the reason for aesthetics: distance from the crisis which appears in art, in the hunger artist as much as the story about the hunger artist. The adults dryly laughed it off, but the children gaped open-mouthed. The adults needed the spectacle of crisis, properly confined within its bounds, and were thus able to close off the crisis, to limit it to the performance and forget it. And yet, years later, when the witnesses recalled the event, perhaps by coming across a photograph, they remembered nothing. They had no understanding. *Wurden sie sich oft selbst unverstandlich*. There was no understanding to remember. They have neither the power nor the knowledge to remember. The hunger artist has always known, "Against this nonunderstanding, against this world of nonunderstanding, it was impossible to

fight." *Gegen diesen Unverstand, gegen diese Welt des Unverstandes zu kämpfen, war unmöglich.*³⁹ The hunger artist gazed out at this nonunderstanding and faced the hopelessness of his art, the futility with which he practiced his craft. The witnesses thought they understood – in fact, they *knew* they understood. The hunger artist is grumpy because he's hungry. The hunger artist must emerge after forty days because he could not possibly fast longer. These things they knew – *wahrscheinlich* - apparently. But they know nothing of the hunger artist's art. How does he do what he does? And why? Repeatedly we hear how easy it was to hunger, and how he longs to succumb to the imperative of hungering, to hunger without end.

But we also hear continuously that hunger art is a thing of the past. There was, apparently, some moment, a moment no one but a hunger artist can remember, a moment when there was an interest in hungering, but there was never a moment when hungering was understood. There is, or was, an interest in hungering, only to a certain border, a temporal limit, then not now, again not now. If there was such a moment it can never be. The Impresario hunts for an audience over half of Europe but the audience is not there. The hunger artist separates from the Impresario and abandons himself to be engaged by a circus which will allow him his greatest wish, to hunger endlessly, to be who he is and to be forgotten. He is no longer center stage, of course, but a side show, one of many in a menagerie, and a lesser one at that. Spectators do not pay their money to see the hunger artist, and only a few grant him a moment of attention, those few who remember the art of hungering even though they never understood it. There is not even a prose-poet like Baudelaire to pity him. There is not even a prose-poet like Baudelaire to pity

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 168; p. 273.

him, in other words, to identify with him. But like the art itself, the "initiates" become a thing of the past and the hunger artist is forgotten but not gone, swept out of the cage, buried straw and all, but not necessarily gone. He is replaced, immediately, by a young, threatening panther who lacked nothing, especially not the crowd enthralled by the promise and threat lurking in his jaws so that they do "not ever want to move away."⁴⁰ This cat is just a big cat. He pulls people around him, he gathers them by a contained threat and a promise. The cage is the necessary security and frame, not for him but *for us*, and this is what the hunger artist had lost and forgotten, what, in fact, he could never remember. With his parting words, the artist apologizes for his performance, begging forgiveness for the ruse he had staged. He knows himself as artifice, and turns on himself. The hunger artist terrifies us because he is like us, not a cat but a paper tiger. We are forced to confront that we, too, are paper tigers, staging a ruse of reality so convincing that it becomes the supreme fiction. Literature is difficult and difficulties arise when we interrogate literature. It beckons to us with familiarity and identity simultaneously resisting and denying any connection to our reality. Kafka's story, "A Hunger artist" is about literature and its failure to communicate. Communication implies interpretation. The hunger artist only is when he is alone, when he is one hunger artist which is one way to read the title of this story in German, "Ein Hungerkünstler." The hunger artist is a singularity.

Kafka may be figured in almost all of his protagonists. That is not to say that Kafka's writing is autobiographical. (I would venture that there is perhaps no writer who is less autobiographical than Kafka.) The figure which appears again and again in Kafka is the solitary figure who is not an individual but a singularity. The

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 171 ;p. 277.

singular is the complement to the individual; its completion. The singularity and the individual only complement each other when unaware of each other. As Benjamin wrote to Scholem, "Kafka offered the complement without being aware of what surrounded him."⁴¹ Baudelaire suggested that the poet should learn to speak other than the crowd by speaking like the crowd. Kafka simply speaks without any attention to the crowd. Benjamin aptly and simply explains this: "Kafka lives in a *complementary* world." And he lives in this world *alone*. Kafka lives under the law of literature, and he is not willing to abide by any other. The protagonists in his stories are not subjects. Indeed, they are often not even human. Even when anthropomorphized, these figures are not subjects but singularities. Benjamin understands Kafka's solitude (perhaps because it was also his own) and the apparent prophecy of Kafka's singularity which was not "farsightedness or 'prophetic vision'" but a listening.⁴² What Kafka heard was an almost imperceptible murmur. Kafka's *singular* contribution is to offer a "complement" to a world capable of destroying itself.

The long and short of it is that apparently an appeal had to be made to the forces of this tradition if an individual (by the name of Franz Kafka) was to be confronted with that reality of ours which realizes itself theoretically, for example, in modern physics, and practically in the technology of modern warfare. . . [T]his reality can virtually no longer be experienced by an *individual*, and Kafka's world, . . . is the exact complement of this earth which is preparing to do away with the inhabitants of this planet on a considerable scale.⁴³

⁴¹ Illum p. 143.

⁴² "Kafka listened to tradition." (Illum, p. 143).

⁴³ *ibid.*

Kafka splits open the indivisible totality of the Subject as scientists were soon to split the atom. Benjamin was witnessing such planetary destruction first hand in 1938, but he resisted the temptation to find in Kafka a prophet, a *seer*, and he also resisted any kind of identification with Kafka. In Kafka, Benjamin found a *listener*, another listener, a kindred spirit who could hear "the most indistinct sounds", even silence.

Kafka could make this silence heard by writing it. Of course, writing is always silent, but there remains an internal 'reading aloud' that accompanies most writing, and the chatter of critique and commentary is incessant. Kafka hushes the chatter, and the reading aloud becomes rhythmic. Kafka is a storyteller, and he tells stories, as all storytellers do, of far away lands and exotic beings. The only difference is that the distant and the different is our own world in its unconcealed concealment. Kafka grants us a glimpse of this "other" world. Usually we call it "fiction." Kafka shows us that there is something more real in the fictive world than the actual one. We have the opportunity to hear something other in literature, to hear the rhythm and rhyme Baudelaire dreamed about. In literature, poetically human beings dwell on the earth. And so perhaps Heidegger's nostalgia is not for a moment but for a place. The ontological difference is not temporal but spatial, and literature is the space of this difference.

Kafka's story, "*Josefine die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse*" [Josephine the Singer or the Mousefolk] seems to be about music and piping among the mousefolk, a people not musical by nature and doing well all but without it. The entire story wavers between superlative praise for Josephine and a generalized indifference to her performance, and periodically, and finally, with the question of whether indeed she sang at all. The story is about the question of music, asking after all what it is that defines music, and answering that question, finally, with silence [*Stummheit*]. The story of the mouse folk ends when Josephine suddenly

disappears, and the narrator contemplates the impact of the withdrawal of Josephine's singing for the one thing it seemed to do was to gather the community together. Indeed, Josefine insisted on gathering a large crowd, and she would even poise herself to sing but refuse to begin, until the crowd had grown sufficiently large enough. When Josephine stands to sing, "it is not so much a performance of songs as an assembly of the people, and an assembly where except for the small piping voice in front there is complete stillness." [*Es ist nicht so sehr eine Gesangsvorführung als vielmehr eine Volksversammlung, und zwar eine Versammlung bei der es bis auf das kleine Pfeifen vorne völlig still ist.*]⁴⁴ Once Josephine has vanished, the narrator can remember only the silence.

*Leicht wird es uns ja nicht werden ; wie werden die
Versammlungen in volliger Stummheit möglich sein.
Freilich, waren sie nicht auch mit Josefine stumm?*

It will not be easy for us, for how is it possible for our gatherings to take place in *perfect silence*? Still, were they not silent even with Josephine? ⁴⁵

The story opens with the laudatory words, *Unsere Sängerin heißt Josefine, wie sie nicht gehört hat, kennt nicht die Macht des Gesanges* [Our singer is called Josephine, whoever has not heard her, does not know the power of song]. However, not only does the story reveal an increasing disquietude about the power of song, but by the time Josephine has vanished, we have not heard a single note, piped or sung. The

⁴⁴ German citations for *Josefine die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse* and *Der Bau* are from Franz Kafka, *Schriften und Fragmente*, in two volumes, ed. Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1992), (hereafter Fischer), p. 361; *Stories*, p. 367.

⁴⁵ Emphasis added. Fischer, p. 376; *Stories*, p. 376. In the notebook, Kafka does not indicate these questions with individual punctuation but they are all run together, including the quote which follows below.

narrator has proven himself a suitable representative for the mousefolk, and for Josephine. The narrator sings silence. The mousefolk are unmusical but they have a tradition of singing. "In the old days our people did sing . . . and some songs have actually survived, which it is true, no one can now sing"⁴⁶ -- not even, or especially not Josephine. It soon becomes clear that there is a question of whether Josephine sings at all. The narrator confides that "among intimates we admit freely to one another that Josephine's singing, as singing, is nothing out of the ordinary," and immediately asks the pertinent question, "Is it in fact singing at all?" The mousefolk know that her singing does not conform to the tradition of the old songs -- which have survived but cannot be sung. Indeed, it seems that Josephine "pipes" just like any other mouse, or even perhaps a bit below average.

The idea that Josephine does not really sing, and does not even pipe particularly well, leaves the question of her tremendous effect. If it can be established that Josephine is only a poor piper, "that would merely clear the ground for the real riddle which needs solving, the enormous influence she has."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the story continues about her piping, or singing, or her standing open-mouthed wherever she pleases until a sufficient crowd gathers, and the story ends when Josephine simply vanishes, and even the memory of her singing is questioned.

War ihr wirkliches Pfeifen nennenswert lauter und lebendiger, als die Erinnerung daran sein wird? War es

⁴⁶ "In den alten Zeiten unseres Volkes lag es Gesang; Sagen erzählen davon und sogar Lieder sind erhalten, die freilich niemand mehr singen kann. Eine Ahnung dessen, was Gesang ist, haben wir also und dieser Ahnung nun entspricht Josefinens Kunst eigentlich nicht." Fischer, p. 351; Stories, p. 361.

⁴⁷ Fischer, p. 352; Stories, p. 361.

denn noch bei ihren Lebzeiten mehr als eine bloße Erinnerung? Hat nicht vielmehr das Volk in seiner Weisheit Josefinens Gesang, eben deshalb, weil er in dieser Art unverlierbar war, so hoch gestellt? (emphasis added)

Was her piping notably louder and more alive than the memory of it will be? Was it even in her lifetime more than a simple memory [*Erinnerung*], was it not rather because Josephine's singing was already past losing in this way that our people in their wisdom prized it so highly?⁴⁸

The proverbial rug has not just come out from under Josephine: the entire story has folded in on itself. Kafka has done something truly remarkable. He has written the allegory of silence and at the same time shown that silence can only appear allegorically, in the appearance of singing that is not sung but piped, in the telling of a story that is not told but written. "Josephine the Singer" is an allegory of silence. The story does not refer to silence, does not point to it as its meaning, but silence appears there, everywhere and nowhere.

Because of this singularity, the mode proper to literature is the imperative. Kafka writes the imperative. He does not offer us causes or meanings, but merely states what is. Is hungering work? A hunger artist says that it is. ("It was not the hunger artist who was cheating, he was working honestly, but the world was cheating him of his reward.")⁴⁹ Hungering produces nothing and causes nothing. What *is* its reward? Hungering has no force; it is the absence of force, the absence of will and desire. Like the hunger artist can no longer hunger; the singer can no longer sing. This impotence is not particularly modern. Kafka is not prophetic. He simply sees the world in its concealment, in all that it is not but pretends to be.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 376; p. 376.

⁴⁹ Kafka, p. 170; *Stories*, p. 276.

Kafka's "prophecy" is just as much a hindsight. In Plato's *Republic*, the philosophers can no longer philosophize. Like Plato himself, they must tell stories, "severe rather than amusing" (III 398b). They must remember events that never happened and recall a place that does not exist. There *is* only the cave. In Book VII, the philosopher kings are required to return to the cave from whence they apparently emerged but really have never left (520c). It is their duty and their calling, their place in the Republic. When Glaucon wonders if it is just that the "best natures" should be compelled to "live an inferior life", Socrates reminds him: "You have again forgotten my friend, that the law is not concerned with the special happiness of any class in the state, but is trying to produce this condition in the city as a whole, harmonizing and adapting the citizens . . . and requiring them to impart to one another any benefit which they are severally able to bestow upon the community" (520a).

The *Republic* is nothing other than an attempt to think community, to devalue the individual in favor of a greater organism, *the Republic*.⁵⁰ The philosopher-kings do not reign in the realm of ideas. The cave of shadows is their kingdom, and they will rule there not because they have seen the *eidos* but because of a keener vision in the darkness. Socrates assures these imaginary kings, "For once habituated, you will discern [the obscure things there] infinitely better than the dwellers there, . . . and so our city will be governed by us and you with waking minds" (520c-d). Plato does not write philosophy. He writes dialogues, plays in the theater of the mind, and philosophy appears there. Philosophy only appears in

⁵⁰ Hegel reminds us of the same condition regarding *the Absolute*: "The share in the total work of Spirit that falls to the individual can only be very small" (§72).

what it is not. Many millennia later, Kafka illuminates this darkness with the luminescence of a writing whose light comes only from itself.

In the posthumously published story, "Der Bau" or "The Burrow", we are invited once again into Plato's cave, into the darkness, which is privileged and secret. In "The Burrow" it takes a tremendous effort to go up into the light as well as to return to the darkness, but it is not because the darkness itself is inferior (quite the contrary) but because the threshold between the two worlds is almost impossible to cross. Dwelling within, the creature⁵¹ avoids the entrance, because it is a "defect" in the construction and danger emanates from it.

Gehe ich nur in der Richtung zum Ausgang, sei ich auch noch durch Gänge und Plätze von ihm getrennt, glaube ich schon in die Atmosphäre einer großen Gefahr zu geraten, . . . Gewiß, solche ungesunde Gefühle bringt schon an und für sich der Ausgang selbst hervor, das Aufhören des häuslichen Schutzes.

If I merely walk in the direction of the entrance, even though I may be separated from it by several passages and rooms, I believe already in sensing an atmosphere of great danger . . . Yes, the mere thought of the door itself, the end of the domestic protection, brings such feelings with it.⁵²

To leave the burrow requires an effort both physically and mentally exhausting. At the very threshold of the burrow, where the moss secrets the real entrance to the burrow, there is but one final effort, "a little push with the head" [*noch ein Ruck des Kopfes*], and the creature is out, *in der Fremde*, into the unknown. But even this requires great effort, and the only obstacle to turning back is the thought of wending

⁵¹ I use "creature" to refer to the narrator of Kafka's tale, an inadequate attempt to sustain the secret of the narrator's identity, which is to be without identity except for the identity with the burrow.

⁵² Fischer, p. 588; *Stories*, p. 332.

through the labyrinth again. This place beneath the moss door has its own curious comfort. In the moment of his darkest terror, the creature will return here and find comfort in the stillness.

Tiefe Stille; wie schön es hier ist, niemand kümmert sich dort um meinen Bau, jeder hat seine Geschäfte, die keine Beziehung zu mir haben . . . Hier an der Moosdecke ist vielleicht jetzt die einzige Stelle in meinem Bau, wo ich stundenlang vergebens horchen kann.

Deep stillness; how lovely it is here, outside there nobody troubles about my burrow, everybody has his own affairs, which have no connection with me; . . . Here under the moss covering is perhaps the only place in my burrow now where I can listen for hours and hear nothing.⁵³

But what has disturbed the quiet of the burrow which has been designed explicitly with silence as its objective? There is a barely audible whistle, or a piping, which seems to modulate, although barely, within the creature's imagination. He has become unavoidably attuned to it, listening for the sound even when he does not hear it initially, and tormenting himself when he finally discerns it. This whistle haunts him only after his return from *die Fremde*.

Perhaps the creature has brought this heightened sense into his being, and that explains why he can hear what was inaudible before. According to Plato, the realm of light has enhanced the philosopher-king's senses. This keener vision does not bring happiness, but torment. While Plato admits that the philosopher-kings will not want to leave the realm of light, he is silent as to whether an infinitely better discernment of obscure things is a gift or a curse. It is just as difficult, if not more so, for the creature to return to his burrow. A bit like Plato's philosopher-king, the creature admits that he has been "spoiled by seeing for such a long time

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 621; p. 352.

everything that happened around the entrance", but unlike the philosopher, the creature is drawn downwards. It is not the enlightened world which fascinates him but the goings on about the threshold between this world and the burrow. And yet, the creature hesitates. "I find great difficulty in summoning the resolution to carry out the actual descent," and indeed pages of torment and anguish intervene between the decision to descend and the final descent which is, like the ascent through the labyrinth, thoroughly exhausting in both body and mind.

Und nun, schon denkenfähig von Müdigkeit, mit hängendem Kopf, unsicheren Beinen, halb schlafend, mehr tastend als gehend nähere ich mich dem Eingang, hebe langsam das Moos, steige langsam hinab, lasse aus Zerstreutheit den Eingang überflüssig lange unbedeckt, erinnere mich dann an das Versäumte, steige wieder hinauf um es nachzuholen, . . . Nur in diesem Zustand, ausschließlich in diesem Zustand kann ich diese Sache ausführen.

And then, too exhausted to be any longer capable of thought, my head hanging, my legs trembling with fatigue, half asleep, feeling my way rather than walking, I approach the entrance, slowly raise the moss covering, slowly descend, leaving the door open in my distraction for a needlessly long time, and presently remember my omission, and get out again to make it good . . . Only in this state, and in this state alone, can I achieve my descent.⁵⁴

The passage through this threshold, both going and coming, lies at the center of this work.

Initially, as readers or hearers of Kafka's story, we become comfortable in this burrow and charmed by the eccentric creature who has implicitly invited us into the maze of passages, explained the intricate architecture, and taken us back out again.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 593-4; p. 336; and, p. 602; p. 341.

We are just settling in again when an intrusion begins, the intrusion of the slightest of noises, "*ein kaum hörbares Zischen*", an almost imperceptible whistling, or perhaps *ein zischende Geräusch* [a whistling sound]. From this moment on there is no rest, only exhaustion, and it is almost as if the creaturely host would like nothing better than to be rid of his listeners because he has to keep explaining things and justifying things that are neither explicable or justifiable. We might even ask if we are the whistler, "the beast" as the Muirs have translated the more banal German word, "*das Tier*".

As readers of this tale, we are no longer welcome. In the story of Josefine, the singer or poet finally vanished, and even the memory of poetry, or song, is called into question. In "The Burrow" it is the audience which vanishes. There is a storyteller (or a poet) who finally wants to tell a story to no one, without anyone to witness it. He fails. Everywhere he goes, every turn, every safe haven, even the castle keep itself is exposed, unprotected, open to the assault of . . . the eye of the reader. The creature is caught in the threshold between two entirely different worlds, that of the reader and that of the poet. Only on the threshold does it find peace, but it cannot remain there. Instead, it survives only by scurrying between one world and the other. Once over the threshold, the creature could finally sleep, but he does not sleep *because* he has finally, in all exhaustion and a state of delirium, crossed the threshold.

*Ich habe den Ort gewechselt, aus der Oberwelt bin ich in
meinen Bau gekommen und ich fühle die Wirkung
dessens sofort. Es ist eine neue Welt, die neue Kräfte gibt
und was oben Müdigkeit ist, gilt hier nicht als solche
. . . es ist, als hätte ich während des Augenblicks, da ich
den Bau betrat, einen langen und tiefen Schlaf getan.*

I have changed my place, I have left the upper world and
am in my burrow, and I feel its effect at once. It is a new

world, endowing me with new powers, and what I felt as fatigue up there is no longer that here. . . . it is as though at the moment I set foot into the burrow I had wakened from a long and profound sleep.⁵⁵

The rejuvenation which Plato found in an upward gaze has become the invigoration of returning into the earth. Whereas the philosophical figure glories in the *Oberwelt*, the *Fremde*, the literary figure is more alive on the side of the threshold just beneath the earth, in the familiar world of shadows. But the *Fremde* has entered while the door was open too long. After the creature finally sleeps, it awakens to the barely audible whistle.

Like the philosopher-kings, his senses have been tuned in the upper world, not the sense of seeing but the sense of hearing. It is not immediate, for an adjustment period is necessary, but once this sense has been attuned, there is no stopping it. The literary appears to be the inversion of the philosophical, but we need to see what is concealed in the literary text and to hear what is silenced in philosophy. Kafka directs us to a limit shared by philosophy and literature. In both the *Republic* and "The Burrow", there are not only two worlds, but there is also the threshold which joins them. Even in calling it a threshold something essential has been revealed. The threshold is language. The language of passage is what is easily identified as "literary language" because of its use of tropes and figures in order to express its meaning. Philosophy needs "literary", or, as is more apropos of classical works, "rhetorical" language in order to be understood. In modern editions of Plato's *Republic*, the passage in Book VII is most often called "the allegory of the cave."

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 603; p. 341.

There is something much greater at stake than quibbling between philosophers and poets. The problem of linkage remains, and it takes someone who is neither a philosopher nor a poet to draw our attention to this necessary threshold. This is what happens over and over again in Kafka, although it is perhaps most pronounced in "The Burrow", a story in which the entire text turns on the threshold and is engulfed by it. If "Josefine the Singer" is an allegory of silence, "The Burrow" is an allegory of allegory. Kafka shows that allegory is the structure of its own appearance. Allegory is the threshold. For this reason allegory reaches its most pure form in Kafka, because of his attention to the very division which allegory sustains. This is the limit between the two worlds or two realms which not only makes possible their linkage but is the limit from which they indeed emerge. The name Heidegger gave to this threshold was *phusis*, and Kafka shows us that *phusis* is the image of allegory.

In this dissertation I have approached this threshold and attempted to find a language and a figure that is adequate to allegory. There is no such figure. What I have done in this entire dissertation, Kafka accomplishes in one short story that may not even be finished. I have to say the image of allegory. Kafka does not. The image *is* the work. The image and the work of Kafka are allegorical because they cannot be otherwise. Kafka has been appropriated in the service of both moral and metaphorical ideals, although not without some contortion. It is, however, impossible to find in Kafka the anagogical level to which allegory has long been assumed to aspire. Without the anagogical level, the entire four-tiered structure of allegory collapses inward. Kafka's work confronts us with two possibilities. We could say that Kafka's stories are not metaphorical, not allegorical in any way, that

they do not refer. This is the way that Heidegger reads Hölderlin.⁵⁶ Or, we can say that Kafka's work is entirely allegorical, wholly allegorical, allegory that does not refer to anything else, which is indeed to say the same thing as Heidegger, but to say it differently, to say it through literature rather than through poetry.

The division between poetry and language is a crisis. Baudelaire recognized it but could only mourn. Kafka had one decisive advantage over Baudelaire. For Kafka, there is no poetry. This frees Kafka to master the technique of a writing not constrained either by the rules of poetry or by a *desespoir* which continues to mourn for it. Kafka is indifferent to poetry but he is passionate about literature. Kafka's indifference allowed him to explore the division between poetry and prose in a way of which Baudelaire was incapable. Because Kafka is Literature, the mode of expression is this very division. He can express its crisis. Kafka does not resolve the crisis but responds to it. Kafka "wants" to define literature, to fill in the gaping hole left by the rapid withdrawal of poetry. In his writing of literature, Kafka gestures toward the poetic but always, it seems, under two conditions: never reaching the poetic, although it is always present, and never drawing attention to the poet, or at least not with anything more than a sideways glance. Allegory is other than to speak; therefore, allegory is never spoken. Allegory is silent, concealed. Writing brings this concealment into the open. This unconcealment is the space of literature, and literature is the space of allegory.

⁵⁶ In treating Kafka and his work as "a rhizome, a burrow", Deleuze and Guattari are also trying to find a way to avoid "the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation" (p. 3). Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to systematize this experimentation and to give it the figure of the burrow.

AFTERWORD

The Allegorical Exigency:
Sensus communis allegoricus

Dasein is primarily defined as being-*in*-the world and constituted by a common "being-toward-death". Martin Heidegger rather thoroughly pursued an alternative to subjectivity in attempting to find a way to say "I is not -- *a m* not -- a subject" as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it. However, Nancy also points out that Heidegger "never radically implicated [Dasein's being-toward-death] in its being-with -- in *Mitsein* -- and [it] is this implication which needs to be thought."¹ To be in the world is to be among other beings. It is specifically not to be absolved from the world or from these other beings, but the self-certainty of a self-conscious Subject precludes Dasein. The Absolute Subject is not *in* the world; it *is* the world. What becomes problematic for this Subject is precisely its relation to individuals, to other subjects. It is the problem of community. In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy takes up the problem of community in the modern age, in part through an analysis of the failure of the politico-social ideal of communism but with roots that go much deeper.

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis, MN: U Minnesota P, 1991). (Hereafter, IC), p. 14. [*La communauté désœuvrée*, (Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1999).] Nancy suggests that this failure to think through *Mitsein* and "the question of community as such" explains why Heidegger "went astray with his vision of a people and destiny conceived at least in part as a subject" (14). Nancy is not the first to suggest that Heidegger failed to escape what Jacques Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence. Nancy directs attention to an essay by his sometime collaborator and another of Derrida's early students, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: "Transcendence ends in Politics," trans. P. Caws, in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. C. Fynsk, Harvard UP, 1989, pp.267-300. Nancy also refers to G. Granel "Pourquoi avoir publié cela?" in *De l'université* (Toulouse: T.E.R., 1982). See note 9 to chapter 1, p.157.

The loss of community is a modern problem, and it begins to take shape in Kantian philosophy. Kant addresses the need for an immanent judgment, a moral imperative which *demand*s a “sense of the common”. In §40, Kant defended taste, or judgment, as a “kind of *sensus communis*”. In §40 Kant revises the qualification made earlier, in §20, that the feeling of “common sense”, although universally valid did not function as the common understanding or *sensus communis* which judges by concepts, not feeling. In §22, Kant begins to move the feeling of a “common sense” towards an objective principle of common understanding or *sensus communis*. He argues that this common sense cannot be based on experience but must be based on the demand for “universal assent”. “It does not say that everyone *will* agree with my judgment, but that they *ought* to” (§22).² By §40, however, Kant has dropped the analogical relation and suggests that Taste is indeed a *sensus communis*, with only a slight qualification. Rather than being based on a universal *concept*, Taste is based on a universal *feeling*. In a note near the end of §40, Kant suggests: “Taste could be called a *sensus communis aestheticus*, and common understanding a *sensus communis logicus*”. Kant identifies the *sensus communis* as that which is common -- but uncultivated -- in all human beings as an a priori power to judge. The sense shared by all human beings is “a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else’s way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones” (§40). The universal assent necessary for judgment is found within the individual. Kant does not

² Emmanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, tr. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1987).

recognize that the morally constituted Subject no longer shares in *community*. Community is neither a *sensus communis logicus* or *aestheticus*, but perhaps we might call it a *sensus communis allegoricus*.

The argument for the sense of the common that is allegorical (rather than aesthetic or logical) is found in §59. In establishing the “objective reality” of Beauty, Kant admits that no intuition is in itself capable of establishing the objective reality of a rational concept. The concept must be exposed through the rhetorical tropes of *hypotyposis*, a vivid scene, which under the auspices of philosophy, Kant describes as a schema, or more accurately as a “schema-image”. Kant distinguishes between two types of intuition which are adequate to the concept: the schemata and the symbol. The schemata directly expose a concept while the symbol works indirectly, and it is the symbol which Kant needs for the universal sense (or pseudo-concept) of the beautiful. The “symbol” in Kant is explicitly allegorical.

Symbolic exhibition uses an analogy . . . in which judgment performs a double function: it applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition; and *then it applies the mere rule by which it reflects on that intuition to an entirely different object.*³

Kant also admits that language is “replete with such indirect exhibitions” and for a very sound reason. The transfer by “our reflection” from an object of intuition to an entirely different concept is necessary because no direct intuition can correspond to this concept. And he gives the example of God. “If a mere way of presenting [something] may ever be called cognition . . . then all our cognition of God is merely symbolic. Whoever regards it as schematic -- while including in it the properties of understanding, will, etc., whose objective reality is proved only in worldly beings -- falls into anthropomorphism, just as anyone who omits everything intuitive falls

³ *ibid.*, §59, p. 227, emphasis added.

into deism, which allows us to cognize nothing whatsoever, not even from a practical point of view.”⁴ The pure concept requires both schematism and intuition for neither alone is adequate to it. The concept cannot be presented but only represented, not in a representation constituted by a direct analogy but by the double movement of both schematic and intuitive cognition. Between these two different modes of cognition, the pure concept can be represented in a mediation that is immediate. The structure of this relation is implicitly allegorical.

Kant explains that this is also the case for the beautiful which is the intuition of the “morally good.” The allegorical structure which Kant carelessly names “symbol” provides both the “how” and the “why” of the transcendental analysis. The allegorical symbol makes possible a “judgment that finds itself referred to something that is both in the subject [it]self and outside [it], . . . the supersensible, in which the theoretical and practical power are in an *unknown manner* combined and joined into a unity.”⁵ The last word on the beautiful, in §60, is that “there neither is, nor can be a science of the beautiful”. In the preceding section, however, Kant has shown that there can indeed be an allegory of the beautiful.

In tracing the history of aesthetics, Hans-Georg Gadamer notes the turning point to be found in Kantian philosophy. Kant marginalized the experience of sense-perception by deeming it merely empirical. The devaluation of sensory experience corresponded to a decline in the value of classically humanist forms of knowledge, effectively eliminating “the methodological uniqueness of the human sciences.”⁶ Without the humanist methodologies of rhetoric (in particular), there

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*, §59, p. 229.

was little left to resist philosophical dominance of the “human sciences” or *Geisteswissenschaften* of art, poetry, and history. Gadamer’s observation still holds:

The specific problem that the human sciences present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity.⁷

The *Geisteswissenschaften* remain a problem for the science of knowing, that is, for philosophy, but with greatly diminished force.⁸ It is perhaps not coincidental that Hegel undertakes a phenomenology of *Geist*, in an attempt to counter the disruption of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. This dissertation has shown that Hegel was not entirely successful in suppressing this resistance. The methodological uniqueness of the human sciences has gone inward (in true Hegelian fashion) but has not been eviscerated. Nonetheless, when the *Zeitgeist* of the nineteenth century demanded that the human sciences legitimate themselves on par with the natural sciences, the only model for such legitimation was that *of* the natural sciences. Consequently, the human sciences tried to adapt the method of natural science to the material of art and history.

Gadamer provocatively argues that it is not the pressure of assuming the form of scientific method inherited from the eighteenth century which leads to this problematic combination but the developing concepts of *Bildung* and *Erlebnis*. Although “Bildung” is a post-Kantian ideal, the significance of the image in Kant is essential to understanding the developments of the nineteenth century, and to

⁶ TM, p. 41.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ Gadamer acknowledges that the “human sciences” prompt the very question of truth and method, “and thus cannot be fitted into the modern concept of science, [and] they remain a problem for philosophy itself.”

questioning them. In the first sections of the first critique, *Bild* or “image” reveals itself as fundamental to the project of critique. The first issue with which Kant must contend is the *Versinnlichung*, the sensibilization of the material of “pure reason”, material which is not sensible but intuited. Generally, the image makes this possible. As Heidegger clarifies in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, an image can manifest an immediate sensibility of something actually present as well as a reproductive appearance of something absent. The German word *Abbild*, with the potentially privative prefix “*ab*”, indicates this simultaneous presence and absence etymologically. Gadamer also notes the inherent ambiguity of the root word, *Bild*, encompassing both the sense of image or copy, *Nachbild*, “an image after”, and the sense of a model, *Vorbild*, “an image for”. The latter, *Vorbild*, is Heidegger’s third description for *Bild*, as an “appearance” of something in general, like “a dog” (which is Kant’s example). The problem confronting Kant is the relationship between the image and the concept. Kant faces the same basic problem as Prudentius: How can the finite appear in the infinite? At the end of the first chapter, I repeated Heidegger’s question of metaphysics in both its philosophical and poetic articulations. In the first chapter on Prudentius, a phenomenological method of reading reversed the common assumption that allegory is an intentional device. In the poem generally agreed to be the first full-fledged “allegory”, I have shown that allegory is not (or at least not primarily) metaphysical but poetic. Throughout the dissertation the structure of allegory draws into focus the very limit upon which metaphysics always and unavoidably depends. In one form or another, this limit divides the knowable or sensible from the unknowable. “Metaphysics” is the science of making things known. Poetry is not concerned with making things known but with making things appear – things that cannot otherwise appear. Historically, allegory first emerges as a *response* to the exigency of the appearance I

have called *phantasmenological*, but allegory has accumulated deep layers of sediment since the fourth century, and that has obscured its work from view. However, this sedimentation has not affected allegory's *necessity*. The phenomenological reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in chapter three has uncovered allegory in one of the most powerful and influential works of metaphysics. The allegorical structure upon which the text depends has revealed that this mighty work of philosophy is also a work of poetry. *Spirit* is neither sensible nor metaphysical, even in Hegel's own terms. Because it can only appear in the substance of the insubstantial image, as a *phantasmenon*, Spirit can only appear in the structure of allegory. Of necessity, Hegel responded to the question of metaphysics *poetically* rather than philosophically.

The two versions of Heidegger's question now bear repeating because the philosopher's question has been upstaged by the poet's. The philosopher seeks transcendence, from the finite to the infinite, and therefore asks,

How can finite human Dasein in advance pass beyond
(transcend) the essent when not only has it not created this
essent but also is dependent on it in order to exist as Dasein?⁹

In this formulation, Dasein's existence *in the world* depends on its relation to something outside the world. Hegelian philosophy is the greatest effort at appropriating this outside by denying its exteriority.¹⁰ What has been demonstrated in the first half of this dissertation is that the philosophical appropriation of the outside or other by the subject depends on forgetting its own alienation from itself. Metaphysics unravels whenever the "I" tries to speak itself. To say "I" is to alienate

⁹ KPM, p. 47.

¹⁰ Heidegger attempts to reinstate this exteriority within the history of metaphysics in his volumes on *Nietzsche*. See especially vol. 2 (I THINK).

oneself from oneself. The “I” is a logical impossibility. This impossibility is necessarily written over in philosophy, in Plato as much as in Hegel, but it remains logically impossible. The way that philosophy writes over this logical impossibility is to erect a structure in which the “I” can appear identical with itself. The logical impossibility is possible in allegory.

In the wake of Kant, J. G. Fichte considered the fiction or myth of philosophy’s first principle, the principle of identity, logically rendered as $A = A$. For the first time since Descartes’ *cogito, ergo sum*, Fichte clarifies that what this principle really says is: *If A is, then A is A*. By isolating the absolute proposition of the first principle Fichte determines that the importance of this proposition is *not what* it says but *how*. The importance of the relation is not the logical abstraction (A is A) but the tautological identity of the self (I am). Only the self can posit itself but the self must first exist in order to posit itself. Fichte has radicalized the Cartesian principle of identity. *Cogito ergo sum* says, in Fichte’s radicalization, “In the self I oppose a divisible not-self to the divisible self”¹¹ With the *Wissenschaftslehre* (translated as *The Science of Knowledge*), Fichte introduces the possibility of a system which includes all possible knowledge: a system in which all knowledge is unified. The Fichtean system maintains completeness over an infinite range of possibility. There is one “absolute” and necessary proposition from which all other propositions develop. This First principle is the sentence:

$$A = A \qquad \text{or} \qquad \text{self} = \text{self}.$$

¹¹ *Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre of 1794: Text and A Commentary on Part I* by George Seidel (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1993). [Page references correspond to Seidel, but the corresponding Section number and page number for the Cambridge University Press edition of Fichte are also included as annotated by Seidel.] Part I, 110, p. 67.

This absolute principle cannot be proved or derived, but from this follows the Second principle:

$$\sim A = \sim A \quad \text{or} \quad \text{not-self} = \text{not-self.}$$

The second principle is equally impossible to prove because, in fact, it is the same proposition. However, the second principle, because it is a counterpositing, can at least be determined as to content, that is as something that is not identical with A (or the self).¹²

A third principle is needed to prove the validity of the first two. This third principle is determined as to form and the preceding propositions, although absolute and unprovable in themselves, lay the groundwork for the Science of Knowledge (*Wissenschaftslehre*) which will be borne by the third principle. In the third principle, consciousness takes a pivotal role. The "A" is no longer simply a logical abstraction but the "I" or self. "In so far as the not-self is posited, the self is not posited; for the not-self completely nullifies the self."¹³ The not-I needs the I to say it; the I is negated by saying "I" is not. There would seem to be two "I"s, two selves, in the space only available to one. Likewise the nullity of the second principle is itself nullified. By negating that the "I" is, the not-I precludes the condition of its own possibility. What this all comes down to is a third principle which expresses contradiction.

$$\text{self} = \text{not self} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{not-self} = \text{self}$$

This proposition would appear to eliminate the very identity of the consciousness it is supposed to be positing.¹⁴ Fichte declares that there must be an "X" which will

¹² See *ibid.* I. 102, p. 45.

¹³ *ibid.*, I.106, p. 55.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, I. 107, p. 56.

grant all three principles without the loss of consciousness. This "X" must also exist in consciousness.

Fichte's question is to ask "how A and ~A, being and nonbeing, reality and negation are to be thought together without mutual elimination and destruction." The answer is that "they will mutually limit one another."¹⁵ "X" is the mark of this limit, and the limit introduces the concept of divisibility into consciousness and into the System. To limit is to abolish reality only in part, to divide it by negation. In one regard, the self is "one", unified, but in an equally necessary way, the self must also be posited as divisible.

The self is to be equated with and yet opposed to itself. But in regard to consciousness it is equal to itself for consciousness is one: but in this consciousness the absolute self is posited as indivisible; whereas the self to which the not-self is opposed is posited as divisible.¹⁶

In the "I", the self is its own object: the self posits the self. This is an unconditional primary and totally free act. This unconditional primary identity is the basis for unity; it is the absolute Subject. However, Fichte does not forget that the desire for absolution will remain unfulfilled. The first principle must be absolutely free, and such freedom is not empirically possible. It is only possible when the "I" is an empty grammatical form, in other words, only in the imagination.

Hegel cannot escape this difficulty, but he convincingly forgets it. In "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" de Man painfully recollects this problem in Hegel's figure of the philosopher. In a clever and close reading of paragraph 20 of *Encyclopedia I*, de Man exposes the paradox at the very foundation of Hegel's

¹⁵ *ibid.*, I. 108, p. 58.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, I. 110, p. 66.

thought. de Man translates the polyvalent meaning of the German verb *meinen* in a key statement establishing the objectivity of the philosopher:

so ich kann nicht sagen was ich nur meine
which de Man initially translates idiomatically:

"[thus,] I cannot say what is only my opinion."

The German also says:

"I cannot say what I cannot make mine."

De Man suggests that "To make mine" is also to say "to think", and so the statement also says,

"I cannot say what I think."

or even,

"I cannot say I."

De Man implies that the sentence can have the following meaning: "I cannot say what I think, and if what I think is 'I am I', this is what I cannot say, 'I cannot say I'."

Hegel thus not only fulfills the Aristotelian dictum of "philosophical self-forgetting" but exceeds it in so far as the above statement implies the eradication of any relationship between the philosopher and thought. The "very possibility of thought depends on the possibility of saying 'I.'" It is not this statement alone which shows a disturbance in Hegel's philosophy, but in the *Encyclopedia I*, there is Hegel's own admission of this very problem.

"When I say 'I,' I *mean* myself as *this* I to the exclusion of all others; but what I say, I, is precisely anyone; any I, as that which excludes all others from itself."

eben so, wenn ich sage: 'Ich,' meine ich mich also diesen all anderen Ausschließenden; aber was ich sage, Ich, ist even jeder".¹⁷

The "I" that is posited by the particular I is "precisely that which cannot have a thing [anything] in common with myself."¹⁸ This was not a problem for Fichte because he conceived the "I" logically and grammatically, not historically.

In order to proceed historically, Hegel has to forget that the very condition for thought, the self-identity of the "I", is empirically impossible. The movement between history and thought can only be accomplished allegorically.

The proof of thought is possible only if we postulate that what has to be proven (namely that thought is possible) is indeed the case. The figure of this circularity is time. Thought is proleptic.¹⁹

This figure is familiar enough from Hegelian philosophy. De Man neatly summarizes this process in Hegel: "At the end of the gradual progression of its own functioning, as it moves from perception to representation and finally to thought, the intellect will refind and recognize itself."²⁰ The intrinsic difficulty of this progressive view of history is that if the end is the same as the beginning, then I can still not say I, and therefore, the "I" will not be able to recognize itself. De Man concludes the essay with the provocative observation that "Hegel's philosophy . . . is in fact an allegory of the disjunction between philosophy and history, or in our more restricted concern, between literature and aesthetics."²¹ Hegel is not to blame.

¹⁷ Quoted in de Man, SSHA, p. 98.

¹⁸ SSHA, p. 98.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 99.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 104.

The necessity, which is also an impossibility, to identify the subject with the predicate is inherent in language. It is language itself that is unavoidably allegorical.

In allegorical language, "I" can say "I". Philosophy proceeds from allegory, but allegory proceeds from poetry. The poetic question is not yet metaphysical, but it provides the structure within which the metaphysical question can be articulated. Thus, the poetic articulation is more primordial than the philosophical one.

How must the finite essent that we call man be in his inmost essence in order that in general he can be open to the essent that he himself is not, which essent therefore must be able to reveal itself by itself.²²

The poetic question is the question of *expropriation*, a question of distance rather than difference (or identity). In Goethe and in Benjamin, this question begins to emerge specifically in relation to allegory and symbol as secular terms. They are not different from one another but distant. This distance has been disregarded, not only between symbol and allegory but far more significantly, between the finite being and the essent that the finite being *is not*. Baudelaire regards the distance and recognizes the crisis in poetry which is both a response to this distance and also makes it appear. Poetry has never been connected to the natural world, not even with the earliest Greeks, but poetry can make the natural world appear in its intrinsically divine, that is, poetic essence. To dwell poetically is not to dwell "naturally" but to dwell with an ear to the divine and an inclination towards the other. If allegory is still functional in Kant, it remains to be determined how allegory came to be the bane of literature and art -- more precisely the bane of aesthetics -- because it is the bane of aesthetics. It further remains to be investigated why allegory is a privileged category in the post-modern resistance to subjectivity.

²² KPM, p. 47.

Gadamer provides a convincing answer to the former inquiry. Under the influence of idealism, *Erlebnis* became a “determining feature for the foundation of art” and as a consequence, “the work of art is understood as the consummation of the symbolic representation of life”.²³ However, Gadamer’s trademark attention to history reminds us that “this period is only an episode in the total history of art and literature.”²⁴

It cannot be doubted that the great ages in the history of art were those in which people without any aesthetic consciousness and without our concept of “art” surrounded themselves with creations whose function in religious or secular life could be understood by everyone and which gave no one solely aesthetic pleasure.²⁵

Modern aesthetics depends utterly on the concept of the symbolic, but Gadamer dares to ask whether that is a sufficient foundation. “Is not this symbolic-making activity also in fact limited by the continued existence of a mythical, allegorical tradition?”²⁶ Gadamer argues that in fact *it is* thus limited and needs to be

²³ Gadamer goes so far as to say that “for aesthetics the conclusion follows that so-called *Erlebniskunst* (art based on experience) is art per se” (70). Gadamer argues that the “self-contained epoch” is now subject to clear hindsight, the limits of *Erlebniskunst* can be ascertained. “The century of Goethe seems remarkable to us for the self-evidence of these assumptions, a century that is a whole age, an epoch” (71). While that epoch may not be entirely in the past, as Gadamer seems to assume, certainly the limits of that epoch have started to emerge.

²⁴ TM, p. 71. The historically anterior limit of this epoch borders on the period of the Baroque. By examining this limit, Gadamer has tried to recall to consciousness that “from the classical period up to the age of the baroque, art was dominated by quite other standards of value than that of being experienced” and the aesthetic criteria of value, particularly *Bildung* and *Erlebnis*, “are not adequate here” (71).

²⁵ TM, p. 81.

recognized. Returning to the beginnings of speculative idealism Gadamer suggests that the "Rehabilitation of Allegory" is the proper response to the "limits of *Erlebniskunst*" and the aesthetic evaluation of art. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy inverts this question without changing its focus. Nancy seems to ask if the mythical, allegorical tradition is not in fact limited by the continued existence of the symbolic-making activity of the Subject. Despite the inversion of terms, this is the same question. In radically different ways, both Nancy and Gadamer refuse to submit to the exigency of the aesthetic. They are not alone.

Nancy calls this resistance "literary communism". This is not an aesthetic or philosophical concept but a poetic articulation of the problem of community, which is also the problem of subjectivity. Community is the "essent" which the individual is not. The individual subject cannot become part of a community as the ideology of subjectivity tacitly assumes. The individual can become a member of a community only if the individual has not absolved itself. Nancy calls this individual member a "singular being" or a singularity. The singular being can incline towards other beings with which it does not identify and subsequently negate (or sublate) the other. In this inclination for being-*with*, the Dasein can be open to the essent that it is not. The singular (or particular) can be open to the community (or universal). That the "open" is defined in particularly literary terms is not coincidence.

What is at stake is the articulation of community.

"Articulation" means, in some way, "writing," which is to say, the inscription of a meaning whose transcendence or presence is indefinitely and constitutively deferred . . . This presupposes that neither literary art nor communication can answer to the double

²⁶ TM, p. 81. de Man emphatically repeats Gadamer's question in his study of allegory and symbol in the essay "The Rhetoric of Romanticism", although he loosely translates the crucial question as follows: "Is the symbolizing activity not actually still *bound today* by the *survival* of a *mythological* and *allegorical* tradition" (in *Blindness and Insight*, U Minnesota P, 1992, p.191).

exigency proposed in "literary communism": to defy at the same time the speechless immanence and the transcendence of a Word.²⁷

Nancy propaedeutically concludes:

Literary communism indicates at least the following: that community, in its infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion . . . signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of 'literature', the inscription of our infinite resistance. (80-81).

The Renaissance Humanist, Giambattista Vico believed in a time when "life was a severe poem," a golden age of the gods. Auerbach summarizes Vico's position:

The mental order in which they conceived the surrounding world and created their institutions was not rational, but magic and fantastic . . . they were poets by their very nature; their wisdom, their metaphysics, their laws, all their life was 'poetic'. (Drama 192)

This view of a time (whether real or imagined matters little) in which poetically man once dwelled on the earth, this mere possibility puts force behind Gadamer's rhetorical question: "Can the Concept of the aesthetic *Erlebnis* be applied to these creations without truncating their true being?" (81). Gadamer asks a rhetorical question which tautologically answers itself but also has no direct answer.

What happens if the aesthetic *Erlebnis* is suspended, not only from works of art in some nostalgic past but from works of literature which respond to the exigency of "literary communism"? Walter Benjamin set the precedent for this suspension, or phenomenological reduction, in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* and elsewhere, particularly in his work on Goethe. The resistance to aesthetics that is more apparent in works from a time when people did not have an aesthetic *consciousness* about art helps to illuminate the resistance in works from

²⁷ IC, p. 80.

an age which seems powerless against this consciousness. One place to begin such an inquiry is in a comparison of the figure of community in a pre-aesthetic work, like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and a modern work written and received under the auspices of aesthetic consciousness, for example, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. In a time when the Subject did not reign, the image of community could appear in the figuration of a community, a fellowship of pilgrims. In a world of subjects who admire the independence of the individual, the figure of community can only appear in a solitary figure. This figure is an allegory.

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