THE METAPHYSICS OF SYNTAX IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LYRIC

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THE METAPHYSICS OF SYNTAX IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LYRIC

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This dissertation takes a new approach to the basic problem of literary criticism, the move from form to meaning, by rethinking the category of form through German Idealism and Chomskyan linguistics. My central methodological thesis is that we cannot develop a framework *a priori* and then apply it to particular cases, since such a procedure fails to read literary works in their particularity (and hence *as literary*), and I therefore approach issues in poetics and metaphysics from within interpretations of particular works, interpretations that do not form a unified narrative but rather a web of negative relations.

 Chapter 1, on Hardy's *The Workbox*, traces the shift from Plato's alignment of form with the universal to Aristotle's alignment of form with the particular. *The Workbox* traces the inverse trajectory in matter, revealing the convergence of universality and opacity in death. Chapter 2, on Keats's *To Autumn*, focuses on the metaphysics of particularity and the particularity of literature, and introduces *synthetic constructions* as a way of understanding poetic ungrammaticality. *To Autumn* is concerned with the relation between a universal nature divinity and her particular manifestations, culminating in an inhuman pagan theodicy. Chapter 3, on Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, presents a new theory of literary metaphors as synthetic constructions, in order to show that the ode deploys such

constructions to think the experience of what is beyond experience. Chapter 4, on Browning's *'Childe Roland'*, argues that Hegel's speculative transformation of Kant's conception of objectivity has a terrifying underside that *'Roland'* explores, forcing us to re-think collectivity as requiring not only the mediation of the subject by objects but also by a (negatively) divine third term. Chapter 5, on Browning's *My Last Duchess*, discusses the relationship between the verse line and syntax to show how the poem exploits the artifice of lineation to become a negative love poem, while Chapter 6 shows how Browning's *Karshish* uses the negativity of lineation to rethink the theological, in line with Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*, as neither a transcendent Absolute nor a pantheistic immanence, but rather as the immanence of the negative through which immanence exceeds itself.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robin John Sowards was born in Eugene, Oregon, where he attended primary and secondary school. He then attended New York University, where he wrote an honors thesis titled *Alice and the Syntax of Chaos* and in 1998 was awarded a BA with honors in English. After two years spent as a legal assistant by day and a *littérateur* by night, he entered the doctoral program in English at Cornell University, earning his degree in August 2006. He is currently an Assistant Professor of English at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York.

For Danielle

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a commonplace to observe that a book-length project always accumulates more debts than it can acknowledge. This is doubly so with a dissertation, which, being the culmination of a scholar's formal education and in some sense the culmination of a scholar's intellectual life, in all fairness should acknowledge the debts of an entire lifetime. And so the usual practicalities that prevent perfectly exhaustive acknowledgement are particularly exigent here. For their salutary influence on my intellectual and personal development as a young person, I would like to thank my teachers Farrel Mizer, Judy Wenger and Robert Veeck, as well as Harlan Ellison, who persuaded me not to be a lawyer. Mary Poovey, Anselm Haverkamp and Mark Baltin were kind enough to oversee my undergraduate thesis, in which many of the ideas in this dissertation were first explored, and I am grateful for their guidance on that project and their always illuminating criticism. Among the many fine teachers I encountered as an undergraduate, I should make special mention of Blanford Parker, whose mesmerizing lectures remain an inspiration to me, whose well-timed and gentle rebuke turned me toward greater diligence in my studies, and whose friendship was a bulwark in a troubled time.

The members of my special committee are to be commended for enduring an inordinately ambitious and eccentric dissertation project. I would particularly like to thank the chair of my special committee, Jonathan Culler, whose faith in my project enabled me to continue it

And, finally, I would like to thank my wife and partner, my co-theorist—often practically my co-author—, my severest critic, and my best friend, to whom this dissertation is dedicated.

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Nicht sind die Fragen gelöst, nicht einmal ihre Unlösbarkeit bewiesen. Sie sind vergessen, und wo man sie beredet, werden sie nur desto tiefer in ihren schlimmen Schlaf gesungen.

[The questions have not been solved, nor has their insolubility even been demonstrated. They have been forgotten, and where they are talked of they are only sung the more deeply into their bad sleep.]

Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*

Introduction

The Future of Formalism

The aim of this dissertation as a whole is to present a substantially new method for literary criticism. Each individual study, however, only accomplishes this larger aim incidentally, in the course of engaging specific problems in poetics and metaphysics through the interpretation of particular poems. From the perspective of the dissertation, each portion of the main text is a *chapter*, one part of a larger whole, whereas from its own perspective each portion is an *essay*, both in the sense of a necessarily partial inquiry and in the sense of an experiment.[1] The aim of this introduction is therefore to give voice to the aims of the whole text by explaining just what I take literary criticism to be and what my fundamental methodological claims are. Having done so, it should be apparent why it would undo what I have attempted to accomplish in the essays that follow if I were to render their substantive contents in summary, since the aim of the essays is to get at the very things that a summary necessarily leaves out.

I don't want to suggest, however, that an introduction has no place, or that it is impossible to find a beginning. We cannot, it is true, sweep the board clean and begin as if so many centuries of literary inquiry had not already been conducted, but we can begin, in proper dialectical fashion, right where we are, *in medias res*. Since most

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[1] See Adorno's "The Essay as Form" in *NL* for a detailed discussion with which I am largely in agreement.

literary criticism is devoted to the interpretation of literary texts, it makes sense to suppose that interpretation is the primary task of literary criticism. If *criticism* is properly just a name for reflection, then literary criticism must be made up of the reflections to which we are spurred by literary texts. There are three broad questions we might ask when confronted with a literary text, each of which constitutes one of the domains in which our reflections fall:

1. What is it? (the question of the theories of literature and language)
2. What does it mean? (the question of interpretation)
3. Is it true? (the question of philosophy, including politics, ethics, metaphysics)[2]

Much of contemporary theory, to the extent that it concerns itself with literature at all, focuses on the first question (e.g., Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's *The Literary Absolute*). And much of criticism proper's avowed interest is in the third question, where its concern with the political in particular often seems to serve as an alibi for a slightly embarrassed interest in the literary, in interpretation. We cannot, of course, interpret a text at all without assuming, however unconsciously, certain answers to the first question, but the engagement with the first question is in this way merely a means to the second. And since the truth of the object just is the truth of its meaning, the question of truth cannot be thought independently of the question of interpretation (though interpretation, by contrast, can be

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[2] The three elements of my title correspond to these three interrogative domains: "Syntax" to the first question, "Nineteenth Century Lyric" to the second, and "Metaphysics" to the third.

thought without invoking the question of truth—which is not to say that it ought to be thought in that way). Interpretation is thus the heart of the matter, and the question of interpretation is what gives descriptive discourse and veridical discourse purpose and substance, respectively. The aim of this dissertation is to show concretely that the work of meaning and the work of truth transpire at the (seemingly only descriptive) level of linguistic form, which is just to say, syntax. In order to see why it makes sense to take up this task, we will need to consider description, interpretation and truth in more detail.

The central task of literary criticism is interpretation. But the initial question we face in thinking about interpretation is what we must necessarily presuppose in undertaking it. Anyone who is a partisan of a particular method or theoretical framework will naturally rely on the presuppositions of that framework: to be a bit reductive, the historicist critic will presuppose Foucault, the psychoanalytic critic will presuppose Freud, the Marxist critic will presuppose, well, Marx. But before we can assess those sophisticated presuppositions, we should attempt to grasp the basic presuppositions that all of these approaches share, the presuppositions that any *possible* approach to literary interpretation would necessarily have to adopt. In practical terms, we might say that one can hardly sit down to interpret a poem written in a language one does not know.[3] This, among many other practicalities, must be in place before one can interpret a poem, but it's not clear that practical presuppositions have any substantive

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[3] If one is reading a poem in translation, then one must at least know the language the translation is written in (and it seems fair to say that in that case one's interpretation is an interpretation of the translation, not of the original).

consequences for critical method as such.[4] We must also, however, necessarily adopt two sets of theoretical presuppositions if we are to interpret a work of literature: (1) a theory of literature, and (2) a theory of language. We must have both theories before we can answer our first question about the object, "What is it?"

By "a theory of literature" I do not mean anything more exotic than a descriptive account of what makes a work of literature a work of literature rather than something else. This might be understood as a problem of definition: if we are to interpret a work of literature (rather than interpreting whatever happens to be in front of us), then we must interpret it *as* a work of literature, with appropriate attention to the specificity of its kind. This does not mean that we need presuppose a fully elaborated account of literature that would exhaustively cover, say, all of the significant topics of philosophical aesthetics. All we need presuppose, however unconsciously, is a basic *descriptive* account of literature: just enough of an account that our claim to be interpreting a work of literature has content, a threshold account. Needless to say, the fact that we must necessarily presuppose such an account is no guarantee that our account is the correct one, or even that it meets rudimentary conditions of plausibility. But since we must necessarily presuppose at least a threshold theory of literature, it makes sense to adopt the best theory we can. Ideally, such a theory would not conflict with any commitments we might have to specific theoretical

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[4] There is, of course, a sociopolitical dimension to the question of knowing (especially the "standard" dialect of), say, English, and politically motivated approaches to criticism would have good reason to pay attention to this issue. But it would not necessarily have consequences for *any possible* method, and so I am bracketing it for the time being in order to focus on more basic and unavoidable issues.

frameworks or approaches (historicism, say) since, as an account only of what we must necessarily presuppose, it would equally be presupposed by any approach we might wish to take.[5]

Similarly, we cannot engage in the interpretation of a work of literature without presupposing a theory of language, however *ad hoc* the theory is and however unconsciously we presuppose it. When we sit down to merely read a text, we deploy our knowledge of language[6] (partly innate, partly determined by experience) quite unconsciously. But when we start making claims about what particular portions of the text mean, then we do more than simply use our knowledge of language; we thereby appeal to our knowledge of language as an objective basis for our claims and as an objective standard against which they are to be measured. A sequence of thoughts need not have any inferential or systematic relationship, but we do not write critical essays in a stream of consciousness. We make arguments, and to the extent we are in the business of making arguments our arguments about the meanings of texts, regardless of our approach, will depend upon claims about language—we must be able to call a verb a verb and know what we mean. Here also it makes sense for us to seek the best account of language we can find. In the case of the theory of literature, we need have little recourse to anything outside our own

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[5] There are, of course, limits to what approaches are intelligible. For example, an approach to literary interpretation that presupposed that there is no such thing as literature would be internally contradictory and impossible to salvage except by removing its claim to being an approach to literary interpretation.

[6] This phrase is intended to invoke Chomsky's terminology in *Knowledge of Language*, the first two chapters of which (apart from a few technical points that have since changed) are a reliable and accessible introduction to the outlines of the theory of language in current linguistics. Adger's *Core Syntax* is a good introductory textbook; Hornstein, et al., is a good intermediate textbook.

field, as long as we're allowed to poach on the field of philosophical aesthetics—which should be no problem since its proper owner has, in this country, largely let it go to seed. But in the case of the theory of language we have the good fortune of having on hand an entire academic discipline devoted to exactly the questions we need answered in order to have a theory of language, and we are thus able to draw heavily on the work of specialists in that field, namely linguistics.

Unfortunately, the work that has been done in linguistics departments in the last half century or so is not well known in literature departments. Historical linguistics (philology) has long been intimately connected to literary study, particularly since the 19th century, and its integration into literary study seems now to arouse little controversy. The Russian Formalists and their structuralist successors are responsible for the more controversial early 20th century attempts to bring linguistics to bear on literary study.[7] The various proposals associated with structuralism in particular have probably had the largest impact on literary study of any form of linguistics, as is evident from the fact that in literature departments *linguistics* often just means structuralism, despite the latter's demise in linguistics departments. In the decade after Chomsky began publishing in the late 1950s,[8] some literary scholars attempted to

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[7] The most important figure connecting Russian Formalism with structuralism is Roman Jakobson, since he was involved with both the Moscow Linguistic Circle and then the Prague Linguistic Circle (see his *Language in Literature* for his most influential essays).

[8] His first published book was *Syntactic Structures* (1957), but this was a much reduced version of arguments he had worked out more systematically two years before in a then-unpublishable manuscript titled *The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory*. The latter was eventually published two decades later, despite the fact that it was quite dated by that time, because, thanks to the circulation of mimeographed

assimilate the new developments associated with transformational-generative grammar into literary study. But before literary study had enough time to absorb the new developments, and while literary linguistics was still closely tied to structuralism,[9] literary structuralism began to decline due in part to its failure to bear out its large claims in satisfactory, concrete ways. As Derrida's work began to filter into the English-speaking world in the 1970s, his critique of structuralism seemed from the vantage point of literature departments to be a serious blow to linguistics, even though, by that time, the lay of the land in linguistics had changed entirely. The decline of structuralism, along with its displacement by deconstruction (or identity politics and other kinds of politically-informed approaches), thus took all criticism informed by linguistics down with it. Apart from a handful of very promising essays[10] and a single book-length study (Timothy R. Austin's *Language Crafted*), comparatively little to date has been published that has seriously attempted to employ the insights of current syntactic theory in literary study.

In the meantime, things in linguistics had gotten increasingly interesting. When Chomsky first mounted arguments for the 'innateness hypothesis,' against the behaviorist orthodoxy, he caused considerable controversy. The ensuing flurry of empirical research over

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copies, it was often cited even though many scholars did not have access to it. All of which is just to say that the most substantial treatment of Chomsky's initial ideas is to be found in *LSLT* not in *SS*.

[9] The classic treatment of the structuralist program for literary study is Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), a book that is so deftly argued and wide-ranging that it remains illuminating.

[10] One the most influential collections in the development of stylistics is Chatman and Levin's *Essays on the Language of Literature* (1967).

the next couple of decades dramatically vindicated many of the claims that, when he originally asserted them, were thought outlandish, so that the transformational-generative approach eventually claimed a central position in linguistics. The dominant theory of language in the 19th century emerged from the subfield of historical linguistics, and many of the most important insights of structural linguistics derived from phonetics and phonology (Ferdinand de Saussure is most well-known in linguistics departments not for the *Cours de linguistique générale* but for his work on laryngeals). But with the emergence of modern syntactic theory, a quite different conception of human language emerged. Many of the ideas in this new conception were actually, as Chomsky has often emphasized, not really new at all but rather were formalizations of conceptions of language dating from at least the 17th century that had lain fallow during the first half of the 20th (see his *Cartesian Linguistics*). These traditional lines of thinking included the idea that all human languages must have underlying similarities that can be formalized as rules (a 'Universal Grammar') and that human language use, rather than being merely imitative, is fundamentally creative (in the sense that speakers have an unbounded capacity to produce new constructions that are not related by any process of induction or analogy to constructions they have heard). The so-called 'Chomskyan Revolution' was thus really just an updated version of one kind of traditional approach, synthesized with theoretical developments in the formal sciences. The general framework underwent an even more dramatic shift when Chomsky published his *Lectures on Government and Binding* (1981), a work that,

synthesizing a large body of research by many different linguists working in the field, inaugurated an approach that was historically unprecedented, the 'Principles and Parameters' approach. As Chomsky describes it,

> The P&P approach held that languages have no rules in anything like the familiar sense, and no theoretically significant grammatical constructions except as taxonomic artifacts. There are universal principles [that are identical across all human languages] and a finite array of options as to how they apply (parameters), but no language-particular rules and no grammatical constructions of the traditional sort within or across languages. (*MP* 5-6)

The current line of thinking today is known as 'minimalism,' an approach, heavily influenced by Luigi Rizzi's *Relativized Minimality* (1990) and Chomsky's *The Minimalist Program* (1995), that is similar to the P&P model in many respects but (as the name suggests) aims to dramatically simplify the theoretical apparatus.

One particularly important aspect of current linguistic theory that has been made increasingly explicit as it has developed is its *internalist* orientation. The behaviorist approach construed the linguist's object of inquiry, language, as a set of learned behaviors or a set of learned rules; the structuralist approach construed the object of inquiry as a set of sentences, a set of paired sounds and meanings, or a system of signs. Both of these approaches encountered serious problems: the empirical predictions of the behaviorist approach were not borne out by the facts, and the structuralist approach was so abstract that it was difficult to see what empirical predictions it could make (a 'science of signs' very quickly becomes a science of everything). The current approach is to construe the object of inquiry

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as the human faculty for language itself—that is, one module of the human mind, a real thing in the world. Linguistics so conceived is a naturalistic inquiry like any other,[11] and can thus be held to the stringent standards of the natural sciences rather than falling awkwardly in the interstices between the robustly humanistic and the robustly naturalistic.[12] This does not mean that linguistics can provide an automatic descriptive procedure, or that it can make literary study itself scientific (in any sense), but just that linguistics has a somewhat more clearly defined domain of inquiry than it once did. Literature departments have, sadly, not taken much notice of these developments, and, since linguists are often wary of some kinds of literary theory,[13] and since current research in linguistics displays a level of technical complexity that is truly daunting to the untrained, the obstacles to remedying this situation are not inconsiderable. One of the main aims of this dissertation is therefore to present some of the findings of current linguistics, particularly within syntactic theory, and

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[11] Chomsky has even gone so far as to suggest that speaking of language 'learning' is misleading and that we should rather speak of language 'growth,' because the language faculty develops in a way identical to any other organ: it has a genetically pre-determined course whose unfolding is only affected by environmental factors within certain narrow bounds (*New Horizons* 120).

[12] See Chomsky's *New Horizons* (106-34) for a more detailed discussion of what it means for linguistics to be a naturalistic inquiry.

[13] Austin, for example, who is clearly a quite capable linguist, makes the rather strange claim that "The whole enterprise of modern linguistic science, together with its many interdisciplinary applications, is, after all, in serious trouble if the suspicions of the Derrideans turn out to be justified" (4). Austin seems unaware both that Derrida is not professing a simplistic radical skepticism of the nothing-means-anything variety (which would, after all, be a silly position for a trained philosopher to hold), and that Derrida's critiques of linguistics are almost entirely directed at structural linguistics (and when Derrida does discuss Chomsky, it's fairly clear that he has only limited acquaintance with the scholarly literature in syntax). Deconstruction is no more a threat to linguistics than it is a threat to physics.

to show in practice how these findings may be applied to specific problems of literary interpretation.

This dissertation also aims to present and defend a theory of literature. The test of such a theory must be how well it squares with what happens when one concretely engages with a particular text, and so I have attempted as much as possible to weave interpretation and theoretical argumentation together, thereby to hold my theoretical arguments to the strictest standard I could manage. This is, however, an unorthodox strategy; an introduction such as this is usually devoted largely to an argument on behalf of the method to be employed in the main text and its theoretical presuppositions, whereas I will not present all of those arguments here since they are part of the subject matter of the main text. As an aid to those who wish to put my theory of literature together as a whole, given that it is distributed throughout the body text, and as a stimulus to the memory for those who have already worked through the arguments in the main text, I have included as Appendix A a summary of the whole theory including many of the arguments in its defense. The appendix is intended to aid to the reader in considering the arguments as they appear in the body of the dissertation, not to replace those arguments.

For the present, I will briefly discuss two main aspects of my theory of literature that have significant consequences for my method in these essays and, I think, for literary criticism generally. The two claims I wish to discuss are that artworks are (1) immanently autotelic, and that they are (2) inherently particular. To say that artworks are *immanently autotelic* is to say that, considered in

themselves, they are not instrumental (i.e., they do not have an external end). Artworks contrast, in this respect, with non-aesthetic man-made objects, like hammers, that are immanently exotelic. If I hit a nail with a hammer, I am using the hammer *as a hammer*, and being used to whack things is part of what it means to be a hammer. I can, of course, hit a nail with a volume of verse, but then I am not using the poems as poems—I am using them as a hammer. It would make little sense to say that being used to whack things is necessarily part of what it means to be a poem, since a poem performed aloud could hardly be turned to that purpose (whereas a hammer made of air would be no hammer at all). Artworks, then, are immanently autotelic: considered in themselves, they are their own end.

It is important to distinguish this view from the stronger claim sometimes identified as the claim of 'aesthetic autonomy,' namely that artworks are *both* immanently and transcendently autotelic, as when Oscar Wilde, in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* asserts that "All art is quite useless" (4).[14] Whenever an artwork spurs us to

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[14] Oddly, this view is often attributed to the New Critics, who thought no such thing. See Wellek's chapter on the New Criticism in vol. 6 of *A History of Modern Criticism.* As he points out, the usual complaints against the New Critics "can be so convincingly refuted by an appeal to the texts that I wonder whether current commentators have ever actually read the writings of the New Critics" (144). Often, it seems to me, the New Critics (Wimsatt and Brooks especially) were asking the right questions, even if they did not frame those questions rigorously enough or answer them in a satisfactory way. The only element of the New Critical paradigm that I would reject wholesale (and it was really only central to Brooks' position) is the view (ultimately derived from Romantic organicism) that the poem reconciles opposites or, in one way or another, achieves unity. We do not need the notion of unity as long as we can speak of a text as a coherent object by appeal to the linguistic facts that constitute it (and by its temporal constitution, for which see Appendix A), and we cannot know in advance whether a poem will resolve the problems it produces (in my experience, poems never do, and this is surely part of what makes them enigmas rather than riddles, *q.v.* Adorno *AT*). My main sympathy with the New Critics is the emphasis on close reading, though I aim to make close reading a dramatically more demanding procedure.

reflection, it is serving an external end (namely, to make us think in a particular way), and so *for us* the artwork does have an external end and is not *quite* useless. Artworks are, therefore, immanently autotelic, but they are also transcendently exotelic. The latter is not part of what makes the artwork an artwork (a painting is still a painting if no-one is looking at it), which is why it is a merely *transcendent* feature of the object (a feature that the object has insofar as it is considered from a perspective outside of itself—that is, from our perspective).[15] When we write an interpretation of a work of literature, we are putting the work to use, just as we would be putting it to use if we gave it to a child in the hopes that it would amuse them, or even morally improve them, where the external end of the work from the perspective of the child is the child's pleasure or the child's emboldened virtue. But interpretation is a unique use to which literature can be put because it claims to be an interpretation *of the text*, to return to the immanence of the work, rather than simply leaving the work behind after one has taken one's pleasure from it. To put it another way, if we use the work for our amusement, then we reduce the work to a mere occasion for our own self-reflection; and if we use the work to make a political point, then we reduce the work to a mere instrument of propaganda; whereas if we make an interpretation of the work, then *we* become the

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[15] In this context, I am using the word *transcendent* in its etymological sense of that which exceeds the boundaries of the object (e.g., in this case, the world of readers and the various uses to which they put literature), rather than its Kantian sense, or any other sense. When I say that artworks are *transcendently exotelic*, the word *transcendently* should not be taken to imply, for example, that it is part of the essential nature of artworks to be exotelic, or that they are exotelic in some kind of mystical or religious way. In other words, the boundary the crossing of which *transcendent* is supposed to designate is just the boundary of the immanence of the object itself.

mere occasion, the domain in which the artwork's self-reflection can transpire. Among all of the uses to which literature may be put, only interpretation does not betray the dialectic of the work by bringing it to rest. Only interpretation preserves the artwork as an artwork, rather than exploiting it for alien ends.

This merely descriptive feature of the artwork (that it is immanently autotelic but transcendently exotelic) thus has definite implications for our interpretive practice. The implications just mentioned are admittedly abstract, but they do give us some sense of what interpretation ought to be: the self-reflection of the object mediated by the critic, rather than the critic's vain self-reflection mediated by the object. This does not necessarily prevent our adopting any of the familiar frameworks for interpretation, but it obliges us to approach the application of those frameworks in a less cavalier manner than we might otherwise be inclined. But these descriptive facts also have, I believe, further consequences. If, for example, artworks are by nature not instrumental in themselves, and if communicative language, by contrast, is by nature instrumental in itself, then it follows that artworks made of language (works of literature) are not instances of communicative language.[16] This in turn entails that the aim of interpretation cannot be to recover the

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[16] See ch. 3 for further discussion of this point. I am in sympathy here, to an extent, with the Russian Formalists, who also distinguished between "practical" and literary language (Eichenbaum 108). My arguments in support of this point, however, differ considerably from theirs, in much the same way that, although I also invoke linguistics as a necessary feature of literary study, the linguistics I am invoking is quite different (i.e., not structuralist or proto-structuralist) and my view of its place in literary study is different (they sought to understand "literariness" rather than to interpret individual texts).

intentions of the author, because the immanent *telos* of the artwork cannot be to communicate an intention, which means that the author's views about the meaning of his or her work (or about anything else, for that matter) are no more relevant to the interpretation of the text than anyone else's views are. The fact that works of literature are not communicative also entails that theories of the communicative use of language (e.g., speech act theory) will be qualitatively incompatible with literary study.

The second main feature of my theory of literature that I'd like to mention here is the claim that artworks are *intrinsically particular*.[17] We find a similar notion in a sentence from Aristotle's *Poetics* (a sentence to which I will often return in the following essays): "Poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since poetry rather speaks universally [*katholou*], whereas history speaks the particular [*hekaston*]" (1451b5-7, my trans.). Aristotle's point is that, although the *matter* of poetry and history are the same (the particular), poetry speaks in a distinctive *manner* (universally). The universality of poetry's mode of speaking is still not the pure universality of philosophy (which is why it is "*more* philosophic" than history, not just equivalent to philosophy). The universal manner of poetry transpires within the particularity of its matter. A history of Thebes might contain an account of Oedipus the Tyrant, but, although the particular details might be exactly the same, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* nevertheless gives voice to what is universal in the story of Oedipus, though without going over into making general

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[17] See Chapter 2 for further discussion of this issue.

pronouncements. The universality of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is not, for example, reducible to the universal statements made by individual characters; if those statements are removed from the play and taken out of the mouths of literary characters, they become simply philosophical claims. The universality of *Oedipus Tyrannus* resides exactly in what cannot be wrested free from its particular substance. Even an allegory does not simply discuss abstract concepts, but embodies them; the gesture of embodiment is just what makes an allegory an allegory rather than a moral treatise. Even the novel of ideas feels the need to provide a particular *persona* to give its ideas a voice. Works of literature, then, are intrinsically particular, but (transcendently) they aim beyond the mere recording of facts towards the universality of meaning, a universality mediated by particularity.

One important consequence of the inherent particularity of literature is that interpretation cannot proceed by attempting to convert the particulars of the text into universals, because in doing so we would leave out precisely what makes the text a work of literature, its particularity. Our aim cannot be just to reduce a poem to a plain prose statement (which usually just leaves us with a plain prose platitude anyway). And we also cannot reduce the text to a mere instantiation of some larger, universal phenomenon like literariness, ideology, resistance or subversion. To do so is not just to misread the text, it is to fail to read the text at all—that is, to read it *as literature*. But we also don't want to fall into the view that the text has no relation to the world at all, since that leaves us only with the discourse of appreciation, which, in attempting to praise the artwork, only

slanders it by imputing to it no real importance whatever. Our Scylla and Charybdis are Dogmatism and Belletrism.[18]

Artworks do have a relation to the world, but it is a *negative* relation. Insofar as an artwork comes into being as something immanently autotelic and inherently particular (that is, insofar as it is an artwork at all), it can only come into being through its determinate repudiation of a world that is, after all, wholly mastered by the reduction of people to mere means and the elevation of abstractions over human lives. If anything has a claim to being hermetic, it is the world, whose bloated totality is punctured by the sharp corners of art's negativity. As Adorno says, "Art's asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society" (*AT* 226). The particularity of artworks is a crucial element of their negativity. This means that we must consider artworks in themselves, not because of their independence from the social but precisely because of their intimacy with the social. Artworks become less relevant to human concerns, not more relevant, when we attempt to bolster their political credentials with an injection of extrinsic historical or conceptual material. Dogmatism and Belletrism end up converging in their disdain for the artwork. For the belletrist, the artwork is at best a source of private joy (in the midst of universal horror) that reconciles us to our fate, rather than allowing us to see how what was humanly made can be humanly unmade. The dogmatist has the same conception of the artwork, but responds with loathing for art's depraved failure to act when action seems demanded, combined with guilt for taking an interest in art in the first place—and

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[18] On the latter, see Williams, "The New Belletrism."

so the dogmatist attempts to undo art's autonomy in order to save it, like a child trying to restore flight to an injured bird by tossing it off of a tall building.

The intrinsic particularity of art, then, demands not larger, bolder, broader theses and less nitpicky close reading, but *more* close reading, a close reading far closer than anyone has ever even attempted. I have made some very partial and preliminary attempts along these lines in the essays that follow in the hopes of showing not only that such an approach has positive results but also that an enormous amount of work remains to be done, even with the most well-known poems. Minute attention to detail and subtle discriminations often provoke the complaint that one is 'over-reading,' but this complaint presents one with a false choice between an unseemly excess and a restraint that keeps one in the well-worn grooves. The only question is whether or not an argument in support of an interpretation has demonstrated its truth on the basis of textual evidence. Either the argument proves its claims or it doesn't. Neither indulging in technical detail nor ascetically eschewing it will immunize us against error.

The inherent particularity of art also entails that one ought not construct a book-length project in which a series of studies of individual poems are subordinated to a larger interpretive argument. If one succeeds at integrating multiple individual works into the same argument then one will be certain to have missed everything particular to each individual work, and hence will have missed what makes them works of literature entirely. The truth of the matter, of course, is that

most academic books—even extremely good ones like Auerbach's *Mimesis*—are really just collections of essays anyway, nested in a set of claims so ambitious that no book could ever possibly make good on them. Such concessions to the vagaries of academic publishing are a positive hindrance in inquiries of this kind. But if we take the opposite approach and only write articles about individual poems we end up replicating in our own work the errors of the hermetic theory of art, behaving as if the artwork's particularity is a product of indifference rather than negativity. What this dissertation attempts to do, then, is to construct a book length project in which the individual chapters are deliberately disjunctive, in which the individual readings relate to one another in such a way that they create further tensions and difficulties, rather than using one interpretation to prop up the sagging corners of the other in the hopes that the whole ramshackle edifice will amount to something. The essays that follow are to be taken one by one, to successively construct a legible constellation, a web of suspended difficulties.

The theories of language and of literature that I've presented are doubtless imperfect, but they do at least demarcate the boundaries of a coherent space within which to carry out the inquiries I have in mind. As I've said, these inquiries, however much they may involve discussions of literary theory, poetics or philosophy, are primarily interpretive. At this point, having disposed of the necessary presuppositions of interpretation at least for the nonce, and thus leaving the domain of description, I ought to give some account of my method of interpretation proper. But, from the account of the inherent

particularity of artworks that I have provided above, it follows necessarily that *no method for interpretation is in fact possible.* If the aim is to interpret the object in its particularity (since this is the only way to interpret it *as literature*), then one can hardly expect to know in advance of reading it what it will mean. Similarly, if the aim is to interpret the object immanently, without importing extrinsic material, then one cannot approach the text with the external material of a positive method. But if one is not to arrive at the text with a method (apart from the purely negative conditions imposed on interpretation by the nature of literature and language), this does not mean that one must do without a method entirely, proceeding arbitrarily rather than methodically. Rather, the aim should be to develop one's interpretive method out of the text itself. Instead of arriving at the poem with an interpretive toolkit, one wrests a way of thinking about the poem from the poem's own resources. This does not, of course, prevent one from employing, for example, the technical apparatus of linguistics, because then a merely descriptive claim is at issue: using linguistics can give you a very precise way of characterizing particular linguistic facts about the text. By the same token, those merely descriptive observations do not themselves constitute interpretations, so rather than linguistics solving interpretive problems it actually does just the opposite, making apparently simple problems more exigent and revealing entirely new problems to spur inquiry.

Most of the following essays begin with discussions of issues in philosophy or poetics and then proceed to discussing the text of the poem. One should not be misled by this format into inferring that the

text is to be treated as a mere example of the theoretical claims (the alternative format, which would give theory the last word, seemed to me the worse evil).[19] The theoretical discourse is purely instrumental to the interpretation of the poem, to the unfolding of its immanent truth. In principle one could always provide the same account of the poem without appeal to such topics as Aristotle's views on form, and I discuss extrinsic material only (1) in order draw out the philosophical issues that are *already* in the poem, and (2) to do so in the most perspicuous, accessible and economical way possible. That is not to say that the essays that follow do not make philosophical claims, but just that each essay (if I have done my job) shows that the *poem* makes (or determinately demands that we make) those philosophical claims. I found while writing these essays that, even if I had wanted to reduce the poems to mere illustrations, it would have been impossible for me to do so. Even poems that I had read hundreds of times, committed to memory and examined closely, would surprise me every time I sat down to work with them—obstructing my attempts to predict where the argument would go with surprising frequency. The interpretations in each essay thus frequently stray from the frame in which I have placed them, as will necessarily happen whenever one takes the particularity of the work seriously.

It should, however, be said that despite the absence of any positive interpretive method, there are thematic regularities among the

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[19] Sometimes I have attempted a slightly more dialectical progression by beginning with the poem in order to set up the problem, turning to the theoretical issues to give a richer account of the problem, and then returning to the poem in order that it may agitate and contradict the theoretical account. This has not, however, always been practicable, particularly in chapters whose primary focus is poetics.

interpretations these essays produce, not least in that they are all concerned, in some way, with the ways in which the poems engage with the metaphysics of form. I begin with the relation between form and matter (chapter 1), the problem at the origin of metaphysics itself; if form is construed as a universal (as in Plato), the problem of the universal and the particular (chapter 2) results; if form is construed as perceptible shape, then form becomes a problem of experience (chapter 3); if forms are universals and universals are concepts that the mind applies to the world, then the problem is one of subject and object (chapter 4); if nature is the mere stuff which mankind forms, then the problem of form is one of art and nature (chapter 5); and if forms are eternal, and things in this diurnal sphere mere changeable dross, then the problem of form is the problem of transcendence (chapter 6). This linkage by *topos* is one of the things that puts the poems into enough of a relation to one another that the essays can be disjunctive rather than being merely indifferent, but it also makes it possible to focus attention on the ways in which issues in poetics and interpretation are bound up with metaphysical questions. If we see the basic problem of criticism as the difficulty of getting from form to content, from an observation about a text to its meaning, then the relationship between form and content is a central problem of method. My aim has been to set into relation a set of poems that, in thematizing metaphysical issues, also thematize the problems of interpretive method, thus ideally allowing us to think through poetry's own theory of itself rather than our theory of it. And it is no mere accident that it should be possible to do so: when we invoke the category of form in literary

criticism, the concept bears with it a long philosophical history and an enormous array of difficult problems that we must deal with if we are to take literary form even remotely seriously. One of the most unfortunate features of the fragmentation of literary study is that critics with the greatest philosophical sophistication often have limited acquaintance with the technical problems of linguistics and poetics, and critics with intricate knowledge of linguistics and poetics often have a limited grasp of the philosophical tradition. The peculiar problems of literary study demand that these two things be thought together.

The philosophical tradition I draw especially heavily on in the following essays is German Idealism, along with some of its important antecedents in the ancient world and inheritors in the present. In part this choice is motivated by the fact that the philosophers in this tradition have some of the most interesting things to say about metaphysics and form, since both categories are central concerns of their philosophical projects. But this is also another element that draws together this particular set of poems. Despite the considerable stretch of time between the earliest and the latest poems I discuss (1821-1914), all of them emerge out of an intellectual historical situation that is deeply informed by idealist philosophy (and the utilitarian and positivist reactions to it). These poems thus share a negative relation to similar historical circumstances, which draws them just close enough to one another that their differences are thrown into relief. The choice of the long 19th century is not an absolute restriction: it would be possible to pursue work along similar

lines in any period (or with a selection of poems that cuts across periods), and the choice of period for this dissertation is in no small part a practical matter. But there are more substantial reasons why the 19th century should be a particularly rich seam.

If one of the substantial (rather than merely critical) aims of metaphysics is to think the absolute, then metaphysics begins to resemble theology (more on this in ch. 6). But metaphysics remains something other than theology; it preserves the impulse to think the absolute but is fraught with problems in attempting to fulfill that impulse (not least that it insists on *thinking* the absolute rather than merely *believing* in it). The culture of the 19th century exhibits a peculiar sympathy with the predicament of metaphysics, since the durable verities of religion then seemed seriously threatened in a new way (principally by historical criticism of the Bible and new developments in the natural sciences), and new discourses of the transcendent arose to fill the void (the Everlasting Yea!) that showed strain at every seam but could not simply be dismissed. In this sense, as in so many others, our own concerns are inherited from the 19th century, both in the larger culture and in academic life, where an interest in religion is on the rise (though, admittedly, not always in a salutary way). These poems, then, remain responsive to our condition, the determinate negations of an intolerable world that, in perpetually disturbing thought's dogmatic slumber, demand that we learn not merely to think different thoughts but to think differently, in order that we might think a world better than the present one.

Chapter 1

Form & Matter: *The Workbox*

The Workbox, like so many of Hardy's poems, summons gravity out of triviality, a gesture which puts on display the curious power of the accidental and contingent to draw the inevitable and necessary. In *Channel Firing,* for instance, the churchyard dead are woken up accidentally by gunnery practice out at sea, which they mistake for the thunder of the Day of Wrath, and, after being set right by a whimsical Deity, make the kind of small talk which only the long perspective of death makes possible; but the roaring of the guns echoes through the final lines all the way back to the abyssal druidic past. Most of the poems which, like *The Workbox,* appeared in the volume titled *Satires of Circumstance* are centered on some mere contingency which points beyond itself: the coincidental convergence of the Titanic with a block of ice, which "jars two hemispheres"; the dog in *Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?* who, having utterly forgotten his dead mistress, like everyone else, happens to have buried a bone on her grave; or the tune playing outside the newlyweds' window in *In the Nuptial Chamber* which inspires the bride's revelation about her old lover. In *The Workbox* the accidental lodestone is a sewing box offered by a joiner to his wife in the first two lines:

> 'See, here's the workbox, little wife,
>   That I made of polished oak.'[20]

We can hardly be surprised that the poem opens by gesturing at the workbox of its title, but it is less clear why the joiner should go on to

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[20] All quotations are from *Complete Poems.*

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specify what the workbox is made out of. The difference between the two lines is the difference between matter and form: the second designates the material at the joiner's disposal and the first specifies the particular thing he made out of it. The second line is a relative clause modifying the noun phrase *the workbox,* thus subordinating mere matter to form. We cannot be sure, however, whether the relative clause is restrictive (i.e., *the workbox made of oak as opposed to the one made of cedar*), and hence necessary and essential, or whether it is non-restrictive (i.e., *the workbox, which just happens to be made of oak*), and hence contingent. [21] In the former case, matter would not be subordinated to form but would define its essence; matter would be that upon which form depends, the wood without which there could be no workbox. In the latter case, matter would be inessential: a workbox could be made out of a different material and still be the same sort of object, a workbox. If the workbox is the hinge on which the drama of the poem turns from happenstance to fear and trembling, it embodies the drama within itself, an embodiment brought into being by the form of the poem.

Working out the relations between form and matter, contingency and necessity in even these first two lines is far from straightforward.

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[21] In Standard American English, *which* can normally be used with either restrictive or non-restrictive relative clauses, but *that* can only be used with restrictive clauses unless it is accompanied by an intonational break (which, in writing, the comma often marks). In my view, the phrase "little wife," intervening where it does, provides just such an intonational break, and therefore opens up the ambiguity I'm suggesting. Also, the Old English *þe,* from which *that* is derived, could be used either restrictively or non-restrictively (Allen 91), and Hardy, being an avid amateur philologist, might well have been acquainted with this earlier usage. Moreover, there are some dialects of Modern English that still may use *that* ambiguously in this way (see Jacobsson and van der Auwera). (Thanks to John Bowers and Wayne Harbert for these references.)

Since the oak is *polished* the raw material which the joiner used to form the workbox isn't really raw at all; it has been preformed, subjected already to the labor of art (a point to which we will return presently). The ambiguity of the relative clause mentioned above results from the fact that the usual means of clarification, namely the comma (*the workbox that is made of oak* versus *the workbox, which is made of oak*), have been preempted by the parenthetical *little wife.* This suggests already the way in which the joiner's wife will form another hinge, somehow associated with the workbox, marking the enigma of the relation between form and matter.

We should not be surprised that difficulties and puzzles abound since these lines invoke metaphysical categories, categories bearing with them the most durable problems facing two millennia of philosophical speculation. Even the etymologies of the Greek philosophical vocabulary seem to glimmer through the language of these lines: *hylē,* the term for matter in Plato and Aristotle, originally meant 'wood,' and both *idea* and *eidos,* two of the slippery names of form, derive from verbs meaning 'to see.'[22] The earliest sense of these philosophical terms, as their origin suggests, was 'perceptible form' or 'type.' But it is worth tracing the trajectory of these terms so that we can understand, against its philosophical background, how *The Workbox* extends and complicates a set of familiar problems.

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[22] Liddel & Scott, *s.v.,* "hylē," "idea," "eidos," "*eido." Aristotle even associates the desire to know that motivates metaphysics with sight in the first paragraph of his *Metaphysics* (980a in the *Complete Works;* all further references are to this edition unless otherwise indicated).

Plato's early dialogues, on a traditional reading of the Platonic corpus, give us a relatively clear picture of the Socratic conception of philosophy.[23] For Socrates, the vocation of philosophy is the teaching of the right life. One cannot live rightly without knowing what is right, and so right action presupposes a prior inquiry into the nature of right. Much of the early dialogues are thus concerned with establishing reliable definitions for conceptions of right embodied in virtues. *Euthyphro,* for example, is concerned with piety, and the aim is to discover "that form itself that makes all pious actions pious . . . so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not" (6d-e).[24] "Form," here, is thus the property that each pious action has by virtue of which it is pious. This pursuit presupposes, of course, that the set of pious actions is a natural kind and that the criterion for inclusion in the set is a particular property. For example, Euthyphro proposes to define the pious as "what is dear to the gods" (6e). In order for this definition to satisfy Socrates' criteria, it must be the case that every pious action has the property of being dear to the gods and every impious action does not have this property. The problem that Socrates sets himself here is only incidentally to establish what piety is (that is, which property makes an action pious).

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[23] My account of Plato here and in what follows may be unfair in certain respects because I am reading Plato through the lens of Aristotle (see *Met.* 987a32-b10, 1078b9-1079a4, 1086a32-b11), though I am doing so mainly to outline a specific set of problems that bear on the poem. This is, in other words, a reading of the philosophical tradition through the lens of the *The Workbox,* rather than a reading of *The Workbox* through the lens of the philosophical tradition (which, in my view, wouldn't be a reading of *The Workbox* at all).

[24] All references to Plato in this chapter are to *Five Dialogues,* unless otherwise noted.

The definition of this virtue or any other is sought not for its own sake, but for the sake of an act of judgment in which we decide which actions are pious and which ones are not. Such judgments allow us to evaluate the courses of action open to us and to choose the virtuous course. But *Euthyphro* is an inconclusive dialogue in the sense that Socrates never agrees to any of the definitions Euthyphro proposes. By the end, Socrates's line of thinking seems to be heading, if anywhere, in the direction of dissolving the virtue of piety into the virtue of justice. The point is not (or not only) to expose the self-importance behind Euthyphro's pretended piety; Socrates is quite earnest in seeking a definition of piety. But since the aim is right action, knowledge of the essence of piety is finally irrelevant: the only test of a good definition is the practical test of whether it will consistently produce the right results. In this respect, Socrates is not interested in "form" in a metaphysical sense at all, or if he is interested in metaphysics it is only as something wholly subordinated to ethics.

The Plato of the middle dialogues, however, is a metaphysician proper, and "form" therefore comes to mean the real essence of things rather than an ethical rule of thumb.[25] For Plato, [26] ethics is just the pursuit of the good (not, say, the practice of right), and thus ethics presupposes metaphysics and metaphysics cannot be subordinated to

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[25] I am setting aside the late Plato in order to make the contrast with Aristotle more stark, thereby to make the philosophical issues clearer. But it is worth noting that many of the common criticisms of the theory of forms as it is described in *Phaedo* and *Republic* are to be found in Plato's own *Parmenides,* and the *Laws* seems to have little use for the theory of forms.

[26] I am using "Plato" here as a shorthand for the views that Plato's Socrates seems to advocate in the middle dialogues, which, in accordance with the traditional reading, I take to be more properly Plato's views (though Plato surely regarded them as an elaboration of his master's views rather than a refutation of them).

it. Plato's metaphysical categories have an ethical comportment, which is why the Form of the Good is the highest reality, but knowledge of essence is no longer purely instrumental. *Phaedo* is the dialogue in which it is most clear how knowledge of essence becomes, in Plato, the sum of ethics, since philosophy is there construed as a "training for death" that eases the passage of the soul into its more durable environs (81a). Plato makes the distinction between forms and sensible particulars by observing that the soul perceives the former, whereas the body perceives the latter (65-66a). But the body is a merely mutable thing and suffers change. Plato claims that "the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, [cannot] ever be affected by any change whatever," whereas "the many beautiful particulars, be they men, horses, clothes, or other such things, or the many equal particulars, and all those which bear the same name as those others . . . never in any way remain the same as themselves or in relation to each other" (78d-e). The suggestion that sensible particulars don't even "remain the same as themselves" might sound implausibly extreme, but the rationale here is a compelling one. There is presumably something about all beautiful things by virtue of which they are beautiful (call it *Beauty*), but a beautiful horse will one day die. And it makes little sense to say (except hyperbolically) that Beauty itself dies when the horse dies, since after the horse's death there are still beautiful things. That by virtue of which the horse is beautiful must be immutable since it seems unaffected by all the transformations to which flesh is heir. If we say that the horse and that by virtue of which the horse is beautiful are the same thing, since

we can't imagine the two separately, we put ourselves in the position of saying that the horse is simultaneously mutable and immutable; so, if we are to be consistent, we must suppose that the horse and its beauty are different, the one mutable the other immutable. In the Socratic terms we began with, we might say that any definition (of a virtue, for example) that we might construct must, if it is a true definition, always be true of what it defines, which is just to say that it must be a universal. But if a definition must be universal, then it must always be true, and if it must always be true then it cannot be subject to change and must therefore be something qualitatively different than any particular virtuous person or act.

The problem, of course, is then to explain how it is that forms relate to sensible particulars, how Beauty and a horse add up to a beautiful horse. Plato's rather dodgy answer is to say that "nothing else makes [a beautiful thing] beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to the Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of this relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful" (100d). Plato here leaves a significant gap in his account since he simply refuses to explain how exactly this "presence" (*parousia*) or "sharing in" (*koinōnia*) or participation (*methexis*) of the Form in the thing happens. He seems to presume that the exact nature of the interaction of Forms with sensible particulars will not affect the claims he has explicitly made (that Forms and sensible particulars are separate, that Forms are immutable and sensible particulars are mutable, that Forms are perceived by the soul and

sensible particulars are perceived by the body). Part of the reason why this linkage can be left alone in the *Phaedo* is that its larger purpose is to prove that the soul is immortal once separated from the body—and a feebler linkage is more easily broken.

Aristotle takes Plato to task on just this point. As he observes in the *Metaphysics*, a Form is always the form *of* something, and so depends upon the particular for its content in such a way that it cannot be really autonomous (991b). In a sense, this is the revenge of the problem of definitions, since every Form except the Form of the Good is a Form of something particular, and its definability therefore chains it to sensible particulars like a man chained to a corpse. For Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, the primary question is the nature of substance (*ousia*) and whether or not it should be associated with form (*morphē*) or matter (*hylē*). When we seek to know the substance of something we are looking for two things, according to Aristotle: (1) what it is that makes the thing what it is (its essence), and (2) what it is in the thing that persists through various changes (*to hypokeimenon,* 'the substrate,' or more literally, 'the what-underlies').[27] The key to the problem of essence is to distinguish merely accidental properties of each object from those properties that are necessary to the object being what it is (1031b). In a very straightforward way, matter doesn't seem like a very good candidate for providing us with the essence of the thing: there's nothing about the sheer fact of being made of bronze that explains the essence of a bronze statue, especially

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[27] I take this way of framing the issues from Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles,* 202ff.

since so many things can be made of bronze that the bronze must be indifferent to what is made of it. Form thus seems like the more plausible candidate, and so Aristotle sets himself the task of showing that form is the substance of things, in the sense that their form is their essence, without reproducing the Platonic dualism.

Of course Aristotle must also deal with the problems that Plato's theory was responding to, not least the problem of change. Since sensible particulars are subject to change, Plato supposed that there must be something immutable behind them. Aristotle also wants to claim that there is something that persists, but what persists for Aristotle must be something internal to the thing itself since we are able to recognize the same object even as it changes (in fact, being able to recognize the object as the same is the only thing that makes it possible for us to know that it has changed). As Aristotle puts it, "the substratum is that of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else" (1028b-1029a). For example, we can say that a man who learns music becomes 'musical,' and by doing so we presuppose that something holds constant (the man) even though we have predicated something new of him (that he is musical). The substrate of the man is what persists through any number of predications, what persists when the man becomes a musical man, just as the essence of the man is what makes him a man rather than, say, a sheep. Aristotle's project is to construe the relationship of form and matter in such a way that he can explain the substance of things both in terms of their substrate and in terms of their essence.

In order to do so, he reconceives form as actuality (*energeia* or *entelechia*) and matter as potentiality (*dynamis*). Aristotle's claim is that the categories of form and matter as conceived by Plato were too static. On the one hand, Plato tried to keep them too strictly apart when the real question is how they relate to one another; on the other, Plato used the distinction as a bulwark against the flux of the perceptible world instead of finding a way to explain that flux as a movement toward the immovable. On Aristotle's account, understanding form as a permanent determination prevents one from understanding change. We need to be able to say not only that a particular sheep is a sheep, but also to say that a lamb becomes a sheep, that a lamb is potentially a sheep. Understanding form as actuality, as the realization of essence, explains why change happens the way it does, why acorns become trees and not sheep—because the acorn is already *potentially* a tree.

The clean separation between form and matter in Plato is thus quite done away with, not because it is impossible to conceive of a realm of pure Forms carrying out some immutable existence more real that ours (though Aristotle does think that notion absurd), but because it is impossible to conceive of *pure matter:* "matter is unknowable in itself" (*Met.* 1036a8). If matter is understood as potentiality, then it is already potentially *something.* The potentiality of matter is infinite—wood could be made into as many things as human ingenuity can come up with—but it is also determinate—wood will never be made into a round of cheese or a sparrow (1044a). Matter is preformed (1049b). The closer the matter is to actualization in a

sensory particular, the more preformed it is—wood which has been hewn into boards is closer to being actualized as a workbox than a living tree is, and hence is a more *proximate* potentiality (1049a; Irwin 230-3). In this sense, Aristotle maintains the traditional hierarchy which places form above matter (1049b), since matter is only conceivable in its relation to form.[28]

The Workbox seems to proceed against the grain of this traditional elevation of form over matter. When the joiner's wife comments, upon receiving the present, "'Twill last all my sewing years!" (8) the joiner responds, not with observations about aspects of the box's form (those aspects of its construction which resulted in its durability, for example), but with observations about the materials from which it was made:

> 'I warrant it will. And longer too.
>   'Tis a scantling that I got
> Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who
>   Died of they knew not what.' (9-12)

The *it,* which is contracted into "'Tis" in the second line of this stanza, refers to the workbox, and the line immediately proceeds to identify the workbox in terms of its matter, as "a scantling" with a particular provenance. The morbid associations of this provenance seem to have suggested the issue of matter in the first place: half way through the first line the joiner has agreed that it will "last all [her] sewing years," but then goes on to remark that it will last longer than that, longer than her ability to sew lasts, longer even than her life. What calls John

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[28] For further discussion of how Aristotle ends up restoring the primacy of form, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept & Problems,* pp. 37ff. Hegel's account of form and matter in the *Science of Logic* is remarkably close to Aristotle's, and there form also ends up being the superior member because, since it is the negative, it is active whereas matter is passive (450-4).

Wayward's demise to mind, in other words, is the hypothetical *persistence* of the workbox beyond the inevitable demise of its owner. As in the *Phaedo,* death provokes the question of form. Matter is thus identified with what persists, and by extension form seems, like human life, to be a mere accidental contingency.

The joiner elaborates on the persistence of matter in the two stanzas that follow:

> 'The shingled pattern that seems to cease
>   Against your box's rim
> Continues right on in the piece
>   That's underground with him.
>
> 'And while I worked it made me think
>   Of timber's varied doom;
> One inch where people eat and drink,
>   The next inch in a tomb.' (13-20)

"The shingled pattern" only "*seems* to cease" at the edge of the box; the truth behind this deceptive appearance is that the pattern persists in the matter of the coffin. The pattern is, in this sense, the *hypokeimenon* of the workbox *and* the coffin. On the other hand, there is in fact a physical division between the matter of the workbox and the matter of the coffin—the division which makes it possible to speak of the matter *of* the workbox. The wood of the workbox is not, however, so proximate a potentiality as to differentiate between the kinds of boxes it might be formed into. The extent to which the materials of the workbox are remote from actuality, the extent to which they gravitate towards pure matter, is also the extent to which coffin and workbox become indistinguishable or interchangeable. In terms of matter, and even to an extent in terms of form, the two are identical; the real difference is what you put in them.

It is not the *wood* out of which the workbox is made that "seems to cease"; it is the "shingled pattern"—the pattern which marks the material as preformed. "Shingled" in this context seems to mean "arranged tile-wise, imbricated," like the overlapping tiles on a roof.[29] It seems unlikely that this pattern refers to a natural property of the wood (its grain, for example), and so must refer to some artificial modification of the original material. The relative clause opened in the first line of this stanza itself "seems to cease" at the line break since "seems to cease" is a constituent (i.e., a syntactic unit[30]); the fact that the relative clause continues with "Against your box's rim" marks through syntax the persistence of the pattern over the discontinuity of the line break, the shingling of syntax and lineation.

Just as the fact that "seems to cease" is a constituent inclines us to think the relative clause might end at the line break, so in the following line "the box's rim" marks the real end of the relative clause, as well as the large grammatical subject of which it is a part. We finally arrive at the main verb for the sentence in the following line, which continues with "Continues." The phrase "Against your box's rim," since it continues over the line break, formally embodies persistence over separation, whereas its meaning remains on the side of the workbox instead of the side of the coffin, only the first half of the shingled pattern. Syntax and semantics, in other words, are at odds in that phrase. But the two meet again at the box's rim: the line break

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[29] OED, *s.v.,* "shingled."
[30] For a more detailed explanation, see Adger, pp. 62-77, 124-6.

divides subordinate from main clause, subject from predicate, workbox from coffin.

The stanza is also "shingled" with respect to the metrical positions of its polysyllables. The word "shingled" itself is positioned as a bracketing mismatch (a mismatch between the phonological word boundaries and the metrical foot boundaries),[31] setting up a pattern continued by the word "pattern." The following line has another disyllabic word, "against," but this time without the bracketing mismatch. The second two lines each contain a trisyllabic word, the first in a $W_1S_2W_3$ configuration (where 'W' is a weak, or unstressed, syllable, 'S' is strong, or stressed, syllable and the subscripts correspond to metrical positions), the second shifted one position to the right into a $S_2W_3S_4$ configuration. This shift is exactly the inverse of "shingled" and "against," which are S_2W_3 and W_1S_2, respectively. These metrical details divide the stanza neatly in half, with the couplets in an antithetical or inverse relationship, just as we have seen in their syntactic constituency, lineation and meaning.

This stanza, then, is shingled in a way that brings out the continuity of matter, the persistence of the pattern at all levels of structure, the vein of form that runs through the workbox's wood. The two couplets of the following stanza are neatly antithetical by comparison: the first two lines form a continuous sentence and the second two are made up of two discontinuous noun phrases, so the first two seem to emphasize continuity and the second two emphasize

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[31] See Appendix B for an explanation of this term and the theory of meter I am assuming.

division. Whereas the former stanza was concerned primarily with the matter of the workbox, this stanza is concerned primarily with the form given that matter, with "timber's varied doom." In opposition to Plato and Aristotle, here it is form that is on the side of contingency, that is a sign of mere flux, whereas the undivided wood, the pure matter, is necessity and unity. At precisely this point in the drama of the poem the color drains from the face of the joiner's wife.

> 'But why do you look so white, my dear,
>   And turn aside your face?
> You knew not that good lad, I fear,
>   Though he came from your native place?'
>
> 'How could I know that good young man,
>   Though he came from my native town,
> When he must have left far earlier than
>   I was a woman grown?' (21-28)

This dramatic turn contains some of the poem's most metrically rough lines, including the only two lines in the poem which have two resolutions each (24, 26; a *resolution* is when two unstressed syllables occupy a single metrical position because they are between two stressed syllables, as in "Two roads diverged *in a* yellow wood"). In the first of these two stanzas, the joiner asks two questions, only the latter of which his wife answers: "You knew not that good lad, I fear, / Though he came from your native place?" What the joiner *fears* is not that his wife did *not* know John Wayward, but that she *did* know him, so logically it should be annexed to a positive version of the sentence rather than the negative one he actually produces ("You knew *not*..."). The sentence functions both as a question (did you know that good lad?) and as a statement (I fear that you *did* know that good lad). His wife answers him with another question, repeating almost word for

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word the qualification the joiner adds, a qualification that suggests why she *might* in fact have known the dead man but which is added, in both cases, only to exclude its own implication. Of these eight lines, five require resolutions (on top of the "d'you" in line 21), and the nearly repeated lines each contain two. In each case, the resolution serves to de-emphasize the words involved, squeezing both into a single weak slot in the meter through their reduction. What is de-emphasized in both cases is the pronoun "he," referring to the dead man, and the genitive pronouns "your" and "my," both referring to the joiner's wife. This underscores the rhetorical function of these lines: John Wayward and the joiner's wife are associated, but only to suppress and exclude that association.

But the two lines are only near repetitions; apart from the genitive pronouns, the only difference between them is the final noun: "place" in the first instance and "town" in the second. We are told in the first stanza of the poem that "He was a joiner, of village life; / She came of borough folk." The word "borough" seems to be used here in the somewhat antiquated sense of something larger than a "village" but not so large as to deserve the title of "city."[32] Both the joiner and his wife, then, are not metropolitan, but of the two the wife seems to be more so, a fact which she underscores here by changing the indeterminate title of "place" to "town" (which presumably also suggests something larger than the joiner's mere "village"). The implications of this are difficult to pin down, but it seems to suggest that the period of her maturation was not passed in the joiner's village

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[32] OED, *s.v.,* "borough."

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(hence she may have a past he does not know about through local gossip) and that this past might be worth concealing, given that the larger a town is the greater is its power to corrupt (as in, for example, *The Ruined Maid*). In other words, the implication might be not only that she was associated with John Wayward in the past, but that she was wayward herself.

The last two lines of the stanza not only contain another resolution but are the most syntactically odd in the poem. One plausible reading of the syntax is to take "woman grown" to be an inverted adjective-noun sequence (i.e., 'I was a grown woman'). But this does not remove the oddity produced by the expression "earlier than," which usually requires two conjuncts with the same main verb, with the second usually ellipted, as in *John left earlier than Sally [left].* The awkwardness of line 28 is comparable to **John left earlier than she got up,* which would be more idiomatic with 'before,' as in *John left before she got up.* The awkwardness of this construction is underscored by the labeling mismatch on "than," which, being at the end of the line, should receive quite strong stress, but can't without sounding very peculiar indeed; this fact is reinforced by the strong enjambment (one of only two such in the poem, the other being line 11). The meter of these lines also seems to be reprising the suppression of she and the dead man in the repeated line. "He" again disappears into a resolution and the "I" of the second line is in a weak position (though, since inversion is commonly allowed in the first foot,

this could easily bear contrastive stress without the meter becoming inaudible).[33]

An alternative reading of the syntax of this phrase is to take "grown" as a main verb, as in *John grew marigolds*.[34] This would mean that line 28 is a passive construction meaning that some unspecified agent grew her (into a) woman—which opens the question of who this unspecified agent might be. The phrase "woman grown" also places the word "grown" at the end of a line (and at the end of a sentence and stanza), thus bringing to the forefront the question of her maturation, and what kind of experiences it entailed. All of the aspects of the form of this stanza that I have pointed to seem to imply some sort of concealed narrative, suggestive of a past association with the dead man that might explain her turning pallid at the mention of his name. The poem even invites us to imagine the sort of past which is revealed in *In the Nuptial Chamber* or something like the conclusion of Joyce's "The Dead." But in this poem the answer to the question of what the dark past might be is not supplied, any more than the wife directly answers the joiner's first question. The joiner proposes an answer himself in the stanza that follows, but his wife rejects his supposition as condescending, a suggestion that she might be affected by "Mere accidental things" (34). The *accidental* thing to which she is referring is her husband's suggestion that "It shocked [her] that [he] gave / To [her] one end of a piece of wood / Whose other is in a grave." In other words, she decisively denies just the material continuity which the

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[33] I'm speaking loosely, of course; meter can never be "audible," being a regularity in the disposition of phonological structure, not a realized phonological structure itself.
[34] Specifically, this is a causative transitive verb. See Chapter 2 for discussion.

joiner elaborated in his comment on the "shingled pattern." The following stanza opens with a "Yet" which may suggest that we are not to believe the wife's denial, that this deep continuity of matter—mere accident or not—is in fact what renders her pale and averse.

The first question the joiner asks (in the sixth stanza) is about the present moment; the question his wife answers is the second, a question about the past. But the first clause of her answer is in the *present* tense ("How could I *know* that good young man"). This suggests a displacement such that she appears to be answering the first question as well as the second, instead of flatly leaving the first unanswered. But the use of the word "know," which appears in lines 12, 39 and 40 as well, stands out. The two different senses of each use of the word in the last couplet of the poem correspond to the two prior instances in which it appears: first in the context of knowing what John Wayward died of, and second in the context of knowing John Wayward himself (with perhaps an archaic hint of carnal relations).[35]

> Yet still her lips were limp and wan,
>   Her face still held aside,
> As if she had known not only John,
>   But known of what he died. (37-40)

This last stanza has altogether less metrical tension than any other stanza of the poem; it is also not "shingled" like some others by enjambment, and displays an extremely tight parallelism in each of the two couplets. Each couplet contains two clauses which share the same verb, but in the second couplet the verb, *know,* is repeated, whereas in the first it is ellipted in the second line. *Know,* thus emphasized, has a

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[35] OED, *s.v., "*know."

slightly different sense in each of the two instances. The first sense (corresponding to the German *kennen* or the French *connaître*) is to know as in to recognize someone, to be familiar with him, or more generally to know through the senses. This mode of knowing remains within the domain of *appearance* as opposed to *essence,* and is therefore bound up with what both Plato and Aristotle regard as the transience and volatility of materiality. The second sense (corresponding to the German *wissen* or the French *savoir*) is to know as in to have certain information in mind, or to know by means of the mind. This suggests knowledge of essence or of form.

For Plato, the Forms are the only true object of knowledge, and the purpose of philosophy is to renew our acquaintance with the Forms through *anamnesis.* But for Aristotle, as we have seen, form is immanent to sensory particulars, and so he describes the movement from knowledge of appearance to knowledge of essence as a movement from knowledge of the object as it is *for us* to a knowledge of the object as it is "by nature" or *in itself* (*Phys.* 184a10-21).[36] Aristotle understands inquiry into the object as it is "by nature" as an inquiry into its causes (*aition*), by which he means questions about why the object is as it is, where it came from, who made it and what purpose it serves—as opposed to thought simply coming to rest at the mere fact that the object *appears.*

This final stanza presents us with a description of the wife's *appearance,* in the first two lines a strictly physical description. And in

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[36] Cited in Irwin, p. 4; see pp. 4ff. for an illuminating discussion of the nature of Aristotle's metaphysical realism.

a sense, it's a very straightforward description, providing us with physical details about how "her lips were limp and wan, / Her face still held aside." But this is immediately qualified by a description which is precisely not physical and concrete, a description which is emphatically about what she *knows,* about spirit instead of body. It does not claim, however, to actually provide access to her mental state: the statement, already a qualification subordinated to a physical description, announces itself with an *as if.* This could plausibly be understood as a jealous projection, but if so it seems like a jealous projection which is brought up short: "As if she had known not only John" could easily have been followed by 'But other men as well,' where *known* would return the issue to pure physicality by way of a Biblical euphemism. In the event, however, the final line seems unexpected, not a plausible projection at all. The mental state it describes would not actually be secondary to, much less be in the same domain as, the physical appearance; the former would explain the latter, since the former would be the *cause* of the latter. She looks as if she knew, not the circumstances of John Wayward's death, or the mere fact of his death, but the *cause* of his death, "*of what* he died." The question of cause leads Aristotle to the question of being, then to the question of substance, then to the question of change—effectively a return since questions about causes are always questions about change—in this case, the change into death, the transformation from body ensouled to mere flesh. The question about the cause of John Wayward's death, about which the "they" (12) from whom the joiner obtained the scantlings knew nothing, is a question about a

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discontinuity of soul bound up with a continuity of flesh—a continuity of matter which is no mere accidental thing but the *telos* and terminus of all created things.

The workbox and the coffin, despite the obvious differences between them, differences which animate the drama, have one feature in common: both are boxes, and hence both have contents. Content, in the case of boxes or in the case of poems, is the opposite of form, but it is not quite the same thing as *matter*. The two boxes have much the same matter, preformed in similar ways (being "polished" [2], the "shingled pattern," &c.), but they have different contents: one contains natural matter which is declining from actuality, falling from form, whereas the other contains matter that is the proximate potentiality of yet more artifacts to come. Pure matter in either case is dead.

If, on Aristotle's account, form ends up on the side of the particular, then matter should end up on the side of the universal. In *The Workbox* the universality of matter is spelled out as death. But the domain of the universal is where communication transpires because concepts (mental universals) are bound up with language. Without the universal, we would be simply opaque to one another. But here, matter is the universal, and so the wife is not simply opaque in the sense that she fails to communicate. She communicates, but communicates only her opacity; she speaks, but only to deny the joiner's suppositions about her internal state. The wife, in other words, is not coyly dissembling but honestly setting forth the consciousness of her incommunicability in the face of death. If the only universality is matter, and the universality of matter is death, then the only truth

becomes the sheer fact that all things must die—the major premise of the old syllogism, *All men are mortal*. We thereby lose the possibility of thinking the cause of ourselves as life and see in our origin only the *telos*, only our demise, that we are born only to die.

Chapter 2

Universal & Particular: *To Autumn*

Autumn, more than any other season, provokes reflections on the passage of time, on change and on death. Winter, already dead, figures the inhuman and indifferent, quiet without calm—at its most human, it figures bare survival; the frothy profusion of Spring bodies forth raw life, the sheer immediacy of vital spirits; Summer's distending days seem unbounded and undivided, never passing until wholly past and given over to silence and slow time. So Summer appears in the retrospect of Autumn, whose harvest must outrun decay and the looming dark. *To Autumn,* endlessly praised for its praise of plenty, fills our ken with such concretion that time is out of mind and we, like the bees, "think warm days will never cease" (line 10). But the bees are deceived.

To praise the poem as "perfect" suggests not merely that it is faultless (a dubious compliment, even outside Vasari) but, as Walter Jackson Bate observes, that it has been brought to completion (581), that it is as free of superfluities as it is of defects, that, as in the Ptolemaic cosmos, each wandering star has its allotted place and contributes its lone melody to the music of the spheres. However much this may be so, the poem is not uniform, and if it will succeed in reconciling "process and stasis" as Bate claims (582), it must invoke them in isolation. Bate's intuition is that the first stanza presents us with process and the second presents us with stasis, an intuition which has been given a firmer foundation in Donald C. Freeman's

analysis of the poem's verbs. Since the publication of Freeman's essay in 1978, research in linguistics has provided yet more support for his main observations and has given us an opportunity to elaborate others in more detail. The risky passage is, as always, from these formal descriptions to meaning. Freeman's analysis opens the possibility of a linguistically rigorous mode of criticism, but it is also a crucial case for understanding how linguistically informed criticism has often gone astray, namely by equating *form* with *pattern* rather than with *syntax* (and, as I will show, one of the crucial features of poetic language, what I call 'synthetic constructions,' cannot be construed as a question of pattern at all).

Syntactic theory, aspiring as it does to systematically formalize the constants of human language, has often been treated with suspicion by those who dread the reduction of language to a mathematical purity void of human meaning. But for some time its tendency has not been to purify syntax of any semantic perplexities but to assimilate semantics into syntax. According to a more traditional view, the (synchronic) study of human language has three primary domains: syntax, the purely formal study of the allowable sequences of word categories, presumably indifferent to which particular words appear in a given instance; semantics, the study of the meanings of individual words and how these meanings combine into propositional meanings; and pragmatics, the study of the use to which sentences are put, accounting for such issues as the effects of context and background assumptions. But as Noam Chomsky has

argued, much of semantics may be redundant if we understand syntax properly:

> One can speak of "reference" or "coreference" with some intelligibility if one postulates a domain of mental objects associated with formal entities of language by a relation with many of the properties of reference, but all of this is internal to the theory of mental representations; it is a form of syntax. (*Knowledge of Language* 45)

As Chomksy puts it, rather bluntly, in a more recent book, "It is possible that natural language has only syntax and pragmatics" (*New Horizons* 132). This polemical claim is probably too strong to be true, but it will be easiest to see what its limitations are if we attempt to hold it in this strong form. The fact that many syntactic processes are sensitive to the semantic properties of particular lexical items is a clear indicator that the move to integrate semantics, at least partially, is heading in the right direction.

A particularly clear instance of the significance of semantic information in current syntactic theory is the prominence of the theory of thematic relations or "θ-roles" (originating in work by Gruber). Every verb requires a specific number of *arguments,* typically noun phrases; for example, an intransitive verb like *sneeze* takes one argument (*John* in *John sneezed*) whereas a transitive verb like *buy* takes two arguments (a buyer and a thing bought, and an optional argument for the seller). The mental lexical entry for each verb must specify how many arguments the verb takes, but it must also have some way of distinguishing the argument positions to be filled, otherwise it would fail to differentiate between *John bought the cheese* and *The cheese bought John.* The distinction between *John* and *the cheese* in *John*

bought the cheese is in part a semantic one (John is the entity doing the buying and the cheese is the entity being bought), and the syntactic realization of a verb's argument positions seems to strongly correlate with the semantic differences (e.g., the grammatical subject of an action verb like *buy* or *tickle* is almost invariably the agent of the action). *John,* then, bears the θ-role of AGENT and *the cheese* bears the θ-role of THEME.[37] In cases such as these, syntax and semantics are clearly on intimate terms: a change in one effects a corresponding change in the other.

Θ-theory unveils a set of cases in which this intimacy almost goes over into identity, in which a strictly syntactic phenomenon is inexplicable without an appeal to semantic distinctions. Luigi Burzio, in *Italian Syntax,* uses θ-theory to distinguish between two classes of intransitive verbs. Being intransitive, each takes only a single argument, but the argument of one class, the *unergative* verbs, is assigned the AGENT θ-role, whereas the argument of the other class, the *unaccusative* verbs, is assigned the THEME θ-role. The class of unergative verbs would include the following:[38]

(1) John may *protest.*

John was *lying.*

John *complained.*

John was *fishing.*

John *whistled.*

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[37] These terms are extremely difficult to define abstractly, but the intuitions of native speakers about which arguments are AGENTs, which THEMEs, and so on, are extremely consistent. We can therefore use the terms with reasonable precision even in the absence of explicit definitions.
[38] Examples (1)-(6) and (8)-(10) are adapted from Radford.

John *sang.*

The subject of each of the verbs in (1) seems to be an AGENT, and many of these verbs can be paraphrased as a verb+noun in which a THEME argument also appears:

(2) John may *make a protest.*

John was *telling a lie.*

John *made a complaint.*

John was *catching fish.*

The paraphrases in (2) suggest that each of the verbs in (1) has an implicit THEME argument, and hence that their explicit argument must be an AGENT (Radford 390-1; see also, Baker).

The subjects of unaccusative verbs, on the other hand, do not seem intuitively to be agents of the action designated by the verb:

(3) The train *arrived.*

The sun *emerged* from the clouds.

A slight discomfort will *begin.*

A corpse-light *appeared* on the bog.

The intuition that the subjects of these verbs are THEMEs rather than AGENTs gains force if we paraphrase the sentences in (3) as noun phrases, in which case the subjects in (3) appear in a normal THEME position:

(4) The *arrival* of the train…

The *emergence* of the sun from the clouds…

The *beginning* of a slight discomfort…

The *appearance* of a corpse light on the bog…

Just like *the city* in *The destruction of the city,* where *the city* is not the entity that initiates the action but the entity that must suffer it, the overt subjects in (3) show up as THEMES in (4).

The distinction between unergative verbs (which take an AGENT argument) and unaccusative verbs (which take a THEME argument), a distinction which seems primarily semantic, produces a wide array of systematic syntactic effects, as in the following sentences (in what follows, sentences marked with an asterisk [*] are ungrammatical):

(5) An unfortunate misunderstanding *arose.*

   There *arose* an unfortunate misunderstanding.

   A ghostly face *appeared* at the window.

   There *appeared* a ghostly face at the window.

(6) The dentist's patient *groaned.*

   *There *groaned* the dentist's patient.

   Major Muddle has *apologized* for firebombing civilians.

   *There has *apologized* Major Muddle for firebombing
     civilians.

Unaccusative verbs, such as those in (5), are consistently grammatical in expletive constructions with *there,* whereas unergative verbs, such as those in (6), are consistently ungrammatical in the same constructions.

Auxiliary selection also seems to be determined by the unergative/unaccusative distinction, as in the case of Burzio's examples from Italian:

(7)   Giovanni *è* arrivato.

Giovanni is arrived.

'Giovanni has arrived.'

Giovanni *ha* telefonato.

Giovanni has telephoned.

Unaccusative verbs like *arrivare* take *essere* ('to be') as their auxiliary in the past tense, whereas unergative verbs like *telefonare* take *avere* ('to have'). The same distribution appears cross-linguistically in languages like French and German, and the remnants of the distinction are to be found in Early Modern English before the past auxiliary *be* fell out of the language entirely, as in these (unaccusative) examples from Shakespeare:

(8)   Mistress Page *is come* with me. (*Merry Wives* V.v.22)
        Is the duke *gone?* / Then *is* your cause *gone* too. (*Measure for Meas.* V.i.299-300)
        How chance thou *art returned* so soon? (*Comedy of Err.* I.ii.42)

All of these syntactic phenomena are inexplicable without appealing to the fundamentally semantic categories of θ-theory, and so the unergative/unaccusative distinction is one clear case in which syntax as a "theory of mental representations" in Chomsky's sense must wholly incorporate semantics. Literary critics, obliged as they are to cross the mountainous border between form and content, description and interpretation, might reasonably hope that this

distinction, employed in the analysis of such a poem as *To Autumn,* will ease their passage. This is just what Donald Freeman has done in his essay on *To Autumn,* albeit sometimes a bit approximately due to the limitations of the theory then at his disposal (his essay was published nearly a decade before Burzio's monograph).

The centerpiece of Freeman's analysis is his observation that each of the three stanzas of *To Autumn* is almost exclusively dominated by a single verb type. The dominant type in the first stanza is causative transitive verbs, whose distinguishing property is that they have unaccusative intransitive counterparts, as in the following:

(9) The Americans *sank* the boat.

The boat *sank.*

Sally *opened* the window on the south side.

The window on the south side *opened.*

John *broke* the vase on Tuesday.

The vase *broke* on Tuesday.

Non-causative transitive verbs, on the other hand, do not have intransitive counterparts at all:

(10) John *watched* the sunset.

*The sunset *watched.*

Colonel Kilgore *smelled* the napalm.

*The napalm *smelled.*[39]

Egbert *found* the Easter eggs under the chiffonier.

*The Easter eggs *found* under the chiffonier.

Just as the syntactic behavior of unaccusative and unergative intransitive verbs was determined by their semantic properties, causative verbs cause some state of affairs to be the case (hence the name). Freeman's observation, then, is that the first stanza of *To Autumn* is dominated by causative transitive verbs (as in [9]), the second by non-causative transitive verbs (as in [10]), and the third by unergative verbs (as in [1]).

The first stanza of *To Autumn* is largely made up of non-finite clauses whose main verb is a causative transitive ("to *load* and *bless*... / To *bend*... / And *fill*... / To *swell*...and *plump*..."); as Freeman argues, this "mak[es] the *subjects* of these natural processes—the vines (which load), the trees (which bend), the fruit (which fills with ripeness), the gourd (which swells), and the hazel shells (which plump)—into *objects* of Autumn's all-powerful agency. All of the verb phrases in the first stanza reflect the transformation of natural *states*...into active dynamic *processes* fundamental to the poem's structure" (87).

In the second stanza, Autumn's agency wanes: "nearly every mention of Autumn here [is surrounded] with past participles, which

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[39] This sentence can be parsed in such a way that it's grammatical (where it means *the napalm was smelly*), but not under the relevant interpretation, where it must be interpreted in a manner analogous to the rest of the paired examples in (9) and (10).

are reduced passives ('soft-lifted,' 'half-reaped,' 'drows'd,' 'twined,' 'laden'). Even the transitive verbs predicated of Autumn are strangely inactive ('spares,' 'keep steady,' 'watchest')" (Freeman 92). All of these "strangely inactive" verbs are what we have just defined as non-causative transitives (those lacking unaccusative counterparts), and here they are largely verbs of sensory perception.

As Freeman points out, the third stanza marks a dramatic shift since its verbs are predominantly intransitive, but, thanks to Burzio, we can also observe that all these intransitive verbs are also unergative (their subjects are assigned the AGENT θ-role and they have only an implicit THEME). Freeman claims that in the final stanza "the personified vision fades...[T]he poem ends in a series of short conjoined sentences all of which have intransitive verbs which focus on minute and precise detail, and which, with the dying of the light, leave us with only sound—the unaffected, utterly spontaneous and natural end of another 'diurnal course' in a wholly ordered and harmonious natural universe." The trajectory of the whole poem, then, is on Freeman's reading "a steady diminution of transitivity, agency, and causation: by the last lines of the poem, natural processes occur self-caused, autonomously" (92).

This direct conversion of syntactic observations into interpretive claims seems, given the nature of the evidence, quite plausible, and the resulting reading is consistent with some of the more influential readings of the poem (those of Hartman and Bate, both of whom Freeman specifically acknowledges). But one category intervenes with seeming innocence between description and interpretation here: the

notion of *pattern.* The conception of linguistic pattern Freeman appeals to is derived from Paul Kiparsky's essay "The Role of Linguistics in a Theory of Poetry." Kiparsky defines a pattern as "some kind of recurrence of equivalent linguistic elements" (233), but what he has primarily in mind are phenomena like meter, rhyme and alliteration (from analogy with which he derives an account of syntactic pattern). All three phenomena involve the repetition of some linguistic element or structure (a phoneme or stress contour) that is potentially *significant* only by virtue of that repetition. It is simply a formal linguistic fact that *spill* and *fill* end with the same sounds; the specifically poetic use of such accidental properties results from their repetition, and only when repeated can they bear on poetic meaning.

Syntax, however, is a rather different case. It is certainly possible to have a syntactic pattern of the sort that Kiparsky has in mind (a repetition of Adjective-Noun sequences, for example), and such a pattern may well be significant (hence the utility of classical rhetorical schemes). But the individual instances in a syntactic pattern are already meaningful in themselves and do not depend on repetition to accrue significance. On the contrary, the significance of the pattern will be highly dependent on the significance of the individual words and phrases that make it up.

The focus on patterns that leads Kiparsky and Freeman astray here is not an idiosyncrasy of theirs, but is a nearly universal feature of literary scholarship informed by linguistics. In his influential essay "Linguistics and Poetics," Roman Jakobson goes so far in disputing Wimsatt as to claim that "As soon as parallelism is promoted to canon,

the interaction between meter and meaning and the arrangement of tropes cease to be 'the free and individual and unpredictable parts of the poetry'" (83). This devotion to pattern persists to the present: a recent textbook in the field is bluntly titled *Patterns in Language* (Thornborrow, et al.). One classic essay that promises a clear departure from this proclivity is Richard Ohmann's "Literature as Sentences" (1966). The basic insight of the essay, an insight that always bears repeating, is that "whatever complex apprehension the critic develops of the whole work, that understanding arrives mundanely, sentence by sentence" (232). He also argues that the relationship between form and content unfolds *within* the domain of syntax, and infers (plausibly, given the theory of the time) that form amounts to "surface structure" and content to "deep structure" (232). Current theory has done away with deep structure and surface structure (and all other "levels of representation" [q.v., Chomsky, *Minimalist Program*]), a development wholly in accord with the literary reticence about treating form and content as if they were tidily separable. But Ohmann's impulse to locate both of them in syntax is for this reason all the more compelling.

The procedure that such a view would imply comes a bit clearer when Ohmann takes up the analysis of Dylan Thomas' *A Winter's Tale:* he proceeds to a careful and thoroughgoing analysis of how best to characterize the phrase "the river wended vales," not as vaguely understandable nor as simply deviant and therefore vacuous but as a structure with specific properties defined by its relationship to facts

about English syntax. But when he proceeds from description to interpretation he automatically grabs hold of *pattern* to get him there:

> There are many other examples in the poem of deviance that projects unaccustomed activity and process upon nature….[M]uch of Thomas' poetry displays the world as process, as interacting forces and repeating cycles, in which human beings and human thought are indifferently caught up. I suggest that Thomas' syntactical irregularities often serve this vision of things. To say so, of course, is only to extend the natural critical premise that a good poet sets linguistic forms to work for him in the cause of artistic and thematic form. (237-8)

From a rather vague statement about the significance of the structure he has so ingeniously unfolded we are immediately propelled into snatching up "many other examples" from the poem, and only a few sentences later all of Thomas' poetry is at issue. Suddenly syntactic structure merely "serves" these thematic generalizations—as if it hadn't been the sentence that came first—and some patterned regularity of "linguistic forms" subserves the greater, and still more general, "cause of artistic and thematic form."

This sort of maneuver is just what leaves linguistically-informed approaches to literature vulnerable to the criticisms of Barbara Herrnstein Smith or Stanley Fish, that the real relationship between form and content is undertheorized. In the first of two essays with the same title (both reprinted in *Is There a Text in This Class?*), Fish "focus[es]…on the arbitrary relationship between the specification of formal patterns and their subsequent interpretation," and claims that many linguistically-oriented critics have tried to evade this problem by making their formal observations highly technical and keeping their

interpretations relatively impressionistic. In the second, more extreme essay his

> thesis is that formal patterns are themselves the products of interpretation and that therefore there is no such thing as a formal pattern, at least in the sense necessary for the practice of stylistics: that is, no pattern that one can observe before interpretation is hazarded and which therefore can be used to prefer one interpretation to another. (267)

The weak point both of these theses are aimed at is the notion of "a formal pattern": since identification of a pattern always involves a principle of selection, and since any non-arbitrary principle of selection must contain interpretive determinations, Fish believes he is authorized to infer that there is no such thing as form—an inference which, in his mind, fells stylistics and Chomskyan linguistics in one blow. Much as Fish is inclined to make his opponents into straw men, and much as he is hampered by a lack of even rudimentary competence in the linguistics he opposes, and much as his case is wildly overstated—still, he has a point about patterns. The implications of his point are clear: whatever relies on patterns is of no *necessary* use to literary interpretation, including statistical word counts, attempts to identify an author's style in terms of linguistic regularities, microgrammars of poems or corpora, and much else.[40]

As usual when Fish is right about something, he is wrong about the reasons he is right, for they are invariably more metaphysical than he would wish them to be. And in the metaphysics we may find a clue

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[40] In other words, one may well be able to make plausible interpretive inferences from formal patterns as long as one also analyzes the formal particulars that make the pattern up, and of course one may plausibly interpret the formal particulars directly. But Fish is right to rebuke the reliance on patterns alone to make an interpretive point.

about what kind of linguistically-informed criticism would not be vulnerable to Fish's argument. Patterns have the structure of universals. The individual instances of the pattern (like *spill* and *fill* in my previous example) are only specimens, and in the absence of the pattern are nothing at all, blank, mere stuff. A universal term like *muffin* enables us to designate some class of objects in the world, and presumably all muffins bear properties by virtue of which they are muffins and not, say, sheep. But every particular muffin has many more properties than just those that make it a muffin, and we can only arrive at the category of *muffin* by subtracting every unique property of a given muffin, everything concrete and specific in our experience of the muffin. This subtraction of the singular is what makes universal terms useful, allowing us, for example, to make predicative judgments: armed with the category of *muffin* you will be able to spot muffins when you see them, you will have a much better idea what a muffin is going to taste like and so you will be better able to decide if you would prefer to have a muffin or a croissant or a leg of lamb. Socrates' project of defining the Just and the Good aims similarly at making reliable moral judgments: if you know what makes an action just you will have a rule by which to govern your action in any given situation; if you know what makes a man virtuous, you will have a much easier time aspiring to be such a man.

Plato elevates the universal to a higher order of reality. Instead of the universal being simply an abstraction from an actual experience (being, in other words, *post rem* not *ante rem*) it is the ground of that experience, its condition of possibility. Even Aristotle in his

Metaphysics, which takes Plato to task for failing to explain just *how* universals ground particulars, reproduces the elevation of form over matter[41] (q.v., Ch. 1 herein). But in his *Poetics* Aristotle provides an account of poetry that seems to muddle the distinction between universal and particular, claiming that poetry is "something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since poetry rather speaks universally [*katholou*], whereas history speaks the particular [*hekaston*]" (1451b5-7, my trans.). Achilles may have been an historical personage, and an historical discourse about him could relate all the particular facts of his character and life; but the *Iliad* does more than present us with the mere historical fact that Achilles returned Hektor's corpse to his grieving father. The *Iliad* invests this fact with universal significance, extending beyond the mere particulars of a given time and place—extending it toward some abstract idea of compassion or *caritas,* unmoored from culturally specific burial rites. But the *Iliad* is not a philosophical discourse, which takes place merely at the level of universals like compassion or *caritas;* the poem is about particulars and is itself irreducibly particular. For Aristotle, then, poetry is neither merely concrete and particular nor merely abstract and universal, but is a way of thinking the universal *through* the particular.

One strand—perhaps the main strand—of philosophical thinking about art continually returns to its paradoxical relationship with the

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[41] For Aristotle, form is on the side of the particular rather than the universal: the particular *just is* a realization through form of mere matter (which by itself is less than nothing); rather than just saying that universals are more real than particulars, then, Aristotle affirms the particular but only insofar as it is already mastered by the universal.

universal and particular. Kant, in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* defines the beautiful as that "which pleases universally without a concept" (5:219). The claim that "*x* is beautiful" is not conceptual for Kant because no rational argument, no appeal to shared concepts, could settle a dispute over such a judgment; such judgments are, to that extent, trapped in particular judges. But the claim that "*x* is beautiful" also differs from the claim that "*x* makes me feel good" in that the former presupposes universal assent whereas the latter has no implications for other people's responses. Hegel, of course, would never subscribe to an account which, even if only for a moment, uttered the words *non disputandum est,* but in some respects his account is similar to Kant's, only transferred from the perceiving subject to the artwork itself—the universal actualized in the particular artwork:

> In the products of art, Spirit has to do solely with its own. And even if works of art are not thought or the Concept, but a development of the Concept out of itself, a shift of the Concept from its own ground to that of sense, still the power of thinking Spirit lies in being able not only to grasp itself in its proper form as thinking, but to know itself again just as much when it has surrendered its proper form to feeling and sense, to comprehend itself in its opposite, because it changes into thoughts what has been estranged and so reverts to itself. (13, trans. modified; see also 153-60)

Although art on Hegel's account (poetry being the highest form of art) never attains to the level of the Absolute, and so falls short of Philosophy, it nevertheless is characterized by a true, achieved unity of the Idea and its concrete form, of universal and particular. John Crowe Ransom, in his essay "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," argues

that such a unity is neither desirable nor possible, that concretion and particularity can never be assimilated to the universal without the destitution of the very things we value in art. Scientific discourse, on Ransom's account, aims at just such an assimilation and destitution; poetry is therefore a counter-measure to scientism that returns us to the materiality of our experience: "under the iconic sign the abstract item is restored to the body from which it is taken" (285).

Such a view is always in danger of stripping art bare in order to save it, despairing of poetry's claim to truth. But to commit oneself wholly to universality (e.g., to appeal to the 'timeless themes' of literature) is to repudiate poetry as such, poetry as something different from merely instrumental language. As Cleanth Brooks argues, poems dramatize ethical situations, and are likely to inspire us to ethical reflection by putting us in someone else's shoes, but "poems as such indulge in no ethical *generalizations*" (258). Poetry in particular among the arts invites the liquidation of the particular because its medium is language, and language is inextricably bound up with conceptuality (and hence with the universal) in a way that granite and oil paint are not. If poetry is particular, then, it must achieve that particularity against the grain of the medium it uses; and because poetry's medium is language, its full unfolding within the domain of the universal is already present in the poem's particularity.

The main consequence of this for our purposes is that no meaningful syntactic pattern is possible that is not already present *in nuce* in singular constructions. Fish is right that there is "no pattern that one can observe before interpretation is hazarded," but the

"interpretation" in question emerges from reflection on the form of specific, individual syntactic constructions whose structure *does* pre-exist the act of conscious interpretation. The particular contains the principle of selection from which the universal derives. Form, then, is not only something quite different from pattern, but precedes pattern and is its ground.[42] It is possible to pay no attention to patterns in a literary work, but form, in the sense of syntactic structure, cannot be ignored. Every interpretation of a poem that pays even the slightest attention to the text itself (i.e., any interpretation which meets the most minimal standards for evidence) is engaged in the analysis of form.

If, as Aristotle argues, poetry thinks universality through particularity, and if the sort of particularity peculiar to poetry dwells in its syntactic form, then the project of criticism is to seek the moments in which syntactic particulars point beyond themselves.[43] In Keats's *To Autumn* we should search for the ways in which the pattern Freeman brings out is monadologically determined by and transformed in particular constructions. In the first stanza, for example, Freeman points out that the main verbs of the non-finite clauses ("to load and bless..." &c.) are all causative transitive verbs, and he infers from this that "the *subjects* of these natural processes" have been turned into "*objects* of Autumn's all-powerful agency" (87). If we turn to the main

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[42] We might understand form in this sense as what Malabou (via Hegel) calls *plasticity:* both that which gives form (as in *plastic surgery*) and that which is formed (as in *plastic forks*) (8-12 & *passim.*).

[43] Put another way, criticism must understand form as *energeia* (actuality) in Aristotle's sense, the realization of the particular, rather than simply as that under which the particular is subsumed (q.v., Ch. 1 above).

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clause to which these non-finite clauses are subordinated, looking for evidence of Autumn's agency, what we find is that the main clause— "Conspiring with him [the sun] how to load and bless..."—is in fact ungrammatical. The verb *conspire* must be followed by a naked non-finite clause, not by a wh-word like *how* as in

(11)   a.   *Sally and John conspired *how* to rob the bank.

The normal use of *conspire* looks like (11b):

b.   [The President and his cronies]$_1$ conspired [PRO$_1$ to

enrich themselves].

Instead of an expressed wh-word like *how,* this lower clause begins with a phonetically null element identified in the literature as *PRO* (so named because it functions similarly to a pronoun). The rationale behind positing this null element has to do with θ-roles, according to Chomsky's account in *The Minimalist Program* (see Adger 304-5 for an accessible summary). In example (11b), the verb of the lower clause, *enrich,* must assign both AGENT and THEME θ-roles; *themselves* can take the THEME, but there is no subject in the same clause to take the AGENT role. *Enrich* also cannot assign the AGENT role to the subject of the higher clause, *The President and his cronies,* because this already has a θ-role assigned to it by its own verb, *conspire.*[44] The AGENT θ-role for *enrich* is therefore assigned to a null element within its own clause, *viz.,* PRO. We understand the agents of the action of enriching to be the same as the agents of the action of conspiring, so PRO must refer to the same entity as the subject of the higher clause. This is

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[44] In accordance with Baker's Uniform Theta Assignment Hypothesis, every argument must receive one and only one θ-role.

what is called a *control construction*, and *conspire* is thus a *control verb* (because its subject controls the reference of PRO).

The construction that shows up in the poem would have been just fine with a non-control verb like *explain,* as in (11c):

c.   Sally explained *how* to build an obelisk.

So what we get in the poem is something we might call a *synthetic construction,* an ungrammatical combination of two different normal grammatical constructions, in this case a combination of a normal construction with a verb like *conspire* and a normal construction with a verb like *explain.* Synthetic constructions are one way the language of poetry differentiates itself from ordinary uses of language and effects the enigmatic union of familiarity and estrangement through which poetry's truth content unfolds.[45]

According to Freeman's reading, this stanza, dominated as it is by causative transitive verbs, is all about Autumn's *agency.* But the introduction of *how* into this construction prevents the null element PRO from appearing in any of the lower clauses, thus preventing it from embodying Autumn in any of those clauses (since it would have been coindexed with the subject of the higher clause, "Season of mists…") and from bearing the AGENT θ-role assigned by each causative transitive verb. Autumn-as-agent is thereby excluded from participating in the unfolding processes each subordinate clause describes; the verbs of the subordinate clauses are still transitive, but

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[45] This is not, of course, an adequate means for systematically distinguishing between literary and non-literary uses of language since nothing prevents speakers from employing synthetic constructions in ordinary conversation; but presumably such constructions will be a good deal rarer in ordinary speech than in poetry.

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their AGENTs are hidden. One way to gloss this phrase is to say that Autumn and the sun have a conspiracy which involves some entity (which may or may not be the two of them) causing all of the enumerated things to happen. This synthetic construction, in other words, introduces an ambivalent third term between Autumn (the universal) and her phenomenal manifestations (the particulars), which means that this stanza cannot be read as a straightforward affirmation of Autumn's agency in the transformation of things.

The slightly sinister undertones of the word *conspire* flower in the final subordinate clause, which Freeman does not discuss:

> to set budding more,
> And still more, later flowers for the bees,
> Until they think warm days will never cease,
> For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.
>
> (8-11)

This clause also fits Freeman's pattern to the extent that it too is causative and transitive. But here the cause and the process effected do not appear through a single verb; *set* marks the initiating cause and *budding* the process that, once caused, carries on autonomously.[46] The gap between Autumn's agency (or someone else's agency) and the process it brings into being finds explicit form here, monadologically reflecting within the particular the gap that separates it from the universal. Moreover, we can no longer speak here of the conversion of "natural *states*…into active dynamic *processes*," since *budding* is a process already. The causative here just sets in motion

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[46] This is what is often called an *Acc-ing construction,* a construction in which the grammatical object (bearing accusative case) is followed by a verb bearing the *-ing* inflection, e.g., *Sally got the engine going.* See Reuland and Abney.

what was already processual, adding to Summer's already excessive abundance a super-added plenitude of natural bounty.

Autumn's agency looks even shakier if we consider that the entire first stanza does not have a main verb; despite the complexity of its subordinate clauses, the first stanza is nothing but an appositive, just a noun phrase, reducible simply to *O Autumn....* The first complete sentence of the poem is a question: "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?" (12). If we take this question literally, it concerns only a single individual: who is this person who has failed to often see Autumn in her abundance? (Or perhaps: who is this person who has *often failed* to see Autumn in her abundance?) The question seems, in a way, to have a straightforward answer, since we might well wonder who *has* actually seen Autumn personified (if she is *amid* her "store" then she and her "store" are different things). But the question is also a strange one because it is addressed to Autumn. How would Autumn know who hasn't seen her? The bees don't seem to have noticed her arrival, but *the bees* is not singular and we know the answer to the question must be singular from the inflection of the verb ("hath"). The only thing we can be sure of if we take this question literally is that the person being inquired about cannot bear witness to the veracity of the poem's statements about Autumn, and we might understand the question as an attempt to include those lonely souls who are excluded in principle by the gesture of apostrophe to a deity.

The more intuitive reading is surely to take the question as rhetorical, and in so doing the question expands from the particular to an emphatic universal. As a rhetorical question, it is in effect a

statement that no-one has failed to see Autumn amid her store. This rhetorical question is perhaps the most roundabout possible means of claiming universal validity for the poem's truth. Such a near-qualification through form emerges explicitly in the *sometimes* with which the following line begins. Strict logical consistency between the two lines would require that "whoever seeks abroad may find" Autumn *often,* not "sometimes." And if only those who willfully seek Autumn out can find her, then the proportion of those who see her will surely be a good deal smaller than the rhetorical reading of the preceding question would suggest. This dubiety about the visibility of Autumn emerges naturally from any attempt to take the poem seriously, to take seriously its claim that Autumn is a person. The fact that the poem explicitly registers this dubiety indicates retroactively that the poem is to be taken seriously, that this personification is not just a manner of speaking but a matter of fact. Autumn must therefore be rendered not merely personable but visible, and the aim of the second stanza is to achieve this through the incarnation of the divinity, through the unity of universal Autumn and her plumping particulars. The rhetorical question, with its oscillation between (literal) particular and (rhetorical) universal, is the fulcrum on which Autumn's descent into concretion turns.

If the actual agency behind the ripening of things in the first stanza turned out to be some unspecified third term, we might imagine that the second stanza has now provided us with the identity of that third term: the observer who "seeks abroad" for Autumn and finds her "sitting careless on a granary floor" (13-4). Autumn, as Freeman's

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observations make clear, appears exceedingly passive in this stanza (or at least in lines 14-18). Although all of the main verbs in the stanza are non-causative transitives, lines 14-18 contain only one main verb but four reduced passives (see Freeman 92), two describing Autumn and two describing the furrow, twining the two together. Autumn is neither subject nor AGENT of a single verb in this stanza until line 18, and even then it is only her "hook" (stranded at the end of a line) that "Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers." The cost of rendering Autumn visible is to render her utterly inactive; even the instrument of her agency, her hook, can perform no action but to realize its restraint as Autumn sleeps the afternoon away.

In the last few lines of the stanza, though, the gazing third party disappears and we get a direct description of a slightly more active Autumn:

> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
>   Steady thy laden head across a brook;
>   Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
>   Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.
>
> (19-22)

Here Autumn acts, but these are actions of a peculiar sort. In order to "keep / Steady [her] laden head" she must continuously act, unlike her hook simply sparing the flowers, but the outcome of the act is stillness, immobility, something that does not *look* like an action. The visible action that she is presumably performing, crossing the river, is nowhere to be found in the sentence (i.e., we do not get a phrase like *as you cross the brook* or *while crossing the brook*). The syntax of the phrase "across a brook" is similar to a sentence like *Sally held her breath [all the way home],* which implies, if anything, that Sally is

being passively transported. At the very least, these lines suggest that the primary, important action is the invisible act of Autumn steadying her load.

In the following two lines Autumn again performs an action that is invisible, watching "the last oozings hours by hours." Just as the previous lines emphasize the labor underwriting her seeming inactivity, here the qualification that her "look" is "patient" suggests a gaze that is deliberate, engaged, meaningful, a watching that needs to be done.[47] But it is not clear why exactly this job does need to be done; if it is only "the *last* oozings" Autumn is watching, then we can scarcely be concerned that the barrel they are oozing into will overflow. Where the flowers and the bees' clammy cells continued to overproduce in the first stanza, here we seem to be reaching the end of Autumn's fecundity.

With this thought of the end, the first hint of "last" things, comes the issue of time, raised strangely in the phrase with which the stanza ends: "Thou watchest the last oozings *hours by hours.*" This also seems like a sort of synthetic construction, in this case a combination of two idioms. One idiom is exemplified by the phrase *one by one*, meaning 'one at a time' (i.e., successively), and the other is exemplified by the phrase *hour after hour,* indicating an excessive accumulation of hours, an exhausting persistence. Both idioms are relatively productive, meaning that they can be used with other nouns (as in C. Rossetti: "Remember me when no more day by day / You tell

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[47] The derivation of *patient* from the Latin *patior* ('to suffer') also underscores the arduousness and seriousness of the task.

me of the future that you planned"; or Coleridge: "Day after day, day after day, / We stuck, nor breath, nor motion"[48]), but both require at least that the nouns be singular. Both are, so to speak, semantically plural in the sense that they suggest multiple elements (perhaps an iteration of two elements represented by the two nouns), but *one by one* keeps its eye on only one element at a time whereas *hour after hour* dissolves the individual units into an undifferentiated plural whole. Put another way, *one by one* achieves multiplicity by adding individual units one at a time, whereas *hour after hour* achieves multiplicity by breaking down the very boundaries between individual units. The phrase in the poem, "hours by hours," seems to achieve multiplicity by adding multiples, suggesting a succession of persistences.

If we understand *persistence* to mean persistence over time, then we might follow Kant in concluding that *persistence* is just another name for substance (*CPR* B224-5), and that therefore the idea of a succession of persistences is unintelligible since that which persists cannot be subject to change and still be what it is. Alternatively, we could understand the persistence implied by "hours" as duration (*durée*) in the sense that Bergson uses the term, i.e., as the immediate temporality of lived experience in which individual states of consciousness "melt into one another" (Bergson 186). For Kant, time is "nothing except the form of our inner intuition" (*CPR* A37/B54) i.e., it is a *subjective* determination (which, in Kant's view,

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[48] These quotations are from "Remember" and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* respectively.

does not make it any less real); similarly, Bergson's view of time (which he sees as a refutation of Kant's view; see 211-2) depends upon a perceiving subject who is capable of having experiences. The temporality of Autumn's gaze, then, is a vital clue as to what kind of a subject personified Autumn is—or whether Autumn can be a subject at all.

That which *oozes* is by definition slow moving,[49] and the oozing cider here has been almost arrested even in that slow movement through nominalization as an *oozing.* But the "oozings" are, like the "hours," plural, as if the issue were not just distension, duration—the elongation of experience by concentration—but a multitude of unmediated and unmeasurable durations, a crowd of unique objects. Where does one oozing end and the next begin? One can count *drops*, but *oozings*? Both the mode of the watching ("hours by hours") and the mode of what is being watched ("the last oozings") display the same elusive structure, some kind of grouping which dissolves the rule by which it comes into being as a group, particulars that do not remain subject to a universal. Paradoxical as it may be, a time made up of successive durations (instead of successive instants) would be a time packed full, in which each cell of experience were bottomless and the last load of pomace would never cease to yield its thick slow juice.

But if these "last oozings" were to last forever, the cider would never be made—and since cider (which must mature for 5 or 6 months after fermentation) comes of age in the Spring, the thought of Autumn obeying Zeno's paradox calls Spring to mind. Spring is the subject of

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[49] OED, s.v., "ooze, *v.*," 1a.

the questions with which the third stanza opens: "Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?" Our initial reading of these questions will no doubt take them to be rhetorical, much like the question that opened the second stanza. But whereas the question in the second stanza, taken rhetorically, can be glossed as a straightforward statement ('Everyone has often seen Autumn amid her store'), the question in the third stanza does not admit of a straightforward gloss. Does it mean *The songs of Spring are nowhere*? Or *There are no songs of Spring*? Is Spring being dared to sing? The following line clarifies matters in the sense that it takes the form of a reply to the question: "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too." But if the question actually elicits a reply, it is not rhetorical at all. Moreover, if it is the speaker of the poem who replies and who refers to the questioner in the second person (*thou* hast *thy* music), and if *thou* and *thy* must refer to Autumn (since a comparison between Spring's music and Autumn's music is at issue), then the question is not only literal but is spoken by Autumn herself. Unlike the Grecian Urn, the addressee of this ode does not pipe up merely to mutter a consoling platitude; Autumn interrupts the speaker's discourse to interrogate him about Spring, attempting perhaps to derail the poem, to silence the apostrophe that conjures her into presence.

As Jonathan Culler has observed, the aim of apostrophe is to overcome man's alienation from the natural world, to reconcile subject and object by speaking to a non-human entity as if it were human (63-4). An apostrophe to Autumn presupposes, minimally, that Autumn is something capable of listening, even of talking back. But *To Autumn*

pushes the *prosopopoeia* to which apostrophe is bound considerably further than this bare minimum, moving from what Hegel would call natural divinity in the form of "mere personification,"a mere mask (Gr. *prosopon*), to natural divinity in the form of a free "spiritual individual" (454-5). Here we have an Autumn made fully human, which is a desirable state of affairs if we agree with Adorno that "It is only through humanization that nature is to be restored the rights that human domination took from it" (41). But Autumn's autonomy seems to have gotten a bit out of hand; as is typical in Keats, this poem takes the conventions of its kind (here, the ode) so literally that they reveal just how strange and wayward they always were. But taking the convention of apostrophe literally also involves taking it seriously, investing it with real power. In the first stanza Autumn's agency and activity suffers from a *chorismos* between universal and particular, and even the incarnation of the second stanza, much as it concretizes Autumn, also leaves her listless and passive. Autumn's first real assertion of herself, in which she kindles into speech, would seem to be a triumph of apostrophe, an achieved reconciliation of man and nature, but just at that point the poem veers towards intransitive verbs and away from depicting a natural abundance earmarked for human consumption.

Our first glance at the question with which the final stanza opens is not only wrong because we take it to be a rhetorical question and because we take it to be issued by the speaker of the poem; we will likely also take "the songs of Spring" to mean 'the songs *about* Spring.' In itself this is a plausible enough reading, since the *of* is

ambiguous here and could mean either *about* or *by.* But the response that follows the question is not similarly ambiguous: "thou hast thy music too" must mean the music which Autumn possesses or produces, not the poems about Autumn we euphemistically call *songs.* The answer retroactively disambiguates the question, making it plain that, although the speaker/poet responds affirmatively to the challenge issued by Autumn, he only succeeds in affirming Autumn's denial of the poem—this poem is no longer the "music" of Autumn, she is writing her own score with the speaker as a mere instrument. Pater may have been right that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music"; what he failed to note was that any poem that succeeds in that aspiration fails thereby to remain a poem.

Given the appeal to "music" we might expect the lines immediately following to provide us with descriptions musical, or at least auditory. Instead we immediately get the tactile figuring the visual:

> While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
> And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue… (25-6)

And given the pattern Freeman has pointed to, we expect this stanza to be dominated by unergative intransitive verbs, but these two lines do not fit that expectation. Instead they recapitulate the pattern of the poem as a whole: from *bloom* in line 25, a causative transitive in this usage, to *touch,* a non-causative transitive, and then on to *mourn* in line 28, which is the first in a string of unergative constructions. Unlike the first stanza, however, the causative transitive *bloom* is not participating in a synthetic construction and has a perfectly transparent causal relation to its object (*the soft-dying day*). All

problematic mediations of agency have gone, but here the causative transitive verb is not forming a link between a universal and a particular: both the "barred clouds" and the "soft-dying day" are particulars. Similarly, the non-causative transitive *touch* designates a direct, positive action, unlike the inactive or invisible actions of the second stanza ("*Spares* the next swath," "*keep* / Steady thy laden head," "*watchest* the last oozings"), and the subject of the verb is again the "barred clouds." What has disappeared, despite the identity at the level of pattern between this moment and the larger pattern of the previous stanzas, is the attempt to render Autumn human (the other meaning of the Greek *prosopon* is 'face, person'); *prosopopoeia* has fulfilled itself in its own dissolution.

These two lines are also marked by another synthetic construction: 'while *x,* then *y.*' *While* usually appears in parallel constructions of the following sort: *While bombs fell on civilians, the perpetrators spoke of "liberating" them. Then* has a number of uses, but the relevant one in this context seems to be the deictic use, indicating a specific moment in time, as in *We now take tea in the afternoons, but then we wandered the moors.* The 'while *x,* *y*' construction indicates simultaneous periods of time, whereas the '*x,* then *y*' construction indicates successive periods of time; put another way, *while* designates simultaneous durations whereas *then* designates successive instants. This construction, then, recalls the difficulties at the end of the preceding stanza, but here the richness of duration calls out only to receive a bare instant in reply, a dearth that comes after (and hence puts an end to) duration instead of an answering parallel plenitude.

This collapse into a pure instant, in which sheep are simultaneously "lambs" and "full-grown," has all of the immediacy of music with none of its development over time. There seems to be something human in the music of the "wailful choir" in which "the small gnats mourn," but *mourn* is not only intransitive, it is unergative: they mourn without an object or a THEME, and mourning without an object is a pure immediacy of suffering that can never end and can never be worked-through. This mourning is no more human than the *singing* of the "Hedge-crickets," the *whistling* of the "red-breast," the *bleat* of the "full-grown lambs" or the *twitter* of the last "gathering swallows." There is no human Autumn to which the speaker might address himself, no venturesome soul to seek her abroad—no human beings at all. If this music is spontaneous, it is only because it is thoughtless. If it is orderly, it is because it has no aim. If it is beautiful, it is because it is sublime. This poem does not present simply the epitome of that negative capability which seeks to enter into its object so fully that the speaking voice disappears; the poem succeeds at fully entering into a world in which there is no-one to speak to, no-one to hear, and nothing to say. What has made for uneasiness even among many critics who find this poem ultimately peaceful[50] is just this sense that its peace is a result of dehumanization or outright inhumanity—that it is not far from a call to collective suicide. The fissures in the smooth surface of the poem's

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[50] Ricks, for example, opens his discussion by remarking on "the deep pain and deep serenity of 'To Autumn'" (205), though the rest of his reading says little about the "pain."

patterned progression are the undialectical traces of the human subject upon whose sacrifice the universal reconciliation depends.

If linguistically-informed criticism has often been thwarted by the gap between form and content, between description and interpretation, and has therefore fallen back on a creaky vocabulary of 'mimesis' and 'reflection,' it is because it has focused on patterns and not on local syntactic phenomena themselves. For it is at the level of the individual moment, the unrepeated and singular, that form and content intertwine in systematically explicable ways. The pattern Freeman describes in *To Autumn* turns out to be useful (far more so than observations about patterns typically are) because it is drawn directly from the analysis of the particular sentences which are its ground; in the above reading, I have attempted to bring the issues the pattern raises back down to earth again, to follow a trajectory that remains *within* the individual sentences without lording it over them from above. One need not sail off in search of patterns to get from poetic form to poetic meaning. An observed pattern may serve as a useful foil, a pattern may provide useful clues, a pattern may inspire sheer mathematical delight, but a pattern cannot be converted into an interpretation and cannot be substituted for the analysis of particular sentences and lines. Pattern is, if anything, the opposite of poetic form. In the end, interpretations derived from patterns are always reductive, because patterns themselves are reductions, and it is the business of serious literary criticism always to thwart reduction just as poems thwart interpretation. Unlike pattern-hunting, the analysis of

individual sentences has the virtue that it cannot possibly promise what Fish calls "an automatic interpretive procedure" (70). On the contrary, it makes the business of interpretation more difficult, and opens up possibilities that demand yet more nuanced labors of thought.

Chapter 3

Form & Figure: *Ode to a Nightingale*

A sentence uttered makes a world appear
Where all things happen as it says they do;
We doubt the speaker, not the tongue we hear:
Words have no word for words that are not true.
<p align="right">W.H. Auden, "Words"</p>

There are two kinds of metaphor: metaphor as it is used in works of literature and metaphor as it is used in conversation. These two kinds of metaphor are linguistically analogous, but require such different kinds of interpretive labor that we are ill advised even to use the same word for both. Most of the errors that beset the scholarly study of literary metaphor result from a confusion between literary metaphor and conversational metaphor, derived in turn from a more basic confusion between aesthetic and instrumental uses of language. Attending to the distinction between the aesthetic and the instrumental has, or so this essay will argue, two significant consequences for understanding literary metaphor: no literal/ metaphorical distinction can be maintained in the description or interpretation of literary metaphor, and literary metaphors cannot be interpreted in referential terms (that is, in relation to anything non-linguistic). Both of these claims fall under the rubric of what we will call *literalism.* The aims of this essay are (1) to show that literalism, in this sense, follows of necessity from the belief that there is such a thing as literature (a belief that literary criticism cannot coherently renounce), (2) to provide a literalist account of literary metaphor based

on current work in syntax, an account that sees literary metaphor as a disruption of semantics by syntax, and (3) to explore this disruption of semantics through a close reading of a poem for which it is a central concern, John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale.*

I. Literalism Against Figuralism: A Program for Inquiry into Literary Metaphor

Someone who wants to understand metaphor might reasonably suppose that a sensible way to proceed would be to begin with a simple case (like someone saying in conversation that their cousin George is a gorilla) and, once we attain an understanding of the simple cases, only then to proceed to the more complex cases that appear in poems. The presupposition of this procedure is that the use of metaphor in conversation is different in degree but not in kind from the use of metaphor in a poem. In order to see how this view is mistaken, we will have to consider the nature of the difference between aesthetic and communicative language in general. To begin at the beginning, we can distinguish natural objects from man-made objects by saying, to borrow some Aristotelian jargon, that natural objects have their formal causes within themselves whereas man-made objects have their formal causes outside of themselves.[51] The *formal cause* of

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[51] I am using Aristotle's terminology just to put a label on what is, I think, a very intuitive way of carving up the world. This argument does not presuppose Aristotle's other views connected with the four causes (for which, see *Physics* 194b16-195a3 and *Metaphysics* 983a24-34, as well as *Physics* 192b9ff in connection with what

an object is that by virtue of which it is what it is; this is most easily understood by considering the way organisms grow: an acorn becomes a tree not because of any property of the soil, water or sun that it is exposed to (these are its efficient causes), but because of its inherent properties, whatever they may be. Exposed to the appropriate efficient causes, an acorn will, if anything, become a tree and not a sheep. Similarly, no amount of soil, water or sun will make a lamb grow into a tree. On the other hand, a tree does not become a table (rather than something else) by virtue of any properties inherent in the tree. If a person makes a tree into a table, the form of the table (that by virtue of which the table is a table and not something else) is imposed from outside by the maker. All man-made objects (or, lest we neglect beaver dams and the like, *artificial objects*) become what they are because they are given form externally.

Most people who make things do so for a reason. If I make an umbrella, presumably I do so in order to keep my head dry. Keeping my head dry is the umbrella's *final cause*, the purpose for which the umbrella was made. I may use an umbrella however I like, of course: to ward off intruders, to dowse for hidden wells, to restrain errant sheep. But then I am not using the umbrella as an umbrella. An umbrella is what it is by virtue of its purpose, and we distinguish an umbrella from a shepherd's crook based upon what it is used for. To put it another way, an umbrella is not an end in itself; its final cause is outside of it. A painting, on the other hand, has no external final

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follows). See Appendix A for a schematic picture of where this fits in the larger theory of poetry that this project takes as its starting point.

cause. I may use a painting to ward off intruders, to dowse for hidden wells, or to restrain errant sheep, but then I would not be using the painting as a painting, and not just because it is poorly suited to those uses. To use a painting properly is simply to observe it, which is a refusal to use it for anything at all. A painting may inspire in me a thought, and from my perspective the painting is the cause of the thought (without the painting my mind would have remained a still pool), but that is not a property of the painting itself: what makes the painting a painting is not that it inspires my thought. The painting would be a painting even if I had never seen it. Any attempt to use the painting for some external end (even an attempt by the artist) would fail to use the painting as a painting. Whereas if I use an umbrella to keep my head dry, I am using the umbrella as an umbrella, even though it is subordinated to an external end, since that is what the umbrella is *for*. In short, works of art are immanently autotelic, or, to use a more familiar term, autonomous.[52]

What is true of art in general is also true of poems: they are *in themselves* autotelic, though *for us* they serve to spur reflection. Communicative acts, on the other hand, are a use of language that is purely instrumental. Their external end (final cause) is communication, i.e., the inducement in the listener of a mental

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[52] Strictly speaking, the word *autonomous* is misleading here, since it really means something that gives its law (*nomos*) to itself. In terms of the formal cause, this is true of natural objects in a way it isn't of artificial objects (aesthetic ones included). And human beings are autonomous in a moral sense since they have free will and reason and are thus capable of *practice* in the Kantian sense of action in accordance with a rule (*Practical Philosophy* 8:275). In themselves, artworks dwell in solitude and unfreedom, but they give us the gift of spurring reflection, which is the precondition of freedom and community.

representation that matches the speaker's own.[53] If poems are aesthetic objects and the aesthetic is, by definition, non-instrumental, it follows that the language of poems cannot be a mere means and that poems are not communicative acts. Since our ordinary use of language is communicative, and since in most respects poems seem to use ordinary language (we are not obliged to learn poetic language in the same way that we learn a foreign language), we naturally imagine that poems and communicative acts are at least analogous, if not identical. But further reflection on the two uses of language reveals just what a chasm lies between them. For example, communicative acts always take place in a concrete context, a context that affects very significantly what is communicated. If I say this afternoon *It is raining,* my communicative act means something different than if I say *It is raining* tomorrow afternoon; in the first case, I mean to say that it is raining on the 15th of April, whereas in the second I mean to say that it is raining on the 16th of April. In both cases I use the same sentence, but I use the sentence to communicate different things.[54] A poem is always actualized concretely as well (where being *actualized* includes recollection, printing, reading or performance), but every instance in which the poem is actualized is an instance of *the same* poem,

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[53] The term *communication* is not very perspicuous in that it suggests that a thought somehow moves from one person's mind to another, whereas in fact the listener is in the position of having to *produce* a representation that approximates the thought that the speaker intends to communicate. If thoughts could move between minds, we would all have a much easier time understanding one another.

[54] The usual way of putting this is that the sentence is the same in the two cases but the proposition the sentence expresses is different. I prefer to avoid putting it this way because I have yet to find an account of just what a proposition *is* that is even remotely plausible, whereas linguists have given quite explicit accounts of just what is meant by *sentence.*

whereas every communicative act is bound to its context—which is why a marriage performed on stage can never end in divorce.

Moreover, a communicative act could use a wide variety of linguistic means to achieve its end. If I wanted to communicate that it is raining, I could say *It is raining* or *Rain falls on the world* or *What a wet afternoon!*—or I could give up on language entirely and do charades until my listener guessed correctly what my frantic flailing meant. All of these could reasonably count as the same communicative act, and if I succeed at inducing the right mental representation in the listener's mind it doesn't really matter how I manage to do so. The linguistic facts about a communicative act are, in other words, radically contingent in relation to the communicative act itself. A poem, however, is not only bound to specific sentences—a poem *just is* a set of specific sentences (and specific line breaks). If I change the words, I am not just uttering a different version of the same poem, I am uttering a different poem. If the notion of *same poem* could encompass different linguistic objects, then we would have considerable trouble telling the difference between a poem and a paraphrase of a poem, between *A slumber did my spirit seal* and "I was sleepy, she was lively, but now she's dead and going around in circles." The linguistic facts about a poem, in other words, are strictly necessary in relation to the poem.

This distinction between poems and communicative acts also affects how we understand their meaning. Since the point of a communicative act is to induce in the listener's mind whatever mental representation the speaker is trying to communicate, a communicative

act can only correctly have one meaning attributed to it. Even if I utter a formally ambiguous sentence like *Someone ate every tomato*, the communicative act is not ambiguous: the sentence (*qua* communicative act) means whatever I intend to communicate by it, regardless of whether or not the sentence (*qua* sentence) can be differently parsed. Even if I make a grammatical error and utter a sentence that literally means something that logically excludes what I am trying to communicate, the meaning of the communicative act will still be what I intended to communicate, not what I actually said. The reason for this, as we have seen already, is that communicative acts are defined instrumentally, by their ends, and however much I may fail to make myself understood the meaning of my communicative act cannot be ambiguous. A poem, on the other hand, means only what its sentences mean, and is therefore quite capable of being ambiguous. Absolutely nothing can change the fact that "A slumber did my spirit seal" is formally ambiguous: either the speaker's spirit sealed a slumber or a slumber sealed his spirit. We may interpret the line in any number of different ways (where an *interpretation* is an account of its significance) but the strictly descriptive facts about its meaning are determined by the facts about the language, e.g., that any sentence with the same form as "A slumber did my spirit seal," such as *A spaniel did my cat pursue,* will be ambiguous in the same way.

So the meaning of a communicative act is determined both by the mental state of the speaker and by the context of the utterance, whereas the meaning (in a narrow sense) of the poem is exclusively determined by its linguistic facts. This means that the seemingly

intuitive strategy of beginning with such conversational metaphors as *George is a gorilla* and applying our discoveries to more complex literary metaphors will not work because the theory we would produce would necessarily be impertinent to poetry. For example, we might consider an utterance of *George is a gorilla* as an indirect way of making a direct statement (that George is bulky and hairy, has a saggital crest and an opposable big toe) or we might regard it as an implicit comparison (that George is, in some perhaps unspecified way, similar to a gorilla, though he is not in fact a gorilla). Both of these kinds of account depend on initially observing that *George is a gorilla* is not "literally" true, and then attributing to the sentence a "metaphorical" meaning. But a poem is not determined by context in the way that a communicative act is, and so it would make no sense to distinguish a metaphorical meaning (George is big and hairy) from a literal meaning (George is a gorilla, not a man). If the sentence *George is a gorilla* appeared in a poem, it would mean just what the words mean in that order, and to complain that the sentence makes a false statement would be simply obtuse, a sort of *metabasis eis allo genos.*

This means that the literal/metaphorical distinction itself, which accounts of metaphor have almost universally relied upon as far back as Aristotle, simply does not apply to literary metaphor. And if we believe Donald Davidson, it doesn't even apply to conversational metaphor. On Davidson's account, "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (32). So far Davidson and I agree, but his rationale is exactly the opposite of the one I am suggesting: "I depend on a distinction between what

words mean and what they are used to do. I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use" (33). And his argument is quite convincing, except for the fact that he assumes throughout his essay that poems are just one of many kinds of communicative acts, whereas if my argument above is correct then poems differ from communicative acts in ways that fundamentally determine how we ought to conceive metaphor. If Davidson is right about how conversational metaphors work, and if I am right about the differences between communicative acts and poems, then it follows that poems don't have metaphors in them at all. For example, Davidson insists that "most metaphorical sentences are *patently* false" (42, his emph.), whereas it really makes no sense to call a sentence in a poem true or false in the sense that Davidson means (correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs, or, in the more graceful Scholastic vocabulary, *adequatio rerum et intellectus*).[55] Since Davidson seems to me to be more or less right

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[55] It follows from my account here that poems are neither true nor false in this sense, and it would be reasonable to infer from this fact that poems have no relation to truth whatsoever. But it seems to me that, rather than despairing of poetry's claim to truth, this circumstance should compel us to rethink the category of truth itself. More specifically, I would suggest that we can think about truth in poetry in terms of Hegel's conception of truth as explained in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Science of Logic* (though not in his *Lectures on Fine Art*, where it seems to me that he presupposes the details of his system in such a way that he fails to live up to the stringency of the demands his system places on an account of art). To give an account of Hegel's conception of truth and its relevance to the truth of poetry would, given the complexity of the issues, take me very far afield, and so I will have to leave this matter fallow for the time being. But, to put it a bit simplistically, my view would be that Hegel's emphatic conception of truth is linked to actualization in the world (what is true is the actualization of Spirit), and therefore we can think of the truth of poetry as its realization in the reader's experience of reflection—which is just to say that the truth of poetry is criticism. Just as a moral demand (e.g., that all people should be free) issues from the world and is true of the world but nevertheless does not refer to a state of affairs in the world—refers, in fact, to the absence of a state of affairs (people are not free)—so the poem arrives in the form of a *demand*, not a merely indicative proposition. The poem, by virtue of its enigma-character, demands that the reader think, and the fulfillment of that demand is the precondition of the fulfillment of any moral demand whatever.

about conversational metaphors (and since I think I'm right about the differences between communicative acts and poems), the case of literary metaphor seems to me extremely problematic. Thus far, we know at least that it is categorically different from the case of conversational metaphor.

But the negative discoveries about how not to approach inquiry into literary metaphor also have positive implications. (From here on out, *metaphor* just means *literary metaphor*.) An approach that defines metaphor in terms of a relation to the extra-linguistic world (like Davidson's appeal to the "patent falsity" of metaphors) or an approach that defines metaphor in terms of a relation between sentences and thoughts (like that of Samuel Levin) will never hold water if my account of the difference between poems and communicative acts is correct. But it follows from this that, if there is such a thing as literary metaphor, it should be something we can describe in terms of the linguistic facts about the text—that is, something we can describe in terms of what is *literally* there on the page (*literal* comes from *litteræ,* 'letters'). Literalism, in this sense, is turns out the be the same thing as an immanent approach to the language of the text. This puts us immediately in the domain of linguistics, specifically syntax and semantics. On the face of it, semantics seems like the relevant area: metaphorical sentences generally aren't ungrammatical, so the heart of the matter must be some kind of semantic deviance. To anticipate a bit, my argument will be that metaphors are sentences that contain inconsistencies between the semantic features of their words. This means that a metaphorical sentence is one that runs against the grain

of normal semantic associations, and it follows from this that the normal operations of semantics, if a metaphor is to deviate from them, cannot themselves produce the metaphor. It must be the case that the semantic deviance of a metaphor is an effect that the syntax of the sentence has on its semantics, and so it is to syntax we must turn if we are to explain how literary metaphors work.

II. Syntax Against Semantics: The Linguistic Structure of Literary Metaphor

The basic problem we face in providing an account of metaphor is to distinguish two sentences such as the following on the basis of the language alone (that is, without appealing to reference):

      (1)   The ship ploughed the sea

      (2)   The ship traversed the sea

The simplest way to face this problem might be just to say that the verb *plough* doesn't fit with the rest of sentence (1), whereas the verb *traverse* does fit with sentence (2). We might say that the normal use of *plough* is in such a sentence as the following:

      (3)   The farmer ploughed the field.

Or we might appeal to the fact that the *OED* lists the primary transitive use of the verb *plough* as "To make furrows in and turn up (the earth) with a plough, especially as a preparation for sowing" (def. 1a). The *OED* also helpfully lists the usage of *plough* in sentence (1), which it marks as "*fig.*" and "Chiefly *poet.*," "Of a ship, boat, swimming animal, etc.: To cleave the surface of the water" (def. 4a). We might say, then,

that sentence (1) uses *plough* in a transferred sense, where the transfer in question is from *OED* definition 1a to *OED* definition 4a. This is essentially the account which Aristotle gives in the *Rhetoric,* and it is embedded in the Greek etymology of the word *metaphor* itself, which just means 'transfer' or 'transport' (hence the commonplace in introductory literature courses that the literary tourist who finds himself in Greece may be tickled to discover the word *metapherein* plastered on the sides of city buses).

The problem with such an account is that it locates the metaphor in a single word. If the rest of the sentence is simply normal and literal (and hence can be fitted out comfortably with the verb *traverse*), then the locus of the metaphor is the word *ploughed* itself. But it doesn't make sense to say that the word *in itself* is the metaphor, since it does not seem to carry any particularly metaphorical sense when used in (3). Part of the problem here is, in accordance with the argument from the previous section, that the metaphorical/literal distinction doesn't make much sense if we are talking about literary metaphor and are thus confined to facts about the sentence itself. But the other, more important, part of the problem is that metaphor is here conceived as a property of a word rather than of a sentence as a whole. If we conceive of metaphor as a property of sentences rather than of words, the literal/metaphorical distinction at once falls away. *The ship ploughed the sea* thus becomes a metaphorical sentence, not a sentence containing words used metaphorically.

The most significant attempt to salvage the word-based theory is Max Black's account in *Models and Metaphors* (1962). For Black, we solve the problems outlined above if we see a metaphorical sentence as one in which a word (here *ploughed*) is what he calls the *focus* of the metaphor and the rest of the sentence is what he calls the *frame* of the metaphor (28). The advantage of this account is that it allows us to understand metaphor as a kind of relation between a focus and a frame, so that we can locate its metaphorical quality at the level of the sentence. At the same time, it allows Black to preserve Aristotle's sense that in *The ship ploughed the sea* or *Achilles was a lion*, a single word is being used (Black might say *framed*) in a special way whereby it acquires a special meaning. Thus Black can say that we have a metaphorical word embedded in a literal sentence without having to commit himself to the notion that the word is *in itself* metaphorical. The problem, as Roger M. White observes in *The Structure of Metaphor* (1996), is that when one applies this view to actual literary examples one often finds that it is difficult to systematically distinguish focus from frame. One example White discusses at length is this sentence from *Othello*: "His [that is, Othello's] unbookish jealousy must construe poor Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviors quite in the wrong" (IV.i.9-11). We seem to be able to go along with Black's theory in saying that the word *unbookish* is the focus of the metaphor, but what do we do with the word *construe*? The problem here is precisely that one can both construe behaviors and construe literature, that both are equally possible objects of interpretation. So Shakespeare's metaphor, as White points out, hinges on *construe*,

which allows the meaning to swing between literary and behavioral interpretation (77).[56] Even if we stick to the simple task of assigning each of the words in the sentence to either focus or frame, literary examples persistently muck up the works.

The basic problem we face, then, is to account for our intuition that a metaphor is a sentence in which some words are in some way semantically incompatible with other words in the sentence, without falling into the trap of imagining that some words are being assigned special or metaphorical senses. In other words, we need to find a way to explain the distinction between metaphorical and non-metaphorical sentences without having to produce a metaphorical semantics to complement the existing non-metaphorical semantics. We might, therefore, construe the real problem as being how the words in a metaphorical sentence relate to one another, which puts us back in the domain of what is literally on the page. If Black's theory was no good because it fell back into assigning special senses to individual words, he still had the right instinct in attempting to produce a theory that would understand metaphor as a *relation* between the words in a sentence. The study of the relations between words in sentences is, of course, just syntax.

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[56] For White, the vocabulary associated with interpreting behavior is the *primary vocabulary*, whereas the vocabulary associated with interpreting literature is the *secondary vocabulary*. The primary vocabulary is primary, on his account, because it refers to the "actual situation" (Othello interpreting Cassio's behavior) rather than some "hypothetical situation" (someone interpreting a work of literature) (111). Despite his opposition to the notion of special or metaphorical meanings, White ends up reproducing the literal/figural distinction in a different way, and I suspect that part of what leads him astray is the fact that his example comes from a play and therefore resembles a speech act more than, for example, a lyric poem might.

One of the most straightforward kinds of relationships between words is what linguists call *c-selection* (short for "categorial-selection"). The lexical entry for each word includes a specification of what kinds of words can follow it, a specification that linguists call its *c-selection features.* For example, the distribution of *intone* in the following sentences shows that it can be followed by a noun phrase as in (4) or by *that*+sentence as in (5) (more technically, it selects for a Determiner Phrase or a Complementizer Phrase), but it cannot be followed by a lone adjective as in (6).

> (4)　　Mathilde intoned the prayer
>
> (5)　　Mathilde intoned that she was tired
>
> (6)　　*Mathilde intoned old[57]

A sentence in which the c-selection features of any of its words are violated will be, like (6), ungrammatical. As we saw in the previous chapter, one often finds in poems expressions that are, strictly speaking, ungrammatical (like "Conspiring . . . *how* to load and bless"), but can be understood as a combination between two different grammatical constructions. We might understand such "synthetic constructions" as cases in which the c-selection restrictions of a word have been violated; more precisely then, we might call such cases *c-synthetic constructions.*

But this doesn't seem to get us very far with metaphor since, although a metaphor might appear in an ungrammatical sentence,

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[57] These examples and some of the following discussion are borrowed from Adger 87-90. The classic treatment is Grimshaw, though she uses an older vocabulary: she uses the term "selection" to refer only to what Adger (along with most people these days) calls "s-selection" and she uses the term "subcategorization" to refer to "c-selection."

there's nothing about being metaphorical that requires a sentence to be ungrammatical. *The ship ploughed the sea* is perfectly grammatical: the c-selection features of the transitive verb *plough* allow it to be followed by a noun phrase but not by *that*+sentence (**The farmer ploughed that he was happy*). We would be obliged to say that the following sentence is grammatical as well, but nevertheless something seems to be seriously wrong with it:

(7)   ?Mathilde intoned the mirror

This sentence is not ungrammatical, but it nevertheless seems *unacceptable*; in other words, it doesn't seem to violate a basic syntactic restriction, but it does seem to violate a basic semantic restriction (from now on, I will use a question mark at the beginning of a sentence to denote unacceptability). In order to account for cases such as these, linguists have suggested that the lexical entry for each word, in addition to a specification of its c-selection features, also contains a set of *s-selection features* (short for "semantic selection"). Just as the c-selection features of a word restrict which categories of words can follow it, so the s-selection features of a word restrict which kinds of words can follow it on semantic grounds.[58] The verb *intone,* for example, seems, on the basis of the data in (4)-(7), to include in its lexical entry the s-selection feature {utterable} (from now on, I will indicate s-selection features with curly brackets). In other words, the

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[58] If we assume that c-selection motivates merge (that is, that a given word merges with another in order to satisfy its c-selection feature), then we can define a *complement* as an expression that merges with a head. S-selection would then be a relation between a head and its complement, a relation that would have no effect on whether or not a sentence satisfied the bare output conditions but which would have some effect on the eventual interpretation of the sentence in the conceptual-intentional apparatus.

word that follows *intone* must have in its own lexical entry a specification that it is included in the class of things that are {utterable}, just as it must also have in its lexical entry a specification that it is included in the category of [DP] or [CP].

We might therefore understand *?Mathilde intoned the mirror* as an *s-synthetic construction,* i.e., a construction in which the s-selection features of *intone* are violated. This kind of relation between words in a sentence seems to be just what we were looking for in an account of metaphor: it accounts for intuition that some words in a metaphorical sentence seem out of place but without falling into claiming that the words have anything other than their normal meanings or that the metaphorical character of the sentence is actually a property of the word. *?Mathilde intoned the mirror* might seem like an odd example of a metaphor, but it is just a particularly extreme case of precisely the same phenomenon. In a similar way, **Mathilde intoned old* seems too extreme an ungrammaticality for Keats (or even for Shelley), but "Conspiring . . . *how* to load and bless" is ungrammatical nevertheless. Metaphors, then, are just s-synthetic constructions.

If metaphors are s-synthetic constructions, then they are not simply a matter of either lexical or sentential semantics. This view of metaphor depends on the semantics of individual words (namely, their s-selection features), but it assumes that all of the individual words have the same semantics in a metaphorical sentence that they have in a non-metaphorical sentence. What makes the sentence a metaphor is that certain words are placed in a structural relationship to one another such that their s-selection features clash, which is just to say

that *syntax* is what makes a metaphor a metaphor.[59] The primary advantage of this view is that it allows us to approach particular cases very concretely: if the metaphorical character of a sentence is exhaustively mediated by its syntax, then the focus of our interpretive energies should be the syntax of the metaphorical sentence. In this sense, what we will be concerned with is just the words on the page, and our inquiry will therefore be *literal* both in the sense that we are concerned with what's actually on the page (*litteræ,* 'letters') and in the sense that we are not concerned with some kind of special, 'metaphorical' meaning. This allows us to approach metaphors in a very precise and explicit manner, and we can thereby avoid the danger of in many discussions of particular metaphors of falling into vague, impressionistic generalities or simple-minded reductions (like when Lakoff and his collaborators take an enormous array of both literary and non-literary examples and boil them down to such crude formulæ as "THE MIND IS A CONTAINER" [152]). In short, metaphors are best understood *literally.*

Another advantage of this account is that it allows us to understand how we come to have *dead metaphors,* like *The SUV ploughed into my sensible sedan.* Here *plough* seems to fit in the sentence just fine; it just has an idiomatic interpretation in

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[59] The closest thing I have seen to an approach of this kind is Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Grammar of Metaphor* (1958), though the main aim of that book is to provide a taxonomy (rich in examples) of different kinds of constructions in which metaphors appear. She deliberately leaves her theory of metaphor a bit vague in order to be as capacious as possible (23-4), thereby to get the best sense of how poets exploit opportunities for metaphor provided by different kinds of constructions, though she generally assumes that the metaphor is located in a particular word (which allows her to break things down in terms of which part of speech the metaphorical word is).

constructions of this kind where the phrasal verb *plough into* is synonymous with *ram into*. Given our account of a metaphor as an s-synthetic construction, it makes sense that if the construction were repeated enough the relevant lexical entries would just be modified to include the new usage as idiomatic. It would then not, as Richards says (following Johnson), give us "two ideas" at once (119). At some point, a sentence like *The ship ploughed the sea* is likely to simply cease to be a metaphor in the sense that it will cease to be s-synthetic—the fact that the relevant interpretation of *plough* is already listed in the *OED* suggests that it is nearly dead already. Understanding metaphors in this way also allows us to distinguish them sharply from similes, which are perfectly grammatical and acceptable sentences, thereby discouraging the approach to metaphors that seeks to reduce them to similes (such as we find in Aristotle, *Rh.* 1457b and Quintilian, *Inst.* VIII.vi.9).

The main problem faced by an analysis of this kind is that the linguistics literature on s-selection has some serious limitations if we want to put it to practical use, not least that no-one (as far as I can discover) has proposed a worked-out list of the set of s-selection features. Although different languages lexicalize concepts differently in certain respects, there are also clearly underlying similarities (and so there must be if a language is to be learnable at the pace with which children acquire languages). It should be in principle possible, therefore, to determine the universal set of s-selection features just as linguists have determined the universal set of phonetic features. There are two main difficulties facing any attempt do so, however. The first is

that one must have categories more universal than simply the meaning of the word in question, otherwise the argument for a particular s-selection feature ends up being circular. So, for example, it would be easy enough just to say that the s-selection feature for *intone* is {intonable}. In order for the attribution of an s-selection feature to a word to be substantive, the proposed feature must be a concept with greater extension than that of the word itself. In the case of *intone*, we seem to accomplish something if we say that its s-selection feature is {utterable}, since intoning is only one kind of uttering.

The other problem faced by any attempt to provide the universal set of s-selection features is that, if we aim to define those features in terms of the most basic conceptual categories available, then the attempt to do linguistics goes over into metaphysics. We might take a starting point from the philosophical tradition by, for example, adopting Kant's table of the categories from the *Critique of Pure Reason* and attempting to adapt it to the data we find. But it will be difficult to justify the choices we make between different kinds of conceptual distinctions on linguistic (rather than metaphysical) grounds, and so we end up stuck doing something like a science of everything in order to understand a small (if important) issue in semantics. In the end we aim to give an account of intuitions that we all use when judging sentences, and since most of us probably don't have much trouble distinguishing metaphorical from non-metaphorical sentences (e.g., *My lady is a rose* from *My lady is like a rose*), there must in fact be universal categories already in place. So we do not have to construct

the universe *ex nihilo*; the question is how we are to obtain access to the underlying concepts that our linguistic knowledge seems to rely on (and which, presumably, are part of our innate genetic endowment). Studying metaphors in poetry, with informed introspection about what intuitions guide our perception of metaphors, might, in this instance, be of some use to linguists, since examining concrete instances in which s-selection features are clearly in conflict may well allow us to work out what the s-selection features must be such that they are inconsistent with one another (in other words, it allows us to take the fact that a particular sentence is a metaphor as given). And so, in the next section I will turn to examining the use of metaphors in a particular poem, Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*. This poem is particularly illuminating on these issues, and a particularly good test case for the theory outlined here, because the poem itself is, to anticipate a bit, concerned with the attempt to have a kind of experience that exceeds or violates the limitations of the conceptual categories that otherwise form and constrain our experience.

III. Language Against Concepts: *Ode to a Nightingale* and Metaphysical Experience

Ode to a Nightingale ends with the speaker bluntly questioning the reality of the experiences he has just described:

> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music...Do I wake or sleep? (79-80)[60]

This finale seems out of keeping with the poem since up to this point the poem is focused on minute, concrete and determinate—even literal-minded—descriptions even of the speaker's enigmatically synæsthetic experiences. A poem that begins with so definite an experiential assertion ("My heart aches") seems to promise an equally definite conclusion. The problem is one of mood (here, the interrogative), so the first step in understanding this finale is to work out just what is being asked. The last question seems like the most straightforward. If the speaker were simply unconscious (in a dreamless sleep), then he presumably could not inquire after his condition in this way.[61] The directly active construction ("Do I wake or sleep?" not *Am I awake or sleeping?*) suggests something other than the mere passivity of unconsciousness, so the question seems best glossed as *Am I experiencing waking reality or the dreams of sleep?* But it remains unclear why the absence of the nightingale's "music" should cause the speaker to question the reality of his present experience.

Turning to the previous line, we might wonder whether "that music" even refers to the nightingale's song at all. Presumably, "that music" refers to the same thing that "it" refers to in the previous line, but what is the antecedent of "it"? The immediately preceding clause itself has "it" as its subject (77), but that clause is conjoined to a parallel construction whose subject is "thy [presumably the

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[60] All citations from Keats's poems are from Allott's edition. The ellipsis in the final line is Keats's.

[61] One could argue that the speaker is, once the nightingale's song is fled, in an entirely anæsthetic state, but I see no indication in the poem that his senses of smell, touch and taste are at all diminished.

nightingale's] plaintive anthem" (75). The "plaintive anthem" is a good fit with "that music" in the final line, but in what sense could an "anthem," however "plaintive," be either a "vision" or a "waking dream"? We might speak of a musical composition as 'visionary,' but if Sally tells Egbert that she 'had a vision' Egbert will not take her to mean that she had a purely auditory experience; visions are (at least) visual (hence the derivation from *videre,* 'to see'). So a more plausible candidate for an antecedent for *it* might be "the fancy" of lines 73-4. But it's far from clear what "fancy" exactly this line is referring to: it could be the fancy of the preceding stanza (that the nightingale is immortal or its song transhistorical), or it could be the fancy of the fourth stanza in which the speaker abruptly declares that he is "Already with thee!", or it could be the fancy of the entire poem.[62] This last option becomes more attractive when we consider that the poem is the only thing which we could call both a 'song' and a 'vision,' and that the opening of the stanza, with its reflexive rumination on the word *forlorn* ("the very word" troubles him, not its meaning), reminds us that "Poesy" itself is one of the poem's central *topoi.* The question of the reality of the poem's language is thereby explicitly bound up with the reality of the speaker's experience, and the phrase "waking dream" gives this difficulty concrete form—Morpheus, we must remember, is not only the god of Sleep and Dreams, but also the god of Form.

A poem that ends with a question would seem to be a poem that has undone itself; we would surely feel more at ease with a poem that

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[62] It could also refer to the mental faculty of 'fancy' or *Phantasie* (e.g., in Coleridge's sense), but if so it cannot be referring to the same entity as the "vision" of the penultimate line.

began with a question which it proceeded to answer. But to answer a question about experience would be to redact it into a conceptual framework that is alien to experience itself, especially when one is concerned with an experience whose content resists conceptualization. This is why, in this case, the questions can only be asked once the experience has fled. Since the poem links that experience to its language, we must turn to the language of the poem in order to understand what kind of experience the poem attempts to think.

The poem opens with the dead metaphor "My heart aches," which functions as an idiom in that we directly assign a special sense to it ('I feel sad'). But this already numb phrase is conjoined to another, stranger phrase: "and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense" (1-2). This has all the earmarks of an s-synthetic construction: a "numbness" is not the sort of thing that can inflict pain or be the source of pain and "my sense" is too much of an abstraction to be a recipient of pain (can something inflict pain on the faculty of perception itself? or, more generally, can a capacity be in pain?). To put it a bit more explicitly, the verb *pain* requires a subject that is {sensible} (i.e., 'a possible object of sensation/feeling') and it requires an object that is {sensitive} (i.e., 'capable of sensation'[63]).

The oddness of this conjunct is doubled by the line break,[64] which encourages one to read *pains* as if it were intransitive, a suggestion reinforced by the parallelism between "a drowsy numbness

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[63] In other words, 'sensitive' as opposed to 'insensible,' and 'sensible' as opposed to 'non-sensible' (not as opposed to 'senseless').

[64] See Chapter 5 for the theoretical justification of approaching lineation this way. Leavis observes that the line break is "worth noting," though, oddly, he goes on to say nothing about it at all (*Revaluation* 246).

pains" and "my heart aches." The mere fact of conjunction suggests that the conjuncts have some kind of relation, but it leaves the nature of the relation totally undetermined, thereby compelling us to give it content. The form of the conjunction combined with the parallelism created by the lineation thus requires us to reconsider "my heart aches," and what at first seemed a dead metaphor seems, thus contextualized, to quicken again. The word *heart* has always referred to the bodily organ and to the seat of feeling, but earlier uses of the word had a materialist cast: the physical heart was the physical place where feeling was located. More modern usage has no such materialist underpinnings, so that *heart* can be unproblematically used as an abstraction for a (presumably non-physical) mental state, as in *My heart yearns for peace.* On the other hand, *ache* has remained essentially physical, which is why a sentence like *?My faith aches* sounds anomalous. Despite its idiomatic character, then, "My heart aches" is in fact an s-synthetic construction, something that might have gone unnoticed without an aggressively s-synthetic conjunct. The resurrection of this dead metaphor not only opens up the problem of synaesthesia that saturates the entire poem but exhibits it as dwelling within language we thought to be straightforward. This resurrection is thus something more than simply a garden-variety defamiliarization but is an attempt to experience what is as something already transformed,[65] to resurrect the dead letter of the world into living movement of Spirit.[66]

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[65] Criticism on this poem very often attempts to understand it in terms of a binary opposition like that between "the world of imagination" and "the real world" (Brooks, *Modern Poetry* 31) or between the "ideal and the real" (Tate, quoted in Fogle, "Keats's

Having brought "My heart aches" back to life and having introduced a "numbness" (presumably the absence of pain) that nevertheless causes pain, we then discover that the speaker's state is neither pain nor numbness:

> 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
> But being too happy in thine happiness – (5-6)

This is not a language of suffering: three variations on *happy* appear in two lines. In the first instance, "thy happy lot," *happy* seems to mean 'lucky' or 'fortunate,' but in the second case it seems to mean something like 'joyful' (*being too joyful in your happiness* sounds better than *?being too lucky in your happiness*). The movement from the nightingale's merely external circumstances ("thy happy lot") to the speaker's internal state ("being too happy") returns us to the domain of experience. Now we are faced with the difficulty of specifying what "being too happy in thine happiness" might mean. The heart of the problem is the seemingly innocent preposition *in.* This is clear if we replace *in* with *for* ('being too happy for thine happiness'), in which case the sense would clearly be that the speaker experiences an excess of joy as a result of the fact that the nightingale is joyful, experiences a

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Ode to a Nightingale" 33) or between the speaker and the bird (Bate 503). But surely Earl Wasserman is right that this poem is emphatically processual, and shifts through any number of problems (179ff.). What I am trying to do in this essay is to show that the attempt to experience what is beyond experience is the fundamental process or operation throughout the poem, unfolding through a shifting chiaroscuro of different problems.

[66] In other words, rather than experiencing the world as a set of static givens (like when we think of the world as a collection of scientific data), in this moment the speaker seeks to experience the world as something living, something continuously exceeding itself, something, so to speak, with a mind of its own. I am filtering Paul through Hegel here in order to emphasize the way in which the spirit, rather than the letter, of the Law is just the law written on the living flesh of a human heart, rather than being a law that is given, either as the law of God or a law of nature (2 Cor. 3).

feeling-for-other (*Oh, you found your long-lost twin again? I'm so happy for you!*). The preposition *in,* however, does not have a straightforward reading in this context (an interpretive crux that rests on a preposition is usually impossible to resolve in a satisfactory way—but *in* is at least easier to handle than *of*). As a rule *in* selects for noun phrases that are {extended} so that even such things as *mind* or *memory* are treated as if they had extension (as in *Egbert preserved her in memory* or *Mathilde kept his last words in mind as she opened the safe*). *Happiness,* however, is not a noun which we typically treat as if it were extended (*Egbert is happy* not *?Egbert is in happiness*), so this construction is s-synthetic.[67] The point of this construction seems to be that the speaker is *in* the nightingale's happiness, as if the nightingale's happiness were a space within which one could dwell, thereby denying that the speaker is outside (or in some external relation to) the nightingale's happiness, as would be the case if the speaker envied the nightingale's "happy lot" or if the speaker sympathized with the nightingale's agreeable mental state.

Strangely, this denial that the speaker has an external (or alienated) relation to the nightingale seems to be reversed in the third stanza, in which the speaker laments the state of the world,

> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies[.]
> (22-6)

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[67] Byron's "She walks in beauty" is a similar case—we usually speak of someone *being* beautiful or *having* beauty but not being *in* beauty.

These lines as well focus on a specific location, a location filled with the opposite of the nightingale's song of summer: *"Here,* where men sit and hear each other groan." The speaker does not claim to be in this place (and hence to yearn to escape from it to the place where the nightingale is), but rather the speaker has already left this place and wishes to "quite forget" that it exists (21). The difference between the speaker and the nightingale, in other words, is not that one is in misery and one is in joy, but that, while both are in joy, one remembers what misery was like, remembers that misery exists elsewhere. And the speaker is obliged to remember that suffering in order to understand his present condition as a freedom from suffering, which is why he still refers to the world of suffering as "Here." The s-synthetic constructions in these lines do not point the way out of a world of suffering: the "few" and "last gray hairs" are also "sad," so that decay and death cannot inspire an Epicurean detachment and serenity (i.e., that death is nothing to fear because nothing of you persists that might suffer[68]) but are infused with suffering at the level of their very being (the old man does not lament his lost hairs, the hairs themselves suffer and are sad). Similarly, it is "youth" itself (not young people in general, not some young person in particular) that "grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies"; in other words, metaphysical entities themselves now suffer decay, fall into the mutability which so terrified the ancient world.

In light of the way the very metaphysical foundations seem suddenly to be made of sand, the speaker's desire for flight is

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[68] See Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* III.830-1094.

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understandable. His first attempt at finding a means of flight is, in the second stanza, to yearn for "a draught of vintage" that would constitute "the true, the blushful Hippocrene," as opposed to the merely transparent waters of the classical muses (11,16). But the strong drink that this stanza invokes in the muses' place turns out not to be merely a means by which the speaker can escape the suffering of the world or enter into the singing of the nightingale; it is no common table wine. The s-synthetic constructions in this stanza produce a wine that actually contains an experience in itself, and not a merely gustatory experience. A gustatory experience, though, is what we are led to expect when we are told how the wine is supposed to taste:

> Oh, for a draught of vintage that hath been
>   Cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
> Tasting of Flora and the country green,
>   Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
>   (11-14)

What we get, of course, is an s-synthetic construction. *Tasting of* selects for something that is {concrete} (as opposed to abstract), which encourages us to find a concrete way of understanding "Flora." Given that the word is capitalized, we might take it to be a proper name, and hence to understand it as referring to the Roman goddess of flowers. But while this would render the semantics of the expression internally consistent, it seems hardly likely, despite the capitals, that the speaker yearns for wine that actually tastes like the goddess (how would a goddess taste? can a goddess be fermented? would she tolerate being pressed?). Alternatively, we might understand "Flora" in a secular sense as a name for the flowers themselves. But even this seems like an awkward solution since what these lines invoke is surely

not a wine that actually tastes like flowers, but a wine that is 'floral,' that tastes like flowers smell. In order to work out what sense of "Flora" could satisfy the semantic requirements of "Tasting of" we are obliged to seek something concrete and material. But what we find, though it is indeed concrete, is not concretion of the right kind: however closely linked the sense of smell and taste are, one cannot actually taste a smell. When we speak in this way ('That Gewürtztraminer is strangely floral'), we are drawing an analogy, and the analogy is *only* an analogy to the extent that smell and taste are not inter-translatable. But however synæsthetic our understanding of the phrase ends up being, we are likely to go along with it since our habitual use of language already presupposes a synæsthetic analogy, which allows us to speak of a wine as 'floral.'

While it seems possible to reconcile "Tasting of Flora" to *gourmanderie*, we would be hard-pressed to do the same with "Tasting of . . . the country green" (assuming that we're not talking about wheat grass juice). The phrase "the country green" could mean the "village green" of some unspecified locale (*OED,* s.v., "green, n." B.12.b). A particular village green of a particular place is perfectly concrete, and even if the poem read '*a* country green' it would be referring to a concrete green, albeit one arbitrarily selected. But to speak of "*the* country green" is to speak of an abstraction, just as someone who observes that 'the domestic feline is easily swayed by the promise of food' is referring to an abstraction (unless the expression is contextualized in such a way that we know that a particular domestic feline is being referred to). The noun *green* could also refer to "foliage,"

in which case the country greenery is what is at issue (*op. cit.,* B.9). But even then the determiner *the* renders this expression an abstraction: not the greenery behind my house or even the greenery in Yorkshire, but the country greenery in general. Regardless of which way we understand *green,* then, the construction is s-synthetic since the phrase must be an abstraction, in the one case an abstraction over nature enclosed within the social order and in the other nature outside of the social order (i.e., in the country rather than the *polis*).

While it takes some reflection to see that "the country green" is something abstract, not something concrete, no-one would make the same about "Dance," which, lacking any determiner, is clearly an abstraction. In fact, the phrase *full of dance* so conspicuously violates acceptability that we only fail to notice its oddity because of the intervening phrases. Of the many things lines 14 and 15 tell us the sip of wine is supposed to contain, this is by far the most abstract, but it also refers to a kind of experience (the experience of dancing) that is the most immediate thus far: the experience of the goddess or her flowers is mediated by (nature-) religion and the experience of the green is mediated by society (even if only negatively), but the experience of dancing is purely bodily. But precisely what is concrete about dancing cannot be concrete in such a way that it could fill a beaker or fill a mouth, and it is no easier to imagine how a wine might contain or produce or reproduce the experience of dancing. Here the split between the abstract and the concrete, the distinction on which the selectional properties of *full of* depend, marks a point at which experience would be patently unassimilable to language. This is a

serious problem for a poem that, however much it seeks to attain to (some kind of) experience, seeks to do so within language, albeit by using language against itself.

And so the next item in the line invokes poetry itself. The movement from dance to song wouldn't seem like much of a leap (one must have something to dance to), but the additional qualifier that the song must be *Provençal* suddenly pull song into the realm of historical specificity. The adjective *Provençal* presumably also disambiguates *song* so that it refers to poetry and only in a derivative manner to song (that is, a poem might be sung but *song* in this sense would exclude wordless singing, birdsong, and the like). The appeal to the troubadours is hardly adventitious, given that that the troubadour is so often a figure for the poet in his freedom and that the nightingale is a persistent figure in troubadour poetry (in fact, the muses' fountain in this stanza, and the nightingale and eglantine elsewhere, particularly call to mind Jaufré Rudel's *Quan lo rius de la fontana*—and what is the *Ode to a Nightingale* but an *amor de lonh?*). At this point, we might be tempted to see these lines not so much as a list of things the sip of wine is supposed to contain as a description of the setting of an experience that this wine is supposed to (somehow) produce. With the specificity of the appeal to the troubadours, it becomes plain just how remote an experience the speaker wishes to have: both troubadours and ancient Roman goddesses are to be in attendance on this country green full of dancers. And the final item in the list nicely summarizes the affect he seeks in an s-synthetic construction within this larger s-synthetic construction: "sunburnt mirth." This calls to mind, of

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course, the end of the preceding stanza, in which the nightingale's "happiness" provoked it to sing "of summer in full-throated ease." Just as the nightingale's "ease" itself seems to be "full-throated," so "mirth" itself is here subject to the warmth of the sun's rays, so that, if abstractions have become concrete, it is to their benefit. Mirth itself has a body and can feel its own joy.

But it is not the abandon of sheer pleasure that the speaker seeks, a world in which concepts can be redeemed by simply falling out of language into incarnation. As the appeal to the troubadours has already indicated, it is poetic inspiration that he seeks from his "blushful Hippocrene," inspiration enough, we might imagine, to conjure the dancing green. And yet his stated aim at the end of the stanza is, strangely enough, not to call into being a dancing world:

> That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
> And with thee fade away into the forest dim [. . .] (19-20)

All of these things the sip of wine is supposed to contain are merely means to an end, and that end is to "leave the world unseen." This phrase is syntactically ambiguous; it could either mean that he aims to escape the world without being seen by the world (or by the people in the world), or it could mean that he aims to stop looking at the world, to *leave the world unseen* as one would *leave the book unread.* In the one reading, the world is doing the looking, and the speaker just wants to avoid being the object of that gaze, whereas in the other, the speaker is doing the looking and he wishes to avert his gaze (inward, perhaps, or towards the forest). In the following line, the phrase "fade away" suggests the first reading, i.e., the speaker wishes to fade from view. But the beginning of the next stanza continues the sentence:

"Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget . . ." (21). Here the speaker seems actually to be fading away himself, dissolving, not just fading from sight, and *quite forget* suggests that it is the speaker's attentiveness, not the world's, that is at issue. The ambiguity of *leave the world unseen* thus produces a reversal from a position in which the speaker is merely the object of the world to a position in which the speaker is a subject. But the speaker only becomes subject enough to dissolve, and so finds himself aligned with just those features of the world he most seeks to escape: the "youth" that "grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies." The speaker's desperate turn inward thus unconsciously becomes a turn outward, a painful identification with the world's mutability that offers no solace to his suffering.

The speaker thus far has little luck in fulfilling his desire to flee this miserable world into the nightingale's domain. It comes as a shock, then, that in the fourth stanza, immediately after declaring his intention to "fly to" the nightingale (in the future), the speaker declares that he has already achieved unity with the nightingale: "Already with thee!" (35). It sounds as though the speaker has not only succeeded, but has come to realize that he was already where he wanted to be, that the miseries of the third stanza were already illusory. The mechanism by which he gets to this point is not "Bacchus and his pards" (Roman deities are rarely helpful in this poem) but "the viewless wings of Poesy" (32-3). Since "Poesy" usually refers specifically to the composition of poetry, we might imagine that the font of inspiration to which he turned in the second stanza was the *reading* of poetry, and that this turning to tradition failed him in comparison to his own

creative powers. But what exactly are poesy's "viewless wings"? To speak of poetry as capable of flying surely suggests (especially to a poet living before the age of the aeroplane) an identification of poetry with some material creature like a bird. It also, of course, makes sense to say that poetry is invisible, both since it exists as sound when performed and since its visible manifestation (letters on a page) is not really the poem itself. It might seem odd to mix the two, but being both winged and invisible seems to be the condition of the nightingale: the nightingale is in "*some* melodious plot," not *this* or *that* melodious plot, so the speaker is just hearing the nightingale's song through the trees. The mechanism by which the speaker is to achieve unity with the nightingale thus just is the properties of the nightingale itself; the manner in which unity is sought entails that it is already possessed. It is for this reason that the speaker can both aim at unity with the nightingale in line 31 and then declare that unity already obtained at line 35.

Up to this point, much of the language has been s-synthetic as a way of bringing together otherwise irreconcilable categories (e.g., the abstract and the concrete) in order to obtain unity with the nightingale. The achieved unity is epitomized in the expression "the Queen-Moon is on her throne" (36). As in the preceding line and at the beginning of the next sentence, the main verb here is merely the copular *be* ("Tender is the night," "here there is no light"), which can join any two things in a manner that is linguistically unrestricted. So this expression is certainly not s-synthetic in the manner we have discussed thus far. The domination of copular *be,* along with the use

of the transitive *perplex* and *retard* as if they were intransitive (34), also makes these lines quite static, suggesting that the speaker is already where he wants to be. But the compound "Queen-Moon" has an effect very much like an s-synthetic construction in that it seems like a category mistake to merge the celestial with the political in this way. The "Queen-Moon" thus seems like a metaphor that has been subjected to such compression that it vanishes into the realm of the lexical and leaves syntax aside entirely. Here the sentence need not assert the unity of Queen and Moon; that unity is simply given by the lexicon.

Even as a compound, however, the "Queen-Moon" is a bit odd. A compound is a lexical item made up of two other, independent lexical items, like *houseboat,* which is made up of *house* and *boat.*[69] But the two parts of the compound are not equal: we distinguish as *houseboat* from a *boathouse,* even though both are compounds of the same two words. Moreover, we know immediately that a *houseboat* is a kind of boat (one that resembles a house) and that a *boathouse* is a kind of house (a house containing boats). This dependency is expressed by saying that the second element in the compound is the HEAD, and determines the basic meaning of the compound, whereas the first element is the MODIFIER, which further specifies the meaning of the compound. This is not to say that the semantics of every compound works out so neatly—it's difficult to imagine any sense in which a *nuthatch* is a kind of hatch. But when we encounter an entirely

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[69] The discussion in the remainder of this paragraph is adapted from Matthews 82-93, 97-8.

unfamiliar compound, we assume that it has the MODIFIER-HEAD structure just described (if it were appropriately contextualized, someone who had never heard the word *nuthatch* might well suppose that it is a kind of hatch). Compounds also have the phonological property that the stress falls on the first element, whereas a non-compound sequence of the same lexical items is the reverse (*bláckbird* versus *black bírd*).

If the "Queen-Moon" were a compound we would expect the natural pronunciation to stress the first syllable. Such a pronunciation does not sound especially marked, but the meter of the line, which puts "Queen" in a weak metrical position and "Moon" in a strong metrical position, encourages us to pronounce it the other way, "Queen-*Moon,*" which makes it sounds like it isn't a compound. Moreover it seems odd to consider the "Queen-Moon" a kind of moon, as if there were many moons and this moon were the queen of the rest. Surely the point of calling the moon a "Queen" is to attribute grandeur to her in comparison to the stars, the "starry fays" that are "Clustered round" their sovereign. Disraeli's perhaps unconscious appropriation of this phrase in his 1826 *Vivien Grey* is an instructive comparison: "The bright moon with her starry court" (III.vi).[70] The sense in Keats is presumably similar, so reading "Queen-Moon" as a compound seems unsatisfactory. But reading it as a non-compound expression of some kind is equally unsatisfactory since a non-compound expression should be separable in a way that this expression is not. The sense of "Queen-Moon" here seems almost to demand a compound with two

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[70] This sentence is cited in the *OED*, *s.v.* "starry, a." 2a.

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heads. In this sense, the compound demands a unity that the language cannot quite provide it. To the extent that the relations between the parts of the compound resemble syntactic relationships (particularly in having the property of headedness), the form of the compound is still not adequate to do away with the conceptual distance between the bare astronomical fact and the world of imagination.

And so the speaker returns abruptly to earth: "But here there is no light" (38). If there is no light *here*, then the speaker cannot be "Already with" the nightingale in the moon's luminous court. Since unity with the nightingale at the beginning of the stanza is merely prospective, and since, here near the end of the stanza, that unity seems still not yet achieved, the moment in which that unity is triumphantly declared seems all the more strange. With the sober vision of retrospection, we might note that "Already with thee!" is a construction without a verb, which leaves us with two options in terms of understanding its syntax: either we regard it as an elliptical form of a longer expression (*I am* already with thee), or we attempt to assimilate it to the subsequent sentence. The second option is more viable than it might seem on first glance: the main impediment is the exclamation point, but we could just regard the exclamation point as medial punctuation[71] (the capital *t* of "Tender is the night" in the printed text seems like less of a problem, especially in light of the fact that in the manuscript of the poem it is clearly lowercase). If we take

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[71] Wasserman, citing Clyde S. Kilby, makes a case for this reading in *The Finer Tone* 198-9.

the exclamation point as medial and undo the inversions, the sentence would read *Already the night is tender with thee*. The point of the line would then be to suggest the intimacy between the nightingale and the night (the orthographic coincidence already points in this direction), and the medial punctuation would put contrastive stress on the "with thee"—contrasting it, that is, with "here" where "there is no light." The promise of declared unity, however close the "Queen-Moon" may come to incarnating that unity in language, thus dissolves here, slipping through the speaker's fingers just as the darkness of his surroundings begins to dissolve his discrete experiences into one another.

Even though he doesn't achieve unity with the nightingale, the speaker does at least seem to achieve the dissolution he yearned for at the beginning of the third stanza. This dissolution takes the form of synæsthetic experiences, the first hint of which appears just at the moment when the speaker despairs of his distance from the nightingale:

> But here there is no light,
> Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
> Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.
>
> (38-40)

The despair of distance is quickly qualified: there is, in fact, light here, but it is light of a peculiar kind, the kind of light that can be blown with the breezes down from heaven.[72] This construction with *blow* is s-

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[72] Fogle comments that in this "image one overlooks the usual sense-transference of light blown with the breezes because it is at once obvious that Keats has consummately described the effect of glancing light filtering down through leaves stirred gently by the wind" ("Synaesthetic Imagery" 49). This impressionistic maneuver obliges one, it seems to me, to overlook what the text actually says. For Fogle, phrases such as this one actually reconcile two senses rather than producing any sort of conflict between them, and his tendency to treat the text rather cavalierly is motivated by his belief that Keats has "an intuitive sense of the Oneness of things," and therefore that all of his poems must be internally reconcilable. I see little

synthetic because *blow*, like *taste of*, selects for noun phrases that are {concrete}, which *light* is clearly not.[73] But the syntax of this construction, with its passive voice, its inversions, and its wh-word standing in for *light,* makes the fact that it is s-synthetic difficult to spot. These are lines that it is quite easy to pass through without noticing anything odd about the suggestion that light can blown around. Moreover, we would expect the blowing to be done by the breezes, but in fact the light is blown from heaven *with* the breezes; in the absence of an agent doing the blowing, the *with* doesn't invite an instrumental interpretation here.[74] This suggests that both the breezes and the light are being blown from heaven by some unspecified entity, a suggestion that is strange not only because light is being blown around but because the blowing around of air is itself being blown around. This is no normal, everyday wind, anymore than the light is a normal, everyday light, since we discover at the beginning of the next stanza that the light does not allow the speaker to "see what flowers are at [his] feet" (41). We can construe this wind which bears both the light and the breezes as something like the breath of some god (coming as it does from "heaven"), with the implication that, although the

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evidence for these views in the texts of Keats's poems in general or in the text of this poem in particular. Surely Keats is the *least* affirmative of the big six Romantic poets.

[73] I do not mean to take a stand here on whether light consists of particles or waves; concretion here is determined by our experience, not by its objective properties (as being a form of energy and thus, in a sense, material).

[74] *With* can, of course, receive an instrumental interpretation in a passive sentence such as *He was killed with a sword.* But I suspect that such a sentence is grammatical because verbs like *kill* or *tickle* already suggest an action that employs an instrument (or employs one's body parts as instruments), whereas a verb like *blow* does not have the same suggestion because one doesn't really use any particular body part to blow with (hence the oddity of *John blew on the fire with the bellows*).

speaker failed to received inspiration hitherto from either Flora or from Bacchus, he is here finally receiving the divine breath from some unspecified heavenly source. What seems at first to be an expression of despair, of the distance between the Queen-Moon's court and the speaker miserable immanence, thus reverses itself here into achieved inspiration, if not achieved unity with the nightingale.

What is curious about this reading, of course, is the *givenness* of the inspiration, as if it were grace and not the labor of language in the poem. The divine breath of inspiration (especially issuing from something natural—here "heaven" as merely sky—and coursing through the untamed natural world, the "verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways") is, to put it mildly, a characteristic concern of "Romantic" verse, but Keats's treatment of it here is characteristically negative. For example, Coleridge's effusion about the Aeolian harp, much as it passes through similar reflections on birds and faery lands, prepares the way for an affirmation of "the one Life" (12-33).[75] In Keats, this affirmative moment is bound up with the sensory privation of the fifth stanza. It is the "seasonable month" that "endows / The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild" with various flowers, but the "seasonable month" does not satisfy the selectional restrictions of *endow*, which require something {agentive} (which is why the passive use of *endow* to speak of the abilities of human beings can only emerge within a *Weltanschauung* that presupposes a divine creator). This s-synthetic construction makes the "seasonable month" more

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[75] The lines about "the one Life" were added to the original (1795) version of the poem for the collection *Sibylline Leaves* of 1817, but the original version alone is emphatically affirmative even in its closing chastisement of itself.

than just a condition of possibility of the blossoming flowers, it invests the month with creative power, something that can be the agent of giving (*endow* originally derives from the PIE stem **do-ti*, 'to give'). But the flowers with which the month endows the greenery are themselves only occasions or conditions for the exercise of the speaker's own creative power, designated by the activity of *guessing.*

> I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
>   Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
> But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
>   Wherewith the seasonable month endows
> The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild—
>   White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
>   Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
>   And mid-May's eldest child,
>   The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
>   The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
>
> (41-50)

The verb *guess* is ambiguous here, and could either mean that the speaker is engaged in the activity of speculating about a factual question (*We can only guess the time of his arrival*) or that he has actually hit upon the correct solution (*Egbert guessed right away the nature of the visit*). The former reading would be much more idiomatic, however, with an embedded question as its object (*I guess which flowers the seasonable month endows the greenery with*) rather than simply with a noun phrase (*I guess each flower that the month endows the greenery with*). Moreover, the list he then provides in lines 46-50 is in apposition to "each sweet," not to his supposition, and it therefore is a list of each flower that is actually there, not just the flowers that the speaker thinks are there. Since the speaker is able to provide such a

list, he does not merely suppose but actually knows (or knows that his supposition is in fact correct, which amounts to the same thing).

The object of his knowledge is not, however, so straightforward as the "flowers" of the first line of the stanza would suggest, since the following line identifies his object as "what soft incense hangs upon the boughs." A traditional approach to metaphor would regard this as a straightforward example of a single metaphorical word ("incense") or short phrase ("soft incense") clearly replacing a more literal word ("flowers"); the two clauses are in parallel, a parallelism reinforced by the lineation, and are thus clearly identified. But the poem could, after all, if it wanted to repeat itself merely use the same word again (*incense* has the same stress contour as *flowers*); the difference between the two is not reducible to simply decorative variation. Part of what makes this phrase tricky is the adjective "soft," which in modern English most commonly modifies {tactile} nouns, but it can also apply to sounds (as in *soft music*), hence modifying {auditory} nouns, and to light (as in *soft focus*), hence modifying {visual} nouns, and even to tastes (though this is probably on analogy with the tactile uses, as in the opposition between *soft* and *sharp flavors*), hence modifying {gustatory} nouns.[76] The noun *incense* is itself ambiguous since it can refer either to the incense smoke or the substance whose combustion produces the smoke—in the one case something potentially {tactile}

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[76] Each of these sensory s-selection features designates an *object* of the sense in question, not something with the capacity for that sense nor something that constitutes the content of that sense; for example, something that is {visual} in this sense is a possible object of the faculty of sight (like a rock), not capable of sight itself (rocks can't see) or constituting the content of the activity of seeing (the rock is not the same thing as the light which renders the rock visible or the mental representation produced by the activity of seeing).

and in the other something {olfactory}. If we construe "incense" as {tactile}, then we can easily reconcile it to "soft," but only at the cost of sense—flower petals might be soft, but incense certainly isn't. Moreover, the following line identifies the speaker's objects as *sweets*, presumably a nominalization of the adjective in its {olfactory} not its {gustatory} sense since there's no indication that the speaker is actually eating flowers as if they were candies. *Incense,* then, should be equally {olfactory}, which makes it s-synthetic with the adjective "soft." The language of the stanza is thus located right on the boundary between the familiar sensory associations and synaesthesia, using s-synthetic constructions in combination with lexical ambiguities to leverage us into a different kind of experience.

Just as the "soft incense" suggests a crossover from the {tactile} to the {olfactory}, so the phrase "embalmèd darkness" suggests a crossover from the {olfactory} to the {visual}. "Embalmèd" here already implies the givenness of "endows," but here what is given is not merely the flowers themselves but the balmy fragrance that infuses the very darkness. It is not just that the speaker is in the dark and is surrounded by sweet smells, or that the speaker, since he is in the dark, is more sensitive to other sensory inputs; the implication of this phrase is that the darkness itself is sweetly odoriferous (and perhaps even has healing properties). Whereas the end of the previous stanza suggested that there was some kind of light, a kind of light that could be "blown" down "from heaven," here we see that perhaps the light in question is a kind of darkness (which allows us to take line 38, "But here there is no light," more seriously). But "darkness" usually

designates merely the absence of light, not something positive that displaces light. Here the darkness is something positive enough to be invested with an {olfactory} quality, something whose very negativity enables an experience unconstrained by the mechanisms of identification that can operate only in the natural light of reason. The aim of this stanza (and perhaps of the entire poem) is thus not to advocate the immediacy of sensory experience, as if the horrors of the world could be evaded by stopping to smell the flowers between the tracks that lead to the extermination camps, but neither does the poem advocate a flight from the corporeal world to a disembodied realm of pure spirits. The discourse of experience becomes ideology as soon as it thinks it can wish its way out of thought, but a thought that wasn't bound up with concrete realities would be its own less-than-empty delusion. The aim here is to use the fact that experience is mediated by concepts against concepts, rather than to flee thought or to philosophize about philosophy's outside. The phrase "embalmèd darkness," by virtue of that fact that it is both intelligible and impossible to reconcile to the categories of cognitive judgment, is quintessentially aesthetic since, among other things, it obstructs paraphrase infinitely. But it is not, for all that, simply empty or meaningless, and as it invests a concrete negativity with sensory content it compels us to see in even our habitual categories the seeds of their own transformation.

But this stanza, which is as affirmative as this poem gets (even if it is an affirmation that the negative is not merely nothing), is immediately followed by a meditation on death. The phrase "embalmèd

darkness" already throws a shroud over the proceedings by calling to mind the aromatic spices with which the bodies of the dead are preserved as well as a darkness that really would be just nothing. The darkness is now no longer a kind of richly interwoven light: "Darkling I listen" (51). The speaker's declaration here that he is in the dark recalls Milton's blindness without recalling the "celestial light" by which Milton is inspired (*PL* III.51). This statement that the poet is busy listening is immediately followed by a strange construction about time not unlike those we saw in *To Autumn*: "and for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death" (51-2). "For many a time" is a c-synthetic construction combining two idioms, one such as *for many years* and another such as *many a time.* The first kind of idiom designates an extended, continuous stretch of time, whereas the second kind suggests a large number of particular moments in time; the first is the accumulation of continuous quantity whereas the second is accumulation of discrete quanta.[77] These two temporalities suggest quite different relations to death, the first a continuous orientation towards death (something like the brooding on death that Heidegger finds so contemptible), the second a life punctuated by the momentary yearning for death. To combine the two suggests moments of yearning for death against a continuous background of brooding on death, redoubling the force of those moments of longing which do not turn away towards life but only slide back into the dull ache of the self-same longing. He is only "half in love," but his longing is all-consuming.

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[77] See Hegel, *Science of Logic,* pp. 199ff., for a detailed discussion.

The death that the speaker longs for, however, is not simple non-existence like the speaker of Shakespeare's *Sonnet* 66 ("Tired with all these for restful death I cry"). Given his laments about the world in the third stanza, we might expect him to want to case to exist so that he is no longer capable of suffering. On the other hand, one of the things that makes the world horrible in third stanza is exactly that "youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies" (26). Death can hardly be a solution if death is part of the problem. And yet the speaker here tells us that death is "easeful" (52), recalling the "full-throated ease" of the nightingale's song in the first stanza, and thus associating death with the condition of the nightingale to which the speaker has aspired throughout the poem. The speaker goes on to explain just what he asks of this "Death" with whom he is "half in love": "To take into the air my quiet breath" (54). This is not a request to cease to be, or even a request to case breathing; the speaker does not say that this breath is to be his last, only that it is to be "take[n] into the air." The ideas of "breath" and "air" are deeply intertwined with the notions of spirit and the "soul" which the nightingale is "pouring forth . . . abroad / In such an ecstasy" (57-8), that is, in a casting-out-of-himself. The Greek *pneuma* and *psychē* both originally refer to breath, but *pneuma* is also associated with the wind (Liddell & Scott); in Paul's appropriation of the Gnostics, *pneuma* thus ends up being associated with what is divine in man (the breath that is also the breathing of the world and thus recalls the original inspiration into Adam in Genesis), whereas *psychē* comes to mean the merely private spirit (and hence consciousness, mind; see 1 Cor. 2:14-3:4). We thus might take the

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speaker as asking death to transform his *psychē* into *pneuma*, to dissolve his individuality into something that is more than merely himself, into the air which is the ambient aether of nature.[78] This is, then, not strictly speaking a desire for non-being, but a return of the yearning for dissolution into nature introduced at line 20. What is striking in this stanza is that the speaker yearns for unity with the nightingale through a sort of reciprocal breathing out—the nightingale's singing is an exceeding of its mere individuality, just at the speaker exceeds himself in expiring from himself.

The dissolution into nature does not have a satisfactory end, though, because what is left behind here is that the synæsthetic experiences of the previous stanzas depended on embodiment; however much it may strain the mind, synaesthesia needs a sensorium. In the final lines of the stanza, the speaker observes that their two kinds of expiring are not quite equal: "Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain— / To thy high requiem become a sod" (59-60). Here again the traditional theory of metaphor would be tempted to imagine that *becoming a sod* must just mean *becoming a corpse* or, more briefly, just *dying.* But it is particularly important that we take the speaker at his word here since a sod, even though it is part of nature and (since the word *sod* usually refers to a grass-bearing clump of dirt) is very much alive, it still is dead to the experience of the nightingale's singing. The ground cannot yearn, and so cannot be fulfilled in being itself. Materiality in the previous stanza, embodiment,

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[78] Bloom makes a similar point about the "breath-soul" in this stanza, though he gets there by claiming that death is a source of poetic inspiration here, which does not seem to me sound reasoning (*The Visionary Company* 411).

was what made experience possible, even the experience of the unthinkable, but in this stanza materiality is what blocks experience altogether. The "embalmèd darkness" and the "fast-fading violets" of the previous stanza already suggested the way in which the promise of experience in materiality already contains death within itself. As Hegel says, "The finite not only alters, like something in general, but it *ceases to be*; and its ceasing to be is not merely a possibility, so that it could be without ceasing to be, but the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of decease as their being-within-self: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death" (*SL* 129).

This doom of material finitude is in stark contrast to the nightingale as the speaker addresses him in the following stanza: "Thou was not born for death, immortal bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down" (61-2). "Generations" here could be either descendants (presumably of the nightingale) or instances of production or procreation. In either case, the point seems to be that the nightingale has no demanding children, that the nightingale is outside of the finite cycle of reproduction that makes things only in order that they may die. It is for this reason that the speaker goes on to describe "the self-same song" as having been heard "In ancient days"; the nightingale is only exempt from death because it cannot give birth. And so it is now no longer the condition of the nightingale itself that the speaker is concerned with, but rather he is concerned with those who have heard the nightingale, since (as the insight of the sod suggests) a mere bird is not in a position to recognize the beauty of its own song any more than it is in a position to recognize its own

finitude. Hence the pathos of these strange and moving lines about the biblical figure of Ruth:

> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn. (65-7)

What is most peculiar about these lines is that they seem to describe a dramatic moment that not only doesn't appear in the Book of Ruth but that seems exactly the opposite of what does appear there. Ruth leaves her homeland, Moab, with her mother-in-law, Naomi, when Ruth's husband dies. Naomi tries to persuade Ruth to stay in her homeland and to return to her family, but Ruth (unlike the other local girl who married Ruth's husband's brother, now also dead) insists on accompanying her mother-in-law to Bethlehem (1:14-18). Once in Bethlehem, Ruth takes to working in the fields, and is so dutiful in her labor, refusing even to take breaks, that the owner of the land takes an interest in her, displays considerable generosity towards her, and, after some sexual shenanigans and the disposal of Ruth's husband's land, the owner marries her. At no point is Ruth said to suffer from homesickness; if anything, Ruth is bizarrely unconcerned about committing herself to living in a foreign land, given that foreigners in general and foreign women in particular had little if any rights in the ancient world. The story of Ruth in the Bible, in other words, is the story of a woman who is exemplary both in her work ethic and in her commitment to her husband's family (to which she is supposed to cleave). Keats's miniature narrative suggests, if anything, the pain of unsought exile and the drudgery of unremitting manual labor,

especially in light of the persistent theme of ease and freedom from work throughout the poem.

The biblical account also makes no mention of any singing birds, and even in itself these lines do not make clear why the song of the nightingale should have the effect it does. If the song of the nightingale has the effect on Ruth that it had on the speaker in the first stanza, we would perhaps not be surprised at the tears but we would be surprised if there were only tears—the speaker's pain, after all, came from "being too happy in [the nightingale's] happiness." The song itself is a bit peculiar since, thanks to an s-synthetic construction with *find*, it seems to be capable of volition. The most intuitive way to understand these lines is to imagine that Ruth, in exile from her homeland, hears the song of the nightingale and it reminds her of home, thus being the cause of her homesick weeping. But if the whole point of the stanza is that the nightingale's song is infinite, if it has been heard throughout time, then surely it also extends infinitely over space—or at least covers enough territory that two adjacent near-eastern territories might both have heard it. These lines imply, in other words, precisely some kind of limitation of the nightingale to a specific locality, some kind of finitude. To commit the nightingale to the infinite is to locate the nightingale finally in an inaccessible beyond, leaving only humanity and the yearning for home. Whereas an excess of body seemed to confine the speaker to a chunk of dirt, here an excess of spirit seems to push the nightingale infinitely far away, so that in the final three lines the word referring to the nightingale's song is ellipted from the sentence: "The same [_] that oft-

times hath / Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn" (68-70).

Keats's reversal of the biblical story is particularly strange because the original narrative seems much more closely analogous to what the speaker has thus far sought to do: bravely to venture forth to seek a foreign and unknown land, committing himself to the care of Roman dieties or the "Queen-Moon" and "her starry fays." Instead, we get a version of the Ruth narrative that suggests the opposite trajectory: the return home, the yearning for the familiar. And so it should be no surprise that this comes just before the moment in which the speaker snaps back into himself, spurred by the word *forlorn.* Cleanth Brooks has observed that

> In the first instance, "forlorn" is being used primarily in its archaic sense of "utterly lost." The faery lands are those of a past which is remote and far away. But the meaning of 'forlorn' is definitely shifted as the poet repeats the word. In its meaning, "pitiable; left desolate," "forlorn" describes the poet's own state, and applies, as he suddenly realizes in the poem, to his own case. (31)

The second sense of *forlorn* is somewhat clearer than the first, but perhaps Brooks has in mind the derivation of *forlorn,* according to the *OED*, from the Old English verb *forléosan,* or even the image from *The Wanderer* of the halls of the giants, bereft (*lease*) of their joyful shouts:

> Yþde swa þisne eardgeard   ælda scyppend
> oþþæt burgwara   breahtma lease
> eald enta geweorc   idlu stodon. (85-7)
>
> [Thus the maker of men wrecked the city
> until, robbed of the noise of the keep-folk,
> the ancient works of the giants stood idle.]

The distinction that Brooks wants to make seems to hang on the notion that one cannot pity a place because a place cannot suffer, so

"fairy lands" can hardly be "forlorn" in the same sense that the speaker can; in other words, *forlorn* must modify something that is {affective} (i.e., capable of affect). But what Brooks excludes here is the s-synthetic reading of "fairy lands forlorn" in which the assertion is exactly that these distant lands are not merely bereft of us but suffer our absence. It is just this s-synthetic reading which shows how the distant places in which the speaker's flight of fancy had landed him turn out not to be distant after all. It is not just that the word connects the loneliness of the place to the speaker's loneliness by virtue of having two meanings. The loneliness of the place *is* the speaker's loneliness, and it is for just this reason that it is "The very word" that "tolls [him] back from [the nightingale] to [his] sole self" (71-2).

If this poem attempts to bring into being a new kind of experience, an experience of the world as other than it is that opens up the possibility of the transformation of that world, it can only do so through language. And so it is language that calls the speaker back once the transcendentalized nightingale finally recedes to infinity. If this far-away land of the imagination still finds Ruth "in tears amid the alien corn," then it is no escape from this world "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow."[79] The promise of turning the conceptuality of

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[79] As Kenneth Muir puts it, in this poem "Keats expresses with a maximum of intensity the desire to escape from reality, and yet he recognizes that no escape is possible" (69). This fairly traditional reading is sensitive to something that is there in the poem (stanza three particularly), but I have tried to show that what is really at issue is not "escape from reality" but really experiencing the world as other than it is, and that as soon as the speaker aims for escape he fails. The tendency to read this poem as about escape almost invariably goes hand in hand with the presupposition that the vocation of poetry is to console us for the horrors of the world—so that we can climb back into the mines and breathe deep the toxic air with giddy smiles on our faces. This is, it seems to me, a rather dim view to take of art, and it is adapted directly from the logic of the culture industry: "Amusement always means putting

embodied experience against concepts sours as soon as the speaker seeks simply to break out of that embodiment, to issue an executive renunciation of the materiality and finitude that suffers and dies. It is for this reason that materiality has its revenge in the final stanza since the nightingale's "plaintive anthem," which before was the mark of its immortality, now is "buried deep / In the next valley-glades." What was thought deathless has died but death goes on living. And the s-synthetic and c-synthetic constructions of the final stanza, like the *toll me back* that marks the speaker's return to himself, rather than bringing together what was held asunder or opening up new modes of being, now merely point to the vast gulf between the world as it is and the world as the speaker wishes it to be. The only note of hope in this final return home is in the closing lines, where the speaker doubts even his own experiences. For in this doubt the speaker also finds the world to which he has returned illusory. "Do I wake or sleep?" refers not to the experiences he has been describing, but to his mental state now. And so a life of "full-throated ease" is not yet made real, but the unreality of this world groaning its way to the grave promises at least that the spell of what is may yet be broken.

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things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality" (Adorno, *DE* 116). This poem aims for more than merely to amuse.

Chapter 4

Subject & Object: *'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'*

> This schematism of our understanding with regard to appearances and their mere form is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty.
>
> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (B180-1)

The history of the word *subject* is closely tied to the history of metaphysics. The English word derives from the Latin *subjectum*, itself a translation of the Greek *hypokeimenon* (OED, s.v. "subject, n."). The Greek word literally means 'that which lies beneath,' denoting a hierarchy that could be polarized in one of two ways: either *to hypokeimenon* is that which underlies, persists and remains beneath the merely changeable, or it is that which is subordinate to or dominated by that which has power and authority over it—roughly, a metaphysical polarity and a political one.[80] It is from the latter sense that we get the use of the English word *subject* as the subject of law (the subject as opposed to the sovereign). In the former sense, *subject* ends up as another same for substance (as opposed to accident).[81] Descartes, for example, in the third of his *Meditations,* uses the word *subjectum* to refer to the actual thing about which he thinks (rather than his mental representations of the thing), for which reason the

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[80] See Liddell and Scott for a more historical breakdown.

[81] For an ancient example, see Plato's *Protagoras* 349b, where the issue is whether the cardinal virtues are just accidents of a singular Virtue or whether they have their own *hypokeimenon.*

translator renders *subjectum* as "object" (26).[82] Because of the sense of *hypokeimenon* as the substrate of physical change (*Phys.* 190a-b), Aristotle also uses the word to refer to the grammatical subject, the subject of predication (*Met.* 1028b-29a). Within the context of Aristotle's naturalism, the subject-substrate is a feature of what we would call the objective world, and this metaphysical position is reflected in the claim that the grammatical structure of a sentence will reflect relationships in nature, with a subject-substrate modified by a predicate. Our more familiar usage of *subject* as subject of consciousness (subject as opposed to object) similarly emerges from a larger philosophical position, but in this case it is the metaphysical idealism of modern philosophy, principally Descartes (although he does not use the word in this way): if the *I think* is the real ground of things, then what the ancients considered in terms of the soul (*psyche, anima*) merges with *to hypokeimenon.* In this sense, Hegel's declared aim in *Phenomenology of Spirit* to show that substance is subject is not as polemical as it might seem: to use the word *subject* to refer to the self is already implicitly to claim as a first principle that the self is the floor to the universe.

But what becomes of the grammatical subject when *subject* becomes the subject of consciousness? The subject of consciousness and the subject of a sentence converge in the proposition *I think,* and so we might imagine that all predications have the implicit form *I think that* x (e.g., *I think that the car is green*). Rather than the subject of the

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[82] In a similar vein, we get the scholastic usage of *subject* as the topic of a rational inquiry, *subjecta materia,* 'subject matter.'

sentence being what is really substantial, the whole proposition (*the car is green*) ends up subordinated to the thinking subject—what used to be the subject in the sense of being a stable, real thing (*the car*) becomes merely an object of thought and hence merely intellectual. The phantasmatic potential of this predicament was not lost on Browning, whose *'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'* opens precisely with the assertion of a thinking *I*:

> My first thought was, he lied in every word,
>   That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
>   Askance to watch the working of his lie
> On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
> Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
>   Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby. (1-6)

The poem begins nearly where Descartes' deduction begins, with *I think* (Descartes 17). It doesn't, though, begin in exactly the same place. The "thought" is Roland's, and it is his "first," but it is the thought with which we begin, not with Roland himself. And since no *that* or *which* follows the comma it seems like a complete expression, as if "was" were existential here: Roland's first thought simply was, like the *fiat* of divine creation. But as we continue, it becomes clear that what follows the comma is the contents of Roland's "first thought," namely that "he lied in every word." The pronoun *he* has been introduced here without an antecedent: we do not know who Roland thinks is lying, only that someone is lying, a yet-undefined object. And we are told that the object is deceptive, that, like the world of appearances or like Descartes' all-too-malleable ball of wax, the object seeks to mislead us. But it is not just that this unspecified someone is lying; "he lied *in every word*." We might breeze by this expression as

just a characteristic instance of Browning's fondness for hyperbole, but upon reflection it's a strange idea: someone is lying if they tell us something that is not true, but presumably in order to say something that's even capable of being true or false they would have to utter a complete sentence. A man who shouts "bunny!" or "the!" in a crowded supermarket may well be ushered outside, but not for uttering falsehoods. So how exactly does this very capable liar manage to lie "in every word"? It is as though the lie is so perfidious that its falsehood penetrates all the way down to its smallest particles, infecting even hitherto innocent pronouns and prepositions with its foul taint. The lie, then, is a lie all the way down to brass tacks, permeating even *he,* the liar himself. If Roland knows it's a lie, then of course he is undeceived by this false and glittering show and knows the object in its very substance.

Presumably the contents of Roland's "first thought" ends there, and with the next line we have moved on to direct description, but it's worth noting that we don't have any particularly good reason to believe that this is the case. "He lied in every word" could easily have been enclosed in quotation marks, which would have plainly closed off Roland's thought with the line break. But as it stands, we can't be quite sure that all of what follows, despite his claims to know the substance of the object, isn't just contained in Roland's own "first thought." The *That* with which the next line begins invites the supposition that we're going to find out just what lie the liar told. But *That* turns out to be deictic pronoun, pointing its long finger at the author of this fraud: "That hoary cripple." Now the object is concrete

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and particularized. The liar registers his falsehood, it seems, in his very physiognomy, even down to the "eye" that is "malicious" all by itself. This Roland can tell from his interlocutor's appearance; just as the lie of the liar's sentence creeps into his "every word," so the liar's evil permeates his every part. The line break here, "with malicious eye / Askance," seems to draw us into looking sideways at the words, peering at the liar's eye just as the liar peers at Roland.

But Roland seems to have complete access to the liar's mental state, since he tells us that the liar's "mouth" could barely suppress his "glee" at having deceived Roland. As the liar watches to see his lie go to work on Roland, so the liar labors to keep his mouth shut, a labor reflected in elaborate syntax of "scarce able to afford / Suppression" —a costly labor the liar can only barely "afford." Thus Roland is not merely in the position of having full access to the world of appearances, not merely capable of grasping their truth or falsity in their very substance, but can see what is in the liar's mind, can sense even the laugh the liar suppresses. Of course we are told how the liar's mental state finds its way into his appearance: the glee itself seems to 'purse' the liar's mouth, as if from the inside, and it also 'scores' his mouth's "edge," marking it with lines from the outside. The act of "suppression" by itself prevents the glee from escaping, but the intimation of the glee still sneaks through the liar's distorted mouth. And Roland knows so much about the glee that he can even discern that it is glee "at one more victim gained thereby."

So the trajectory of the first stanza is from Roland's "first thought," to the world of perceptual appearances, in all their

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fickleness, to the world of essences behind those appearances, the liar's malevolent "glee." The poem thus moves very swiftly indeed from the sheer fact of thought to a knowledge of 'things as in themselves they truly are,' or, as Aristotle puts it in the *Physics*, things as they are "known by nature" (184a21). Despite Roland's manifest isolation through most of the poem, it is not quite right to say that he's alienated from his surroundings, that the object is opaque to him. But his ability to enter into the liar's mind does seem to have its limitations: in the third stanza, Roland worries about what would happen "If at his counsel I should turn aside / Into that ominous tract which, all agree, / Hides the Dark Tower" (13-5). If "all agree" that this "ominous tract" is where the "Dark Tower" is, and if it is to this "ominous tract" that the liar has directed Roland, then the liar isn't lying at all. Not only has he given Roland good directions, but Roland didn't even need to ask for them since everyone seems to know where the Dark Tower is. We might be tempted to infer at this point that Roland is the one lying—lying to *us*—or that the "hoary cripple" is just in Roland's head, or that Roland is just plain nuts. But each of these skeptical responses is finally unsatisfactory, since the text gives no hints to this effect and so becomes simply opaque as soon as we stop taking it seriously. Taking the poem seriously involves, among other things thinking through in more precise terms just what kind of epistemology it posits and how it performs that epistemology in its syntax. This epistemology is best understood in relation to the problem of the object and objectivity in Hegel's attempts to overcome Kant's restriction of our (theoretical) knowledge to appearances.

Kant begins his exposition in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by arguing that we should understand space and time as, roughly, features of our minds that make experience of objects possible rather than features of the world outside our minds that determine objects even when we don't perceive them. One of the targets of this argument is empiricist philosophers such as Hume who hold that whatever concepts we use to classify the things we experience must be derived from our experiences rather than being in place before we ever have experiences. Given the way we usually go about learning things (particularly in school), this seems like a plausible supposition. But Kant points out that it is difficult to imagine from what experience we could derive, for example, the notion of space without presupposing space just in order to have that experience in the first place.

> For in order for certain sensations to be related to something outside me (i.e., to something in another place in space from that in which I find myself), thus in order for me to represent them as outside and next to one another, thus not merely as different but as in different places, the representation of space must already be their ground. (B38)[83]

Any empirical input (intuition) we can receive, according to Kant, already presupposes space, without which there would be nothing for an object to appear *in;* space isn't even a concept (a category we can place objects of experience under), but is an "*a priori* intuition," a condition of perceiving an object before we have even had a chance to categorize it (B40). It follows from the fact that space must be

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[83] All references to the first *Critique*, here and elsewhere, follow the standard convention of using the Akademie page numbers with an *A* indicating page numbers from the first (1781) edition and *B* indicating page numbers from the second (1787) edition.

presupposed in order to have an experience at all that it is a feature of our minds (since it is not derived from experience of the outside world), and it follows from the fact that space is a feature of our minds that it is not a feature of objects in themselves, i.e., independent of our perception of them. This conclusion is perhaps surprising since we tend to think of space as something objective, something out there in the world (Newton conceived it this way, and he was no fool), and the notion that space and time are just features of our minds almost makes it sound as though the world would somehow collapse if we weren't here to perceive it. But Kant's argument is not that all objects are just fictions of our fevered brains; he certainly thinks objects exist independently of our perception of them: "even if we cannot **cognize** these same objects as things in themselves, we at least must be able to **think** them as things in themselves. For otherwise there would follow the absurd proposition that there is an appearance without anything that appears" (Bxxvi). Kant argues that we cannot have knowledge of "things in themselves," but this is nothing to lament since when we speak of "things in themselves" all we mean is things considered apart from their appearing to us—and if they don't appear to us, they are no objects *for us* and so not things about which it makes sense for us to wish to know.[84]

The outcome of Kant's restriction of our (theoretical) knowledge to appearances is a transformation in the project of epistemology: "the question is no longer about the community of the soul with other known but different substances outside us, but merely about the

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[84] See Allison, pp 237ff., for a more detailed exposition on this point.

conjunction of representations in inner sense with the modifications of our outer sensibility, and how these may be conjoined with one another according to constant laws, so that they are connected into one experience" (A385-6). We might broadly say that Descartes inaugurates the project of modern philosophy when he subjects the objective world to thoroughgoing doubt in the first *Meditation.* In doing so, he opens the door to a subsequent tradition that sees itself as having to overcome a dualism between thoughts and things in an attempt to rescue the possibility of our having true cognitions (where truth is understood in traditional terms as an adequation between thoughts and things). Kant's solution to this problem is to locate the object (insofar as it appears) in the human mind, as the domain of receptivity. Kant thinks that there are things that exist independently of our perception of them, and he even supposes that there might be minds constructed differently than ours that could perceive such things (A27/B43), but in locating the domain of objects within the subject he heals the dualism that obstructs the possibility of truth.

For Hegel, this is both Kant's greatest insight and, at the same time, manifests some of Kant's most serious errors. The main defect of this approach is that, although our knowledge is restricted, the force of that restriction turns out to be empty because "its illusory being [*Schein*] ha[s] for content the entire wealth of the world" (*SL* 396). If everything that we would care to know is in appearance, then the thing in itself is reduced to nothing, and Kant's philosophy ends up not being "critical" in the sense that Kant aims for it to be, where "critique" is the project of reminding consciousness ever and again of

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the limitations of its knowledge (A296-8/B353-5). The thing in itself is too empty for the restriction of our knowledge to have any force, but too full for us to be able to claim that our knowledge, limited to appearances, is true. Hegel is often said to be unfair to Kant in this regard (and others), or simply to have misunderstood Kant, or to have failed to read him carefully,[85] and the legitimate element of this complaint is that the method of Hegel's critique of Kant is, in one important respect, transcendent rather than immanent (that is, the premises of his argument against Kant aren't derived entirely from Kant's own framework, which is the philosophical procedure Hegel argues for at length in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). The real ground of Hegel's critique of Kant is that Hegel assumes an emphatic conception of truth, rather than the conception of truth as adequation that Kant adopts from the Scholastics and dogmatic metaphysics. The point of trying to rescue this emphatic conception of truth is that any less emphatic conception of truth isn't a conception of truth at all but simply a call for consistency (something which, even when it does not suffer from the illusion that it is truth, Hegel still regards as spurious; see *SL* 439-43). In a sense, Hegel wants to restore Aristotle's conception of truth as knowing the object as it is "by nature," but within a dialectical framework. As Hegel puts it, "Only this self-*restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself—not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such—is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked

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[85] See Ameriks for a fairly sophisticated version of this approach.

out to its end, is it actual" (*PhS* 10). In other words, the "nature" of the object is not something simply fixed and given, but is a result of an unfolding process at the end of which the object is "actual." This language of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) recalls Aristotle's *energeia*, but Hegel's conception of how actuality comes to be is quite different. The most important difference is that for Hegel the object is altered when it is grasped as knowledge. Rather than the object being a mere datum, indifferent to the subject's attempts to know it, the object is, in a sense, latent knowing. In other words, if Kant is right that the subject has an element of objectivity in it (and this is what Hegel finds most appealing in Kant), then it must also be true, if it makes sense to talk about knowing the world at all, that the object similarly has something subjective in it. This is part of what Hegel has in mind when he claims that "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance,* but equally as *Subject*" (*PhS* 10). Appearance, as the subjective element of the object, is not merely something given but is something that *becomes* through the movement of thought in grasping the object.

If Kant's innovation is to locate both sides of the dualism within the subject (with the noumenal world as a sort of remainder), Hegel's innovation is to claim that if consciousness can think both appearance and essence then consciousness can think the *relation* between the two. And once consciousness can grasp the relation between thoughts and things within thought, then consciousness had already grasped the relation between itself and its objects. Consciousness just is that relation.

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For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not. The object, it is true, seems only to be for consciousness in the way that consciousness knows it; it seems that consciousness cannot, as it were, get behind the object as it exists for consciousness so as to examine what the object is *in itself,* and hence, too, cannot test its own knowledge by that standard. But the distinction between the in-itself and knowledge is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Something is *for it* the *in-itself*; and knowledge, or the being of the object for consciousness, is, *for it*, another moment. Upon this distinction, which is present as a fact, the examination rests. If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. . . . the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is.

> *Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it,* this *dialectical* movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called *experience* [*Erfahrung*]. (*PhS* 54-5)

What really sets Hegel apart from Kant here is the idea that the criterion of knowledge could be subject to change, which is just to say that the structure of consciousness itself could be subject to change. Since appearance must be closely linked with what appears, this transformation also ends up affecting the object. This peculiarity of Hegel's follows from his emphatic conception of truth: if true knowledge is knowledge of the object as it is "by nature," if the true

nature of the object is its actuality, and if that actuality just is its realization as an object of knowledge, then appearance isn't the opposite of essence—appearance is the fulfillment and realization of essence. This approach reverses the traditional evaluation in modern philosophy (to some extent derived from Plato) that appearance, being mutable, is mere shadowy seeming, whereas essence is the firm bedrock of truth. For Hegel, essence is almost in the position of Aristotle's conception of matter as mere potentiality (*dynamis*); essence that fails to appear would equally fail to be actual, and so would fail to have that comportment to knowledge by which it could become true.

Appearance, as essence rendered actual under the gaze of the knowing subject, is on the side of form. This converges very nicely with the early resonances of the Greek word for form, *eidos*, which is derived from **eido*, 'to see' (cf. L. *species* from *specio*). In both cases, perceptible form is linked to the reality of the object: form is that which makes the object what it is (rather than remaining mere unformed matter), and it is also the mode in which the object appears to consciousness. This is why Roland's knowledge of the "hoary cripple" is so visual: Roland is able to discover his inner state on the basis of his appearance. Essence breaks through into appearance just as the malicious "glee" of the "hoary cripple" breaks through his attempts to suppress it. In *Childe Roland*, all that is, appears. But the structure of appearance in Hegel, in which the subject's objectivity allows it access to the inner truth of the object, opens up a dangerous possibility that *Childe Roland* exploits. If the subject can, in gazing upon the object, come to know its essence because it is realized,

through being gazed upon, as appearance, and if this trick only works because the objectivity of the subject is reciprocally answered by the subjectivity of the object—if, in other words, substance is subject—then this invests the object with the power to gaze back. *Childe Roland* thus begins not just with a moment of insight on Roland's part as he stares at the "hoary cripple," but also with an obsession with his returning gaze, the "malicious eye / Askance to watch the working of his lie / On mine" (3-5). Here eye gazes back upon eye, and expects it to be revealing since to reveal "the working of his lie" is presumably to reveal Roland's mental state. Roland's eye, appearing in the elliptical "mine," is here no longer the syntactic subject of the gaze (as in the first words of the poem) but has become part of its syntactic object.[86] What is terrifying in *Childe Roland* is that the poem is not simply a nightmare, a series of merely subjective illusions. On the contrary, what is terrifying is the very autonomy of the objective world, an autonomy here invested not in the submissive objects of natural science but a "starved ignoble nature" that responds to Roland's presence with savage vehemence (55). It is for this reason that so many features of the landscape appear to Roland so suddenly, suggesting the receptivity rather than the spontaneity of consciousness: just after he turns off the road into the plain he looks back towards the road to find "'t was gone; grey plain all round: / Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound," the river he comes to in the middle of the poem appears "As unexpected as a serpent comes," and

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[86] The notion of *object* does not play as large a role in current syntactic theory as it did in traditional grammar. For my purposes in this chapter, I will just use the word *object* in a fairly traditional way to refer to the DP complement of VP.

the Dark Tower itself comes upon him "Burningly . . . all at once" (52-3, 110, 175).

But the objective world in *Childe Roland*, despite its autonomy, is also, in proper dialectical fashion, bound up with Roland's consciousness. Its manifestation is tied to his experience, and the horrors of the landscape appear as if in response to his own imaginings, as when he speculates about the battered foliage in stanza twelve:

> If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
> Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
> Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
> In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
> All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
> Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents. (67-72)

Stanza twelve opens with a strange drama among the field greens: "any ragged thistle-stalk" that gets a bit too uppity "was chopped" in order to appease the "bents"—and "bents" here refers to a kind of weedy grass but also suggests broken stalks that spitefully insist on dragging the saucy thistle into their own condition. The passive voice of "was chopped" gives us no indication of who exactly does the chopping (presumably chopping is beyond the bents). The following sentence proceeds to ask just this question in connection with the torn dock leaves that are "bruised as to baulk / All hope of greenness." Oddly, the dock leaves seem to be themselves doing the baulking, which suggests that they are somehow collaborating in their own brutalization. Nevertheless, the main culprit is finally identified as some kind of "brute," who "must walk / Pashing" the "life out" of the innocent greenery, and "with a brute's intents." Before Roland has

even seen the brute he already is sure of the brute's intentions, if only in the somewhat tautological sense that its intentions must be brutish.

The next stanza, instead of immediately introducing the brute, returns us to the drama of the grass, anthropomorphizing it yet further as analogous (though not identical) to the hairs of a leper, and introducing through another passive construction an agent who kneads up the mud "with blood." The use of this passive construction projects a grammatical subject as Roland's object of inquiry, but a subject who is obscured, for the moment, by the syntax of the sentence. Then the agent of all of this malevolence, the brute who Roland is offhandedly stalking, suddenly appears as a grammatical subject: "One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare, / Stood stupified" (76-7). This seems like a strange candidate for the terrible brute Roland had in mind; on the contrary, the horse "Stood stupified, however he came there" as if he himself isn't sure how he ended up on Roland's path. By the next stanza, Roland is not even sure if the horse is alive: "he might be dead for aught I know." He tells us that the horse's neck is "a-strain," but since the horse otherwise seems immobile it's not clear just what the horse's neck is straining at—it might just be straining to stay vertical.

In a sense, the objective world is very responsive to Roland here: he imagines a brute to fit the bruised dock leaves, and some kind of brute appears. This is more than happens when most of us imagine something. But the objective reality that appears in response to Roland's imagination is not quite what he seems to have expected: not a brutish monster whom he could vanquish, thereby doing the dock

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leaves a good turn, but a sluggish, ancient and unhappy horse whose very vulnerability seems to inspire Roland's disgust. "Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe; / I never saw a brute I hated so; / He must be wicked to deserve such pain" (82-4). Roland's ability to enter into the interiority of his objects here, to construe his objects as grammatical subjects, only reveals that the horse emphatically suffers, "*such* woe" and "*such* pain," and fails to provide Roland with some intelligible rationale for the suffering. His rather startling reaction, venomous and unqualified repugnance, seems to reflect merely the gap between his mental state and its objects. He expects a brute, and since he finds nothing but mute suffering in the horse, he appeals to distributive justice to provide an objective framework to render his experience intelligible: the horse "must be wicked to deserve such pain."

But this solution must be entirely unsatisfactory for Roland, given that he immediately turns inward: "I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart" (85). This, of course, doesn't get him anywhere either, but it is striking as the one moment in which we get something that really is all in Roland's head, and in this line he correspondingly becomes his own syntactic object: his gaze is directed at his own "heart." What he discovers, perhaps unsurpisingly, is that the horrors are in his head as well, and the "draught of earlier, happier sights" is wormwood on his tongue (87). When he opens his eyes, the horse is gone and the gloom is growing. Other things appear abruptly appear in his path, coming alive under his gaze: a "sudden little river" with its "suicidal throng" of willows, a patch of trampled ground in which

Roland sees signs of a struggle but which has neither tracks out nor tracks in, an evil looking machine "fit to reel / Men's bodies out like silk" that seems "to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel," a "palsied oak" with "a cleft in him / Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim / Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils" (109, 118, 129-138, 141-2, 145, 154-6). As the world of objects seems to follow its increasingly autonomous course, responding to Roland not with mimic hootings but with twisted, mocking echoes, Roland's despair deepens yet further.

Then finally, in stanza thirty-one, "What lay in the midst but the Tower itself?" (181). As soon as Roland sees the tower, he wonders aloud whether he's actually seeing it: "Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day / Came back again for that!" (187-8). Roland doesn't even appear as the grammatical subject of the elliptical "Not see?", but the objective world is very responsive indeed, the light 'coming back' in order to allow Roland to see. And again the objects spring to life: "The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay, / Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,— / 'Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!'" (190-2). Here the objective world seems to actually respond to Roland, to note his presence, *and* he himself is the mere "creature" that some other entity regards with loathing. And the giant hills, presumably addressing one another, speak in an imperative, introducing an implied second person grammatical subject.

The next stanza opens in the same syntactic form as the last, except this time the rhetorical question doesn't seem to respond to our implicit question; we might have wondered whether he *could* see, given

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that night was coming on, but we would have no reason to suppose that he has gone deaf. And the announcement that he can hear is not even phrased as a fact about Roland: "Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled / Increasing like a bell" (193-4). Since Roland knows that the noise is everywhere, we know that he can hear, but the point of the statement seems rather to be that *everyone* can hear it, that the experience is not merely his own but some kind of collective experience. And ringing out of the falling night comes a sort of epic catalogue: "Names in my ears / Of all the lost adventurers my peers,— / How such a one was strong, and such was bold, / And such was fortunate" (194-7). This perhaps is the collectivity that the "everywhere" of the first line implied, "the Band" among whom Roland says early in the poem that he has "been writ" (38-9). Unlike his introspective attempt after seeing and loathing the horse to recall his fellow knights and take some solace from the thought, each adventurer here, though unnamed for us, receives a noble epithet. But this is a strange cohort, since all of them are long gone: "each of old / Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years" (197-8). The knell is the work of the "moment" itself, as if Time itself were ringing its changes down on Roland's mortal clay.

Which brings us to the poem's enigmatic final stanza:
> There they stood, ranged along the hills-sides, met
> To view the last of me, a living frame
> For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
> I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
> Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
> And blew. *'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.'*
>
> (199-204)

The valley is now thronged with ghosts, assembled to "view the last of" Roland. We might take this to mean that they have assembled to see Roland's death, but nothing in the last stanza seems particularly to suggest that he dies. So it seems more plausible to take this to mean that they have assembled to see the remainder of him, what remains after the trials of his long journey. And what remains is very little indeed, "a living frame." Roland is not dead, but he is only the frame in which the pictures are exhibited, not the pictures themselves. And perhaps this is why the poem begins with Roland's "first thought" and not with Roland himself, because he is only the "living frame" within which the thought transpires. And now he is to present "one more picture," a picture that has been preceded by many (hence "one *more*") and that is to be the last (hence "*one* more").

But by the next line, it is Roland who is doing the seeing, gazing upon the ghosts with a gaze that seems also to confer knowledge of them, placing him among them as among familiar things. It's not clear whether the phrase "in a sheet of flame" modifies Roland or the ghosts or the act of seeing itself—it may even be the picture to fill Roland's picture-frame. Like Dante passing through the fire on the far side of Purgatory (*Pur.* XXVII.49ff.), Roland emerges from the "sheet of flame" decisive in action. His decisiveness, however, takes the form of defiance,[87] introduced by "And yet" rather than "And so": "And yet / Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew. *'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.'*" This defiance perhaps echoes the sounding of the horn of Roland's namesake, a call for aid that came too late to save

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[87] Cf. Langbaum 195ff.

that other Roland's armies. But here the armies are already long lost, and all Roland has to save is himself.

It's far from clear just how he does so. Does his slug-horn speak in slogans, singing out the title of the poem? Or does a banner unfold from the end of Roland's trumpet like a joke-shop pistol? This final abrupt appearance reads almost like an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: 'Here, in this year, Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.' The event of Roland's arrival is inscribed, as it were, in the historical record; he is not only writ among "the Band" but emerges as the first among them. The Dark Tower, that opaque and distant object *par excellence,* is now in Roland's ken, and its essence is the sheer fact of Roland's arrival, a fact that returns us to the title page and reveals the poem in its entirety as the reality of objectivity, that Roland was an object all along. But he was not simply an object of nature. Even at the first, in the "all agree" by which we knew the liar to be telling the truth, an element of objectivity was there in the form of intersubjectivity. At the end of the poem, intersubjectivity fully unfolds as a pantheon of ghosts, or, to borrow Chesterton's phrase, a "democracy of the dead." But this is not the materialist collectivity of our 20th Century mass movements. Subject and object are reconciled only because a third term appears and emerges through their reconciliation, the tolling voices from beyond the grave, a divine collectivity. This calling from beyond the grave provides no answers and reveals no providential design: it merely looks on. But in looking back we see ourselves for what we are: things in a realm of things and

also shades in a realm of shades. To truly dwell in Nature we must also dwell among the Dead.

Chapter 5

Art & Nature: *My Last Duchess*

'Verse,' from the Latin *versus,* meaning 'turn,' originally referred to the turn of a plow at the end of a furrow; following the route by which agriculture becomes culture, it subsequently came to refer both to poetry in general and to the poetic line in particular. The analogy between plowing a field and writing a poem makes poetry seem natural and orderly, a characterization that enjambment in particular, that delirious turn against syntax, should render suspect. This etymology does underline, however, the way in which the status of the line is deeply moored to the category of poetry; simply put, poetry is language lineated, language which turns. Hence it is no surprise that enjambments in particular poems have often been subjected to critical scrutiny. Enjambment as such, however, has rarely been considered in detail, and discussion of the poetic line has suffered even greater neglect. Perhaps most importantly, neither discussions of enjambment nor of the line have taken up current work on syntax in linguistics. But the relationship between syntax and the line is the heart of the matter; the interference between these two grids is the structural ground of what Adorno calls the 'enigma-character' of poetry.[88]

The most illuminating rumination on the properties of

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[88] For an extended discussion of the 'enigma-character' (*Rätselcharakter*) of artworks in general, see Adorno, *AT*, 120-131. The German word *Rätsel* can be translated either as 'riddle' or as 'enigma,' and both of these senses are at issue in Adorno's use of the term: the artwork is a riddle in the sense that it demands an interpretation and effectively promises that there is in fact a determinate answer, but it is an enigma in the sense that it eludes all attempts to pin the answer down.

enjambment is probably still John Hollander's discussion of Milton's line breaks in *Vision & Resonance* (91-116).[89] A typical example of the kinds of effects Hollander brings out is his discussion of the opening lines of *Paradise Lost:*

> Of Man's first Disobedience, and the Fruit
> Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste [...]
>
> (I.1-2)

As Hollander observes, the "stasis" of the symmetrical distribution of monosyllables and polysyllables in the first line

> is immediately disturbed by the brilliant line-ending. "Fruit" might well have led to something like "Thereof" in the following line, thus being taken in the figurative sense of "results"; actually, the line which follows thrusts us into the primary, literal sense of *that* fruit of *that* tree. "Disobedience" has the importance of staged centrality, "Fruit" the urgency of a terminal place which reveals both its own positional ambiguity and that of the word occupying it. These two impulses—the one toward systematic, static pattern, the other toward periodic flux and articulated paragraphing—are the warp and weft of the verse fabric of *Paradise Lost.* (94)

Considering Adam's conclusion after repenting of having eaten the fruit "that to *obey* is best" (XII.561, my emph.), this subtle ambiguity goes to the heart of Milton's project in *Paradise Lost;* as Hollander puts it, "the intricately related demands of local meaning and larger vision are being served by the many ways in which Milton's line endings variously fetter and spur the exuberance of syntactic production" (94). Effects such as these are achieved, not through enjambment alone, but through its relation to syntax, and, by way of this relation, to the

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[89] For a brief survey of discussions of the line, including appropriate laments about the sparseness of the field, see Johnson, "Applying the Breaks." For some suggestive—if sometimes *merely* suggestive—theoretical reflections on the line, see Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 23-42 and 109-15. For an extremely useful annotated bibliography of significant books and articles on poetic syntax and grammar through 1980, see Brogan.

larger conceptual burden of the poem.

Syntax itself provides many examples of analogous effects, for example in 'garden-path' sentences like *The horse raced past the barn fell.* This sentence produces momentary confusion because the cognitive apparatus that parses the sentence has taken *raced* to be the main verb of the sentence, only to discover that *fell* is thereby left out in the cold; the parser thus has to reconstruct the sentence such that *raced past the barn* is a reduced relative clause (meaning effectively 'the horse *that was* raced past the barn'). The analogy between these garden-path sentences and effects like that in the first line of *Paradise Lost* can, however, break down. If one eliminates the line break from Milton's opening gambit, the effect Hollander points to disappears: *Of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree;* whereas introducing a line break into the garden-path sentence only amplifies the original effect:[90]

> The horse raced past the barn
> Fell in the muddy trench.

The 'momentary ambiguity' produced by the opening of *Paradise Lost* is therefore not only a phenomenon of syntax, but depends upon the line break; the line break in some sense functions *as if* it were a syntactic boundary. When the line break arrives, the parser attempts to make sense of the line as a unit, producing an expectation which the continuation of the sentence on the following line denies. This phenomenon is also, however, distinct from structural ambiguity, as in

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[90] One might argue that the line break opens the possibility of reading the second line as a conjoined clause, i.e., *The horse raced past the barn* and *fell in the muddy trench.* But, whatever other effects it might produce, the lineation does not *eliminate* the possibility of the garden-path effect at issue here.

Flying planes can be dangerous, which can mean either that it is dangerous for one to fly planes or that one should be on the lookout for flying planes. In any normal communicative context this ambiguity will go unnoticed and will be assigned only the relevant structural description by both speaker and hearer. Such ambiguities are therefore only relevant after the fact or out of context; one has to be looking for the ambiguity to find it. But, since works of literature are not communicative,[91] the effect of enjambment that Hollander is pointing to, like the effect of a garden-path sentence, comes into being in the context of reading itself—though a reader may not be consciously aware of it.

Typically, accounts of enjambment propose (or tacitly assume) one of two theories about how it works cognitively: either what we might call the 'insertion' theory or the 'interruption' theory. The insertion theory claims that a line break that divides a syntactic unit will be 'filled in' by the reader with some sort of hypothetical completion, as if the reader were to write in an ending in the blank space at the end of the line. A strong version of this theory quickly proves itself implausible. In the *Paradise Lost* example above, Hollander basically assumes the insertion theory: the reader will get to the end of the line, expect some completion of the phrase, and therefore will mentally insert a plausible completion like "Thereof." But if the reader really wanted to know how the line finished, why would he spend time inventing a completion when he can simply read the following line? As a rule, linguistic processes do not perform more

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[91] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this point. See also, Appendix A.

work than they have to, and there is no obvious reason to imagine that the reader in this case would abruptly shift from reading to writing.[92] While a line ending without a syntactically complete phrase will certainly arouse particular expectations, it makes little sense to imagine that the reader actually generates a specific completion in the midst of reading. And if the reader could go straight to the next line without inserting a completion, it is unclear under this theory how she could experience the effect Hollander is describing.

The interruption theory, on the other hand, assumes that when the reader reaches the end of the line the processing of the sentence will come to a standstill, if only briefly. Christopher Ricks, citing an observation of Leavis's, makes such a claim about these lines from Keats' *To Autumn:*

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook (19-20)

Leavis comments that "as we pass across the line-division from 'keep' to 'steady' we are made to enact, analogically, the upright steadying carriage of the gleaner as she steps from one stone to the next," and Ricks continues: "The perfect steadiness of rhythm matches the simple steady movement of the syntax; the sense that such steadiness has to be achieved, that it is laden and not just casual, is enforced by the

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[92] The parser does seem to construct hypothetical structural descriptions for the completions of phrases during processing, but these merely mark out *categories* necessitated by the selectional features of individual lexical items, not specific contents (see Adger 77-96). In other words, if a line break left the incomplete phrase *John hopes that,* the parser will hypothetically construct a structure for what follows, in this cases some complete clause (i.e., a TP). It will not hypothetically specify a particular clause like *John hopes that / Sally likes Swiss cheese.* The one exception is certain kinds of collocations (like breaking up an idiom), for which see Dillon, *Language Processing and the Reading of Literature.* The pragmatic aspects of linguistic processing that Dillon is interested in do not bear directly on the concerns of this essay (see the note after next below).

line-ending, across which—it stands for the unseen brook which we are *not* looking down at—the steady movement must be made" ("William Wordsworth 1" 90).[93] Despite Ricks' own skillful use of parenthesis to reproduce the identification of the brook with the line break, the interruption theory which this assumes also cannot be maintained in a strong form because line breaks do not actually substantially impede linguistic processing.[94] If the line break really arrested the parsing of the sentence so dramatically we would expect that it would obstruct such phenomena as antecedent government, movement, control or c-command (all of which are relations between words that hold by virtue of syntactic structure), but the intervention of a carriage return seems to have no more effect on processing an enjambed sentence in a poem than it would in prose. The line break clearly has some sort of effect, but it does not interrupt processing in any strong sense.

Both theories, then, are only plausible in a very weak form (which is presumably the form in which Hollander and Ricks assume them): they cannot claim to describe precisely what is happening but can only serve as heuristic markers that some unknown phenomenon

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[93] The implicit mimetic claim that Ricks is making here is not convincing (any more than any other claim which demands that some ontologically extant 'reality' intervene between the poem and its interpretation as the poem's 'content'), but it is also not necessary to his argument about Wordsworth's enjambments, which is full of illuminating observations.

[94] There may well be empirical instances in which line breaks produce some small impedence (marginally slower processing time, for example), but it's unlikely that there will substantive regularities of this kind since the effects are entirely dependent on pragmatics and are thus going to be affected by a wide array of extra-textual factors. This is an empirical question, but, since it is limited to the pragmatics of reading, would tell us more about the reader than about the poem, and hence may not be a relevant empirical question for my purposes.

=*x* is making interesting meanings. For this reason, we should search for a theory that could hold in a strong sense. One clue is that both the insertion theory and the interruption theory are explicitly theories of enjambment, and therefore have nothing to say about an end-stopped line, which they regard as the dull unmarked instance. But we can see a similar effect to those above in this typical couplet from Pope's *Essay on Man,* in which the line break can hardly be considered prominently enjambed:

> Virtuous and vicious ev'ry Man must be,
> Few in th'extreme, but all in the degree. (II.231-2)

Having read only the first line, the reader is bound to think that the speaker is urging a flatly impossible proposition: that virtue and vice, presumably mutually exclusive states of the spirit, not only can cohabit but in fact do cohabit in every human being alive. The paradox is ameliorated in the following line, but the sense of an absurd incongruity (not to mention a whisper of the impossibility of virtue) still clings to our understanding of humanity. This very typical example of Pope's wit relies heavily on the line break, without which we would have no reason to imagine the first clause to be a complete thought, and the effect is similar to the telescoping of Milton's "Fruit" from the abstract and metaphorical to the concrete and literal. Approaching the problem in terms of enjambment, then, already construes the issue too narrowly; what is really at issue in these phenomena is the line itself.

The effect in the Pope couplet, unlike in Milton's blank verse, also seems to rely on rhyme. As W.K. Wimsatt has observed, rhymes "impose upon the logical pattern of expressed argument a kind of

fixative counterpattern of alogical implication" in which "the greater the difference in meaning between rhyme words the more marked and the more appropriate will be the binding effect" (153, 164). What rhyme accomplishes in Pope (as opposed to Chaucer, on Wimsatt's account) is to bind together unlike things so that, however implausible the equation may be, the rhyme gives it the ring of necessity. The function of rhyme thus seems to be similar to that of line breaks in the sense that both create a tension between syntactic structure and some other kind of structure. As Wimsatt suggests, the structure which rhyme counterposes to syntax, and the means by which the rhyme bears on meaning, is the line itself: "It may be said, broadly, that difference in meaning of rhyme words can be recognized in difference of parts of speech and in difference in functions of the same part of speech, and that both of these differences will be qualified by the degree of parallel or obliquity appearing between the two whole lines of a rhyming pair" (157). This should be no surprise, since end-rhyme, for someone listening to an oral performance of a rhymed poem, establishes the line breaks. Other forms of phonetic patterning, e.g., alliteration in strong stress verse, also can serve the same function, and the same goes for meter or, especially in free verse, typography. Part of the effect of rhyme, then, is mediated by the line, and is meaningful only due to the relation between the line and the syntax. Of course rhyme, and phonetic patterning more generally, can simply associate two or more words, as well as marking the line; but, if such associations are meaningful, this will be because the words thus associated already bear meaning due to their syntactic context and

function. Either way, syntax is the bridge between rhyme and meaning, and the bridge between rhyme and syntax is either the association of individual words or the line.

Since poems are made of language, and language is a mental property, some aspects of the cognitive processes involved in reading will bear directly on how we understand poetic structure. The two functions of rhyme mentioned above, associating individual words or marking the line, differ based upon where they arise in cognition. If, as mentioned above, the effects of line breaks arise at the level of *processing*[95] (like the effects of garden-path sentences), then rhyme must also stake out the line at the level of processing; likewise, the association of individual words will only have semantic effects to the extent that the words already have meanings determined by the syntax, and as such association (like structural ambiguity) must operate at the level of *reflection.* By 'processing,' I mean the activities of the 'language faculty' as it is understood in current linguistic theory, i.e., as a discrete system of the mind/brain, largely isolated from other systems except for the two it directly interfaces with: the 'articulatory-perceptual system' (which turns a sentence into sounds, or gestures in the case of sign language) and the 'conceptual-intentional system' (which takes the basic meaning assigned to a sentence by the language faculty and construes its significance in terms of context, beliefs and expectations about the world, &c., and puts it to use in

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[95] I am not using this term in a technical sense derived from the linguistics literature, though the sense in which I am using it resembles Fodor's "input systems" in *The Modularity of Mind.*

various ways—one such way being literary interpretation).[96] 'Reflection,' then, is associated with the 'conceptual-intentional system,' about which we know virtually nothing of substance except that it is distinct from the language faculty. One indicator of this distinction is the difference between *tacit* and *explicit* knowledge. Every native speaker of (Modern Standard) English knows that you can say *Who did Sally go to the theatre with?* but not **Who did Sally go to the theatre and?,* or that you can say *He sneezed* but not **Himself sneezed;* but a native speaker does not know this in the sense of consciously employing an explicit rule. Few of us know explicitly what the mechanics of breathing or digesting a crumbly muffin are, but thankfully we know tacitly how to do these things. Knowledge of language is, in this sense, tacit knowledge.[97]

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[96] A fairly detailed and accessible (if slightly dated) outline of the fundamental nature and organization of the language faculty can be found in Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language,* 1-50. More recent work typically assumes the model outlined in Chomsky 1995. The best current introductory textbook in the field is Adger. In the absence of a more fully elaborated account of processing, it is difficult to say how line breaks might fit into the picture. If my hypothesis is correct that line breaks are registered at the level of processing, it seems plausible that, since they assume linear order, line breaks are marked at PF (Phonological Form, the representation at the articulatory-perceptual interface); in order for them to affect the meaning of a sentence, they must also be registered at LF (Logical Form, the representation at the conceptual-intentional interface), though clearly they would arrive there as benign stowaways on the derivation. A fully elaborated account would thus also require a clear understanding of the relationship between phonological phrase structure and syntax (among other things, phonological phrase structure seems to be a crucial determinant of the level of markedness, or 'strength,' of an enjambment). If this hypothesis turns out to be even partially accurate, it would mean that processing lineated language is a fundamental feature of the genetic endowment of the species, that poetry, in other words, is a fundamental feature of what it means to be human. The widespread appearance of rhymed or otherwise lineated language use among children in different cultures may be at least an anecdotal hint that this is the case.
[97] This analogy is not entirely facetious: according to Chomsky, both the language faculty and the digestive system are possible objects of 'naturalistic' inquiry. The idea that they are qualitatively different objects of inquiry is, in Chomsky's view, grounded in a spurious distinction between 'mind' and 'body' that is bound to a definition of 'body' based on the mechanistic physics that Newton effectively demolished. Without a meaningful definition of a 'body,' we are not in a position even

By 'processing,' then, I mean essentially syntax, the theory of mental representations in the language faculty (which includes aspects of both 'form' and 'meaning,' under current theory); 'reflection' falls under the category of pragmatics, the theory of language use (Chomsky, *New Horizons*, 26). To clarify the distinction, consider the sentence *John expects to like him.*[98] If we hear this sentence, we take *John* and *him* to refer to different people. But if it is embedded in *Guess who John expects to like him*, then *him* could refer either to *John* or to someone else. All native speakers tacitly know this difference between the two cases (though they would not be able to provide an explanation of it unless they happened to be linguists) because it is a matter of syntax, which is just to say that it is a result of the interaction of fixed principles and parameters of the language faculty with properties of these lexical items. The resolution of the ambiguity between the two interpretations of *him* in the second example (as referring either to *John* or to someone else) will be accomplished by context (and in most contexts it will be quite clear, e.g., one might be talking about how self-conscious John is or one might be speculating about John's assessment of Ted), and will thus be a matter of pragmatics. At present, we do not know much about pragmatics, apart from the fact that we will need to have syntax fairly well nailed down before we will be able even to formulate the right questions (and it is possible that pragmatics could turn out to be simply impossible to

to specify what the 'mind/body problem' is. For further discussion, see Chomsky, *New Horizons,* 108ff.

[98] This example and most of the discussion of it is adapted from Chomsky, *New Horizons,* 142.

study through a 'naturalistic' mode of inquiry, in the sense that Chomsky uses the term).

Considerations of this kind arise in relation to the poetic line because the sorts of effects that Hollander, for example, discusses are phenomena not of the poem as an inert object but as an *event* in the mind of a reader. Moreover, since the goal is interpretation, we must distinguish mental events at the level of processing from those at the level of reflection because the former will arise in *every* instance of reading, performing, or hearing a poem, whereas the latter *may* arise in many instances but also may not. Our object of inquiry is, first and foremost, whatever is the case in every instance of reading; this is what we mean by referring to 'the poem' as something separate from its physical instantiations in particular books or performances.[99] Only properties which are, in that sense, necessarily linked to the poem as such can have a necessary link to interpretation; other properties are neither uninteresting nor finally eliminable, but are nevertheless secondary and can be analytically separated out at the level of theory (though not, perhaps, at the level of critical practice).[100] Only properties of the poem which are events at the level of processing have a necessary connection to interpretation; events at the level of

[99] For a discussion with many useful arguments but, in my view, an erroneous conclusion, see Wellek and Warren, 142-157. The correct conclusion is, as Adorno puts it, that "in the artwork the subject is neither the observer nor the creator nor absolute spirit, but rather spirit bound up with, preformed and mediated by the object" (*AT* 166).

[100] This claim must be carefully distinguished from the claim that literature is simply reducible to universal properties of the human mind, or that literary criticism is simply reducible to linguistics; to the extent that criticism and linguistics are in tension, that tension is necessary and productive. The liquidation of the universal and constant is just as dangerous as the liquidation of the particular and ephemeral.

reflection have only a contingent connection to interpretation.

The phenomena we are concerned with here can thus be separated into two groups based upon whether they are phenomena of processing or of reflection. The phenomena of reflection are: (1) structural ambiguity,[101] (2) rhyme (insofar as it simply associates two words), (3) meter (insofar as it produces metrical tension), and (4) typography (in shape poems and the like). The phenomena of processing are (1) syntactic constructions that produce parsing problems (e.g., garden-path sentences or center-embedded constructions like *The child whom the spider whose web broke startled screamed*[102]), (2) rhyme (insofar as it stakes out the line), (3) meter (insofar as it stakes out the line), and (4) typography (insofar as it stakes out the line, e.g., in *vers libre*). All of the phenomena of processing, in other words, either stake out the line or have to do with parsing the syntax. And, as we discovered above, the line itself only bears on interpretation through its relation to syntax. The question of the line is thus not merely what is really at issue in discussions of enjambment, but is at the heart of the nature of the experience of poetry and of poetry as such.

The question of the line poses the problem of poetic form at its most acute. Syntax itself is not merely a matter of form (not, say,

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[101] The processing of structurally ambiguous phrases does seem to involve producing both of the possible structural descriptions, but at some point one of the alternatives is thrown out and the relevant structural description selected. This all happens below the level of reflection; the product of processing is a single structural description, and this is all reflection has to go on unless the reader consciously examines the text looking for an ambiguity. Hence ambiguity *exists* at the level of processing, but it also ceases to exist at the level of processing and therefore cannot bear on interpretation unless consciously invoked through reflection.

[102] This example is adapted from Austin (39).

merely a matter of the sequence of words), but turns out to be immanently contentive; syntax marks the necessary intertwinement of form and content.[103] The line, by comparison, seems like a purely formal aspect of poetic structure; among other things, there are no *a priori* restrictions on what elements can make up a line.[104] But this arbitrariness of the line, its sheer formal blankness, can, as we have seen, nevertheless have effects on meaning by virtue of its extrusion of syntax. Such effects cannot be produced by syntax alone, and the line simply cannot exist without syntax; the two are irretrievably bound up with one another. As the *Paradise Lost* example shows, the line can create effects that seem, in principle, to exceed its capacities; it can produce the *semblance* of being more than it is. This mere particular appearance which points beyond itself partakes of the fundamental structure which Aristotle imputed to poetry in the *Poetics*: poetry is a form of thinking—cognition of the universal—mediated by the particular (1451b). But a line does not have just the particularity of a concrete instance; it has the particularity of what is blank, apparently nugatory, what cannot be grasped by the Concept. Even at the level of form, the exigency of the line is a challenge to thought, which must

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[103] Current syntactic theory includes much of what was hitherto regarded as the domain of semantics (see chapter 2).

[104] That is, apart from a more or less pragmatic constraint on line length (it would be implausible to consider *Vanity Fair* a single line of verse) and the fact that line breaks probably can only occur above the level of the syllable, i.e., you can't have a line break like "pesterin / g"; there are a number of plausible reasons for this, but the most obvious is that it would be unpronounceable since "ng" represents a single phoneme, namely /ŋ/. This latter claim is only true if it can be empirically demonstrated that all inputs to the language faculty are mediated, to some meaningful extent, by phonological form, which may turn out not to be the case. In that event, this constraint would only hold for spoken performances of a poem, and reading may be subject to different constraints.

think by means of concepts what is aconceptual. In short, the line is a cipher of the non-identical which binds itself to thought; it is a creation of meaning *ex nihilo,* but it always threatens to drag everything back into the vortex of mere seeming; it calls forth what thought lives on, and by living denies.[105] Poetry turns language, the medium of thought, against itself in order to prevent thought from coming to rest.

This suggests a preliminary answer to an old quandary: the relation between poems and (normal, prose) statements. To say that the two are simply unrelated, to declare poetic language absolutely autonomous of the world or of thought, or to confine the poetic to the sphere of mere feeling, would fail to account for the obvious sense in which poems depend upon the extra-aesthetic world, without which the words would not be meaningful. But to erect the opposite principle, that poems simply *are* statements and only a self-indulgent aesthete would think otherwise, is to neglect the fact that people have little trouble consistently distinguishing the two (if John tells Sally he's been thinking about buying new shoes, she might reasonably expect him to actually buy shoes; if he recites a sonnet on the joys of new shoes, she will expect nothing of him, apart from more such silliness or a career in advertising). Poems, unlike statements, are enigmas; and as Adorno observes, "in enigmas, the answer is both hidden and demanded by the structure. This is the function of the work's immanent logic, of the lawfulness that transpires in it, and that is the

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[105] Cf. Adorno, *AT* 127: "[The artwork's] enigmaticalness [*Rätselcharakter*] goads it to articulate itself immanently in such a fashion that it achieves meaning by forming its emphatic absence of meaning."

theodicy of the concept of purpose in art. The aim of artworks is the determination of the indeterminate" (*AT* 124). The line demands interpretation in the very gesture that obstructs it. The fact that poems and statements are both grounded in syntax marks their similarity; lineation makes the poem an enigma.[106] The absence of an adequate theory of the line has thus not only limited criticism's descriptive capabilities but has rendered vital interpretive issues inaccessible.

But the effects of the line are always local, and for this reason (as well as Aristotle's dictum, referred to above) criticism must proceed from inside the particular, from the minutiae of local effects. In practical terms, this means that instead of critics only taking an interest in line breaks they should also take an interest in lines, especially since the latter topic opens up new fields of inquiry even in strongly end-stopped verse. The effects which critics attribute to line *breaks* (e.g., in accordance with the interruption or insertion theories) are in fact effects of the line itself; if the reader gets to the end of the first line of *Paradise Lost* and has a particular expectation about what will follow, it is not because the blank space on the page calls out to be filled in but because the line itself implies what may follow it (either because of syntactic restrictions on what may follow a given construction or because of pragmatic inferences based upon what is being said, or both). If what follows on the second line is a surprise, that is due to what is in the second line, and its relationship to what is

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[106] Strictly speaking, this is only true of *good* poetry; but that qualification is, in my view, unnecessary, since the fact that one goes to the trouble to write about a poem entails a prior evaluation in its favor. For this reason, evaluation is both ineliminable from and superfluous to criticism.

in the first line; the line break *in itself* is irrelevant.[107] For some kinds of questions, this theory amounts mainly to a more precise use of terminology; for example, it does not dramatically change questions about the relationship between two halves of a syntactic phrase sitting on two different lines, though it puts the pursuit of such questions on a more systematic basis. But it does open up entirely new questions: instead of merely asking why a phrase has been broken in half, we might ask what happens when two sentence fragments are glued together on a line. It is easy enough to invent silly examples in which straightforward effects can be achieved, as in

> It is cheese that
> She wants. To leave
> Is to relent.

But in particular cases in good poems, the effects are bound to be subtle and complex, and we can hardly propose to work out in advance what their nuances will be.

One of the oddest aspects of Hollander's discussion of Milton's enjambments is that he often seems to suggest that Milton, if he did not invent these effects, was the first major poet in English to employ them, and that they were not really out in force again until the 20th Century, apart from Blake. But Hollander's insights illuminate much more than just Milton's poetic practice. As a point of comparison, consider Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess:* given that this poem has been so much discussed,[108] if we can make new discoveries about it

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[107] To put it in Hegelese, the line break is relevant *for the line* but not *in itself;* the line break is in an exclusively negative relation to the individual lines, and never has positive content.

[108] This poem has even occasioned a book-length explication (Berman's *Browning's Duke*) which, though sometimes extremely speculative, is very useful and covers a remarkable range of then extant criticism.

from the perspective I have suggested, then we know we are on to something. This poem is particularly illuminating both because of its extremely conspicuous enjambments (students often don't even notice that the poem is in rhymed couplets) and because it is extremely self-conscious about both the problems of interpretation (a painting, in this case) and about the relationship between art and nature, lineation and language. To begin with, we will have to be very precise about the syntax of individual lines, and only then can we draw forth the subtle effects of their lineation and the interrelation of those effects with other aspects of the interpretation of the poem as a whole. The poem is so complex that, for reasons of economy, I will focus primarily on the first four lines:

> That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive; I call
> That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
> Worked busily a day, and there she stands.[109]

The first line consists of a main clause, "That's my last Duchess," and an adjunct small clause, "painted on the wall."[110] An adjunct is a kind of optional modifier, like the second (bracketed) prepositional phrase in *The student of Physics [with red hair];* both prepositional phrases seem, on the face of it, to be syntactic equals, but if we invert them the phrase becomes ungrammatical: *The student [with red hair] of Physics.* What this demonstrates is that *of Physics* is more closely tied

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[109] In order to underscore the way in which these first four lines form a plausible unit to treat as a monad, I am following the punctuation in the first, 1842 edition of the poem (see Longman *Poems*); for the 1888-9 (final) version of the poem, see the Oxford *Poetical Works*: 186-8. This is, in the end, largely a cosmetic issue; from the standpoint of syntax, punctuation is entirely irrelevant.

[110] "Painted on the wall" could also be analyzed as a reduced relative clause; for the purpose of this discussion it doesn't matter which it is because the salient properties are the same.

to the Noun Phrase *the student* than *with red hair;* the former is optional in the sense that if you omit *of Physics* you're saying something different, but if you omit *of red hair* you're just providing less information.[111] A 'small clause' is a verbless clause following a main clause of which it is not a constituent but with which it nevertheless has a subject-predicate relationship, as in *they appointed her head of the department,* in which *head of the department* is predicated of *her* but is neither the subject nor the object of the main verb 'appoint.'[112] Similarly, "painted on the wall" seems at first glance to be predicated of "my last Duchess" even though it is neither object nor subject of the main verb (and hence is a small clause); it is also an optional modifier which provides additional information about what it modifies.

As a consequence of the fact that "painted on the wall" is an adjunct, it stands outside the main statement of the sentence. For example, if someone said *Mary tickled John naked,* and someone else asked him *Are you sure it was Mary?* that question will be understood as *Are you sure it was Mary who tickled John?* and not *Are you sure it was Mary who was naked?* The sentence thus presupposes the nakedness while it explicitly makes an argument about the tickling. A further complication is that adjunct small clauses are ambiguous as to

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[111] Figuring out the exact structure of adjuncts has been a persistent problem in syntax; the old analysis in X-bar theory, which just added another maximal projection, always had something of an *ad hoc* flavor. Since the minimalist program has done away with X-bar theory entirely, it is still more unclear how adjuncts are to be described. In any event, my interpretation relies only on well-attested descriptive facts about adjuncts, so the question of structural description shouldn't have any catastrophic effects on it.

[112] For an extended discussion within the government-binding framework, see Aarts.

whether they modify the subject or the object of the main clause. For example, in *Mary tickled John naked,* we do not know whether is was *Mary* or *John* who was naked during the tickling. "Painted on the wall" thus slips in as a presupposition of the statement made by the main clause, a presupposition that either modifies the deictic pronoun "That" (the grammatical subject) or "my last Duchess" (the object). This ambiguity opens up two subtly distinct readings, depending on whether "That" (the painting) or "my last Duchess" (the person) is, by virtue of association with the small clause, the *focus* of the main clause.[113] The first is analogous to *That, which is painted on the wall, is my last Duchess,* a reading which posits the painting first, then asserts the Duchess as its content. The second reading is analogous to *That's my last Duchess, who is painted on the wall,* positing the Duchess first, then identifying her with the painting. In the first reading, the Duchess is just a passive object, the mere *matter* which the painting has as its theme; in the second reading the Duchess is implicitly an agent and the painting just a *means* whereby she comes into being.

The second line begins with another adjunct small clause,

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[113] I am using the term 'focus' here in the sense of Chomsky's essay "Deep Structure, Surface Structure, and Semantic Interpretation" (see in particular 199ff.), wherein he makes a distinction between what he calls the 'focus' and the 'presupposition' of a sentence: "The focus is a phrase containing the intonation center; the presupposition, an expression derived by replacing the focus by a variable" (205). For example, if the sentence *Is it John who writes poetry?* is uttered with normal intonation (i.e., with *John* as the intonation center), the response *No, it is Bill who writes poetry* will seem more natural than *No, John writes only stories.* In the absence of contrastive or emphatic stress, in other words, 'John' will be understood as the focus of the sentence and the fact that someone writes poetry will be understood as presupposed by the sentence. Chomsky's use of 'presupposition' does not quite coincide with the usual use of it in formal semantics or logic (nor with my use of it above), so I have avoided employing it here.

"Looking as if she were alive," associated with the same main clause. The syntactic relationship is the same, but there is one crucial difference: the pronoun "she" probably refers to the Duchess and not the painting (because inanimate objects, with rare exceptions, are referred to with neuter pronouns in English). The ambiguity which the first line opened up (between "That" as focus and "my last Duchess" as focus) is thereby resolved in favor of "my last Duchess" as focus, and hence in favor of the Duchess-as-subject reading through the presence of the pronoun 'she.' The verb 'look' is also ambiguous as to whether it makes its grammatical subject an agent or an object; in *Sally looks at her watch,* Sally is the agent of the action of looking, whereas in *Sally looks happy,* Sally is the object of the action of looking. "Looking as if she were alive" can thus mean either that 'to us she appears alive' or 'she is looking at something as she would look at it if she were alive.' Given the immediate context, the reader is likely to favor the former, non-agentive reading, in which the gaze is directed at her, but the Duke very quickly ventures into an elaborate account of her "earnest glance" (8), i.e., the Duchess becomes the agent of looking (though this follows line 5, in which the Duke asks the Count's flunky, "Will't please you sit and look at her?"). For the moment, the pronoun 'she' is, of the two ambiguities, the only one that strongly argues for agency, but the ambiguity of 'look' engenders a possibility that the poem goes on to fulfill, effectively bringing the Duchess back from the grave. The second line ends, however, with the incomplete expression "I call," where 'call,' given the context, means 'to give as name or title to; to

name.'[114] The line brackets this expression with "Looking as if she were alive," emphasizing that the Duke is effectively resurrecting the Duchess and at the same time subtly underscoring *his* agency in the resurrection.[115]

This effect of the line brings us to the traditional interpretive dilemma of the poem:[116] given the dramatic context (the Duke is speaking to the Count's flunky on the evening in which he intends to affiance the Count's daughter, should the dowry prove adequate), why would the Duke choose to tell a story which presumably does him no credit? His story plainly makes the Count's flunky uncomfortable (surely it is the flunky's attempt to re-establish an appropriate distance between them that inspires the Duke's polite condescension: "Nay, we'll go / Together down, Sir!" [53-4]), and given the Duke's cleverness (indicated by traditional rhetorical disavowals, most importantly in lines 35-6) such behavior seems strangely out of character. The key to the puzzle is the Duke's concern that the Duchess did not distinguish him from other people, which is just to say that she did not confer recognition on him:[117]

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[114]   OED, *s.v.* "call, v.," def. II.11.a.

[115] And as W. David Shaw quite rightly notes, "I call" also evokes the "fiat of divine creation" (*Dialectical Temper* 95). Shaw's illuminating account of the poem in that book is analogous to mine in that he sees the Duke as "restag[ing] the uneven drama of his domestic life in the form most flattering to his producer's ego" (94), though Shaw proceeds from there in a quite different direction.

[116] See Berman for a survey of the literature on this issue.

[117] I am drawing on Hegel's concept of "Recognition" in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (111), though the situation of the poem is not analogous at all points to the "Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage." Hegel's formulation is useful to the extent that it draws together recognition by an individual other and a socially-mediated form of recognition (hence the Duke's emphasis on his "nine hundred years old name" [33]). The Duchess' recognition of him is essential because she is the only person in a position to confer recognition on the Duke in both senses, her status as Duchess

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>   She had
> A heart…how shall I say?…too soon made glad,
> Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
> She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
> Sir, 'twas all one!
>
> (21-5)

The Duchess failed, in his view, to determinately recognize the Duke, only registering his "favor" as one aspect of an undifferentiated totality of pleasurable affects. Moreover, her relation to those affects is purely passive—they are "impressed" on the mere material of her "heart"—and this too prevents her from being able to confer recognition upon him; she must act autonomously in order for her recognition to be substantive, and for this reason he cannot "stoop" to imposing the necessary differentiations upon her (37-43). As a result, the conclusion of the events he narrates, his "commands" which presumably result in her death (45-6), is entirely unsatisfactory: being dead, she is even more emphatically unable to confer recognition. And so he is obliged to resurrect her in order that they might play out a struggle to the death along the lines of Hegel's 'Dialectic of Lordship & Bondage' and thus demonstrate his mastery.[118] But this is a low-risk version of the struggle, a game he is sure in advance to win since he is holding her cards as well as his own. What makes this sleight of hand possible is the mode of her appearance in the artwork, which brings the past into a present that still does not amount to actual presence. The

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designating both a personal (husband/wife) relationship and a public (Duke/Duchess) relationship.

[118] *PhS* 111-19. For the 'trial by death,' see 113-5. One could easily proceed to a psychoanalytic reading on this basis with the addition of Lacanian premises—and several critics have—but such additional premises do not, it seems to me, increase explanatory force to any appreciable extent and they involve importing assumptions about human consciousness that are, to put it mildly, arguable.

doubleness of the painting, through its formation in the dialectic of lineation, is thus at the heart of what makes this poem function.

As we have seen, the opening line of the poem is ambiguous as to whether the Duchess is subject or object, but the second line resolves this ambiguity in favor of the Duchess-as-subject, thus making her an autonomous agent. She has been negated in life by the Duke's "commands," preserved in the painting and sublated in the Duke's interpretation. But the Duke cannot do without the Duchess-as-object reading, because she must not become agent enough to constitute an actual threat. This restricted, finite economy of significance is the opposite of actual love, which Hegel describes well in a fragment in his *Early Theological Writings:*

> The lover who takes is not thereby made richer than the other; he is enriched indeed, but only so much as the other is. So too the giver does not make himself poorer; by giving to the other he has at the same time and to the same extent enhanced his own treasure (compare Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* [ii.1.175-77: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, My love as deep;] the more I give to thee, The more I have."). This wealth of life love acquires in the exchange of every thought, every variety of inner experience, for it seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infinitum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out of every life. (307) [119]

For the Duke, this economy is bound to a logic of exchange whose perverse *quid pro quo* reflects his complicity with a social order that reduces people to things (and in this sense, as in so many others, this poem is about the present, not merely an historical curiosity about the Renaissance). *My Last Duchess,* then, is a sort of negative love poem, indicating through its destitution what the fullness of amorous

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[119] This passage is cited with useful commentary in Hamacher's *Pleroma.*

experience would be.

The painting, mediating the relation between Duke and Duchess as both scrim and screen, performs the function the Duke requires only because of the interpretation he imposes on it. This puts us as readers in the position of thinking that we can pronounce moral judgment on the Duke because we can accuse him of misreading, but that very gesture reveals the way in which we are already bound by the poem's nexus: the Duke pronounces moral judgment on the Duchess by interpreting the painting, and we pronounce moral judgment on the Duke by interpreting the poem. Thus disillusioned, we find ourselves no longer in the position of moral ascendancy which would allow us to judge the Duke's misreading.[120]

We find ourselves at the brink of an abyss, an infinite regress (or what Hegel calls a 'bad infinity' [*SL* 138ff.]) which seems to put the categories of the True and the Good on unending deferral—a situation essentially at odds with the very concept of Truth. This predicament is characteristic of dramatic lyric generally; just as Browning's view of the Incarnation requires that we cannot directly access God through cognition of the universal but only through entering into the

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[120] I am indebted, as we all are, to Robert Langbaum's pioneering treatment of the dramatic monologue in *The Poetry of Experience* (1957). Although he speaks a good deal about the "tension between sympathy and judgment" (92), he strangely says of "My Last Duchess," "Moral judgment is in fact important as the thing to be suspended, as a measure of the price we pay for the privilege of appreciating to the full this extraordinary man" (83). But as W. David Shaw points out, "The intellectual sympathy that allows Browning to understand a point of view so different from his own also allows him to uncover its internal contradictions" (*Dialectical Temper* 103). Langbaum's position all too often falls into relativism, which is not only an undesirable position but one which is impossible to actually occupy: if all truth is relative, then that principle itself must be relative, and it therefore falls into performative contradiction. See also Adorno, *ND* 45-8.

particular, so the dramatic monologue requires us to sympathetically enter into the particular consciousness of the individual (an individual who is often odious or elusive in Browning's monologues) in order to think the universal. [121] To put it another way, the dramatic monologue is the poetic analogue of immanent critique, which dwells on the particular until it reflects what is beyond itself. The truth content of *My Last Duchess* would vanish if it did not, through the device of the painting, reveal its object as mediated within itself, if it did not come into being as its own metacritique.

The undialectical element of the poem, which puts its dialectic in motion, consists in the presence of third terms which are not reducible to negative extremes. Each of the poem's three temporalities presents us with a triad of (1) a person doing the representing, (2) a person represented, and (3) an observer: in the diegetic past of the Duke's narrative, the representer is Frà Pandolf, the represented is the Duchess, and the observer is the Duke; in the diegetic present of the Duke's speech, the representer is the Duke, the represented is the Duchess, and the observer is the Count's flunky; in the (non-diegetic) present of the reader of the poem, the representer is Browning qua author-function, the represented is the Duke, and the observer is the reader. The painting is what makes possible the homology between the diegetic past and the diegetic present which the Duke needs to resurrect the Duchess; the poem is what makes possible the homology

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[121] For example, in the "Epilogue" to *Dramatis Personae,* Browning seems to be explaining his method when he writes: "Take the least man of all mankind, as I: / Look at his head and heart, find how and why / He differs from his fellows utterly" (69-71).

between the diegetic present and the non-diegetic present of reading.[122]

We can begin to see the way the former homology functions in the third line, which consists of three Noun Phrases, the first two being the direct object and predicate nominative[123] of "call" from the previous line, and third being the subject of "worked" in the following line. In the middle of the line sits a conspicuous "now," set off on either side by punctuation but seemingly gluing the diegetic present of "call" to the diegetic past of "worked." If the painting is a wonder *now,* then presumably it was not always a wonder.[124] It is a wonder now because it breathes life into the Duchess, the life she takes on in the second line, but in order for this to serve the Duke's purpose this semblance of life can only come into being with death as its context and condition. According to the Duke's narrative, the immediate origin of the Duchess' "earnest glance" (8) is some remark of Frà Pandolf's, a "courtesy" (15-21). Hence the painting is guilty, blushing evidence of the Duchess' wandering heart, the particular trace which certifies the general guilt. The painting was not a wonder before because it testified to the source of the Duke's displeasure; Frà Pandolf was, in this instance, a culpable accessory to a crime against vanity—no doubt the Duke had wondered, given "that spot / Of joy," if Frà Pandolf's hands

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[122] For a different reading that draws intriguing consequences from a distinction between the temporality of "verbal art" and that of "plastic art," see Martin 100-5.
[123] This predicate nominative ("a wonder") is also a small clause.
[124] It is also possible that this *now* is just a sort of rhetorical interjection (as in OED, *s.v.* "now, *adv., conj., n.* and *a.*," def. 7a), but reading it that way *now* becomes just a filler word and is thereby stripped of any substantive effect on interpretation. In general, it should be a rule of thumb, whenever one is trying to choose between two readings that cannot be read together, that one ought to choose whichever reading makes the poem more interesting.

had been caressing only brushes. In line 3 those hands, bloodied with the Duchess' blush, are isolated from their verb, stranded in stasis, linked to the painting only by the joint of that imperious "now," testifying to the evaporation of that life which the painting sought to capture—and captured only too well. The Duke exhibits not merely the pigmented sarcophagus of his wife, but the hands of her alleged lover as well, severed by lineation.

The structure of the Duke's bid for mastery is also potentially registered at the level of reflection in the metrical peculiarities of these lines. The poem consists of entirely metrical iambic pentameter, but of the disyllabic words in the first four lines, four constitute bracketing mismatches:[125] "Duchess" and "painted" in line 1, and "wonder" and "Pandolf" in line 3, the former word in each pair being a stronger mismatch as it crosses over at the highest level of metrical structure (the division between the second and third feet in iambic pentameter). "Duchess" and "wonder," as well as "painted" and "Pandolf," are linked vertically through lineation, suggesting the autonomy of the Duchess and the agency of the painter, respectively. Through syntax (that is, horizontally) these relations are destroyed, linking "Pandolf" statically to "wonder" as elaborated above, and linking the "Duchess" to her status as a merely "painted" thing, the product of someone else's action. Pandolf's agency is exhausted in the object he has made, unwittingly serving the Duke's malicious whims, a fact registered in

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[125] A 'bracketing mismatch' is when word boundaries in the rhythm of the line violate the abstract divisions of the meter. I am assuming the theory of meter in Kiparsky's "The Rhythmic Structure of English Verse"; see Appendix B for an overview of the theory.

the partial rhyme between "painted" and "Pandolf" (they share onset and coda of the first syllable, and the onsets of their second syllables differ only in voicing).

The fourth line both separates the painter's hands from their activity, as observed before, and it brackets the now-subjectless active verb with the active but intransitive "she stands." The antecedent of the pronoun "she" is ambiguous, just like the same pronoun in line 2, but this time the painting, not the Duchess, seems like the more plausible antecedent since it is explicitly the making of the painting that is at issue. The line thus makes the painting effectively an agent of its own manifestation, as if it resulted from its own work, Satanically self-created. This odd state of affairs is rendered stranger still by the missing preposition before "a day," which could be understood as either *for* or *on.* The former seems more intuitive, but it is difficult to imagine such a portrait being painted in a single day.[126] If we take the missing preposition to be *on,* indicating only one of the days on which the painter exerted himself in the service of his art and his patron, what distinguishes this particular day? Given that the specific descriptions of the making of the painting are limited to (probably fantasized) descriptions of something like a flirtation, this might refer to the day on which something slightly more than painting

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[126] The note to this line in the Longman edition proposes that the portrait is a fresco, not a painting, thus making the time frame more plausible. But as Berman points out, the "completion [of the portrait] in several hours, *one* 'day,' is unlikely from at least two major considerations: portraits painted in the Renaissance generally occupied the artist two to three weeks or longer—and even the extremely few fresco portraits took at least a week for completion; and the Duke of Ferrara's wanting an extremely hasty work would be most inconsistent with, even antipodean to, both his familial pride and the superior artistic sensibilities that he believes he has" (34-5; see also his 'Appendix B,' 103-14).

went on—a day, perhaps, on which the Duke could not be present to observe the fulfillment of his commission. But this knowledgeable declaration effectively inserts the Duke into the diegetic past, a gesture which allows him to take over the position of represented and thus to bring the past into being, this time on his own terms.

The Duke eventually fails because the bridge he makes between the diegetic present and the diegetic past opens up an analogous course for the reader, allowing us to enter into the space which the Duke must control absolutely in order to triumph. The bridge that we cross is the poem itself, and the space which allows us in, which opens the possibility of both interpretation and judgment, is the enigma-character of the line, the turning of the Duke's language against itself. Once we have entered into the scene of the Duke's triumph, its hollowness becomes evident. In resurrecting the Duchess through art, she becomes not less autonomous but more so, not dehumanized but more than human. His mastery depends upon the reduction of the artwork to absolute determinacy,[127] and to the extent he succeeds the artwork becomes a mere dead thing, unable through its elusiveness to bring the Duchess into being—"There she stands / *As if* alive" (46-7, my emph.).[128] To the extent that he masters the

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[127] Herbert Tucker reaches a similar conclusion in his illuminating discussion of the poem, observing that "'My Last Duchess' may be considered a study in the reductive study of poetry, with the face of the Duchess as a highly figured text and the Duke as a 'reader' of 'that pictured countenance,' a student impatient of uncertainties who would fix the meaning of a text beyond doubt, regardless of the cost to its vitality" (182). In Tucker's view, the enigma is the Duchess herself, not the artwork, but it seems to me that the Duchess, since she dwells in the undifferentiated pleasure of living joy, is not enigmatic at all, and becomes so only through the enigma-character of the artwork.

[128] As W. David Shaw observes, this enjambment invokes her ghostly presence only to abruptly shove her back into her framed tomb (*Origins of the Monologue* 21).

painting, like Neptune "Taming a sea-horse" (55), the poem exposes the violence of that mastery, a violence which turns against itself because even to vanquish the dead he must recall and perform the sins for which they are punished. Were there no painting, any story would do, the Duchess could be entombed beyond remembrance, the Duke would be free from possible remorse through determination without remainder. Instead, the work of art persists as an indelible trace of the workings of objective Spirit,[129] unfolding through the turn of verse. Only the enigma-character of the line makes it possible for the poem to exceed mere reification, to perform the immanent metacritique that raises it to a moment of absolute Spirit, drawing us toward the possibility of Love even in a world where life itself is no longer possible.

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[129] "Objective Spirit" is Hegel's term for social reality (insofar as it inhabits the minds of individuals). The finitude of objective Spirit is contrasted with the infinite character of the next stage of development, "absolute Spirit," which is also a kind of intersubjectivity dwelling in the individual, but extended beyond the merely social (and hence national) to encompass absolute totality (Hegel associates absolute Spirit with Art, Religion and Philosophy).

Chapter 6

Transcendence & Immanence: *An Epistle Containing*

the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician

According to Auguste Comte, father of sociology and self-proclaimed Pope of Positivism, the history of "the human mind" can be divided up into three "states" or phases: "the theological or fictitious state, the metaphysical or abstract state, and the scientific or positive state" (1). In his essay on Milton of 1825, Macaulay echoes this classification, preserving much the same evaluations, with Comte's "fictitious state" appearing here as the "poetical":

> In a rude state of society men are children with a greater variety of ideas. It is therefore in such a state of society that we may expect to find the poetical temperament in its highest perfection. In an enlightened age there will be much intelligence, much science, much philosophy, abundance of just classification and subtle analysis, abundance of wit and eloquence, abundance of verses, and even of good ones; but little poetry. Men will judge and compare; but they will not create. (153)

But as an account of history, Comte's schema is not very plausible; among other things, all three of these, theology, metaphysics and the natural sciences, have coexisted at least since Aristotle; over time, their configurations have shifted, but history has abolished none of the three. What is useful about Comte's schema is that its implicit narrative suggests a close relationship between the three stages: theology is secularized into metaphysics when the blessed gods of the Greek pantheon are metamorphosed into Plato's Forms (with the Form of the Good as the *pater omnipotens*), and Plato's forms are brought down to earth by Kant as properties of human Reason, midwifing the

transformation of perceptions into thoughts. It should be no surprise that the three turn out to be related, considering that in certain respects they are difficult to distinguish. Metaphysics and theology are both concerned with transcendental objects (i.e., things which are not possible objects of sensory experience). But though they share an object, they differ considerably in their epistemological orientation. Theology seeks to know the transcendental through revelation, which is just to say the mind of God; metaphysics seeks to know the transcendental through reason, which is just to say the mind of Man. The two projects are thus not radically separate but are, in a sense, the same project conducted along different axes. Positivism denies the project entirely, and thus becomes part of it: it transcendentally rejects the transcendental, thereby drifting not only into metaphysics but into a deeply dogmatic metaphysics.

One of the reasons that theology, metaphysics and positivism appear to be inseparable is that they share a central problem: the relation between the subject and transcendence. In the last chapter, I explored the way in which the negativity of the poetic line functions in *My Last Duchess* to allow us to think human relations differently, to think the possibility of love out of the very brokenness of actual human relations. In this chapter, I want to continue our inquiry into the functions of the poetic line;[130] but the poem that will concern us here, Browning's *Karshish*, is about the relation between the subject and transcendence—a significantly different but related problem. In

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[130] For the purposes of this chapter, I will simply assume the account given of the linguistic structure of the line in the previous chapter.

order to clarify what is at stake in the negative re-thinking of theology that *Karshish* undertakes, it will be useful to consider the ways in which the theological functions in Adorno's philosophy, since his ambivalence about theology recasts it in a usefully negative form. As we will see, *Karshish* exploits the relationship between lineation and syntax to deploy theological categories in such a way that they do not merely dogmatically affirm an Absolute in the beyond (a merely transcendent deity) but also do not devolve into a simplistic pantheism (God is in all things, therefore all things are divine). The theological here is the presence of the divine in all things, but only negatively, and it therefore does what metaphysics cannot do, yet without going over into the dogmatism of religion.

In the opening of Adorno's 1965 *Metaphysics* lectures, he goes to some trouble to distinguish metaphysics from theology on both theoretical and historical grounds. On theoretical grounds, he distinguishes theology from "metaphysics in the traditional sense" by saying that metaphysics "does not derive the absolute dogmatically through revelation, … it determines the absolute through concepts" (*MCP* 7). Metaphysics, then, is on the side of reason against revelation, of critique against dogma. On historical grounds, adapting Comte's three stages, he describes metaphysics as, in some sense, a later stage of development that secularizes theological categories. This project of secularization is now, according to Adorno, historically condemned; so, for example, Heidegger can be criticized for "the surreptitious attempt to appropriate theologically posited possibilities of experience without theology" (*MCP* 107). Not only, then, is theology itself inappropriate to

this moment in history, but attempts to appropriate it are doomed in their turn. In light of such claims, we would hardly expect Adorno himself to deploy theological categories in his own metaphysical project. And yet, theological categories and theological terminology are a pervasive feature of Adorno's work as a whole, particularly categories drawn from Christianity.[131] Since theological categories and terminology tend to appear in the company of some of Adorno's most ambitious claims, I do not think that Adorno can be fully secularized without his philosophy entirely losing its traction. In other words, removing the theology from Adorno's thought is not like removing a mole; it's like removing a finger. To anticipate a bit, I want to show that Adorno is not trying to squeeze the rational kernel back into the mystical shell, that his use of theology is, paradoxical as it may seem, bound up with the most practical elements of his philosophy, and that grasping the theological in Adorno can help us understand why the aesthetic should have such a central place in that conception of practice. This, in turn, will throw related motifs in *Karshish* into relief.

During the period in which Adorno delivered his lectures on *Metaphysics* he was at work on the manuscript of his late masterpiece, *Negative Dialectik.* In the final pages of that work, he argues that metaphysics now is "not merely the secularization of theology in the concept" but that "it preserves theology in the critique of theology,

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[131] I should say by way of clarification, that *Christian* or *Christianity* in this paper refer to the teachings of Jesus as redacted in the synoptic gospels plus such corroborating extra-canonical materials as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary; the remainder of New Testament literature, and all historical churches, I will designate with the terms *Christendom.* The doctrine of Christianity is summarized in the Sermon on the Mount; the doctrine of Christendom is summarized in the Nicene Creed; I take for granted in what follows the incompatibility of the two.

whilst it opens to human beings as a possibility that to which theology compels them, and which theology thereby damages" (*ND* 389). In what follows, I want to consider this passage in light of a few significant moments in two of his other most important works, the early *Minima Moralia* and the late *Aesthetic Theory*. But to begin with, we might reasonably suppose that "preserv[ing] theology in the critique of theology" just means that all that ought remain of theology is the argument against God (that is, the preservation of theology *as* the critique of theology). But if theology is to be preserved, something of it must persist, enough to open a possibility; after all, even the mere hope that world might be otherwise has *some* positive content. We might get somewhere by reversing the question: what is it about theology that prevents us from just replacing metaphysics with it? What stands in need of critique? The problem is the compulsion to which theology subjects human beings. When, for example, Christendom demands a profession of faith in what Adorno calls "the core of the positive religions, the hope of a beyond" (*ND* 390), this can only serve to underwrite the present: to believe the redemption of the world *inevitable* is to renounce one's obligation to bring that redemption about. A hope that is unalloyed with despair is not hope at all but certainty. As Adorno puts it in *Minima Moralia*, "Hope is soonest found among the comfortless" (*MM* 223), just as it is the one lost sheep the shepherd pursues not the ninety-nine who never stray (Mtt. 18.12-3).

Of course "the comfortless" in the immediate context of that aphorism refers to "great works of art," and it is no accident that the

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passage we have been considering from *Negative Dialectic* moves so swiftly from theology to art:

> Any given expression of hope, as it emanates more powerfully from great works of art even in the epoch of their falling silent than it does from the theological texts which have been handed down, is configured with the hope of the human; nowhere more unequivocally than in moments of Beethoven. That which signifies that not everything is in vain is, through sympathy with the human, the self-awareness of nature in subjects; only in the experience of its own nature-like aspect does genius extend beyond nature. (*ND* 389-90)

The movement from the theological category of redemption to the utopian aspects of art doesn't seem like much of a leap, but it's not entirely clear why this movement should be mediated by, on the one hand, the subject (and the genius as the exemplary human), and, on the other, by "nature." In order to make sense of these two mediations we must turn to *Minima Moralia* and *Aesthetic Theory*.

Minima Moralia is the closest we have to an ethics from Adorno. Its stated aim is to return philosophy to its "true field," namely, "the teaching of the right life," and to do so "from the standpoint of subjective experience" (*MM* 15,18). Just as the word ethics, with its Greek root in *ethos*, 'personal character,' begins with the individual, so Adorno attempts to think the right life through the individual's predicament. His focus is usually on the things that obstruct the individual's attempt to live rightly:

> The predicament of private life today is shown by its arena. Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible. ... The best mode of conduct, in face of all this, still seems an uncommitted, suspended one: to lead a private life, as far as the social order and one's own needs will tolerate nothing else, but not to attach weight to it as to something still socially substantial and individually appropriate. "It is

even part of my good fortune not to be a house-owner," Nietzsche already wrote in the *Gay Science*. Today we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home [*nicht bei sich selber zu Hause zu sein*]. This gives some indication of the difficult relationship in which the individual now stands to his property, as long as he still possesses anything at all. The trick is to keep in view, and to express, the fact that private property no longer belongs to one, in the sense that consumer goods have become potentially so abundant that no individual has the right to cling to the principle of their limitation; but that one must nevertheless have possessions, if one is not to sink into that dependence and need which serves the blind perpetuation of property relations. But the thesis of this paradox leads to destruction, a loveless disregard for things which necessarily turns against people too; and the antithesis, no sooner uttered is an ideology for those wishing with a bad conscience to keep what they have. Wrong life cannot be lived rightly. [*Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen.*] (*MM* 38-9)

It is tempting to read a passage such as this as an elaborate apology for inaction: it begins by asserting that the best approach is "an uncommitted, suspended one," and concludes on a note of unremitting despair: "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly." We seem to be so thoroughly prevented from acting rightly that even our inaction is culpable. This passage seems like clear evidence that Adorno is, in fact, just a pessimist. The initial thesis of the passage (that we should take "an uncommitted, suspended" approach) precipitates in a piece of practical advice (keep your property, but don't fall under its spell), but the passage then proceeds to dialectically explode this advice. Either it leads to a self-congratulatory asceticism that thinks it can free itself of moral responsibility through charity, or it leads to a shameless apology for accumulation (I must preserve my privileges so that I can continue to fight the good fight against privilege). The point here is to

demonstrate that inaction is in fact the same thing as despair. This does not mean, of course, that the answer is to heroically leap into the fray. If "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly" then nothing which presupposes wrong life can ever be right. And so it is life itself that we must change. Adorno's argument here not only doesn't counsel inaction, it demonstrates that the impasse that faces both action and inaction is a demand that the conditions of action themselves be transformed. This demand has the same extremity as Jesus's injunction in the Sermon on the Mount: "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mtt. 5.48). This cannot simply be a regulating ideal since it's not an injunction to *try* to be perfect, any more than Adorno's argument allows one to simply *try* to act rightly. It is not enough, according to Jesus's reasoning, simply to do no wrong, nor simply to repress one's impulse to do wrong for the benefit of society: one must become the sort of person to whom it never even occurs to do wrong, a sort of person that does not yet exist.

Adorno and Christianity seem to coincide here, and I do not think it's a coincidence. Surprisingly frequently in *Minima Moralia* Adorno approvingly cites theological concepts, even the strange doctrine of Christendom concerning the resurrection of the flesh (*MM* 242). But often the text silently appropriates Christianity in such a way that it can be easily missed, as when Adorno advises philosophers that "they should try always to lose the argument, but in such a way as to convict their opponent of untruth" (*MM* 70). This is plainly an application to the sphere of intellectual life of the Christian doctrine of non-violence, according to which one places oneself in harm's way in

order to convict the violent in the court of their own hearts. The Christian doctrine concerning property produces much the same difficulties as Adorno's argument about private life in passage number two, and it is similarly susceptible of misreading. A man comes to Jesus and asks what he must do in order to enter the Kingdom of God, given that he keeps the commandments: "What," he says,

> "do I still lack?" Jesus said to him "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.
> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mtt. 19.20-4)

This piece of advice seems straightforward: only those with nothing will be saved. But if that is true, then giving all that one has to the poor necessarily involves condemning those whom you are attempting to help. In light of this, it seems almost better to hoard one's possessions at the cost of one's salvation rather than to propagate the pestilence of wealth. Even if one did set about to give everything away, it would be impossible to achieve the condition of having nothing at all without actually becoming nothing. In other words, we might see this as a variant of the paradox of the heap, that a merely quantitative subtraction is supposed to free one of the qualitative state of being rich. Hence, "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, 'Then who can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible'" (Mtt. 19.25-6). In other words, we are right to think that

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even giving everything away would not be enough.[132] Here again, both leaping into action and resigning ourselves to riches prove to be catastrophically inadequate to our moral obligations. And here, as in Adorno, those moral obligations are a product of the sheer fact that others are poor. As Adorno says elsewhere in *Minima Moralia,* in trying to describe what an emancipated society would look like, "There is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more" (*MM* 156). But the most important thing that connects these two arguments is that a question that seems to be a matter of personal right, and which is confined in the present to the sphere of private life, is in fact burdened with the weight of an *absolute* demand. In other words, ethics is inhabited by theology.

The question, then, is how it is possible to meet this demand. We can hardly just glue together a metaphysics that seeks to open "to human beings as a possibility that to which theology compels them" and a morality for which we must do what it is only possible for God to do. *Minima Moralia* itself opens with a declaration that its project is to do philosophy "from the standpoint of subjective experience" but then ends with a declaration that "The only philosophy which can be

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[132] The orthodox misreading of this statement sees it as emphasizing, in Paulist fashion, the primacy of *gratia gratis data* over *justitia ex operibus.* The point, however, is not *Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten,* but rather that salvation can only come about through the agency of the Absolute (which is not some being dwelling in the beyond or the Being of beings or any such paganism, but realized Spirit—the content of free collectivity), whereas right action is the proper domain of the individual. We need not choose between nature and grace; we need only realize that we may act rightly on our own but that we can redeem the world only by acting collectively, and, since right action is bound up with redemption, ethics (as *ethos*, personal virtue) must become morality (as *mores*, collective virtue). The truth of the human being is in the negativity through which it exceeds itself. Or, to put it another way, no-one is free until everyone is free.

responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption" (*MM* 18, 247). If we are to make sense of *Minima Moralia,* we must find a way to reconcile those two standpoints, to wear, so to speak, both the tiny uncomfortable shoes of man and the enormous clown shoes of God.

In the midst of criticizing Nietzsche for blind devotion to the category of genuineness, Adorno claims that "The self should not be spoken of as the ontological ground, but at the most theologically, in the name of its likeness to God. He who holds fast the self and does away with theological concepts helps to justify the diabolical positive, naked interest" (*MM* 154). To speak of the self "theologically" just is to speak of it "in the name of its likeness to God"—a likeness that the syntax of this construction presupposes. If the redemption of the world is linked to what is divine in human beings (or to the manner in which theology inhabits practice), then the crux to which this passage points is the relation between the human and the divine, a relation identified with the image (*Bild*) and thereby perhaps to the aesthetic.

One significant strand of the argument of *Aesthetic Theory* is the attempt to negotiate between a subject-aesthetics concerned with the perceiver of art and an object-aesthetics concerned with the artwork itself. Kant is particularly important for Adorno in terms of the former: "What is revolutionary in the *Critique of Judgment* is that without leaving the circle of the older effect-aesthetics Kant at the same time restricted it through immanent criticism; this is in keeping with the whole of his subjectivism, which plays a significant part in his

objective effort to save objectivity through the analysis of subjective elements" (*AT* 10). Kant, on Adorno's account, attempts to think what is objective about the subjective experience of art, thus pushing subject-aesthetics towards object-aesthetics. Hegel, by virtue of his insistence on conceiving substance as subject, pushes object-aesthetics reciprocally back towards subject-aesthetics. The missing element in this attempt to draw man-made things closer to man is that which is neither, namely Nature, which Hegel excludes from aesthetics up front and which Adorno seeks to reintroduce. Through the category of nature (and natural beauty), Adorno tries to think through what in the object is opaque to subjectivity, what in *Negative Dialectic* and elsewhere he calls the non-identical. The alienness of nature, on Adorno's account, contains the promise of something other than what is, however fragile that promise might be: "Natural beauty is the trace of the nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity. As long as this spell prevails, the nonidentical has no positive existence. Therefore natural beauty remains as dispersed and uncertain as what it promises, that which surpasses all human immanence" (*AT* 73). If nature "promises . . . that which surpasses all human immanence," then nature's promise is essentially transcendental, which is just to say theological. This shows why Adorno's theology cannot take an affirmative form (for example, a proof of the existence of God); theology in Adorno always marks the moment in which immanence is ruptured by something undialectical, and it is crucial for Adorno that this breaking-through is a breaking-out from within, not a messianic

interruption from elsewhere. Adorno goes on to link natural beauty to the experience of art:

> Involuntarily and unconsciously, the observer enters into a contract with the work, agreeing to submit to it on condition that it speak. In the pledged receptivity of the observer, pure self-abandonment—that moment of free exhalation in nature—survives. Natural beauty shares the weakness of every promise with that promise's inextinguishability. . . . Contrary to that philosopher of identity, Hegel, natural beauty is close to the truth but veils itself at the moment of greatest proximity. This, too, art learned from natural beauty. The boundary established against fetishism of nature—the pantheistic subterfuge that would amount to nothing but an affirmative mask appended to an endlessly repetitive fate—is drawn by the fact that nature, as it stirs mortally and tenderly in its beauty, does not yet exist. The shame felt in the face of natural beauty stems from the damage implicitly done to what does not yet exist by taking it for existent. The dignity of nature is that of the not-yet-existing; by its expression it repels intentional humanization. (*AT* 73-4)

So nature appears in both the experience of art, on the side of subject-aesthetics, and in the work of art itself, on the side of object aesthetics. In the end Adorno is interested in art, not nature, but through the category of nature he is able to get at what in art is alien to cognition. Artworks are made by human beings, and so can never *be* nature, but nature nevertheless emerges in art. This can take the form of the "genius" who appears in the passage from *Negative Dialektik* with which we began, who is able to bring into being "the self-awareness of nature in subjects," or it can take the form of the aesthetic observer in this passage from *Aesthetic Theory* who is willing to indulge in "pure self-abandonment," to lose his life in order to save it (Mtt. 16.25). As Adorno says earlier in *Aesthetic Theory*, "Human

beings are not equipped positively with dignity; rather, dignity would be exclusively what they have yet to achieve" (*AT* 62). Nature, then, whose "dignity . . . is that of the not-yet-existent" already has dignity but it does not have existence; human beings have only existence, and the element of nature calls out to them to achieve dignity, to realize what nature can only promise. Just so, Jesus emphasizes the immanence of the kingdom of God: "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within all of you [*entos humōn*]" (Lk. 17.20-1). There is no world beyond or behind this one, no life beyond this life, no messiah swooping down to rescue us on glittering pinions—to become other than we are is the entirety of our task. It is this possibility that metaphysics holds open by preserving theology.

If the vocation of philosophy is the teaching of the right life, then the vocation of art is to spur the transformation of consciousness that could bring that life into being. Art's promise dwells in its very opacity, since thinking the non-identical can hardly leave the thinking subject untransformed. Theology designates both the absoluteness of the demand that suffering come to an end as well as the hope that lies in becoming other than we are—the hope, we might say, in despair itself. If part of the lesson of Adorno's work is that it is not possible to escape metaphysics if one wants to think, then I would add that it is equally not possible to escape theology if one wants to act. Theology's vocation for Adorno is to function as the undialectical lever that teaches metaphysics how to inhabit both ethics and aesthetics while

preserving its negativity, as the infinite demand and the concrete enigma, to see in the very brokenness of the world some intimation of how it might be otherwise. And the vocation of poetry is to embody this consummate negativity of thought, for poetic language is essentially negative.

The language of Browning's poetry, if our discussion in the last chapter of *My Last Duchess* was any indication, embodies this negativity in a very emphatic way. And it is no coincidence that this negativity of Browning's poetic language cohabits with his persistent interest in the transcendental. The word *transcendental* was even one of the main sticks with which contemporary critics were keen to beat him. Carlyle's version of metaphysics bore much of the responsibility for the currency of the word *transcendentalism,* and one Browning biographer even suggests, though surely with tongue parked in cheek, that "Browning was not far from being a poetic Carlyle" (Irvine and Honan 84).

For Carlyle, of course, *transcendentalism* was a good thing, but it was no so with Browning's critics. One reviewer complained that Browning's long early poem *Sordello* "carries us too far into regions of *transcendentalism*" (*Athenaeum,* 30 May 1840); ten years later, "the *Athenaeum* critic of [Browning's] *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* censured the double-poem as 'highly transcendental', ruling that 'transcendentalism delivered in doggerel verse has … the effect of a discord'" (Browning, Oxford ed. 468; *Athenaeum,* 6 Apr. 1850). *Transcendental,* in other words, was more often than not a calumny against Browning's subject matter, and was often coupled with the

accusation that his style was needlessly esoteric. As G.K. Chesterton observes:

> There had been [before then] authors whom it was fashionable to boast of admiring and authors whom it was fashionable to boast of despising; but with *Sordello* enters into literary history the Browning of popular badinage, the author whom it is fashionable to boast of not understanding. (20-1)

In later years, from the members of the Browning Society, Browning received a more sympathetic audience—really *too* sympathetic an audience, since their praise put the man himself on edge. But Browning's reputation thus swung round entirely: from being accused of propounding transcendental blather in doggerel to being praised as one of the great Sages of the era. Both the abuse and the encomium are, of course, wrong-headed in their confusion between the properties of the poems and the mental states of the author (Browning did, after all, go to considerable trouble to emphasize that the speakers in his monologues were not him), but they provide a useful perspective for understanding just how negative a relation Browning's poems had with their historical moment.

One pair of recurring ideas in Browning's poetry is particularly illuminating on this point. According to G.K. Chesterton, who derives much of what he says from his understanding of *Saul* and book X of *The Ring & the Book*, it

> may be expressed in two comparatively parallel phrases. The first was what may be called the hope which lies in the imperfection of man[:]...the idea that some hope may always be based on deficiency itself[.]...The second of the great Browning doctrines requires some audacity to express. It can only be properly stated as the hope that lies in the imperfection of God. That is to say, that Browning held that sorrow and self-denial, if they were the burdens of man, were also his privileges. He held that

these stubborn sorrows and obscure valours might, to use a yet more strange expression, have provoked the envy of the Almighty. If man has self-sacrifice and God has none, then man has in the Universe a secret and blasphemous superiority. (105)

To put it in the terminology we began with, Browning's poetry has two cognitive vectors, both of them, in a crucial sense, negative: a metaphysics which points to theology, and a theology which points to metaphysics.

The ideal poetic form for reflecting on the imperfection of man is, of course, the dramatic monologue, the kind of lyric Browning is primarily known for and which he refined as no-one else has. The point of the dramatic monologue form is that one can attain to the truth of a whole drama through the fragmentary perspective of a single character, addressing a usually silent auditor. This notion is already implicit in Aristotle's observation in the *Poetics* that, although poems, like all artworks, are concrete particulars, "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since poetry rather speaks universally [*katholou*], whereas history speaks the particular [*hekaston*]" (1451b5-7, my trans.). Poetry is thus not like philosophy, which articulates the realm of the Concept through abstract propositions, but it is also not *merely* particular: it gets at the universal *through* the particular—the negativity of the particular's particularity. Since language is necessarily conceptual, poetry must turn language against itself in order to form a particularity irreducible to statement which nevertheless says something. And for this reason, we must turn to the subtle nuances of Browning's language if we are

to have any hope of articulating the thought which unfolds through his poems.

An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician is a piece of fictional New Testament apocrypha modeled on Paul's epistles. The year is 66AD and Karshish, a travelling Arab physician of genial temperament and highly rational, empirical cast of mind, is writing to his teacher Abib about his recent travels in the vicinity of Jerusalem, enumerating various diseases, cures, and medicines he has come across; in the midst of this, he mentions the subject which quickly dominates the contents of the letter: the curious case of a Jew he met who claimed to have been brought back to life by a physician of his tribe after he had been stone dead for three whole days. Karshish's diagnosis is that

'T is but a case of mania—subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days (79-81)

a condition which the "learned leech" (247) must have cured by some unknown medical means. He attempts to end the letter there, and repeatedly declares that he's going to stop writing and send it off, but he keeps returning to his conversation with this man Lazarus and his friends. Karshish finds the medical details intriguing, but even more so the strange things that Lazarus has said to him:

This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As—God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile! (267-70)

Karshish dwells himself on the case of Lazarus for a while, and the poem ends, somewhat ambivalently, on the brink of conversion. Most of the poem's 300-odd lines are taken up with Karshish's observations

about the strange things that Lazarus says and does, and it's understandable that Lazarus would be an interesting subject, both for Karshish and for Browning: he is brought back from the dead, mainly as a windup to Jesus declaring himself "the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25), and, having experienced Heaven for himself, is now stuck waiting around until the Day of Wrath so that he can get back. The poem puts us in Karshish's shoes, giving us an estranged perspective on these strange Biblical events.

The name "Karshish" is apparently derived from an Arabic word meaning "one who gathers," especially sticks; he translates his own name in the first line of the poem: "Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs." This is usually taken as an allusion to Matthew 15:27, in which "a non-Israelite woman claims help from Jesus, saying: 'yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the masters' table'" (Jack and Smith ed., 89). But a more illuminating Biblical parallel comes from the Acts of the Apostles, in which Paul, during his visit to Athens, is called by some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers a *spermologos*, which is usually translated as "babbler" (Acts 17:18). The Greek word in its literal sense refers to birds who pick up seeds (Gk. *sperma*), but is used metaphorically to refer to "one who picks up scraps of knowledge" (Liddell and Scott). This similarity of epithets suggests an analogy between Paul and Karshish, which is plausible considering that Paul also wanders around the ancient near east, periodically suffering beatings, imprisonment and expulsion from cities for his teachings. Similarly, Karshish writes:

> Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
> And once a town declared me for a spy. (32-3)

The analogy only goes so far, since Karshish is looking to learn things and Paul is looking to teach them, but Karshish functions in this poem as something of an apostle to us positivist moderns, just as Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. Karshish is, like many of Browning's contemporaries, vaguely theistic (in the second line, he calls himself "The not-incurious in God's handiwork") but in substance he is a materialist, deeming what can be experienced by the senses the primary criterion of truth. He functions, then, as a point of identification for the Victorian *Zeitgeist*. Karshish also differs from Paul in that he does not speak directly of Christ, but of Lazarus, who in turn speaks of Christ, thus adding another link in the chain of mediations, a further remove from any affirmative theological declarations.

To a very similar extent, there's an analogy in the poem between Lazarus and Christ, most importantly in that both are figures for mediation. The mediation represented by Christ is at the very heart of Christianity: the incarnation. For Browning, the incarnation and crucifixion fulfill "the hope that lies in the imperfection of God": once God has suffered and died on the cross, man no longer has this "secret and blasphemous superiority." Christ is, for Browning, the realization of divine love, the mediating element in the trinity of God the father, who represents power, and the holy spirit, who represents knowledge. Christ thus mediates not just the relation between God and man but the relation between God and himself. Just as Christ as mediator addresses "the hope that lies in the imperfection of God," Lazarus addresses "the hope that lies in the imperfection of man." But Lazarus

is very far from preaching either like Jesus or like Paul: Karshish writes,

> Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
> The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,
> Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do:
> How can he give his neighbor the real ground,
> His own conviction? (213-7)

Lazarus' inability to provide "the real ground" suggests that if he is a figure for mediation, it must be a mediation which is very different from Christ's, somehow incomplete.

One section of the poem is especially illuminating of the nature of Karshish's position, and it constitutes a sort of lens through which the rest of the poem comes into focus:

> He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
> (It is the life to lead perforcedly)
> Which runs across some vast distracting orb
> Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
> Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
> The spiritual life around the earthly life:
> The law of that is known to him as this,
> His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
> So is the man perplext with impulses
> Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
> Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
> And not along, this black thread through the blaze—
> 'It should be' baulked by 'here it cannot be.' (178-90)

One line that stands out right away is the second (179), a parenthetical interjection that is the only moment in the passage that smacks of editorializing. It is conspicuous if for no other reason than that the more you look at it the less clear its meaning is. One way to understand it is on analogy with constructions like *It is the car to drive* or *It is the way to go*. Both of those suggest that there are available alternatives, other cars and other ways, but that the specified

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alternative is the best of these; so Browning's line might be glossed as 'It is the life one *should* lead,' suggesting that, even if this isn't the best of all possible worlds, this is the best of all possible lives. This reading implies, however, that Lazarus has some sort of choice, that he can choose another life, but the fact that this is not so is enforced by the odd word "perforcedly," which means something like 'of necessity.' In other words, the line does not mean 'It is the life one should lead,' but rather 'It is the life one *must* lead.' The word 'perforce,' deriving from the Middle French *par force,* literally 'by force,' originally meant, according to the *OED,* "by application of physical force or violence," and was later weakened to "by constraint of circumstances." This peculiar adverbial form of the word, *perforcedly,* is listed in the *OED* with only a single citation—this poem. What it suggests is that Lazarus is not so much leading as being led, dragged along violently by God and circumstance. He is trapped in the sphere of immanence, which obviously, if he did have a choice, he would get out of but quick, and the necessity that binds him is both earthly and divine. This is exactly the opposite of Jesus, the pathos of whose self-sacrifice comes from his willingness to suffer and die.

But although Lazarus is thus penned into immanence, he cannot reconcile himself to it because of the "vast distracting orb / Of glory" that he is "conscious of." One thing which this passage dramatically underscores, and which I will come back to presently, is the figure of the poetic line itself, identified at various points with the "thread of life" that Lazarus "holds on firmly to." Here the "orb / Of glory" runs over the line break, connecting through syntax what the

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lineation interrupts, and thereby suggesting the fullness of transcendent meaning to which Lazarus is denied access. The "orb / Of glory," in other words, can't be contained either by the line of life or by the line of verse. He is nevertheless conscious enough of that sphere to be tormented by its inaccessibility. The word *distract* originally meant "to rend into parts or sections; to divide," and here it indicates not just the fact that Lazarus is pulled in different directions but that his torment is the consciousness of the gulf between immanence and transcendence.

This divide finds explicit form in line 183: "The spiritual life around the earthly life," a balanced and symmetrical line, verbless and static. Moreover, it is not syntactically related to either the previous or to the following lines, and no nearby verb applies to it: it is suspended, hanging on nothing like Lazarus's "thread of life" itself. The split between transcendence and immanence that it names is complicated, however, in the following line, which only implicitly symmetrical: "The law of that is known to him as this." The most plausible reading of this line is, assuming that the deictics refer to the entities in the previous line: 'The law of the spiritual life is known to him as the law of the earthly life.' But the ellipsis of words that would qualify "this" opens the possibility of other readings, like 'The law of the spiritual life is known to him as *the earthly life itself*.' One reading suggests that the transcendent law gives the rule to immanence; the other reading suggests that the sphere of immanence is his only access to the transcendent law. On top of marking the gulf between transcendence and immanence, this line thus also brings into play an ambiguity

about whether Lazarus has access to transcendence immediately or only mediated through this world—and it's a matter of some importance because the latter reading can always slide into the *justification* of this world, imagining that the world with all its horrors is as it should be. The tension between transcendence and immanence is thus linked to the tension between Ought and Is.

In the following line, this gulf is registered in Lazarus himself, as if he were a monad of the divided cosmos: "His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here." The asymmetry and movement introduced through the ambiguity of the previous line is fully realized here in the explicit opposition between *move* and *stay* and in an asymmetrical division of the self in which one side has two terms, "heart and brain," and the other has only "feet." The transition from asymmetrical, hypotactic constructions in the first five lines to symmetrical, paratactic constructions in the following three is thus internally reversed within those three by an increasing drift toward internal asymmetry. The tripartite division in Lazarus's internal constitution even roughly mirrors Browning's trinity of knowledge, love and power, though power finds incomplete expression in Lazarus's immobile "feet." The love and knowledge that correspond to Lazarus'a "heart and brain" are stranded in transcendence, unable, so it seems, to come down to earth and allow Lazarus "to give his neighbor the real ground / [of] His conviction."

But the following line, which swiftly drags us back into hypotaxis, shows how knowledge and love, even though inaccessible, continue to affect him: "So is the man perplext with impulses /

Sudden to start off crosswise." These "impulses" that perplex him seem to have crossed the gulf between transcendence and immanence, but they appear as prodigies, marked by the peculiar line break: "Sudden" is an adjective modifying "impulses," but the two have been both inverted and divided by the line break, injecting a jagged energy that directs him "to start off crosswise," against the grain of the "thread of life" to which he clings "perforcedly" as it sweeps him into the current. The twisting and rupture the lineation presents here is underscored by the use of the word *perplex*, which in English originally had an abstract, psychological meaning, *viz.*, "to fill (a person) with uncertainty as to the nature or treatment of a thing by reason of its involved or intricate character," but later developed the concrete meaning of "render[ing] (a thing) intricate or complicated in character and hence difficult to understand" and "caus[ing] to become tangled." The Latin word which it derives from, *perplexus,* followed exactly the opposite trajectory, referring originally to things being "interwoven, entangled, involved, intricate" and moving toward the abstract psychological meaning of perplexity. The intervention of the transcendent in the person of Lazarus has the effect of tangling his line of life and tangling the lines of verse, dragging the reader against the current of the syntax.

These interwoven lines continue to describe the divine impulses to which Lazarus is subject as specifically moral, impelling Lazarus to proclaim "what is right and wrong across, / And not along, this black thread through the blaze." The internal rhyme between "wrong" and "along" associates the morally defective with the sphere of immanence,

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the habit of proceeding along the "thread of life" as if it were the only reality. The impetus to violate this condition, to remake the world as Heaven or to demand that it be so remade, remains merely an impetus; Lazarus cannot fulfill the command in action as Christ fulfills the plan for salvation in undergoing the crucifixion. He remains bound to "this black thread through the blaze," the sphere of immanence whose tightly woven net is registered in the rigid equivalences of alliteration: "this" and "the," "thread" and "through," "black" and "blaze." The movement of his "heart and brain" cannot be realized, and for this reason, the "thread of life" becomes "this black thread," a body which absorbs the divine light without remainder. Thus the passage ends with another assertion of the gulf between transcendence and immanence, Ought and Is, but this time, unlike "The spiritual life around the earthly life," the line has a verb, which leaves the world abject and horrifying, untouched by heavenly fire: "'It should be' baulked by 'here it cannot be.'"

Lazarus is here seemingly the opposite of Christ, bearing the seal not of hope but of despair. But as Adorno observes in *Negative Dialektik,* "Consciousness could not even despair over the grey, did it not harbor the notion of a different color, whose dispersed traces are not absent in the negative whole" (370). Lazarus could not suffer despair at all had he not seen Heaven first-hand; he could not lament the course of the world were he not painfully conscious of the way the world should be. Lazarus suffers from the demand of theology that the world be redeemed, without finding any comfort in theology's promises—not "the hope that lies in the imperfection of man" but 'the

hope that lies in the despair of redemption.' He is a figure for fruitless waiting, and embodies the position of metaphysics, which gazes across the gulf at what should be the case but which it cannot think, much less bring into being by Divine *fiat.* Lazarus' 'thread of life' that 'runs a*cross* some vast distracting orb / Of glory,' his 'impulses / …to start off *cross*wise, … / Proclaiming what is right and wrong a*cross*'—all of these, drifting outward in the course of the passage, echo that other cross which symbolizes the paradox and conflict at the heart of Christianity—an infinite demand to which only God can be adequate but to which we must nevertheless strain, always falling short. We ourselves are, so to speak, nailed to the cross of metaphysics.

Appendix A

Micrological Theses

Critical Maxims

- ❖ The aim of art is to induce thought; the aim of entertainment is to discourage thought.
- ❖ A poem is, *in itself*, quite useless; *for readers*, its use is to make them think.
- ❖ Poetry is true to the world as it is by being true to the world as it might be.
- ❖ Poems are immanently historical but transcendentally ahistorical.
- ❖ Poems demand interpretation but elude interpretations.
- ❖ Interpretations are made, not found.
- ❖ There are many true interpretations, in a vast sea of false ones.
- ❖ The one true meaning of a poem is in the conflict of its many true meanings.
- ❖ The critic learns what to argue by arguing, just as the swimmer learns to swim by swimming.
- ❖ The true critic does not think about herself through the poem; the true critic allows the poem to think about itself through her.
- ❖ Criticism is the art of fine disticions.
- ❖ Criticism sees the individual in the general; Science sees the general in the individual.
- ❖ Criticism moves from the inside out, Science from the outside in.
- ❖ Science wants to know what will happen; Criticism wants to be

surprised.

❖ Science sees the simple in the complex; Criticism sees the complex in the simple.

Critical Theses

AXIOM: The method of literary criticism must be an *immanent* rather than a transcendent method, i.e., its methodology is to discover its interpretive method *within the work itself,* rather than arriving at the work with a prior interpretive method.

> *Remark 1.* This axiom follows of necessity from the fact that the status of a poem as a poem is linked to its particularity (which prevents it from being a possible object of science). As Aristotle says in *Poetics* 1451b5-7: "Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since poetry rather speaks universally [*katholou*], whereas history speaks the particular [*hekaston*]" (my translation) [*dio kai philosophôteron kai spoudaioteron poiêsis historias estin: hê men gar poiêsis mallon ta katholou, hê d'historia ta kath'hekaston legei*]. Literature is thus not philosophy (which speaks the universal universally) or history (which speaks the particular particularly) because its universality is mediated by particularity. See also, Wimsatt, "The Concrete Universal," in *The Verbal Icon.*

Remark 2. To come to a work of literature with a positive interpretive methodology (i.e., a methodology with any particular content) is to presume to read the work in advance of reading it. Immanent criticism is not as difficult as it sounds, since it is, in truth, what most of us do in practice (who decides to write an essay on a work they have never read?). The question is not whether or not to do immanent criticism, but whether or not one will do it knowingly, deliberately, and *rigorously.*

Remark 3. This stricture does not preclude a strictly *descriptive* methodology (namely, linguistics), since description does not presume to know the particularity of the work but only presumes to know the language the work is in—which indeed one must know in advance of reading since one would otherwise be unable to read the work.

Example. If a critic came to a work with the presumption that it was bound to subvert the prevailing ideologies of the time in which it was written, the critic would presume to know the work in advance of knowing it and the critic would find only his own reflection on the opaque surface of the work.

Reference. See Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" in *Prismen,* and "Der Essay als Form" in *Noten zur Literatur.* See also Hegel, *PhS* 54ff.

THE FOUR CAUSES: Aristotle argues that there are four kinds of 'why' questions we can address to a thing, four kinds of 'causes' we might seek ('cause' is *aition,* which can mean something more like *explanation* than *cause*): (1) The Formal Cause: What kind of thing is it? (2) The Material Cause: What is it made of? (3) The Efficient Cause: Who made it as it is? (4) The Final Cause: What is it for?

Reference 1. "Now that we have established these distinctions, we must proceed to consider causes, their character and number. Knowledge is the object of our inquiry, and men do not think they know a thing till they have grasped the 'why' of it (which is to grasp its primary cause). So clearly we too must do this as regards both coming to be and passing away and every kind of natural change, in order that, knowing their principles, we my try to refer to these principles each of our problems.

"In one way, then, that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists, is called a cause, e.g. the bronze of the statue, the silver of the bowl, and the genera of which the bronze and silver are species.

"In another way, the form or archetype, i.e. the definition of the essence, and its genera, are called causes (e.g. of the octave the relation of 2:1, and generally number), and the parts in the definition.

"Again, the primary source of the change or rest; e.g. the man who deliberated is a cause, the father is

cause of the child, and generally what makes of what is made and what changes of what is changed.

"Again, in the sense of end or that for the sake of which a thing is done, e.g. health is the cause of walking about. ('Why is he walking about?' We say: 'To be healthy', and, having said that, we think we have assigned the cause.) The same is also true of all the intermediate steps which are brought about through the action of something else as means toward the end, e.g. reduction of flesh, purging, drugs, or surgical instruments are means toward health. All these things are for the sake of the end, though they differ from one another in that some are activities, others instruments." (Arist. *Physics* 194b16-195a3)

Reference 2. "Evidently we have to acquire knowledge of the original causes (for we say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause), and causes are spoken of in four senses. In one of these we mean the substance, i.e. the essence (for the 'why' is referred finally to the formula [λόγος], and the ultimate 'why' is a cause and principle); in another the matter or substratum, in a third the source of the change, and in a fourth the cause opposed to this, that for the sake of which and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change)." (Arist. *Metaphysics* 983a24-34)

I. THE FORMAL CAUSE: WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE AESTHETIC?

1. Natural objects have their formal causes within themselves.

Example. An acorn becomes a tree by virtue of the nature of the acorn; nothing about the sun or the water which make this change possible determines that the acorn specifically become a tree, or indeed that it change at all.

Remark. Linguistic development is similarly inner-directed, and so it must be defined in terms of its essential properties not in terms of environment, which precludes a behaviorist conception of language—it would be just as plausible as a behaviorist theory of how an acorn becomes an oak. As Chomsky says, it would actually make more sense to talk about 'language growth' than to talk about 'language learning' ("Language and Nature" 13-5).

Reference. See Aristotle, *Physics* 192b9ff.

2. Artificial objects have their formal causes outside of themselves.

Example. Wood becomes a coffin or a coffer because an external agent, the carpenter, makes it a coffin or a coffer.

Remark. With both natural and artificial objects, their efficient causes are outside themselves, and the efficient cause is a sufficient explanation only of the object's bare existence not, for example, its significance or its *ousia.*

3. Aesthetic objects are non-instrumental (autotelic) artificial objects (see IV below).

4. Works of literature are aesthetic objects made of language (see II below).

II. THE MATERIAL CAUSE: WHAT IS LITERATURE MADE OF?

1. Literature is made of language. More precisely, *Literature is made of sentences.*

> *Remark 1.* A random string of words, however amusing, might be a work of art of some kind, but it could not be a poem or a work of prose fiction. The term *literature* is misleading in this sense, since for most of its history it refers to anything written, i.e., composed in letters, *litteræ.* The otherwise attractive German term *Wortkunst* is also misleading since literature is not really word-art but sentence-art.
>
> *Remark 2.* The fact that literature is made out of sentences distinguishes works of literature from other kinds of aesthetic objects (which might be made out of granite or paint or noise), but it lumps literature together with some communicative acts, which is a source of much confusion about the meaning of literary works (see III below).
>
> *Remark 3.* The fact that literature is made of language means that linguistics is a *necessary* prerequisite to literary study in a way that even history is not: we can imagine a theory of literature that denied that works of literature had any historical content whatsoever, however mistaken such a theory would be, whereas *we cannot even*

imagine a theory of literature that denied that it was made of language. It follows that we are all doing linguistics, in the sense of presupposing and employing a theory of language, and the only question is whether we are going to do linguistics well or to do it badly (i.e., have plausible or implausible views about how human languages work).

Reference. See also Kiparsky, "The Role of Linguistics in a Theory of Poetry": "the linguistic sames that are potentially relevant in poetry are just those which are potentially relevant in grammar." For an accessible discussion of the premises of the current theory of language, see the first two chapters of Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use* (1986).

2. Poems are made of *lineated sentences.*

Remark. The fact of being broken up into lines is the sole feature that distinguishes poetry from prose fiction, and it follows that many syntactic phenomena that are of independent interest (e.g., ungrammaticality and ambiguity) will be just as significant in prose as in poetry. Poetry adds the additional problem of lineation, which produces a complex dialectic between syntactic and non-syntactic units. There is some evidence that producing lineated language is a fundamental feature of the genetic endowment of the species, and in most cultures the bulk of the literary tradition—if not its entirety—is verse. Prose

fiction is not thereby a lesser form, but it should be understood in its proper historical place.

Remark 2. In some ways *poetry* is a misleading term since it has often had a normative force that allowed it to encompass various works that were not lineated and to exclude various works that were. The most appropriate terms is clearly *verse*, since it designates lineation both etymologically and as commonly used, but that word has the limitation of lacking a form that corresponds to *poem.*

3. Lineation can be constituted by one or more of the following determinations:

Remark. These four can constitute the line, as well as performing other functions, but their bearing on interpretation will be exhaustively mediated by the line. A particular rhyme, for example, will not have significance independent of the sentences and lines in which it appears; its significance will unfold only through those sentences and lines.

a. Phonological Patterning (i.e., meter; see Appendix B)

Reference. Kiparsky, "The rhythmic structure of English verse," *Linguistic Inquiry* 8.2 (1977).

b. Phonetic Patterning (e.g., rhyme or alliteration)

Remark. This is the one area in which there is much to be learned from the structuralist tradition, e.g., Jakobson and Levi-Strauss's essay on Baudelaire's *Les Chats.* The reason for this is that, despite the failure of structuralism

to produce a plausible theory of human language in general, structuralism can be credited with some of the most important developments in phonetics in this century, particularly the feature system.

c. {Typography}

Remark. This only effectively constitutes the line, obviously, when the text is written; in an oral performance, this distinction would be lost, so this is not a systematically reliable means of constituting the line.

d. {Performance}

Remark. One could certainly mark line breaks with pauses in a performance, but one could always perform a poem without such line breaks, so this is not a systematically reliable means of constituting the line (hence the prominence of phonological and phonetic patterning in every literary tradition).

III. THE EFFICIENT CAUSE: WHAT OF THE AUTHOR?

1. In communicative uses of language, the linguistic facts are strictly *instrumental* and therefore *contingent* and *eliminable.*

Remark. Communication isn't even necessarily linguistic, so the linguistic medium is in fact *radically contingent.* A person who is trying to communicate uses language, if at all, just to cause a mental representation (of some kind) to arise in the mind of her interlocutor that corresponds (in some sense) to a mental representation in her own mind.

2. In works of literature, the linguistic facts are *necessary* and *ineliminable:* the work just is a specific set of sentences (with line breaks, if verse).

> *Remark.* In practice, we do not have any difficulty distinguishing a paraphrase of a poem from the poem itself. If we run across a sentence that reads, "I don't know whether to live or die, sink or swim, piss or get off the pot," we may be reading something with its own manner of charm but we are not reading *Hamlet.*

3. Therefore, by *modus tollens*, works of literature cannot be communicative uses of language.

> *Remark.* Or to put it another way, the linguistic facts about a poem are not merely *instrumental* in relation to the poem (whereas the linguistic facts about an utterance *are* merely instrumental in relation to a communicative act). In this sense, poems are *autotelic* (see section IV below).

4. In communicative uses of language, the utterances or expressions mean just what their author intends them to mean, regardless of what the sentences mean independently: a correct interpretation corresponds to what the author intended to communicate.

> *Remark.* The word *mean* conceals an equivocation here. When we say *Sally meant that she was sorry*, we use the word *mean* to refer to Sally's intention, not the meaning of the words she used; whereas when we say *'diurnal' means*

'daily' we refer to the meaning of the word regardless of what anyone might have intended to communicate by using it.

Example. If Sally from San Francisco says, while standing knee-deep in a snow bank, *Lovely weather you have here in Ithaca,* we are surely correct if we understand the meaning of her communicative act to be that the weather is horrible, even though the sentence she actually uttered says the opposite. The criterion of correctness for the interpretation of a communicative act is the intention of its author, regardless of whether or not we have any access to the information that would be salient to determining whether a given interpretation satisfies that criterion. In most cases, we are obliged to rely on guesswork to interpret communicative acts, and it is difficult to imagine a circumstance in which we could be absolutely certain that we have interpreted a sentence correctly—but it is the author's intention that we are trying to guess.

Remark. One interesting consequence of this fact is that a sentence *qua* communicative act cannot be ambiguous, even if it is formally so. In any actual communicative use, a sentence like *Someone at every tomato* will be taken in only one sense and the hearer will probably not even notice that it is formally ambiguous. Even if a hearer misunderstood what was being communicated because of a formal ambiguity and later corrected himself, he would

still in each case be dealing only with a single meaning. At no point in a communicative act does a sentence have more than one mutually exclusive meaning for a particular hearer. There's nothing ambiguous about Archie Bunker's "What's the difference?"; both he and his wife understand the sentence in only one way, and the difference between their interpretations marks their failure to communicate, not any deep complexity in language. Yeats's "How can we know the dancer from the dance?", however, is in fact ambiguous, and is, in itself, both rhetorical and non-rhetorical at the same time in the sense that it can legitimately license both readings; to understand the poem itself, then, we must interpret the conflict of interpretations it produces. See DeMan, "Semiology and Rhetoric" in *Allegories of Reading*, and Cavell, "The Politics of Interpretation (Politics as Opposed to What?)" in *Themes Out of School.*

5. Since works of literature are not communicative uses of language, and since the linguistic facts that constitute the work of literature are necessary and not contingent, works of literature mean what their sentences mean, regardless of what their author intended them to mean: textual evidence and valid inferences therefrom are the sole criteria of the truth of an interpretation.

> *Remark 1.* The comparison of poems with communicative acts involves some inherent equivocation since an interpretation of a communicative act can only be *correct*

or *incorrect* not *true* or *false,* whereas an interpretation of a work of literature can be *true* or *false* but not *correct* or *incorrect,* where truth has metaphysical content (as the unfolding of actuality).

Remark 2. If the author's views are not the criterion of meaning, it follows that the author's personal defects do not vitiate the value of his work as art. Wagner's repulsive anti-Semitism or David Mamet's shameless apologetics for the Jews-only state, neither renders their works politically suspect unless those works are politically suspect in themselves (as with the explicitly anti-Semitic elements of *Parsifal*).

Reference. The classic statement of the anti-intentionalist position is Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" in Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon,* though I prefer the formulations in Wimsatt's later essay, benefiting as it does from hindsight, "Genesis: An Argument Resumed" in *Day of the Leopards.* As he puts it there: "the intention of a literary artist qua intention as neither a valid ground for arguing the presence of a quality or a meaning in a given instance of his literary work nor a valid criterion for judging the value of that work" (12).

IV. The Final Cause: What is Literature for?

A. The End of Literature: Interpretation

1. In themselves (that is, immanently) artworks do not have an external end (III.1), but *for a reader* (that is, transcendently) they do have an external end, namely interpretation.

> *Remark* This point is analogous in certain respects to Kant's claim in the third critique that artworks have "purposiveness without purpose" (5:236), though Kant's account has to do with the experience of art rather than the interpretation of it or the reflection on it, which is why he has such trouble attributing cognitive content to artworks. This point is also closely related to Adorno's account of the *Rätselcharakter* ('enigma-character') of art, for which see *AT* 118-36.

2. Works of literature are inherently particular (I.rem1), but if meaning depends on universality then they must be have a orientation towards universality, a universality mediated by particularity, by virtue of which it can be an object of interpretation.

3. The criterion of truth of an interpretation is the text itself (axiom), and it follows that interpretation is an objective (rather than a subjective) matter—its truth or falsity is an objective feature of the text. But different critics notice different things, and bring the objective features of the text to bear on each other in unique ways, possibly an unbounded number of unique ways. And since interpretation is a transcendent, rather than an immanent, feature of the text, it must be a phenomenon of the critic. Thus interpretation is

objective, but it is a kind of objectivity mediated by the critic's subjectivity: the self-reflection of the object, which only criticism makes possible.

4. Poems are only instantiated temporally, in an act of reading, recitation or recollection (a poem's physical, written form is really only *potentially* an instance of the poem, a potentially heavily dependent on readers). This means that poems, even when instantiated, are not *things* that *persist* through time but *events* that *become*. Nevertheless, we can speak of a poem as a coherent object insofar as it is constituted as a set of linguistic facts (even though this is an abstraction from any particular instantiation). In this sense, the poem can only be an object in retrospect; or, to put it another way, the poem, as a whole object, is never read but only *recollected* (in Hegel's sense of *erinnert*, 'interiorized'). The poem as a set of linguistic facts in recollection is all the unity a poem has or needs.

5. If the criterion of truth is the text of the poem itself (axiom), then the only information relevant to the text would be information that is in the text already. But the meaning of the text's words will usually depend on the world outside the text (e.g., Marvell's *Horatian Ode* does not explain who Cromwell is, but the accurate interpretation of the poem depends on extra-textual information). Some kind of extra-textual information will therefore be relevant, and we need, therefore, a criterion of salience to judge particular cases. The criterion of salience is the same as the criterion of truth: the text itself. Criticism remains immanent, as long as the text is the final criterion. Cromwell is relevant to Marvell's *Horatian Ode* because Cromwell is

what the poem is about. There may even be cases in which a systematic (rather than an accidental) omission may make something determinately not mentioned in the poem relevant. There is no way to know in advance what will turn out to be relevant, and in each case an argument must be presented to justify a particular piece of information's claim to salience.

B. The End of Interpretation: Reflection & Social Transformation

1. In order to act effectively, one must act in accordance with a rule (what Kant calls *practice*) rather than just acting randomly or acting on impulse (what Kant calls a *mere doing*) (8:275). If, therefore, we are to create a world better than the present one, we must have some rule to guide our actions toward the creation of that world. This means that any practice presupposes reflection and deliberation. Thought is the precondition of right action.

2. If works of literature are, by nature, enigmatic (that is, they are so constructed as to demand thought on the part of a reader), then it follows that they can have a direct impact on thought and thus an indirect impact on the creation of a better world. Literature and literary study are often lamented for their failure to transform the world, but the lament is simply mistaken: literature transforms the world by transforming individual minds, one by one. Even minute transformations in a single mind—a tiny *clinamen* of thought—may have enormous and far-reaching implications. And the immediate

effect of literature is the demand of thought, which is intrinsically morally improving.

3. Moreover, the transformation of the individual consciousness is not just something that must take place in order for the world to change; that transformation is the change in the world that we seek. Human beings have developed an advanced technological society that, unlike the condition of nature, makes it possible to put an end to suffering and exploitation. But suffering and exploitation continue as human creations, not merely as a consequence of our subjection to nature. Therefore it is the human consciousness that must be changed—beginning with one's own.

4. More specifically, the individual must, through reflection, recognize itself as socially constituted—not as *individual* in the etymological sense (where it translates the Greek *atom*) but as a creature of reflection, a creature made to exceed itself, to stand outside of itself and look in. This means that there is no such thing as individual freedom, but only collective freedom, that freedom can only be predicated of the social whole: humanity is free or unfree, not humans.

> *Remark* The libertarian individualist (who thinks that freedom is the highest good, but thinks freedom is a property of individuals) is committed to the idea that the master is free though his slave is in chains. The slave, in his view, is also free in a sense—free to rise up, free to break his bonds—but deserves his chains if he does not seize his freedom. But if the slave breaks his bonds and

flees, *the master will chase him.* This is because the master's freedom (not just his mastery) is bound to the slave's unfreedom, and so the master is in fact unfree, chained to domination. The slave is unfree as well, but in a very trivial sense: the slave dominates no-one, which why, when the slave breaks his bonds, he may run wherever he wants. The master thought to make himself free, but he has made himself a slave; to be free, he need only cease to be a master. When the time comes, the rich will burn their own yachts, and their hearts will be filled with joy.

5. This property of the individual—that its reflection is an exceeding of itself—is what is divine in human beings (i.e., what is not the mere finitude of sex or race but is pure *homo cogitans*). Just as in Hegel, the absolute is that in particularity that is more than merely particular (not, for example, something above or beyond the particular), so the divine in the human is becoming more than oneself. Since literature arrives as the demand of thought, literature is not merely a stimulus to the precondition of right life (where the demand of thought must come before the demand of action), but is a means by which human beings make themselves into realizations of the absolute through the realization of their innate negativity. Literature makes us other than we are, the world other than it is. Such is the divine life that shatters the malevolent social system formed by those enemies of the human race, states and corporations (or coercive social institutions of any kind). There are two outcomes in this conflict

between states & corporations and the human race: either we exterminate them (nonviolently rescuing the humans who collaborate with states and corporations from their error) or they exterminate us. The aim of politics is therefore simple: a world without bosses and without borders. The means are many, but the vocation of criticism is to be one of them.

Appendix B

A Brief Guide to Generative Metrics

The name *generative metrics* is a source of confusion, and at this point should probably just be jettisoned. Unfortunately, it is the usual name given to any theory of meter which includes claims about phonology based on current linguistics, and so I have been obliged to use it here. One problem with the name is that it calls to mind the "generative phonology" that Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle proposed in *The Sound Pattern of English* (1968), a set of proposals that were not as successful as Chomsky's "generative" approach to syntax. The name *generative metrics* is thus misleading in that most of the theories of meter it is supposed to designate do not, in fact, presuppose Chomsky & Halle's generative phonology. The main theory that does actually deserve the name *generative metrics*, then, is Halle and Keyser's *English Stress* (1971), since it does presuppose generative phonology. The theory of meter described in this handout, on the other hand, assumes the phonological theory of Liberman and Prince (associated with tree-type representations), which is one of the two main theories that are current in metrical phonology (the other being associated with grid-type representations).[133]

The other problem with the name is that the word *generative* suggests something like a theory of creation or production, i.e., that a "generative" theory of syntax would be a theory of how sentences are "generated" by speakers of a language, an so analogously a

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[133] See Hogg & McCully for details.

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"generative" theory of meter would be an account of composing or performing metered verse. Chomsky's use of the term in the 1950s and 60s, however, was derived from formal systems (not from biology), and in essence it just meant *explicit*—neither generative syntax nor the theory of meter described here purports to be an account of the actual mechanism of processing linguistic objects. Chomsky has since largely abandoned the use of the term, and it rarely appears in work under the current framework in syntax (the "minimalist program").[134] The term *generative,* in other words, was just supposed to indicate that the theory seeks to satisfy one of the basic conditions for being a scientific theory; those conditions are (1) *explicitness* (i.e., the theory must have no undefined terms, unstated assumptions, &c.), (2) *generality* (i.e., it must have the largest scope possible within a natural kind; a theory of meter that accounts for every poet writing in a particular language is better than a theory that only works for Swinburne poems beginning with the letter *L*), (3) *falsifiability,* in the sense elaborated in Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (i.e., it must be possible *in principle* to prove the theory's claims false by appeal to some kind of independent evidence),[135] and (4) *economy* (if two theories are equivalently successful in every other respect, then we choose the

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[134] See the Introduction for a brief overview of recent developments in theoretical linguistics.

[135] In case this term isn't familiar, here are a few examples: *All cows are mortal* is both falsifiable and true (since we both have access to salient evidence and the evidence does in fact bear out the claim); *All cows have 700 legs* is falsifiable but false (since we have access to salient evidence and the evidence contradicts the claim); *All cows are happy* is not falsifiable, and therefore we cannot determine whether it is true or false (since we don't have access to salient evidence). Falsifiability is, of course, a weaker condition than verifiability; for more details, see Popper.

simpler of the two). A theory of phonology must meet these criteria, as must a theory of meter (where a *theory of meter* is a descriptive account of metrical patterns in linguistic objects, *not* a methodology for interpretation or an account of writing or reading).

A theory of meter also should meet a few additional criteria, namely (1) *independent motivation* (i.e., any terminology, concepts or theories used to describe linguistic facts should be legitimated by the study of language in general, not merely by the study of verse, which is just to say that one's phonology should be up to date and that one's linguistic descriptions should be consistent with the findings of current phonology),[136] (2) *descriptive adequacy* (i.e., the theory must accurately predict the relevant intuitions of native speakers; in other words, it must designate as unmetrical all and only the lines that are in fact unmetrical), (3) *syntactic salience* (i.e., its formalizations ought to be as close as possible to the formalizations of syntax, since putting the theory to use in interpretation will depend upon the relation between phonological and syntactic structure),[137] and (4) *economy* (as above; an inordinately complex theory of meter is likely to be wrong since people perceive metrical patterns unconsciously, with relative ease, and in the absence of explicit training).

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[136] See Kiparsky, "The Role of Linguistics in a Theory of Poetry" for some useful reflections on this point, though I take issue with some of what he says in my Chapter 2 above.

[137] See Chapter 5 for further discussion of the line and its relationship to meter. This requirement is part of what makes Kiparsky's theory (based on the Liberman and Prince tree-type phonology) preferable to the new theory offered by Halle and Keyser (in "On Meter in General and on Robert Frost's Loose Iambics in Particular"), which is based on a grid-type phonology whose formalizations are more remote from those of syntax.

The aim of a theory of meter is to provide a descriptive account of phonological regularities in versified language. When we say that a poem has a meter, what we mean is that there are rhythmic (phonological) regularities among two or more lines.[138] It is important to note that meter is a property of the poem, not a property of the reader or the performer of the poem. In order for a theory of meter to provide an objective account of English meter (rather than something like a phenomenology of the experience of verse rhythm, which would be a legitimate but completely different exercise),[139] it must give an account of the rhythmic regularities that would obtain in any performance that didn't violate the rules of English phonology. We might say, to put it more strongly, that in order for there even to *be* such a thing as English meter, there must be such regularities.

The phonology of English, however, allows considerable variation in the rhythmic structure of any particular sentence. So, for example, a sentence like *The cheese is on the table*, if performed as neutrally as possible, will have its strongest stress on the first syllable of *table,* and another stress on *cheese,* but the rest of the words in the sentence will be essentially unstressed. But it is perfectly possible to add contrastive or emphatic stress to, say, the word *on,* which would change the semantics of the utterance such that the point of the sentence would

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[138] It follows from this, of course, that a single line has no meter (in much the same way that a single syllable has no stress).

[139] Derek Attridge's well-known book, *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, for example, fails to distinguish between these two projects, and this, combined with Attridge's utter failure to be sufficiently explicit (what *is* a "beat" anyway?) or sufficiently methodical (when the scansion doesn't work, just "promote" or "demote" one of the offending syllables—a bizarre assimilation of the language of Management) results in a theory that is not sufficiently intelligible or rigorous to be either true or false.

not just be that the cheese is on the table but that it is *on* the table rather than being *under* the table or *beside* the table—the cheese's orientation to the table would then be the important thing. Similarly, we could say "*the* cheese" (not just any old cheese), or "*is* on the table" (despite your ridiculous assertion that it isn't!—the French *si*), or "is on *the* table" (not just any old table). The possibilities of contrastive or emphatic stress allow us a very wide array of variant performances, each of which gives a different rhythmic structure to the sentence. But there are limits: we cannot, for example, put a stress on the second syllable of *table* rather than the first—doing so doesn't just sound like a strange performance of an English word, is sounds like something that isn't English at all. And it is a general feature of the phonology of the language that *the stress contour of every polysyllabic word is lexically fixed*, and it therefore must be pronounced in only one way. If this were not the case, we would invariably end up confused over words that have different meanings when stressed differently (*per*mit, the noun, and per*mit*, the verb). In a language like English, we would therefore expect the meter, if it is going to have a structure that obtains with all performances, will have to regulate the polysyllables and leave the monosyllables alone. An accentual-syllabic meter (that is, a meter concerned with stress for which the number of unstressed positions matters) will therefore consist of a regularity among two or more lines of verse in terms of the distribution among a fixed number of positions of its polysyllables.

But before we go on, it is worth clarifying just what is meant by the term *stress*. *Stress* is a combination of three properties, which are,

in order of importance, (1) pitch, (2) loudness, and (3) duration. In other words, a stressed syllable is always higher in pitch, and typically louder and longer as well, than an unstressed syllable. Notice that the stress of syllables in English is a *relational* property, which means that stress is not a property that a syllable can have by itself; when we say that a particular is syllable is stressed, what we mean is that it is *more stressed* (i.e., higher in pitch, &c.) than an adjacent syllable, which is therefore *less stressed*. Stress does not, of course, work the same way in all languages; Latin meters, for example, do not regulate the stress of syllables (stress assignment being a fairly pedestrian matter in Latin) but rather their length (i.e., duration, sometimes called syllable 'weight'), and length is not a relational property. It follows from these facts that in English verse, unlike Latin verse, there are only binary feet—in fact, only two binary feet: [WS] (i.e., as unstressed, or 'weak,' syllable followed by a stressed, or 'strong,' syllable) and [SW].[140] To see why there cannot be binary feet in English, consider a case in which you have a sequence of three syllables (call them A, B and C) where A is the most stressed and C is the least stressed. We could then say that A is stressed and C is unstressed, but B would be indeterminate: it would be stressed in relation to C but unstressed in relation to A, and the theory would thereby fail to assign a stress value to B. This is not the case, of course, in languages like Latin, since syllable length is an absolute, not a relative, property. It is for this reason that

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[140] It is also theoretically possible to have a [SS] foot or a [WW] foot, as long as a phonological phrase boundary intervenes in the middle of the foot, but this circumstance is vanishingly rare and so will not delay us here. See Hogg & McCully 64-6/

traditional approaches to English meter, which derive their terminology and theoretical apparatus from the study of classical verse, are so inadequate to the linguistic realities of English verse; the two languages are fundamentally different, and the kinds of meter in the two are fundamentally incompatible.[141] For the sake of convenience, I will continue to use some of the traditional terminology, namely: *iambic* for a foot that is [WS], *trochaic* for a foot that is [SW], and the traditional terms for the number of feet in a line (*trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter,* &c.).

To recap: a poem is METERED when we perceive a regular rhythmic pattern across its lines. A particular line is thus METRICAL to the extent that its rhythm (its actual stress contour) conforms with this abstract pattern and UNMETRICAL to the extent that it does not. One of the basic things that a theory of meter should be able to do is to consistently distinguish the metrical from the unmetrical lines, and this gives us an empirical basis for testing proposed theories. The pattern in question cannot be too restrictive, since all of the lines of any given sonnet, say, are not by any means rhythmically identical, and it must be present in any performance of the poem that doesn't violate English phonology. It follows from the fact that only

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[141] This does not, of course, mean that it is impossible to construct lines of English verse whose rhythm resembles a classical meter *if performed in specific ways*. It is in the nature of the case, by virtue of the phonology of English, that it will be easy to perform such verse (like Clough's experiments with classical forms) so that the classical metrical pattern will not be present. Moreover, it is often possible to scan poems attempting to imitate classical meters as in fact instances of normal, accentual-syllabic English meters. It is unsurprising that poets, even when consciously attempting to write in a classical meter, would naturally drift in the direction of meters that are more amenable to the language they are writing in. See Kiparsky & Hanson for a suggestive account of how different languages parameterize for different kinds of meter.

polysyllables have a lexically fixed rhythm (as explained above), that meters must regulate polysyllables.

Following Kiparsky's account in "The Rhythmic Structure of English Verse,"[142] we might think of the abstract pattern as a sequence of abstract POSITIONS, and we could then understand the meter as providing an associated set of REALIZATION RULES that determine which positions the stressed syllables in polysyllabic words may occupy. The abstract metrical form for iambic pentameter is

W S W S W S W S W S

and its primary realization rule is that *stressed syllables in polysyllabic words must occupy strong (S) positions and may not occupy weak (W) positions.* The following is thus a metrical line of iambic pentameter (stresses are indicated with italics):

meter: W S W **S** W S W **S** W   **S**
rhythm: *True Wit* is *Na*•ture to ad•*van*•tage *dress'd*

Note that only the stresses in the polysyllabic words are regulated by the meter, so the stressed monosyllable 'true' beginning the line does not violate the meter. This accounts for the fact observed previously that the rhythm, the actual stress contour, of a metrical line will not *exactly* conform to the pattern of the abstract meter most of the time,

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[142] The remainder of this appendix is mostly a summary of Kiparsky, and many of the examples are taken from Fabb, *Linguistics and Literature.*

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except in the placement of its polysyllabic words. This line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 106 is a rare instance of a line whose rhythm is identical to the abstract meter of the poem:

W　S　　W　S　W　S　W　S　　W　S

Of *hand*, of *foot*, of *lip*, of *eye*, of *brow*

What makes a given use of meter interesting is the location and quality of the tension between its rhythm and the abstract meter, what we might call METRICAL TENSION. Great poets will use this tension in very sophisticated ways; for example, note the emphasis on 'aches' in the following line from Keats:

W　S　　W　　S　W　S　W　　S　　W　　S

My *heart aches*, and a *drow•sy numb•ness pains*

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk...

Emphasis is only one of many effects that can be achieved through metrical tension (e.g., note the use of rising vs. falling polysyllables in "A*wake*, a*rise*, or be for*ev*er *fa*llen!"). Individual poets will also differ generally in how much metrical tension they are after. Donne seems bent on maximizing it (even to the point of outright unmetricality, as in the opening line of *Twicknam Garden*); Spenser, on the whole, sets out to minimize metrical tension (this is an aspect of his mellifluousness), and the liberties he takes are largely in eccentricities of word choice (as in his dodgy archaisms). Even Spenser, however, allows certain

supplements to the above fundamental realization rule. The below are the basic additional rules for English (accentual-syllabic) verse generally. It should also be noted that the additional rules are not random or merely conventional deviations but are possible because of the properties of English phonology, i.e., facts about the rhythms of speech.

I.   INVERSION

Virtually all poets in the English tradition allow an inversion in the first foot, i.e., they allow the primary stress in a polysyllabic word to occupy the initial weak position, e.g.,

(That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees...)

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S
*Sing•*est of *sum•*mer in *full-throa•*ted *ease*

Most poets also allow inversions at the beginnings of PHONOLOGICAL PHRASES (for the most part, phonological phrase boundaries coincide with major syntactic divisions, so most places where a comma or other punctuation mark appears count as phonological phrase boundaries):

(By night he fled, and at midnight returned)

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S

From *com•pa•*ssing the *Earth—cau•*tious of *day*

This is because of a general rule in the rhythmic structure of common speech to the effect that phonological rules apply less strictly at the beginnings of phonological phrases and more strictly at the ends.

II.   RESOLUTION

In common speech, two unstressed syllables between two stressed syllables are often run together so that, for rhythmic purposes, they behave like a single syllable. This also appears in verse, e.g., this iambic tetrameter line from Frost:

<div align="center">

W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S

Two roads di•*verged* {in a} *ye•*llow *wood*

</div>

This rule is something of a necessity, because otherwise certain words, like 'fortification', could never be deployed in verse; Shakespeare was thus saved by resolution in the following (which also contains two instances of extrametricality, for which, see below):

<div align="center">

W   S   W   S W   S W   S   W   S

This *for•*{ti•fi}•*ca•*tion *gent•*le•[men], *shall* we *see* [it]?

</div>

III.   ELISION

Some words will lose a syllable in common speech unless they are very carefully enunciated; thus, 'experience' can either have four syllables or three, depending on whether the 'i' is pronounced as a vowel (like the 'ee' in 'fl*ee*') or a glide (like the 'y' in '*y*ellow'). Three common elisions are as follows:

    i.   The elimination of an unstressed vowel following a stressed vowel-GLIDE sequence (the two 'glides' in English are 'y' as in '*y*ellow' and 'w' as in '*w*icked'), e.g., 'voyage' can be either two syllables or one.

    ii.   The first of two unstressed vowels can be eliminated when only the liquid   nasal 'r' (as in '*r*ibbon') intervenes, e.g., 'lingering'®'ling'ring.'

    iii.   A high unstressed vowel (the high vowels in English are the 'ee' in 'b*ee*t' and the 'oo' in 'b*oo*t') immediately followed by another vowel may reduce to a glide, e.g., the 'i' in 'env*i*ous' can either be like the 'ee' in 'fl*ee*' or like the 'y' in '*y*ellow,' and thus the word can have either three syllables or two.

Since these words can be pronounced either way, poets often (though not always) mark reductions they expect you to follow, e.g., 'ling'ring.'

IV.   DIACRITICALLY MARKED LEXICAL VARIATION

Many poets will alter the fixed stress contour of a word for metrical purposes; this is most common with words containing an -ed suffix, almost always marked with a diacritical mark, as in 'vanishéd' or 'vanishèd', and with 'the'+Noun combinations, e.g., 'th'Earth'. Other than words with -ed suffixes, there are a few other reductions that don't appear in modern common speech but have become naturalized in poetic discourse through usage, e.g., 'e'en' for 'even,' 'heav'n' for 'heaven' and ''tis' for 'it is' (making them monosyllables). The following line from Donne is a fairly extreme example:

> W   S   W   S   W   S   W   S
> *So* {to'in}•ter•*graft* our *hands*, as yet
> Was all our means to make us one…

V.   EXTRAMETRICALITY

As was shown in the example from Shakespeare in section (II) above, an extra weak syllable can appear at the end of a phonological phrase in iambic verse. These are more common at the ends of lines, as in

> W S W S W S W S W   S
> To *be*, or not to *be*, *that* is the *Ques*•[tion]

but can also appear at the ends of phonological phrases in other positions, as in

W S W S W S   W S W S
A *sam•*ple to the *youn•*[gest]; {to the} *more* ma•*ture*

By a similar principle, an iambic line can have a completely unoccupied initial weak position. It should be noted that an iambic pentameter line with an empty initial position and an extrametrical syllable at the end could just as easily be scanned as a trochaic pentameter line. This may seem like a problem with the theory in the sense that it does not uniquely describe such a line, but it is in fact the case that such a line will be read (and hence should be scanned) such that it conforms to the rhythmic regularities of the poem in which it appears. Indeed, it is one of the necessary demands on a theory of meter that it account for the fact that some lines can appear just as easily in a predominantly iambic context as in a predominantly trochaic context (and in each case will not stand out as marked in relation to the rest of the poem). This is also further evidence that a meter is not a property of a line (indeed, an isolated line *has no meter*), but a property of a poem; a line of the sort just mentioned is simply not definitively scannable without an immediate rhythmic context.

As pointed out above, much of the interest (and interpretive usefulness) of scanning verse resides not merely in drawing the conclusion that a line is metrical or not, but in considering the ways in which the rhythm departs from the meter (while still being in accordance with the realization rules of the latter). To be of any real use to the literary critic, a theory of meter is thus obliged to provide useful ways of specifying the properties of these departures.

There are two kinds of such departures, two sources of what we have called 'metrical tension,' that can be formalized in abstract terms: LABELLING MISMATCHES and BRACKETING MISMATCHES. A labeling mismatch is when a stressed monosyllabic word appears in a weak position in the meter or when an unstressed monosyllable appears in a strong position in the meter (if it is a polysyllabic word, then it would push the line into unmetricality—something which Donne, as mentioned before, is not above doing). Under normal circumstances (i.e., circumstances in which there is no contrastive or emphatic stress), monosyllables will be either stressed or unstressed depending on their category (part of speech). Linguists distinguish between 'functional words' or 'functors' (which are intrinsically unstressed) and 'lexical words' (which are intrinsically stressed); as a rule of thumb, lexical words are referential (they refer to things in the world, e.g., nouns, proper names, verbs, adjectives and certain kinds of adverbs and particles) and functional words have only a syntactic or logical

function (e.g., articles, conjunctions, prepositions, copular verbs, auxiliary verbs, wh-words, and, in most circumstances, pronouns). In some cases the distinction can be variable (the preposition 'up', for example, is unstressed in 'He climbed up the tower' but stressed when it is a particle as in 'John broke up the game'), and in such instances, in the absence of detailed training in syntax, the critic will have to go by his or her ear. Consider, for example, the following line:

(There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio,)

  W   S   W   S W   S   W S W S
Than are *dreamt* of in your phi•*lo*•so•phy.

This line is metrical, since the primary stress in the only polysyllable, 'philosophy', occupies a strong position in the meter. The lexically stressed monosyllable, 'dreamt', on the other hand, occupies a weak metrical position; this does not cause the line to be unmetrical, but, at the very least, it puts considerable emphasis on the word *dreamt.*

A bracketing mismatch arises when a phonological grouping of syllables (into words or into phonological phrases) in the line violates the groupings inherent in the abstract meter. The meter is not just a series of ten positions, but a series of binary pairs (not unlike the traditional notion of the 'foot', but independently motivated by the fact that the phonology of English stress [namely, that stress is a *relational*

property] requires a set of binary groupings), themselves grouped into a group of two and a group of three; this can be represented as follows:

[[WS] [WS]] [[WS] [WS] [WS]]

One of the reasons why traditional foot scansion seems, at least heuristically, plausible is that some of its claims are correct: namely that the meter is divided into five groups of two and that there is a natural division between the second and third such groups. Traditional prosody, however, is plainly wrong in suggesting that the *rhythm* of the line is obliged to observe these boundaries. For example, the word boundaries in the following, quite metrical, line do not match up to this pattern:

<div align="center">

W SW SW S W S W S

The *li*on *dy*ing *thru*steth *forth* his *paw*

</div>

Each of the disyllabic words in the line crosses the binary groups of the abstract meter, and the word 'dying' also crosses the larger 2/3 division. What we intuitively sense as something 'trochaic' about this legitimately iambic line is the result of its bracketing mismatches, and 'dying' seems to be particularly conspicuous in this respect (it would likely appear even more so in the context of a regularly iambic poem).

It should be said for the sake of clarity that linguistics can provide no algorithm for producing *interpretations* out of any of these facts; they

are formal observations—no more, no less. If they are significant, it is only because the critic manages to make them so, and the responsibility for that task is well beyond the purview of the linguists. But if one is to make claims about the meaning of poems, there must be some kind of agreement on the facts about the poem upon which such claims are based. This, in turn, requires an account of poetic form solidly grounded in objective empirical research. Happily for literary critics, much of that research has already been done by linguists; it is a resource which is all too often left untapped in favor of more familiar modes of formal description—a complacency that gazes through a glass darkly instead of looking on the thing directly as it speaks through its minute evasions. Only when one sees clearly can one perceive an enigma; an enigma in a fog is not an enigma at all, just more fog.

THOMAS HARDY: *The Workbox*

"See, here's the workbox, little wife,
    That I made of polished oak."
He was a joiner, of village life;
    She came of borough folk.

He holds the present up to her
    As with a smile she nears
And answers to the profferer,
    "'Twill last all my sewing years!"

"I warrant it will. And longer too.
    'Tis a scantling that I got   10
Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who
    Died of they knew not what.

"The shingled pattern that seems to cease
    Against your box's rim
Continues right on in the piece
    That's underground with him.

"And while I worked it made me think

Of timber's varied doom;
One inch where people eat and drink,
   The next inch in a tomb. 20

"But why do you look so white, my dear,
   And turn aside your face?
You knew not that good lad, I fear,
   Though he came from your native place?"

"How could I know that good young man,
   Though he came from my native town,
When he must have left far earlier than
   I was a woman grown?"

"Ah, no. I should have understood!
   It shocked you that I gave 30
To you one end of a piece of wood
   Whose other is in a grave?"

"Don't, dear, despise my intellect,
   Mere accidental things
Of that sort never have effect
   On my imaginings."

Yet still her lips were limp and wan,
   Her face still held aside,

As if she had known not only John,

But known of what he died.   40

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

   Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

   With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,

   And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

     To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

   And still more, later flowers for the bees,

   Until they think warm days will never cease,   10

     For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

2

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

   Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

   Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

   Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

     Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

   Steady thy laden head across a brook;   20

Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
    Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

<div align="center">3</div>

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
    Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
    And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
    Among the river sallows, borne aloft
      Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;   30
    Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
    The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
      And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

JOHN KEATS: *Ode to a Nightingale*

<p style="text-align:center">I</p>

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
   My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
   One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk.
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
   But being too happy in thine happiness –
     That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
      In some melodious plot
   Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
    Singest of summer in full-throated ease.   10

<p style="text-align:center">II</p>

Oh, for a draught of vintage that hath been
   Cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
   Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
Oh, for a beaker full of the warm South,
   Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
     With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
      And purple-stainèd mouth;

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

    And with thee fade away into the forest dim—   20

III

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

    What thou among the leaves hast never known,

The weariness, the fever, and the fret

    Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

    Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

        Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

           And leaden-eyed despairs;

    Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

    Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.   30

IV

Away! away! For I will fly to thee,

    Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,

But on the viewless wings of Poesy,

    Though the dull brain perplexes and retards.

Already with thee! Tender is the night,

    And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,

        Clustered around by all her starry fays;

But here there is no light,
   Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
      Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.   40

V

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
   Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
   Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild –
   White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
      Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
         And mid-May's eldest child,
   The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
      The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.   50

VI

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
   I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
   To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
   To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
    In such an ecstasy.
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain –
    To thy high requiem become a sod.   60

VII

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!
    No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
    In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
    Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
        She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
            The same that oft-times hath
        Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
            Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.   70

VIII

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
    To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
    As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
    Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep

    In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

    Fled is that music...Do I wake or sleep?   80

ROBERT BROWNING: *'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'*

(See Edgar's song in "Lear.")

I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
  That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
  Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
  Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
  What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
  All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh   10
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
  For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
  Into that ominous tract which, all agree,

Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly

I did turn as he pointed: neither pride

Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,

So much as gladness that some end might be

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,

What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope   20

Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope

With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—

I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring

My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

V

As when a sick man very near to death

Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end

The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,

And hears one bid the other go, draw breath

Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,

"And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;")   30

VI

While some discuss if near the other graves
   Be room enough for this, and when a day
   Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves:
And still the man hears all, and only craves
   He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
   Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
   So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed   40
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
   And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

VIII

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
   That hateful cripple, out of his highway
   Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim

Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim

    Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found

    Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,   50

    Than, pausing to throw backward a last view

O'er the safe road, 't was gone; grey plain all round:

Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.

    I might go on; nought else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw

    Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:

    For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!

But cockle, spurge, according to their law

Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,

    You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.   60

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,

    In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See

    "Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,

"It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:

"'T is the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,

  "Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

<div align="center">XII</div>

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk

  Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents

  Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents

In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk   70

All hope of greenness? 't is a brute must walk

  Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

<div align="center">XIII</div>

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair

  In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud

  Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.

One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,

Stood stupefied, however he came there:

  Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

<div align="center">XIV</div>

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,

  With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,   80

And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;

Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;

I never saw a brute I hated so;

    He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.

    As a man calls for wine before he fights,

    I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,

Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.

Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:

    One taste of the old time sets all to rights.   90

XVI

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face

    Beneath its garniture of curly gold,

    Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold

An arm in mine to fix me to the place,

That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!

    Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands

    Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.

    What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.

Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman-hands   100

Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands

    Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;

    Back therefore to my darkening path again!

    No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.

Will the night send a howlet or a bat?

I asked: when something on the dismal flat

    Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path

    As unexpected as a serpent comes.   110

    No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;

This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath

For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath

    Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,

    Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;

    Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit

Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:

The river which had done them all the wrong,

    Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.   120

XXI

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared

    To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,

    Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek

For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!

—It may have been a water-rat I speared,

    But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.

    Now for a better country. Vain presage!

    Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,

Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank   130

Soil to a plash? Toads in a poisoned tank,

    Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.

    What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?

    No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,

None out of it. Mad brewage set to work

Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk

    Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!

    What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,   140

    Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel

Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air

Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,

    Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,

   Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth

   Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,

Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood

Changes and off he goes!) within a rood—

   Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.   150

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,

   Now patches where some leanness of the soil's

   Broke into moss or substances like boils;

Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him

Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim

   Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end!

   Nought in the distance but the evening, nought

   To point my footstep further! At the thought,

A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,   160

Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned

   That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
   'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
   All round to mountains—with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!
   How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
   Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—   170
   In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
   As when a trap shuts—you 're inside the den!

XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once,
   This was the place! those two hills on the right,
   Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,

Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,

    After a life spent training for the sight!   180

XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?

    The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,

    Built of brown stone, without a counterpart

In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf

Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf

    He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day

    Came back again for that! before it left,

    The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:

The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,   190

Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—

    "Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!

XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled

    Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears

    Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—

How such a one was strong, and such was bold,

And such was fortunate, yet each of old

    Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

<center>XXXIV</center>

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met

    To view the last of me, a living frame   200

    For one more picture! in a sheet of flame

I saw them and I knew them all. And yet

Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,

    And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

Ferarra

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)   10

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not

Her husband's presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps

"Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint

"Must never hope to reproduce the faint

"Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough   20

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,   30

Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked

Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame

This sort of trifling? Even had you skill

In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this

"Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,

"Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let

Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set   40

Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,

—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her, but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet

The company below, then. I repeat,

The Count your master's known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence 50

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;

Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed

At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

ROBERT BROWNING: *An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician*

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)
---To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,   10
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term,---
And aptest in contrivance (under God)
To baffle it by deftly stopping such:---
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)
Three samples of true snakestone---rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.   20

My journeyings were brought to Jericho:
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art

Shall count a little labour unrepaid?

I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone

On many a flinty furlong of this land.

Also, the country-side is all on fire

With rumours of a marching hitherward:

Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.

A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;

Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls: 30

I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.

Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,

And once a town declared me for a spy;

But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,

Since this poor covert where I pass the night,

This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence

A man with plague-sores at the third degree

Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here!

'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,

To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip   40

And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.

A viscid choler is observable

In tertians, I was nearly bold to say;

And falling-sickness hath a happier cure

Than our school wots of: there's a spider here

Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,

Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back;

Take five and drop them . . but who knows his mind,

The Syrian runagate I trust this to?

His service payeth me a sublimate   50

Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.

Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,

There set in order my experiences,

Gather what most deserves, and give thee all---

Or I might add, Judæa's gum-tragacanth

Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,

Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,

In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease

Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy---

Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar---   60

But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefully,

Protesteth his devotion is my price---

Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?

I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,

What set me off a-writing first of all.

An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!

For, be it this town's barrenness---or else

The Man had something in the look of him---

His case has struck me far more than 't is worth.   70

So, pardon if---(lest presently I lose

In the great press of novelty at hand

The care and pains this somehow stole from me)

I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,

Almost in sight---for, wilt thou have the truth?

The very man is gone from me but now,

Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.

Thus then, and let thy better wit help all!

'T is but a case of mania---subinduced

By epilepsy, at the turning-point   80

Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:

When, by the exhibition of some drug

Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art

Unknown to me and which 't were well to know

The evil thing out-breaking all at once

Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,---

But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide

Making a clear house of it too suddenly,

The first conceit that entered might inscribe

Whatever it was minded on the wall   90

So plainly at that vantage, as it were

(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent

Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls

The just-returned and new-established soul

Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart

That henceforth she will read or these or none.

And first---the man's own firm conviction rests

That he was dead (in fact they buried him)

---That he was dead and then restored to life

By a Nazarene physician of his tribe: 100

---'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.

"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.

Not so this figment!---not, that such a fume,

Instead of giving way to time and health,

Should eat itself into the life of life,

As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!

For see, how he takes up the after-life.

The man---it is one Lazarus a Jew,

Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,

The body's habit wholly laudable,   110

As much, indeed, beyond the common health

As he were made and put aside to show.

Think, could we penetrate by any drug

And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,

And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep!

Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?

This grown man eyes the world now like a child.

Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,

Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,

To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,   120

Now sharply, now with sorrow,---told the case,---

He listened not except I spoke to him,

But folded his two hands and let them talk,

Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.

And that's a sample how his years must go.

Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,

Should find a treasure,---can he use the same

With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,

And take at once to his impoverished brain

The sudden element that changes things,   130

That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand

And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?

Is he not such an one as moves to mirth---

Warily parsimonious, when no need,

Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?

All prudent counsel as to what befits

The golden mean, is lost on such an one:

The man's fantastic will is the man's law.

So here---we call the treasure knowledge, say,

Increased beyond the fleshly faculty---   140

Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,

Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:

The man is witless of the size, the sum,

The value in proportion of all things,

Or whether it be little or be much.

Discourse to him of prodigious armaments

Assembled to besiege his city now,

And of the passing of a mule with gourds---

'T is one! Then take it on the other side,

Speak of some trifling fact,---he will gaze rapt   150

With stupor at its very littleness,

(Far as I see) as if in that indeed

He caught prodigious import, whole results;

And so will turn to us the bystanders

In ever the same stupor (note this point)

That we too see not with his opened eyes.

Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,

Preposterously, at cross purposes.

    Should his child sicken unto death,---why, look

For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,   160

Or pretermission of the daily craft!

While a word, gesture, glance from that same child

At play or in the school or laid asleep,

Will startle him to an agony of fear,

Exasperation, just as like. Demand

The reason why---"'t is but a word," object---

"A gesture"---he regards thee as our lord

Who lived there in the pyramid alone,

Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,

We both would unadvisedly recite   170

Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,

Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst

All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.

Thou and the child have each a veil alike

Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both

Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match

Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!

He holds on firmly to some thread of life---

(It is the life to lead perforcedly)

Which runs across some vast distracting orb   180

Of glory on either side that meagre thread,

Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet---

The spiritual life around the earthly life:

The law of that is known to him as this,

His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.

So is the man perplext with impulses

Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,

Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,

And not along, this black thread through the blaze---

"It should be" baulked by "here it cannot be."   190

And oft the man's soul springs into his face

As if he saw again and heard again

His sage that bade him "Rise" and he did rise.

Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within

Admonishes: then back he sinks at once

To ashes, who was very fire before,

In sedulous recurrence to his trade

Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;

And studiously the humbler for that pride,

Professedly the faultier that he knows   200

God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.

Indeed the especial marking of the man

Is prone submission to the heavenly will---

Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.

'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last

For that same death which must restore his being

To equilibrium, body loosening soul

Divorced even now by premature full growth:

He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live

So long as God please, and just how God please.   210

He even seeketh not to please God more

(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.

Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach

The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,

Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do:

How can he give his neighbour the real ground,

His own conviction? Ardent as he is---

Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old

"Be it as God please" reassureth him.

I probed the sore as thy disciple should: 210

"How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness

"Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march

"To stamp out like a little spark thy town,

"Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"

He merely looked with his large eyes on me.

The man is apathetic, you deduce?

Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,

Able and weak, affects the very brutes

And birds---how say I? flowers of the field---

As a wise workman recognizes tools   230

In a master's workshop, loving what they make.

Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:

Only impatient, let him do his best,

At ignorance and carelessness and sin---

An indignation which is promptly curbed:

As when in certain travel I have feigned

To be an ignoramus in our art

According to some preconceived design,

And happed to hear the land's practitioners

Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,   240

Prattle fantastically on disease,

Its cause and cure---and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object---Why have I not ere this

Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene

Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,

Conferring with the frankness that befits?

Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech

Perished in a tumult many years ago,

Accused,---our learning's fate,---of wizardry,

Rebellion, to the setting up a rule   250

And creed prodigious as described to me.

His death, which happened when the earthquake fell

(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss

To occult learning in our lord the sage

Who lived there in the pyramid alone)

Was wrought by the mad people---that's their wont!

On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,

To his tried virtue, for miraculous help---

How could he stop the earthquake? That's their way!

The other imputations must be lies: 260

But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,

In mere respect for any good man's fame.

(And after all, our patient Lazarus

Is stark mad; should we count on what he says?

Perhaps not: though in writing to a leech

'T is well to keep back nothing of a case.)

This man so cured regards the curer, then,

As---God forgive me! who but God himself,

Creator and sustainer of the world,

That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!   270

---'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,

Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,

Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,

And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,

And must have so avouched himself, in fact,

In hearing of this very Lazarus

Who saith---but why all this of what he saith?

Why write of trivial matters, things of price

Calling at every moment for remark?

I noticed on the margin of a pool 280

Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,

Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,

Which, now that I review it, needs must seem

Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth!

Nor I myself discern in what is writ

Good cause for the peculiar interest

And awe indeed this man has touched me with.

Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness

Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus: 290

I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills

Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came

A moon made like a face with certain spots

Multiform, manifold and menacing:

Then a wind rose behind me. So we met

In this old sleepy town at unaware,

The man and I. I send thee what is writ.

Regard it as a chance, a matter risked

To this ambiguous Syrian---he may lose,

Or steal, or give it thee with equal good. 300

Jerusalem's repose shall make amends

For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine;

Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too---

So, through the thunder comes a human voice

Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!

"Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!

"Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,

"But love I gave thee, with myself to love   310

"And thou must love me who have died for thee!"

The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

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