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Preface

Perhaps more than any other of the annual workshops organized by the Department of German at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, the one held on October 3 and 4, 1986, and titled “From Ode To Anthem: Problems of Lyric Poetry,” featured a variety of comparative approaches, themes, and methods. It also branched out, in some instances at least, into areas not normally included in the study of the lyrical genre. Thus, the contributions to this Seventeenth Wisconsin Workshop extended from historical surveys and general typologies to specifically modern trends and theories, from old or new subgenres, such as the love poem or the war poem from the trenches, to the question of poetry and ethnicity in a given, both multilingual and multicultural, geographical region and, finally, from the interaction of poetic texts with art or music to the textual problems posed by national anthems. Authored by Hiltrud Gnüg (Universität Köln, FRG), Reinhold Grimm (UW—Madison), Jost Hermand (UW—Madison), George L. Mosse (UW—Madison and Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Próspero Saíz (UW—Madison), Karla Lydia Schultz (University of Oregon), F. K. Stanzel (Universität Graz, Austria), and a Student Collective (UW—Madison), respectively, all eight contributions are now assembled—expanded, in most cases, as well as thoroughly revised—in the present volume.

Its main title, by the way, should be taken with a grain of salt. Or, to be more precise, “From Ode to Anthem” is meant to be read a little bit figuratively also. While, restored to their proper order, the letters “A” and “O,” or Alpha and Omega according to the Greek alphabet, may be seen to intimate our broad and comprehensive, indeed catholic, attitude toward the genre of the lyric, the reverse order in which they actually appear can be said to indicate the limits and constraints imposed upon our selection of topics, which, of necessity, had to be somewhat arbitrary. Chronologically speaking, “From Epigram to Anthem” might therefore have been preferable in certain respects; yet it would surely have been less allusive and pithy, and hardly more exact or exhaustive, either.

Both the German Department’s sister Department of Comparative Literature and the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies co-sponsored the Seventeenth Wisconsin Workshop. The generous support of the Austrian Institute (New York), the Goethe Institute (Chicago), and, above all, the Max Kade Foundation (New York) is also gratefully acknowledged. Our special thanks, however, are due, as in previous years, to the Vilas Fund of the University of Wisconsin.
From Ode to Anthem
It is perhaps not inappropriate to begin by heaving a sigh—or, to be pre-
cise, by quoting one, emphatically as well as empathetically, heaved
though it was almost thirty years ago. “Under different circumstances,” an
American poet then came to confess, “I would rather have been a painter
than to bother with these goddamn words.” Ironically enough, that sigh
and simultaneous curse emerged from a book entitled I Wanted to Write a
Poem. Its author, none other than William Carlos Williams, was soon to
publish, contradictorily again and yet solving the contradiction, a volume
called Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems, which included some of
the finest modern verse on canonic artworks treating classical motifs: as,
for example, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,” a transposition of the
like-named painting by Pieter Breughel the Elder.

But there is, in effect, no need to resort to such drastic outbursts in
order to intimate that an aesthetic, both practical and theoretical, exchange
has been going on over the centuries, indeed millennia, an interplay and
interaction involving poems and/as pictures, or writers and/as artists, and
vice versa. I could as well have invoked (and probably should have done so
in the first place) two ancient authorities, one Greek and one Roman, and
their cool and factual yet most momentous if, in part, grossly misunder-
stood pronouncements: to wit, Simonides of Ceos, who lived from around
556 to 468 B.C., and is said to have decreed that “painting is mute poetry,
and poetry a speaking picture”; and, naturally, venerable Horace, with his
famous ut pictura poesis, a quite ingenious and, moreover, fragmentary
“dictum” which has nevertheless been read as meaning that poets operate
like painters, hence must strive to achieve pictorial results. Gotthold
Ephraim Lessing tried to set things to rights with his Laokoon of 1766,
delineating the “boundaries of painting and poetry” (Grenzen der Malerei
und Poesie) according to its subtitle—and he certainly succeeded in the
realm of theory. In practice, however, the cherished intercourse between
the so-called sister arts has blithely continued, for all Lessing’s admirable
efforts; indeed it has reached, with the advent of modernism, an intensity
and dimensions hitherto unheard-of, the sole exception being the near pan-European craze for emblems during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Nor is there, despite protestations to the contrary, any lack of affinities connecting those earlier epochs, emblematic or otherwise, with our own literary and artistic era as it extends, roughly, from the turn of the century to the present. For instance, writing in 1914, the German Expressionist and friend of Gottfried Benn, Carl Einstein, held that Stéphane Mallarmé’s enigmatic “Un Coup de dés” (“A Toss of the Dice”) was an attempt at justifying poetic language exclusively through its graphic design or “fixation”: that is, by way of the contrast it creates between the written black of the letters and the untainted white of the paper. Yet might not Einstein just as well have referred to, say, Giovanni Lomazzo, a 16th-century Italian painter and theorist who also enjoyed some popularity outside his country, notably with his laconic statement that “writing is nothing else, but a picture of white and black”? Or to switch back to France: Maurice Lemaître, the loudest warrior of the Romanian-born Letterist chief, Isidore Isou, was surely wrong—or, in any case, pitably belated—when he dared to propound in recent years: “For the first time with poetic Letterism and pictorial Hypergraphic Letterism, PAINTER AND POET are one and the same” (“because,” as he alleged in parentheses, “the genre has become the same”). Anticipating him by decades, his elective compatriot from Poland, Guillaume Apollinaire, Einstein and Benn’s contemporary, had doubtless been more entitled to claiming that he, too, was a kind of “painter.”

Clearly, then, the “genre” in question—at least its conception or idea—derives from antiquity. It has been developing, without necessarily being confined to Western culture, all across the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, and beyond; in fact, it is still, and today more than ever, rampant both internationally and interculturally. But before I proceed to unfold, in time-lapse quickness, my historical bird’s-eye view spanning two and a half millennia, a few distinctions, definitions, and terminological clarifications will be in order.

This seems to be a rather easy task, for, as stressed from the outset, the relationship between the sister arts is of an undeniably dual nature. On the one hand, their aesthetic intercourse simply brings them together, retaining, as separate entities, poems and pictures; on the other hand, it brings forth a, more or less complex, poetic-pictorial unity, producing poems as pictures. Unfortunately, though, we are faced with an “embarrassment of riches” not only as to the number and quality of pertinent studies, but also in regard to the terminology they employ—and however much we may benefit from the former, we cannot but suffer from the latter. The following terms (I restrict myself, for the most part, to German and English examples) have been used to cover either the entire hybrid “genre,” if indeed it can be labeled as such, or one of its two subgenres:
Poems and/as Pictures

One of the authors under consideration, whose book has rightly been praised as a seminal work, applies Bildgedicht to the whole "border area" (Grenzgebiet) between art and "literature" (Dichtung) from antiquity to the beginnings of modernism, including not just the emblem but likewise what he terms Figurgedicht. Another one, the compiler of a huge and widely read anthology, indiscriminately subsumes nearly everything he can find—and the output of modernism in particular—under the overall heading "pictorial poetry," excluding, however, not only the Middle Ages but Greek and Roman antiquity as well. And there are others still who, conversely, favor problematic subdivisions instead, as, for instance, a clear-cut differentiation between two types of poems on paintings: those (called, quite arbitrarily, "ecphrastic") which evoke imaginary, or fictitious, objects, and those (called "iconic" proper) which deal with real ones that exist, can be reproduced, and perhaps accompany them. Indeed, not even the handiest and most dependable reference books offer viable solutions, as it turns out. Echoing the encyclopedic Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, Gero von Wilpert’s neat Sachwörterbuch, while distinguishing between Gemäldegedicht and Figurengedicht, causes widespread confusion nonetheless by introducing Bilderlyrik as synonymous with the latter; and the little-known yet, in many ways, very useful Glossary of German Literary Terms, a booklet brought out in New Zealand, does essentially the same, but complicates matters further by listing Bildgedicht as synonymous with Gemäldegedicht.

William Carlos Williams, had he deigned to read scholarly stuff, would have sighed and cussed anew, I am sure. But then, haven’t the poets themselves slipped on occasion? No less a luminary than Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the erudite admirer and translator of Williams, rashly contributed to the general mix-up when he chose two different (though familiar) terms for the selfsame, if not identical, phenomenon. Without a doubt, a terminological pruning and cleansing is called for, in English as well as in German, rather than the coinage of motley neologisms like “iconogenous,” “iconocentric,” or “iconogeneous,” as advocated, not so much by scholars, let alone poets, but by rabid didacts, or didacticists. I therefore—to make a long story short—fully agree to the proposal submitted repeatedly by Gisbert Kranz, the most thorough and knowledgeable if almost monomaniacal specialist in the field and author or editor of at least five books, according to whom the twin terms Bildgedicht and Figurengedicht, respectively, should henceforth be used in German as the exclusive designations of the areas of poems and pictures, on the one hand,
and poems as pictures, on the other. As for their English equivalents, I should like to suggest that the twin terms “iconic poem” (equaling Bildgedicht) and “pattern poem” (equaling Figurengedicht) be taken up, and adopted for good, all the more so since they are the respective headwords selected by the MLA International Bibliography.

What, exactly, do these concepts denote? Kranz, in basic agreement with the American scholar Jean Hagstrum and his pioneer work, defines them as follows:

(1) The subgenre of Bildgedichte, or “iconic poems,” comprises any sort of verse that relates to an artwork, i.e., the subject of which consists of a work of graphic art, regardless of whether the latter is a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, a print (woodcut, etching, lithograph), a tapestry, a mosaic, or—as long as formed or adorned accordingly—stained glass, a gem, a vase or urn, and even the articles of gold- and silversmiths.*

It will be noted that this enumeration, which is fairly exhaustive, does not include photographs; as a matter of fact, photos are expressly excluded by Kranz*°—a grave mistake and ensuing deficiency, as we shall see. Otherwise, however, his definition is satisfactory and convincing throughout, not only in itself, by encompassing the totality of art,*° but also in that it is meant to apply equally to real and to imagined artworks.*°

(2) The subgenre of Figurengedichte, or “pattern poems,” comprises any sort of verse which produces, by virtue of the graphic arrangement of its lines, visual effects as well, in addition to its auditory (and, above all, intellectual) impact. In short, these poems both depict—in the most literal sense of the word—and say what they “say”; at least, they consciously aim at such a two-fold representation.*

It should once more be noted that I have supplemented Kranz’s definition as I saw fit, yet without any alteration or distortion of meaning. Besides, let me mention in passing that there exists, not surprisingly, a point where the two subgenres intersect, indeed coincide, which gives rise to a third—but definitely minor—variety within our hybrid “genre”: a combination, that is, of poems and pictures and poems as pictures . . . or, as we duly ought to modify our formula, of poems as pictures and poems on pictures.

The learned reader will have been wondering, I suspect, why I haven’t discussed, nor even adduced, technical terms from the Greek and Latin, such as, precisely, technopaign(e)ion and carmen figuratum. However, not only are concepts in the vernacular to be preferred anyhow, in German as in English, but, more important, both those ancient terms also designate quite specific historical instances of pattern poetry though, admittedly, they have been expanded, in varying manner and degree, by practitioners and critics. A similar objection, by the way, could be raised, and refuted
similarly, in respect to a decidedly modern—or even modernist and avant-garde—counterpart of sorts, a poetic catchword and view and the manifestations thereof that have likewise been conspicuously absent so far: namely, *konkrete Poesie*, or "concrete poetry." While, amazingly enough, one of the founding fathers and indefatigable propagators of that international movement, the Bolivian-born Swiss Eugen Gomringer, must be commended for having exercised great care in critically correlating its artifacts with pattern poetry at large, identifying the narrow zone where they do overlap, pedagogues and scholars alike have to date been so much the more careless, and have not only inflated the nomenclature, but also confounded it consistently, as it were. And even when they appear to be heeding Gomringer's sound advice, they at once relapse into generalizing, and thus muddy the waters again.*

These are, of course, mere allusions and deliberately open questions to which we shall have to come back. All the same, we are now ready to embark on our double excursion into the vast realm of history, and to watch the ways and doings of the sister arts in progress. Considered chronologically, their interactions prove to be parallel as well as dual; yet it is clear that the two strands of this evolution—as opposed to the twofold typology outlined before—do not meet, mix, and merge at a single juncture, but tend to converge repeatedly, being always close together, and, at times, virtually intertwined. Still, the historian will do well to grasp them separately, and to pursue and investigate them, in however fleeting a fashion, one after the other. Hence I shall start out (for reasons that will immediately become obvious) with the development of the iconic poem, then move on to that of the pattern poem, and, finally, cast a brief glance at the point where these two strands or branches—in terms of typological subgenres once more—intersect and coincide.

To iterate: it all began in Greek antiquity. Yet even my two and a half millennia of aesthetic intercourse are likely to reveal themselves, on second thoughts, as a slight understatement. Kranz, for one, maintains that the history of iconic poetry extends over no fewer than twenty-eight centuries, and prides himself on having surveyed them. And he is undoubtedly right historically, if we take into account, as seems to be customary, the genre of the heroic epic, too. For, in that case, it was indeed none other than Homer who composed, in Book XVIII of his *Iliad*, the first iconic verse ever—and on a fictitious object to boot. "Perhaps," as Hagstrum cautiously put it, the Homeric description of the shield that Hephaestus is making for Achilles constitutes "the prototype" of any and all such poetry. But the actual beginnings of the iconic poem as an independent art form (and, incidentally, those of the pattern poem as well) date from the 5th and 4th centuries b.c., as I have emphasized early on by invoking Simonides of Ceos, the poet credited not only with having
coined that influential slogan about poems and pictures, but also with having founded, as a literary genre of its own, the epigram, the very vehicle of Greek iconic verse. This genre, classified by the experts as a most genuine and original creation of the Hellenic spirit (eine Urschöpfung) which has no exact correspondence anywhere, came into being when the Greeks adopted the usage of placing versified inscriptions—mainly distichs—on real things of their everyday world, such as votive offerings like tools and weapons, or artworks and monuments like statues, funeral columns, and tombs. In fact, the literal meaning of the Greek word epigramma (another truism, granted) is “inscription.”

Contrary, though, to what might be expected, it is not Lessing who deserves to be hailed this time as the major aesthetician, or theorist of the genre, even though he did publish, in 1771, the first generic tract worthy of note; rather, it is Johann Gottfried Herder who, taking issue with him in two treatises of 1785–86, marks the decisive breakthrough and was the first to arrive at fundamental insights into the essence and origin of the epigram, and to unveil its innate iconicity. Doesn’t his overall characterization of it—“the portrayal of an image or emotion concerning an isolated object” (die Exposition [in the sense of Darstellung, etc.] eines Bildes oder einer Empfindung über einen einzelnen Gegenstand)—already have a direct bearing on our disquisition? Herder was more explicit yet. When I perceive a work of art in its entirety, discern each and every detail of it, and combine both experiences in the idea of one aesthetic whole: “what,” he argued, “is the most natural expression of my feelings if not an inscription (Aufschrift) portraying in words this beautiful whole that so affects me?” Such is the nature not just of iconic verse in Greece, but of iconic poetry in general. And that which Herder calls, in one of his titles, die Anthologie der Griechen, points to the “greatest single repository” of epigrammatic poems, whether iconic or plain, in antiquity as well as thereafter: namely, the Alexandrian and Byzantine compilations of several thousand epigrams labeled summarily as the Greek Anthology, or Anthologia Graeca. A sizable portion of it, indeed one of the “most prominent” of its various types, is made up by art epigrams, or brief iconic poems.

While their Greek tradition continued in Byzantium, new forms of a comparable interplay between the sister arts sprang up: first, in Rome and in Latin, then, in the Middle Ages, either in Latin again or, later on, in the vernacular languages. (The Roman contribution to the art epigram is negligible, as are the medieval jugs and bells that happen to be inscribed.) Those new forms of iconic poetry were basically Christian; dominant among them was the so-called titulus, which began to sprout from the 4th century A.D. onward, and was to flourish for many centuries to come. In essence, it is but another explanatory inscription. Unlike the ancient epigrams, however, which have greater literary independence, and easily rid
Figure 1. Nicholas of Verdun, “Solomon and the Queen of Sheba” (Klosterneuburg, 1181)
themselves of their respective objects, tituli are inseparably connected with what they describe and explain. Furthermore, they primarily refer to works of art—e.g., murals, stained glass windows, altarpieces, and so on—of which they are part and parcel. A good example (fig. 1) is provided by an enamel plate executed by Nicholas of Verdun for a pulpit, but transferred to a triptych subsequently, at Klosterneuburg near Vienna. Dating from around 1181, it shows the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, whose wisdom made her pay homage to him—an event from the Old Testament that prefigures in the New Testament, according to medieval exegesis, the journey of the three Wise Men from the East to Bethlehem, and their adoration of Christ. The caption of the picture reads, “REGIN(A) A SABA,” its inscription, a rhymed couplet of sorts:

MISTICAT [sic] DONIS
REGINA FIDEM SALOMONIS.

I think this should be rendered as: “In the mystery of her gifts, the queen reveals the faith of Solomon.” (That she is depicted as a black woman, albeit with tresses that are obviously blond, raises quite different though not altogether unrelated questions that I cannot even try to answer here.)

At any rate, tituli such as this one, plus a wealth of similar iconic verse, were produced in large numbers throughout the Middle Ages. It is, therefore, simply beyond my comprehension how a scholar of the stature of Etienne Souriau could come up with the blunt assertion that there obtained scarcely any exchange between medieval painting and poetry. Even so tardy and mundane a work as the Ständebuch of 1568—an array of all the trades and estates, professions and occupations, with its doggerel by Hans Sachs commenting on its woodcuts by Jost Ammann—and even so literary and self-contained a book as Sebastian Brant’s illustrated Narrenschiff, his famous Ship of Fools of 1494, still partake, in a way, of the modes of iconic expression bequeathed to them by the preceding centuries. Two pages from the former, showing the huntsman (fig. 2) and the foolish glutton, or gluttonous fool (fig. 3), may serve to give an idea of either.

The year 1494 also saw the first printing of the Anthologia Graeca. This publication, enthusiastically received as it was by the humanists and their successors, triggered a gigantic avalanche of a novel brand of iconic poetry, on the one hand, and caused a no less gigantic—if somewhat delayed—tidal wave of regular, more traditional though appropriately modernized, iconic poems, on the other. (I hope I shall be forgiven for my mixed metaphor; what we are dealing with is, after all, a mixed, or “hybrid,” genre.) Of course, said avalanche refers to that veritable craze I hinted at in the beginning: to wit, the near pan-European mania for emblems pervading all walks of life during the 16th and 17th centuries, especially in Central, Western, and Southern Europe. That novel iconic poetry, its emblematic
Der Jäger.

Ich bin meines Herrn Jäger worn/
Mit mein Hunden und Jägerhorn
Ich Bern und wild Schwein heß/
Die Stich ich denn in meinem Nek/
Rehe/ Hirschchen/ Fuchs/ Wölff vü Hasst
Müssen die Heut hinder jn lassin/
Den ich nachspür/ Wald/ Berg vü Thal
Fell jr ein jar ein grosse zal.

Figure 2. Jost Ammann and Hans Sachs, “The Huntsman” (Das Ständebuch, 1568)

brand, originated in 1531 when an Italian lawyer by name of Andrea Alciati (or Alciato, or Andreas Alciatus in latinized form) published in Augsburg his Emblemata libellus, the first “Book of Emblems,” complete with woodcuts by a local artist, Jörg Breu. It was to go through more than 170 editions; at the same time, it engendered scores of additional books of emblems as well. All in all, over six hundred authors brought out—so the untiring bibliographers have counted and estimated—about a thousand titles, which were issued in over two thousand editions, before that craze subsided, and
Grimm

Der Fressend Narr.

Ich bin genannt der Fressend Narr/
Man kennt mich in der ganzen Pfarr/
Wo mich ein reich Mann lebt zu tisch/
Sitz mit für gut Wildpreis und fisch/
So schlecht ich sam wolt mirs entlauffn/
Thu auch den Wein so konscht lauffn/
Als ob ich sey ganz bodenloch/
Des ist mein Schmerbauch dick und groß.

Figure 3. Jost Ammann and Hans Sachs, “The Gluttonous Fool” (Das Ständebuch, 1568)

emblems and emblem books fell not only into disrepute but into almost complete oblivion. The experts further agree that the total of copies of the mass of such books that swept the European market may well have amounted to a seven-digit number. Roughly one third of this stunning output was “made in Germany”—a fact which is noteworthy in itself.59

Germans, more than any others, have likewise been instrumental in the recent scholarly revival and reevaluation of the emblem and what it entails, both as an art form and a specific way of thinking.60 Therefore, and since a
Ex bello pax.

Figure 4. Andrea Alciati, “Peace out of War” (Emblemata libellus, 1542)

lively debate has been going on over the past two decades, making the terms “emblem,” “emblem book,” and “emblematic” household words in literary criticism, it will suffice, I trust, merely to refresh our memory with a few supplementary names and facts. A typical emblem, for instance, is the following, taken from the 1542 Paris edition of Alciati’s work (fig. 4). Its picture shows a helmet that has been “converted into a beehive” (zu aim pinen korb verkert); the Latin text framing it—a heading above and a poem in distichs below, both of which appear on the opposite page in a free German rendition—briefly describes what is shown, reflecting upon the problems of war and peace, and concludes with a useful lesson, or practical application:

O Furst all krieg mit ernst vermeyd,
Wo du mit rwe [sic] magst sitzen stil.61

The tripartite structure which characterizes the emblem, and sets it off against a unidirectional poem-plus-picture relationship, cannot but strike
the eye immediately. In this, as in every other characteristic, “Ex bello pax,” or “Frid auß krieg,” constitutes a truly classical example, combining a pithy and allusive heading (called motto, or inscriptio), a slightly cryptic yet evocative picture (called pictura), and an explanatory epigrammatic poem (called subscriptio). Despite its structural triplicity, however, it has, as does any true emblem, a function that is twofold: representation and interpretation, the former pertaining to the picture, but also, in part, to the text, the latter, solely to the text, and the poem in particular.

Naturally, Alciati “did not create something new out of nothing.”62 The medieval tituli, along with related forms such as dance of death sequences and illustrated broadsheets and books,63 figure prominently among the forerunners of his bestseller; but even more important was the heraldry of the late Middle Ages, with their growing predilection for devices, and the newly discovered hieroglyphics as well as nature symbolism, ancient mythology
Poems and/as Pictures

Multi sunt vocati, pauci verò electi.

Figure 6. Mathias Holtzwart, “Many Be Called, But Few Chosen” (Emblematum tyrocinia, 1581)

and history, and Biblical lore. Still, the Anthologia Graeca exerted, without fail, the determinative impact. Nearly half of the 103 emblems contained in the volume of 1531 are—as, for instance, figure 5—either translations or imitations of Greek epigrams. Granted that this remarkable percentage decreased as enlarged versions of the original edition were published—but so did the predominantly secular orientation of emblematizing, not only in Alciati’s work but in those of his many emulators, until spiritual emblems like Mathias Holtzwart’s “Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi” of 1581 (fig. 6) or George Wither’s “Virtus inexpugnabilis” of 1635 (fig. 7) were on the same footing with their mundane counterparts, and religious emblem books made up, in the long run, more than 30 percent of the entire production. Even when very worldly love emblems began to emerge in the Netherlands around 1600, bringing about some of the most beautiful and artistically accomplished collections, they were quickly and easily adapted to other-worldly purposes in turn. There was indeed “nothing under the sun” that
could not be utilized for emblems—Nulla res est sub sole, quae materiam Emblemata dare non possit, as Bohuslaus Balbinus quite pragmatically phrased it as late as 1687. But the Englishman Francis Quarles, a whole generation before him, was equally justified in appealing to God, and asking the pious rhetorical question: "... what are the Heaven, the Earth, nay every creature, but Hieroglyphicks and Emblems of His Glory?"

Not only did emblems readily manifest themselves everywhere—and everything was prone to emblematic interpretation—but emblematic representation also informed everything. They helped to shape "virtually every form of verbal and visual communication" during the period in question.
In that respect, the Imperial City of Nuremberg, home of the poet, theoretician, and council member Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, seems to have been especially active, even exemplary, as witness above all a series of emblematic paintings (now almost totally destroyed) which were commissioned for the assembly room of its old townhall, and executed in 1613. Luckily, etchings thereof came out as a book shortly afterward; and since these Emblematum politica have been reissued, one can still, as could Harsdörffer and his fellow aldermen of the Baroque Era, study Nuremberg’s official emblems, and ponder their hortatory messages: for instance, the lion, with the suppliant dog on the ground (figure 8), standing for mercy
toward the conquered, or the clock, with its weights and bell (fig. 9), for resounding fame won in fulfillment of burdensome duties. Thirty-two such "political emblems" with their Latin inscriptiones decorated the walls of that stately room.70

However, what is most significant in our context is the influence which the emblem, inspired as it has been by a literary genre, exerted for its part on literature. Traces of this influence can be demonstrated to range—if in a covert manner, so to speak, and erratically—as far as Goethe and, indeed, Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett; yet its immediate and overt repercus-

Figure 9. [Peter Is(s)elburg], "Where There Is Burden There Is Renown" (Emblemata politica, 1640, No. 18)
Poems and/as Pictures

sions were felt in 17th-century letters, notably in German drama and po-
etry. Ignoring the former and its obvious emblematic linkage of the act
(Abhandlung) to the chorus (Reyhen) and so on, we find a certain type of
verse that succeeds in “creating through words a structure which parallels the
emblem at all points,” verbally providing the pictura, or visual representa-
tion, alongside the subscriptio, or interpretation per se, and which thus gives
the impression of having dispensed, prior to its printing, with a woodcut or
etching that at first was meant to accompany it. Beyond doubt, epigrams
are particularly fit for this kind of poetizing; but sonnets are no less. They
may, in fact, lend themselves even more to like purposes: “The sonnet form,
with its strict division into quatrains and tercets, not only allows, but also
encourages, a division into pictorial and interpretational sections.”
Moreover, if we regard (as we ought to) headings as integral parts of poems, then,
in addition to the twofold function of the emblem, its tripartite structure,
too, is mirrored by that of the sonnet: the title, quatrains, and tercets of the
one equaling the motto, picture, and epigram of the other. Not just Andreas
Gryphius, whose name at once comes to mind, but also Catharina Regina
von Greiffenberg, Jesaias Rompler von Löwenhalt, and Angelus Silesius
composed such “emblematic poems”; and the same holds true for some of
the Metaphysical Poets in 17th-century England. Henry Vaughan’s “The
Water-fall,” where the poet, addressing what he is contemplating, both
depicts and interprets it, is a telling example:

With what deep murmurs through times silent stealth
Doth thy transparent, cool and watry wealth
Here flowing fall,
And chide, and call,
As if his liquid, loose Retinue staid
Lingring, and were of this steep place afraid,
The common pass
Where, clear as glass,
All must descend
Not to an end:
But quickned by this deep and rocky grave
Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.
Dear stream! dear bank, where often I
Have sate, and pleas’d my pensive eye,
Why, since each drop of thy quick store
Runs thither, whence it flow’s before,
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,
Who came (sure) from a sea of light?
Or since those drops are all sent back
So sure to thee, that none doth lack,
Why should frail flesh doubt any more
That what God takes, hee’ll not restore?
O useful element and clear!
My sacred wash and cleanser here,
My first consigner unto those
Fountains of life, where the Lamb goes?
What sublime truths, and wholesome themes,
Lodge in thy mystical, deep streams!
Such as dull man can never finde
Unless that Spirit lead his minde,
Which first upon thy face did move,
And hatch'd all with his quickning love.
As this loud brooks incessant fall
In streaming rings restagnates all,
Which reach by course the bank, and then
Are no more seen, just so pass men.
O my invisible estate,
My glorious liberty, still late!
Thou art the Channel my soul seeks,
Not this with Cataracts and Creeks.

Small wonder if verses such as these, with their duality of graphic evocation and subsequent explication, also bear an essential and often striking resemblance to the interpretative descriptions characterizing the modern—that is to say, postmedieval—specimens of our subgenre at large, which are, in so many cases, likewise devoid of any pictorial accompaniment.

With that we have returned to said tidal wave of iconicity which rose, however belatedly, after the Greek Anthology had been printed, and had triggered the emblematic avalanche. But whereas the emblem, despite appearances, is a highly intricate phenomenon which resists being given short shrift, the iconic poem, again despite appearances, is not. Here, I can really content myself with reporting the principal findings of scholarship, and listing the major figures and events. Yet are there any—historically speaking, or in terms of development? The one date relevant to us is the year 1619, for it marks the publication of the first as well as most celebrated and influential collection of iconic verse by a single author: namely, La Galleria, a volume amassed by the Italian mannerist Giovanni Battista (Giambattista) Marino. Granted, minor—and rather playful and private—volumes by various hands, assembled by humanists, had preceded it, and numerous isolated iconic poems or groups of poems had also been written and published previously. Still, it was only with Marino's huge “Gallery” of several hundred sonnets and epigrammatic madrigals (plus a few similar forms) on paintings and sculptures by Raphael and Titian, Michelangelo and Correggio (plus a host of other real and imaginary artworks) that modern iconic poetry of a more or less regular kind finally came into its own. During the entire 17th century and beyond, this book enjoyed an enormous popularity both inside and outside of Italy; and,
naturally, its poems were widely imitated, in addition to being admired and praised.\textsuperscript{82} One can safely conclude that ever since—with the early yet plausible exception of the mid-18th century, the heyday of German Enlightenment and age of Lessing—the mainstream of iconic poetry has been on the increase even when Marino’s fame sank, and has reached an unprecedented crest nowadays. Gisbert Kranz, in 1981, counted no fewer than 2,827 iconic poems since the beginning of the 20th century;\textsuperscript{83} between 1950 and 1980 alone, he informs us, at least 148 volumes consisting exclusively of such verse were brought out, as well as 33 anthologies.\textsuperscript{84} Kranz doesn’t tire of exclaiming that never before have there appeared so many Bildgedichte; and never before, he insists, have they been poetically so good.\textsuperscript{85}

It would be hard either to prove or disprove the latter statement. In more than one respect, including that of aesthetic value, iconic poems are, after all, “normal” poems. Or as an American scholar once put it: “The poetry which in some measure takes its origin from the finished works of the fine arts is somewhat unusual and specialized poetry, perhaps. But who shall say that poets may not be inspired by statues and paintings as well as by sunrises, daffodils, or deserted lovers?”\textsuperscript{86} Hence, suffice it to note but a few supplementary facts and findings, whether explicit or not. Some sound already familiar. For instance, after having located, and meticulously catalogued, well over 40,000 pertinent items by 4,583 authors in 33 languages, Kranz is able to confirm that, indeed, not only are epigrams and sonnets the most frequent forms of iconic poetry, but they are also the ones most suitable to its purposes.\textsuperscript{87} Conversely, the fact that German and English are far ahead, in sheer quantity, of even Italian may be astonishing at first sight, but is probably due, at least in part, to the background of the collector; yet it is worth noting all the same.\textsuperscript{88} Another interesting observation concerns the frequency and distribution of whole cycles and sizable tomes of iconic poetry—Spaniards in particular seem to have taken a liking for such latter-day Marinism, as witness Miguel de Unamuno’s “El Cristo de Velázquez” (composed between 1913 and 1920),\textsuperscript{89} Ramón José Sender’s \textit{Las imágenes migratorias} of 1960,\textsuperscript{90} and Rafael Alberti’s \textit{A la pintura} (composed between 1945 and 1967).\textsuperscript{91} Even Marcel Proust, as early as 1895, wrote a cycle of poems called “Portraits de peintres,”\textsuperscript{92} while the most productive present-day iconic writer is, as it turns out, a German poetess living and working in New York: namely, Margot Scharpenberg. The very titles of her exquisitely printed and illustrated books, six altogether, are suggestive of her intimate “pictorial conversations” (\textit{Bildgespräche}) with ancient, medieval, and modern art, whether in galleries or in churches.\textsuperscript{93}

Yet cycles are not always labeled as such. Are we aware, for example, that up to one third of the poems in what is perhaps the greatest and surely the finest collection of Rainer Maria Rilke’s verse, the two volumes so modestly and matter-of-factly—and without any hint at their
iconicity—entitled *Neue Gedichte*, are actually devoted to artworks?\(^9\) (His sonnet on the trunk of a Greek statue, “Archaischer Torso Apollos,” which belongs to this collection, deals precisely with the way art affects us, or ought to affect, move, and transform us.) On the other hand, the insight proffered by Kranz that John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” of 1819 is “one of the most beautiful iconic poems ever created” (*eines der schönsten Bildgedichte überhaupt*) is anything but new:\(^9\) already the aforecited American scholar, writing in 1943, had raised its five stanzas to an “ideal of poetic sculpture” of sorts;\(^9\) more recently, it was extolled as amounting to nothing short of a “museum” of its own.\(^9\) And there are many more facts and findings, some of them similar, some very different, that could be brought up or reiterated: as, to mention but one, that insoluble union of the two sister arts in a sole individual for which German has the word *Doppelbegabung*. A fascinating and most variegated sequence of such “doubly gifted” artist-writers or writer-artists could be arrayed, extending from Michelangelo and his contemporaries\(^9\) via William Blake right down to Dante Gabriel Rossetti or, for that matter, Wilhelm Busch.\(^9\)

However, let us touch instead, if only in passing, on yet another volume of great iconic poetry. It is a cycle which sublates, in a way, our entire subgenre; indeed it must be seen, as I have argued elsewhere, as a full-fledged modern emblem book, and a thoroughly political one at that. It is a work by Bertolt Brecht: to wit, his Marxist collection of 69 “photo(epi)grams” (thus the author’s own term[s]) which came out, under the lapidary title *Kriegsfibel*, in 1955.\(^10\) This impressive and, clearly, adult enough “War Primer” stemmed from Brecht’s near compulsive habit—practiced especially during and shortly before and after the Second World War—of making clippings from journals and magazines, mounting them on sheets of paper, and then turning them, much in the vein of the photo artist John Heartfield,\(^10\) into a critical, both pictorial and poetic, art form. For almost immediately, it seems, Brecht would conceive, compose, and write underneath the respective clipping an epigrammatic quatrain in order to interpret, lay bare, or, as often as not, outright debunk what was represented in the picture. The following two examples will be sufficient, I trust, not only for indicating the vast range of those modern *emblemata politica*, but also for demonstrating how utterly ill-advised Kranz was when he banned photographic elements from iconic poetry. Signaling the deadly serious, even tragic, aspect of Brecht’s collection, the first shot (fig. 10) depicts workers in a big steel factory. Thrice, the poet addresses them directly; thrice, they respond:

> “Was macht ihr, Brüder?”—“Einen Eisenwagen.”
> “Und was aus diesen Platten dicht daneben?”
Figure 10. Bertolt Brecht, “What Are You Assembling, Friends?” (Kriegsfibel, 1955)

“Geschosse, die durch Eisenwände schlagen.”
“Und warum all das, Brüder?”—“Um zu leben.”

(“What are you assembling, friends?”—“An armored car.”
“And what about those sheets of metal over there?”
“Grenades which penetrate the structure of armored cars.”
“And why are you doing all this?”—“In order to live.”)

The second shot (fig. 11) is a real snapshot. Confronting “honest” Goebbels—note how he places his hand on his heart—and fat, brutal Göring with each other, it typifies the other extreme of the “War Primer”—wildly hilarious satire. This time, Brecht feigns to overhear a dialogue, making the fatso start off:

“Joseph, ich hör, du hast von mir gesagt:
Ich raube.”—“Hermann, warum sollst du rauben?”
Dir was verweigern, wär verdammt gewagt.
Und hätt ichs schon gesagt: wer würd mir glauben?”103

(“Joseph, I hear you said about me that I am
A thief.”—“Hermann, why should you be a thief?
To deny you anything you want would be damn daring.
And suppose I did say such a thing: who would believe me?”)

These masterful iconic poems require no further commentary. Not only is Kranz proven wrong by them, as by Brecht’s whole volume, but what they also confute is the absurd claim set up in a popular reference book, according to which the epigram has been on a steady decline from the mid-19th century onward.104 Brecht, for one, knew better, having read and admired the fine epigrammatist Karl Kraus, who lived from 1874 to 1936; nor was he unaware of the roots of the age-old tradition he himself so superbly continued. Quite
to the contrary, various entries in the diary he kept during the war years (his *Arbeitsjournal*, another Brechtian combination of picture and text) refer explicitly to the “ancient Greek epigram” and its inception and function—and they are as fully informed as one can possibly wish.105

Thus, the Kriegsfibel takes us all the way back to the source again, not just of the iconic poem but of the pattern poem also. For both, as will be remembered, originated at about the same time, several centuries B.C., in classical Greece.106 Understandably, we find far fewer and less wide-ranging examples of pattern poetry than we do of iconic poetry. In fact, merely six are included in the *Greek Anthology*, forming the simple shapes of an egg and an ax, of a shepherd’s pipe and a pair of wings, and of two altars. The wings, to which we shall return presently, are by Sim(m)ias of Rhodes, who is generally believed to have invented the technopaign(e)ion, or Greek pattern poem; the shepherd’s pipe (fig. 12), also called panpipe or syrinx, is by his famous contemporary from Sicily, Theocritus; and one of the altars (fig. 13), dating from the 2nd century A.D., was, in all probability, dedicated to Emperor Hadrian of Rome (namely, by means of the first
letters in its every line, which yield an acrostic that runs, “Olympian, mayst thou sacrifice for many years”). As can be inferred from the last example, poets indulged in such verses throughout antiquity—in Latin, too—and they also introduced or favored additional devices, acrostics in particular. And these, as early as the first half of the 4th century A.D., ultimately led to the emergence of the carmen figuratum proper, the Latin counterpart of the Greek technopaign(e)ion.

Although we cannot be quite sure, the earliest pattern poems in Greece (say, the ax or the syrinx) may well have derived their shapes automatically from the objects on which they were inscribed, as was suspected by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Nietzsche’s illustrious adversary. The Latin pattern poems, on the other hand, seem to have presented themselves from the outset as a purely “literary art form,” with no real objects whatsoever impressing, as it were, their shapes upon them. This second—and, in its way, no less important and influential—variety of our second subgenre made its historical debut in a work dedicated to the Emperor Constantine: an elaborate panegyric, authored by a
Figure 14. Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius, from “Poem in Praise of Emperor Constantine” (4th century A.D.)
certain Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius, of a series of *carmina figurata* that are not only unquestionably literary but also exceedingly lettered as well as contrived (fig. 14). Their patterns do not circumscribe any outward contours; rather, they surface from within the text through acrostic lines (the so-called *versus intexti*) picked out in silver and gold, appearing here in mere boldface. The textual matrix, so to speak, of the poem, composed as it is of hexameters of equal length, indeed of exactly the same number of letters, occupies the page in its entirety, thus forming a regular rectangle, while the inward figure acrostically designed by it, an interlacement of the Greek letters Χ (chi) and Ρ (rho), forms the well-known monogram of Christ. Its words in turn—to be read from the upper left corner downward, then from the lower left corner upward, and twice down the center—reveal themselves once more as a profuse eulogy on that pious Christian ruler who, "with the help of the Almighty" (*summi dei auxilio*), has restored the empire, hence the world, to peace.110

This is but a relatively easy case in point; there are other poems in Porphyry's cycle which prove to be far more difficult, perhaps altogether undecipherable.111 He had some successors nonetheless, and further *carmina figurata* were produced, both during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. One of their notable if more isolated practitioners was Venantius Fortunatus, a learned Christian poet of the 6th century, who is today remembered chiefly as a writer of church hymns. However, the foremost medieval pattern poet was not a loner at all, but grew out of a whole circle of like-minded missionaries, teachers, and theologians each of whom experimented with Latin poetry. He was Hrabanus Maurus, abbot of Fulda in Hesse and a promoter, along with men such as Boniface and Alcuin, of what has aptly been termed Carolingian Renaissance. His cyclical *carmina figurata* in praise of the Holy Cross, *De laudibus sanctae crucis*, were composed or finished around 810; and not only did they crown those erudite poetic efforts under Charlemagne, but they also resembled to a hair (fig. 15) the Porphyrian model and its cryptography—so much so, in fact, that Hrabanus Maurus (alias Ramus, as he abbreviated his name in his poetry) deemed it necessary to append explanatory commentaries.112 Admittedly, later on in the Middle Ages, there is little, if any, evidence of *carmina figurata*;113 yet it was precisely *De laudibus sanctae crucis* which, when printed for the first time in 1501, less than a decade after the publication of the *Anthologia Graeca*, helped prepare for the reemergence of the pattern poem in the 16th and 17th centuries. Both these influences, that of the Greek *technopaign(e)ion* and that of the Latin *carmen figuratum*, converged and combined.114 To deny the latter the status of pattern poetry because of its liberal use of acrostics, as has been suggested by a Spanish scholar,115 is in no way justifiable.

Conversely, a British scholar, author of a concise historical stock-
taking,\textsuperscript{116} acknowledges not only the ancient and medieval \textit{carmina figu-
rat\textemdash{}rata}, as do nearly all specialists, but likewise recognizes a group of neo-
Latin ones. They are, as a matter of fact, the second most common type of
the five he distinguishes in Renaissance and Baroque pattern poetry.\textsuperscript{117} He
also notes that such poems at large total “a few hundred” in the vernacular
literatures of the 17th century in particular, apart from “a good number in
neo-Latin” and “a handful in Greek”; moreover, he expressly states that
“the German \textit{Bilder-Reime} [then the preferred technical term]\textsuperscript{118} are probably
the most numerous and possibly . . . the most skilful” among them.\textsuperscript{119}
This sounds quite nice, and cannot but flatter the ear of the Germanist.
And as to quantity, the generous Britisher may even be right. In Germany,
more than anywhere else, a “new canon,” in addition to that established by the Greek Anthology, did arise of readily available shapes, if mainly for occasional poetry. This expanded canon included, among other things, “hearts and goblets, usually for weddings; pyramids and biers for funerals; and crosses for . . . devotional verse.” It is also interesting that Nuremberg, just as in the case of emblematizing, played a leading role here, too, in that it became a, perhaps the, “center for the writing of pattern poems.” Since the standard examples are rather familiar, I shall adduce a
couple of rarer and lesser known instead. Both appear in Johann Geuder's *Der Fried-selig Irenen Lustgarten*, a work composed in celebration of the end of the Thirty Years' War.\(^{122}\) The trefoil (fig. 16) quite astutely signals that peacetime has enabled sheep and people alike to live in clover again, literally and/or figuratively; the fiddle (fig. 17), somewhat forced and less convincing, conjures up the musical outpourings and offerings, as it were, elicited by this peace. A third example, provided by Sigmund von Birken's balance ("In Form einer Wage") from a modern reprint (fig. 18), is timeless and neutral, but also more easily legible, both on account of its typeface and the arrangement of its lines, words, and letters. Yet it must be dismantled all the same, in order to be understood, and its opening sentence must be repeated:

\[
\text{Die Rechtsens Wage soll}
\text{Verdiensten und Verbrechen}
\text{recht Lohn und Straff zu sprechen:}
\]
\[
\text{Die Kunst bekronen}
\text{Der Tugend lohnen}
\text{Der Unschult schonen.}
\text{Doch nach Gewinst nit / noch üm Günst;}
\text{desondern einig nach Verdienste.}
\]
\[
[D\text{ie Rechtsens Wage soll}
\text{Verdiensten und Verbrechen}
\text{recht Lohn und Straff zu sprechen:}]
\]
\[
\text{Dem Recht recht schaffen}
\text{Die Laster straffen;}
\text{Die Schulden raffen,}
\text{Doch nit zu scharf noch zu geschwinde:}
\text{nach Billigkeit / iedoch gelinde.}^{123}
\]

If we look at figure 18 once more, we realize what the poet, in however unobtrusive a way, has achieved through his patterned balance. For, while the annunciatory lines of its beam and suspension are straightforward, a crisscross of vertical and horizontal text permeates over half of either scale: the former conveying the message embedded, the latter yielding, somehow acrostically, additional rhymes and assonances and even—consider, for instance, "bek- end schult" equaling "bekennt Schuld"—other, more hidden as well as allusive, correspondences.

Still, the best and most sophisticated achievements of Baroque pattern poetry, sparse as they are, occur in religious, or devotional, verse; also, as a rule, such Christian poems betray a strong affinity to the emblem and things emblematic. On the other hand, they have to be seen in relation to
Die Rechten Wage soll Verdiensten und Verbrechen recht Lohn und Straff zu sprechen:

Doch nach Gewinst Doch nit zu scharf nit noch im Gunste; desondern einig nach Verdienste.

Figure 18. Sigmund von Birken, “Scales” (Pegnessis, 1673; rpt. in Die Pegnitzschäfer, 1964)

“mystical thought” and “meditative practice”; indeed, their very composition reveals itself as a “paradigm” thereof, where the form exists as a “unifying focus” while the reading constitutes the contemplation, or “enactment” of the meditation and unfolding of the vision. On the other hand, one has rightly asked: “What could be more natural than to transform [an emblem or] emblematic poem with its serious conceptual foundation into a pattern poem by condensing the pictura [or the text evoking it] into the shape of the verbal work?” And one can argue again that the outline here, as in any such synthesis, “visually introduces the object of . . . meditation” and “constant reinforces [its] meaning by appealing to the sense of sight and fixing attention on the concrete basis of thought.” In short, then, this type of pattern poem “conflates pictura and subscriptio into a single word-image”; it amounts to a “telescoped emblem,” so to speak, or a “modern equivalent of the hieroglyphic.”

The conclusion, whether drawn in specifically religious and Christian or in generically emblematic terms, is one and the same: “The poem becomes an independent artefact; not just a picture of something else, but itself a kind of object.”

Let us take, for example, Gottfried Kleiner’s poem in the shape of a tree (fig. 19—meant to represent a cedar) which was prompted by the words of the psalmist, “The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted . . . .” This text (a very late one dating from 1732) must be read as a tree grows, i.e., from bottom to top, up- and heavenward; by that token, its line arrangement works “in several mutually supportive ways”:
Anagogically, it reveals a spiritual ascent; allegorically, it signifies the motion of the sap; affectively, it works on the reader's heart and mind; and physically, it provokes him to raise his eyes to Heaven. The use of line within the context of a speaking shape turns the poem into a devotional object, which actively furthers meditation. But it is also a prayer. The text identifies the cedar with Jesus, who is apostrophized as the tree at the start and whose name finally appears in the middle of the central line, at the heart of the poem. Having evoked the *arbor vitae crucifixa*, the imagery reverses in the poet's plea to Christ as gardener: the poet becomes the tree. The spiritual reward for this identification, the 'fruit,' does not appear pictorially and remains an invisible goal in the next world, beyond the material realm of the poem. It is the words of the prayer which allow the spiritual sense of the
Uber den gekreuzigten JESUS.

Seht der König hängen/ und uns all mit Blut befrengen.
Seine Wunden sehn die Brüste/ draus all unser Heil gerunnen.
Gest der König hängen/ und uns all mit Blut befrengen.
Seine Wunden sehn die Brüste/ draus all unser Heil gerunnen.

Seht, der König König hängen/ und uns all mit Blut befrengen.
Seine Wunden sehn die Brüste/ draus all unser Heil gerunnen.
Gest, der König König hängen/ und uns all mit Blut befrengen.
Seine Wunden sehn die Brüste/ draus all unser Heil gerunnen.

Seine Sehnen und Gefieder sich auf unser Heil gestreifen.
Seine Seiten offen sich/ macht sein Gnädigk Herz uns sehst
wenn wir schauen mit den Eißen/ sehen vor uns selbst darin.
So viel Strief/ so viel Wunden/ als an seinen keb gefunden/
so viel Sief- und Segens-Quellen
wolte Er unser Seele bestellten.
zwischen Himmel und der Erden
wolte Er aufgeopfert werden:
dass Er Gott und uns vergliche,
uns zu stärken / Er verbliche;
Ja sein Ersenden hat das Leben
mir und aller Welt gegeben.
Jesu Christ/ dein Tod und Schmerzen
Ich und schwebe mir stets im Herzen!

Figure 20. Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, “On the Crucified Jesus” (Geistliche Sonnette, Lieder und Gedichte, 1662)

pattern to emerge: the poem as text penetrates the inner meaning of the physical world represented by its shape. This use of patterning not only enhances the sense of unity created by repeated analogies (between the tree, Christ and the speaker; between the sap, blood and love; and so on), it makes possible a religious work through which, for the pious reader, such unity may be achieved.130

A similar if simpler use of patterning informs “Über den gekreuzigten JESUS” (fig. 20), a verse by the Austrian poetess who died in Nuremberg in 1694, Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg. Her text,131 no doubt, must be read in the opposite direction, downward from top to bottom; precisely thereby, however, it is invested with a deeper significance.132 “As we read down,” another specialist comments, “we see the figure of Christ hanging on the cross: his arms are mentioned in the lines forming the horizontal bar; just beneath this, his heart and wounded side are described. The attention to visual detail is even more evident in the manuscript version of the poem.”133
Easter-wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Figure 21. George Herbert, “Easter-wings” (from The Metaphysical Poets, 1967)

Nevertheless, the subtlest, most ingenious, and poetically as well as spiritually most powerful pattern verses of the Baroque era were not composed by a German writer, the generous Britisher’s surmise notwithstanding. On the contrary, they hail from his own country, their author being one of the English Metaphysical poets: namely, George Herbert (1593–1633). What I am referring to is Herbert’s well-known and much-debated poem “Easter-wings.” Actually, it consists of two pairs of wings (fig. 21). That, at any rate, is the way “Easter-wings” is printed nowadays. Yet he who wrote it intended it differently, as witness the editio princeps of his poems and various subsequent editions (fig. 22). Not only does such an upright arrangement intensify, quite markedly, the visual impression of wings, but it also reminds us of the heritage that Herbert consciously partook of; indeed it points, in all likelihood, to his very source and inspiration: to wit, “The Wings of Love” (ΑΙ ΠΤΕΡΥΓΕΣ ΕΡΩΤΟΣ) of Sim(m)ias of Rhodes as printed—with a Latin translation that accounts for their doubling on facing pages (fig. 23)—by the humanists who edited the Greek Anthology. Truly, more than anything else in poetry, Sim(m)ias’ verse, perhaps the most famous pattern poem in Western history, testifies to the
last lasting authority of literary tradition (die Mächtigkeit des literarischen Traditionalismus, as a promising German researcher put it). Concerning antiquity, for instance, we know of at least one imitation, composed by a minor Latin writer, which dates from the 1st century A.D. From the Middle Ages, nothing appears to be extant, provided there ever existed any such thing, but in the 16th century we find, among others, two Frenchmen (of the names of Mellin de Sainct-Gelais and Jean Grisel, respectively) who produced either congratulatory “Wings” (fig. 24) or genuine “Wings of Love” (fig. 25)—the former, in fact, as early as around 1506—and to top it off, the 17th-century German poet and theoretician Philipp von Zesen seems to have gone so far as to employ the notion of Sim(m)ian wings, and the term Flügel-Gedicht, in an overall generic sense. Furthermore, those verbal wings made themselves felt even in the 20th century, in the work of no less a literary worthy and individualist than Dylan Thomas, half of whose long cycle of pattern poems called “Vision and Prayer” consists of a series of six turned-around and “normalized” pairs of wings (the other half is taken up by as many diamonds, or lozenges). Granted, Thomas is more likely to have been inspired by Herbert than by Sim(m)ias directly; his twelve strophes are, after all, an impassioned religious text. But the tradition is being continued all the same. One of the founding fathers of modern poetic concretism whom I mentioned in the beginning, Eugen Gomringer, may
indeed, when designing his avant-garde wings (fig. 26), have harked back to the Greek father of Western pattern poetry.

Criticism devoted to Herbert’s “Easter-wings” is so copious and manifold that I cannot even select and quote an apposite passage from it, much

A la guérison de Madame, mère de François Ier.

O heureuse nouvelle, ô desirieux rapport
De la santé de qui la maladie
Estoit fin de plus d’une vie!
O agréable port,
Dont les plaisirs
Sont égaux
Aux travaux!
Des longs désirs
O favorable sort!
Et toi, ô mon âme assouvie,
Qu’entends-tu plus? as-tu encore envie
D’avoir un plus grand bien ça bas avant la Mort?

Figure 24. Mellin de Saint-Gelais, “On the Recovery . . .” (ca. 1506)
Figure 25. Jean Grisel, “Don’t Be Afraid of Love’s Surprises Anymore” (16th century)

less analyze it comprehensively. A few exegetic hints and brief citations will have to suffice. Note, for example, Herbert’s reduction of Sim(m)ias’ six lines to five in each half stanza, “which compares exactly with the description of two cherubim in the temple of Solomon, whose wings were five cubits high”; also, observe how the gradual shortening of the lines expresses decay and (the) fall while their gradual lengthening indicates “redemptive arising” and “spiritual growth.” Or consider the obvious though seldom interpreted fact that these lines “that look like wings when
the poem is [viewed] sideways [as in the early printings] look like hourglasses when it is held in normal reading position—a calculated visual effect which opens up the vast additional perspective of past and future, or time, death, and eternity, hourglasses being a favorite utensil and symbol both of the Baroque era in general and of its emblematic leanings in particular (they were associated with wings and wing symbolism closely enough, anyway; indeed, the two were not only placed side by side but were even welded together to form “winged hourglasses”). In sum, Herbert’s poem “rests on a polysemous network of analogous things [and events] in nature and history—bird[s; for we must not forget the ‘larks,’ the harbingers of spring and reawakening around Easter, and their rise and fall in flight], man, human race, [angels,] Christ[; and many more]—all encompassed in the physical pattern of blocks of letters.” Such a text will positively “not yield its [rich plenitude of] meaning unless one reads the visual shape as part of its carefully controlled symbolic [or emblematic] language.”

Interestingly and tellingly, pairs of meditative wings are not the sole poetic pattern of the 17th century that extends as far as the 1950s and 1960s. A Silesian writer by name of David Klesel, who lived from 1631 to 1687, brought forth a rectangular “block” of words and letters (fig. 27) likewise meant to be meditated upon, titled as it is a “Denck=Täffelchen,” yet which appears to defy any classification in traditional terms of its time, and therefore has, at least to my knowledge, never been investigated or discussed by Baroque scholars. To anyone even remotely familiar with modern experimental poetry, though, this textual arrangement is not enigmatic at all; quite to the contrary, it will immediately be recognized and classified as nothing less than a piece of combinatory, or permutational, “concrete poetry” centuries avant la lettre, and as a remarkably good one to boot. For not only are “techniques like the combination and the permutation” (techniken wie kombination und permutation) listed and praised by Gomringer as major devices of what he baptized—with a word that has itself become a catchword—as Konstellationen, but such “constellations” have also been constructed, eagerly and in large numbers, both by himself and by his fellow concretists during the past three decades. A
pertinent text published in 1968 by Claus Bremer, a German living in Switzerland, will serve as a fitting example, all the more so since it produces an initial impression strikingly similar to that created by its Baroque forerunner (fig. 28). Soon, however, the dissimilarities come to the fore; and they are no less striking. For, on closer scrutiny, Bremer’s mobile text about mobility remains fortuitous, repetitive, and, so to speak, self-referential, whereas Klesel’s “little tablet for thought,” far from being arbitrary, does impart something beyond sheer identity and redundance. The advice “B(et),” and the act of reading (and heeding) it, occupy the center, moving diagonally across the page; they are hemmed in, on either side, by “N(ot)”; but whichever direction, right or left, the “prayer in
bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich

sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und beweglich sein bewegen und bewegli...
The 20th century has been proclaimed the “third Golden Age” of pattern poetry, and the appearance of Apollinaire’s volume *Calligrammes* in 1918, the triumphant inauguration thereof. Less bombastically and more correctly put, one might also say—if, perhaps, all too critically toward earlier epochs—that it took both “a Mallarmé and an Apollinaire to extend a rather limited repertoire of shapes,” or of “forms borrowed from a common pool.” In any event, the most rabid partisans of either concretism or letterism would have us believe, in all innocence, that theirs is the attainment of the absolute peak in the development of modern poetry, whether shaped or unshaped; and their soberer friends and copractitioners are, as often as not, hardly less vocal. But I am not going to enter into the quibbles and squabbles of their seemingly endless debate, replete as it is with weirdest—textual experiments and verbal mutilations, not just of concrete poetry but even of letterism.)
accidental, imprecise, and contradictory terminology, and marred, as it fur-
ther is, by an excessive splintering into competing cliques, factions, in-
groups, and even one-man movements. Besides, an “exhaustive bibliogra-
phy” of concrete poetry alone would run up to “several thousand items,” as
was computed as early as 1978. The following double pronouncement,
selected at random, ought to be enough to characterize these inflational
tendencies in their entirety:

A Lettrist poem can be appreciated only performed, only listened to. The
printed material is just a score. . . . Concrete poetry is most of the time a field
of printed words and parts of words. Only in the rare works where all trace of
semantic material has disappeared is it a true abstract visual poetry.

What, really, is concrete poetry if its true state is “abstract” (as the author
himself emphasizes)? And what does letterism mean if the “printed
material”—partly, at least, composed of letters, as we have to presume—is
so utterly immaterial? However, there are not only vast collections of both
letterist and, above all, concrete poems but also numerous studies investi-
gating and situating them, some of which do prove to be helpful. Moreover,
the whole phenomenon is by far not so elusive or impenetrable as it
may seem, or itself claim to be.

Hence I can restrict my concluding remarks to a few observations
pertaining to the most relevant historical, terminological, and phenomeno-
logical aspects involved. Concerning history, neither letterism nor concrete
poetry—indeed, not a single text of avant-garde poetizing, as I have argued
elsewhere, can adequately be understood as separate occurrences,
much less as independent or, worse yet, novel and unheard-of achieve-
ments; rather, they must be seen as jointly emanating, in however medi-
ated a way, from the mainspring of poetic modernism: namely, the twin
oeuvre of Stéphane Mallarmé and Arthur Rimbaud and the dual revolution
their most advanced lyrical ventures initiated. “Since its very inception,” as
I once phrased it, “modern lyric poetry has known, or disposed of, two
extreme possibilities: texts for the eye and text for the ear.” Mallarmé’s
hazardous “Un Coup de dés” of the 1890s was, and professed to be, a
graphic constellatio n (precisely the word Gomringer adopted); concomi-
tantly, certain lines of Rimbaud’s verbal alchemy of the 1870s came close to
being combinations, or permutations, of pure sound. These methods,
which after Ezra Pound might be labeled as “graphopoëia” and “phono-
poëia,” respectively, were taken up and radicalized between 1910 and
1920: the former, in Apollinaire’s lyrisme visuel, as he would call his mod-
ern pattern poems summarily, or idéogrammes lyriques, as he referred to
them before coining that erstwhile neologism calligrammes; the latter in
the verbal "sound compositions"\textsuperscript{167} of the Dadaists, their sundry \textit{Laut-} and \textit{Simultangedichte} forged and recited by Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, and others, including the "Ursonate" contributed, with slight delay, by Kurt Schwitters.\textsuperscript{168} In between, as it were, the resounding battle cry \textit{parole in libertà} of the Futurists arose (meaning actually "letters in liberty," not merely "words") and came to serve as a kind of common revolutionary denominator—or may, in any case, be regarded as such—and all this has kept spreading and growing over the decades, and is still being practiced today, both by the adherents of letterism and by the adepts of concretism. No wonder, then, that none other than a descendant of Futurism, and with the express blessings of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, its founder and grand
old man, not only predated them, but also paved the way for them, if only unwittingly. He was the now little-known Carlo Belloli, whose Testi-Poemi murali, or “Poster Poems” of sorts, first appeared in 1944. Without fail, the concrete “trains” of letters (fig. 30) set in motion by him the year before, and which so impressed Marinetti, paradoxically display elements of sound no less than optical ones: “i treni[iiiiiiiii]” speed across the page and, in doing so, blow their shrill whistles.169

Thus, in spite of the misconceptions that prevail, and of occasional disclaimers by some of the initiates,170 concrete poetry and letterism belong together. Both participate, if in varying manner and degree, in “phonopoëia” as well as in “graphopoëia.” Yet in no way is the latter necessarily, nor even to a great extent, identical with pattern poetry proper. Terminologically speaking, not only can we discard the former altogether, but we can also dispense with the scrawling and scribbling of letterism. Founded by the Romanian Jean-Isidore Goldstein alias Isidore Isou, who had followed in the footsteps of his Dadaist compatriot Samuel Rosenstein alias Tristan Tzara,171 letterism was never more than a sectarian grouping anyway, almost wholly confined to France, indeed to Paris or the Latin Quarter. However, even large segments of concretism itself have to be ruled out, for, once again, not only are “visual” and concrete poetry far from being synonymous, or “near synonymous”172—misleading connections and compounds such as “concrete or optical poets” and poesia concreto-visual173 notwithstanding—but concrete poetry and pattern poetry are not nearly the same, either. In short, while concretism, not unlike letterism though much more distinctly, is divided into the “two major strands”174 of, on the one hand, “visual poetry . . . intended to be seen like a painting,” and, on the other, “sound poetry . . . composed to be listened to like music,”175 each of these must, and can, be further subdivided. Still, simply to speak (as does the rigorous German concretist Franz Löffelholz alias Franz Mon) of a corpus of Texte aus verbalem Material that broadly border on either “visual” or “phonetic” texts, which in turn transcend into art or music,176 is certainly not enough; it remains all too vague and unspecific, and this applies to the optical area in particular. Here the only viable solution appears to be offered by Gomringer, although he succumbs for his part to the opposite temptation, unduly narrowing the scope of concrete pattern poetry even while relegating it, just like Mon, to a marginal position. But he has at least a specific, even graphic, term for the pattern poems written by concretists: namely, “pictograms,”177 which he defines as follows:

poetische piktogramme sind textanordnungen, deren erscheinungsbild absichtlich abbildende umrisse hat. Es kann deshalb z.b. zuerst eine figur
One thing is for sure: Görminger’s “poetic pictograms,” which he defines as “arrangements of texts purposely aiming at depiction,” are those concrete pattern poems proper that we have been in search of; they appear, as it were, natural. His “constellations,” on the other hand (the term is clearly used here in a narrower sense), favor the techniques of combination and permutation; hence, the structures they arrive at are “geometric,” rather than “organic.” Finally, “poetic ideograms” are defined by Görminger in the same context as “formations” or “images” (gebilde) originating “through the precise concretion of semantic as well as semiotic intentions”; they are even praised by him—and justly so—as “one of the classical forms” of concretism. While, from the point of view of pattern poetry, his (mainly serial) “constellations” are marginal at best, as were already, albeit for different reasons, the disfigured and exploding parole and, indeed, lettere in libertà of Futurism, both the concrete “pictogram” and the concrete “ideogram” are indeed, pace Görminger, genuine forms of pattern poetry, as is easily borne out by any phenomenological investigation.

But let us return for a moment to history and terminology once more. Contrary to common belief, none other than Ernest Fenellosa seems to have been the first ever to employ the term “concrete poetry,” if somewhat accidentally; he did so in 1908, in his essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” published in 1919 at the instigation of Ezra Pound. The term “concrete art,” which came to be closely associated with it, was propagated and perhaps coined by the Dutch avant-gardist Theo van Doesburg in the very title of his “Manifest der Konkreten Kunst” of 1930, brought out in the sole issue of his journal Art Concret, and was subsequently taken up and used in the mid-1940s by the Swiss painter Max Bill, who greatly influenced Görminger, his secretary from 1954 to 1958. In fact, Bill even illustrated (if that is the word) some of Görminger’s “constellations” (fig. 31). Still, the first to employ the term “concrete poetry” not just by chance but programmatically was not, as is also widely held, Görminger himself but the Swedish avant-
gardist Öyvind Fahlström in a rather esoteric manifesto of 1953; and he had not been inspired by "concrete art" either, but by "concrete music" instead (more specifically, by Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*).\(^{183}\) Even so, it was not until the mid-1950s, after Gomringer had met leading members of the avant-gardistic circle *Noigandres* then flourishing in Brazil, that "concrete poetry"—both as a term and as a movement—fully emerged, indeed was immediately canonized, and soon gained recognition and momentum not only in Europe and South America, but likewise in North America, Mexico, and Japan. The friendly agreement of those years, a veritable *entente cordiale*, never quite reestablished again, was sealed with the publication, in 1958, of the Brazilians' manifesto *Plano-Piloto para uma Poesia Concreta*, authored by Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos; it marked the end of the prehistory of concretism, so to speak, and the beginnings as well as an early climax of its history.

By and large, this terminological development of concrete poetry is paralleled by the historical development of modern pattern poetry, which also commenced between 1910 and 1920. Mallarmé's "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" had appeared, it is true, even before the turn of
the century; yet it asserted itself and its power only upon its reedition almost twenty years afterward, shortly before the outbreak of World War I. Thus, in a manner of speaking, the emergence of the modern “poetic ideogram” and that of the modern “poetic pictogram” coincide, for, doubtless, “Un Coup de dés” reveals itself precisely as such an ideographic text in that it portrays, most “concretely,” dynamic processes and abstract thoughts and notions—the “throwing of the dice” and the reflection on “chance” in its title being already indicative thereof—whereas, without any doubt again, whole series of “concrete” pictograms, or, precisely, calligrammes, are contained in Apollinaire’s like-named collection of 1918. Of course, a phenomenology of those two basic modes of 20th-century pattern poetry would have to start out with Mallarmé; however, since his extended ideogram, which is not only highly complex but also covers a number of pages, cannot be reproduced here, we must settle for some later examples.

A splendid achievement indeed is the famous poem on the grasshopper (fig. 32) by the American E. E. Cummings, which evokes the entire essence and existence of that insect: not only can we hear it chirping in the grass, but, more important, we can also see it before our very eyes as it jumps. Cummings succeeded brilliantly in depicting its sudden movement and the way this affects our perception. Similarly, Gomringer’s poem “fliegt” (fig. 33) manages to capture the flight of a plane as it continuously proceeds, swiftly and smoothly, through the air that resists it and thereby
Figure 33. Eugen Gomringer, “Flying” (33 Konstellationen, 1960)

supports it; the six verbs and their apparently simple though most skilful arrangement, by means of either constant repetition or variation and change, convey nothing less than the idea of pure motion. On the other hand, do these ideograms really call for explanations? Gomringer’s best-known text, at any rate, and one of the most frequently cited, quoted, or reproduced of international concretism, “schweigen” (fig. 34), is overwhelmingly self-evident.185 (It is also exceedingly easy to translate, and its author has not failed to avail himself of this possibility.)186 Still, cases of such a striking self-evidence are the exception rather than the rule in the area of the concrete ideogram, whereas they naturally abound among concrete pictograms, which, equally naturally, prove to be much more numerous. Of the latter, Apollinaire’s “IL PLEUT” (fig. 35) is surely the most renowned precursor, and is regarded as quite typical187 even though one could argue that it might as well be subsumed under the previous heading, considering the way the rain is portrayed coming down. Yet aren’t these strings of falling raindrops fairly static, in effect? Most other pattern poems of Apollinaire’s—as, for example, “LA CRAVATE ET LA MONTRE” (fig. 36)—do not allow of any uncertainty; they constitute clear and unquestionable instances of the modern pictogram, and this applies even more to the specimens added posthumously to his collection.

Figure 34. Eugen Gomringer, “Silence” (33 Konstellationen, 1960)
Il pleut

Il pleut
c'est vous aussi
et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hâner
le regret et le dédain
entraînant
univers de villes auriculaires
pleurent une ancienne musique

Figure 35. Guillaume Apollinaire, “It Is Raining” (Calligrammes, 1918)
Figure 36. Guillaume Apollinaire, “The Tie and the Watch” (Calligrammes, 1918)

Here, as elsewhere in Apollinaire’s pictographic poetry, we sense an admixture of playfulness (notice the “tie” in particular) reminiscent of Christian Morgenstern’s charming poem on the funnels that walk through the night, “Die Trichter.” Concretism, by contrast with those forbears of its, is either deadly serious in its endeavors, or prone to being caught in the pitfalls of shaped punning, as it were; very rarely does it attain the witticism of Apollinaire’s written drawings (fig. 37) made sixty years ago, or the humor of Morgenstern’s patterned nonsense verse (fig. 38) antedating even them. Illustrative of such determined efforts are, for example, the Frenchman Pierre Garnier, one of the most prolific of all concrete poets, or the American Mary Ellen Solt, with her flowering “Forsythia” (fig. 39), the sprays of which stem—quite cleverly executed, albeit by a typographer—from the letters of the name of the shrub and their equivalents in the Morse Code. “The text,” Solt gravely assures us, “is part of the design.” And an enlightened critic subjoins the comparison: “The literary and visual meaning of concrete poetry as conceived by the poet and interpreted by the typographer...
Figure 37. Guillaume Apollinaire, various calligrams (Montparnasse, 1914; published posthumously)
DIE TRICHTER

Zwei Trichter wandeln durch die Nacht.  
Durch ihres Rumpfes verengten Schacht  
fließt weißes Mondlicht  
still und heiter  
auf ihren  
Waldweg

u. s.

w.

Figure 38. Christian Morgenstern, “The Funnels” (Galgenlieder, 1905)

Figure 39. Mary Ellen Solt, “Forsythia” (1966)
is somewhat analogous to a stage performance of a play. Garnier, while joyfully enthusiastic in his programmatic utterances, is hardly less earnest than Solt as a poetic concretizer. Consider the bullfight arena he built, in collaboration with his wife Ilse (fig. 40), of the Spanish word for it; or look at the branches covered with cherry blossoms he and Seiichi Niikuni cultivated (fig. 41), drawing on the Japanese character for them, and on a few roundish Latin ones in addition. In fact, whereas nearly all concretists indulging in pictograms move in the wake of the technopaignment(e)ion, whether ancient or modern, Garnier, with the help of his wife once more, truly went out of the way and even produced a latter-day carmen figuratum in the strict sense of the term. Permuting an alienated or archaic French “lily” (lys, or lis), the couple arrived at a picture the contours of which are unmistakably formed by the letters that have been left out (fig. 42). And just as plants and flowers invite concrete poetizing, so do also, ever since Apollinaire’s admired verbal horse, animals of any kind. In the mid-1970s, the Canadian Earle Birney had reared, not without some satiric intent, a dual and wondrously bilingual cat that was franco- as well as anglophone; and the Englishman Stanley Cook

Figure 40. Ilse and Pierre Garnier, “Bullfight Arena” (Prototypes, n.d. [1960s])
bred, as late as 1985, a formidable lettered rat (fig. 43)—or even, who knows, a Grassian Rättin.¹⁹²

That which I mean by “shaped punning” is, I am afraid, only too amply illuminated by the German poet-professor Reinhard Döhl’s one-piece still life with maggot of 1965 (fig. 44) which, slightly amusing though

Figure 41. Pierre Garnier and Seiichi Niikuni, “Cherry Blossoms” (Poèmes franco-japonais, 1966)
it may be momentarily, neither requires nor deserves any comment. Or, rather, the commentary it does deserve has been supplied long since: namely, by a then-budding Germanist at the University of Frankfurt in the year 1963. Writing for its student newspaper under the youthful pseudonym Ignaz Agnostowitsch, he countered Döhl's worm in the apple with a parodistic yolk in the egg (fig. 45), even before it had come to light. Which did not in the least prevent the anthologists from featuring it time
and again, alongside similar concrete items . . . and there exist a great many texts that are but such literal duplications of things, including—to add merely one—the Austrian Ernst Jandl’s “filmstrip” (fig. 46). All the same, we find a few other concrete poems, however thinly dispersed, that are more sophisticated, more sharply pointed; and they are no longer plain pictograms, either. Jandl’s “der vater / kontrolliert / seinen langen” (fig. 47), from his volume Laut und Luise of 1966, ought to suffice as an illustration. The reader instantly wonders what it might be that this father controls, or examines; after all, the gender of the missing noun, or the thing in question, is masculine. Hence, he or she begins to suspect that something not just lettered is involved here, but rather something four-lettered—and, lo and behold, he or she does discover a blunt and undisguised four-letter-word in the “long” run. Alas, it is a German word, and of a very different ilk indeed; and the answer it furnishes, way down at the
bottom of the page, is both banal and comical, and most sobering at that (fig. 48). To use the appropriate technical terms: Bart, taking the reader by surprise, clearly functions as an epigrammatic “point,” yet its effect is brought about by the “pattern” only, the arrangement and bare distribution of letters and words on the page and its blank space. Jandl was fully aware of these implications; the very chapter containing “der vater” is titled, precisely, “Epigramme.” Also, over and above the poet’s own elucidation, his editor Helmut Heischenbüttel, in a postface he appended, briefly notes and traces the epigrammatic tradition such concrete poems are part of.¹⁹⁶

With Jandl’s form of the epigram and that egg-shaped pseudonymous poem from Frankfurt, we are back, one last time, at the Greek Anthology: i.e., at Simonides and Sim(m)ias, respectively, and the joint origin of the iconic as well as pattern poems in ancient Greece, two and a half millennia ago. And as I have maintained from the outset, there must be a juncture where the two strands of their historical development intersect and actually coincide: that is to say, there must be something like a pattern poem on something like a picture—in short, the iconic pattern poem (whether devoted, more broadly speaking, to tools or weapons, to statues or paint-
ings). Such poems do in fact exist; however, they are exceedingly rare. For the only texts that qualify, as far as I have been able to ascertain, seem to be, on the one hand, the earliest Greek pattern poems—unless Wilamowitz’s hypothesis, according to which they derived their shapes directly from the objects they were inscribed on, is false—and, on the other hand, a
few quite modern, indeed contemporary, concrete pictograms. At any rate, no more than a mere handful of texts among the over 40,000 iconic poems inspected by Kranz can be identified as iconic pattern poems; of these, in turn, only a meager threesome is really worthy of note, at least in my opinion. All three of them, remarkably enough, are in German even if authored, as in one case, by a man who apparently was a native speaker of Italian.

The Austrian Jandl, as might perhaps be expected, provides us with yet another example of epigrammatic concretism, and one again not devoid of a certain comic relief within that serious business. The artwork he selected, in a text first published by the journal Akzente in 1969, was the Romanian Constantine Brancusi’s sculpture The Kiss of 1908 (fig. 49). It is both depicted and shrewdly interpreted in Jandl’s poem entitled “Der Kuß,’ nach Brancusi” (fig. 50). Kris Tanzberg, allegedly a Swiss roundling born in 1943, chose the Italian mannerist Giuseppe Arcimboldi’s portrait Rudolf II as Vertumnus of 1591 (fig. 51); his poem “bildnis rudolfs des zweiten,” written in 1970, constitutes an almost incredible yet, no doubt, most congenial linguistic tour de force in that it verbally imitates, or tries to imitate, the painter’s procedure of composing the autumnal face of the emperor by way of assorted fruits and vegetables. A glance at its opening stanza will, I believe, be sufficient:

vertumnus schalmeien lauscht
denkt an palermo ehren will auch er
die künstler denkt an tivoli veneerische
krankheiten nimmt man in kauf
wenn man wie auf capri kozen kann
neulich schlug ein anatom atemlos
heissa laterna magica entzwei zentauren
galoppierten vorüber noch wirkt in ihm das
trauma israelit kam ohne seinen sauren
kaftan an astrologe wollt er sein
wollt ihm einen fakir schenken
saß auf seinem divan illegitim...

Last but not least, there is Carlo Carduna, who wrote an iconic pattern poem on Pieter Breughel the Elder’s Parable of the Blind of 1568 (fig. 52), a painting also treated in that cycle of “normal” iconic poems William
der vater
kontrolliert
seinen langen

bart

Figure 48. Ernst Jandl, “The Father Controls” (*Laut und Luise*, 1966)
Figure 49. Constantine Brancusi, “The Kiss (detail)” (1908)

Figure 50. Ernst Jandl, “‘The Kiss’ by Brancusi” (Akzente 1969)
Figure 51. Giuseppe Arcimboldi, “Rudolf II as Vertumnus” (1591)

Carlos Williams composed, and which I mentioned at the very beginning. Carduna, born at Forio on the Island of Ischia in 1950, died in Naples in 1973; he did not live to see the publication of his text, for, according to Kranz, it was first printed—in German—in 1975. To juxtapose it (fig. 53) with the great American’s poem on the same subject might prove to be revealing, though. Williams’ “The Parable of the Blind,” the ninth verse of his cycle, reads as follows:

This horrible but superb painting
the parable of the blind
without a red
in the composition shows a group
of beggars leading
each other diagonally downward
across the canvas
from one side
to stumble finally into a bog
where the picture
and the composition ends back
of which no seeing man
is represented the unshaven
features of the des-
titute with their few
pitiful possessions a basin
to wash in a peasant
cottage is seen and a church spire
the faces are raised
as toward the light
there is no detail extraneous
to the composition one
follows the others stick in
hand triumphant to disaster\textsuperscript{201}

The iconic pattern poem of the Italian who died so young, and of whom
little appears to be known,\textsuperscript{202} can stand the test, in its specific manner, of a
comparison with the masterfully evocative tercets of the American—
whom, by the way, the concretists count among their predecessors. The
symbolic importance of Breughel’s church, for instance, evidently underes-
timated, or played down on purpose, by Williams, is better and more
convincingly grasped and expressed by Carduna, both through the wording
he selected for it and through its very position.7%

We have finally come full circle. To be sure, there are many more
questions that could be asked, many more problems that should be raised.
Some concern particulars, such as the relationship of the emblematic think-
ing of the Baroque Era to the seemingly all-embracing concrete thought of
the present, or the inclusion of the third of the sister arts, music, and the
creation of a “total work of art” (Gesamtkunstwerk) based either on 17th-
century emblems or on modern iconic, pattern, and concrete poetry. Others are of a more general, both historical and evaluative, nature. For
example, does there obtain a genuine affinity of pattern—and, perhaps,
even iconic—poetry to mannerism, as a style and/or an epoch? And might
this entire phenomenon, i.e., the interplay of poems and pictures at large, be
characteristic of late, Alexandrian or Hellenistic, eras in history? The fact
that we encounter, among concrete poets in particular, so many scholars and
learned philologists must, of necessity, give us pause. A related if far more
dubious affinity can be observed between concreteness and the practices of

Figure 53. Carlo Carduna, “The Blind by Breughel” (posthumous, 1970s)
modern advertisement. Cook's concrete rat, for one, is akin to an equally concrete American fish produced as a plaything for children (fig. 54), and both could easily be transformed into international advertising material, and used—or abused—for commercial purposes. On the other hand, any concrete poet could turn the butterfly gracing the ad of a large Paris perfume shop (fig. 55) into a perfect pictogram by replacing the French plural parfums by the singular papillon. This is not to say, however, that concrete poetry is essentially an offshoot or symptom of Western mercantilism and decadence. There exists, on the contrary, a veritable center of concretism behind the Iron Curtain (namely, Czechoslovakia and her capital, Prague); as a matter of fact, even a renowned Russian poet, Andrei Voznesensky, wallowed for a while in concrete poetizing. And as to the less offensive and avant-gardistic iconic poem, at least two collections have appeared in the German Democratic Republic, one of them stemming from a “circle of workers” who try their hands at creative writing.
Les longs boyaux où tu chemines
Adieu les cagnats d'artilleurs

Figure 56. Guillaume Apollinaire, “Cotton in the Ears (detail)” (Calligrammes, 1918)

But the gravest questions and problems that arise pertain to evaluation, and apply above all to pattern poetry in general and concrete pictog-raphy in particular. Indeed, so conveniently can those texts as pictures be emulated, either seriously or parodistically, that they are being forged and counterfeited, mimicked and mocked incessantly nowadays. An overall aping rages in the realm of modern shaped verse—and the most telling case in point is none other than Apollinaire’s seminal and celebrated rain poem. In truth, he was himself the first to copy his idea, varying only slightly (and not very successfully, I should say) his own original (fig. 56). Hosts of eager emulators have since followed suit, especially in recent years. The Scot Ian Hamilton Finlay, apart from alluding learnedly to Paul Verlaine, slyly opened at last the requisite umbrella (fig. 57), thereby adding a patterned pun; Seiichi Niikuni, whom we already met as a coproducer of lettered cherry blossoms, translated the French rain into his native tongue (fig. 58) by permuting fragments of its Japanese character, which then emerges
Figure 57. Ian Hamilton Finlay, “Rain” (1960s)

from the ultimate line; Felipe Boso—a Spaniard who lives in the Federal Republic of Germany, i.e., on soil imbued with concretism—simply reproduced, in bold letters, the Spanish word for rain (fig. 59), turning the i of lluvia upside down, and thus its dot, into a solitary raindrop; and a fellow countryman of his, José Luis Castillejo, filling the page with flurries of N’s, unleashed all sorts of Spanish or Portuguese, French or Italian nevadas, nevões, neiges, or nevicate (fig. 60), in lieu of that early Apollinairean rain though still, indisputably, in its wake.215 If we use S’s instead of N’s we can do the same in English or German or other Teutonic languages, and cause snowfalls or Schneefälle or their Dutch and Scandinavian equivalents . . . and if there are words for “snow” in African idioms, the Tuareg, Yoruba, or Hottentots can join us and do it also. And so on. Not even the cleverest or most diligent and faithful of such emulations are proof against becoming, unbeknownst to their authors, involuntary parodies and self-parodies. Deliberate parodying is all the more facile. Just take the Czech Ladislav Novak’s liturgical “GLORIA” (fig. 61), presumably full of religious faith and fervor, and compare it with the playful little balloon (fig. 62), rising so easily in French or German, of an erstwhile Milwaukeean. Reinhold Aman (who is a philologist, indeed a Germanist) did not hesitate to parody the Baroque scales of Birken, either (fig. 63); in what I called “shaped punning,” moreover, he can surely compete with the most daring of concretists (fig. 64).216

Perhaps Jandl has summed it all up with his “easy grammar poem” even though its lines do not form a pictogram. In exchange, they are
Figure 58. Seiichi Niikuni, “Rain” (1960s)

Figure 59. Felipe Boso, “Rain” (1970s)
Figure 60. José Luis Castillejo, “Snow” (Libro de la letra, 1974)
Figure 61. Ladislav Novak, “Gloria” (1960s)
written in a kind of audiovisual Pidgin English which must be looked at as well as listened to (fig. 65). Eventually, anything goes in this easy poesy; anything is exploitable, convertible, marketable. Or as an insightful Italian critic, himself not unaffiliated with visual, optical, and pictographic concretism, curtly phrased it: “Everything seems to be poetry, or can be read as such” (Tutto sembra poesia o può diventare leggibile). The rules and regulations of the game boil down to an “easy grammar” indeed. They often belie what is held by an American critic:

To slow down the glance, optical poetry is particularly efficacious . . . impeding the linear rush from beginning to end, and forcing attention to sides and center; the relation of the optical to the verbal creates its own problems and thus its own creative delay within the text, holding it up, and slowing it down for greater insight.

That, I am afraid, is scarcely tenable, and least of all in regard to modern pattern poetry, indeed to pattern poetry at large. Apart from a few notable exceptions, most of which I have in fact mentioned, its countless constructs must strike the reader, no matter how much time and effort their authors may have invested, as verbal lightweights and visual quickies producing neither “creative delay” nor “greater insight.” In a way, the whole area of pictography is but a huge playground for punsters that teems with gags and gimmicks, or “idiosyncratic oddities” at best. And such verdicts, sweeping and harsh as they sound, are far from being new or unequaled; quite to the contrary. In England, for example, pattern poetry, while glorified by its
fans, was denounced as “fantastical,” “foolish,” and “mad” by its foes as early as the 16th century—“Nothinge so absurde and fruteless but being once taken vpp shall have sume imitatoures,” as Gabriel Harvey, a friend of Edmund Spenser’s, contemptuously remarked in conclusion.221

Or am I wrong, just as he was? After all, only a few decades later, there originated that masterpiece of English literature, Herbert’s “Easterwings,” a perfect pattern poem if ever there was one; also, no less a literary worthy than Charles Baudelaire maintained that the “best account of a picture would be a sonnet or an elegy,” thus vindicating the iconic poem.222 Have I, then, overdone my criticism? Have I been carried away polemically? Is there more than arbitrariness or pedantry, trickery or cheap imitation to the majority of modern pictograms, more than trite or erudite playfulness (and an occasional witty point) to concretism in general? But I shall leave any and all such questions and problems to the ongoing aesthetic as well as theoretical intercourse.223

Notes

1 See William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem (Boston, 1958), p. 29.
2 William Carlos Williams, Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems (New York, 1962).


5 Cf. De arte poetica, v. 361–365:

\[ ut \ \textit{pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes,}
\[ \textit{te capiat magis, et quaedam, si longius abstes}
\[ \textit{haec amat obscurum, volet haec sub luce videri,}
\[ \textit{iudicus argutum quae non formidat acumen;}
\[ \textit{haec placuit semel, haec deciens repetita placebit.} \]

Evidently, what Horace here lists are mere accidentals of aesthetic reception, such as its place and time; in no way does he aim at, much less proclaim, an essential equation of the two art forms. For a more extensive critical discussion, see Hagstrum, pp. 9ff. and 59ff.

A brief monograph, beautifully illustrated, does not pertain to our discussion, despite its promising main title; cf. Hann Trier, \textit{Ut poesis pictura? Eine Betrachtung zur Malerei der griechischen Antike} (Heidelberg, 1985).


12 On occasion, medieval Persian poetry has been mentioned as containing similar phenomena; see, for instance, Helmut Rosenfeld, \textit{Das deutsche Bildgedicht: Seine antiken Vorbilder und seine Entwicklung bis zur Gegenwart. Aus dem Grenzgebiet zwischen bildender Kunst und Dichtung} (Leipzig, 1935), pp. 89 and 92.


Poems and/as Pictures


20 Cf. Ernst, “Die Entwicklung der optischen Poesie.” The title of his book then announced as forthcoming runs, significantly enough, “Carmina figurata”: Visuelle Lyrik vom hellenistischen Bildgedicht bis zur konkreten Poesie. Versuch einer gattungsgeschichtlichen Grundlegung. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the volume has not yet appeared.


22 Cf. Hagstrum, Sister Arts, p. 18.


24 Cf. Adler, “Technopaigneia.”


26 Adler, “Technopaigneia”; compare also the most recent issues of the annual MLA International Bibliography.

27 Cf. the very title of Rosenfeld’s aforecited monograph.

28 Cf. Klonsky, Speaking Pictures; his title is equally “speaking.” And, by the way, his introduction, a veritable hodgepodge to begin with, abounds with mistakes.

29 Albrecht-Bott, Die Bildende Kunst, states categorically: “Ikonisch werden . . . diejenigen Verse genannt, in denen sich der Dichter konkret auf ein reales Kunstwerk bezieht.” She goes on to explain: “Unter ekphrastischen Gedichten werden in Differenzierung der antiken Bedeutung, die literarische Beschreibungen [more correctly, rhetorical descriptions] verschiedenster Art und Gegenstände umfassende, hier die Verse auf ausschließlich imaginäre Bildwerke verstanden als . . . zu unterschiedende Gattung”; cf. pp. 1f., n. 1. But already Rosenfeld had insisted, it should be noted, that a Bildgedicht must be devoted to ein reales Werk der bildenden Kunst; cf. p. iii.


32 Cf. Enzensberger alias Thalmayr, Das Wasserzeichen der Poesie, pp. 312f.: Bildgedicht here appears side by side with the previously mentioned Kalligramm.


34 In addition to the two scholarly—and, in one case, truly monumental—monographs published by Kranz (see n. 15), compare the following anthologies he compiled and edited: Deutsche Bildwerke im deutschen Gedicht (Munich, 1975); Gedichte auf Bilder: Anthologie und Galerie (Munich, 1975); Bildmeditation der Dichter: Verse auf christliche Kunst (Regensburg [and] Hamburg, 1976).
36 See ibid., p. 16.
37 Jost, “Gedichte auf Bilder,” enters a similar protest, substantiating it very poorly, however. Compare my article(s) cited in n. 100.
38 This, at any rate, is what Kranz wants to convey. Others are more explicit if more laconic, as, for example, Titus Heydenreich, “Salome in Übersee: Lateinamerikas Modernisten und die Tradition des Bildgedichts,” Lateinamerika-Studien 9 (1982): 503–31; here, p. 504: “Bildgedichte . . . können sich auf die Gesamtheit der Formen darstellender Kunst beziehen.” Compare also Hagstrum, Sister Arts, p. 18.
39 See Kranz, Das Bildgedicht in Europa, pp. 78ff., and Das Bildgedicht 1: 329ff.—But there seems to obtain a certain inconsistency insofar as Kranz, while incorporating fictitious artworks, does not admit emblems unless their pictures demonstrably antedate their texts; cf. ibid., pp. 7 and 11.
41 For a sampling of pertinent terms and utterances, see nn. 106, 155, 117, 161, 173, and 177.
42 Compare, for the survey following, Hagstrum, Sister Arts, pp. 18ff.; Kranz, Das Bildgedicht in Europa, pp. 85ff.; Rosenfeld, Das deutsche Bildgedicht, pp. 11ff.
43 See Kranz Das Bildgedicht 1: 11.
44 See Hagstrum, Sister Arts, p. 19.
48 Quoted and discussed by Peek, Griechische Grabgedichte, pp. 3ff.
49 Thus Hagstrum, Sister Arts, p. 22.
51 See, for example, Antonio Muñoz, “Descrizioni di opere d’arte in un poeta bizantino del secolo XIV (Manuel Philes),” Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft 27 (1904): 390–400.
52 But compare Kranz, Das Bildgedicht in Europa, p. 87.
53 See Hagstrum, Sister Arts, p. 41.
54 Cf. ibid., n. 19.
55 Oddly enough, the pertinent standard work, the rendition of which I have adopted almost unaltered, translates the concluding genitive as “to Solomon”; cf. The Image of the Black in Western Art II: From the Early Christian Era to the “Age of Discovery” I: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood, ed. Jean Devisse [etc.] (New York, 1977), p. 129.
57 They abound especially in the late Middle Ages; see Rosenfeld, Das deutsche Bildgedicht, pp. 17ff. et passim.
59 The best introductory essays and general overviews have been provided by Peter M. Daly, whom I am following closely; see especially his “The Emblematic Tradition and Baroque Poetry,” in German Baroque Literature: The European Perspective, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (New York, 1983), pp. 52–71. But compare also the monumental reference

60 See Daly’s summary cited in n. 59.
62 Thus Daly, “The Emblematic Tradition and Baroque Poetry,” p. 53.
63 A particularly interesting case in point is Brant’s Ship of Fools; see Holger Homann, “Emblematisches in Sebastian Brants Narrenschiff?,” Modern Language Notes 81 (1966): 463–75.
65 Compare, for instance, the recent anthology by P. J. Meertens and Hilary Sayles, Nederlandse Emblemata: Bloemlezing uit de Noord- en Zuidnederlandse Emblemata-literatuur van de 16de en 17de eeuw (The Hague, 1983).
66 Quoted by Hoffmann, “Alciati,” p. 515.
68 Thus Daly, “The Emblematic Tradition and Baroque Poetry,” p. 53.
70 For more details and similar instances, see Karl Heinz Schrey’s postface to the aforementioned edition, especially pp. 93ff.
72 For a comprehensive treatment, see Schöne’s seminal monograph, Emblematur und Drama.
74 Ibid., p. 122.
77 Rather oddly, Rosemary Freeman claims to discern not just “three sharply distinguished sections” in Vaughan’s poem, but even a marked “change in form and rhythm” in each; cf. her English Emblem Books (London, 1948; rpt. 1967), pp. 151f.
78 Mention should also be made, if only in passing, of a sizable number of atypical emblems, the so-called emblemata nuda, or “naked emblems,” i.e., emblematic verse with no picture at all; cf. Daly, “The Emblematic Tradition and Baroque Poetry,” p. 62. Furthermore, it should be noted that every literary form underwent, to a greater or lesser degree, the influence of the emblematic mode during the 17th century, including narrative prose and edifying literature, to name but two more. For the former, see Daly’s Literature in the Light of the Emblem, pp. 168ff., but also the volume Emblem und Emblematikrezeption cited in n. 71 above; for the latter, compare both this volume and Waltraud Tepfenhardt’s article “Emblematisches in Christian Scrivers Gottholds Zufällige Andachten,” Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik 14 (1982): 111–24.
79 Kranz, for instance, has offered a descriptive typology—not, as he claims, a theory—that comprises no fewer than 27 different kinds of iconic poetry; compare, above all, his Das Bildgedicht 1: 13 and 173ff.
80 One of them, the so-called Coryciana of 1524, even predates Alciati’s Emblemata liber; cf. ibid. 1: 354f.
81 See ibid. 2: 1037ff. and Hagstrum, *Sister Arts*, pp. 102ff.; also, compare Albrecht-Bott, *Die Bildende Kunst*.
82 See Kranz, *Das Bildgedicht in Europa*, pp. 42ff. and 93ff.
83 Kranz, *Das Bildgedicht* 1: 12.
84 Cf. ibid., p. 7.
85 Cf. Kranz, *Das Bildgedicht in Europa*, p. 101, as well as his preface to the volume *Bildmeditation der Dichter*, p. 11, where he adds: “Bildmeditation ist heute mehr als eine Mode. Sie ist eine Notwendigkeit.” Clearly, this statement is at least as debatable as is Kranz’s overall assessment.
87 Cf. Kranz, *Das Bildgedicht* 1: 15, and *Das Bildgedicht in Europa*, p. 84.
90 See Ramón José Sender, *Las imágenes migratorias* (México, 1960); also, compare Kranz, *Das Bildgedicht* 1: 324.
93 See the following works by Margot Scharpenberg: *Bildgespräche mit Zillis: 15 Gedichte zu einer romanischen Kirchendecke* (Beuron, 1974); *Bildgespräche in Aachen: Fünfundzwanzig Gedichte zu mittelalterlichen Skulpturen des Suermondt-Ludwig-Museums Aachen* (Duisburg, 1978); *Fundort Köln: Fünfundzwanzig Gedichte angeregt durch das Römisch-Germanische Museum in Köln* [etc.] (Duisburg, 1979); *Domgespräch: Fünfundzwanzig Gedichte zum Kölner Dom* [etc.] (Duisburg, 1980); Moderne Kunst im Bildgespräch: Fünfundzwanzig Gedichte zu Kunstwerken aus dem Museum Ludwig in Köln* [etc.] (Duisburg, 1982); *Verlegte Zeiten* [etc.] (Duisburg, 1988).
94 Cf. Rosenfeld, *Das deutsche Bildgedicht*, p. 252; he seems to have been the first to underscore this obvious fact. See also Kranz, *Das Bildgedicht* 2: 1158ff. See also Ralph Freedman, “Rainer Maria Rilke and the Sister Arts,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism: Festschrift Presented to René Wellek in Honor of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (Berne and New York, 1984), pp. 821–47.
96 Cf. Larrabee, *English Bards*, p. 9. In his own wording, Keats’s ode “is probably as close as any Romantic—or, for that matter, any English—poem to the ideal of poetic sculpture.”
99 Kranz, adhering to his strict definition, lists merely their iconic poems proper; cf. his *Das Bildgedicht* 2: 701 (Blake), 739 (Busch), and 1171ff. (Rossetti).
101 Compare, above all, Wieland Herzfelde, *John Heartfield: Leben und Werk* (Dresden, 2d rev. and enlarged ed. 1971); also, see *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (Berlin, 1929), Kurt Tucholsky’s “Bilderbuch” the layout of which is by Heartfield.
103 Ibid., p. 27.


For the brief survey following, compare in particular the aforecited articles and books by Peignot, Adler, Rosenfeld, Ernst, and Cook (see nn. 10, 11, 12, 15, and 21) as well as the two anthologies by Klaus Peter Dencker, *Text-Bilder: Visuelle Poesie international. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Cologne, 1972) and Miguel d’Ors, *El caligrama, de Simmias a Apollinaire: Historia y antología de una tradición clásica* (Pamplona, 1977). As can be gleaned from the very titles they have chosen, both these anthologists try to introduce a new terminology: the former, by coining the novel term Textbild, the latter, by quite arbitrarily—indeed, as he admits himself, contrarily to Spanish usage—expanding an already existing term; cf. Dencker, p. 7 and d’Ors, p. 11. But see also Robert Massin, *La Lettre et l’image* (Paris, 1970).


In an article of 1899; cf. Adler, p. 109.

In their entirety, the *versus intexti* read:

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Summi dei auxilio nutuque perpetuo tutus
orbem totum pacavit trucidatis tyrannis
Constantinus pius et aeternus imperator,
reparator orbis.
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Compare, for instance, the so-called *versus cancellati* reproduced by Enzensberger alias Thalmayr, *Das Wasserzeichen der Poesie*, p. 319. The accompanying “Quellen und Scholien,” which attempt to decipher them, pass on them the summary verdict: “Es handelt sich um eine aberwitzige *tour de force*”; cf. ibid., p. 468. A German neologism for this kind of verse seems to be *Gittergedicht*; cf. Dencker, *Text-Bilder*, pp. 8f.


Cf. d’Ors, *El caligrama*, p. 20; he dismisses any *carmina figurata* as “ciertas modalidades de poesía visual que nada tienen que ver con los caligramas [i.e., pattern poems, according to his terminology].”

He is Jeremy Adler; cf. his “Technopaigneia.” But compare also Rosenfeld, *Das deutsche Bildgedicht*, pp. 87ff., Warnock and Folter, “The German Pattern Poem,” and Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, 123ff. (who, unfortunately, still confounds Bildgedicht and Figurengedicht, using both as synonyms for “pattern poem”).


For other terms, see Warnock and Folter, “The German Pattern Poem,” p. 44.


Ibid., p. 118.

Thus Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, p. 132.

It came out, for whatever reason, only in 1672.

Die Pegnitz Schäfer Georg Philipp Harsdörffer Johann Klay Sigmund von Birken: *Gedichte*, ed. Gerhard Rühm (Berlin, 1964), p. 65. Not by chance, Rühm has been one of the loudest proponents—if only a very minor practitioner—of “concrete poetry.”


Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, p. 125.

Cf. ibid.


Ibid., p. 133.
Ps. 104:16.

Adler, "Technopaigneia," p. 136. It should be noted, however, that reading from bottom to top was already mentioned, and even illustrated, by George Puttenham, whose The Art of English Poesie dates from 1589.


In the very first line, the downward movement is emphasized by the verb hängen; later on, it is reinforced by er neigt.


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156 See d’Ors, *El caligrama*, p. 49; his wording *tercera edad de oro*, of course, cannot but provoke a comparison with the Spanish *siglo de oro*. But this is intentional, as is the challenging use of the term *clásico* in his subtitle.


163 Cf. ibid., p. 7; “Treize thèses,” p. 22. I combine both writings, which are practically identical anyhow.


165 As well as on Peter Demetz; see his “Varieties of Phonetic Poetry: An Introduction,” in *From Kafka and Dada to Brecht and Beyond: Five Essays*, ed. Reinhold Grimm et al. (Madison, 1982), pp. 23–33; here p. 24.

166 Cf. Peignot, *Du Calligramme*, p. 3; Thomas, “Lecture / Montage / Espace,” p. 87.


At least as far as concrete poetry is concerned, Belloli’s status as a predecessor has been acknowledged, and most emphatically at that. Cf. especially Mon, “Über konkrete Poesie,” p. 136: “Das erste ‘konkrete’ Gedicht schrieb Carlo Belloli 1943.”

Not surprisingly, Curtay, “Lettrism,” attempts to separate letterism completely from concrete poetry, whereas others justly insist, not only on their kinship but also on the presence of both “phono-” and “graphopoeic” elements in letterism. Compare, for example, Lora-Totino, “Poesia concreta poesia sonora,” pp. 335f.

I wonder if their ethnic and geographical background had not perhaps influenced their attitude toward “the word,” indeed “the letter.”

This is the way in which the point I am making is corroborated by Döhl, “Konkrete Literatur,” p. 270.

It should be noted that errors of this kind have been committed by experts and dabblers alike. Cf. Mary Ann Caws, “Seeing the Snag: Optical Poetry and Beyond,” Dada/Surrealism 12 (1983): 81–89 (my emphasis); Chicharro Chamorro, “Notes para un análisis,” pp. 377ff.

See Lora-Totino, p. 334. He distinguishes due filoni essenziali comprising, on the one hand, testi audiopoetici and, on the other, visualità (with the emphatic addition, strictu sensu).

Cf. Solt, Concrete Poetry, p. 7; Cobbing and Mayer, Concerning Concrete Poetry, p. 63ff. and 71ff.


This term has now been expanded by a didact to embrace any and all pattern poetry from Greek antiquity onwards; cf. Rückert, “Experimentelle Lyrik,” p. 188.


“Pictograms” and “constellations” make up the two modalità, called organica and geometrica, of concrete poetry at large that Sara Barni distinguishes in her fine and informed—and also not uncritical—article “Sulla poesia concreta tedesca,” Studi germanici, N.S. 16 (1978): 403–34. She explains: “La prima ha carattere mimetico dell’apparenza naturale e inclina all’icona e al calligrama . . . . L’altra, più frequente nell’area tedesca, opera in moduli geometrici e perviene a una sorta di architettura testuale”; p. 409. However, hers is not a distinction strictly in terms of pattern poetry; also, she omits one of the most interesting contributions of concrete poetry that Gomringer himself has dubbed “classical.” See below.


See Cobbing/Mayer, Concerning Concrete Poetry, p. 54; but compare Döhl, “Konkrete Literatur,” p. 273.

See Döhl, “Konkrete Literatur,” pp. 271 and 273. Döhl also reports and comments on an essay by Hans Arp of 1951, entitled “Kandinsky, le poète,” which contains additional if slightly doubtful evidence.


Much less can “Un Coup de dés” be imitated; the attempts of Gomringer, for instance, failed pitifully. Cf. his Worte sind Schatten, pp. 137ff.

Nonetheless, there exist commentaries; see, for instance, Wolfgang Max Faust, Bilder werden Worte: Zum Verhältnis von bildender Kunst und Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert oder Vom Anfang der Kunst im Ende der Künste (Munich, 1977), pp. 10f.

See Gomringer’s Worte sind Schatten, pp. 28ff. (with further examples).

Compare, for instance, Enzensberger alias Thalmayr, Das Wasserzeichen der Poesie, pp. 307ff.

Christian Morgenstern, Alle Galgenlieder (Frankfurt, 1972), p. 29; for an improved, that is, even more pictographic, version, see Enzensberger alias Thalmayr, Das Wasserzeichen der Poesie, p. 313 (the pattern seems to work best with an old-fashioned typewriter, though). Cf. also Rosenfeld, Das deutsche Bildgedicht, pp. 95f.

See Solt, Concrete Poetry, n.p.

Both the lilies and the bullfight arena are contained in Ilse et Pierre Garnier, Prototypes: Textes pour une architecture (Paris, n.d.), n.p.

192 In The Rialto 2 (Spring 1985): 11.

193 Cf. Diskus 13, 10 (1963): 13. I strongly suspect Karl Riha—now also a professor of German, and a Dada specialist to boot—to have been the author. See n. 168 above, but compare also n. 209 below.

194 An Italian critic calls such texts mero calligrafismo della parola; cf. Lora-Totino, “Poesia concreta poesia sonora,” p. 337.


196 Cf. ibid., pp. 203ff.


198 See Kranz, Das Bildgedicht 2: 1257ff.; Gedichte auf Bilder, pp. 288f. Of course, Kris Tanzberg is an anagram of Gisbert Kranz; hence . . .

199 Ibid., p. 161.

200 See ibid., p. 267; Kranz, Das Bildgedicht 2: 749. Once again, his identity is rather doubtful.

201 Williams, Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems, p. 11; for an interpretation of Carduna’s poem, see Kranz, Das Bildgedicht 1: 36ff.

202 All Kranz has to say about Carduna is: “Sohn eines Arbeiters. Als Lyriker Begründer des grammatischen Konkretismus”; cf. Gedichte auf Bilder, p. 267. Also, compare ns. 198 and 200 above.

203 See Gomringer’s preface to the volume Konkrete Poesie, p. 5.


205 The concretist Sylvestre Houédard, in a way clearly reminiscent of the Baroque pronouncements by Quarles and Balbinus quoted on p. 16, called the entire universe “a beautiful concrete poem”; cf. Garnier, “Jüngste Entwicklung der internationalen Lyrik,” p. 489. But then, Houédard is a Benedictine monk.

206 Cf. Daly, “The Emblematic Tradition and Baroque Poetry,” p. 60: “One of the most highly specialized emblem books remains the collection by Michael Maier entitled Atlanta Fugiens (1617). This work contains mottoes and epigrams in Latin and German and a musical setting for the Latin epigrams. A learned Latin commentary is appended to each emblem. Maier’s volume may thus be considered a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ in nuce.”

207 See Kranz, Das Bildgedicht 1: 415ff.; also, compare Claus Clüver, “Concrete Poetry into Music: Oliveira’s Intersemiotic Transposition,” The Comparatist 6 (1982): 3–15. Clüver discusses in great detail the ingenious way a poem by Augusto de Campos was set to music by the Brazilian composer Willy Corrêa de Oliveira, a student of Stockhausen’s. Furthermore, it should be noted that there exists a score by Paul Dessau for most of Brecht’s Kriegsfibel; the oratorio thus created is titled Deutsches Miserere. For more details, see my “Marxistische Emblematic” cited in n. 100 above.

208 Cf. Ernst, “Die Entwicklung der optischen Poesie,” p. 380; he even speaks of “closest affinity” (engste Affinität).

209 Döhl has already been mentioned; but Jandl, too, is a philologist, for he teaches (or taught) English at a Viennese high school. Mention should further be made of the philosopher and aestetician Max Bense, of Kurt Mautz, a retired high school teacher of German, and, once more, of Karl Riha; cf. Mautz’s Augentest: Permutationen, Typogramme, Collagen (Düsseldorf, 1979) and Riha’s Nicht alle Fische sind Vögel: Gedichte und Gedichtgedichte (Siegen, 1981). Also, compare Konkrete Poesie, pp. 19ff., as well as ns 168 above and 216 below.


212 Reproduced in Massin, La Lettre et l'image, p. 154.

213 For illustrations, see Dencker, Text-Bilder, p. 121.

214 See Wort und Gestalt (Dresden, 1958); Wenn Bilder reden, ed. Klaus-Dieter Schönewerk, Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der Druckerei Neues Deutschland (Berlin, 1980).


216 Cf. Reinhold Aman, Sinnliches (Milwaukee, 1971), n.p.; the tiny booklet, a private
edition, is ironically dedicated to Ernst Jandl. For Novak, see *La escritura en libertad*, p. 108.


218 Lora-Totino, “Poesia concreta poesia sonora,” p. 337; for his subsequent criticism, see n. 194.


221 Quoted ibid., p. 9.


223 The discussion is indeed an ongoing one. And it manifests itself on a national and on an international as well as intercultural level. In addition to the many recent contributions already cited, the following books and articles dating from the 1970s and early 1980s should at least be listed: Luciano Caruso, *La poesia figurata nell’Alto Medioevo* (Naples, 1971); Kalanāth Jhā, *Figurative Poetry in Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi, 1975); Giovanni Pozzi, *La parola dipinta* (Milan, 1981); Ulrich Ernst, “Europäische Figurengedichte in Pyramidenform aus dem 16. und 17. Jahrhundert: Konstruktionsmodelle und Sinnbildfunktionen,” *Euphorion* 76 (1982): 295–360; Ana Hatherley, *A Experiência do Prodígio: Bases Teóricas e Antologia de Textos-Visuais Portugueses dos Séculos XVII e XVIII* (Lisbon, 1983); Giovanni Pozzi, *Poesia per gioco: Prontuario di figure artificiose* (Bologna, 1984); Ulrich Ernst, “Zahl und Maß in den Figurengedichten der Antike und des Frühmittelalters: Beobachtungen zur Entwicklung tektonischer Bauformen,” in *Mensura, Maß, Zahl, Zahlensymbolik im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 310–32; Dick (Richard Carter) Higgins, *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature* (Albany, 1986). What characterizes most of these contributions—all of which are, significantly enough, devoted to pattern poetry—is, on the one hand, a tendency to overestimate the genre in question and, on the other, a concomitant extension of it beyond its proper limits. The same holds true, to a great extent, for the special issue titled “Pattern Poetry: A Symposium” of the journal *Visible Language* (vol. 20, nr. 1 [Winter 1986]). It is worthy of note, however, that “pattern poetry” is defined by its editor—Higgins again—as “our preferred term” (p. 5); furthermore, Higgins states, confirming our own findings: “The largest of all bodies of pattern poems is the German, to which one might add the works in Neo-Latin by Germans” (p. 6). The issue’s most important article is undoubtedly Ulrich Ernst’s “The Figured Poem: Toward a Definition of Genre” (pp. 8–27) because it proposes a novel and elaborate—if, unfortunately, incomplete—typology and terminology. Coining new terms, Ernst distinguishes five main types of the pattern poem: (1) the “outline poem” (corresponding to the Greek τεχνογαφίας); (2) the “grid poem” (corresponding to the early Latin *carmen figuratum*); (3) the “intextual imago-poem” (corresponding to the late Latin *carmen figuratum*, that of Hrabanus Maurus in particular); (4) the medieval “spatial line-poem” (not included in my survey); (5) the “cubus” of the 17th and 18th centuries (mentioned and illustrated in my survey, if only in passing). But already the latter two forms clearly reveal themselves as marginal, either implicitly or explicitly; Ernst himself concedes that “the cubus can only with certain reservations be counted as a figured poem.” Contrarily, he denies—exaggerating things once more, it seems to me—the “break in . . . continuity” during the Middle Ages as well as since 1750, while contending all too cautiously that, even though “most avant-garde concrete poetry lies outside the bounds of the figured poem,” its “pictograms” (“still . . . a considerable amount,” as he admits) “may be [!] included in the genre.” As to the international, indeed intercultural, range of pattern poetry, Ernst is of course in full agreement with the aforelisted researchers, citing examples from Turkish, Hebrew, Persian, Indian, and Chinese literature, plus pertinent secondary works. Regrettably, his monumental monograph (see n. 20 above) has not yet appeared, from all I can judge—nor has that of the Polish scholar Piotr Rypson, likewise announced long since—however, we do have Jeremy Adler and Ulrich Ernst’s *Text als Figur: Visuelle Poesie von der Antike bis zur Moderne* (Wolfenbüttel, 1987).
The illustrations have been reproduced from the sources listed below.

Fig. 1: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg
Figs. 2 and 3: Jost Ammann and Hans Sachs, *Das Ständebuch* (rpt. Insel-Verlag, 1960)
Figs. 4 and 5: Andrea Alciati, *Emblematum libellus* (rpt. Darmstadt, 1967)
Fig. 6: Mathias Holtzwarth, *Emblematum tyrocinia* (rpt. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1968)
Fig. 7: George Wither, *A Collection of Emblems*
Figs. 10 and 11: Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel* (Berlin, 1955)
Figs. 12, 37, and 38: Klaus Peter Dencker, *Text-Bilder: Visuelle Poesie international* (Cologne: Verlag DuMont Schauberg, 1972)
Fig. 13: *Greek Anthology*
Fig. 18: *Die Pegnitz Schäfer: Georg Philipp Harsdörfer, Johann Klap, Sigmund von Birken*, collected by Gerhard Rührm (Berlin: Gerhardt Verlag, 1964)
Fig. 20: Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg, *Geistliche Sonette, Lieder und Gedichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967)
Fig. 21: *The Metaphysical Poets*, selected and edited by Helen Gardner, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967)
Fig. 25: Jeremy Adler and Ulrich Ernst, eds., *Text als Figur: Visuelle Poesie von der Antike bis zur Moderne* (Weinheim: VCH Verlags-gesellschaft, 1987)
Fig. 27: *Gedichte des Barock*, collected by Ulrich Maché and Volker Meid (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1980)
Figs. 28 and 44: Eugen Gomringer, ed., *Konkrete Poesie* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1972)
Fig. 30: *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968)
Fig. 41: Niikuni-Garnier, *Poèmes franco-japonais* (Paris, Editions André Silvain, n.d.)
Fig. 43: *The Rialto* 2 (Spring 1985)
Fig. 45: Ignaz Agnostowitsch, *Diskus* 13, no. 10 (1963)
Fig. 46: Ernst Jandl, *Sprechblasen* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1968)
Fig. 50: Ernst Jandl, *Akzente* 16 (1969)
Fig. 54 and 55: Massin, *La lettre et l'image* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1973)
Fig. 56: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes* (Paris, 1918)
Fig. 57: *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology*, ed. Stephen Bann (London: London Magazine Editions, 1967)
Fig. 60: José Luis Castillejo, *Libro de la letra* (Madrid, 1974)
Figs. 62, 63, and 64: Reinhold Aman, *Sinnliches* (Milwaukee: R. Aman, 1971)
Fig. 65: Ernst Jandl, *mais hart lieb zapfen eibe hold* (London: Writers Forum Poets, 1965)
“It is time we passed a law reinstating orders and decorations,” one high official of the German Federal Republic is reported to have said in 1955, “otherwise during official occasions one can hardly distinguish between the honored guests and the headwaiter.” While today, in most of the world, orders and decorations would not be regarded as prerequisites of national sovereignty, every nation must possess a flag and a national anthem. While all newly independent states speedily adopted such anthems after the Second World War, the Federal Republic found itself without a national anthem. The “Deutschlandlied,” at first glance, seemed to have a spotless past; after all, it was adopted as the national anthem by President Friedrich Ebert in 1922. But it had been kept in use during the Third Reich and was now said to have been introduced by President Hindenburg. A new flag was also needed, as the Third Reich had used the black, white, and red flag of Imperial Germany. But here the black, red, and gold flag of the Weimar Republic lay readily at hand, though in the Bundestag debate on the adoption of a flag in 1949 some deputies expressed a certain nostalgia for the older flag under which Germans had fought and died in two world wars. Yet the debate was concluded almost at once, and the new flag became part of the law of the land, for, as one deputy put it, national symbols were all that was left to devastated Germany.

It took another three years to settle upon a national anthem. The first strophe of the “Deutschlandlied,” which had given most offense with its “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt,” was dropped, and only the third strophe, which called for “Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit” (“unity, justice, and freedom”), was kept. The attempt to do without a national anthem altogether had led to constant embarrassment; indeed, the effort to abolish all national anthems at the European Field and Track Contest of 1954, and to substitute fanfares of trumpets instead, was never repeated. Some kind of anthem was needed, and the first Bundestag had opened its session in 1949 by singing “Brüder reicht mir die Hand zum Bunde” (“brothers, give me your hands in union”). However, tradition could not be ignored. President Theodor Heuss attempted to introduce a
new national anthem which he had commissioned after the Second World War, but like “Brüder reicht mir die Hand zum Bunde,” it fell an easy victim to a return of the “Deutschlandlied,” even though a poll taken in 1986 found that three-fourths of the German population did not know its third strophe. But, if anything, they remembered the first strophe, and lately, in 1986, the whole song has been revived and taught as the national anthem—of all places, in Theodor Heuss’s Swabia. The modern nation which had always presented itself as rooted in history could not suddenly acquire new symbols.

Yet such had not been the case at the turn of the 18th century. National anthems grew up, together with a new national consciousness, in the age of the French Revolution. Even if some songs, like “God Save the King,” reached back far into the 18th century, they became national anthems only at this time. Most national anthems were shaped by, or read in the light of, the wars of the French Revolution and of Napoleon—wars which presented a clear break with history. The modern nation at its birth was a nation in arms. The citizens’ armies of volunteers and conscripts in France, Prussia, and even England mobilized masses of men for the first time; these armies gave them a feeling of participation in the fate of the nation, and disciplined them as well. The national anthem was part and parcel of a whole network of symbols through which the new nation sought to present itself to its people and to engage their undivided allegiance. The flag, the anthem, and most national festivals always retained something of the nation-in-arms about them, even in times of peace. Within all of these national symbols, but especially in national anthems, waging war was an essential ingredient of national self-representation. Studying national anthems means examining how war was built into most nationalisms, which in turn formed a bridge through which the acceptance of war became a factor taken for granted in modern life.

The change in the status of the soldier was crucial here. From the lot of mercenaries or of those forced into the army—taken from the dregs of society or driven by economic necessity—the soldierly life turned into a demanding but attainable ideal. Thus, in practically all of the festivals of the French Revolution, soldiers and their glorious death in war played a part. The volunteers who had rushed to the colors in the French Revolution and the so-called Wars of Liberation—a new phenomenon in military life—manufactured their own national myths which, especially in Germany, gained great influence. Theirs was a crusade, a holy war; this was a German Easter, and those who died were assured of resurrection. Concern with death, sacrifice, and total commitment runs throughout the poetry of these wars, not only in Germany, but in France as well, and so does the elation of having finally found meaning in life. In Germany, whether they
were the poets of the Wars of Liberation or those who belonged to the famed "generation of 1914," the volunteers were the mythmakers of modern wars, the heralds of nationalism.

The national anthem which grew up at this time reflected many of the themes of the new national consciousness, themes derived in large measure from nations engaged in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: French conquest and English defense, Prussia's trauma of occupation and her elation when it finally came to battle. Some reference to war and death in war was part of most national anthems, though there are exceptions, as we shall see. The theme of brotherhood or camaraderie was also strong: most volunteers, but many conscripts as well, had experienced a new kind of community held together by common danger and a common goal. Youth and manliness played an important role as national ideals; these mythmakers were young, exuberant, and had taken to heart the lines from Schiller's "Reiterlied," according to which only the soldier is free, because he has looked death in the face and has discarded life's anxieties. Indeed, the elation of youth was bound up with the theme of personal and national regeneration, with the longing for the exceptional that came alive when, both in Germany and France, volunteers or their flags were blessed in church before joining the war. The nation as provider of hope for the future was implied in all of these themes, but never spelled out—except, perhaps, in the "Deutschlandlied," which paints a happy and healthy world of wine, women, and song.

There is no need to dwell at length on the theme of camaraderie. It is found as a dominant theme in the "Marseillaise," and in the "Deutschlandlied" as a reference to a Germany "das brüderlich zusammenhält" ("which lives in brotherly unity"). Referring to men as brothers was part of the national myth; the nation made possible a true community of comrades not only through war, but also because, in contrast to the older ideal of friendship, the comrades were united through service in a higher cause. References to youth are rarely found in the texts of the anthems themselves as opposed to popular nationalist poetry. But youth was present, either indirectly or by association, in the occasional mention of virility as well as in the rhythm of the music. We shall soon see how the "Deutschlandlied," as a future national anthem that did not mention youth, nor even imply youthfulness, became closely associated with the death of youth in battle.

The concept of manliness grew up in the late 18th century and struck root through the Wars of Liberation. It was conjured up in almost ecstatic terms by the poets of these wars as we hear of the Männerstreit, the Männerschlacht, the Männererehre—as, for example, in Max von Schenkendorf's poem called "Freiheit" ("Freedom"): "Wo sich Männer finden, / die für Ehr und Recht / mutig sich verbinden / weißt ein frei Geschlecht" ("Where there are men who courageously unite on behalf of honor and their rights,
there we have a free race”). Surely the same ideal is implied in the
references to the “valiant and brave” sons of Sweden or in “Lithuania, land
of heroes,” to take just two national anthems. Manly youth was part of the
warrior image, of the nation besieged by its enemies. The themes of youth
and camaraderie were not part of those anthems which centered upon a
ruler: neither “God Save the King” nor “Heil Dir im Siegerkranz, / Retter
des Vaterlands” contains such sentiments. They would have been quite
unsuitable to their subject even before “God Save the King” became “God
Save the Queen” with the ascension of Queen Victoria. But even royal
anthems at times contained the dominant theme of all national anthems:
picturing the nation at war, even if personal sacrifice was not demanded.

The wars which saw the rise of modern national consciousness also
distinguished between private death and death for the nation. Mercenary
troops had taken their death for granted, and done their best to avoid being
killed and wounded. “Ich bin noch nicht bereit / zu jener Ewigkeit . . .
Mein Lebenszeit ist aus, / ich muß ins Totenhaus” (“I am not yet ready for
eternity . . . but my life span is finished, and I must go to my grave”): so
ran one of their songs. But the “Marseillaise” told proudly that when its
young heroes fall the sacred soil of France will reproduce them all. The
soldier was part of an unending chain of life which reached beyond death to
this resurrection. In many of the songs of the French Revolution, patriotic
death was described in analogy to Christian ideals, as an armed martyr-
dom, and attention was paid to the soldiers’ last resting place even though
the military cemetery as a shrine of national worship had to wait until after
the First World War. C. Cambry, in his officially sanctioned but never
executed design for a new cemetery in the revolutionary Paris of 1792,
suggested that the ashes of fallen soldiers be mixed with those of France’s
great men, and placed in a pyramid at the very center of the cemetery.
More significantly, the so-called Hessendenkmal of 1793, which comemo-
rated the defense of Frankfurt against the French, listed for the first time a
great number of the fallen by name, without paying attention to their
military ranks. This memorial has been called the first German answer to
the French ideal of human equality; rather, it documents the radically
changed status of the common soldier as symbolic of the heroism of the
nation.

This change was also reflected in the poetry of the time, where death
in war became the fulfillment of life: the individual melts into the nation
and comes to partake of its immutability. In Germany, the poet and patriot
Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock had praised such a death already by mid-18th
century, but few had then followed, in contrast to the cacophony of voices
which joined in during the Wars of Liberation. Theodor Körner’s famous
“Reiterlied” of 1813 highlights the new relationship between soldier, na-
tion, and death: “Die Ehre ist der Hochzeitsgast, / das Vaterland die
Braut. / Wer sie recht brünstiglich umfaßt, / den hat der Tod getraut” (“Honor is the wedding guest, the fatherland, the bride, and whoever holds her in fervent embrace has been married by death”). Such puffed-up language would have destroyed the national anthems, whose simplicity served to make them comprehensible, and encouraged people to join in song. Körner’s “Nur in dem Opfertod reift uns das Glück” (“We shall gain happiness only through sacrificial death”) was a more suitable summary of what the nation thought it required in order to dominate men’s allegiances. Many examples of national anthems that express such a demand come to mind: The Belgians, in their “Brabançonne” of 1830, give their arms, hearts, and blood to the fatherland; the Italians, in their “Inno de Mameli” of 1847, are ready to die; the Mexicans—to pass to another continent—will fight to the last breath (1850); the Swedes are willing to live and die for their country (1844), while the Swiss have two national anthems, one adopted in 1843, peaceful and pastoral, the other dating from 1811, and echoing Schiller’s verse that only those who die for the fatherland are free.

The “Star-Spangled Banner” largely, but not entirely, fits this pattern. Composed in 1814 after a night of fighting in the Anglo-American War, it is directed against the foes’ “haughty host” and paints a picture of war. It does not explicitly mention death in war, though ideas of heroism are present in the “home of the brave.” But in its fourth stanza it also refers to “war’s desolation,” a phrase that would be out of place in the other anthems discussed, which seek to exalt war and its sacrifice.

I shall return to the more peaceful, pastoral anthems later. They are, by and large, confined to the smaller nations, while the more powerful states combine the glorification of death in war with a defensive or offensive posture directed at putative enemies. In its refrain, the “Marseillaise,” originating as a song in war, calls for the impure blood of the enemy to flow in the wake of the revolution’s fierce heroes. The “Deutschlandlied” has none of Theodor Körner’s “Kampfes kühne Wollust” (“the bold voluptuousness of battle”) but, more typical for many national anthems, takes a defensive posture: “Wenn es stets zum Schutz und Trutze brüderlich zusammenhält” (“If [Germany] unites in brotherly love for protection and defense”—though the latter could be translated as “defiance”). Moreover, it contains no reference to death in war and emphasizes the positive: i.e., a united Germany as it should be, rather than the struggle for unification.

The “Deutschlandlied” lacks the linkage between death and the nation which gives most anthems their warlike cast. But here the myth based upon the first two lines, with their “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt,” proved to be of greater importance than reality. For even these lines were originally directed against German rulers who stood in the way of unification, and not against any foreign power, not even
against the French. Yet the single-minded focus on things German, their unqualified praise, made it relatively easy to seek an aggressive interpretation of the song. Its author’s, Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s, own “Nur in Deutschland will ich ewig leben” (“Only in Germany will I live forever”) points to a commitment which liquidated what had remained of the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. Ernst Moritz Arndt had still defined the freedom he wished to obtain for Germany in the Wars of Liberation as the freedom for all mankind; indeed, in a practical expression of these sentiments, the Polish flag accompanied the German flag to Hambach Castle in 1832, as part of the celebration of Germany’s first national festival. But already Theodor Körner and Max von Schenkendorf, the most popular poets of the Wars of Liberation, who left their imprint upon future nationalism as well, restricted their idea of freedom to Germany itself. National anthems, by and large, reflected such a restricted vision, though the “Marseillaise” at first—and in spite of its specific references to the French—could be taken in its general language to apply to all peoples. The “Deutschlandlied” exemplified a narrow national vision, and that made it easier for German nationalists, despite its actual text, to link its first strophe to sacrificial death in war.

Already in the Wilhelminian Empire, the “Deutschlandlied” had been reinterpreted by conservatives in a more aggressive direction, read in the light of the ever-present poetry of the Wars of Liberation. For example, a book published in 1896 by the anti-Semitic and volkish Verein Deutscher Studenten reinterpreted the rather harmless lines about “Deutsche Frauen, deutsche Treue” as referring to the Valkyrie who floats above the heroes in battle and gives them encouragement. But of decisive importance in the association of the future national anthem with death in war was the German Army Bulletin of 11 November 1914 which stated:

Westlich von Langemarck brachen junge Regimenter unter dem Gesang ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles’ gegen die erste Linie der feindlichen Stellung vor und nahmen sie.

(West of Langemarck, youthful regiments took by storm the first line of the enemy’s trenches, singing “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.”)

This battle was the baptism of fire of regiments allegedly made up of thousands of students and many former members of the German Youth Movement, bringing to life, in the euphoria of the very first months of the war, the image of youth volunteering and sacrificing itself joyously (in reality, only 18 percent of the regiments at Langemarck were students; most were older conscripts). The battle of Langemarck became symbolic of the triumph of heroic youth; it would be, I think, correct to speak of the cult of Langemarck in defeated Germany after the First World War. In 1932, Josef Magnus Wehner, a right-wing war novelist, summarized the
myth of Langemarck, which made the “Deutschlandlied” such an integral part of Germany’s regeneration through war, and he did this in a speech given at the request of the major German student organization (the Deutsche Studentenschaft), and read in public at all German universities. “Before the Reich covered its face in shame and defeat,” Wehner said, “those at Langemarck sang. The dying sang! . . . they sang running, young students running to their own destruction in face of the overwhelming forces and the roaring guns of the enemy.” They died, he continued, with the “Deutschlandlied” on their lips, “and through the song with which they died, they are resurrected”:

Ehe das Reich sich verhüllte, sangen die von Langemarck. Sterbende sangen! Stürmende sangen, sie sangen in Reihen, die Kugel im Herzen, sie sangen im Lauf, die jungen Studenten, sangen in die eigene Vernichtung hinein, vor dem übermächtigen, aus tausend Geschützen brüllenden Feinde . . . Aber mit dem Lied, mit dem sie starben, sind sie wiederauferstanden . . .

Certainly, this was powerful imagery, co-opting a song which President Ebert had thought peaceful enough to adopt as the national anthem of the Weimar Republic.

The changes in the way in which national anthems were perceived as they worked themselves out through history must not be forgotten in reading the text. Not only the “Deutschlandlied,” but the “Marseillaise” itself went through a similar change of perceptions. In 1879, when the “Marseillaise” became once again the French National Anthem, it was seen as a song of national reconciliation and of expectation of a future victory over the Germans. Certainly, neither the restored Bourbons nor Napoleon III had seen the “Marseillaise” in this light. They had banned it as a revolutionary anthem. Defeat and the song’s use during the Paris Commune had brought about this change. But, as a consequence, militant workers felt that they could no longer sing the “Marseillaise,” and therefore asked a socialist worker, Pierre de Geyter, to write a new song to lines by Eugène Pottier, a member of the First International. The “International” was born as a reaction against the abuse of the “Marseillaise,” and tested in 1896 when workers clashed with nationalists in Lille—but now it was the nationalists who sang the “Marseillaise,” and the workers, the new “International.”

The “Marseillaise,” like the “Deutschlandlied,” was eventually co-opted by the political right. Whatever havoc this may have played with their original intentions, the nation militant remained the major theme of national anthems despite the changes in perception with the passage of time. The overriding concern with war and defense in the vast majority of national anthems—after all, the “Deutschlandlied” was concerned with defense as well—remained the same, along with the restricted vision and
The new concept of death, regardless of whether the music was festive or military.

The Italian Fascists and the National Socialists brought the implications inherent in the nature of national anthems to their climax. They instituted what might be called a veritable cult of anthems as part of their cult of the nation. Fascist Italy did this in a formal, National Socialist Germany in a more informal manner. Perhaps Italy’s operatic tradition encouraged every Fascist organization to have its own official anthem even though they were subordinate to “La Giovinezza,” the main Fascist hymn. Pietro Mascagni, better known for his opera Cavalleria rusticana, wrote the anthems for labor and for the elite corps of Fascist youth; Giuseppe Blanc, the composer of “La Giovinezza,” had written operettas; indeed, the melody of the “Giovinezza” had been used in his “Festival of Flowers.” But originally, at the beginning of this century, the “Giovinezza” had been a popular student song created by Blanc and the young poet Nino Oxilia, who was killed in the First World War. As such, it was a salute to youth and beauty, a backward look at a life of study and lovemaking which has given way to the harshness of life—a banal student song such as those which existed in most countries at that time.

Seeing how the “Giovinezza” passed from being a light-hearted student song to the official Fascist party anthem played side by side with the traditional anthem on all occasions, returns us to the main theme of our analysis. First of all, the Alpini, the Italian mountain troops, took the song with them into the Libyan war before it became the official song of the Arditi, the Italian storm troopers in the First World War. This elite of frontline soldiers added one extra verse to the “Giovinezza,” asserting that youth does not fear death but prefers it to dishonor and will die smiling when confronting the enemy. This new verse of the Arditi made the song fit to become the Fascist anthem: youth, beauty, and death were basic themes of Fascist mythology, associated with sacrifice, and it should not surprise us that the “Hymn of the Ballila,” the Fascist youth, sends them to their death as well. Just so, the citizen-soldiers of the French Revolution were said to have fought singing the “Marseillaise,” and the flower of German youth, as we saw, died with the “Deutschlandlied” on their lips. Within the mythology of nationalism, such national anthems not only praised death in war in their texts, but themselves were tested in battle.

The “Horst-Wessel-Lied,” used as a national anthem and the equal of the “Deutschlandlied,” was not in need of transformation. The relevant themes were present from the beginning: the fallen who march in the ranks of the living, the ideal of camaraderie in the serried ranks, the destruction of the enemy, and even youthfulness, which though it is not expressed in the text, is implied in the rhythm. Significantly, the song ranked next in
importance by the *SA Liederbuch,* and written by Max von Schenkendorf, dates from the Wars of Liberation and does emphasize youth consecrated to die for the love of the fatherland: a *Liebestod,* as it is called, not unlike that image of death conjured up by Theodor Körner in his "Reiterlied." Such themes had made the battle of Langemarck the most symbolic battle of the First World War. The Nazis brought the Langemarck cult to its climax, and that may well be one reason why the "Deutschlandlied," which Adolf Hitler himself disliked, could not be so easily discarded.

The elan produced by the dawn of the Nazi Revolution, as it was officially called (*Revolutionärer Aufbruch*), gave many songs the form of national anthems as it placed them in the liturgy of individual Nazi organizations. The "Deutschlandlied" was now only one of the many anthems which gave the "Horst-Wessel-Lied" pride of place. The liturgy of nationalism as the self-representation of the nation now penetrated all organized forms of social and political life, and with it came a variety of anthems which could be called, according to their themes and liturgical functions, national anthems in miniature.

These Fascist and National Socialist anthems used the same musical forms as most other national anthems which we have discussed. When Alfred Rosenberg told the National Choir Festival (*Sängertag*) of 1935 that such National Socialist music must not be sentimental—the expression of a weak and underdeveloped masculinity, as he put it—but simple, plain, and heroic, he merely repeated ideals which were followed by the music of most national anthems. To be sure, the Italian anthem, and many Latin-American anthems of Italian inspiration, showed operatic influence, but others were close to marches or to church music. Whatever musical forms were used, all national anthems depend upon a clear and expressive rhythm as the unifying factor of their music. The nature of this rhythm depended upon whether the anthem was supposed to be primarily sung while marching or standing; in either case, people had to be able to join in the singing. The "Marseillaise" was the first anthem which used a militant marching rhythm, as opposed to older anthems, like "God Save the King," which took Christian hymns as their model.

The age of nationalism was also the first age of mass politics, and this fact led to the introduction of rhythm into all ceremonies—marches, parades, and festivals—in order to transform the undisciplined masses into a disciplined crowd. At the beginning of the 19th century, when the revolutionary festivals were in place, and the "Marseillaise" had begun its own triumphal march through Europe, Goethe wrote that rhythm has a magic about it which makes us believe that we are part of the sublime. Almost prophetically, Goethe linked rhythm with the need felt by many men and women in the age of the French and Industrial Revolutions to find firm
ground under their feet, to pull a piece of eternity down into their lives. Joining in the national liturgy, singing national anthems, they did just that, sublimating themselves into the greater national community. After the birth of the “Marseillaise,” most national anthems were played allegretto con fuoco, whether or not they supported the French Revolution: for example, the “Preußen-Lied” was played in this manner.36

The national anthems discussed up to now were written and composed during or after the French Revolution. They were essentially anthems of national self-representation even if they did, at times, mention a ruler. But some influential anthems originated prior to the French Revolution, though they were adopted as national anthems only during the age of awakening national consciousness. They were meant to be sung standing rather than in movement, and bore the imprint of prayers or church hymns. “God Save the King” was the most influential of these anthems, surpassing the “Marseillaise” in popularity as the model for other national anthems: Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland are only some of the nations which adopted its style and its music. Unlike the “Marseillaise,” it was not sung first on the way to do battle, but in 1715 in the Drury Lane Theatre in honor of King George II.37

And yet, “God Save the King” also became popular through war: namely, when the king distinguished himself against the French and when, in 1746, he repelled the invasion of the Stuart Pretender.38 While the first strophe of the anthem is prayerful, the second asks God to scatter the king’s enemies: “... and make them fall; confound their politics—frustrate their knavish tricks.” The music that accompanies the words, and that proved so popular throughout Europe as a hymn to the ruler, becomes livelier whenever the king is called to defeat his enemies, or when he is depicted as a sovereign.

Moreover, in such anthems, as opposed to those which glorify the nation rather than the ruler, there is often a gap between aggressive words and hymnlike music. King Christian of Denmark, for example, in the Danish National Anthem of around 1780, hammers so effectively with his sword that it passes through Gothic helm and brain, and this to the slightly changed tune of “God Save the King.” In England, however, “God Save the King” did not satisfy the growing militancy during the crisis of the Napoleonic Wars. “Rule Britannia, Rule the Waves” had been published by James Thomson in 1729 in order to arouse public feeling against a supposed “peace-at-any-price policy” toward Spain.39 But it now became a second national anthem, militant and triumphant. At the same time, the figure of John Bull was used to symbolize the British people in their struggle against France. The hunger for symbols which represented the spirit of the entire nation, rather than the nation through a single ruler, made
inroads even into that nation whose ruler proved to be secure. But, as we have seen, such symbolism was usually, though not always, combined with a warlike spirit.

Were there then no national anthems which represented a nation wholly at peace? The anthems of the smaller powers were apt to concentrate upon an analogy between the nation and nature, instead of upon defensive or aggressive wars. The "Swiss Psalm," for example, is such an anthem, in contrast to Switzerland's second anthem which I mentioned before, while Liechtenstein's national anthem pictures a country of quiet happiness. The "Swiss Psalm" asked the Swiss to pray as dawn rises above the Alps, and other pastoral anthems, like those of the Czechs, Finns, and Norwegians, also concentrated upon the native landscape. This was the tradition to which some nations turned after the Second World War in order to purge their past. Austria's new national anthem, sung to music derived from one of Mozart's "Masonic Cantatas," begins with the words "Land of Mountains, Land of Streams, Land of Fields." Theodor Heuss's proposed new national anthem described the Germans as belonging to a land of faith, hope, and love, united in peace. Such anthems, then, had nothing warlike about them, and did not even mention the necessity of defending the fatherland against aggressors.

Songs which were directed toward the future, and which contained an important utopian element, went one step further: they praised peace rather than war. However, these were not, properly speaking, national anthems but the songs of the labor movement. Yet they fulfilled a function identical to that of national anthems, giving the workers a sense of corporate identity. To be sure, the texts of many of these songs, including the "International," had a thrust similar to that of national anthems. Vernon Lidke, in his analysis of German workers songs, comes to the conclusion that their fundamental structure was directed against an enemy such as the rich, the exploiters and oppressors. Moreover, many of these songs were sung to patriotic melodies. And yet, for all the real and potential aggressiveness of many workers songs, their tone was fundamentally different from those of most national anthems.

For example, the most popular German workers song, the "Workers Marseillaise"—the national anthem of the German workers movement—first calls for engaging the workers' countless enemies in a hazardous struggle, but then goes on to assert that it is not calling for hatred against the rich, but for equal rights for all. Even the "International," which appealed to the workers to attain their rights by force, ends by saying that when this has been accomplished the sun will shine forever. Such appeals to a better world, a world at peace, are missing from most national anthems. The nation looked backward, not forward: history, not a utopian vision, gave it the immutability it needed in order to tame the accelerating speed of time.
When, for example, in the “Deutschlandlied” German women, German faithfulness, and German song are conjured up as future ideals, they are immediately linked to history: “Sollen in der Welt erhalten / Ihren alten schönen Klang” (“They shall retain their once noble and traditional repute”). The theme of regeneration was part of both workers songs and national anthems: in the former, however, the analogy was usually to spring, to an awakening into a better world; in the latter, it came through the immutable landscape or the heroic in war. After the Second World War, as far as I know, only the anthem of the German Democratic Republic takes up the form and the themes of these workers songs.

Yet none of the newly adopted postwar anthems in Europe, including those of the Soviet Union, continue to link national consciousness and war in the by now traditional manner. Surely this change has little to do with actual politics, which would have made the traditional self-representation of the nation perhaps even more appropriate after than before 1945. Instead, it seemed due to changed attitudes toward death in war: fear of death had replaced thoughts of glory or resurrection in a vision of Armageddon conjured up by a war which knew no distinction between civilians and soldiers, as well as by the use of the atomic bomb. Western and Central Europe brought home no unknown warrior with great ceremony in order to keep the older hero company, and no new War Memorials were built to take their place beside the Menin Gate at Ypres or the Tannenberg Monument. Instead, wartime ruins were left standing as a warning to future generations. Yet power politics would go on as usual, and the warlike stances of nations continued unbroken. The function of national symbols was no longer to arouse men to march to war and to sacrifice their lives, but instead to calm the fear of death and to project a healthy, happy, and peaceful world. War was no longer glorified as part of national self-representation, but masked through keeping it at the greatest possible distance from individual lives.

The most important and widespread national anthems never lost their origins in a nation-in-arms; indeed, as we saw, even a national anthem which came from a different tradition, like “God Save the King,” contained warlike passages. It remains to be determined to what extent this self-representation of the nation, which remained so consistent over a long period of time, influenced general attitudes toward death and war. It is certain that for over a century generations took for granted that the nation demanded the sacrifice of its youth accompanied by poetry and song.
Notes

2 Fritz Sandmann, “Das Deutschlandlied und der Nationalismus,” Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 13 (1962): 653; for the co-option of the song by the Nazis, see Ernst Hauck, Das Deutschlandlied (Dortmund, 1941).
5 Die Abendzeitung, 3 September 1949 (“Nationalhyme,” Archiv, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich).
6 For the poll, see “Die Hymne der Deutschen,” broadcast by the ZDF, 19 Mai 1986, 17:15 p.m.; for teaching the anthem, see “Nationalhyme,” Der Spiegel, 40 (21 Juli 1986): 153–54.
7 Cf. George L. Mosse, The Nationalization of the Masses (New York, 1975), where, however, almost nothing is said about national anthems.
9 Citations and analyses of national anthems are taken from Martin Shaw and Henry Coleman, eds., National Anthems of the World (London and New York, 1960) and the much less complete Nationalhymnen: Texte und Melodien (Stuttgart, 1982).
11 Quoted in Christoph Pripitz, Vaterlandsliebe und Freiheit (Wiesbaden, 1981), p. 121.
13 Lynn, Bayonets of the Republic, p. 147.
17 Ibid., p. 126, “Bundeslied vor der Schlacht.”
18 Ibid., p. 120, “Aufruf (1813).”
20 Pripitz, Vaterlandsliebe und Freiheit, p. 133; Mosse, Nationalization, pp. 82–87.
26 Fiamma Nicolodi, Musica e Musicisti nel Ventennio Fascista (Fiesole, 1984), pp. 318, 382.
28 Ibid., p. 77.
29 Ibid., p. 112.


34 Ulrich Ragozat, *Die Nationalhymnen der Welt* (Freiburg, 1982), p. 100. I have used this book extensively for the discussion of the derivation and nature of the music of national anthems.


36 Ibid., p. 355.


41 I have expanded this theme in my “The Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience,” *Journal of Contemporary History* (October 1986).
The Protestant church cantata evolved around 1660, achieving its highpoint between 1700 and 1750. During this time, it had its fixed place in the main Sunday sermon, usually between the reading of the Bible text and the Lutheran hymnal creed, "We believe in the one God." Coming just before the sermon, the cantata consisted of a loose series of choral movements, arias, and recitations whose texts were closely connected to the main theme of the respective sermon. It was therefore no irrelevant or isolated intermezzo, but an integral part of the liturgy. Because of its specific function, the cantata could only be performed on the intended Sunday or holiday, and was meant to serve as an additional musical reinforcement of the given sermon. In the service of a postulate formulated by Martin Luther, it signified, as did the recited Bible passage and the sermon, that the word of God as written in the Scriptures is dead and ineffectual if it is not "heralded." Everything depended on "bringing" the word of God into motion, or into full "swing," as his followers called it.

The origins of the genre can be sketched quickly. Luther himself had already sought to establish a semantic relationship between the religious message and music. The "heralding" character was further strengthened in Protestant church music when the Italian monodic style, developed around 1600, began to spread to Germany from 1620 onward. Above all, Heinrich Schütz used this form of "passionate declamation of the word set to music" in his Symphoniae sacrae to lead to their true destination those who were "flagging" back. Indeed, in the second half of the 17th century, noticeably lengthened "church music," or "musical devotions," emerged to take their place beside the hymn and monodies based on the words of the Bible. The newly expanded music, with its simple instrumental accompaniment, brought an "explaining, interpretative element into the church hymns" through the "insertion of freely invented words in the given text" which demanded a form extended accordingly. The "cantata," which also originated in Italy, suited the purpose well. The "textual backbone" remained the "word of the Bible presented in the Scripture reading itself," but it was dealt...
with in an increasingly freer, more lyrical, more poetic fashion. Alongside the choralelike hymnal lines conserved from older tradition, there arose more and more the secco-recitativos and dacapo-arias which determined the style of the cantata, whether secular or religious, and of Neapolitan opera as well. Thus, around 1700, the Protestant church cantata became, both musically and textually, a precisely contoured and greatly esteemed genre. The best example is the 1704 collection, Geistliche Cantaten statt einer Kirchen-Musik (“Spiritual Cantatas Instead of Church Music”), by the Saxon minister Erdmann Neumeister, who served in Hamburg after 1715. Following this volume, which contains cantata texts for all fifty-nine Sundays and holidays in the year, Neumeister wrote nine more volumes of such liturgically determined cantata cycles. Cantatas, he wrote, are “created” by “alternating stylum recitativum and arias.” They function therefore “like a piece from an opera.” While the strict Pietists rejected the cantata because of its “unacceptable intrusion of worldliness into the church service,” the cantata form devised by Neumeister soon prevailed in traditionally Lutheran areas, above all in wealthy commercial cities such as Leipzig, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Nuremberg, and others, where for a time it became the favorite genre in church music for representing faith outright.

It was at this stage of development that Johann Sebastian Bach entered. Active almost exclusively in Thuringia and Saxony, the cradle of Lutheran tradition, Bach had been born into a family of organists and choirmasters intimately connected with establishing the church cantata, from which he later assembled his “Old Bachian Archive.” The church cantata therefore became for Bach, along with works for the organ, one of the central forms of composition and remained so throughout his life. Over half the works published in the Neue Bach-Ausgabe (“New Bach Edition” of 1954ff.) are church cantatas (it should be noted that only three of his cantata cycles have been preserved almost in their entirety, while two additional ones are lost). At the outset of his career as cantor in Mühlhausen and Weimar, from 1713 to 1716, Bach had already composed a number of remarkable church cantatas, including “Gott ist mein König” (“God Is My King”) and “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”). The cantatas composed in Mühlhausen have no recitativos or arias, and thus correspond to the older cantata-type; in his Weimar cantatas, however, Bach chose the type created by Neumeister, and considered more “modern.” The Weimar court poet Salomon Franck, who, unlike the rather dry Neumeister, scorned neither enthusiastic nor mystical elements, provided the requisite lyrics. In his search for appropriate texts, Bach also had recourse to cantata cycles such as Georg Christian Lehms’ 1711 Gottgefallige Kirchen-Opffer (“Church Offerings to Please God”) and to Neumeister’s work as well. During his appointment in Köthen, he wrote only secular cantatas since the prince there belonged to
the Reformed Church, which, unlike the Lutheran Church, rejected spiritual music. However, between 1723 and 1728, as the newly appointed cantor of the Thomas Church in Leipzig, Bach composed a cantata almost weekly, thereby creating during this interval a reserve of cantatas which, with only a few exceptions, served him for the rest of his career.

Within the frame of the usual Leipzig liturgy, barely one-half hour was at the disposal of the Sunday cantata. The church service began at 7 A.M. and lasted till 11 A.M. The organ prelude opened the service and was followed by a motette. Next came the introit, the Kyrie, and the Gloria, the choir either responding with “In Terra Pax” or the congregation with “Alone God in the Highest Be Praised.” After the offering, passages from the Epistles or Psalms would be read aloud, succeeded by a hymn, a Scripture reading by a minister, and the Creed. At this juncture, the organist would play a prelude preparatory to the beginning of the cantata. The Lutheran hymn of faith concluded the cantata. Only then did the sermon begin, continuing usually for over an hour. Thereupon followed prayer and blessing, an additional hymn, and, finally, as a second highpoint of the service, the Lord’s Supper. The Bachian cantata in Leipzig thus stood at the center of the liturgy, alongside the sermon, and served as a musical commentary on both the preceding Gospel texts. This was no inserted concert but rather a customary part of the service used to encourage listeners to “moral application.” The choir of Thomas Church performed the cantatas. Usually, each voice was represented by only three singers: a soloist and two accompanying voices, who sang the choral parts. As for instrumentalists, Bach had at his disposal two violinists, two viola players, two cellists, two bass cellists, two oboeists, two recorder players, two trumpeters, two bassoonists, and a drummer—some 30 to 35 performers in all. Often, however, he had to make do with far fewer. Bach was active with his group alternately at the Thomas Church and at St. Nicholas, the principal church of Leipzig.

While working on his first Leipzig cantata cycle, Bach depended on earlier cantatas and composed new ones, their lyricists being largely unknown. The structure of these cantatas usually follows a pattern of Biblical passage-recitativo-aria-recitativo-aria-choral hymn. We do not know much about the lyricists of the second Leipzig cantata cycle either, except that Bach used the Leipzig poet Mariane von Ziegler for new cantata texts and helped adapt and recast older church hymns. The third Leipzig cantata cycle does not appear to be as closed as the first two. Here, Bach turned in part to text patterns by Lehms, Franck, and Neumeister; however, he used texts of unknown origin as well. That Bach in his later (no longer extant) cantatas also drew on texts by Christian Friedrich Henrici, who wrote under the name Picander, seems likely from the latter’s preface to his 1738 cycle Cantaten auf die Sonn- und Festtage durch das ganze Jahr (“Cantatas
for the Sundays and Holidays throughout the Year") published in Leipzig, in which he emphasized that many of his cantata texts had already been heard in Leipzig churches in the compositions of "Herr Capell-Meister Bach." In later years, Bach apparently completed the cantata cycles he had begun earlier, as well as several cantatas for special occasions, such as commemorations of organs, or weddings, funerals, etc.; but he wrote no further cycles.

If one considers the texts of Bach's 220 church cantatas that have come down to us in their entirety, one sees, despite their variety, that the same Lutheran certainty of faith underlies each one of them, and that they rarely stray into mysticism or Pietism. These texts seek to "preach" in a Lutheran fashion. They seek, with the help of certain Bible passages, to transport their listeners into a state of mourning, happiness, or bewilderment. In short, they seek to leave the merely poetic behind, and to be in and of themselves "the word of God." Indeed, many were printed and given the congregation so that they might follow and remember the purport of the music. The main concern of the lyricists was not some subjectively comprehended poetic quality but rather the pure and—in the religious sense—objective truth. In their way, they wanted to achieve an effect similar to that of the preacher by "instructing" (docere) and "stirring" (movere) at the same time: that is to say, they wished to put themselves in the service of religious "devotional edification." Therefore, these texts have also been called "sermons in metrical speech" which stay as close as possible to the word of the Bible in the orthodox Lutheran sense.

The ideological basis that these cantata texts assume toward the world in a purely earthly sense, is almost always one of rejection if not damnation. That world, in which most people simply exist from day to day without any sort of belief, is a "Satan's world," a "Babel," a "Sodom and Gomorrah," a "sink of iniquity," a "wilderness," a "hospital," a "cave of torment": that is, a "false world" in which all human endeavor is useless and futile. The only things that are worth striving for in this so-called Satan's world are "arrogance," "pride," "mammon," "desire of the eye," and "drive of the flesh." In this world, "falsehood," "hypocrisy," "infidelity," "deception," "bare vanity," and "false appearances" rule. Here below, man longs for "glitter" and "useless trifles," wallowing in "gold" and "riches" which all too soon prove to be filth. In this world, man lies chained to mammon and is exposed to the abuse of "mockers," since no one in it thinks of others; everyone follows only his own desires, yet without finding any inner "satisfaction." For, after all, material goods and things of the flesh are transient. They provide but fleeting pleasure, arouse passions which only lead toward new temptations, never to desired goals. In this world, all human endeavors strive toward nothingness. Here below, humans who are solely concerned with their own needs dissipate into "mire,
sand, ashes, and earth.” Here, all “enjoyment” turns into “encumbrance”; all “sugar” turns into “poison.” Behind each rose, there lurk “countless thorns”; each joy proves to be a “comet” quickly extinguished. Here on earth, humans sink into “their graves before their time,” “wallowing in poison” and “infected with leprous sinfulness”; for people think only of the transient, not of the intransient, not of the “salvation of the soul.”

Two reasons explain man’s continual baseness in these texts. First, he is undeniably “weak”; second, animality and frailty are his nature. His spirit is willing, but the flesh all too often proves itself weak if not decrepit. Therefore, man is not only “arrogant” and “driven” but also “cowardly,” “easily deceived,” “pusillanimous,” “fearful,” “fickle,” and “faint-hearted.” Accordingly, Satan, that “hellish fiend,” that “Antichrist,” that “great monster,” rules the world. He easily catches men, who show the faintest signs of “weakness,” in a “yoke of sin” or chains them to “mammon,” thus bonding them in “slavery.” Small wonder, therefore, that belief in a higher truth is entirely eclipsed in a “humankind” dancing only to the Devil’s tune. In sum, man becomes tangled in a vicious circle.

So much for the pitch-black pictures of a Satan’s world in which man can enjoy fleeting satisfaction, but never attain true “peace.” Yet, what alternatives do these texts really offer their listeners? Certainly not “reason,” upon which the men of the Enlightenment set all their stakes. Even reason is in the long run, like all things, entirely human and of no lasting worth. “Knowledge and that which man invents,” Bach says emphatically, “will finally be destroyed through the grave.” Reason in his texts is considered the same way as are greed and carnal desire: it is something “delirious,” “foolishness.” Because it is tied to transitory things, reason is an enemy to men concerned with the salvation of their souls. It is part of the Devil’s craftiness to divert straying men away from the path of righteousness. The following lines concern such allegedly “wise” men: “They teach vain and false craftiness / That goes against God and his truth; / And what the lone wit invents / —Oh woe! he who painfully grieves the church— / That must stand in the Bible’s stead. / One chooses this: the other, that. / Foolish reason is its compass.”

Instead of pursuing the path of knowledge and “wit,” which only leads to confusion, these texts put “trust” (one of the repeated key words) in God alone and in the one who leads to Him and becomes one with Him in Christ. He alone is the “prince of peace,” the “helper in times of need,” the “steadfast standard,” the “refuge,” the “fortress,” the “shield”—in short, he who makes possible the flight from this false here and now to the righteous hereafter. In Christ alone resides peace, happiness, “pleasant quiet,” and “solace.” Only when a man “trusts” in him has he not “built on sand.” Christ alone “wipes away the tears” when man rises to eternal “bliss” on the Day of Judgment.
In these texts, two ways are offered to salvation. The first is the “renunciation” of the finite world that stands under Satan’s sway. Thus, one text reads: “Why do I bother seeking this world?” Or again: “Leave behind, oh man, the voluptuousness of this world, / Pomp, pride, riches, honor, and money.” Equally often, one finds: “Scorn the temptation of this flattering earth”; “Good night, world of turmoil”; “I find no joy here / In this world of vanity and of earthly things”; “When I make Jesus my friend, / Then mammon means nothing to me”; “The world cannot provide you any comfort, / Only in the Lord can you live in joy and bliss”; “Now then, false world! I’m tired of you, / I wish to go home to heaven.” Invariably, this departure is intended to gain the respect of God, who only loves those who turn away from Satan and return to Him.

The other possibility of earning God’s love is to lead a life well pleasing Him here on earth, as hard as that may be. This path appears considerably strenuous and thorny. Trusting in help from the state remains outside the scope of such texts. In the typically Lutheran way, a clear separation is made between the authorities on the one side and God on the other. The true Christian should not seek support from rulers, according to these texts; rather, he should seek it within the community of believers, the ordained “fold” in whom God sees “His own.” Even the individual is not lost from the outset as long as he believes. What is open to him is a path of virtuous modesty. This means an attitude that does not simply trust in God’s grace but one that seeks to earn His grace by leading a life well pleasing Him. In this realm, the highest quality is “moderation,” as opposed to the “insatiability” of those people from the upper echelons of society who attach their hearts solely to “mammon,” “lust,” and “vanity.” Whereas disciples of Satan can never attain true peace on earth or after death, those who lead a “believing”—in other words, a “quiet and calm”—life in this world, are promised peace in the afterlife. Other praised virtues include “patience,” “humility,” “purity,” “integrity,” “tranquillity,” “compassion,” “love of one’s neighbor,” “soft-spokenness,” “modesty,” “poverty,” and the rejection of all worldly goods. The people in the best position are those who make no demands but instead make do with only the most needful items, seeking for “satisfaction” in spiritual pleasures alone. In these texts, only the “frugal” earn God’s love, in addition to the reward of being raised up in the afterlife and offered a seat in His “lap.” At the end of the cantatas, after numerous appeals and threats, hymns to God, on whom man can always count, who is just and good, who shows all who believe in Him the path of righteousness in their lives, are almost always struck up in the hope of reward. Thus, God will repay with “rich interest” the “capital” on virtues that have been deposited. Accordingly, listeners hear: “Rejoice in the Lord all ye nations”; “Rejoice, exult”; “Sing, jump, jubilate, triumph”; “Praise God in His kingdom”; or “Our mouths be full
of laughter, and our tongues full of praise. / The Lord has done a great
thing in us.” Instead of constantly wailing and complaining, the believers
profess finally to have found true joy, to be “happy” at last, if not in
material things, then in spiritual ones, in the feeling of loving and being
loved. The greatest happiness always exists when the human soul, “uni-
ified” in Christ, celebrates a symbolic wedding with Him as represented in
the images of the Song of Songs, minnesang, or bridal mysticism. All stops
are pulled at such instances, in order to provide men who have renounced
possessions and societal honors, at least in this one respect with a bliss
surpassing all others, as the following lines attest: “For you I wait with
longing”: “Make me your own”; “May I be in your arms to find warmth”;
“Oh, flame of love, melt me”; “The bridegroom is coming”; “The treasure
and joy of my soul”; “My friend is mine.” In such sections of the lyrics,
Jesus is always “the wine of happiness,” the “sweets of love,” the “sun of
mercy,” “the benefactor of pleasure,” for whom one makes oneself “beauti-
ful” and dresses in “wedding clothes,” whom one hurries toward with
“most tender inclinations,” for whom one “thirsts,” whom one wants to
“kiss,” to whom one “sticks like a leech,” to whom one “yields,” for whom
one “opens” oneself, in whom one is “unified,” in whom one feels “great
desire.” Indeed, the believer’s ecstasy sometimes culminates in that legend-
ary jubilus which in all its transcendental spirituality is eminently erotic.

Probably no music fits these lyrics better than Bach’s. His music, too,
always aims at dramatically lifting the listeners out of the depths of despair
in the world of mammon and sin to the heights of spiritual happiness in the
Lord; accordingly, he makes use of all those many means that were still at
the disposal of early 18th-century composers schooled in rhetoric. Like the
writers of his texts, Bach, as a truly Lutheran messenger, wants to direct his
listeners toward true belief by depicting the state of the world of disbeliev-
ers fallen to Satan in all their fear, inconsistency, and vanity with musical
lines as ragged, tottering, and superficially slippery as possible. By con-
trast, he gives the sections concerning the self-sufficiency and trust of true
believers, for whom even death has lost its sting, the character of strength,
exultation, and jubilation. For Bach, the cantata was certainly not the same
minor utilitarian liturgical form many of his contemporaries used to com-
pose some 1000 to 2000 unenergetic works. Instead, it represented to him a
highly meaningful genre, on which he expended as much hard work and
soul-felt energy as he did for those works produced for public approval or
publication.

One can only hint at Bach’s ingenuity in the various sections of his
cantatas. There are no clichés in these works. Not only the structure but
also the composition is different in almost every work. According to the
content, sometimes the solo parts come to the fore, sometimes the choral
parts. Now a quiet chamber tone prevails, then drums and trumpets reach a
persuasive monumentality. At times, an artistry of breathtaking magnitude dominates, while at other times we hear choral pieces which unpracticed singers can join in readily. Multiplicity alone, especially when it seems contrived, has of course no quality. The quality of Bach's works lies in the precise rhetorical or programmatic devices of gesture that he uses to give individual words in the text unusual concreteness through musical elaboration. This is true for even highly general motifs. Thus, running motifs are relayed in musical runs; lassitude or feebleness is expressed in dragging rhythms; death motifs are underscored with intervals of tolling bells; storms are accompanied by wavelike motifs; and motifs of falling are associated with a falling seventh, etc. In the realm of polarities between Satan's and God's worlds, the Devil is often associated with winding snake motifs; pain motifs are relayed through a chain of moans. The instability of sinners sounds through tremolos in sixteenth notes on the violins and is hinted at concurrently through the absence of the continuo in "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht" ("Lord, Do Not Sit in Judgment") to indicate musically that such people are lacking the "foundation of their existence." In the cantata "O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort" ("Oh Eternity, You Word of Thunder"), the state of hopeless sorrow is expressed equally concretely through chromatically descending lines, upon which rhythms interrupted by pauses follow, to emphasize such a will-o'-the-wisp existence. On the other hand, in the confident, god-trusting, and jubilant parts, the swaying motifs of the army of angels and the sounds of happiness and jubilant tones predominate along with the calm, almost songlike ariosos, homophonic chorales, and powerful chorale fugues which intensify in power from trust to triumph. All these are musical gestures of brightness and ascension. Thus, for instance, the singing voice in the cantata "Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen" ("My Sighs, My Tears") suddenly leaps a full octave higher when the words "toward heaven" appear near the end of the work. In "Nun kommt der Heiden Heiland" ("Now Cometh the Savior of Gentiles"), a cantata for Advent, the choir climbs toward the end to the high G to give the appropriate tone of jubilation, and more still, to the impending arrival of the Lord.

Yet such tropes may well be dismissed as traditional rhetorical devices—as in the final analysis they are, for many a composer has made use of such means. What singles out Bach is something else. It is not only the craftsmanship but just as much the great seriousness and depth of feeling underlying these cantatas, which raises their well-meant but sometimes redundant lyrics to the heights of artistic expression. In Bach's cantatas, belief becomes a "proclamation," a soulful expression of a deeply experienced state of joy which cannot be understood through aesthetics or reason alone. All this is really religion, however one may turn it. In fact, it is religion in its actual definition: that is to say, in that suprasubjective truthfulness which can only be grasped and honored as revealed experience.
And here begins the problem, at least for those who do not share the belief expressed in the texts, or even reject it entirely, but who nevertheless experience Bach's cantatas as something highly significant, and for whom only very little in the realm of "modern" music measures up to Bach's in greatness and musical beauty. How can a nonbeliever possibly value, indeed love, a music based on lyrics that can so easily be unmasked by ideological criticism either as a withdrawal into quietism or as theologically instrumentalized rituals of suppression?

In order to clarify this problem, which has occupied many people, let us first examine its origins and history, however briefly. The Enlightenment was hardly interested in such works, nor even in Bach. In the first Bach monograph—by Johann Nikolaus Forkel, and dating from 1802—the church cantatas are only mentioned in two sentences, so fixed was Forkel on Bach's instrumental works, which were to him the utmost in artistry.29 Probably the first to revive these works was Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, who "with great effort and against strong opposition performed a Bach cantata in the Lower Rhine music festival of 1838."30 After that, it was Franz Liszt who associated himself with Bach's cantatas, establishing that "romantic" interpretation of Bach whereby the liturgical meaning of the works was moved further and further into the background. Only at the turn of the century were the cantatas discovered anew as works for church services, and returned to their original function. Two new schools emerged as a result: one continued to emphasize the artistry of these works, the other valued them only as part of the church liturgy. Dispute between the two actually did not come to a head until the 1950s, when the well-known musicologist Friedrich Blume, editor of the reference work Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, argued that one should finally stop trying to see Bach as the "fifth Evangelist," and instead place him among those artists whose primary aim was to compose, and not to preach some sort of Christian message.31 Other music scholars sharply disagreed with him and maintained that a better understanding of Bach can only be possible if a listener—even today's listener—succeeds "in reinstating the link with the liturgy as far as possible."32 In fact, Günther Stiller recently emphasized once again that Bach can only be understood through a fundamental comprehension of "orthodox Lutheranism," and that "autonomous art" was far from Bach's purpose.33

Of course, it cannot be denied that Bach wrote his spiritual cantatas only for church use. Nevertheless, to perform them only in "holy halls" on the designated days with the cast common for such occasions, and with so-called authentic instruments, would be blind historicism. Since the 1920s, after all, we have lived in the age of technical reproduction, which has taken
not only the older church music but also older opera, and concert as well as chamber music, out of their heretofore functional contexts. Through the radio and the turntable and, more recently, through tape recorders, television, cassettes, the walkman, and video and compact discs, even this music, which formerly was tied to a certain place and public, has become more or less readily available. As with all other commodities in our society, attuned as they are to a heightened consumption and communication, such music can be “bought” and delivered to our homes. Since the invention of these media, everyone can hear such works to their heart’s content, leave them alone, or stop in the middle if he or she is not pleased. Even those cantatas which were performed only before devoutly harkening audiences of church-goers have been reproduced millions and billions of times in the last fifty years. One can either experience or merely enjoy their music, whether shielded from the rest of the world in a legendary “quiet chamber” or hearing it as a musical background while driving, reading the newspaper, or talking with others. The words are hardly any longer of importance, especially abroad where the records and tapes are in German. The possibilities for hearing a Bach cantata have become limitless. Nowadays, these works are no longer accessible only to the “pious” but to all, regardless of how little use is made of them. For some, then, listening to these works is merely a secondary occurrence, as when so-called classical music or rock is partially perceived by people primarily busy with something else.

This does not mean that forms of listening that do not comprehend the original function of such music or its content of belief are objectionable or outright worthless. Defunctioning does not only mean devaluing but can also mean a transfer to new levels of meaning. Listening to music has in fact taken on forms which are intimately connected with our different processes of thought, behavior, and perception. Music can be more today than sixty or seventy years ago when only live music existed. Formerly, people could hear music only when they played it themselves or went to the designated places where it was performed. Today, music pervades our entire lives and has become, especially for the young, one of the mainstays of media consumption; it has risen quantitatively beyond all other common pastimes, including exercise, sports, and reading. Wherever we are, some sort of music plays. Even at home, most people cannot do without music to link them to the outer world, and help them overcome the isolation that is ever more clearly perceived.

Listening to Bach’s cantatas must therefore be put into this context. Because of the ongoing secular defunctioning in most walks of life, such works can be heard nowadays in many ways: as mere background music, as a stimulating series of impressions of complaint, as a culinary pleasure providing aesthetic enjoyment, as an expression of Protestant piety, as an abiding comfort in the most general sense, as works that stimulate reflec-
tion on the past, or as works that set off a dialectical process that thrusts the content into the present and, perhaps, even tries to substitute a totally different meaning.

Not much can be said about listening to Bach’s cantatas as background music. In that respect, even they have only the function of bridging the feeling of isolation, something that other types of music can of course do also. In this instance, the cantatas lose their specificity. A more sensitive listener is a step higher in that he perceives specific parts of them, although still in an unconscious way. Associated with this type of listener are above all those rhythmic elements that elicit the well-known nodding, tapping, or other rhythmically accentuated body movements. For such listeners, Bach remains, both in his instrumental and vocal works, the release mechanism for some sort of physical, sensual, and instinctual reflex movements which have something torpid yet also energizing about them. Listening to music in this way remains “unconscious,” at least in the spiritual sense, because it largely concerns aesthetic enjoyment or comfort in the realm of feeling. These are, of course, legitimate ways of listening which should not be scorned. In some ways, such forms of appropriating Bach’s music might be considered as subjectively universal, since they secularize Bach’s music without hesitation, in order to move it closer to an individual’s own point of view or emotional needs. For such listeners, the lament about man fallen into Satan’s world becomes simply a lament about the weakness of man, just as jubilation about the freed and risen soul is understood simply as jubilation. In this way, the religious element of the cantata is dissolved, without any scruples, in a series of generally human emotions which have been the same at all times, and which can be appropriated today in a highly immediate, direct, and, indeed, existential manner. Here, the notion persists that someone can “feel his way into” this music, and all great art as well, without any historical distance.

But what about the listener who attempts to go beyond the sensual, culinary, emotional, or existential forms of immediate appropriation to a historically conscious listening; who, on the basis of a more precise knowledge of the context out of which this music emerged, tries to take into consideration the original intention of Bach’s cantatas? There are listeners who see in such an attempt only a falsification of the listening process from the direct to the indirect sense, and who therefore sharply reject all historically oriented approaches. However, there are also listeners who see in the historical method a means of broadening their musical understanding, and who cannot find out enough about the circumstances accompanying the genesis of such works. They do not want only to experience themselves while hearing, or to have merely sensual or emotional experiences, but they want also the experience of a deeper knowledge of the prehistory of their own musical understanding, their own conception of art, and even
their historically conveyed world of feelings. Their main aim is to recognize as well the first steps of their own understanding of the world, just as they do when they read older literature or contemplate older works of art, neither of which can be understood without educational prerequisites. Within the framework of the musical understanding, which tries to consider the formal structure, the intention, and the message of the musical content, the listener must necessarily come to grips with the lyrics of Bach's cantatas. Because of their sententious language and exacting morality, the lyrics cannot be shrugged off as simple la-la-la's. For, after all, the greatness of the church cantatas lies in the synthesis of text and music, which cannot be sundered without damaging or destroying the original essence of the work.

Such a synthesis nevertheless confronts the historically aware listener with a nagging question: What should be done with these texts? Liberals who trust in the maturity and the autonomy of human beings, can only reject them along with all works of religious art. From such a perspective, there is nothing to “save” in these cantatas. A religious rigor dominates in them, which either turns its back, full of contempt, on the world of mammon and vanity, preferring even death, or which embraces a discipline that establishes human life as a path of virtue, demanding utmost humility or even self-denial, and promising in return only eternal salvation of the soul. Such a frame of reference holds nothing for liberals who see the greatest joy of earth's children in the concept of “personality,” and who then strive unimpeded toward self-realization and self-development. Bach, however, was no humanist, as most of the participants in the 1982 Leipzig conference, “Johann Sebastian Bach and the Enlightenment,” had to admit. Even concepts such as “rationalism” and “sentimentality” were rejected with regard to Bach. Nevertheless, this same group of scholars agreed to place Bach within the general process of secularization of orthodox Lutheranism in the early 18th century, a process that expressed itself in the choice of texts as ratio, fides, and emotio. According to these scholars, a clear distinction between the secular and religious elements in Bach cannot be made; instead, he must be placed, ideologically and artistically, on the borderline between the two.

In the future, it would therefore be better to characterize the Bach of the cantatas neither, one-sidedly, as a Christian of affected piety nor, equally one-sidedly, as a humanist or even a universalist who stands above religion. Rather, one should keep in perspective the middle position which many artists of the early 18th century maintained between the Baroque, sentimentality, rationalism, and Lutheran orthodoxy. This was Bach's case as well. He was, on the one hand, still religious and, on the other, already worldly, but without contradiction. Just as in his lifetime Bach was neither a wealthy citizen nor an ascetic starveling, so, too, was he in his art neither an affected pietist nor a mere “practicus,” as one used to call them. He did
write religious music, which at that time meant serious, expressive, and deeply experienced art (at least in contrast to the "gallant" music which was still widespread at many courts). Indeed, he believed deeply in the content of his cantata lyrics and proclaimed it with a spirit which even today, for believers and nonbelievers alike, is breathtaking. In comparison with Bach’s cantatas, all later Protestant church music is either modernist or archaic in the wrong sense—or archaically modernist, which is even less persuasive.

Thus, beyond a simple historical understanding that departs purely from the deciphering of intention, these cantatas lend themselves to being heard as great and significant music by all who are heritage-minded in the widest sense. For what is "great" in the art of the past is not that which can be topicalized in a direct sense, or, through conclusions of analogy, underscored by a belief in the possibility of repetition, and thus shoved off into the historical realm. Instead, "great" art is that which, through its inner stance, sets an example. Such a stance finds expression in the human seriousness of Bach’s cantatas, something which is far more significant than the rococo worldliness produced in his age. Granted, this seriousness takes the form of a deeply religious conviction. But isn’t the same also the case in Indian, Egyptian, early Greek, and medieval art which is, despite the greatest artistry, in many ways not only religious but also full of belief in authority or the glorification of war? Not a trace of the latter can be found in Bach’s cantatas. Neither do they believe in authority nor do they glorify war, as many other Lutheran works. Moreover, they are not ostentatious either, as is so much baroque Catholic art. Instead, Bach’s music makes no bones of its aversion to the rich and powerful—in short, toward rulers. This is expressed in an attitude of belief that feels covenanted to a suprasubjective and socially oriented morality commanded by God’s love and man’s love of his neighbor.

Along with such an abstract religious attitude in the cantatas, there exists simultaneously a realistic reaction to the material misery and physical feebleness of the population in those days. As has recently been elaborated, people then were constantly confronted with poverty, hunger, and death resulting from the underdeveloped means of production, from periodically recurring famines, widespread unemployment, frequent epidemics, high mortality rates among children, short life expectancies for adults, meat shortages, and inadequate living quarters. Thus, the church cantata can, from a materialist perspective, be understood as an appeal to the masses to resign themselves to the overall misery at a time when there was no way to relieve it. “Satisfaction” was to be found in a belief in God’s love. Given the prevailing economic conditions, these works offered the majority of the population, who constantly suffered want, at least the necessary soul food by trying to make this suffering clear and surmountable
in a religious sense through spiritually and erotically heightened images that betray a great human understanding. In sum, the church cantatas afforded in the midst of poverty, sickness, and death the most ardently desired solace. For this function of religion, Marx's 1844 "Introduction" to his treatise *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* ("In Criticism of Hegel's Judicial Philosophy") is still apt. Marx says: "That which is religious is at once an expression of true poverty and the protest against real poverty. Religion is the sigh of the hard-pressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of unspiritual conditions. It is the opium of the people."40

Seen thus, the lyrics of Bach's cantatas are indeed purely religious, but religious in the heart-stirring and spiritual sense. They responded lovingly and morally, not nihilistically, to the privations of the times. They comforted. In the midst of economic misery, they gave the believer a bitter but needed trust. They elevated him. They achieved this in an impersonal sense that still felt obliged to a collective conscience, and did not yet set personal desire for pleasure and expression above all else. In these cantatas, no private moods are evoked. There are no laments, moans, and wails of frustration. Nothing confounds. No one gets himself into a "sweat," as Brecht, who admired Bach as the great epic composer,41 would have said. In a word, there is expressed in Bach's cantatas a belief and a trust that have become for us almost legendary. Instead of expressing himself primarily as an artist, Bach composed in the service of something higher. What is therefore completely missing from his cantatas in their protest against the evils of this world is that egotistical desire toward self-development, acquisition, and personal expression. Such a desire developed only after production had accelerated, and found expression in that "unbridled capitalism" which amounted to liberté without égalité or even fraternité. Thus, for the historically conscious listener, who is aware of the consequences of the "dialectics of freedom" that were set in motion by the Enlightenment, leading soon enough to excesses at every level, Bach's cantatas assume a radiance that magnifies them far beyond their place in history.

To have come this far in appropriating one's heritage is to be prepared to take a further step. If it is not so much the content but rather the stance that we admire in great works of art from the past,42 then we must, in the last analysis, go beyond their original intentions and try to elicit new meanings from them. Viewed in this light, the legacy of Bach's cantatas—even without their religious motif—would be, first of all, the ideal of a suprasubjective feeling of a communion united in love of one's neighbor, an ideal which rejects with scorn all forms of feudal and bourgeois thirst for possessions and power. But not only that. What can also be admired is the conviction expressed in these works that man will not find satisfaction in purely materialist things, that each material enjoyment only stimulates a
desire for further materialist pleasures, and that man therefore needs something higher—a “belief” without which he would continually fall back into the mire of egotism or, at the least, into a purely critical or carping attitude. What Bach’s church cantatas proclaim, then, to a nonbeliever who tries to interpret such a heritage in his sense is a belief in values that transcend individual values, that recognize neither material possessions nor egoist self-development as the highest goal, but express instead an attitude of faith. Although most of us progressed from one level of consciousness to the next, and replaced religious attitudes with values such as social responsibility or collective conscience, faith is still necessary. After all, as Jürgen Kuczynski has persuasively argued in his 1983 Dialog mit meinem Urenkel (“A Dialogue with My Great Grandson”), even worldly concepts of improving society fill their advocates with conviction only when they are matched by a “faith” in the final goal of such ideas.

Seen in this way, even the ideals of modesty and humility can be appropriated from Bach’s cantatas. In his time, such concepts were still realistic reflections of the prevailing economic conditions and were supposed to prevent social unrest among the poor, who were so because of the underdeveloped means of production. Today, with production having expanded tremendously in the industrialized nations, the rate of economic expansion having become the only fetish, and wanting to have and wanting to own being preached constantly, the praise of frugality proclaimed in the cantata “Ich bin in mir vergnügt” (“I Am Happy in Myself”) sounds almost revolutionary in its self-imposed restraint, if stripped of its religious metaphor and understood in a purely worldly sense. In any case, such ideals, which originated from the economic necessities of agrarian and early capitalist society where most people still suffered from material want, have now, in a time of crisis caused by an unregulated growth of production, taken on a positive meaning of which egalitarian democrats and socialists in particular should not be ashamed. Examples of a comparable attitude can easily be found in the writings of Bach admirers such as Ernst Bloch and Helmut Gollwitzer, who time and again conjured up the Pentecostal spirit of the composer for their extremely worldly views.

Accordingly, then, the highest meaning of Bach’s cantatas would be their having been expressions of a still religiously formulated conviction which has taken on an entirely new quality in the industrial world of today, and which gives us a perception of a society based on socially collective principles. In this society, the worst vice would be the egotistical desire to possess, and the noblest virtue, the humility or love that manifests itself in serving. Such an interpretation of Bach’s church cantatas, however, remains reserved for listeners who are not only non-Christians and educated, but who also have a keen sense of dialectics. The pious will nonetheless continue to feel strengthened through these works in their obsolete quiet-
ism toward God and authority. Certainly, such a persuasion does not belong to the worst in this age of ours in which there are hardly any real conservatives left. What we are confronted with are mostly right-of-center liberals concerned mainly with their own well-being. And it is among them that we encounter the truly objectionable listeners: namely, those who listen to such works neither dialectically nor piously but in an unconscious or "dumb" fashion, as Hanns Eisler would have said. To be sure, such listeners still hear the music, but they do not care for the lyrics. Thus, they do not feel obliged to confront any of the problems set forth in them, especially hunger, poverty, and misery—problems not only of the past but of the present as well. Devoid of any social concern, such listeners wallow only in vague and bloated feelings. This may give them the desired self-gratification but does not advance any ideal, be it progressive or conservative. It leaves things simply as they are: advanced but not resolved, privileged for some and crassly underprivileged for others. Compared to such egoistic complacency, Bach's pious attitude was vastly superior, since there were still no possible solutions to the economic and social miseries in his time. In ours there are. We are just not implementing them.

Translated from the German by Nancy C. Michael

Notes

1 Georg Feder, "Die protestantische Kirchenkantate," in Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart 7 (Kassel, 1958), pp. 581f.

2 I rely here on Alfred Dürr's Die Kantaten von Johann Sebastian Bach (Kassel and Munich, 1975) 1: 13ff.

3 Ibid., p. 13.


5 Dürr, Die Kantaten, 1: 40.


7 Mies, Die geistlichen Kantaten, pp. 2f.

8 Ibid., p. 3.


10 Quoted in Dürr, Die Kantaten, 1: 57.

11 Mies, Die geistlichen Kantaten, p. 44.


13 As a textual basis for Bach's church cantatas, see Dürr and also James Day, The Literary Background to Bach's Cantatas (London, 1961), pp. 24–53.

14 All textual citations are taken from Johann Sebastian Bachs geistliche und weltliche Kantatentexte nach Rudolf Wustmann: Neuausgabe 1967 (Wiesbaden, 1967).
15 Ibid., p. 268.
16 Ibid., pp. 162f.
17 Ibid., p. 158.
18 Ibid., p. 145.
19 Ibid., p. 233.
20 Ibid., p. 194.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 308.
23 Ibid., p. 234.
24 Ibid., p. 233.
25 Ibid., p. 168.
26 Ibid., p. 9.
27 See also Albert Schweitzer, Johann Sebastian Bach (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 466–509, and Arnold Schmitz, Die Bildlichkeit der wortgebundenen Musik Johann Sebastian Bachs (Mainz, 1950).
28 Dürr, Die Kantaten, 2: 389.
29 Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Über Johann Sebastian Bach (Leipzig, 1802), pp. 61f.
32 Mies, Die geistlichen Kantaten, p. 40.
33 Günther Stiller, Johann Sebastian Bach and the Liturgical Life in Leipzig (St. Louis, 1984), pp. 149, 206, 212ff.
41 See Bertolt Brecht, Arbeitsjournal, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt, 1973), pp. 424, 676.
44 See also Richard Hamann, “Christentum und europäische Kultur,” in Richard Hamann in memoriam (Berlin, 1963), pp. 75f.
East and West of No Man’s Land:
A Comparative Study of English and German Poetry from the Trenches of 1914–1918

F. K. Stanzel

The central image associated with the war that originally came to be known as the Great War was the parallel lines of trenches running from the Channel coast to the Swiss Alps. This strip of land ominously called No Man’s Land was in certain areas barely 100 meters wide. It separated the soldiers of the French Army and the British Expeditionary Forces from the soldiers of the German army as hostile combatants, and at the same time tied them together as victims of the same fate. For the dead, French, British and German alike, the division had become entirely irrelevant or, as the French poet René Arcos in his poem “Les Morts” has put it: “Les morts sont tous d’un seul côté” (“The dead are all on the same side”). After reading the letters, diaries, memoirs, novels, plays, and, most of all, the poems written by the combatants of both sides, one is inclined to conclude that this dictum applied to some extent to the living, too: the French, British, and German soldiers in their precarious troglodyte existence in the trenches. The agonies of being under heavy artillery fire, the constant fear of death, and, sometimes even harder to bear, the inclemencies of the weather, the mud on the ground and, in the air, the stench of excrement and of human and animal bodies rotting—these horrors were the same for the men on both sides. A great number of memoirs, novels, plays, and poems have been written about this largely identical experience in English and in German, which offer literary historians and critics a unique opportunity to compare the two national versions of one and the same experience. With regard to the novels and the memoirs from the Great War, this task has already been attempted though here, too, much is still to be done; very little has as yet been said about the German and English trench poetry from a comparative point of view. At first, I found this difficult to believe since such a situation presents itself as an almost ideal object for comparative studies. In this essay, I shall therefore try to point out a few aspects which a detailed investigation of the subject would, among other things, have to look at more closely. It is a first attempt and, as such, of necessity sketchy and incomplete.

To begin with, let me repeat my main assumption: The experience of life and death in and outside the trenches must in its essential quality have

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been the same for the soldiers East and West of No Man’s Land. Granted this, the question arises as to whether the similarity of the experience is also reflected in the English and German poems written about it. If we read German and English trench poetry with this question in mind, we cannot but be struck by the differences between the presentation of the trench experience by English and German poets on. I hasten to add, the higher poetical level. The differences are less marked on the popular level.

Let me first briefly recall the situation of poetry in the years before 1914. Many of the outstanding features of poetry in the Western countries of Europe around the turn of the century were of an international scope: Art for Art’s Sake with its emphasis on the autonomy of poetic activity, Symbolism and its underlying belief in a translucent correspondence between the outer world and the world of thoughts and imagination, and, connected with both, Imagism, the concentration on the instant of perception in which a complex of sights and feelings is fused in an image. This internationalizing of poetry was abruptly stopped by the events of August 1914. Though some international undercurrents continued, particularly in England (Pound and Eliot), the mainstream of German and English poetry began to flow again in the narrower national channels. Or, to put it in more fashionable words, intertextuality on an international scale was reduced again to a form of intertextuality within national boundaries and traditions. As a consequence, it was mainly the national literary traditions that were burdened with the task of providing a poetic medium and style for expressing the experience of fighting in a war. In England, the tradition which—almost by historical coincidence, it seems—became most important for the war poets was the so-called Georgian poetry of Edward Marsh’s anthologies, the first of which was published in 1912. The early phase of German Expressionism corresponds chronologically with Georgian poetry in England, where Imagism and Vorticism share some of the innovative aspirations of German Expressionism. The number of significant war poems written by Imagists and Vorticists is, however, very small compared to the number of Expressionist war poems. In the following analysis, I shall therefore have to compare Georgian poetry, which is close to the mainstream of English poetry, with Expressionist poetry, which differs in many respects from German mainstream poetry. Such a procedure involves many risks, but enables us to focus on the poetically most significant war poems in English and German, as well as on the differences between them.

By far the largest number of war poems produced in Britain and in Germany are of such an ephemeral nature that they can—for our purposes—be ignored. The insatiable demands of the English and German peoples for the poetic expression of patriotic and nationalistic emotions in the first two years of war produced a flood of poetry in both countries which could be translated from the poetic code of one language into that of the other without
anyone noticing its origin. In addition, most of these enthusiastic war poems were written by noncombatants. My study confines itself to war poems written by British and German poets who personally experienced trench warfare on the Western front.

Before I begin with a detailed comparison of a selected number of English and German war poems, I should like to make a few observations on war poetry in general and war as a theme of English and German poetry immediately before 1914.

John H. Johnston, in his book *English Poetry of the First World War* of 1964, maintains that the lyric is not a fit medium for the experience of war. The literary presentation of war requires vision and scope of epic dimensions, which will also include the long periods of routine inactivity, boredom, and endurance of physical discomfort. This is an interesting argument even if one is not inclined to carry it as far as Johnston does. It is interesting because it draws our attention to the problem of the relationship between the different forms of literary presentation of the reality of war. There are, indeed, hardly any poems about the fatigue duties that were so unpopular with the private soldiers on both sides. This is true of German and English war poems even though English poetry, with its greater openness for humble and concrete subject matter, was perhaps slightly better suited to these aspects than German poetry. Once we have become aware of this, we notice other instances of omissions or of overemphasis. A fascinating case of the latter, which cannot be gone into here, is the surprisingly high frequency of references to the bayonet and bayonet fighting. This is surprising if one knows that military historians think the bayonet was already an anachronism at the beginning of the Great War. The most famous example is Siegfried Sassoon's "The Kiss," which, interestingly enough, the poet wished to have excluded from the later edition of his war poems. Of the German war poets considered here, it is Johannes R. Becher who is more than others fascinated by bayonet and sabre as arms as well as metaphors for intense man-to-man fighting ("An den General," "An der Aisne"). On the other hand, there are very few poems about desertion and surrender, though cowardice and its punishment, execution by a firing squad, is given some treatment in German and English war poetry. The most conspicuous instance of an omission, however, is the apparent nonexistence of any English poem on the spontaneous suspension of hostilities and the fraternization of British, French, and German soldiers in No Man's Land at Christmas 1914. So far, I have found only one poem which refers to this brief yet, in the deepest sense, humane interlude of the first war year. It is F. K. Ginzkey's "Die Flöte," written early in 1915. There are, on the other hand, many references to this episode in letters and memoirs written by German and English soldiers.

From a comparative point of view, the most striking absence from the
catalogue of themes in English poetry concerns the anticipation of the coming storm. The only important English formulation, in poetry, of a sense of premonition of war that is to be found in modern anthologies is Thomas Hardy's "Channel Firing." In German poetry, it was mainly the early Expressionists who already in the movement's early phase developed a very high sensitivity for registering the first tremors of the coming cataclysm, or the poets ardently wished for an "Aufbruch." Several German poets gave poetic expression to such foreboding: Georg Heym in "Der Krieg" of 1911, Jakob van Hoddis in "Weltende" of the same year, Alfred Lichtenstein in "Prophezeiung," "Sommerfrische," und "Doch kommt ein Krieg," to name only some of the most prominent. In these anticipatory poems, we find a very peculiar combination of fear and hope, fear of the catastrophe imminent and hope for a new beginning. Messianic visions of a new age arriving, so common with the German Expressionists, are completely missing in English poetry of the time. If we look at the contemporary English novel, the picture changes somewhat. An uncertain future overshadows some of the most thoughtful prewar novels, like E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, while more sensational novels, as, for instance, H. G. Wells's *The War in the Air*, anticipate not only the coming of war but also the fact that Germany will be Britain's enemy in it.

When, in the early days of August 1914, all traffic, material and intellectual, between England and Germany was interrupted, certain national trends in poetry became dominant in both countries. If I had to name the poems that most clearly represent the differences between the characteristic English and German moods in the poetry of the years before the war, I would choose Rupert Brooke's "The Old Vicarage: Grantchester" and Ernst Stadler's "Der Aufbruch." Brooke's poem, composed, as its subtitle indicates, while the poet was sitting in the Café des Westens in Berlin in the spring of 1912, is permeated (in its first part, which I mainly have in mind here) by nostalgia for England, the quiet and cultivated life in a village with the spires of Cambridge reassuringly visible on the horizon. In these surroundings, the 18th-century ideal of the *beatus vir* seems not in the least out of date. On the other hand, the intercultural comparison implied in several lines of the poem has a clearly modern ring. Both the representativeness of this poem as a period piece and its close affinities with Georgian poetry are reflected in the fact that the *Poetry Review*’s prize was awarded to Brooke's poem in 1912 with one of the judges being Edward Marsh, mentor and anthologist of the Georgians.

*The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*  
(Café des Westens, Berlin, May 1912)  
Just now the lilac is in bloom,  
All before my little room;
And in my flower-beds, I think,  
Smile the carnation and the pink;  
And down the borders, well I know,  
The poppy and the pansy blow...  
Oh! there the chestnuts, summer through,  
Beside the river make for you  
A tunnel of green gloom, and sleep  
Deeply above; and green and deep  
The stream mysterious glides beneath,  
Green as a dream and deep as death.  
—Oh, damn! I know it! and I know  
How the May fields all golden show,  
And when the day is young and sweet,  
Gild gloriously the bare feet  
That run to bathe...  

Du lieber Gott!

Here am I, sweating, sick, and hot,  
And there the shadowed waters fresh  
Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.  
Temperamentvoll German Jews  
Drink beer around;—and there the dews  
Are soft beneath a morn of gold.  
Here tulips bloom as they are told;  
Unkempt about those hedges blows  
An English unofficial rose;  
And there the unregulated sun  
Slopes down to rest when day is done,  
And wakes a vague unpunctual star,  
A slippered Hesper; and there are  
Meads towards Haslingfield and Coton  
Where das Betreten's not verboten.¹⁸

Ernst Stadler's "Der Aufbruch" is, in every respect, made of quite different mettle. It was written shortly before the outbreak of the war and first published in his collection of poems Der Aufbruch in 1914. Its theme is announced in the title. "Decampment," the English title in David McDuff's translation, covers only the technical, military connotation of "Aufbruch" and neglects what for Stadler and his contemporaries was equally important: the spiritual and emotional aspect of departure for, or forceful entry into, a new phase of life promising fulfilment of long-repressed ideals and desires. The term "Aufbruch" was also used by René Schickele, Johannes R. Becher, Ernst Wilhelm Lotz, and other Expressionists.¹⁹ It was one of the most forceful metaphors to express the deep dissatisfaction of many intellectuals and literati with the spiritual stagnation of bourgeois culture under the reign of the Kaiser:
Der Aufbruch

Einmal schon haben Fanfaren mein ungeduldiges Herz blutig gerissen
Daß es, aufsteigend wie ein Pferd, sich wütend ins Gezäum verbissen.
Damals schlug Tamburmsch den Sturm auf allen Wegen,
Und herrlichste Musik der Erde hieß uns Kugelregen.
Dann, plötzlich, stand Leben stille. Wege führten zwischen alten Bäumen.
Gemächer lockten. Es war süß, zu weilen und sich versäumen,
Von Wirklichkeit den Leib so wie von staubiger Rüstung zu entketten,
Wollüstig sich in Daunen weicher Traumstunden einzubetten.
Aber eines Morgens rollte durch Nebelluft das Echo von Signalen,
Hart, scharf, wie Schwerthieb pfeifend. Es war wie wenn im Dunkel plötzlich
Lichter aufstrahlen.
Es war wie wenn durch Biwakfrühre Trompetenstöße klingen,
Die Schlafenden aufsprangen und die Zelte abschlagen und die Pferde schirren.
Ich war in Reihen eingeschient, die in den Morgen stießen, Feuer über Helm
und Bügel,
Vorwärts, in Blick und Blut die Schlacht, mit vorgehalmtem Zügel.
Vielleicht würden uns am Abend Siegsmärsche umstreichen,
Vielleicht lagen wir irgendwo ausgestreckt unter Leichen.
Aber vor dem Erraffen und vor dem Versinken
Würden unsre Augen sich an Welt und Sonne satt und glühend trinken.  

(Decampment

There was a time when fanfares
tugged bloodily at my impatient heart
and made it, prancing upwards like a horse,
seize its bit in fury.
At that time a march of drums
beat out the attack on every road,
and rain of bullets seemed to us
earth’s most glorious music.
Then, suddenly, life halted.
Roads led between old trees.
Rooms enticed us.
It was sweet to rest, forget oneself,
unchain the body from reality
as from dusty armour,
bed voluptuously
quilted in mild dreamt hours.
But one morning through the misty air
rolled the echo of signals,
hard, sharp, whistling like sword-cuts.
It was as if through darkness suddenly lights gleamed.
It was as if through bivouacs at early morning
trumpet calls grated, sleeping men leapt up
and struck their tents, and horses were harnessed.
I was inserted into ranks that pushed into morning,
fire above helmets and stirrups.
Forward, into battle light blood
with tightened reins.
Perhaps at evening
victory marches would spread around us,
perhaps we would lie outstretched somewhere
among corpses.
But before the riving
and the foundering
our eyes would glow, drinking their fill
of world and sun.)

Whether Stadler's poem is to be read as an anticipation of the outbreak of war (as the insistent use of military terminology suggests) or as a parable of Stadler's personal spiritual history, his version of the *Growth of a Poet's Mind*, is disputed by the critics. What is important for our discussion is the fact that already before August 1914 images of warfare were congenial to many German poets, while many English poets were still enchanted by the vision of tranquil life in the country.

In England, a similar mood of unrest calling for drastic, even violent, changes as in the "Aufbruch" poems was at that time expressed only by very few English writers, among them Wyndham Lewis in his Vorticist magazine *Blast*, and by some poets of a militant imperialist persuasion like W. E. Henley. What distinguishes the German writers of the premonitory and "Aufbruch"-poems is their fascination with images of war, of military action and their literal and metaphoric use of military paraphernalia like trumpets, drums, fanfares, flags flying, horses galloping, and bayonets glinting in the rays of an ominously rising or setting sun. To what extent this is to be understood as a literal anticipation of the war to come or as a merely metaphoric use of military terms for the expression of a vitalistic ideal of life to counteract the psychological and emotional frustration of the prewar generation, is difficult to say.

We have, therefore, to look more closely at the literary conditions which determined the writing of poetry in English and German at the time immediately before the Great War, in order to understand what gave English poetry, as it presents itself in contemporary and modern anthologies, such a peace-loving, and German poetry, such a martial aspect. An explanation trying to establish a direct causal connection between these contrasting states of English and German poetry and corresponding aspects of national character or the *Zeitgeist* in Edwardian-Georgian England and Wilhelmine Germany would inevitably take us onto the dangerous ground of speculation and generalization. It would also divert our attention from
the literary scene, where at least a few conclusions are to be drawn which can be substantiated by textual evidence.

Since an exhaustive study of such evidence is out of the question here, I should like to base my analysis mainly on the material to be found in modern German and English anthologies covering the period in question. I choose as my main texts James Reeves's *Georgian Poetry* and Silvio Vietta's *Lyrik des Expressionismus.* As I have already pointed out, most of the English trench poetry of lasting value was written by Georgian poets, and at least some of the most interesting German trench poetry, by Expressionists. This is corroborated by the contents of the two anthologies: both contain a large number of war poems, including practically all the most interesting poems by R. Brooke, S. Sassoon, W. Owen, R. Graves, C. Sorley, E. Blunden, I. Rosenberg, I. Gurney and A. Lichtenstein, E. Stadler, W. Klemm, A. Stramm, E. Toller, A. Ehrenstein, and several others. In *Georgian Poetry* the war poems form a strong contrast to the rest of the poems printed there. This distinguishes it already in a very decisive manner from *Lyrik des Expressionismus.* Here the war poems seem to emerge "organically" out of the poems celebrating the "Aufbruch" topos or anticipating a catastrophe leading straight to a "Weltende." The contrast extends right down to the level of imagery and metaphor. Images of catastrophes, violence, and military action are, as we have seen, also to be found in poems not directly describing the war experience, whereas they are totally absent from the comparable Georgian poems.

This observation takes us to the next stage of our investigation, where the question of the relationship between poetry and experience has to be looked into. War poetry, in particular trench poetry as here defined, has traditionally been regarded as the classic case of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" type of poetry.* It was widely held that here experience is directly translated into poetic language. A new understanding of the poetic process makes us less certain whether this really is the case.

In order to make his point clear, Northrop Frye, in 1957, still had to resort to an overstatement: "Poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels." Since then, it has been accepted as a poetological truism that poetry is made out of experience and out of poems about similar experience. Paul Fussell was one of the first to apply this thesis to the study of war literature. In his *The Great War and Modern Memory*, he analyzed the literary conventions and cultural paradigms which influenced British memoirists, novelists, and poets when they wrote about their war experience. Fussell, apart from a few remarks in passing, did not compare the different national conventions as they had become established in English, French, German, or Russian war literature. Such a comparison seems to offer a promising subject for further research. The
situation with regard to the Great War in particular is indeed unique. Never before had such a large number of British and German writers tried to describe one and the same experience. While doing that, they were consciously and/or subconsciously guided by the literature of war already existing in their languages. This makes these texts particularly interesting for the comparatist.

The English tradition of war poetry provided the English soldier-poet with literary conventions, images, and symbols that were different from those on which the German soldier-poet could rely. We even have to assume that the respective literary conventions provided the poets also with different rudimentary patterns for “Sinndeutung,” for making some sort of sense out of events which so often appeared to be totally lacking in meaning.\footnote{It would be fascinating to compare this piece of prose from a diary with very similar thoughts elevated into poetic language, as in Rupert Brooke’s sonnet “Peace.” Brooke’s famous keynote metaphor for volunteer soldiers...}

Most of the literary assumptions about poetry and reality held by the Georgians turned out to be inadequate, in the end, for dealing with modern warfare. To the Georgian poets (Julian Grenfell perhaps excepted) war appeared as a totally alien event that upset the natural order, invalidating moral abstractions like honor, heroism, and sacrifice. For the Expressionist poet, the many premonitory and decampment poems written before August 1914 made it possible to construct an image of war that, though threatening enough, could yet be integrated into a view of the world which was in need of purification by violence to make it worth living in again. It seems that the poeticity latent in the vision of war as “Krieg an sich selbst”\footnote{6.7.1910. Ach, es ist furchtbar. Schlimmer kann es auch 1820 nicht gewesen sein. Es ist immer das gleiche, so langweilig, langweilig, langweilig. Es geschieht nichts, nichts, nichts. Wenn doch einmal etwas geschehen wollte, was nicht diesen faden Geschmack von Alltäglichkeit hinterläßt. Wenn ich mich frage, warum ich bis jetzt gelebt habe. Ich wüßte keine Antwort. Nichts wie Qualerei, Leid und Misere aller Art. . . . Geschähe doch einmal etwas. Würden einmal wieder Barrikaden gebaut. Ich wäre der erste, der sich darauf stellte, ich wollte noch mit der Kugel im Herzen den Rausch der Begeisterung spüren. Oder sei es auch nur, daß man einen Krieg begäne, er kann ungerecht sein. Dieser Frieden ist so faul, ölig und schmierig wie eine Leimpolitur auf alten Möbeln.}" was for the Expressionists more important than the historical-political substance of these forebodings. Georg Heym, whose 1911 poem “Der Krieg” ranks as one of the most impressive prewar poems about the “Krieg an sich selbst,” repeatedly confided to his diary for the years 1910 and 1911 thoughts about war which must perplex the modern reader:
taken from the field of sports, "swimmers into cleanness leaping," contrasts strikingly with the preference of German poets for images derived from military life to describe the "Aufbruch" situation:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!4

It is impossible to establish whether "Krieg" for Heym is more than an overwrought literary metaphor for "Aufbruch." It was precisely this indeterminacy of Heym's concept of war, hovering, as it were, between historical event and literary metaphor, which made it so attractive for his prewar fellow poets and so utterly useless for the poet in the trenches. The irrelevancy of this literary idea of war became evident as soon as the German army suffered its first serious defeat at the Marne in September 1914, and war lost its metaphoric innocence and became a very tangible reality—tangible with all of its most ugly concomitants: bodies torn into pieces by artillery, wounded comrades dying slowly as they crouched in a shell hole or hung helplessly on the wire in No Man's Land. And all this aggravated by the Flanders weather, the rain, the snow, and, everywhere, the mud. It may sound paradoxical, but it seems that the apocalyptic grandeur of the Expressionist paradigm of war was of even less use to the soldier-poet in the trenches than the Georgian paradigm of pastoral nature versus man-made chaos. This can perhaps throw some light on the historical fact that it was the German Expressionist poets who as a group were the first to adopt a severely critical attitude toward war.

Writing about war has necessarily always culminated in the description of set battles. It is probably the impossibility of such a description which explains why "battle pieces" are, more than the presentation of any other activity of warfare, subject to cultural patterning and to media-specific conventions. In painting, the clear favorite has always been the cavalry charge with horses galloping at full speed toward the enemy. Sculpture, especially as found in war memorials, usually focuses on man-to-man fighting with a bayonet penetrating the body of an enemy soldier. In recent years, film has opened up new dimensions for the realistic presentation of battle, which in turn seems to have affected not only the war novels of Heller, Pynchon, Vonnegut, and others, but also, in the later phase of the Vietnam war, the first combat experience of young soldiers. For example,
in Tim O’Brien’s Going After Cacciato, Paul Berlin gets a first close look of a Vietnam village ravaged by war and experiences a strange kind of familiarity: “He had seen it in movies.”

The literary “battle piece” is also genre-oriented. In the epic poem, fighting was dominated by the singular heroic feats of daring and prowess performed by the epic hero. The war novel after Stendhal and Tolstoy placed battles in their wider historical and political context and thus found space for also paying attention to the frequent and often long periods of comparative inactivity in the course of a war when soldiers are resting, drilling, or doing fatigue duties between battles. The poetic battle piece, of necessity, concentrates on the moments of actual combat, in which the emotions of courage and fear, rage and compassion, martial exuberance and disgust reach their climax in the individual soldier. To express in literary terms what virtually transcends the limits of the human capacity of understanding, an experience beyond the reaches of the average civilian imagination, taxes the poet and his linguistic medium to the utmost. It is to be expected that in this situation the average soldier-poets will depend on the poetic paradigms available for the presentation of battle in their respective literary traditions. It may, therefore, at first be a surprise to note that on the level of popular war poems the poetic paradigm for the battle reveals little difference between English and German. The average German or English soldier-poet’s attempt at describing his battle experience in verse, because of its artlessness, shows a strong family likeness. This likeness even extends to English and German battle poems by writers of some literary reputation. Let us glance at two samples, both from poets whose war poems have repeatedly been anthologized, Robert Nichols’ “The Assault” and Kurt Heynicke’s “Angriff”:

_The Assault_

. . . Shells like shrieking birds rush over
Crash and din rises higher.
A stream of lead raves
Over us from the left . . . (we safe under cover!)
Crash! Reverberation! Crash!
Acrid smoke billowing. Flash upon flash.
Black smoke drifting. The German line
Vanishes in confusion, smoke . . .

Time soon now . . . home . . . house on a sunny hill
Gone like a flickered page:
Time soon now . . . zero . . . will engage . . .

My heart burns hot, whiter and whiter,
Contracts tighter and tighter,
Until I stifle with the will
Long forged, now used
(Though utterly strained)—
O pounding heart,
Baffled, confused,
Heart panged, head singing, dizzily pained—
To do my part.

Blindness a moment. Sick.
There the men are!
Bayonets ready: click!
Time goes quick;
A stumbled prayer . . . somehow a blazing star
In a blue night . . . where?
Again prayer . . .

I hear my whistle shriek,
Between teeth set;
I fling an arm up,
Scramble up the grime
Over the parapet!

I’m up. Go on.
Something meets us.
Head down into the storm that greets us.
A wail.
Lights. Blurr.
Gone.
On, on. Lead. Lead. Hail.
Spatter. Whirr! Whirr!
“Toward that patch of brown;
Direction left.” Bullets a stream.
Devouring thought crying in a dream.
Men, crumpled, going down . . .
Go on. Go.
Bullets. Mud. Stumbling and skating.
My voice’s strangled shout:
“Steady pace, boys!”
The still light: gladness.
“Look, sir. Look out!”
Ha! Ha! Bunched figures waiting.
Revolver levelled quick!
Flick! Flick!
Red as blood.
Germans. Germans.
Good! O Good!
Cool madness.
Angriff

Zweiundsiebzig Stunden heult die Luft.
Jede halbe Minute durchjauchzt eine wollüstige Granate.
Unser nasser Körper wechselt die Erdlöcher.
Wir pressen uns an einander.
Die Nässe zerschneidet unsern Körper in tausend frierende Teilchen.
Keine Angst
Nur Lust.
Lust am Leben.
Fernes Leben.
Rote Dächer, Wälderberge, Städte im Licht.
Mädchengeflüster, Kinderwiege.
Viel Blut. Schreie. Toten-Tanz. Schlamm,
Alle Gedanken schreien nach dem Morgen.
Beten. Fluchen, Toben, Brüllen.
Die Luft wird kühler.
Die Sprengstücke klirren heller.
Sacht sinkt aus der Nacht die Dämmernis.
Handgranaten bellen.
Fremde Flüche.
Deckung.
Braune Menschen-Flut.
Wellen vorbei.
Meer von pfeifenden Geschossen, bellenden Handgranaten,
wütenden Händen.
Die Maschine möht Menschen.
Es singt unser Gewehr.
Blut.
Schlamm.
Tod.
Wieder braune Flut.
Zurück.
Vorbei.
Meer von Geschossen.
Brandung des Todes.
Flut.
Zurück.
Heulen.
Wir sind!
Wir.
Unsre Hände kosen das Gewehr.
Alle Dinge werden schlaff.
Leere schöpft unsere Hirne aus.
“Angriff” first appeared in the periodical Der Sturm in 1917, the same year that Nichols’ poem was published. Heynicke and Nichols both use a kind of free-verse interior monologue, which makes the typographical patterns of both poems so similar. The similarity is obviously the result of both poets being guided by a striving after imitative form. As the tension of the battle experience rises, the lines become shorter and shorter, the sentences more fragmentary, and the paratactic syntax finally dissolves into a catalogue of one-word impressions: “Blut / Schlamm / Tod,” “A wail / Lights. Blurr. / Gone.” The thumping of the pulse of the soldier under heavy fire is synchronized with the rapid kaleidoscopic sequence of the sensations registered in the poetic catalogue. Parataxis suggests passivity, the sense of being utterly exposed. In Heynicke’s poem this leads to a state of complete exhaustion and resignation in which death, the wish for instant death, appears as a relief. In contrast to Heynicke’s, the speaker of Nichols’ poem seems to keep control of the situation. Orders are being shouted and a critical moment involving a man-to-man encounter is overcome in cold blood, thanks to the speaker’s good marksmanship with his revolver. It is here that the disadvantages of imitative form as a poetic principle, its dangerous closeness to triviality, become most obvious. Heynicke avoids some of the pitfalls of imitative form by focusing on the feelings and thoughts of the soldier under fire, rather than on a near-cinematic reproduction of the exterior events.

Let me now compare two battle pieces in poems written by leading English and German poets of the Great War. I have chosen Siegfried Sassoon’s “Counter-Attack” and August Stramm’s “Sturmangriff.” “Counter-Attack” is presented from the point of view of a personal speaker, a subaltern in the trench on the morning of a successful attack on the enemy position. The violence of the preceding fighting is still reflected in the wan expression on the face of a soldier, presented only indirectly as a simile for the breaking of dawn. This poeticism contrasts sharply with the stark realism of the description of the bodies of dead German soldiers (“green clumsy legs / High-
booted”), literally trampled into the mud by the new inhabitants of the trench. Almost exactly at the point where the realism of this description becomes nearly unbearable, an unexpected change of subject and style suddenly relieves the tension in a manner which is completely in tune with Georgian poetry: “And then the rain began—the jolly old rain.” The ambivalence of “the jolly old rain” is inimitably English as any attempt at rendering it adequately in German will show. The English phrase, which is charged with reminiscences of the cricket ground and its sociocultural corollaries of fair play, good manners, class, etc., is also a classic instance of Georgian understatement, a typical attempt at domesticating, familiarizing where the Expressionist would resort to dramatic “Verfremdung.” The horror of what is still to come, the exhausted soldiers getting soaked to the skin, then the pinching cold and the trenches covered by the sprawling corpses of the dead Germans, slowly filling with water and mud—all this is not described but only hinted at remotely by the English poet:

Counter-Attack

We’d gained our first objective hours before
While dawn broke like a face with blinking eyes,
Pallid, unshaved and thirsty, blind with smoke.
Things seemed all right at first. We held their line,
With bombers posted, Lewis guns well placed,
And clink of shovels deepening the shallow trench.

The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps
And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled;
And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.
And then the rain began,—the jolly old rain! . . . 40

Stramm’s “Sturmangriff” carries the Expressionists’ preference for highly contracted language, fragmented sentences, conversion of grammatical categories (verbs as nouns), and ambiguity of syntax (is “Das Leben” object or/and subject?) to the extreme; hence the shortness of the poem. There is no personalized speaker as in Sassoon’s poem, nor can the point of view of experience be localized. Such an impersonal, panoramic vision is characteristic of many Expressionist war poems. Experience is being raised beyond the level of the individual self and is thus given an almost general or absolute validity:

Sturmangriff

Aus allen Winkeln gellen Fürchte Wollen
Kreisch
Peitscht
Das Leben
Vor
Sich
Her
Den keuchen Tod
Die Himmel fetzen.
Blinde schlächert wildum das Entsetzen.*

Oskar Kahnel, an Expressionist of more modest innovatory ambitions who does not make up words nor break up grammatical structures, nevertheless adopts the panoramic point of view characteristic of so many Expressionist war poems. As a result, his poem "Schlachtfeld" ("After Battle") turns into a detailed inventory of the destruction of men and material as if seen from a point of vantage outside or above the scene of carnage. The abstraction of battle into a personification, "Die Schlacht ist müde" is also characteristic of such a detached, impersonal way of presentation.* Wilhelm Klemm’s "An der Front" also ends with a similar panoramic vision of all of Europe being divided by trenches: "Und durch ganz Europa ziehen die Drahtverhaue."* If we compare these poems about battle with Edmund Blunden’s "Third Ypres,"* a poem very much in the Georgian style, we immediately notice how clearly the narrative strain in Blunden’s poem defines the here and now of the speaker, and thus provides a focus for the empathy of the reader. Time and space in the Georgian poem are particular moments and particular places, whereas in many Expressionist poems references to specific persons either by pronouns or names are avoided even when the focus of experience seems to be concentrated in a fixed spot on the scene, as in Stramm’s "Patrouille":

Die Steine feinden
Fenster grinst Verrat
Äste würgen
Berge Sträucher blättern raschlig
Gellen
Tod*45

There is a general aversion to using the first person singular to be observed in Stramm’s war poems, an aversion Expressionists of the more radical persuasion shared with the Futurists, whose spokesman Marinetti had demanded the elimination of the "I" from literature altogether.* For the Georgians, the first person singular was, as a rule, either the starting point or the pivot on which the poetic expression of their war experience was supported. Many of Wilfred Owen’s poems rely on this subjective focus, as witness the opening lines from two of them. "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo" begins:
I, too, saw God through mud,—  
the mud that cracked on cheeks when  
wretches smiled.

The poem entitled “Fragment,” which, incidentally, is also an example of one of the few single-image poems of Owen’s, is similar:

I saw his round mouth’s crimson deepen as it fell,  
Like a Sun, in his last deep hour;  
Watched the magnificent recession of farewell,  
Clouding, half gleam, half glower,  
And a last splendour burn the heavens of his cheek.  
And in his eyes  
The cold stars lighting, very old and bleak,  
In different skies.47

This is in fact an Imagist poem with a very characteristic Georgian opening line. “I saw” places the image of the face of the dying soldier, who is presumably bleeding at the mouth seen as a sun darkening in setting, within the observation of a personalized speaker. In the typical Imagist poem, as in Ezra Pound’s “In the Metro,” the image as a rule appears in its absolute form, cut loose from any act of individual observation.

Nature, which supplies the image for the face of the dying soldier, has somehow remained untouched by the agony inflicted by war on man. This also distinguishes Georgians from Expressionists, whose nature images very often seem to have been drawn by war into the disintegration of everything whole and sound.48 In Oskar Kanehl’s “Sonnenuntergang,” the earth appears as corpses floating in a sea of blood, and the moon, as yellow pus dripping from the sky:

Die letzten weißen Wolkenflotten fliehen.  
Der Tag hat ausgekämpft  
Über dem Meer.  
Wie eine rote Blutlache liegt es,  
In der das Land wie Leichen schwimmt.  
Vom Himmel tropft ein Eiter, Mond.  
Es wacht kein Gott.  
In Höhlen ausgestochener Sternenaugen  
Hockt dunkler Tod.  
Und ist kein Licht.  
Und alles Tier schreit wie am Jüngsten Tag.  
Und Menschen brechen um  
Am Ufer.49

This can also be seen in Trakl’s “Grodek”—“Alle Straßen münden in schwarze Verwesung” (“All the roads lead to black decay”)50—and in
Heynicke’s “Angriff”—“Sonnen stieben in Scherben” (“Suns burst into splinters”).51

Since form and content are interdependent aspects of a poem, it seems justified to relate Owen’s preference for the personalized mode of lyrical expression to his personal creed as a war poet as expressed in his draft of a preface for the projected collection of his war poems: “My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.”52 Though there is no comparable personalized expression of “poetry as pity” in German war poems, there is, of course, a large and impressive body of German poems commiserating the ordeal of soldiers wounded or dying, but the commiseration is often expressed in a more impersonal manner.53

In German poetry, the protest against war, against the futility of the human sacrifices called for by the patriots at home, and against the ultimate absurdity of war is to be heard from the very first days, though here, too, in the early days of August 1914 the noise produced by patriotism drowned out everything else. Contrary to the widespread opinion that the Expressionists were opposed to war from the beginning, it has now been established that quite a few of them were also carried along by the fervor of the early August days as was the majority of the German writers at the time, including Thomas Mann and many writers of similar caliber.54 The period of intoxication, however, was on the whole shorter for the Expressionists than for most of the other German writers and poets. The stages of personal development of, for instance, Johannes R. Becher, who passed from a state of fascination with the mystique of war in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war through a short period of submission to the spirit of August 1914 to a stage of increasing disgust at the cruelty and waste of war and, finally, to sharp protest against the continuation of hostilities after 1915, seem typical of the Expressionists in general.55 Again a genre-specific factor is to be observed here: Poetry seems to have had a stronger proclivity toward an affirmative view of war than prose, as could perhaps be shown by a comparison of the poems in Franz Pfemfert’s Die Aktion with the essays and other writings in Die Weißen Blätter. Uwe Wandrey demonstrates that René Schickele’s poem “Erster August 1914” still contains a quite ambivalent attitude toward war, whereas in his essays in Die Weißen Blätter of the same period his denunciation of the nationalist ideology of war is already quite explicit.56 This “Phasenverschiebung” still deserves closer investigation.

It seems that in English poetry on the whole the protest against war took longer to become explicit. The crucial divide of opinion was the battle of the Somme in August 1916 and its dismal failure. From that date onward, Siegfried Sassoon’s bitter satires set an example for many others, among them W. Owen and Isaac Rosenberg.
Sassoon’s early war poems like “The Kiss” were written in a state of “genuine bellicose fervour.” The poems collected in The Old Huntsman, published in May 1917, already range from idealism to severe realism. In his next collection, Counter-Attack, published in the summer of 1918, the note of protest against the continuation of the war dominates and the tone has become angry, his satire savage, as in “Base Detail” and “The General.”

An English poet who was profoundly disillusioned sooner than others about the heroic myth of dying in battle as the ultimate fulfilment of a young man’s life was Charles Sorley. He happened to be in Germany when the war broke out. He returned dutifully, joined up, and was killed in action at the battle of Loos in October 1915. Were here the space, Sorley would deserve a much fuller treatment. He wrote a handful of exquisite war poems, for instance, “All the hills and vales along / Earth is bursting into song,” with its imitation of the carefree lilt of a marching song that is, however, given a sarcastic twist when it continues with the lines, “And the singers are the chaps / Who are going to die perhaps.” Quite different in tone and diction is his sonnet “When you see millions of the mouthless dead / Across your dreams in pale battalions go. . . .” Sorley’s vision and poetic talent matured under the impact of the experience in the trenches even faster than those of Wilfred Owen. That Sorley was granted only so short a spell is also to be regretted because he was the English war poet who not only knew Germany but felt strongly attracted by its people and culture, without losing his sense of critical judgement. The tension between loyalty to Britain and sympathy for Germany has found expression in his sonnet “To Germany”:

You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,  
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.  
But gropers both through fields of thought confined  
We stumble and we do not understand.  
You only saw your future bigly planned,  
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,  
And in each other’s dearest ways we stand,  
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.  

Sorley’s fate, dying so young because of a bullet fired by an enemy he did not hate—“Brother Bosch” he calls him in a letter—has a parallel in the story of the life and death of Ernst Stadler, the Rhodes Scholar from Oxford who wrote a doctoral dissertation on the German translation of Shakespeare, and was killed by a hand grenade thrown by a British soldier. These are two instances of the many tragic paradoxes produced by a war which was not only the first World War but the first European Civil War, or, as Sorley called it, a war “between sisters”: “I regard the war as one between sisters, between Martha and Mary, the efficient and intolerant
against the casual and sympathetic." A comprehensive comparative study of German and English literature about the Great War would also have to trace the transnational personal histories of authors like Stadler and Sorley and the irony of their abrupt termination by the war.

Notes


2 No detailed comparative study of English and German war memoirs and novels has yet been undertaken. There are, however, collections of the kind of Holger Klein's The First World War in Fiction (London, 1976), in which the French, the German, and the English presentations of the war experience is dealt with side by side with occasional comparative comments.

3 Since I began work on such a comparative study, a book on the German war poets has been published which contains a great number of comparative references to the English frontline poets of 1914–18: Patrick Bridgwater, The German Poets of the First World War (London, 1985). Maurice Bowra's Poetry and the First World War (Oxford, 1961) had already included English, German, French, Italian, and Russian war poetry, but the wide scope of this lecture permitted only very general comparative comments.


12 Further investigation of this aspect would, of course, have to include a consideration of the
relative strength of pacifism in Britain and Germany before the war. Bridgwater thinks that pacifism was much less widespread in Germany than in Britain at the outbreak of the war. Cf. his “German Poetry and the First World War,” European Studies Review 1 (1971): 177.


14 How abruptly and unexpectedly this break occurred is demonstrated by the fate of T. E. Hulme’s “German Chronicle,” which was planned to be a report on the latest developments in German literature from the vantage point of the Café des Westens (Café Royal) in Berlin, where two years before Rupert Brooke had written his poem “Grantchester.” Only the first of Hulme’s “German Chronicle[s]” materialized (June 1914; in Poetry and Drama). It contains probably the first English critical reaction to what later became known as “Expressionismus.” Hulme and his German contemporaries in 1914 had no collective name yet for writers like Ernst Blass, Else Lasker-Schüler, Georg Heym, René Schickele, Herwarth Walden, and Kurt Hiller, to name only those whom Hulme mentions or quotes from. He notices correctly that they “use the language in a new way” and that “none of the poems can be described as pretty.” Their most outstanding quality is a certain “ferocity” counterbalanced by “some constructive intelligence.” Quite a competent characterization! See T. E. Hulme, “German Chronicle,” Poetry and Drama (June 1914): 221–29.

15 For the importance of this Café as a meeting place of artists and (Expressionist) writers, see P. Bridgwater, ed., The Poetry of the Café des Westens: Blass, Heym, Hoddis, Lichtenstein, (Leicester, 1984), pp. 7ff.


19 Dietrich Bode gives to the second section of his anthology Gedichte des Expressionismus (Stuttgart, 1966) the title “Aufbruch.”


23 See his poem “The Song of the Sword,” quoted by Bernard Bergonzi in Heroes’ Twilight, p. 22f.


26 I am only concerned with trench poetry, that is, poetry written actually in the trenches or by poets with personal experience of trench warfare in the years 1914–18.


29 Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory. Chapter 5 is entitled “Oh What a Literary War.”

30 In his essay “Der Einfluß kultureller Paradigmen auf die literarische Wiedergabe trau- matischer Erfahrung,” in Kriegererlebnis: Der Erste Weltkrieg in der literarischen Gestaltung und symbolischen Deutung der Nationen, ed. Klaus Vondung (Göttingen, 1980), pp. 175–87, Paul Fussell refers to the war novels and memoirs of Remarque and Jünger as well as to those of Graves and Blunden, but does not go into details.

31 See Vondung’s introduction to Kriegererlebnis, pp. 17f.

32 The phrase “der Krieg an sich selbst” was used by Thomas Mann in his “Gedanken im Kriege”: “Krieg! Es war eine Reinigung, Befreiung, was wir empfanden, und eine ungeheure Hoffnung. . . . Was die Dichter begeisterte, war der Krieg an sich selbst, als Heimsuchung, als sittliche Not.” Quoted after Reinhard Rürup, “Der ‘Geist von 1914’ in Deutschland: Kriegerbegeisterung und Ideologisierung des Krieges im Ersten Weltkrieg,”


35 Bridgwater considers Heym’s “Der Krieg” more an intensely personal vision of a “dance of death” than “a prophetic vision of the Great War for Civilization,” as it was understood by most of Heym’s contemporaries. See his The Poet as Hero and Clown (Durham, 1986), p. 32.

36 There is also a noticeable difference as to which subjects were thought fit for the two seemingly closely related “lyrical” genres, war poem and soldiers’ song. Again, a comparison between the German and English soldiers’ songs would be desirable. What English soldiers sang seems to have been closer to popular hits from the music hall than what German soldiers sang. To counterbalance the highly patriotic songs of the “Wacht am Rhein” kind, Germans seemed to prefer to adapt and sing older folk songs and “Wanderlieder,” as is again revealed by the recently published collection of “Soldatenlieder” edited by H. Ramge, L. E. Schmidt, and C. Wiedemann, Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie, vols. 47 and 48 (Gießen, 1986). Apart from this difference, English and German soldiers’ songs have in common an aversion to deal with the grimmer realities of modern warfare.

Musical battle pieces were very popular during and after the Napoleonic Wars. Their genre-specific characteristic is the ample use of the sound of trumpets, drums, and gunfire finally merging with the tune of the national anthem inevitably celebrating victory. Cf. Beethoven’s “Wellington’s Victory or the Battle of Vittoria, 1813” and Tchaikovsky’s “Ouverture Solennelle, 1812.” No battle symphony has ever been written, as far as I know, on a battle lost. After the two world wars, the battle symphony or overture seems to have been entirely replaced by the form of the musical requiem for dead soldiers, e.g., Benjamin Britten’s “Requiem” based on poems by Wilfred Owen, and Dmitri Kabalevsky’s “Requiem” using verses by Robert Rozhdestvenskii.

37 Tim O’Brien, Going after Cacciato (New York, 1978), p. 255. Robert Jay Lifton reports that Vietnam veterans entering combat often had the feeling, “God, this is right out of a movie!” Cf. his Home from the War (New York, 1974), p. 165. This feeling was part of the special character of the Vietnam war experience produced by its extensive coverage by the media: recognition of the already familiar and a sense of the inauthentic transferred from the cinematic to the real event. See also Walter Hölbling, “Going West—To Europe: Invertierter Mythos und innovative Ästhetik in Tim O’Briens Going After Cacciato,” Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 18 (1985): 309–30.

38 Robert Nichols, Ardours and Endeavours (London, 1918), p. 37ff. “The Assault” was one of the most successful poems of this collection of war poems; cf. Bergonzi, Heroes’ Twilight, pp. 63ff. Soon after the war, however, Douglas Goldring called it “an empty and pretentious piece of work,” a “masterpiece of drivel,” which only wartime criticism could be misled into praising as an outstanding poem; cf. D. Goldring, Reputations (Port Washington, N.Y., 1920; rpt. 1968), p. 110. It seems to lie in the nature of the battle poem striving after imitative form that it is liable to such rapid shifts in critical judgement.

39 Anz and Vogl, Die Dichter und der Krieg, pp. 130ff.


41 August Stramm, Das Werk, ed. René Radrizzani (Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 73. The poem was first published in Herwarth Walden’s journal Der Sturm in February 1915. For a detailed interpretation, see Bridgwater, German Poets of the First World War, pp. 47ff.


43 Ibid., p. 27.

44 Edmund Blunden, Selected Poems, ed. Robyn Marsack (Manchester, 1982), pp. 33f.

45 Stramm, Das Werk, p. 86. The gaping holes of broken windows in ruined houses become powerful images also in several English poems, as for instance in H. S. Sarson’s “The Village”: “A window gapes, / Laughing in mockery the frame still holds, / Grinning its execration”; cf. Galloway Kyle, ed., Soldier Poets: Songs of the Fighting Men, (London, 1916) 1: 84. On Stramm and Futurism, see Bridgwater, “The Sources of Stramm’s Original-
49 Anz and Vogl, Die Dichter und der Krieg, p. 149.
51 Die Dichter und der Krieg, p. 160 (my translation).
52 The Complete Poems and Fragments 2: 535.
53 In contrast to the—in comparison with English poetry—more sparing use of the first person singular, the first person plural is quite frequently used by Georgians and Expressionists alike, in particular as an expression of collective suffering and exposure: “Wir sind alle Tiere. / Wir werden geschlachtet. / Hunde sind wir” (Heynicke, “Trommelfeuer,” quoted from Wandrey, Das Motiv des Krieges, p. 157) and “Our brains ache, in the merciless ice winds that knife us . . . / Wearied we keep awake . . .” (Wilfred Owen, “Exposure,” The Complete Poems and Fragments 2: 185f.).
55 Cf. Wandrey, Das Motiv des Krieges, pp. 26f.
56 Ibid., p. 237.
57 Bergonzi, Heroes' Twilight, p. 94.
60 Ibid., p. 56.
61 Printed together with his poems in Marlborough, p. 134.
62 Ibid., p. 124.
Black Poetry and Poetry on Blacks: 
Three Voices from the Caribbean 

SANDRA ADELL, CHRISTINA GUENTHER, BRIGITTE JIRKU, AND 
ROBERT PHILIPSON 

I 

Cicero used to say that though he should live two men’s lives he would never have the leisure to read the lyric poets. The lyric generates such extreme passions. At the other end of the spectrum, we have the lyric poets themselves, who often claim the supreme importance of their art. “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world,” Shelley declared.

What do a German socialist, a French black communist, and a Cuban revolutionary have in common? They share—or shared—a part of the world, the Caribbean, and they all wrote poetry. They also share varying versions of a Marxist ideology. Is there such a thing as a “Caribbean” lyric? One might as well ask if there is a Marxist lyric. Yet the premise here—the assumption behind our topic—is that some unity binds these three voices together, a Hegelian spirit of which these differing styles, languages, and literary traditions are but the seemingly diverse manifestations. The Caribbean basin, a geographic potpourri of imperialisms and ideologies, figures as the binding concept. And one need only to consult the growing body of works and anthologies on Caribbean literature to see that the concept has persuasive powers. The Cuban writer Antonio Benítez Rojo presents the idea most seductively, subtly asserting its essential unity while seeming to deconstruct it at the same time:

. . . there is no Caribbean literature, there are only literatures written in the anglophone, francophone, etc. blocs within the Caribbean. I agree with this proposition. Only in terms of a first reading, of course, [in which, as Barthes says, the reader inevitably reads himself]. Beneath the arbol, arbre, tree, etc. lies the same island that keeps ‘repeating’ itself all the way to its arrival as a meta-archipelago. There’s no center or circumference; there are tropisms, common patterns, highlighted differently and then, gradually, assimilated into African, European, Indoamerican, and Asian contexts until they have reached the point at which none of them can be differentiated.¹

To the voices of our three diverse poets, we add our four critical ones. If the unity in all of this is difficult to perceive, the fault may either lie with
the subject matter or the approaches taken to it. To quote from that
greatest of American lyricists, Walt Whitman, "Do I contradict myself? 
Well, then, I contradict myself."

II  
Political Lyrics in Columbia:  
Two Approaches to Erich Arendt’s Exile Cycle Tolú  
Spurred by the mission to liberate blacks and the “black soul” from racist
discrimination and oppression, the revolutionary black movement called  
négritude gained momentum among black francophone artists and intellectu-
als in the 1940s. In his famous “Orphée Noir” introduction to Léopold 
Sédar Senghor’s 1948 Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache,
Jean-Paul Sartre said of the movement: “For once at least, the most authen-
tic revolutionary project and the purest of poetry emerge from the same 
source.”2 Concurrent with but culturally far removed from this black move-
ment of revolutionary politics mediated through poetry, a German exile in 
Colombia was engaged in creating his own “black” collection of protest 
poetry, Tolú (1943–50).3 In this lyric cycle, Erich Arendt infused poetic 
form with a revolutionary politics largely absent from his earlier expression-
list poems, and only cautiously ciphered in his later postexile lyrics. The 
focus of his fusion of political reality with poetry is the blacks and Indios of 
the Caribbean tropics.

The central theme that echoes through this cycle of 31 poems reiterates 
some of those of the black francophone poets of négritude, as Tolú, named 
for the small Colombian village where Arendt lived for a short while, is 
poetry of oppression and discrimination, poetry of the struggle for survival 
of two dark-skinned races subjugated in a smoldering environment by white 
capitalism and colonialism. Unlike négritude poetry, however, Arendt’s 
black and Indio poems were written by a white European in exile from a 
fascist government. Moreover, they were written in German for a German-
speaking audience. Not until 1951, promptly upon Arendt’s return to Eu-
rope, did Tolú appear, along with his Spanish exile poetry, in Trug doch die 
Nacht den Albatros, a volume published in the German Democratic Repub-
lic, his newly adopted homeland. Thus, Tolú is not protest poetry for blacks 
and Indios to use or even read. Instead, Arendt realized in these poems a 
self-assigned mission of Geschichtsschreibung. As he said in a 1976 inter-
view, poetry is historiography from that vantage of pain and suffering absent 
in the official and academic way of recording history.4 Tolú is a Marxist-
humanist document in lyric song and poetic pictures which complements 
with its word-colors Arendt’s perceptive collection of black-and-white photo-
graphs and sociohistorical commentary called Colombia: A Tropical Coun-
try, and published in 1954, three years after Tolú.
Two types of lyrics dominate Tolú: remote, free-verse nature tableaux and accessible songs about the daily lives of the blacks and Indios. In these two sorts of lyrics, Arendt's photographer's eye captures and contrasts the dead silence of land- and seascapes with narrative canvases full of movement. The cycle opens on stark, somewhat anthropomorphic stills of desolate settings and disquieting moods. In these nature poems, vast millennial steppes of granite silence are swept with ashes and sand and dotted with palms, skeletal cacti, and leaden seas. A mix of metallic white, ashen grey, and dense black is haunted occasionally by the light of a pale green moon or by stains of red. Inca Rumold has traced much of the nature and color imagery in Arendt's poetry to the verse of the Spaniard Federico García Lorca and the Chilean Pablo Neruda, and has stressed as well the "process of politicization" which these elements represent in Arendt's poetry.7 Certainly, his poetic landscapes, too, are built on a tension of opposition and reversal on the visual and formal level that further sharpens social disparities and political injustices. In short, Arendt projects a tropical prospect which balances opposed elements in an uneasy symmetry that threatens to explode.

In the earliest poem of the cycle, "Karibische Nacht," a wafer-thin moon seems to merge with the sea, green and remote as it floats within the surface of the waters. Out of the dark land, ghostly cacti extend meager branches to the sky. Prone black maidens sleep on the bare earth and dream while their huts sag and settle about them. The spell of this nightscape is suddenly broken midway through the poem by oil and metal, by tankers and airplanes, by the turgid superfluity of imperial capitalism. One restless and hungry mulatto wanders the thin line between these two nights, himself a product of the two worlds, yet alienated from both. Ironically, he guards his white master's oil, booty confiscated from the land. Amid this scene of white oppression and its attendant pollution, Arendt, as in other of his landscapes with figures, allows for a glimmer of optimism by means of a reversing conjunction placed toward the end of the poem: "Doch der Mulatte oben / mit seinem weichen Hundeblick / hält ein Gewehr!" For a moment, the possibility of explosion and rebellion threatens the Caribbean night.

These remote nature tableaux in free verse are contrasted with narrative songs and ballads that portray the lives and plight of Indios and blacks. In this other, more accessible, lyric of movement, the distant and observing voice of the nature tableaux is often replaced by a black voice. "Gesang vom Kanu" is the first of these lyrics in which Arendt seeks to bridge the distance of difference between himself and the blacks. In it, a black fisherman sings proudly of his ebony canoe, which glides him through the schools of fish that are his livelihood, and of his lover's ebony body, which moves him in the sea of night. Such legendary sensuality associated with both male
and female blackness courses through Arendt’s *Tolú* cycle. Often, it is the source of energy or the fertile soil in which the seeds of black anger and rebellion are sown. Like “Karibische Nacht” and many more of Arendt’s Colombian poems, “Gesang vom Kanu” erupts in its concluding stanza with the fisherman’s threat against those capitalist exploiters tempted by his two prized possessions: his ebony canoe and his ebony woman.

Certainly, Arendt’s Colombian lyrics are engaged. His concern for the oppressed blacks and Indios is unmistakable. However, as a white poet who writes in German, he unwittingly succumbs at times to racist myths perpetuating stereotyped images of blacks. For this Marxist, who joined the KPD, the Communist Party of Germany, in 1926 and was a member of the BPRS, the Organization of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers, racial differences based on color, and reinforced by exotic settings, should not exist. Biological and cultural notions of racial differences conflict with the Marxist understanding that economics control social justice. By exploring positive racial differences as well as the problems of racial discrimination in Colombia, Arendt added in *Tolú* a dimension to the Marxist discourse. Frequently, however, he chose to portray blacks solely as a sensual race. Accordingly, his lyrics often contain rhythmical dances of sexual desire and dreaming childlike maidens, mothers, and children. Arendt’s blacks are a race of lithe tigers, pouncing males and females who dance wildly, or stare quietly into the darkness “mit unwissendem Tierauge / von Zeit und Aberzeit” (164).

Nevertheless, and despite certain subconscious stereotyped perceptions, Arendt does attempt consciously and conscientiously to recognize racial prejudice as an additional problem for blacks in Colombia. In the poem “Neger,” an angry cry for solidarity against the rape of the land and its people bursts from a solitary misfit who is a herdsman, fisherman, and peon. (All blacks and Indios in *Tolú* are, in fact, one or more of these.) The poem begins with the events of the misfit’s birth and the curse of racial discrimination which he is heir to:

Der ich gezeugt bin am Rand des Reisfelds,  
mißratener Sohn des einäugigen Negers José,  
der seine Lust stillte im Buschwerk,  
wie irgendein Büffel, an der verzweifelten Magd  
Maria; ich dreifach Verachteter hier: verachtet  
von jenen dreifach gelbhaarigen Göttern des Ölfelds. (182)

The poem condemns the “lords of the oil harbors,” the “Yankees” identified as such in its third stanza. The black voice chanting these liturgical lines is not seeking solidarity exclusively among the black peons. In the final lines of “Neger,” Arendt attempts to include racial divisions within the universal class struggle, albeit only briefly. The black peon feels “am
meisten mißbraten" because he can respond only to the rare handshake of those brothers, both black and white, who toil with him in the rice fields and oilfields, and who burn with the same eagerness for resistance and emancipation.

Toward the end of Tolú, in "Seit man denken kann," one of its latest lyrics, the cycle culminates with a powerful statement that at once clearly distinguishes and yet unites two races, the Indios and the blacks, in an ongoing economic and political struggle. This lyric is one of Arendt's three poems that deal with Indios. The other two are strategically placed at the beginning and at the end of the collection, thus framing the cycle. "Seit man denken kann" tells the story of oppression, struggle, and rebellion during the great strike in Colombia in the 1930s. Amid a setting of poverty, Indios and blacks share anger and suffering. Together, clenching tired fists, they pool their strength to resist white capitalism and colonialism:

Großes Herz des Indios,
großes Herz des Negers;
tot nun ist das Herz der beiden,
Rotes Herz des Indios,
rotes Herz des Negers:
heiß von Empörung,
heiß vom Tod der Weißen
ist die Machete beider. (205)

They die together as brothers and equals in a costly yet successful strike against oppression.

In sum, then, the Tolú cycle is a white man's record of suppression and struggle, seriously attempting not to ignore problems of racial discrimination that exist within the larger class struggle. It is also a poet's plea for cultural and political "internationalism" and for "solidarity" in the progress toward self-emancipation. The Colombian experience provided Arendt with, as he put it, a "Befreiung von europäisch-traditionellem Gestalten." In Colombia, he freed himself from traditional forms and subjects, and he experimented with language and imagery from another cultural tradition in a new geographical context. Unfortunately, the reaction to Arendt's Colombian poetry in the GDR was not encouraging. Even though he was awarded the National Prize Third Class for his display of "militant humanism," his black and Indio political poetry was ultimately rejected. In a 1953 review in Neue Deutsche Literatur, Harald Kohtz voiced the general negative response:

Bleibt nur zu hoffen, daß er nun auch den zeitgenössischen deutschen Themenbereich in sein Schaffen einbeziehen und bei Gestaltung der diesem Themenbereich Rechnung tragenden neuen Inhalte die diesen Inhalten adäquaten Formen finden möge.⁸
Arendt abandoned not only his black and Indio lyrics but all poetry writing for five years following this cold reception. Yet he did maintain his connection to black and Hispanic poetry through his translations of such poets as Rafael Alberti, Nicolás Guillén, and Pablo Neruda.

The lack of reception and the few negative critics open up a wide field for speculation. However, they do not devaluate Erich Arendt’s exile poetry. His response to Harald Kohtz’s harsh criticism was published two months later in the March issue of *Neue Deutsche Literatur*. Arendt accused Kohtz of an “unfounded false analysis.” His choice of theme, he claimed, had not put any restraints on his concern for German literature, nor had he constructed inappropriate metaphors. Arendt argued that his metaphors and his poetry in general grew out of his immediate environment:

> Die dichterischen Bilder gingen immer aus der Anschauung hervor oder stehen als das äußerst sinnlich-geistige Bild des Erlebten oder Geschauten.

It was only after having carefully observed and studied the life of a mostly rural population for three years that Arendt wrote the first poems of his cycle *Tolú*. Along the lines of traditional Marxism, his primary concern is not racism or black identity in itself, but the conditions and the gradual destruction of a population in a country where “not the machine . . . but the stores of nature and the fertility of the fields determine the prosperity of a place.” This population is being exploited, impoverished, and, ultimately, destroyed by imperialist forces. Wolfgang Kießling wrote in his book *Exil in Lateinamerika*:

> [Arendt] nimmt Partei für die lebendige und mißbrauchte Kraft der Ausgebeuteten, für das Aufflackern ihrer Empörung. Er sucht mit ihnen die soziale und geistige Selbstbefreiung.

In *Tolú*, politics emerge from Arendt’s poetry through the enchantment he finds in the landscape and the black population, beyond which he sees the harsh conditions nature imposes as well as the economical and social oppression. Meaning to reveal “the internal logic of the object . . . which can not be mediated through a rational understanding,” he communicates the black’s conditions through the rich landscape metaphors drawn from their immediate surroundings. In an interview with Achim Roscher, Arendt stated this connection:

Arendt's landscape images, as Inca Rumold has pointed out, are radically politicized. Roscher agrees that "there are . . . many poems in which the description of nature leads directly to socio-political conclusions."\(^{16}\)

The shifts in the metaphorical significance reveal the different sides of nature for the black: the source of constant fear and danger is, at the same time, the source of living. On another level, they mediate the white man's overabundant wealth and the hopeless economical situation of the blacks suffering from merciless exploitation. Thus, Arendt uses nature as a metaphor for the exploiter as well as the exploited. Within the created tension, there unfolds the tragic dilemma of the status quo.

The recurring images of the "fat/sated moon" represent the wealthy white man, who draws his wealth from nature and, at the same time, spreads death: "Mondwolken streuen Asche auf den Mund der Steppen."\(^ {17}\) The "ash" the black receives will only contribute to a slowing down of the process of dying. Like the black, nature is left empty, deprived of all means of revitalization: nothing but "ashes, sand thorns, bones." In the process of its own destruction, nature itself turns into a bearer of death. It surrounds the black as mercilessly as it is being surrounded by the white: "Um die Hütten / haucht/ vergifteter Sand / seine Fieberhitze in / den Sterngrund" (163).\(^ {18}\)

Inside this infernal circle drawn by nature, the starvation and dying of the black is expressed through horizontal images often connected to metal: paleness and thinness.\(^ {19}\) In the poem "Karibische Nacht," "Gespenster-Kakteen [strecken] / bettelnd / die mageren Schattenarme / zum toten Himmel empor . . . Die dünnen Lungen der schlafenden / Mädchen zerfallen, / grün und fremd / schwimmt oben / der Mond, / dünn wie ein Blatt" (163–64). This last line not only shows the dying but also the remoteness, the alienation of nature and of the blacks from themselves and from each other. The word "above" introduces a vertical dimension in the horizontal imagery. Above the fields, the "white sated moon" rests and spreads death. The black is removed from nature and from himself. The lines "Oben / . . . / einsam / in der schlafenden Welt / ein Mulatte" (164) hint at his inability to initiate action, at his passivity vis-à-vis total exploitation.

Economic exploitation has undermined the blacks' culture and tradition, which Arendt traces back to the Indios. Men alienated from their "elementary existence," the death of a society and its tradition manifest themselves through strong sexual images such as the one depicted in the following lines of the poem "Indiogötter": "Ein greiser Dorn aus dem Urgestein / steht das Geschlecht dem Gott zeugungslos im Wind" (163). The black has lost his vitality and, within the political realm, his ability to initiate action. In the poem "Trunkener Neger," as in several others, resignation takes over; surrounded by death, the black mourns his selling out in
working for a “white master.” At the end, he returns to the rice field, “dull, weakened” by alcohol.

Only in a state of intoxication and/or sexual enhancement through dance does the black attempt to overcome the alienation from himself, from his own tradition and rituals which, along with nature, seem to be doomed. In such moments, as in “Trinklied,” he is able to express his extreme despair. He sheds his numbness, airs his deep-seated anger and hatred. The rebellion is being acted out in the song: “Die Machete schlug / dem Mond den / blanken / den runden Schädel ab. / Da lachten die Neger” (175). The black, for an instant, is able to recover his self-esteem, to free himself from the ties of “slavery.” As the song progresses, it is no longer the machete which executes the action, but the “I” who kills the “fat/sated moon.” It is a gradual progression toward autonomy and self-definition, and a resurrection of his identity. The individual takes the initiative, acts for himself and, at the same time, for the collective, which applauds his action, joins in, establishing a dialogue.

Just like alcohol, the dances of the Indios also turned into a form of escapism, though they remain perhaps the only form of expressing a true collective identity based on a strong tradition. The sexual element plays a dominant role although it is not used for its own ends. In the poem “Cumbia”—cumbia is the name of a traditional erotic Colombian dance forbidden by the Church—the form, mostly free rhyme and rhythm, embodies the ideology of the oppressed rejecting the dominance of the ruling class. The dancing woman turns into the protector of the black against the white, seeks the protection of the strongest man in the midst of a boundless nature, then, at last, regains her autonomy within her own culture. The sexual imagery, as that of the landscape discussed earlier, takes on a political meaning: the candle turns into a sword, nature, into an army. The woman incites the man to taking up arms, to rebelling. Out of this wild elemental dance grow the revolutionary forces. Like many other poems, “Cumbia” issues a warning, carries the possibility of rebellion induced by the woman. It is the woman, in connection with the traditional element, who is the bearer of vitality, being linked to a utopian moment always present in Arendt’s poetry, which is nonetheless shattered at the end of the cycle.

In its last poem, “Kolumbianische Ballade,” originally dedicated to certain members of the Colombian Communist Party, the black’s dream of the day when “keiner den Nacken mehr neigt” (“Ballade vom Hemd des Negers”; 202), hence, his dream of a socialist revolution, is destroyed. The poem evokes and laments the events of the uprising in April, 1948, which came to an abrupt end when the liberal leader, Echandia, accepted a coalition with the government. This gave the liberals no power; it only
smoothed the way to a Fascist dictatorship under Laureano Gómez. Nonetheless, the ballad ends with a sudden shift: "Doch seht Volkankegel rauchen indianische Feuer, Rippen der Berge, / an sie pocht das Blut, das, rebellisch, kein Elend fraß!" (219). The vision of these last lines, in contrast with the account of the failure to carry through a revolution, projects the possibility of any further action into an indefinite future. The problem of social change and revolution is divorced from its immediate historical context. History is viewed as cultural history within a timeless framework out of which the utopian moment emerges. This utopian moment, though shattered, is present throughout the cycle; Arendt has set its mood in the opening poem, "Indiogötter.” In the midst of a destroyed past, the relics are the foundation of a renaissance.

With the last lines of "Kolumbianische Ballade,” Arendt accomplishes on the thematic level what he had already done on the structural level in “Indiogötter,” the only sonnet in Told. In the form of the sonnet, according to Theodore Ziolkowski, one may find the overcoming of death by way of an aesthetic structure that lends itself to the belief in a recovery. Rudolf Hagelstange sees in the sonnet

[die] Überwindung des zeitlichen Chaos durch Besinnung auf die über- und außerzeitlichen Kräfte des Menschen . . . In [seiner] strengen Form . . . manifestierte sich schon äußerlich . . . der Wille zu neuem Gesetz.22

The possibility of a new order seems to be evoked in the last lines of "Kolumbianische Ballade.” The change from the original ending, “Immer noch fühlt ich den tapferen scheidenden Druck einer Indiohand,”23 to the imperative phrase, “Doch seht: Volkankegel rauchen,” suggests a renewed confidence. It is an appeal to the reader which emphasizes the continuance of the potential for struggle and recovery, and the possibility of a successful socialist revolution.

III

The Relation of the Lyric to Caribbean Society

The situation of the Caribbean artist seems to demand that he be political—and if he is a black artist, he has a double oppression to contend with: that of race and that of economics. In the Caribbean world, the traditional responses to these oppressions have been an embracing of black consciousness (négritude, negrismo, l’indigénisme) and an espousal of revolution. For both responses, the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire would seem to be an exemplary figure. As a négritude writer who was also elected mayor of Fort-de-France and deputy from central Martinique on the Communist ticket, his career embraces both revolution and black
consciousness in a central manner. In his poetry, however, what Césaire called his "Mallarméan side" \(^{24}\) ultimately comes to subvert both his cultural identification with other blacks and his political identification with the oppressed masses.

This is not a position that other critics would support. It was Césaire, after all, who coined the term négritude in his Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (1939). It was also Césaire who wrote that famous Discourse on Colonialism (1955) in which he presented the urban proletariat as "the only class that still has a universal mission." \(^{25}\) Countless articles have been produced, maintaining time and again that Césaire is the poet of négritude and of revolutionary consciousness par excellence. For the period of his most prolific poetic production, from the late 1930s to the late 1950s, it is an image that Césaire himself would have endorsed. Thus I acknowledge that I am swimming very much against the tide. However, I regard the stance here taken as more corrective and heuristic than anything else.

In order to make this argument in a concrete manner, I should like to turn to a poem that appeared in Senghor's famous Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache of 1948, négritude's opening volley on the Parisian scene. The poem is called "Couteaux midi," and it begins with lines that would seem to belie my thesis:

Quand les Nègres font la Révolution ils commencent par arracher du Champ de Mars des arbres géants qu'ils lancent à la face du ciel comme des aboiements et qui couchent dans le plus chaud de l'air de purs courants d'oiseaux frais où ils tirent à blanc. Ils tirent à blanc? Oui ma foi parce que le blanc est la juste coeur controversée du noir qu'ils portent dans le cœur et que ne cesse de conspirer dans les petits hexagones trop bien faits de leurs pores.

(When the Blacks make Revolution they begin by uprooting giant trees from the Champ de Mars which they hurl like bayings into the face of the sky and which in the hottest of the air aim at pure streams of cool birds at which they fire blanks. Fire blanks? Yes indeed because blank is precisely the controversial color of the blackness which they carry in their hearts and which never ceases to conspire in the little too-well-made hexagons of their pores.)

“When the Blacks make Revolution”—here are both of our themes, and both are represented by capitalized nouns. Let us examine this more closely.

What used to be called common nouns indicates classes. “Tree” describes a class of woody perennial plants with one main trunk and many branches. Within this class are numerous subclasses, such as sycamores, elms, filaos, and even the trees lining the Champ de Mars. Proper nouns, on the other hand, indicate specific individuals, places, or objects. They can be made to represent classes, as in the phrase, “He’s a real Don Juan,” but their origin is in the particular rather than the general. By the same
token, metonymy can also make a proper noun represent an abstract concept. The Champ de Mars, for example, is indissolubly linked, in francophone culture, to the Ecole Militaire, and thus stands for French military might. When common nouns are capitalized, it is generally for purposes of intensification. History with a capital H assures the victory of the proletariat in *The Communist Manifesto*. Science with a capital S brings us the salvation of modern medicine and the destruction of the atomic bomb. These capitalized entities become personifications of the classes they normally represent, frequently endowed with a life and personality of their own. And so “Nègres” and “Révolution” turn into an allegory.

Yet who are these “Nègres”? Do they represent all of the oppressed black populations of the earth, as a negritude argument might contend? Why would American or South African blacks be interested in attacking a symbol of French oppression? One could answer that the Champ de Mars is a metonymic reference to all white power structures, not just French ones. Or one could argue that “Nègre” cannot be removed from its linguistic-cultural matrix; that it cannot be translated; that “Nègre” refers *only* to blacks oppressed within the French sphere of influence. Following that logic, “niggers” and “kaffirs” would be as enmeshed within their own cultural-linguistic matrices, requiring that Washington or Pretoria be the site of their respective revolts.

Whatever the solution, the question concerning the referent of “Nègre” brings up divisions of culture and nationality which have always been troublesome to negritude as an ideology. Ideological negritude has been rightly associated with its most prolific and celebrated publicist, Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the principal poets of *négritude* and, later on, president of Senegal. Ideological negritude is a racialist Weltanschauung that draws its inspiration from the Romantic writings of Herder and Gobineau. Its initial valorization of African culture came from the ethnologists Maurice Delafosse and Leo Frobenius. Senghor is most concise in his description when he defines negritude as “the sum total of the cultural values of the black world as they express themselves in the life, institutions, and works [*œuvres*] of the blacks.”

By contrast, Césaire’s negritude was a literary creation, one that sprang from the same sources as Senghorian negritude, but which expressed itself as poetry:

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ma négritude n’est pas une pierre, sa surdité ruée contre la clameur du jour
ma négritude n’est pas une taie d’eau morte sur l’œil mort de la terre
ma négritude n’est ni une tour ni une cathédrale
elle plonge dans le chair rouge du sol
d’elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel
d’elle trouve l’accablement opaque de sa droite patience
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(my negritude is not a stone, its deafness thrown against the
clamor of the day
my negritude is not an albugo of dead liquor over the earth’s
dead eye
my negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral
it plunges in the red flesh of the soil
it plunges in the ardent flesh of the sky
it punctures the opaque prostration with its upright patience)

These lines from the Cahier d’un retour au pays natal introduced the term négritude to the world. And it is significant, I think, that négritude is never defined. It is introduced by what it is not, then made the agent (feminine noun though it be) of masculine, thrusting action. Césairian negritude was not meant to be transformed into an ideology. In an interview given in 1970, Césaire explicitly rejected ideological negritude. He began by noting the unity of his position with Senghor’s during the mid-1930s. “Later on, things changed somewhat and there is one point on which I no longer agreed at all with Senghor . . . : it seemed to me that Senghor made a kind of metaphysics out of negritude; there we parted company. He tended rather to construct negritude into an essentialism as though there were a black essence, a black soul, . . . but I never accepted this point of view.”

Nonetheless, Césaire is universally regarded as a negritude poet. And such titles as “Blues de la pluie,” “Samba,” “A l’Afrique,” “Lynch,” and “Ode à la Guinée”—poems that were published in the same collection as “Couteaux midi”—attest to an identification with black populations that far exceeds the Caribbean world. In an exuberant moment, Césaire proclaimed in a 1961 interview, “Mais je suis un poète africain!” Ten years later, however, his statements on the subject were much more subdued. “[L]’affaire est réglée depuis que nos pères ont été transportés hors d’Afrique, nous avons chacun nos pays, et je suis maintenant un Antillais.” Initially, however, it was Césaire’s blackness that pushed him beyond the boundaries of French literature. As he remarked in an interview with Jacqueline Leiner: “J’ai subi les mêmes influences que tous les étudiants français, plus ou moins cultivés, subirent à cette époque. Mais moi, en plus, je connaissais les écrivains noirs américains qui m’avaient été révélés par la revue du Monde noir [sic], et un peu d’éthnographie, grâce à Senghor, d’ailleurs.”

And yet, is black subject matter enough to bring a poet into the ranks of negritude writers? One could hardly make the case for Arendt, though we have seen that he did occasionally adopt a black persona. Or will African ancestry suffice? Even in its hardest moments, negritude has not yet claimed Pushkin. Lilyan Kesteloot, a well-known critic of black francophone literature, approvingly cites Senghor’s assertion that rhythm is at the basis of black art. Her remarks concerning Césaire’s use of rhythm in his
poetry are canonical in the criticism of his work. “In this domaine, as in so many others, Césaire’s African consanguinity is evident and suffices of itself to differentiate him from the French surrealists, with whom he was for a time a traveling companion.”

To the student familiar with English prosody, whose meters are based on regularly repeated accents, the assertion that rhythm is the special province of black art is absurd. And even in French poetry, whose traditional prosody is based on syllable count rather than accentual stress, rhythm is not an unknown phenomenon. Those familiar with the works of André Breton and Paul Eluard, to choose but two of the better surrealist poets, would hardly deny them rhythm.

All of this is not to dispute the fact that Césaire, in much of his writing, is a negritude poet—a francophone black poet writing on black themes—but the term is problematic and can result, if rigidly applied to all of his literary production, in a distortion of his work. Many of his poems have nothing to do with négritude.

Let us now turn to the second of our two capitalized concepts, “Revolution.” In 1948, the year of the poem’s appearance, the context of this revolution was obvious to black and white readers alike. France’s colonial empire was still intact, but the independence movements were gaining speed. The revolution would liberate blacks from white oppression, both psychological and political. Whether or not this would take place within a Communist framework was a question which was hotly debated at the time, but there was no doubt in the minds of the avant-garde that the movement had already begun. One of négritude’s principal thrusts was the inversion of colonial values: Black culture was seen as superior to white. Dance, rhythm, music, intuitiveness, and oneness with the universe were celebrated over reason, logic, and the sterile will to power. Furthermore, blacks were in a position of moral superiority vis-à-vis the whites:

Doux Seigneur!
durement je crache. Au visage des affameurs, au visage des insulteurs,
au visage des parachites et des éventreurs.

(Sweet Lord!
savagely I spit. Into the face of the starvers, into the face of the revilers, into the face of the parashits and of the eviscerators.)

Up until now we have been submitting the poem “Couteaux midi” to a negritude reading. And we understand now what race and revolution mean in negritude terms. “Quand les Nègres font la Révolution ils commencent par arracher du Champ de Mars des arbres géants qu’ils lancent à la face du ciel comme des aboiements . . .” But what would a negritude reading do with the rest of the line: “. . . et qui couchent dans le plus chaud de l’air de
purs courants d’oiseaux frais où ils tirent à blanc”? Syntactically, the action passes to the trees, the antecedent of the relative pronoun “qui.” It is the trees that lie in the air and fire blanks. It is the blanks that plant four-o’clock’s in the sky “which are not unrelated to the coifs of the Saint Joseph de Cluny nuns.”

We find ourselves rather far from the blacks making revolution on the Champ de Mars. And the following strophe is even less amenable to a logocentric reading:


(Noon? Yes, Noon dispersing in the sky in the sky the too complacent cotton wool which muffles my words, which traps my screams. Noon? Yes Noon almond of night and tongue between my pepper fangs. Noon? Yes Noon which carries on its shoulders of a bum and glazier all the sensitivity toward hatred and ruin that counts. Noon? sure Noon which after pausing on my lips for the time it takes to blaspheme and at the cathedral limits of idleness sets on every line of every hand the trains that repentance kept in reserve in the strongboxes of severe time. Noon? Yes sumptuous Noon which makes me absent from this world.)

Where in all of this is the revolution? A quote from André Breton cited in an article published by Césaire’s wife Suzanne in 1941 provides us the key. “Un poème doit être une débâcle de l’intellect . . . Après le débâcle tout recommence—sable, chalumeaux oxydriques.”

It is easy to forget that Césaire was initially introduced to European audiences not through Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (its initial appearance in the journal Volontés was largely ignored) but through the 1946 publication of Les Armes miraculeuses. This established him not as a negritude poet but as a surrealist. Even when the Cahier made its appearance in France the following year, it was prefaced by André Breton, high priest and gatekeeper of surrealism, who declared:

[C]e poème n’était rien moins que le plus grand monument lyrique de ce temps. Il m’apportait la plus riche des certitudes, celle que l’on ne peut jamais attendre de soi seul: son auteur avait misé sur tout ce que j’avais jamais cru juste et, incontestablement, il avait gagné. L’enjeu, tout compte tenu du génie propre de Césaire, était notre conception commune de la vie.
(This poem was nothing less than the greatest lyrical monument of its time. It brought me the fullest of certainties, one which can never be reached by the individual alone: its author had wagered on everything I had ever believed to be true and, incontestably, he had won. The stake, given Césaire's particular genius, was our communal outlook on life.)

*Soleil cou coupé*, the collection which included "Couteaux midi," was first released in 1948 by the publishing house K, specializing in surrealist authors. And, of course, Césaire took the title of his volume from the final line of Apollinaire's "Zone." (It was Apollinaire who first coined the adjective "surréaliste.") Incontestably—even Senghor admitted it—Césaire was a surrealist poet.

But the *Cahier* itself had not been written under the conscious influence of surrealism; that would come later with Breton's visit to Martinique in 1941. "Je faisais du surréalisme comme Monsieur Jourdain faisait de la prose," Césaire declared in an interview with Jacqueline Leiner. "Ma poésie, par conséquent, ne sortait pas des Manifestes du surréalisme de Breton, mais de courants qui préparait déjà le surréalisme." As a modern poet writing in the French tradition, Césaire had the same literary ancestors as Breton, Tzara, and Eluard. Even before the arrival of Breton in Martinique, Césaire's magazine, *Tropiques*, championed Nietzsche and Péguy. After Breton's visit, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and Breton himself were added to the pantheon. In a paper delivered to a philosophy convention in Haiti, and later printed in a 1944 issue of *Tropiques*, Césaire quotes the whole surrealist genealogy, including Baudelaire and Mallarmé. And he ends his essay on the following note:

> Le poète est cet être très vieux et très neuf, très complexe et très simple qui aux confins vécus du rêve et du réel, du jour et de la nuit, entre absence et présence, cherche et reçoit dans le déclenchement soudain de cataclysmes intérieurs le mot de passe de la connivence et de la puissance.*

Here we have again the surrealist dictum of confounding the opposites. As early as *Miraculous Weapons*, Césaire was experimenting with automatic writing. His poetry, like that of the surrealists, made no attempt to adhere to the rules of versification. As "Couteaux midi" testifies, the boundaries between poetry and prose become soluble and blurred. The syntax broils, and images spurt like catherine wheels. Sense is abandoned in favor of abandonment itself, and all is risked to explore the regions of the unconscious, the unthinkable, the unsayable. By revealing hitherto forbidden realms to humankind, the poet proclaims himself a revolutionary. Let us turn again to Césaire's speech at the convention of philosophers:

> C'est par l'image, l'image révolutionnaire, l'image distante, l'image qui bouleverse toutes les lois de la pensée, que l'homme brise enfin la barrière.36
Mental liberation must precede political liberation, the surrealists cry. As Breton writes in his essay "What Is Surrealism?": "The positive lesson of this negating experiment—that is to say, its transfusion among the proletariat—constitutes the only valid revolutionary poetic propaganda." \(^{37}\)

In a series of essays published under the title *Qu’est-ce que la littérature* (1948), Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out the obvious fallacy of this line of thought: "... the bond between surrealism and the proletariat is indirect and abstract. The strength of a writer lies in his direct action upon the public, in the anger, the enthusiasm, and the reflections which he stirs up by his writings." \(^{38}\) Neither Breton nor Eluard—nor, for that matter, Césaire—were poets who would hear their works recited on the barricades or from the mouths of the oppressed. Many of the Martinican oppressed couldn’t even read French. And this brings us to our final paradox.

Césaire has never accepted the idea that he is an elitist poet, but his surrealist techniques—as well as his use of neologisms, botanical and biological terms, and recherché vocabulary—put his work beyond the reach of most *literate* readers. "Fine," the modernist poets might reply. "Man only grows through striving for what is beyond his grasp." But how does this address the concrete situation of a black, colonized population that is oppressed both through its color and its socioeconomic status? The question remains to be answered. Looking at the current condition of the revolution in France, where surrealism has had the most practitioners and greatest cultural impact, one is not inclined to accept the assertion that the leap from the individual liberation of the poet to the collective liberation of "the people" is inevitable.

**IV**

The Sartrean position that "the strength of a writer lies in his direct action upon the public" is problematic in that it reduces the lyric to a mere function. Furthermore, it assumes that politics is what brings the lyric into a relationship with society. An alternative position which might be used as a critical context for a discussion of Césaire and Nicolás Guillén is the one taken up by Theodor W. Adorno in his essay "Lyric Poetry and Society."

In this essay, Adorno describes the relationship between the lyric and society as being constituted not by the lyric's demonstration of social theses, but rather by the extent to which the descent into individuality, seen by him as the lyric's peculiarity, raises it "to the realm of the general by virtue of its bringing to light things undistorted, ungrasped, things not yet subsumed—and thus it anticipates, in an abstract way, a condition in which no mere generalities [i.e., extreme particularities] can bind and chain that which is most human." \(^{39}\)
That which is most human and therefore most general is the solitude of humanity which "speaks" out of the "loneliness of the lyric expression." Hence, the social nature of the lyric, which demands an interpretation that does not preclude the author's social viewpoints and interests, but rather demands that they be thought through from within: that is, as they present themselves in the complex of ideas that make up the lyric's organized view of things. Césaire's poem entitled "Mississippi" is just one of many of his poems that exemplify this relationship between the lyric and society as Adorno articulates it:

**Mississippi**

Too bad for you men who don't notice that my eyes remember
slings and black flags
which murder with each blink of my lashes

Too bad for you men who do not see who do not see anything
not even the gorgeous railway signals formed
under my eyelids by red and black discs of
the coral snake that my munificence coils in my tears

Too bad for you men who do not see that in the depth of the reticule
where chance deposited our eyes
there is, waiting, a buffalo sunk to the very hilt of the swamp's eyes

Too bad for you men who do not see that you cannot stop me from
building for him plenty
of egg-headed islands out of the flagrant sky
under the calm ferocity of the immense geranium of our sun.\(^{40}\)

For the most part, this poem's resistance to any traditional social interpretation has to do with the ambiguousness of the identity of the "voice," or speaking subject. However, the syntactical discontinuity of the first stanza and the surrealism that makes its imprint on the imagery of the following three stanzas also contribute to what has already been referred to as Césaire's "unintelligibility" and, consequently, his "inaccessibility." Yet, according to Adorno's formulation, this poem is nonetheless social. The "voice" of language that fills the space left by the subsumption under language of the material being of the speaking subject is itself social in that it begets and joins poetry and society in their innermost natures: "... the subject's forgetting himself, his abandoning himself to language as if devoting himself completely to an object—this and the direct intimacy and spontaneity of his expression are the same. Thus language begets and joins both poetry and society in their innermost natures. Lyric poetry, therefore, shows itself most thoroughly integrated into society at those points where it does not repeat what society says—where it conveys no pronouncements, but rather the speaking subject (who succeeds in his expression) comes to
full accord with the language itself, i.e., with what language seeks by its
own inner tendency."  

"Mississippi" does not repeat what society says. Instead, the protest
against racism and the theme of revolution are implied by the defiant tones
the poem takes as it challenges the short-sightedness of the men to whom it
addresses itself. Its title says it all. It evokes a beautiful and fertile yet
dreadful land where once the sweet scent of magnolia blossoms often min-
gled with the nauseating odor of burning black flesh, and where black men
and women learned early in life that they must play the role of a being
inferior to all other beings, or die. It is also a river—broad, long, continu-
ous, eternal. It is also young Emmett Till . . .

While Césaire’s poetry demonstrates the modern notion of lyrical ex-
pression as intimate, subjective, and in opposition to the harsh reality of
the “meanness and falsity” of the world, that of his Cuban contemporary
Nicolás Guillén evolved from a very different tradition. Uninvested with
the utopian idealism that négritude and negrismo inherited from Romanti-
cism, Guillén’s poetry reflects the same close association with music and
the same interest in folk traditions as that of the early Spanish poets,
particularly those of the 14th and 15th centuries, whose poetry in turn
reflects the strong influence of the Mozarabic Kharjas, or refrain verse.
Furthermore, his poetry is a poetry of occasion. His odas, elegías, baladas,
canciones, and sones celebrate the people, places, and events that helped
to turn the idea of a revolutionary and anti-imperialistic Cuban nation into
a reality. Therefore, they are in fact, to a great extent, being used or, in
Adorno’s words, “misused” as objects for the demonstration of social
theses. One example is a poem entitled “Ché Guevara,” which celebrates
the loyalty of the man who “brindó a Fidel su sangre guerrillera” (“offered
to Fidel his guerrilla blood”). Another example is the “Elegia a Emmett
Till,” which has as an epigram the following excerpt, translated from En-
glish into Spanish, from the October 1955 issue of Crisis Magazine:

El cuerpo mutilado de Emmett Till, 14 años de Chicago, Illinois, fue extraído
del río Tallahatchie, cerca de Greenwood, el 31 de agosto, tres días después de
haber sido raptado de la casa de su tío, por un grupo de blancos armados de
fusiles . . .

(The mutilated body of Emmett Till, 14 years old from Chicago, Illinois, was
pulled out of the Tallahatchie river, near Greenwood, on 31 August, three
days after he was abducted from his uncle’s house by a group of white men
armed with guns.)

Obviously, in this, as in other examples too numerous to mention, Guillén
is less concerned with refining his lyrical expression than with providing his
audience, which he always has in mind, with the sociohistorical context that
inspired his poetic vision. However, as Richard Jackson points out in his
Black Writers in Latin America, what accounts for Guillén’s great popularity, not only in Cuba but throughout the Caribbean, is neither his “anti-imperialist poetry of protest and revolution” nor his antiracism or sense of solidarity with other blacks in the diaspora. His popularity is a result of what he achieves with the lyric form: his transformation into written literature of the Son, a black-Cuban dance rhythm in which percussion instruments predominate. Structured on the call and response pattern, the Son also includes black and creole speech patterns, as we see in “Canto Negro”:

¡Yambambó, yambambé!
Repica el congo solongo
repica el negro bien negro;
congo solongo del Songo
baila yambó sobre un pie.
Mamatombe,
serembe cuserembá.
El negro canta y se ajuma,
el negro se ajuma y canta,
el negro canta y se va.
Acuememe serembé,
aé;
yambó,
aé.
Tamba, tamba, tamba, tamba,
tamba del negro que tumba;
tumba del negro, caramba,
caramba, que el negro tumba:
¡yamba, yambó, yambambé!

In this poem, Guillén achieves the rhythmic effect of the traditional Son through assonance, alliteration, repetition, syntactical reversals, and a very clever play on words. For instance, the repetition of the word tamba in the first verse of the last stanza sustains the percussion quality of the poem’s rhythm, but it also names something: the negro’s loin-cloth which falls down in the next verse. Tumba is the third person singular present indicative of the verb tumbar (to fall); in the third verse it is a noun, tumba (tomb, grave), and again a verb in the following stanza.

With the predominance of only five verbs, bailar, repicar, cantar, ajumarse, and tumbar, “Canto Negro” seems to re-represent an existence that revolves around five actions: the Negro dances; he sounds the drum; he sings; he gets drunk; he falls down. For him, there is nothing else—nothing except the tumba (the grave).

“Canto Negro” is part of Sóngoro Consongo, the second collection of
poems by Guillén in which the Son is the principal mode of expression. But, according to Richard Jackson, it is in Motivos de Son published in 1931, a year before Sóngoro Consongo, that Guillén begins to write what, in his opinion, is revolutionary poetry. Quoting the poet and critic Manuel Navarro Luna, Jackson writes: "Since the poems in the first volume came from the hot, lively soul of our people, Guillén’s poetry began to be, from those very first moments, revolutionary poetry, not by mentioning revolution directly, but by reflecting, offering us and giving back to us the peculiar and essential characteristic of our people."\(^\text{46}\)

Worth noting in this quote is the fact that politics and ideology, two concepts that cannot be excluded from any discussion of race and revolution, are not considered the primary factors in making Guillén a revolutionary. But performance is: that is, the effectiveness with which the poet is able to transform into lyrical expression his particular view of things. And this brings us back to the fundamental question: What is the relationship between the lyric and society?

**Notes**

7 Laschen, p. 92.
9 Cf. ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 193.

Rumold, pp. 145f.


Rudolf Hagelstange as quoted in Ziolkowski, “Form als Protest,” p. 165.


Quoted by Suzanne Césaire, “André Breton, poète,” *Tropiques* 3 (1941): 34.


Ibid., p. 122.


Ibid., 1: 400.


Far from the innocuous topic it is often made out to be, love is part of a power-oriented discourse. Love poetry is no exception. Its most conspicuous features—the exaltation of the beloved and the pining of the lover—belong to a patriarchal tradition that thrives on the hierarchical division of genders, and fosters, not coincidentally, the alienation of self from other, head from body.¹

In the discourse of this tradition, love operates largely on metaphysical terrain.² The most intensely experienced emotion is articulated within a void. Neither social conditions nor power relations attach to this space; love's realm is presented as both sanctuary and escape. Correspondingly, love's language shows itself as both neutral and ennobling. With few exceptions, this holds true for poems written by either sex, at least up to this century. Witness, for example, the famous lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "How Do I Love Thee." The ways of love are counted and accounted for in the dominant idiom of bourgeois idealism and otherworldly transcendence. Love goes beyond life:

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

. . . I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.³

Similarly, a well-known example from German literature, Rainer Maria Rilke's "Liebes-Lied" ("Love Song"), praises an all-powerful, divinely orchestrated love that engenders the uniform voice of two disembodied souls. Love goes beyond the body:
Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, daß
die nicht an deine rührt? . . .

Doch alles, was uns anruhrt, dich und mich,
nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,
der aus zwei Saiten eine Stimme zieht.

(How shall I keep my soul from
touching yours? . . .

Yet all that moves us, you and me,
takes us together as a bow’s stroke does,
that out of two strings draws one voice.)

With the rise of modernism, such transcendentally empowered discourse lost many of its users. Yet modernist love poetry, too, is characterized by its remoteness from the world.6 It speaks of love either in enigmatic, highly elusive metaphors, or not at all. The ordinariness of the experience seems to weigh too heavily on its wings. While the culture industry markets the traditional discourse with a vengeance (the formula being plaintive longing and hackneyed exaltation), modernist poets have turned away from it—though more for aesthetic than political reasons. Mallarmé, to name one of the earliest critics, banned love, “that most colorless word,” “that indefinite feeling,” from his writing on aesthetic grounds. Considering its foolishness and ordinariness, he could, so he writes, “only pronounce [it] with a certain unpleasant impression.”

With postmodernism, the criticism has turned political. The power configuration in which love has been embedded has become a major focus. Women, especially, are analyzing the unpleasant impression the word has left on them. Spoken to and spoken about, they have begun speaking for themselves.7 Many contemporary poems address the suffocation and silence love’s discourse has caused. As Adrienne Rich suggests in “Translations,” we have been forced to internalize love, to live as its prisoners:

obsessed
with Love, our subject:
we’ve trained it like ivy to our walls
baked it like bread in our ovens
worn it like lead on our ankles
watched it through binoculars as if
it were a helicopter
bringing food to our famine
or the satellite
of a hostile power

A true poetry of love, feminists argue, must cut itself loose from an incarcerating patriarchal discourse. It must begin to articulate—to use one of
Rich’s titles—“the dream of a common language.” This means that hierarchical poses are abolished, buried sensibilities brought to light, repressed sexualities set free. It means that the gendered division between body and head, desire and language comes to a halt. Or, put with the utopian abandon of Annie Leclerc, it means that a multiplicity of voices arises from a joyous, unruly collective: “The frightful prison of love will finally be forced open when all those who know how to talk of love, how to want it and live it, will join together and merge lovingly, bursting with the laughter and the pleasure of being both man and woman, and yet neither; of being both young and old, and yet neither, and yet all else as well.”

Thus far, conditions have not let the poets and lovers of the world unite. But since the mid-1960s, sparked by feminism, the student movement, the protest against the Vietnam War, a new discourse has been in the making. The voices it engages criticize power and celebrate the body. There is a new search for dialogue. These voices, exemplified here by contemporary German and American love poems, understand that two unequal histories mark the relationship between the sexes, understand that gay and lesbian love have been all but silenced, understand that it is necessary to puncture traditional linguistic molds from within. They also understand that while their desire is experimental, their means remain circumscribed by a social context that is slow in changing.

To present the situation, I have pieced together a love story made up of twenty poems written during the last twenty years. The story form seems appropriate for several reasons. Expository discourse tends to privilege the general over the particular, the conceptual over the specific. Such a hierarchizing approach seems ill-suited to a poetry that means to liberate. The poems must be allowed to speak in their diversity and specificity. Yet, in their diversity, they also speak similarly. A narrative setting reminds us that love, though told in a new way, is an ancient practice that still proceeds along certain stages, such as calling and catching the lover, meeting and making love, sleeping and waking. I have grouped the poems accordingly. The narrative configuration expresses the ancient ways of love, while the open-endedness of the story—to give away the conclusion—shows its future-oriented momentum.

The story begins with a prologue that addresses the difficulties, if not the impossibility, of telling a love story at all. A case in point is the phrase “I love you,” rarely encountered in contemporary poems. If it is, it tends to be used polemically and/or as a quotation. As such, it criticizes an entire history of repression and alienation; in linguistic terms, a history of conceptualization and abstraction.

Critical on both counts is Robert Creeley’s “The Language” (1967). The poem tries to recuperate the phrase by concentrating on its lingual (i.e., tongue-ish) and dialogic qualities. It wants to make the phrase real
again as a concrete utterance, make it fill painful holes in our speech and relationship to each other. The line breaks in the poem stress the difficulty of reading/speaking out loud. It is as if the speaker, while desperately inviting a kiss with the phrase, is acutely aware that signifier and signified are divorced:

    Locate I
    love you some-
    where in
    teeth and
    eyes, bite
    it but
    take care not
    to hurt. . . .
    I heard words
    and words full
    of holes
    aching. Speech
    is a mouth.¹²

A poem by Marge Piercy, “The Friend” (1967), situates the phrase within its patriarchal context. When spoken by a woman, “I love you” frequently is rendered mute. The poem describes a man and a woman sitting across a table, one an aggressive consumer, the other a patient provider. The goods are food, sex, tenderness, and care. It is quite an ordinary situation, characterized by a gender-polarization that cuts one of the poles to the quick:

    We sat across the table.
    he said, cut off your hands.
    they are always poking at things.
    they might touch me.
    I said yes.

    Food grew cold on the table.
    he said, burn your body.
    it is not clean and smells like sex.
    it rubs my mind sore.
    I said yes.

    I love you, I said.
    that’s very nice, he said.
    I like to be loved,
that makes me happy.
Have you cut off your hands yet?\textsuperscript{13}

Focusing on the brutality of the man, who wants his mind clean and his food untouched, yet a woman present to cook and care for him, the poem raises the problem of dialogue. While one of the two says “I love you,” the other hears it yet does not hear at all. The phrase is taken as a tribute, not a speech act that requires two to participate. The male-centered, monologic response casts the woman as Other. This Other, representing sexuality and sensation (here in the form of touch), must be silenced. It must be mutilated and repressed.

Another, less drastic, poem cautiously outlines a possible dialogue, provided the phrase “I love you” is rightly understood. Karin Kiwus’ “Fragile” (1974) tells of giving a birthday present. The recipient, a man, is warned to accept it as something that must be shared. If it is taken once again as an outright gift, due on account of birth and gender, it will shatter:

Wenn ich jetzt sage
ich liebe dich
übergebe ich nur
vorsichtig das Geschenk
zu einem Fest das wir beide
noch nicht gefeiert haben

Und wenn du gleich
wieder allein
deinen Geburtstag
vor Augen hast
und dieses Päckchen
ungeduldig
an dich reißt
dann nimmst du schon
die scheppernden Scherben darin
gar nicht mehr wahr

(If I say now
I love you
I carefully present
nothing but a present
for a party we both
haven’t yet celebrated

And if you as usual
picture solely
your birthday again
and seize
impatiently
this gift
you won’t even
hear
the shards clank inside)¹⁴

The poem implicitly criticizes a long-standing tradition. Our dominant dis-
course, having marked women the selfless givers and men the triumphant
takers, allows few avenues for dialogue. Saying “I love you” is still in
danger of being appropriated, of being taken to mean “you love me,”
rather than being spoken in return. Love, presented by either sex, is always
a gift that comes with strings attached.

A poem by Günter Guben, “So leicht wie Wolken—so schwer” (“As
Light as Clouds—As Heavy”; 1982), is equally cautious, though for less
specific reasons. Its variation on the phrase spells out a distrust of language
in general, because it is spoken in an untrustworthy, uncaring, and intru-
sive world:

wenn jemand sagt
ich liebe dich
bin ich mißtrauisch und schrecke auf
allzu leichtfertig
setzt man worte wie diese
in einer welt aus die ganz ohr ist
und viel überhört

(when someone says
I love you
I am startled and suspicious
all too easily
one lets such words go
in a world that is all ears
and does not hear much)¹⁵

The difficulty of dialogue, finally, telescoped into a phrase, is shown
by the substitution of a less-loaded, less-committing one: “Ich mag dich”
(“I like you”). It appears both in Guben’s poem and, more conspicuously,
like you,” he assures his companion, noting that she is beautiful and easy to
be with, that he cares for her and feels free to tell her his dreams. But there
is a wall, perhaps a partition of glass, or even

ein kurzer scharfer Schnitt zwischen
meinem Kopf und meinem Körper. Und
jetzt, anstatt dich zu lieben
schreibe ich dieses Gedicht. Umgekehrt
wäre besser, würdest du sagen, wenn du
The inability to love is ascribed to an injury, a cut between the language of
the head and that of the body. Yet while the poem meditates on the
difference between making love and making the poem, its logical turns of
conjunctions and inversions clearly mark it as a language of the head,
incapable of opening up. The wary meditation turns on itself.\textsuperscript{17} Still,
through its negations, there appears the possibility of dialogue. Writing
and reading are curiously intertwined. The last few lines show an illogical
shift in tense: “I am writing the poem now. . . . but I \textit{did} not show it to
you.” The contradiction suggests that once head and body are no longer
divided, the poem may reach its reader.

With this prologue in mind, we turn to the love story proper. It begins
with calling and catching the lover. The process still requires that the entire
register of word magic be drawn—playful allusions, mock identities, be-
witching sound, fanciful imagery:

\begin{quote}
Phöbus rotkrachende Wolkenwand
Schwimm
Ihm unters Lid vermenge dich
Mit meinen Haaren
Binde ihn daß er nicht weiß
Ob Montag ob Freitag ist und
Welches Jahrhundert ob er Ovid
Gelesen oder gesehen hat ob ich
Sein Löffel seine Frau bin oder
Nur so ein Wolkentier
Quer übern Himmel
\end{quote}

(Phoebus red-cracking cloud bank
Swim
Under his eyelid mingle in
With my hair
Bind him so he doesn’t know
If it’s Monday or Friday or
Which century if he’s read)
Ovid or seen if I am
His spoon his wife or
Only some cloud animal
Clear across the sky)

Sarah Kirsch’s “Rufformel” ("Calling Spell"; 1973) exhibits considerable skill in enchantment. The poem’s voice is the sorceress, an ancient persona yielding power as well as magic. To compel her lover to love her, she commands the sun god to strike his senses with the clarity of madness. Her passion mingles classical amatory tradition with ancient witchcraft, the mythical with the everyday. The allusions veer off in all directions; the syntax is stretched to the breaking point.

Calmer and more ironic in tone is Margaret Atwood’s “Siren Song” (1974). The poem subverts one of the oldest and most persistent myths, the deathly call of the Sirens. Half female body, half birds of prey, they lured men from their paths only to devour them. Their destructive attraction symbolizes man’s fear of woman as the Other. Atwood uses the myth to taunt and mock, calling the lover with a voice as sweet as it is sound:

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible:

the song that forces men
to leap overboard in squadrons
even though they see the beached skulls

the song nobody knows
because anyone who has heard it
is dead, and the others can’t remember.

Shall I tell you the secret
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?

Poetry, like literature in general, has been largely the domain of men. They have mythologized and poeticized woman as the temptress who diverts man from rational, purposeful activity. While she is made to sing in myth, she has been denied a voice in the real world, a voice “nobody knows.” The poem’s punch line works on several levels at once: it criticizes the long-revered association of love with death, alludes to a modern fable of quasi-mystical eroticism (in the final scene of the notorious Story of O of the early 1960s, the enslaved and dehumanized O appears in a bird suit), ridicules the alleged power of women in light of their historical oppression, and, finally, holds out a promise to the lover: If he truly wants her to speak, he shall have the naked truth.

The next poem turns to the business at hand: catching the lover. Nikki
Giovanni's "Kidnap Poem" (1970) demonstrates a most imaginary / imaginative pursuit. "Ever been kidnapped / by a poet?" The gamy question leads to yet another play with tradition. The poet stands ready with a bagful of tricks:

if i were a poet
i'd kidnap you
put you in my phrases and meter
you to jones beach
or maybe coney island
or maybe just to my house
lyric you in lilacs . . .

ode you with my love song
anything to win you
wrap you in the red Black green
show you off to mama
yeah if i were a poet i'd kid
nap you

The self-effacing poet, who proceeds to write the poem anyway, knows she will succeed. Giovanni makes transient verbs out of the standbys of literary analysis (meter, lyric, ode) to give momentum to the lines as well as the pursuit. The result is a twofold declaration of love: for her man and for poetry. This surefooted love is confident enough to have fun with alliteration ("lyric you in lilacs") and clever linebreaks ("i'd kid / nap you"), to specify its place (New York City) and brag about its culture: Black is the only capitalized word in the whole poem.

Perhaps it is no accident that at this stage of the story all three poems are by women. Instead of being charming, it is the woman who says the charm. But she may say it differently than expected. By contrast, there are few contemporary poems by men to articulate this stage. They appear tongue-tied, conscious of the fact that traditional discourse has little to entice. In the words of Hans Kruppa: "Don't give much / for my words. . . . Listen to / what I don't say" ("Was ich nicht sage"; 1986). However, this reticence does not apply to the next stage, that of meeting and making love.

Assuming a lover has been caught, we can proceed. In Sarah Kirsch's "Don Juan kommt am Vormittag" ("Don Juan Arrives in the Morning"; 1973), he announces his arrival by telegram. The scene mixes everyday details with pastoral allusions. The meeting, like the pace of the poem, is breathless. The expectant yet surprised lover rushes to the edge of town, anxious and somewhat jealously watching Don Juan approach on his racing bike. He is fast and flighty, hence the name. There is neither time for romanticizing preparation, nor time for measured sentences and punctuation:
.... ich hatte den Mond
Eingeplant und Fontänen nun blieb
Nicht viel Zeit nicht mal die Augen
Größer malen die Füße nicht waschen.

( . . . I had planned for
The moon and fountains now not much
Time left not even to paint
My eyes larger wash my feet)

The sentences and fragments telling of the event blend into each other without comma or period, rushing and tumbling to wrap dialogue, nature, and culture all into one. The pastoral setting is punctured by the sounds of recorded music, miraculously played by metal birds, the speech of the lovers shortened by ellipsis and elision. The language is sensuous with images of sound and sight, movement and touch. As in Schönberg’s orchestral *Variations*, a gradual accumulation of affinities builds up:

Legte uns beide ins Gras das rings
Üppig zu werden begann zog Vögel
Aus Metall auf die finge zu singen
An daß es schaltte Variationen
Über ein Thema von Mozart ich kenn das
Sagte er und alle Platten-
Spielersysteme Schönberg und
Ich werd dich jetzt das wird aber gut sein

(Laid us both in the grass becoming
All round luxuriant wound birds
Of metal up that began to sing
That all resounded with variations
On a theme from Mozart I know this
He said and all the record-
Playersystems Schönberg and
Now I'm going to this should be good)²⁴

While Schönberg and, especially, Mozart may readily find their way into a love poem, Marx and Freud may come as a surprise. They are a surprise to the lovers in the next poem, Tom Wayman’s “Wayman in Love” (1973):

At last Wayman gets the girl into bed. . . .

“Excuse me,” a voice mutters, thick with German,
Wayman and the girl sit up astounded
as a furry gentleman in boots and a frock coat
climbs in under the covers.

“My name is Doktor Marx,” the intruder announces
settling his neck comfortably on the pillow.
“I’m here to consider for you the cost of a kiss.”
Much to their consternation, Marx gives them a lesson in economics, reminding the woman, in particular, that a dependent position would influence her moments of intimacy. But a reminder of capitalist exploitation is not enough:

... another beard, more nattily dressed,
is also getting into the bed.
There is a shifting and heaving of bodies
as everyone wriggles out room for themselves.
"I want you to meet a friend from Vienna,"
Marx says. "This is Doktor Freud."

The problems that lovers face may not always appear as drastically intrusive as in Wayman's humorous poem, but they are more likely to be brought up in contemporary poetry than ever before.

"Waking in the Dark" (1971) by Adrienne Rich is a somber (and sobering) meditation on the different histories that have shaped men's and women's sexuality. The poem's voice moves like a camera, moving from close-ups to medium to long shots, with sharp cuts to draw attention to the division. The fifth and last section culminates in a dream sequence of lovemaking, but it is only a dream. The preceding sections outline a bloody world of male politics and pornography, as it is encountered in the street, on wirephotos and tabloids. Wide awake, the poet journeys into hostile territory:

I walk the unconscious forest,
a woman dressed in old army fatigues
that have shrunk to fit her, I am lost
at moments, I feel dazed
by the sun pawing between the trees,
cold in the bog and lichen of the thicket

Images of weightless bodies diving into water, translated from Leni Riefenstahl's film on the Berlin Olympics, provide the transition to the dream. The lovemaking begins in the street, where water images set in to purge the lovers of their specific weights:

we move together like underwater plants
Over and over, starting to wake
I dive back to discover you
still whispering, touch me, we go on
streaming through the slow
citylight forest ocean
stirring our body hair

The sensuality of mutual movement and touch is limited to the dream. Translating its wish, Rich writes of a couple who together explore sexual
difference, clear-sightedly and from two perspectives. It is the wish for a common ground, a new language that permits each sex to retrace a history gone awry:

I wish there were somewhere
actual we could stand
handing the power-glasses back and forth
looking at the earth, the wildwood
where the split began

Far more than previous generations, contemporary poets thematize passion in terms of reading and writing the body. We could speak of love’s literacy. The caution advised in Rich’s poem is brushed aside by Wolfgang Tilgner’s “Eros” (1980). Here, the language of the body is direct. It needs neither historical consciousness nor metaphoric convention—or so the poem pretends:

Deine Brüste nenne ich Brüste,
deine Schenkel Schenkel . . .

Oder bist du es, die so spricht?

(Your breasts I call breasts
your thighs thighs . . .

Or is it you who says this?)

The male voice submits that the woman may have spoken as well. Their lovemaking is a matter of mutual reading:

Du betrachtest mich mit Aufmerksamkeit,
niehts macht dich unsicher,
deine Hand prüft jede Linie,
niehts läßt dich schwanken;
in das Zentrum meines Geschlechts
vertiefst sich dein Herz,
ohne zu erröten

(You watch me attentively,
nothing makes you unsure,
your hand probes each line,
nothing makes you sway;
into the center of my sex
your heart immerses itself
without blushing)

A mutual writing of the body spells out the merging of two female lovers in Audre Lorde’s “Recreation” (1978). The poet turns away from writing with paper and pencil to writing/being written by passion. Each one creates the other anew with a new and common language:
you create me against your thighs
hilly with images
moving through our word countries
my body
writes into your flesh
the poem you make of me

Writing-each-other affirms a carnally shared language. Its poetics make love an inscription, the body, a text. Although the topos has a considerable tradition—from Donne’s “Ecstasy” to Goethe’s “Roman Elegies,” from Heine’s “Song of Songs” to Neruda’s “Love Sonnets”—Lorde introduces the dimension of mutuality: love-writing is reciprocal; each inscribes what the other has written.

Volker Braun provides yet another version, in which writing/reading explodes the barriers between public and private. In “Italienische Nacht” (“Italian Night”; 1978), the passion of two bodies inscribes itself into a bed sheet. The event openly polemicizes against the miraculous in religious tradition by pitting physical ecstasy against the ecstasy of blind faith. In a highly complex montage, the poem renders the frenzy of a night: While soccer fans are carried away by their team’s championship, while the faithful in a procession are transported by eyeing the sudarium of the Lord, a man and a woman collapse onto a hotel bed. The mad scenario outside blends with the scene in the room:

verrückt / Streut sie die Kleider umher, das Bettuch über die Dielen /
Schwarz die gelogene Spur aus den Wunden der Brust /
Und dieser Lärm, I GRANATA SONO CAMPIONI D’ITALIA / . . .
und schwärllich unsere Hände und Füße echt zeichnen sich ein in das Tuch

(madly / She strews her clothes around, the sheet across the floor /
Black the false trace from the wound of the chest /
And this noise, I GRANATA SONO CAMPIONI D’ITALIA / . . .
blackish and true our hands and feet write into the cloth)

The lovers’ actual passion challenges the vicarious passion of the fans. Their traces are real, whereas the traces of Christ have long been appropriated by an authoritarian church to signify the power it wields over the faithful. The polemic works in favor of the body, whose passion cannot be appropriated because it signifies nothing but itself. The pace of the poem quickens; the syntax breaks loose as it moves to the climax. At this point, the notions of inside and outside become meaningless. A carnival takes place, a celebration of the flesh that incorporates perception as well as food, political solidarity as well as orgasmic abandon. The truly catholic feast invites public participation:
Pappelschnee auf der Piazza . . .
Spargel, Tomaten und Fisch mit den Genossen . . .
Und erst bei Sinnen vom Wein nackt . . .
Vino Dolcetto

die Dächer /
Seh ich plötzlich bewohnt . . .
Pappelschnee auf deinem Schoß / LA GIOIA GRANATA È ESPLOSA /
Laß das Fenster auf! sagt sie: damit man uns sieht

(poplar-snow on the piazza . . .

asparagus, tomatoes and fish with the comrades . . .
come to our senses not until wine naked . . .
vino dolcetto

the roofs /
I see suddenly peopled . . .

poplar-snow in your lap / LA GIOIA GRANATA È ESPLOSA /
Leave the window open, she says, so they will see us)²⁹

By quoting her, Braun does homage to his partner. It is she who wants the window left open, who gestures programmatically to the world to read sense from passion, to begin writing a history that makes sense. The line brings to mind the ending lines of “Corona,” a famous poem by Paul Celan about transience and remembrance: “We stand by the window embracing, and people look up from the street: / it is time they knew! / . . . / It is time it were time. / It is time.”³⁰

The story will rest for a moment—the lovers are exhausted. The lacuna of sleep cannot be bridged. But it allows one of the two, the sleepless one, to plumb absence and fears. Traditionally, sleep is the time to contemplate the beauty of the beloved; today, tenderness and a sense of separation predominate.

Margaret Atwood’s “Variations on the Word Sleep” (1981) expresses both in the form of a wish. Language stands in for absence:

I would like to watch you sleeping . . .
I would like to watch you,
sleeping. I would like to sleep
with you, to enter
your sleep as its smooth dark wave
slides over my head³¹

Equally tender are the lines from Thom Gunn’s poem “Touch” (1967). To love means to protect—or, at least, wishing to be able to protect:
You turn and
hold me tightly, do
you know who
I am or am I
your mother or
the nearest human being to
hold on to in a
dreamed pogrom\textsuperscript{32}

The last example shows a curious reversal of the sleep topos. In Elke Erb’s “Wenn er abends am Tisch sitzt und arbeitet” (“When He Sits at the Table at Night, Working”; 1978), it is the sleeper who speaks, drifting, in this case, securely into dream:

\begin{quote}
Den Kopf in den Armen, in Kleidern
schlaf ich ausgestreckt, barfuß,
weiß wie die Wand meiner Füße,
mit je einer Rose bestückt.

(My head in my arms, dressed,
I am stretched out sleeping, barefoot,
white like the wall of my feet,
on each stuck a rose.)\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

The poetry since the 1960s reminds us that lovers awake not just to each other. They awake to the society of which they are a part, or, as the case may be, by which they are marginalized and silenced. Both gay and lesbian love have their poetic tradition, but it is not until recently that their marginalization has been openly thematized. The issue is social space, space that allows lovers “to move openly together.” In Peter Rühmkorf’s “Tagelied” (“Dawn Song”; 1976), we are confronted with a funny, bitter parody of the venerable form of the alba, a medieval dawn song that tells of the regretful parting of the lovers after a night of illicit passion. Rühmkorf’s song mocks the united front of both bourgeois and socialist opinion in the matter of homosexuality:

\begin{quote}
Es traut kein Bürger, segnet uns kein Paster,
kein Sozi stimmt mit ein.
Es muß, mein Kind, nicht immer gleich das Laster,
es kann auch Liebe sein.

(No upright citizen, no minister will wed us,
no leftist would agree.
Who says, my child, it’s vice that joins us,
it could be love, you see.)
\end{quote}

The first lines of the poem are less casual, more strident in tone. Their persiflage of literary convention and a morning’s erection quickly leads to
the ridicule of an idiom that has been cultivated, in German poetry, by Stefan George and Gottfried Benn. The style is nominalist, the pose quasi-Faustian:

An springt der Sommer—: mitten durch den Reifen
—noch einmal trägt mein Glück—
Verweile doch und laß dich auch begreifen,
mein Pfauen-Augen-Blick—

(Up rises summer—: into the hoop and through
—one last time joy bears up—
Oh stay a while and let me fully grasp you,
my peacock-eye, don’t shut—

Precious poesy is rudely amalgamated with slang and the reality of despair. Rühmkorf angrily shows up the bathos of the pose by tying it to the situation of two men whose passion has not been allowed a voice. The rhyme scheme of the poem, aping the ease in which the official pose has articulated itself, stresses the haste and finality of the encounter. Dawn releases them into doom. The farewell is brief and cynical:

Die Nacht ist hin, die Dinge sind so sausend
(Ein Kuß noch draufgepappt)
Eh uns der schwarze Müllmann 1:100 000
im Acheron verklappt—

(The night’s finis, as all is but a race
[Here’s a kiss to feed on]
Before we’re through and dumped as waste
smack into Acheron—)

Another morning poem, this time on lesbian love, puts the question of social space less angrily. One of Adrienne Rich’s Twenty-One Love Poems (1976) describes a waking scene filled with tenderness. Yet the lovers’ life together remains a precarious situation. A daily challenge to them, it is also a daily provocation in the eyes of society. Being different means being ostracized. As Rich writes in “Poem XIX,” “two women together is a work / nothing in civilization has made simple.”35 “Poem II” speaks of the desire to be released from imposed isolation, to be able to move in this world “openly together.” Love is not a private affair, despite the fact that our culture has branded it as such:

... You’ve kissed my hair
to wake me. ‘I dreamed you were a poem,’
I say, ‘a poem I wanted to show someone . . .’
and I laugh and fall dreaming again
of the desire to show you to everyone I love,
to move openly together
The Pull of Gravity

in the pull of gravity, which is not simple, which carries the feathered grass a long way down the upbreathing air.\textsuperscript{36}

The wish “to move openly together / in the pull of gravity” aims at more than social tolerance. It aims at profound social change. The desire to heal the split between public and private is also the desire to heal the split between body and head. The patriarchal structures that enforce these divisions must be abolished, their imprisoning discourse subverted. This is the new poetry’s revolutionary subtext.

The poem to end the story gives us a happy vision of the revolution accomplished. Volker Braun’s “Entscheidende Entdeckung” (“Decisive Discovery”; 1978), presents a most unusual morning: The streets are crowded with half-open eyelids, a turmoil of breasts floods the department stores, waves of armpits reach everywhere, the escalators strain from being overcharged with emotion. The urban scene is entirely out of hand. In fact, it expands to the countryside. People, instead of doggedly rushing to work, begin to bloom like a field of flowers. What the speaker discovers on waking is a joyously sexual world in motion. He, too, is out of joint. At each street crossing, his limbs go in all directions, his head having been left where it belongs—in the lap of his lover. He moves freely, and entirely undone, in the pull of love’s gravity:

An diesem Morgen ist die Straße
Voll halbgeöffneter Lider
Ein Getümmel von Brüsten in den Kaufhallen
Ein Wogen von Achselhöhlen.
Rolltreppen, von Gefühlen überladen.
An jeder Kreuzung öffnen sich
Meine Glieder in vier Richtungen
Des Lebens, jede leuchtend und einfach.
Die Menschen blühn auf einmal aus sich
Wie ein Feld von Mohn, wie ein Feld
Von zarten Gedanken, die sich einander zudrehn
Und aneinander entfalten. Und mein Kopf
Liegt noch immer
Im beharrlichen Gras deines Schoßes.

(On this morning the street is
Full of half-open eye lids
A tumult of breasts in department stores
A wave of armpits.
Escalators, overloaded with emotions.
At each crossing my limbs
Open toward four directions of
Life, each shining and simple.
The people suddenly bloom up
Like a poppy field, like a field
Of tender thoughts that turn to each other
And unfold one with another. And my head
Still lies
In your lap's persistent grass.)

The revolution, then—at least in the story—consists of a literal turning of one's head. The lover experiences a bodily sense of dispersion into a formerly isolating, now participating world. The vision reminds us of Leclerc's imagined utopia quoted at the beginning: a world in motion, "bursting with the pleasure of being both man and woman, and yet neither; of being both young and old, and yet neither, and yet all else as well."  

The subversive title of Braun's poem alludes to a poem by Bertolt Brecht, "Entdeckung an einer jungen Frau" ("Discovery in a Young Woman"). There, a cool and sober lover discovers, on parting, a grey strand in the woman's hair. Coolly, he reminds her of her mortality (not his!)—and stays. While he is overcome with desire, his body turning rigid, as it were, at the prospect of death; his head remains unaffected. Braun turns the situation around. The lover experiences his physical borders becoming undone, while his head grasps the pull of an erotic force that releases him into the world and to life.

The poems throughout the story—to come to a provisional conclusion—are all characterized by this gravitational pull. They are open to society and its ills, critical of a history that has caused pain and mutilation. They draw attention to themselves as linguistic constructs, mindful of the rift between making love and making the poem, yet mindful also of the fact that writing of love is not entirely divorced from the love of writing. They criticize openly the metaphysics of traditional discourse, turning to the body as the basis for celebration. Finally, they tend to use a conversational tone. Love is quite ordinary, though special in each of its manifestations. Perhaps—and this appears to be the hope of these poems—it will yet become a mass movement.

Notes

1 This is a major focus of contemporary feminist theory, which analyzes the binary, oppositional, and hierarchical structure of Western discourse—as do Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan. The exalted (female) beloved and the pining (male) lover represent a poeticized inversion of actual power relations in this discourse. The woman disappears. As French feminism asks:
Where is she?
Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Culture/Nature
Day/Night . . .
Man
Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us through literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection.


2 In Plato's Symposium, the wise Diotima counsels that perfect love is the love of the abstract form of beauty itself. Henry Peyre speaks of the "Platonic banality" evident in the beauty catalogues of traditional love poetry where, after enumerating attributes of physical beauty, "the tradition commands that the soul be praised rather than the body, that love and death be invoked as twin brothers, or that the firm welding of the lovers be only achieved amid Elysian groves and by creatures having shuffled off this mortal coil and abdicated desire." Cf. Henry Peyre, "Baudelaire as a Love Poet," in Baudelaire as a Love Poet and Other Essays, ed. Lois Boe Hyslop (University Park and London, 1969), pp. 7–8. There is, to be sure, also a subversive tradition, which begins, in modernity, with François Villon.


5 Recent (German) modernist love poetry is discussed in an essay by Marie Luise Kaschnitz, who lists as main features depersonalization, disembodiment, remoteness, weightlessness: "Es ist . . . gerade die Kühle, die Vogelleichtigkeit und Durchsichtigkeit der Dinge, denen bald kein Erdenrest mehr anzuhaften scheint." See Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Zwischen Immer und Nie: Gestalten und Themen der Dichtung (Frankfurt, 1971), p. 232.

6 Quoted in Peyre, "Baudelaire as a Love Poet," p. 7. One of the best and most comprehensive discussions of new voices in English is Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America (Boston, 1986).


9 Julia Kristeva's work is of major importance in this respect. Her theory interweaves semiotics, psychoanalysis, and philosophy with strong sociocultural criticism; for example, in Revolution in Poetic Language (English trans. 1984). In Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., New French Feminisms (New York, 1981), p. 141, she says: "What is at stake is to move from a patriarchal society, of class and religion, in other words from prehistory, toward—Who knows? In any event, this process involves going through what is repressed in discourse, in reproductive and productive relationships."


11 Roland Barthes, in his Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), p. 123, speaks of the emancipatory value of narrative: "The function of narrative is not to 'represent,' it is to constitute a spectacle still very enigmatic for us. . . . Logic has here an emancipatory value—and with it the entire narrative."


17 Judith Ryan attributes the wariness to the political disappointment of the 1970s: “The poets of the seventies had become so wary that they seemed unable to give of themselves: the mistrust carried over from the days of the student revolt had penetrated and shattered the most private strongholds of the self.” Cf. German Quarterly 55 (1982): 302.


19 Margaret Atwood, “Siren Song,” in her You are Happy (Toronto, 1974), p. 38.

20 See also my discussion of the Siren motif in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s Dialektik der Aufklärung. The paper, “From Singing Sirens to Scolding Furies: The Feminist Dimension of Dialectic of Enlightenment,” was presented at the 1983 Annual Convention of the PAPC, held at the University of California, Santa Barbara.


22 I do not include one of the most beautiful “calling” poems in modern German literature, Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s “Locklied,” because it appeared before the time period discussed in this essay.


24 Conjurations, p. 106. I have kept Kvam’s translation, though with a correction: Instead of “drew birds of metal up,” it should be “wound . . . up.”


33 Elke Erb, “Wenn er abends am Tisch sitzt und arbeitet,” in Im hohen Grase der Geschlechter, p. 90 (my translation).


36 Ibid., p. 237.


38 The notion of heterogeneity, of love’s liberating force to make us experience multiple selves, is a common theme in French (and other) feminist theory. Hélène Cixous, in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” envisions the “new,” the “other” woman as prototypical for such loving heterogeneity, which may infect men as well: “Other love.—In the beginning are our differences. The new love dares for the other, wants the other, makes dizzying, precipitous flights between knowledge and invention. . . . She comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit.” See New French Feminisms, pp. 263–64. As hymnic as this may sound, the thought takes up where Adorno’s critique of identity thinking and logocentric power left off.

39 Wolfgang Emmerich, in his highly informative essay “Deutsche Demokratische Republik,”
in Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, ed. Walter Hinderer (Stuttgart, 1983), pp. 576–604, touches on an important aspect of contemporary GDR love poetry: its intertwining with society. Although he does not discuss any of Braun’s love poems, he uses a line from Georg Maurer as motto: “. . . Die Tür zur Geliebten / bewegt sich in den Angeln der Welt” (“The door to the beloved / moves on the hinges of the world”). He further refers to the quotation of this line in Braun’s play Tinka; cf. Volker Braun, Stücke I (Frankfurt, 1975), p. 136.

40 This aspect is emphasized in an essay by Hiltrud Gnüg, “Schlechte Zeit für Liebe—Zeit für bessere Liebe? Das Thema Partnerbeziehungen in der gegenwärtigen Lyrik,” in Aufbrüche: Abschiede. Studien zur deutschen Literatur seit 1968, ed. Michael Zeller (Stuttgart, 1979). In contrast to Emmerich’s and my assessments—which are shaped by GDR as well as American poetry, in addition to poems from the FRG—she concludes, “daß sich in der gegenwärtigen Lyrik nichts an freundlicher Utopie abzeichnet, daß hier nichts an besseren Möglichkeiten entworfen wird”; cf. p. 39.
The Supposedly New Subjectivity: 
On German Lyric Poetry of the Late Seventies

HILTRUD GNÜG

Since the 1975 Frankfurt Book Fair, some kings of German criticism have tended to indicate that a new age for lyrical poetry has begun. The authors are discovering their “ego” again, their subjectivity. What some criticize as a flight or a regressive inwardness, others celebrate as a new sensitivity which, after the ice age of political poetry, makes poetry literature again. The latter tacitly presume that subjectivity is a specific of lyrical poetry. But what is subjectivity? When an author speaks of himself, of his perceptions, sensations, moods—is he already voicing his subjectivity? To say that all poetry, all literature and art are aesthetic products of a subject is trivial; it merely means that aesthetic objects are created by subjects. The concept of subjectivity can be more accurately defined as a basic “discovery” of German philosophy at the end of the 18th century. Therefore, it is striking that in the debate on the so-called new subjectivity expressions such as inwardness, mood, “experience” (Ervlebnis) appear increasingly—concepts, that is, which belong to the idealistic aesthetics of the Goethe period. Even a superficial comparison of modern lyric poetry with Goethean or Romantic poetry shows, however, without any doubt that no return to tradition has been proposed; the break with the poetic-artistical language is evident. The modern lyric foregoes all the poetic means that make up our understanding of poetry. The line breaks appear to be the sole characteristic which differentiates poetry from prose. Obviously, it is not the poets who hark back to an aesthetic phase in which lyric poetry first cultivated itself as an expression of subjectivity. Rather, it is the literary critics who return to the poetological concepts of the Goethe period, in order to describe a poetry which decidedly contrasts with the three basic tendencies of modern poetry after the Second World War: those of hermetical, politically engaged, and concrete poetry. Curiously enough, they hit upon the concept of subjectivity at a time which calls the very concept of the subject in question. Until now, the critics have not yet noticed this oddity; they keep ascertaining the new subjectivity without pondering the significance of the concept involved. Their discussions of lyrical poetry have taken place, during the past years, in the gray fog of conceptual haziness.
To repeat: What is subjectivity? At the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century, the philosophy of Kant and of German idealism at large formulated the thought of the free individual who is aware of his freedom and individuality. Subjectivity as a self-conscious freedom was an igniting idea that, even before, helped to prepare the French Revolution. For if a human being is basically defined as a free individual, then the seemingly God-given hierarchical order of feudalism, in which individuals determine themselves through rank, religion, sex, etc., appears more than questionable. The concept of subjectivity as an idea of free self-determination did not aim at mere freedom of thought. As Hegel says, this idea had to impress itself on the world, to become historical reality. Freedom was one color in the tricolor of the French Revolution. However, if every subject realized itself in its subjectivity, or lived out its individuality according to its inclination and wishes, would it not violate the needs of other individuals? Would not, of necessity, chaos rule? Philosophy since Kant bound the principle of freedom to that of equality, the other color of the French tricolor!

Freedom does not mean an arbitrary will, the spontaneous living out of one’s doing. Freedom—as Hegel defines it in the wake of Kant—is the self-determination of the rational will. Idealistic philosophy attempts to solve the contradiction between freedom and the principle of equality by supposing a subject which freely subdues its nature to the law of rationality, a law it decreed itself. If all subjects adapt themselves to the law of rationality, then they are both free and equal: such is the scheme of idealistic reconciliation.

Thus, individuality, as self-assured freedom, includes the mastering of inner and outer nature. Only if the subject is not helplessly given up to the forces of nature but has made nature into a force for its own use, is it free, is it sovereign in its relationship to nature. With command over nature, however, the subject also alienates itself from nature, which becomes a mere source of raw materials and energy. Rationalistic natural science has expelled myth from nature; therefore, no elfs, fauns, or nymphs carry on their play, but rather the laws of Kepler and Galileo rule. Individuality, as freedom based on the domination of nature, includes alienation from nature. Outwitting nature, the subject—as Hegel formulated it in his *Jenenser Rechtsphilosophie*—makes nature into a productive co-worker of social progress while, at the same time, subjugating it to its own interests; not caring about the nature of nature, it takes for granted nature’s inexhaustible productivity. (Ernst Bloch, in his *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, criticized this mentality as “DompteurbewuBtsein.”) What Hegel’s keen intellect, in a metaphorical expression, had interpreted as cunning (*List*), later on, with the advance of industrialization, revealed its destructive being. The physical
and mathematical comprehension of nature turned nature into a set of abstract laws, ignoring its sensual appearance. Literature and, especially, poetry reacted to this phenomenon. Whatever the natural sciences take away from the individual—namely: its sensual, its visual kingdom—poetry shall now compensate. The aesthetic discovery of nature as a beautiful landscape is, in the last analysis, indebted to the alienation from nature. Second, subjectivity, as a self-determined freedom and subjugation of the natural being to the law of reason, meant at the same time affect-regulation, the control of emotion, and intellectualization. Man asserts himself as a free subject only when he is not swept away by the torrent of his drives, but rather dams and channels them; that is, when he sublimates them. This conception of subjectivity brought about the alienation of the individual from his inner self, along with the concept of freedom. Art again reacted, developing an opposing concept that shall reconcile the divided person, reconcile sensualness and rationality, nature and spirit. Idealistic aesthetic saw, in the wake of Kant, the harmony of sensuality and rationality in the aesthetic mood. The subject that searches to free itself through the rational command over nature rediscovers, in a second step, nature in a double sense: as a creating principle of the reproduction of life (one might think of Goethe’s view, his “Natur, du ewig keimende”; his “Urquell der Natur”; his “Mutter Erde,” etc.) and as a productive power, a natural gift of the creating genius. Lyrical subjectivity attempts to compensate the deficiency this concept of subjectivity entails: the alienation from inner and outer nature. The lyrical subject, in its creative freedom, develops poetical conceptions opposed to prosaic reality. And this opposition also concerns language: language as an instrument of purposeful, rational communication.

The idea of free subjectivity remained, in the small feudalistic German states in particular, a utopia. But poetry asserts the idea of individuality even though the period of the beginning industrialization, which produces uniformity, is opposed to a free development of the various individual forces. Hence, poetry as the utopia of human freedom, as “Vorschein geglückten Menschseins” (Bloch)! Programmatical are Eichendorff’s lines: “Und die Welt hebt an zu singen, / trifft du nur das Zauberwort.” They proclaim the transcending power of poetry against a positivistic reality. Poetry as an expression of subjectivity—as defined by Hegel—was not an unfiltered utterance of spontaneous emotions, of accidental daily observations as present-day lyrics record them many times. Lyrical subjectivity as inwardness means neither self-mirroring, without any reference to reality, nor does it exclude reflection for the benefit of immediate expressions of emotions.

Aesthetic reflection determines the poetry of lyrical subjectivity. The freedom principles of the general philosophical concept of subjectivity influence also the lyrical production insofar as mere feeling refines itself into
self-conscious perceptions and images. The idea of poetry as a counterconcept to a deficient reality still stamps the aesthetics of symbolism and surrealism and the hermetic lyric of the postwar period. Ever more radically, the subject asserted its aesthetic autonomy, and the gap between the poetic-aesthetical language and everyday communication became even greater. As early as the Goethe period, the phenomenon refers to an ideal meaning: thus, as a symbol, poetry transcends the real world. The negation of the trivial everyday realities becomes absolute with the intellectual fathers of the modern age: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry, and Benn. They react to the growing technicalization by opposing an absolutely aesthetic, autonomous world, a style of poetical cipher, to the more and more administered world.

Contrarily, the poetry of today breaks with this development of lyrical subjectivity, which encountered more and more difficulties in trying to preserve its aesthetic freedom. The gap between poetical language and communicative language reached an "extreme." Today's poetry, however, has given up every symbolic perspective. Gone is the belief in an inner harmony of ego and world, ego and nature, consciousness and object. Gone is also the lyrical concept of spirituality dear to the symbolists, who no longer sought to reconcile nature and spirit in their lyrical works, but instead aimed at a new idealism which destroys all sensual presence. A view fixed on the surface, which does not see anything behind the things, characterizes the new poetry. Symptomatic of this view are the first lines of a poem by Rolf Dieter Brinkmann entitled "Landschaft," from his collection *Westwärts 1 & 2: Gedichte*:

1 verrufter Baum
nicht mehr zu bestimmen
1 Autowrack, Glasscherben
1 künstliche Wand, schallschluckend
verschiedene kaputte Schuhe
im blätterlosen Gestrüpp

A poem? Yes—but as a catalogue of nonsublimated observations: civilization's rubbish instead of poetical landscape; on purpose, the antipoetical listing employs the numeral "1," rather than the word "one." Similarly, "Das Ende der Landschaftsmalerei" ("The End of Landscape Painting") is the significant title of a lyric collection of Jürgen Becker, who thematizes the devastated landscape and destroyed nature. There is not only a change concerning the view of nature; Becker also questions the traditional aesthetics of the organic, unbroken nature poem in which the ego could project its utopia of freedom.

He starts from his private realm of experiences, from his surroundings, and his poetry mirrors the movement of his observing, discovering look
which sensitively notes details. These surroundings do not appear as an independent object but as “visual pictures” (Sehbilder) of the ego. Becker’s observing ego has historical consciousness; it mixes reminiscences with the observations of the present situation. The funnel troughs of the peaceful landscape suggest, for example, the forgotten bomb troughs and in the drone of flies—in the harmless summer sounds—the threatening tone of the bomb squad is suddenly perceived. (So deep lie the unprocessed fears.) Here, there emerges no poetical counterworld; what matters to the subject of this poem is everyday life with its trivial fears, brief moments of happiness, and adversities. No poetical, lyrical, artistical ego claims its organic identity in the aesthetic concept, but the authentic, real ego tells of his daily experiences. The rejection of the poetical, artistic ego corresponds to a new lyrical language that is in opposition to any hermetrical form. In contrast to hermetical poetry—say, that of Celan, who searches for the absolute poetical word beyond shopworn, ready-made speech—Becker does not oppose a beneficial, unspoiled, lyrical language to the “slow infiltration of general talk”; for him, this would be unreal, ahistorical, and without any authenticity. He quotes daily consciousness without the distanced, disgusted gesture of the aesthetic gourmet. The precious word, the daring metaphor are missing in this poetry; instead, it absorbs much from the contemporary sound, the different idiomatic styles of the “talking environment” (redende Umgebung). Take, for instance, the poem “Privatbereich”:

dieser Regen hört nicht auf; ungestört (schimpfe ich)
 schießt der Rasen
    —nein, der Rasen
 schießt nicht.
    Dimenti. Unwiderlegbar:
    Motorsägen, Pipeline,
    gleich um die Ecke
 im Wald
 Regen. Rasen. Wald.
    Schöne
 Wörter
    für Schöne Aussicht
 widerlegbar.

The first lines are an everyday perception, voiced by a lyrical ego without any sublime stance. The following lines still sound trivial. Irrefutable, robust without double meaning, are the names for the things themselves: chain saws, pipeline. But the simple verbal triad: “rain, lawn, wood”—merely names of objects in the natural world—suggests a picture of a lyrical atmosphere and landscape that are refuted precisely by the chain saws/pipeline reality. Without question, they live unpolluted only in the advertisement slogan “Beautiful View.” The expressions have a beautiful,
poetic aura from their lyrical past, an aura the poet today can only con-
ceive as a semblance that is no longer possible. Hence, what about the new
subjectivity here? An ego talks about its surroundings, its irritations; it
shows a sensitivity to speech, notes its subtle or accidental observations,
but no ego expresses itself in its subjectivity, in the freedom of its aesthetic
self-conception. More often than not, it manifests itself in its sensitive
reaction to frequent if tiny objective stimuli, irritated as it is by the occur-
ring exterior perceptions. The proud gesture of the former self-assured
subject, “I create my poetical world for myself, a counterworld,” has been
basically lost by the poets of the 1970s. Alienation no longer mirrors itself
dialectically in a hermetical lyric concept which rejects social reality. It
manifests itself directly in the lyrical arrangement: i.e., in the association
of perceptions and imaginations that can no longer be assembled to form
a harmonious unity. There obtains an antilyrical language, open to the
clichés from the “speaking environment” (redende Umgebung). Detail
rules, the moment, the fragment. Consequently, Gegenwärtigkeit (“mo-
mentariness”) emerges as yet another distinguishing feature of the new
lyric.

The hermetical poem, too, speaks in the present tense, but this pres-
etent tense suggests a quasi-eternal validity. The lyrical cipher will extinguish
any definite, limited meaning. Every aesthetic mediation of the general
with the concrete-particular, which is so characteristic of lyrical subjectiv-
ity, aims at such a timeless meaning. The present-day lyric, on the other
hand, is skeptical toward the harmonious self-identical ego; it shows the
momentary and, at the same time, fragmentary way of self- or world-
experience. Another poem by Becker, from his penultimate volume of
poetry, Erzähl mir nichts vom Krieg, runs as follows:

Von oben gesehen, der Stand der gelben Ereignisse,
Forsythien in den Gärten. Jetzt sind es
die Geräusche der Kinder; zwischen den Wohnblocks,
auf den Flächen der Tiefgarage, so etwas wie
Leben; das ist jetzt neu. Und es ist hell;
wir kommen aus den Bureaus und sehen
die Sonne noch über den Hügeln, dem Rauch,
den Raffinerien. Glitzernder Berufsverkehr
auf der Ebene zwischen den Dörfern; kurz rauscht
wie eine eingebundene Brandung
die Köln-Bonner Eisenbahn auf; ich dachte,
dieser Winter geht weiter; nasse Halden,
Nebelplantagen. Der Krieg zwischen uns. Aber
mit den Amseln ist jetzt noch zu rechnen, und
wie die Äcker grün werden, das ist, mit dem
Wiederentdecken der Farbe, über Reste ein Blick.
Such is the author's view of the city in the midst of traffic from his penthouse apartment. Once again, there are the remains of nature and the industrial working world, large-scale observations, overexposed, richly contrasting pictures, and technology for a brief moment—like a pretty game of nature. Indeed, the poem itself appears as a freeze-frame, a snapshot fixing the tiniest moment of the changing view.

This kind of a photographic surface-eye marks not only Becker's verse but is an overall distinguishing feature of today's poetry. Nicolas Born's "Bahnhof Lüneburg, 30. April 1976," a poem in the present tense, is composed of nothing but momentary images:

Es ist 5 Uhr 45, unausgeschlafene Autolandschaft, 
alshabe damit endgültig alles seinen Platz.  
(Nichts mehr anrühren, nichts mehr bewegen!)  
Ohnmächtig schluckende Frühauftreter, Rauch 
auf nüchternem Magen. Aktentaschen, aufmuckende  
Blicke zwischen den flappenden Pendeltüren.  
Frau zieht das Rollo des Zeitungsstandes hoch. Birken.  
Violetter Schaum. 
Es ist noch nicht hell, ein bläulicher Abglanz 
des Himmels hängt zwischen den Bäumen.  
Postkarren rattern über den Bahnsteig.  
Etwas später macht die Gaststätte auf. Wer eintritt bin ich.  
Ein Zug ist eingefahren; wenn er steht, hört man ihn  
knistern und stöhnen. Das Material ist erschöpft  
und müde.  
Vor nicht langer Zeit lag hier Schnee.  
Schlafende Parkuhren.  
Schlafende Oberleitung.  
Diesige Helligkeit schwebt ein, ohne Härte wie  
—ich muß mich zusammennehmen—die weiche Hand mit der  
Äthermaske.  
Welch ein Morgen und welch ein Auge darin.  
Wie verlassen und müde ich bin.  
Wie krank und verwöhnt ein Schnellzug vorbeieilt.  
Der Kellner nimmt mir die Tasse weg die noch nicht  
leer ist. Eine Frau raucht mit gespreizten Fingern.  
Daß sie so früh daran denkt die Finger zu spreizen.  
Als sie gähnt, wölben sich ihre Brüste stark hervor.  
Leere Streichholzschachtel auf dem Tisch, Zellophan  
und Silberpapier. Das Wasser rauscht im Spülbecken.  
Kleine zähe Frau, deren Gesicht neben der Kaffeemaschine  
erscheint, wie die Rückblende in einem Zufallsfilm  
den noch keiner gesehen hat.

An overtired yet subtle ear here scans the speech rhythms, fragmentlike; an overtired yet penetrating eye here sketches the passing perceptions,
The Supposedly New Subjectivity

neoimpressionistically, the details of observation. Fixed, however, amidst all the movement of pictures, is the subjective, personal feeling of the author: “How desolate and tired I am. / How sick and worn out an express train blows by.” The mood does not, as in previous poetry based on experience (Erlebnislyrik), express itself in an objective perception. The anaphoric union and synthetic parallelism illustrate the relationship of subjective mood and observation. Alienation, too, articulates itself in the distancing, joyless view. At the same time, there is sensitivity discovering, in a new way, the everyday life in its immediate proximity. “Birch trees. / Violet foam”: it is at once a momentary image and a rediscovery of the ordinary lost through habit. Likewise, in this poem by Nicolas Born, no lyrical subjectivity expresses itself; on the contrary, the subjective flutters apart, loses itself in nuances of feeling and shreds of observation, materializes only as registering senses that discover given details. There is no effort on the part of the ego to regain a new expression of subjectivity by structuring the subjectless perceptions, to create an aesthetic unity out of a flight of images. All we notice is the dissociation of the impressions, manifesting alienation. These poems do not conceal alienation but expose it, through their fragmentary style, in a mixture of everyday perceptions.

Whereas hermetical poetry, in the wake of poésie pure, worked with blancs, that is, blanks and silence, in order to refer to an unspeakable ideal, the poetry of today is more “chatty.” Devoid of any ideal, it is only capable of displaying the trivialities of its daily observations. The emptiness of the tired, apathetic ego expresses itself through the indifferent “side by side” of accidental observations; it would simply not be capable of poetic, sublime flight into a new ideality. The idea of subjectivity as a free self-conception of the independent aesthetic ego can no longer be shared by the poets of the 1970s. They find no poetic space beyond the prose of the social relations oozing steadily into their poetry.

The thematically related poem “S-Bahnstation” by Roman Ritter, from his collection Einen Fremden im Postamt umarmen, betrays the same tendency:

Steinplatten, Wände
vor allem diese gekachelten Wände,
die Schienen, Warnlichter, drei Gestalten
die hier warten und auf der anderen Seite
der großen Lache stehen, wortlos.
Wenn wenigstens einer betrunken wäre und etwas murmeln würde.
Das ist natürlich nur eine Umgebung, das sind Eisenpfiler,
und es ist schon spät. Dieses Klischee von Empfindlichkeit.
Das ist kein Gleichnis, sondern eine S-Bahnstation.
Aber gerade hier fällt mir ein, in diesen gekachelten Wänden,
daß der Tag vergangen ist
wie das Pausenzeichen vor der Zeitansage,
daß wieder nichts näherrückte, nur das Warten auf ein Dröhnen,
daß der Zettel in der Jackentasche zerrissen ist,
daß es so nicht geht, daß es so einfach
einfach nicht geht. Diese große trübe Lache.

The deserted place accentuates the colorless symmetry of this stony underground architecture; the monotony of midnight makes the ego feel the oppressive silence, the wasted time, the emptiness in the brain. However: “That’s only an environment.” The subject’s altered point of view is clear: environment here does not serve as a picture full of meaning, nor as a cipher of inwardness; it appears only as shallow, factual everyday reality. “That is not a simile but a subway station.” As before, the new lyrical view reflects its “surface realism,” perceiving reality without symbolism, yet expressing the reaction of the ego to this reality all the same. As in the poems by Becker and Born, we find but “momentariness”: nonartificial, nonsublimated diction which avoids metaphors and registers accidental observations.

It is striking to note the continuous tendency of this poetry to picture everyday environments where the ego feels “shut out,” indeed like a stranger, although such environments might at the same time be the mirrors of its emptiness or its alienation. Yet, nevertheless, the German authors of the 1970s refrain from the audacity of a Charles Baudelaire, who wrote in his “Spleen” (Les Fleurs du mal, LXXVI):

Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,
De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de romances,
Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des quittances,
Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.
C’est une pyramide, un immense caveau,
Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse commune.
—Je suis un cimetiére abhorré de la lune,
Où comme des remords se traînent de longs vers
Qui s’acharnent toujours sur mes morts les plus chers.
Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,
Où git tout un fouillis de modes surannées,
Où les pastel plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,
Seuls, respirent l’odeur d’un flacon débouché.

Of course, Baudelaire cannot be repeated, and the changed reality also demands its own style. However, there exist astounding analogies in the suffering from an alienated reality, from self-alienation, and from the uniformity and anonymity of modern life. These analogies, above all, may remind one of Baudelaire and his “Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées.” Modern poetry doesn’t dare to coin such metaphors of self-identification anymore; and yet, it implicitly suggests comparisons of this
kind. Ultimately, the lyrical ego of Born, in its depressive fatigue, is the “sick and run down express train rushing by.” Roman Ritter sees himself reflected in that sad, stony symmetry. If indeed the poets of today ventured to express themselves more radically in their crippled subjectivity and broken identity, they would have to create a new imagery and audacious metaphorical style in order to evoke the complex psychological procedures of consciousness.

We now can summarize. The new poetry of the 1970s is characterized throughout by the mark of alienation. It has completely lost the future-oriented optimism of Paris, May 1968. The wings of political fantasy have been clipped, and the flight into poetry as “promesse de bonheur” (Valéry) appears as mere escapism. Consequently, there exists no poetical antithesis to trivial reality anymore: this reality is in itself the goal. The outlook on life is unrefined; the cleft between artistic and everyday language, between poetical and empirical ego, between idea and appearance has been leveled off. This makes possible a new realism of world-perception in the form of self-discovery. The poetical ego understands itself as a medium; it does not proclaim theorems, as did earlier political poetry. It captures reality. This poetry also transcends, in its successful drafts, the current state of affairs, as it expresses its unhappy consciousness and, at the same time, its desire for happiness and its criticism of factual “existence as it is.” Utopia today does not give voice to itself in an anticipation of harmony, but only ex negativo: in the representation of contradiction, alienation, commonness, and failure.

Finally, it is and remains a nonutopian utopia far removed from the pathetic gesture of “in spite of all that.” Indelible are the signs of a melancholy that is aware of political impotence yet, at the same time, sees through the substitution of its aesthetic dealings. The cultural counterworld which the French aristocracy of the Ancien Régime created in the salon, the German bourgeoisie of the 19th century, in nature and inwardness, and which postwar poetry created in the ivory towers of poésie pure: this world does not appear to exist any longer.

Reality as everyday experience has infiltrated everyone’s personal world, however aesthetically refined it may be. Not dualism, but rather one-dimensionality rules, along with the many dangers of banality. Lack of perspective threatens to turn into self-pity, distraction, into strainless triviality, the antihermetical language, into stale tautology. There are many examples of mere narcissistic self-mirroring, of sketchy small talk. If one reviews the poetry yearbooks and anthologies from the 1970s onward, there appear hardly any new perspectives, reversals, or altered points of view. To take into account the growing flood of this poetry, which washes up so much that is insignificant, sharpens the senses for the dangers of its nonartificial style lacking in imagery. Slight accidental impressions, banalities charged, through mere line breaks, with a pseudopoetical aura now fill the countless
volumes of poetry that are being brought out by the renowned publishing houses as well as by small and very small presses. Here, the supposedly new subjectivity is definitely perverted by poetry into a heap of the worst and most inconsequential everyday details. Just compare: “Das schöngrüne Tal, / die Eisenbahn auf dem Damm, / alles nur / Erinnerungen an die Kindheit. / Wir fahren jetzt / im Auto vorbei.”

What am I to do with such clichéd perceptions which the “Vorbeifahrer” (thus the title of this poem by Harald Gröhlen) conveys to me? And what kind of experience is conveyed by Horst Bingel’s poem “Silvester”: “Wollen wir / eine Kahnpartie / machen? Sag bitte / nicht, ich se / frivol auch am / letzten Tag”? The verse by Dietmar Ortlieb titled “Differenzen” is allegedly a political one: “Was aus meinen Freunden / geworden ist, / verschweige ich besser. / Sie könnten zurückschlagen, / verraten, /was aus mir / nicht wurde. // Eine ganze Menge, / betrachte ich mir / ihre Häuser, Garagen, Frauen.” Plain social envy here purports to be critical of society. I learn nothing of this ego, nor of his friends; both their biographies are consciously being withheld. Does the possession of a house condemn anyone? Is a garage the incarnation of capitalistic exploitation? The suggestion that the relative lack of possessions guarantees social morality is stupid. The absence of substantial reflection results in aesthetic flatness, as in so many pseudopolitical poems. Dialectic has been substituted for by pseudopoints.

In sum, then, I must contest that the supposedly new subjectivity—even in its successful lyrical compositions—is not a new, or modern, form of lyrical subjectivity in any precise sense of this term. Quite to the contrary, the authors of the 1970s have lost their belief in a free aesthetic subject. Their poems show, without any dialectical mediation, the alienation of the modern ego in a prosaic world, and they call in question the very idea of the autonomous lyrical subject. The “individual” appears in today’s poetry as a “dividual.”

Note

1 For more details, see Hiltrud Gnüg, Entstehung und Krise lyrischer Subjektivität: Vom klassischen lyrischen Ich zur modernen Erfahrungswirklichkeit (Stuttgart, 1983).
Deconstruction and the Lyric: 
Ça s’écrit

Próspero Saíz

Écrire—

L’encrier, cristal comme une conscience, avec sa goutte, au fond, de ténèbres relative à ce que quelque chose soit: puis, écarte la lampe.

Tu remarquas, on n’écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l’alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s’indique, ébauché ou interrompu; l’homme poursuit noir sur blanc.

Stéphane Mallarmé, Quant au livre

... c’est l’être que l’absence d’être rend présent, non plus l’être dissimulé, mais l’être en tant que dissimulé: la dissimulation elle-même.

Maurice Blanchot, L’espace littéraire

Ce qu’on ne peut pas représenter, c’est le rapport de la représentation à la présence dite originaire. La re-présentation est aussi une dé-présentation. Elle est liée à l’œuvre de l’espacement.

Dans ce jeu de la représentation, le point d’origine devient insaisissable. Il y a des choses, des eaux et des images, un renvoi infini des unes aux autres mais plus de source. Il n’y a plus d’origine simple. Car ce qui est reflété se dédouble en soi même et non seulement comme addition à soi de son image. Le reflet, l’image, le double dédouble ce qu’il redouble. L’origine de la spéculation devient une différence.

Jacques Derrida, De la Grammatologie

Das Schwierige liegt in der Sprache. Unsere abendländischen Sprachen sind in je verschiedener Weise Sprachen des metaphysischen Denkens. Ob das Wesen der abendländischen Sprachen in sich nur metaphysisch und darum endgültig durch die Onto-Theo-Logik geprägt ist, oder ob diese Sprachen andere Möglichkeiten des Sagens und d.h. zugleich des sagenden Nichtsagens gewähren, muß offenbleiben.

Martin Heidegger, Identität und Differenz

Digo las cosas tales como son
O lo sabemos todo de antemano
O no sabremos nunca absolutamente nada.

Nicanor Parra, Emergency Poems

The most significant traces are: “ ” / / ( ) — . . . .

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Friedrich Schlegel in *Athenäums-Fragment* 53 wrote: "Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschließen müssen, beydes zu verbinden." How can one respond to Schlegel’s paradox?

Both the very title of the present volume and, most certainly, the titles of the individual essays inscribe us in the genre concept, *lyric*, and open up the floodgate of systems. They open up, from the “perspective” of deconstruction, a conflict between the historical and the theoretical aspects of the problematic inhabited by the conceptual field, *lyric poetry*. Let us first note that the concept of lyric poetry itself proclaims a synchronic order named by coexisting individual lyric poems. This term emphasizes the similarity between, say, Archilochus and Goethe, or between Dante and Pound, and so on. “Historical difference” is suppressed by the term itself. For example, Theodor W. Adorno was mindful of this problem (and uncomfortable with his position) when he noted, in his famous “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft,” that his definition of the lyric forced him to exclude the “classical” lyric tradition:

Adorno’s view of the lyric, as we shall see, requires that the lyric be viewed as an intense form of self-consciousness, as a very private genre. It is interesting to note in passing that for Hegel, Adorno’s “intertext,” Pindar’s lyrics pose no threat to lyric subjectivity:

For Hegel, this is even true of so-called *poèmes d’occasion*, and Pindar is one of his favorite examples:

So wurde Pindar . . . häufig aufgefordert, diesen oder jenen siegekrönten Wettkämpfer zu feiern, ja er erhielt selbst hin und wieder Geld dafür—und
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...dennoch tritt er als Sänger an die Stelle seines Helden und preist nun in selbständiger Verknüpfung seiner eignen Phantasie die Taten etwa der Voreltern, erinnert an alte Mythen oder spricht seine tiefe Ansicht über das Leben, über Reichtum, Herrschaft, über das, was groß und ehrenwert, über die Hoheit und Lieblichkeit der Musen, vor allem aber über die Würde des Sängers aus. So ehrt er auch in seinen Gedichten nicht sowohl den Helden durch den Ruhm, den er über ihn verbreitet, sondern er läßt sich, den Dichter, hören.*

The lyric requires a private lyrical individuality whose sole expression is limited to giving words to its "inner life," words which, regardless of their "objective" meaning, intensely reveal the spiritual sense of the poet. Pre-eminent greatness of soul makes for great lyric poetry (and Hegel wryly adds that Homer as individual sacrifices himself to his heroes so much that we forget him and remember only their immortality; whereas in Pindar the opposite is true).

Second, let us note that "historical difference" itself, the diachronicity in which we are placed to read and interpret lyric poetry, has a profound impact on the formulation and understanding of the genre. Our notions of the lyric depend somehow on the nature of our understanding of any specific lyric; we also rely, to an important degree, on the concept of lyric we have derived from our previous reading. We tend to resolve this quandary by establishing conscious or unconscious limits, by force of thematic and or generic classifications, by the power of system. The paradox haunts us. For how can one define lyric poetry before one knows on which specific lyric poems to base the definition? Similarly, how can one really know on which lyric poems to base the definition—establish the limits—before one has defined lyric poetry?

So we are posed in the hermeneutic circle, for any "Auslegung, die Verständnis beistellen soll, muß schon das Auszulegende verstanden haben." Thus our inquiries are guided beforehand by what it is we seek, and interpretation as such cannot discover anything radically new:

Die Auslegung von Etwas als Etwas wird wesenhaft durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff fundiert. Auslegung ist nie ein voraussetzungsloses Erfassen eines Vorgegebenen. Wenn sich die besondere Konkretion der Auslegung im Sinne der exakten Textinterpretation gern auf das beruft, was 'dasteht,' so ist das, was zunächst 'dasteht,' nichts anderes als die selbstverständliche, undisdiskutierte Vormeinung des Auslegers, die notwendig in jedem Auslegungsansatz liegt als das, was mit Auslegung überhaupt schon 'gesetzt,' das heißt in Vorhabe, Vorsicht, Vorgriff vorgegeben ist. (SZ, 150)

Let me at once affirm "circularity" but deny any warrant for reproach. The equation of circularity and the positional forestructure (how we are placed...
in the problematic) requires a temporal hermeneutics which does not begin from a spatial (New Critical or Structuralist) notion of the whole, that is, the \textit{whole} viewed as \textit{presence or telos}.

All interpretation, in the final analysis, is circular, for the very idea of interpretation presupposes it. If one lacked prior awareness of \textit{what is} sought, one could not even entertain the possibility of a questioning. Logic, by the force of its rules, makes of the circle a \textit{circulus vitiosus}, for it upholds the ideal of objectivity which is grounded in the epistemological model of the Cartesian tradition. To achieve “objectivity” means to take a presuppositionless stance in the process of rigorous deduction. But this is a futile gesture since circularity underlies all understanding, and objectivism is simply derivative and appropriate for a very limited range of cognition, which seeks to protect the autonomy of the object—the \textit{simples}—under investigation:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

We, posed in historical difference, must therefore take the problems of the \textit{Geisteswissenschaften} seriously. Our distinctive ontological mark is perhaps best grasped by the category of “historicity,” since our existence is temporally (historically) situated. That is, historicity is a fundamental feature of the circle of interpretation, and, as we shall see, Derrida’s deconstruction, contrary to what many would like to believe, takes history most seriously. For Derrida, like Heidegger, refuses the Cartesian dream of a “First Philosophy.” Let us recall that any text is time-bound, and, as such, can only fulfill itself as an \textit{Entwurf} (a projection into the future)—which means that the text must acknowledge its \textit{Geworfenheit} (contingent, finite temporality). Texts are tempered by and in specific historical and cultural situations; hence, each text and situation is historically vulnerable. As Derrida notes, “Un texte a toujours plusieurs âges, la lecture doit en prendre son parti.”

He is aware, of course, that “epoch” for Heidegger does not simply mean a span of time but that it is related to the Greek \textit{epochē}, which means “to hold back.” Thus, texts are always implicated in “holding back,” in withdrawal: “The epochs overlap each other in their sequence so that the
original sending of being as presence is more and more obscured in different ways” (TB, 9). We shall have occasion to return to presence and the problems of critical reading later. We will inquire into the vulnerabilities of certain critical and theoretical texts (positions) historically marked by an epochal logo-phonocentrism.

But first let me reiterate that there is nothing vicious, in the course of explication, about having to pass through the beginning point once again. And I would contend that the essays in our volume have not been involved in the structure of the vicious circle of logic. They have, in various ways, specified, and so understood, parts of the lyric problematic before it has been specified and vice versa. Their virtue is to try to make us come into understanding; for, obviously, many problems of lyric poetry have thus been “opened up.” Indeed, in a remarkable way, these essays have somehow traversed through, and gathered, mimetic, structural, expressive, and pragmatic concepts of the lyric (in this way, many ghosts, some even living, have, by dint of supplementarity, had their “say”). I, nonetheless, wish to defer the question—have we entered the circle correctly? With sufficient foresight? Some would say that this implies that our interpretative situationality is determined by fate. But such is not the case. Rather, our situationality is layered with an openness to possibility temporized in a projective manner.

What does deconstruction do in the face of this? Derrida specifies:

... the incision of deconstruction, which is not a voluntary decision or an absolute beginning, does not take place just anywhere, or in an absolute elsewhere. An incision, precisely, it can be made only according to lines of force and forces of rupture that are localizable in the discourse to be deconstructed. The topical and technical determination of the most necessary sites and operators—beginnings, holds, levers, etc.—in a given situation depends upon an historical analysis. This analysis is made in the general movement of the field, and is never exhausted by the conscious calculation of a ‘subject.’ (Pos, 82)

Deconstructive interventions are therefore also tempered. One cannot simply leap over the bounds of textual tradition, as some unfortunately believe, having (mis)read both Derrida and Nietzsche, who wrote, “perhaps one is a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading [ein Lehrer des langsamen Lesens].”

So it happens that I am positioned by the question: What is at stake in linking one to the other? This positioning raises complex issues, for the conceptual field of the linkage is fraught with theoretical, critical, historical, and terminological difficulties, and I will simply attempt to approach the theory of the lyric by linking it to Derrida’s deconstruction of the metaphysical claims of phonocentrism. Specifically, my remarks are in-
tended to question the very notion of “lyric voice,” which has at least since Plato been essentially inscribed in dominant theories of the lyric. The inquiry, therefore, seeks to discover the “meaning” of the profound historical relationship between what literary theory has identified as “lyric voice” and the metaphysics of presence, i.e., “voice’s” complicity in all the value(s) of presence. As part of this historical relationship, we must also consider the “voice’s” relationship to the privileged onto-theological status that meaning, viewed as ideality or absolute identity, has enjoyed in the Platonism of the modern world-historical situation. Emphasizing the German aspect, I shall briefly discuss how Adorno’s lyric theory is caught up in the metaphysics of presence, for its allurement is, indeed, a moving one. All of my gestures are made ultimately in the interest of illuminating the nihilism question as it emerges out of the problematic itself. For now, however, by way of anticipation, I cite Derrida’s “founding” remarks on the scope and the implications of the problem:

Le privilège de la phonè ne dépend pas d’un choix qu’on aurait pu éviter. Il répond à un moment de l’économie (disons de la ‘vie’ de l’’histoire’ ou de l’’être comme rapport à soi’). Le système du ‘s’entendre-parler’ à travers la substance phonique—qui se donne comme signifiant non-extérieur, non-mondain, donc non empirique ou non-contingent—a dû dominer pendant toute une époque l’histoire du monde, a même produit l’idée de monde, l’idée d’origine du monde à partir de la différence entre le mondain et le non-mondain, le dehors et le dedans, l’idéalité et la non-idéalité, l’universel et le non-universel, le transcendental et l’empirique, etc. (Gramm, 17)

This privilege: a necessity rather than an accident of history; this privilege: produced by a definitive conception of both consciousness and history, by the classical enemy of metaphysics; this privilege: (entendre, to hear [is] to understand) has dominated our thinking, and its effect on the lyric “radical of presentation” continues to be felt, even in the most “aphonic” of poets. Before I take this up more fully, however, I quickly wish to note how it has registered itself in recent criticism and theory of the lyric. Jonathan Culler in “Changes in the Study of the Lyric” has suggested that the influential and productive theory of the lyric institutionalized by New Criticism, while perhaps insufficient, has not been surpassed: “Recent criticism has not developed an alternative theory of the lyric, but has produced changes in the study of the lyric.” The changes noted by Culler are (1) interest in melos and opsis; (2) exploration of intertextuality; (3) interest in voice as figure; (4) a new understanding of self-reflexivity; and (5) deconstruction of hierarchical opposition of symbol and allegory. These changes are naturally related to each other and, according to Culler, help to define a new discursive space for criticism of the lyric. Items 2 through 5 are clearly in the domain of American deconstruction. Culler’s assessment is noteworthy
because it confirms that New Criticism is the parergon of the new discursive space.

Another critic, Annabel Patterson, is less sanguine than Culler:

We ask what has happened to the lyric since what was once called the New Criticism was replaced as the ruling methodology in our discipline; but the question's unanswerability serves mainly to reveal a lacuna in the still newer criticisms which have not, it seems, been able to disturb the premises of the preceding dynasty with respect to lyric, or even to improve on its work.\(^9\)

While there may well be a critical impasse, the newer criticisms have been able to disturb the traditional premises (in fact, the disturbance is registered in Patterson's own critical anxiety). She is right to point out, nevertheless, that the dominant view of "lyric as an intense, imaginative form of self-expression or self-consciousness . . . is a belief derived from Romanticism."\(^1\) The emphasis on subjectivity or pure, uncontaminated self-expression in the form and "language" of lyric textuality remains deeply rooted. Patterson feels that structuralism, Marxism, and deconstruction have not resolved the critical impasse. For instance, she attacks the notion of intertextuality because it "does not compare for interpretive rigor with the older concept of a poet's career, as the first context with which any interpretation must engage."\(^2\)

While there is much to recommend in her essay, she remains blind to the fact that her nostalgia for a first ground, which she offers as our "guilty knowledge that every lyric voice had an original owner,"\(^3\) ultimately aligns her with the position she criticizes. Moreover, the privileging of a ground, the poet and/or lyric voice that must be critically recovered, opens her up to deconstruction, for, indeed, New Criticism—and its genealogy of morals—is likewise her parergon. Patterson, like many other uneasy critics of deconstruction, fails to keep in mind that deconstruction subverts the very grounds for nostalgic critical exchange: poet/voice-(text)-critic. The enshrinement of the lyrical voice requires that all the "powers" of the signifier be repressed in the interest of identifying the voice, either in the form of the empirical or the ideal poet.

This claim for \textit{vocal presence} is supported by a long history of phonocentrism. As Paul de Man notes, the very principle of intelligibility, in lyric poetry, depends on the phenomenalization of the poetic voice. Our claim to understand a lyric text coincides with the actualization of a speaking voice, be it (monologically) that of the poet or (dialogically) that of the exchange that takes place between author and reader in the process of comprehension.\(^4\)

It is obvious that in written lyric the voice cannot be immediately available; yet there is in the theory of the lyric a dogged refusal to let go of the voice,
“for this would deprive it of the attribute of aesthetic presence that determines the hermeneutic of the lyric.” Moreover, this also helps to protect the critical notion of dialogue: (1) between text and reader or (2) between the author and a historically specified audience. Voice (and dialogue) thus shepherd the domain of intelligibility.

It is possible to link the fairly recent concept of lyric subjectivity (which is heavily informed by Hegel's *Aesthetics* and by the Romantic image of the text as a totalizing emblem whose eschatological function subdues textuality, since a text has its meaning by its reflexive powers, its self-referentiality)\(^\text{16}\) to that of the theory of the voice, which has a very long history. The result is a theory, framed by Western philosophy, which must of necessity posit a locus of presence. Hence, theory and criticism, insofar as they help to secure this locus—consciousness, perception, truth, life, origin, experience, etc.—are a stalking horse for the philosophy of presence. Lyric theory, in its insistence on the voice, participates in the philosophical edifice that serves to protect presence.

The discursive shift noted by Culler, however, is problematic, as my comments on the *parergon* briefly suggested. His approach to the problem of change is symptomatic of a larger problem within American deconstruction itself, as criticism. So, at this point, the following discussion—or detour—on deconstruction imposes itself in the form of a question . . .

II

Is there a difference between deconstruction and deconstructive criticism? Deconstructive criticism has come to mean, typically,

a view of literature derived from Jacques Derrida's theory of writing. . . . Writing . . . is less a vehicle of communication or knowledge than an independent force that renders 'problematic' whatever message we try to get across by means of it. Even the simplest form of writing—a note, say, conveying information—is like the most involuted literary work: self-complicating and indecipherable. A text, to be sure, always seems on the verge of becoming whole, intelligible, and coherent. But the sign we hope will complete or ground it ends up deepening its complexity, functioning less as the text's center or origin than as another turn in its labyrinth. Texts, in short, are heterogeneous: they make, they erase, assertions; they begin and end arbitrarily.\(^\text{17}\)

Although Michael Fischer is antagonistic to deconstruction and, indeed, criticizes Derrida and the so-called Yale School (de Man, Hartman, Bloom, Miller [and some would include Derrida himself]), his characterization is in line with the shared intellectual concerns and promulgations of the most prominent American deconstructors. But Jonathan Arac, in his "Af-
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derword” to The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America, has recently noted:

Derrida began writing as a professional philosopher within a culture where philosophy—the study of a canonized body of texts in the last year of lycée—held a crucial place in the system of humanistic education. American philosophy is preoccupied not with the names of philosophers and the bodies of their texts, but with ‘problems’ and ‘arguments.’ So in crossing over to America, Derrida made his impact more immediately upon literary studies, which is organized by name and corpus. In France, where philosophers still figure largely in public life and consciousness . . . Derrida’s intervention could arouse radical political hopes. In the American academy, however, it has also a conservative effect, like that of Leo Strauss upon American ‘political science.’

Some of the contributors to The Yale Critics raise important questions about American deconstruction and about Derrida’s status within it. Arac himself asks, for example: Is Derrida a Yale Critic? What is the nature of his “influence”—especially in view of the fact that he is so widely influential in translation? (Here, however, I feel obliged to quote Derrida in the French in all those instances where the French texts were available to me. Also, as will become apparent, I feel it is important to quote him extensively in order to convey the specificity and peculiarity of his stance.) Perhaps Arac’s most important question is:

What occurs in the metaphorization of terms and practices as Derrida’s work is transported from French to English, from Europe to America, from philosophy to criticism?

This is a difficult but timely question; the philosophy-criticism nexus has not been, in my opinion, sufficiently thought through. While I cannot adequately take it up here, I do want later to show how, in many respects, the use of the terms deconstructive criticism or deconstructive method reveals a fundamental distortion or misunderstanding of Derrida’s position with regard to the term criticism itself, as well as its historical relationship to reading and writing. For now, let me just say that Derrida’s deconstruction, if anything, shows that the very possibility of both philosophy and criticism rests on extremely insecure foundations. In Positions, for example, he notes:

Don’t you see, what has seemed necessary and urgent to me, in the historical situation which is our own, is a general determination of the conditions for the emergence and the limits of philosophy, of metaphysics, of everything that carries it on [such as literary criticism] and that it carries on. (Pos, 51)

The scope of Derrida’s work makes it possible provisionally to define the dominant conceptual edifice of Western “thought.” Deconstruction, there-
fore, rigorously interrogates and deals strategically with the conceptual system of metaphysics. Derrida again:

In *Of Grammatology*, I simultaneously proposed everything that can be reassembled under the rubric of logocentrism . . . along with the project of deconstruction. Here, there is a powerful historical and systematic unity that must be determined first if one is not to take dross for gold every time that an emergence, rupture, break, mutation, etc. is allegedly delineated. Logocentrism is also, fundamentally, an idealism. It is the matrix of idealism. Idealism is its most direct representation, the most constantly dominant force. And the dismantling of logocentrism is simultaneously—a fortiori—a deconstitution of idealism or spiritualism in all their variants. Really, it is not a question of ‘erasing’ the ‘struggle’ against idealism. (Pos, 51)

The globality of the project obviously creates a multitude of problems for any appropriation whose movement is circumscribed by a telos—to do criticism, to perform critical acts on a “literary” canon. Even Vincent B. Leitch, in (yes) Deconstructive Criticism—a highly sympathetic treatment, i.e., an advanced introduction—is forced to remark at length on the problems historically encountered in the appropriation of deconstruction for such ends:

Historically speaking, deconstruction emerges in our time as a severe critique of and an ‘alternative’ to both phenomenology and structuralism. At the outset Derrida undermines both Husserl and Saussure. American deconstructors, however—many of whom are former phenomenologists—tend to critique only phenomenology and sometimes formalism (New Criticism). . . . American deconstructors largely bypass examinations of structuralism (and of its ‘sign’) since it never really established a significant foothold in America. Thus we find a poststructuralist criticism taking root without benefit of a native structuralism. This movement beyond structuralism occurred primarily on French soil. For Americans, the deconstructive critique is more a general assault on all logocentrism or traditional thinking and less a focused attack on phenomenology, structuralism, or formalism. Thus many American deconstructors tend to start with Derrida and go forward from there, taking his critiques of contending philosophies and literary theories as complete and definitive. Like other postwar criticisms, therefore, American deconstruction tends more and more to show up as a narrow method of practical literary analysis.21

It is becoming increasingly obvious that Derrida’s radical deconstruction has been tamed, because the philosophical conceptual structure of his work has been, for the most part, vastly reduced in the interest of doing so-called practical textual criticism, i.e., it has been instrumentalized; as such, as Rodolphe Gasché’s “Deconstruction as Criticism” shows,22 deconstructive criticism is based on a fundamental misinterpretation of Derrida. Thus deconstruction as criticism is the history of an error whose consequences have not yet been fully explored. But one major consequence of this “mis-
take" is that deconstruction as criticism has hardly grasped how Derrida uses “text" as something akin to a transcendental concept. I note that both Fischer (antagonistic depopulizer) and Leitch (friendly populizer) seem to miss the full implications of text(uality) as a problematic in Derrida. Fischer, as previously cited, seems to view text in a naive empirical fashion. Leitch’s characterization, while suggestive and close to the mark, finally is more characteristic of Yale School practices (note the stress on reading as misreading) and misses or elides the full conceptual import of Derrida’s treatment of textuality:

What are texts? Strings of differential traces. Sequences of floating signifiers. Sets of infiltrated signs dragging along ultimately indecipherable intertextual elements. Sites for the freeplay of grammar, rhetoric, and (illusory) reference. What about the truth of the text? The random flights of signifiers across the textual surface, the disseminations of meaning, offer truth under one condition: that the chaotic processes of textuality be willfully regulated, controlled, or stopped. Truth comes forth in the reifications, the personal pleasures, of reading. Truth is not an entity or property of the text. No text utters its truth; the truth lies elsewhere—in a reading. Constitutionally, reading is misreading. Deconstruction works to deregulate controlled dissemination and celebrate misreading.23

Derrida, and this is especially evident in La dissémination (which, incidentally, Leitch cites as his “authority" for the above quote), pursues the nonempirical notion of text which Mallarmé envisioned and situated in the realm of the transcendental. Derrida develops this and places the text outside the “grasp" of an ontology of the text. Gasché, in “Joining the Text: From Heidegger to Derrida," rigorously interrogates text in Derrida and explains Derrida’s position clearly through the notion of “the textual instance" which escapes and precedes all ontology of the text. All ontologies of the text, whether they determine text in terms of the sensible, the intelligent, or dialectically as form, remain within the horizon of metaphysics and its platonic notion of a mimesis subject to truth. The textual instance, on the contrary, as a mimesis of a mimesis, as a hymen [an undecidable] between mimesis and mimesis, appears no longer contained in the process of truth. Instead, it is the horizon of truth that is inscribed in textual mimesis. Only an act of violence, either arbitrary or conventional, can make the textual mark signify a referent.24

Gasché minutely elaborates this and shows why there can be no phenomenology of the text for Derrida and why the textual instance, which does not refer to itself either, undermines Romantic notions of the “self-referentiality" of the text. The textual instance is not a presence—it is rather a donation: es gibt text. While I cannot retrace how the text question in Derrida repeats a movement that is very similar to Heidegger’s elaboration of Being, I would
like to cite Gasché's remarks on this similarity, for it opens up problems for research which so far "literary deconstruction" has been either oblivious to or reluctant to consider:

Derrida's notion of text does not refer to the colloquial understanding of the text as a sensible and palpable corpus to be encountered in empirical experience. It also leaves little doubt that Derrida's notion of text cannot be equated with either an intelligible or ideal definition (the text as the entire sum of all the connections between the differential features of the linguistic signs that form a text) or with a dialectical concept according to which the text as 'form' would sublate both its sensible and intelligible components. On the contrary, like the notion of Being, the notion of the text, as it is employed by Derrida, is rather the result of a transcendental experience following the systematic bracketing of all the regions of natural (and even eidetic) experience. Not having been obtained through a factual or regional experience, and, thus, having little in common with the object of linguistic or literary studies, the notion of text in Derrida is a sort of transcendental concept.5

Gasché's intervention, which I have barely skimmed over here, provocatively emphasizes that question even more: What happens between European philosophy and American criticism? Derrida, let it be noted, has engaged in a sustained reflection on Saussure and Heidegger and Nietzsche and Husserl and Freud and Hegel and Rousseau and Aristotle and Plato and. . . . To reiterate: It is evident that the concepts which constitute this structure have not been sufficiently or rigorously enough interrogated. This is understandable, given the scope of Derrida's oeuvre. The interrogation will entail an immense labor, for even his relationship to Heidegger's metaphysics alone is a large and difficult problem area, as he himself admits. But, and this has hardly been noticed, his writings are also a complex crossing through European culture and philosophy to the problematics of little-known Hebraic interpretive practices and traditions (one only need read carefully the two essays, in L'Écriture et la différence, which deal with Edmond Jabès and the longest essay in the volume on Emmanuel Levinas).

In a very real sense, deconstructive criticism has become the other side of the coin of certain privileged New Critical positions—particularly when it comes to lyric theory.26 It is beyond question that all of the Yale Critics were thinking of some version of New Criticism as they received or appropriated Derrida for their differing deconstructive purposes. Derrida was not; indeed, his has been a concerted effort to break with, and break out of, the ordinary confines of theoretical and critical discourses. And while he has evinced a deep interest in avant-garde literary texts, he has done so in the interest of a definition of literary criticism and aesthetics:

Yes, it is incontestable that certain texts classed as 'literary' have seemed to me to operate breaches or infractions at the most advanced points. Artaud,
Bataille, Mallarmé, Sollers. Why? At least for the reason that induces us to suspect the denomination 'literature,' and which subjects the concept to belles-lettres, to the arts, to poetry, to rhetoric, and to philosophy. These texts operate, in their very movement, the demonstration and practical deconstruction of the representation of what was done with literature, it being well understood that long before these 'modern' texts a certain 'literary' practice was able to operate against this model, against this representation. But it is on the basis of these last texts, on the basis of the general configuration to be remarked in them, that one can best reread, without retrospective teleology, the law of the previous fissures. (Pos, 69)

Unlike the Yale Romantics, Derrida is interested in postmodern figures (and textual problematics) and, of course, the towering 19th-century figure, Mallarmé. Their writings resist the theoretical/critical conceptuality that attempts to "comprehend them, whether directly, or whether through categories derived from this philosophical fund, the categories of aesthetics, rhetoric, or traditional criticism" (Pos, 69). Derrida is most emphatic in saying that his writings "belong neither to the 'philosophical' register nor to the 'literary' register" (Pos, 71). All the categories that contribute to, or are derived from, the term literature are therefore questioned.27

It would seem, then, that we have in America a critical community largely defined by New Criticism receiving Derrida. One major result has been that criticism "sets going a new vocabulary and new paths of reading that have been greatly effective, even while the Yale Critics have not allowed us to forget the terms of their predecessors, but have preserved those terms as the necessary counterpoint to their new terms."28 So perhaps deconstructive criticism has become a method which, unlike Derrida's work, practices criticism as usual and has merely changed the analytical terms, without bothering to interrogate rigorously enough its own process of conceptual appropriation.

But more telling than the indictments of American deconstruction as contained, for instance, in The Yale Critics are Derrida's remarks on the necessity of deconstruction (which, indeed, make Arac's concluding remarks sound naively nostalgic for a criticism forever more):

Selon la conséquence de sa logique, elle s'attaque non seulement à l'édification interne, à la fois sémantique et formelle, des philosophèmes, mais à ce qu'on lui assignerait à tort comme son logement externe, ses conditions d'exercice extrinsèques: les formes historiques de sa pédagogie, les structures sociales, économiques ou politiques de cette institution pédagogique. C'est parce qu'elle touche à des structures solides, à des institutions 'matérales,' et non seulement à des discours ou à des représentations signifiantes, que la déconstruction se distingue toujours d'une analyse ou d'une 'critique.' Et pour être pertinente, elle travaille, le plus strictement possible, en ce lieu où l'agencement dit 'interne' du philosophique s'articule de façon nécessaire (in-
terne et externe) avec les conditions et les formes institutionnelles de l'enseignement. (VenP, 23–24)

Criticism, indeed; critique, indeed. Here is not the place for taking this up, but Derrida’s parergon does seem to indicate a certain poverty in some appropriations of deconstruction. It should be remembered, however, that Heidegger’s destruction and Derrida’s deconstruction dismantle several long-standing narratives or myths constructed in and by criticism. For example, we have all heard the one about the human mind and the world: that they have the same or a similar structure. This is an empowering myth of Western criticism(s), for it empowers the critical claim that human beings can, because of this selfsame structure, discern the way the world actually is (all the while forgetting the problem of actualitas and of the is). Heidegger’s long and painstaking thought on “Das kleine Wort ‘ist,’ das überall in unserer Sprache spricht” (ID, 142) should, if nothing else, open up a possibility for a facing-up to the onto-theo-logic relationship long established between the languages of metaphysical thinking and krinein’s devolution—criticism. This is a major difficulty which Derrida has faced, and that is why he has proceeded with great care and circumspection, and has, therefore, not simply recast the language of his thought into a “newer” methodology or into a deconstructive criticism. His project is highly informed by Heidegger’s thought on onto-theo-logy: that is, the belief that the “real” is or can be present, is or can be presented, or manifests its presence in a system or systems of correspondence, which can be named adequation—namely, the adequate matching of “reality” by the developing conceptual or categorical distinctions of so-called critical thought.

Accordingly, deconstruction at one level takes up l’écriture (issues of reading/writing) and l’écriture as an undecidable. It calls into play—let us say, it produces—undecidables, and in the process (the “movement” of reading/writing) meticulously and insistently questions the values of presence, sign, and truth. In Derrida’s writings/readings, there are easily over thirty undecidables—for example, the hymen, the supplement, the pharmakos, the trace, dissemination, spacing, border, and iterability. Différance, the trace, dissemination, and the supplement seem to be the most often appropriated terms of deconstruction. Still, let me note that in many respects they “stand for,” or substitute for, différance, but they are not synonymous with each other—they are all different—and just like différance they must remain distinct.

In Derrida’s writings, undecidables grow specifically out of his deconstruction of very particular works. Also, for him the terms are provisional and replaceable. It is worth remarking that, in the course of their appropriation by literary criticism, these terms have tended to lose their provisional status, and are seen by some as fundamental to the deconstructive method;
indeed, some of them have been universalized. The classic gesture of decon-
struction, then, is undecidability. Undecidables render insecure the order
and stability of texts and textual traditions. By now this is well known, and
the following remarks should merely serve as “signposts” for the comments
which will ensue. I shall only treat here, as a kind of necessary pedagogy:
(1) the supplement, (2) dissemination, (3) the trace, and (4) différance.

(1) The supplement: Derrida is confident that “l’écriture nous appa-
raîtra de plus en plus comme un autre nom de cette structure de supple-
mentarité” (Gramm, 348). Supplementarity splits and constructs: writing/
reading/writing again, as an endless chain of signification. The supplement
functions to reveal how signs appear to add meaning to previous signs, and
thus supplement the meaning of texts. Of importance here is the fact that
the need for supplementarity emphasizes the essential lack (absence) in
previous signs or texts. Signs seem to make up this lack, but that is not
possible since every sign is likewise inadequate: each sign or text actually
depends on more supplements, which in turn are also deficient. In this way,
deconstruction invokes a hardly noticeable structure—the always already
structure—whose function is to insert the supplement into any kind of
ensemble. Therefore, to write on or about anything is to rely on the supple-
ment. Writing itself is supplemental, as addition to, or substitution for,
previous writing. Hence, according to Derrida:

La supplémentarité rend donc possible tout ce qui fait le propre de l’homme;
la parole, la société, la passion, etc. Mais qu’est-ce que ce propre de l’homme?
D’une part, il est ce dont il faut penser la possibilité avant l’homme et hors de
lui. L’homme se laisse annoncer à lui-même depuis la supplémentarité qui
n’est donc pas un attribut, accidentel ou essentiel, de l’homme. Car d’autre
part, la supplémentarité qui n’est rien, ni une présence ni une absence, n’est ni
une substance ni une essence de l’homme. Elle est précisément le jeu de la
présence et de l’absence, l’ouverture de ce jeu qu’aucun concept de la
métaphysique ou de l’ontologie ne peut comprendre. C’est pourquoi ce propre
de l’homme n’est pas le propre de l’homme: il est la dislocation même du
propre en général, l’impossibilité—et donc le désir—de la proximité à soi;
l’impossibilité et donc le désir de la présence pure. (Gramm, 347)

Supplementarity is, therefore, a necessary (pre)condition of the human-all-
too-human. It inscribes the human condition. The power of supple-
mentarity constitutes what “man” is. Everything, indeed, is as a possibility
of supplementarity. Obviously, it is “tied” to difference and is an impera-
tive for articulation of any kind which itself is différance.

The supplement is important with regard to the practice of citation or
iterability. Iterability is based on the supposition that a minimal remainder
of writing is always there, so that we can identify the selfsame in order to
repeat it and be able to identify it even as we alter it and its context. Both
identity and difference make up the structure of iterability. It is this very discrepancy of a difference that helps to constitute iteration. Hence, repetition is the “inscription” of temporality upon that which seems timeless—the identity of meaning. This has implications for intertextuality and dissemination, since each

sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written... can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. (Linc, 190)

Obviously, (re)citation is an open-ended process; any text can be quoted in different places and at different times. This shows that texts are capable of both being re-marked and re-marking. In this way, textual materials are reiterated, de-contextualized (and re-contextualized)—basically empowered to alter and create innumerable new contextual meanings. Iterability is an independent activity; free of author(ship) and intention; as such, it somehow “inaugurates” difference and is indispensable to the very process of writing itself. There is a convergence here with the notion of intertextuality: every word we use has always already been used and is thus somehow intertextual (the very possibility of the dictionary depends on this). The text, any text anywhere and at any time, is always already infiltrated by prior texts, and writing, endlessly involved in dissemination.

(2) Through dissemination (which he sometimes renders as dissemen-
ation), Derrida counters the use of the dialectic as an infinite producer of “new” meanings. The dialectic is governed by the law of three (thesis, antithesis, synthesis, or position, negation, negation of the negation) and is, as such, firmly established in onto-theology. Dissemination can be thought of as a displacement of

the three of onto-theology along the angle of a certain re-employment. A crisis of versus: these marks can no longer be summed up or ‘decided’ according to the two of binary opposition, nor sublated into the three of speculative dialectic (for example, ‘différance,’ ‘gramme,’ ‘supplement,’ ‘hymen,’ ‘mark-march-margin,’ and several others; since the movement of these marks transmits itself to all writing and therefore cannot be enclosed with any finite taxonomy, still less in any lexicon as such), they destroy the trinitary horizon. Destroy it textually: these are marks of dissemination (and not of polysemy) because they cannot at any point be pinned down by the concept or by the holder of a signified. They ‘add’ to it the more or the less of a fourth term. (Sec, 185)

The possibility of a fourth moment in the dialectic would not only disrupt but destroy the entire logic of the dialectic; moreover, it might then become possible to inscribe a fifth (and so on) moment, which could result in the inauguration of an endless writing seminarium, after Derrida The
Fourth. Yet nothing new could be added after the fourth moment of deconstruction—other than epigonal seriality, that is.

(3) The trace signifies likeness in difference, “counterfeiting”; it, like all undecidables, is and yet is not an inscription, a mark (re-mark) left by all writings. Texts, entire texts as signs, simply trace other tracks, and the origin(al) is always already absent:

La trace n’étant pas une présence mais le simulacre d’une présence qui se disloque, se déplace, se renvoie, n’a proprement pas lieu, l’effacement appartient à sa structure. Non seulement l’effacement qui doit toujours pouvoir la surprendre, faute de quoi elle ne serait pas trace mais indestructible et monumentale substance, mais l’effacement qui la constitue d’entrée de jeu en trace, qui l’installe en changement de lieu et la fait disparaître dans son apparition, sortir de soi en sa position. L’effacement de la trace précoce (die frühe Spur) de la différence est donc ‘le même’ que son tracement dans le texte métaphysique. Celui-ci doit avoir gardé la marque de ce qu’il a perdu ou réservé mis de côté. Le paradoxe d’une telle structure, c’est dans le langage de la métaphysique, cette inversion du concept métaphysique qui produit l’effet suivant: le présent devient le signe du signe, la trace de la trace. Il n’est plus ce à quoi en dernière instance renvoie tout renvoi. Il devient une fonction dans une structure de renvoi généralisé. Il est trace et trace de l’effacement de la trace. (Marges, 25)

Thus, at any time, what is being written or read must be (re)viewed with circumspection, must be taken as otherness, since this is how it is with writing, for time is always, in deconstruction, inscribed in discourses. Writing (another name for language) reminds us that it is always a playing out of presence and absence. The game of language asserts meanings that writing itself has no title to, meanings which can be neither owned nor controlled. Its law is simulation and displacement.

(4) Finally, the neographism différance: a sign without literality—neither in word nor in concept. Derrida notes, in this important citation, the startling implications:

Qu’il n’y ait pas, à ce point, d’essence propre de la différence, cela implique qu’il n’y ait ni être ni vérité du jeu de l’écriture en tant qu’il engage la différence. Pour nous, la différence reste un nom métaphysique et tous les noms qu’elle reçoit dans notre langue sont encore, en tant que noms, métaphysiques. En particulier quand ils disent la détermination de la différence en différence de la présence au présent (Anwesen/Anwesend) mais surtout, et déjà, de la façon la plus générale, quand ils disent la détermination de la différence en différence de l’être à l’étant.

Plus ‘vieille’ que l’être lui-même, une telle différence n’a aucun nom dans notre langue. Mais nous ‘savons déjà’ que, si elle est innommable, ce n’est pas par provision, parce que notre langue n’a pas encore trouvé ou reçu ce nom, ou parce qu’il faudrait le chercher dans une autre langue, hors du système fini
de la notre. C'est parce qu'il n'y a pas même celui d'essence ou d'être, pas même celui de 'différance' qui n'est pas un nom, qui n'est pas une unité nominale pure et se disloque sans cesse dans une chaîne de substitutions différantes. (Marges, 27–28)

**Différance**, the un-nameable, through delay and deferral, does not name but makes possible the effects of naming. It functions by the “distance” of *time* as it separates “things” and also nominates and denominates that *space* which intervenes to effect separation, to break up identity, making “entities” differ from one another. An “entity” is only as it differs or defers. . . . Différance cannot, therefore, *itself* be an origin or first principle of any system, and as such insures that there can be no unique word, no One. There is only deferral and indifference, time/space, delay and non-identity. At this point, let me defer further remarks on différance to give undecidability a broader articulation.

Undecidability emerges out of the process of textual re-marking itself. Usually, we think of the graphic mark as a mark for a *present referent*. In the operations of undecidability, however, this mark is “doubled”—remarked—and it refers neither to itself nor to a *present* referent but to a mark similar to it: always *an-other* mark. There cannot be, therefore, the binary: the original (source, truth, etc.) / and the copy (imitation, fiction, etc.). Undecidables are ultimately re-marks of duplication *sans* identity. They escape and precede, as Derrida says of the supplement, any ontology of the text.

Derrida’s notion of undecidability is related to the work of Gédel on mathematics and to Heidegger’s preoccupation with *logos*, *krinein*, *hermenia*, and *Austrag* (difference) in relation to the Greek *diaphora*.

First Gédel. The problem addressed is: Can we assume that a set of axioms can be developed which gives us a completely meaningful and truthful account of something, and can we assume one foundation or ground for the set? If the answer is yes, then a system of knowledge, based either (1) on a formal logic or (2) on a founding category, would give us both a complete and absolute system of knowledge. Such thinking presupposes: (1) transcendence, such as a transcendental consciousness productive of the logical forms of the description of the system itself—without itself being in any way part of the system; or (2) a formal category of such generality that it could encompass everything in the system, and while it would itself not be part of the system, it would require that it be referred to by everything in the system for the truth/meaning of anything in the system of knowledge. Both (1) and (2) assume a metalevel which would logically close off any “attempt” at adding to the system. Such a system would have no limits, yet would be thought to be *in-closed*, for it could have no *outside*. Formal systems thus impose a transcendental position that is not merely
one item of the logic. It is obvious that an outside to the entire series of the paradigm (in-closed) must be assumed. If not, the axiomatic system would only be part of whatever is being described formally. How can a system be complete? The formal logic requires a metalevel not encompassed by the field formalized by the system. This metalevel can never be accounted for. Metalevels here equal infinite regress. Any complex system can only be complete if a metalevel is left intact, or infinitely regressed; yet this is precisely what simultaneously makes the system incomplete.

Gödel calls this undecidability, for the system is able to generate elements which belong and do not belong: proof of both is possible. Gödel proves that cases in an axiomatic system can be derived from the axioms themselves—cases in which it is impossible to determine whether the element in question is or is not part of the system. The paradox is that undecidables cannot be suppressed, for logical systematic "completion" is either a deferral or a process of supplementation. Derrida enlists this principle to destabilize the notion of truth or ground in philosophy.

I broach undecidability through a detour of "lyric" poetry—

_Siete_

son los temas fundamentales de la poesía lírica
en primer lugar el pubis de la doncella
luego la luna llena que es el pubis del cielo
los bosquecillos abarrotados de pájaros
el crepúsculo que parece una tarjeta postal
el instrumento musical llamado violin
y la maravilla absoluta que es un racimo de uvas.

_(Seven_

the basic themes of lyric poetry are seven
the first one is the pubis of a maiden
then the full moon the pubis of the sky
a small stand of trees bowed down with birds
a sunset like a picture post card
the musical instrument they call a violin
and the absolute marvel of a bunch of grapes._)

"Siete" conjures up the number 7 as a fundamental authority for its systematic (thematic) closure.

Or, as in the haiku of Rippo, the closure is marked by

Three lovely things . . .
Moonlight . . . cherry blossoms . . .
And now . . .
The untrodden snow.
Of interest in the translation is the temporal designation, the “now” of the third theme. But I quickly note that it is a futile attempt at presencing, for the now is inscribed in an epochal-ontological frame that is always before the reading. As such, it is monumental, like an inscription on a grave: it and the reader are con-figured, and the poet’s effort at “voicing” in the now can only be a perpetual prosopopoeia, and so the poet’s “voice” is effaced and the snow is a nowhere whiteness, a blanche trace.

Or in Horace:

Musa dedit fidibus divos puerosque deorum
et pugilem victorem et equum certamine primum
et iuvenum curas et libra vina referre.32

The thematic closure here is indicated by (1) gods and their children, (2) the triumphant boxer, (3) the sufferings of young lovers, (4) and the solace of wine. And Horace quickly adds that if he is not able or willing to preserve the distinct traits of the several genres, he should not be saluted as a poet:

Discriptas sevare vices operumque colores
cur ego ni nequeo ignoroque poeta salutor?

These poems announce what is proper to the lyric. They offer a knowledge of the proper: that is, they authorize a decorum. Therefore, in order to decide what belongs in the lyric as a genre—or its modes—we should have to know thematically what belongs to it and what does not. Could the list be endless? Perhaps, but genre—and each text—itself demands a categorical limit. The numerical imperative—Siete son—establishes fundamentally a limit of inclusion. It plays upon the assumed completeness of any classificatory system. But the limit for inclusion of the basic themes is also structured by exclusion, that is, elements outside the field of “Siete” are necessary to establish its inclusiveness. This appears to be a self-evident proposition—not just anything or everything can belong to the genre of lyric poetry. The word genre draws limits. Derrida, in the “Law of Genre,” writes:

. . . when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: ‘Do,’ ‘Do not’ says ‘genre,’ the word ‘genre,’ the figure, the voice or the law of genre. And this can be said of genre in all genres. (Log, 56)

“Siete” marks membership through a thematic boundary graphically marked as seven, its sign of lyric nomination. Seven as enumeration of theme is a trait, therefore, upon which we are forced to rely in this textual instance, in order to say that “Siete,” too, corresponds to the genre of the lyric. Its code of seven allows us to decide class membership. This code should accordingly provide us with “an identifiable trait which is identical
to itself, authorizing us to determine . . . whether a given text belongs to
this genre or perhaps to that genre” (Log, 56). The problem is, however,
that its distinctive trait is supplementary, for it does not itself properly
belong to the class in question. As it re-marks belonging, it per se does not
belong. Its re-mark must belong without belonging, and so, in its generic
designation, it simply cannot belong to the lyric corpus. Indeed, the design-
nation lyric poem/poetry itself cannot take part in what it names. It can
only assemble the corpus (include and enclose) and simultaneously keep
closure at bay. “Siete” calls attention to this undecidable trait of participa-
tion. It makes the lyric genre its mark and in the process demarcates itself.
“Siete” writes the axiom of nonfulfillment which “enfolds within itself the
condition for the possibility and the impossibility of taxonomy” (Log, 65).
It forces upon us a bewildering thought: namely, that any text cannot
belong to no genre. It cannot “be” without or less a genre. There is no
genre-less text.

In “Siete,” the issues of the figure of genre and its graphics supplement
what has just been traversed. The figure in “Siete” is that of synecdoche.
“Siete” is a synodos (syn means together and hodos—the “h,” aspiration, is
lost—means road), a convention (genre gathers). Each verse at once gath-
ers and disseminates, with the first “line” gathering them all. Lines 2
through 7 inscribe the gathering, which we are surprised to learn equals
only six. The “nameless” seven/th is absent; it is a naming that does not
name—its image is neither absent nor present. “Siete,” as word, here
mocks what is convened under its power to invoke—that which supple-
ments it, as “Siete,” itself starkly represents nothing, conforms to no prior
referent: it is both inside and outside, on the margins in its refusal to re-
present.

The graphic mark (here seven) signals re-presentation. The problem is
that what is presented is itself the representation of nonpresence. This is
the difference or alterity of “Siete.” It is important to recall that the
“poem” is (typo)graphical. “Siete” is flatly on the page. Elsewhere, Parra
writes:

El deber del poeta
Consiste en superar la página en blanco
Dudo que eso sea posible.

(The poet’s duty is this
To improve the blank page
I doubt if it’s possible.)

The graphic marks, the signs rotating around “Siete,” suggest an ideal, that
is, essential, meaning (for the lyric genre as a whole). Its writing “desires”
to convene all the themes of the lyric in a meaningful way. Yet as it
convenes in order to unify, it offers itself transcendence, an escape out of its fragmented graphicness. Obviously, the dark material signifiers on the whiteness of the page are a necessary condition for the production of an ideal truth; the rub is that the marks themselves are simply leftovers, left behind in time and space, language as writing falling away from itself. Graphically, “Siete” is without “meaning,” for what is left behind to improve the página en blanco, as “Siete,” denies sublation into meaning.

Writing, accordingly, is indebted to the blankness of the page; it is but a trace on blankness. But of what? We must defer, for what is, is the metaphysical question par excellence. In this connection, Derrida notes:

Qu’est-ce qui diffère? Qui diffère? Qu’est-ce que la différence?
Si nous répondions à ces questions avant même de les interroger comme questions, avant même de les retourner et d’en suspecter la forme, jusque dans ce qu’elles semblent avoir de plus naturel et de plus nécessaire, nous retomberions déjà en deçà de ce que nous venons de dégager. Si nous acceptions en effet la forme de la question, en son sens et en sa syntaxe (‘qu’est-ce que’ ‘qu’est-ce qui,’ ‘qui est-ce qui’ . . .), il faudrait admettre que la différence est dérivée, survenue, maîtrisée et commandée à partir du point d’un étant-présent, celui-ci pouvant être quelque chose, une forme, un état, un pouvoir dans le monde, auxquels on pourra donner toutes sortes de noms, un quoï, ou un étant-présent comme sujet, un qui. Dans ce dernier cas notamment, on admettrait implicitement que cet étant-présent, par exemple comme étant-présent à soi, comme conscience, en viendrait éventuellement à différer: soit à retarder et à détourner l’accomplissement d’un ‘besoin’ ou d’un ‘désire,’ soit à différer de soi. Mais, dans aucun de ces cas, un tel étant-présent ne serait ‘constitué’ par cette différence. (Marges, 15–16)

Superar la página en blanco. Is this somehow a mimesis of the event of writing? If so, nothing has occurred, only a graphic darkness, re-marking a space(ing) as nothing, blankness. Writing/dissimulation—the writer/writing merely imitates imitation, produces a copy of a copy, and so mimesis as the theory that the “real” can be grasped or understood by being re-created or re-ordered through writing itself (through metaphorization) is deferred. Mimesis, therefore, cannot be, as in Plato, subjected to a horizon of truth. Yet writing as re-mark cannot simply abolish its differential structure.

Such is writing as undecidability. It is not so much an instrument of knowledge or communication as it is a force of joyful disruption. Texts write and simultaneously erase what they assert, in the same blinking of an eye (to use a figure Derrida takes from Nietzsche). They end or begin on the margins, arbitrarily. The fourfold is always blank.

Let us now approach Heidegger’s undecidability through the problem of reading. At this point, it is important to recall that deconstruction extends structuralist and phenomenological modes of close reading: only through such modes can it discover the closure of traditional critical modes and
perhaps initiate a breakdown in them. At the level of "interpretation," deconstruction makes two hermeneutical gestures: the first gesture, through conventional means, "discovers" the stable meanings of texts; the second gesture undermines textual stability by coaxing undecidables from within the traditions of specific textual fields. Apropos of the first gesture, Derrida writes:

Faute de la reconnaître et de respecter toutes ses exigences classiques, ce qui n'est pas facile et requiert tous les instruments de la critique traditionnelle, la production critique risquerait de se faire dans n'importe quel sens et s'autoriser à dire à peu près n'importe quoi. Mais cet indispensable garde-fou n'a jamais fait que protéger, il n'a jamais ouvert une lecture. (Gramm, 227)

The first gesture is always indispensable. The second gesture is not satisfied with the first which closes a reading:

Et pourtant, si la lecture ne doit pas se contenter de redoubler le texte, elle ne peut légitimement transgresser le texte vers autre chose que lui, vers un référent (réalité métaphysique, historique, psycho-biographique, etc.) ou vers un signifié hors texte dont le contenu pourrait avoir lieu, aurait pu avoir lieu hors de la langue, c'est-à-dire, au sens que nous donnons ici à ce mot, hors de l'écriture en général . . . Il n'y a pas de hors-texte. (Gramm, 227)

Two things emerge: (1) Deconstruction reveals and questions the repetition (of texts) by traditional critical modes, and (2) it refuses to violate the text (as do conventional modes) by linking it to a signified outside the text.

Does this mean that the undecidable reading gesture stems from a semantic richness—New Critical ambiguity—of certain texts? According to Derrida, this is not the case: "Cette point s'avance selon l'excès irréductible du syntaxique sur le sémantique" (Diss, 250). This applies to all undecidables, for they have in reading "une valeur double, contradictoire, indécidable qui tient toujours à leur syntaxe, qu'elle soit en quelque sorte 'intérieure,' articulant et combinant sous le même joug, uph'en, deux significations incompatibles, ou qu'elle soit 'extérieure,' dépendant du code dans lequel on fait travailler le mot. Mais la composition ou décomposition syntaxique d'un signe rend caduque cette alternative de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur" (Diss, 250; my emphasis). Conventional modes of reading are violent in making such a mark signify a referent. Thus, for deconstruction reading is neither a dialectical process of elimination that finally renders a pure "reason," nor is it a hermeneutics which will eventually render the truth or the plenitude of the meaning of the texts it "reads." Dissemination rather than polysemic unity offers itself in this way.

Now Heidegger. I approach with circumspection here, by the posing of a question that looks back to the foregoing comments. Specifically: What, after all, is critical about deconstruction? How is it critical reading? Derrida

Deconstruction and the Lyric
notes that criticism is "liée, comme son nom l’indique, à la possibilité du décidable, au krinein" (Diss, 267). So we must again proceed along the axis of un/decidability. Heidegger asks two important questions, Was heißt Denken? and Was heißt Lesen? The Was heißt can be translated as What is called . . . ? or as What calls forth . . . ? In either case, the question calls for a reflection on the nature of language in its relation to thinking and Being, or reading and Being. Language for Heidegger is a "sphere" in which we can dwell aright (or not) and make clear to ourselves who we are. With regard to reading, he is concerned with the way language relates to reading and its response to the call of . . . reading, which is simply a gathering (die Sammlung). But gathered for or to what? Again, simply to what is written. Reading as gatheredness always already claims our essence. Reading is interpretation. So to read is to interpret and to name how we are (with being): that is to say, it is a central activity for Dasein. Logos (Rede) is the openness of Dasein; as such, it is always only a fundamental possibility of discursivity or language. Fundamentally, being-in-the-world is structured by Rede, but the function of language—and this is very important—is not to render externally what is internal, for Dasein, rather than being a pure ipseity, is essentially outside of it/the/self. Language as possibility simply affirms this. Logos is a process of making manifest (SZ, 148–60). As an existential, logos must be taken to mean the power to let be seen what comprehension pro-jects—its two possible modes are (1) keeping silent (Schweigen) and (2) attending (Hören). This begs for the linkage logos-hermeneia-krinein, which essentially points to the process of differentiating.

How is krinein implicated? Heidegger takes the word in a primordial sense and understands by it the cutting off of entities from other things by setting the entity within its limits. Here, limit must be taken not as a point where something ceases or ends, but rather as one where the entity begins to be what it is (EM, 46; SvG, 125). He also takes it to mean

the separating out of the proteron from the hysteron, the prior from the posterior . . . . The posterior is the entity as trace; and the prior is not some first origin but the act of legein itself, the non-teleological movement of the referring of traces. Krinein, Heidegger says, means 'the “critical” ability for differentiating [Unterscheidung] which in turn is always a deciding [Entscheidung: resolve].’ Krinein does not mean making a decision which settles matters by choosing between binary opposites.*4

Entscheidung, in the movement of reading, places us within difference, in differentiating. Interpretation, then, is not critical judgment. It is a gathering encounter with what is written. What is written cannot be viewed as an object for a subject, still less as an intersubjective companion. (Derrida's remarks on [what is] différance, previously cited, are of particular pertinence here.) The gathering is a “forgetting,” or letting go, of such relation-
ships. The text, or language, has an "epochal" priority over the reader at all times and, as such, it is what gathers the reader into language. Blanchot articulates this view most clearly:

_...la lecture ne fait rien, n'ajoute rien; elle laisse être ce qui est; elle est liberté, non pas liberté qui donne l'être ou le saisit, mais liberté qui accueille, consent, dit oui, ne peut que dire oui et, dans l'espace ouvert par ce oui, laisse s'affirmer la décision bouleversante de l'œuvre, l'affirmation qu'elle est—et rien de plus._  

Authentic reading lets the work be, or hears and so interprets it, that is, understands it. Because of the ontological priority of the work, reading displaces the subject or, indeed, is the displaced subject. The temporal aspect is central here. To read (as described above) is to be metaphysical, but in a peculiar way. Reading as call is incapable of referring anything to presence in Heidegger's view; referral is to non-presence. In Derrida's notion of the trace, there is a referral of "things" as traces of what is not present.

Deconstruction, too, eschews the subject-object paradigm. It refuses to assume an "external" vantage point: _il n'y a pas de hors-texte_. Reading/writing is a chain of movement without a telos—it is open-ended—for language cannot be mastered; the effects of a writing are uncontrollable, and the chain of endless referrals also subverts any Aufhebung that would retard the trace, "tame" it, in the interest of truth or meaning. Any identity of (decidable) meaning outside, as origin or goal, is not available. Reading, in a sense, is a tracing of the trace—but the trace of what? The question remains undecided: _Was heißt Lesen?_ Reading is a provisional name for writing or, vice versa, for the movement of differentiation.

Derrida, in his deconstruction of binary oppositions, is involved in a similar notion of "criticism." "Critical reading" can hardly settle the matter of what a thing is. The movement of reading/writing is a dislocation that never reaches an arché or a telos. The trace, in its way, is also a supplement, but only as effacement, for it can never be, can never come to repose in the plenitude of (ideal, pure) meaning. To read "critically" here means to produce or enact undecidability. Derrida's writings require that we grasp and question the principles, or better laws, that structure reading itself. Reading is fraught with problems; reading is a problem, for it is dictated to by the law(s) of a vast metaphysical system, laws that regulate the normative "reproductive" performance of texts. Derrida's strategies require, therefore, "que la lecture échappe, au moins par son axe, aux catégories classiques de l'histoire: de l'histoire des idées, certes, et de l'histoire de la littérature, mais peut-être avant tout de l'histoire de la philosophie" (Gramm, 7).

Reading freeing itself from . . . requires that one rethink the nexus
writing-reading-critique. The strategy of this “freeing” is clearly a questioning, of the normative laws of criticism, that is, of its entire heritage and, as writing, its self-authorization. And the vast economy of différance (which must itself be read) is essential to this strategy. The problem here is that différance inscribes an encouraging of or for criticism and simultaneously bans it. Derrida’s comments on the a of différance and on the term itself must be attended to in order to grasp the magnitude of the problem:

You have noticed that this a is written or read, but cannot be heard. And first off I insist upon the fact that any discourse—for example, ours, at this moment—on this alteration, this graphic and grammatical aggression, implies an irreducible reference to the mute intervention of a written sign. The present participle of the verb différer, on which this noun is modeled, ties together a configuration of concepts I hold to be systematic and irreducible, each one of which intervenes, or rather is accentuated, at a decisive moment of the work. First, différance refers to the (active and passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving. In this sense, différance is not preceded by the originary and indivisible unity of a present possibility that I could reserve, like an expenditure that I would put off calculatedly or for reasons of economy. What defers presence, on the contrary, is the very basis on which presence is announced or desired in what represents it, its sign, its trace . . . (Pos, 8)

We are forced to conclude— provisionally, of course—that the interventions of, by, and through the conceptual configuration which deconstruction demands, lead to an impossibility—namely, that we somehow turn to, and simultaneously turn our backs on, criticism. Yet this is the “source” of all of its possibilities.

Derrida notes, for instance:

. . . mais la déconstruction n’est pas une opération critique, le critique est son objet; la déconstruction porte toujours, à un moment ou à un autre, sur la confiance faite à l’instance critique, critico-théorique c’est-à-dire décidante, à la possibilité ultime du décidable; la déconstruction est déconstruction de la dogmatique critique . . . (Dia, 103)

Does deconstruction, with regard to critical inquiry, “defer” synthesis in the interest of diairesis? And does it in this way, through differentiating, decide, or is it forced ultimately to turn upon itself and “break” itself up? This is a difficult question, but let us attempt an answer, albeit a rather sketchy one. We must recall that there “is no economy without différance” (Pos, 9), and so it is productive of le supplément d’origine, which in turn “n’est ni une présence ni un absence. Aucune ontologie ne peut en penser l’opération” (Gramm, 442). Accordingly, it must be beyond categorization and representation (every “thing” is always already a supplement, including the supplement), and since it escapes all ontologies, all we can point to
is endless reiteration of the dissimulation of all that usually constitutes critique. Deconstructive discourse, *différance* (productive erasing), is inscribed in a dispersive gathering. Such a discourse is by definition insubstantial: simulacrum, trace, as that which is, dissimulation itself. Dissimulation, indeed, names criticism, textuality. The "critical" strategies of deconstruction cannot reach a final verdict, cannot defeat opposing textual forces, for the economy of *différance* is that of the undecidable which prohibits a dialogue with (the terms of) criticism even as it plays with them: *diairein* and *dia-hairein*, a splitting and taking, a (re)doubling.

**III**

Derrida's project in general deals with the meaning of being as *presence*. The implications for *écriture* are vast. Here I wish to specify how logophonocentrism and the theory of the lyric voice are inscribed in the matrix of presence. I intend to show how the problem is "historically determined," and how it is related to the other subdeterminations that also dépendent de cette forme générale et qui organisent en elle leur système et leur enchaînement historial (présence de la chose au regard comme *eidos*, présence comme substance/essence/maintenant ou de l'instant [*nun*], présence à soi du cogito, conscience, subjectivité, co-présence de l'autre et de soi, intersubjectivité comme phénomène intentionnel de l'ego, etc.). Le logocentrisme serait donc solidaire de la détermination de l'être de l'étant comme présence. (Gramm, 23)

Derrida's scheme points to the devolution of Western metaphysics as thought by Nietzsche and Heidegger. The writings of these three are complexly involved in the "deconstruction" of what we can indicate as the Platonism of the modern world-historical situation. Each questions the metaphysical bias which favors presence, and each in his own way shows how this bias is embedded in Western attitudes toward language. I shall focus on those writings by Derrida that reveal how the priority of speech over *écriture* reinforces this Platonism. Phonocentrism as self-heard—or over-heard—speech is a cornerstone of many important positions on lyric theory. This critical tradition, simply put, has bestowed ontological and epistemological priority upon the spoken voice, in order, among other reasons, to affirm various notions of subjectivity and the self-assured certitude of consciousness.

W. R. Johnson, in *The Idea of Lyric*, notes:

Plato . . . fastened on problems that are central to any discussion of lyric genre: the primacy of the object and the agent of mimesis, of story and of *lyric voice*, in discussions of lyric as a genre.36
Indeed Plato establishes the Western triad—drama, lyric, and epic—on the axis of the voice:

There is one kind of poetry and fable which entirely consists of imitation: this is tragedy and comedy, and there's another kind consisting of the poet's own report—you find this particularly in dithyrambs; while the mixture of the two exists in epic and in many other places . . . (Republic, 3, 394 B–C; my emphasis).

Plato specifies generic distinctions by examining each member of the triad in terms of its characteristic agent of mimesis: drama, pure imitation; lyric, haplē diēgesis (direct, pure telling); epic, mixed agency. Plato's attack on mimesis in general and on epic and tragedy in particular is an attack on writing, as we shall see. This should not surprise us, for Plato—something which is rarely noticed—was under the influence of the choreia, the amalgam of poetry, music, and dance. What we must keep in mind, however, is that Greek poetry was not designed for "reading" but for singing, and vocal music rather than purely instrumental music was stressed (music always included dance):

The Greeks of the early period . . . not only perceived poetry's relation to music, but exaggerated it so much that they treated the two as one and the same creative sphere. The explanation for this lies in the fact that they apprehended poetry acoustically and performed it simultaneously with music. Their poetry was sung and their music was vocal. Moreover . . . both led to a state of exultation. . . . Sometimes they even apprehended music not as a separate art, but as an element of poetry and vice versa.37

The word "music" presents us with some difficulties here, for it is related to mousikē. But there is no English equivalent for mousikē. Mousikē covered the lyre, music, poetry, letters, and culture as education, etc. Mousikē, simply, is the sphere of the Muses, and every educated man was a mousikos. Let us recall, too, that mimesis covered both speech and behavior. So, with regard to the lyric, the voice and music, in an integral relation, are central. Indeed, Plato writes in his Laws:

Let us then affirm the paradox that strains of music are our laws . . . and this latter being the name which the ancients gave to lyric songs, they probably would not have very much objected to our proposed application of the word. (Laws, VII, 799–800)

Plato believes that the word "laws" in the past stood for song, and the Athenian Stranger makes the following generic distinctions:

Now music was early divided among us into certain kinds and manners. One sort consisted of prayers to the Gods, which were called hymns; and there was another and opposite sort called lamentations, and another termed paecans,
and another celebrating the birth of Dionysus, called, I believe, ‘dithyrambs.’ And they used the actual word ‘laws’ for another kind of song; and to this they added the term ‘citharoedic.’ All of these and others were duly distinguished, nor were performers allowed to confuse one style of music with another. And the authority which determined and gave judgment, and punished the disobedient, was not expressed in a hiss, nor in the most unmusical shouts of the multitude, as in our days, nor in applause and clapping of hands. (Laws, III, 700)

It should come as no surprise, then, that in lyric voice there is (and Plato stresses this) the idea of proper authority and truth, for the Athenian Stranger goes on to condemn current practices:

And then, as time went on, the poets themselves introduced the reign of vulgar and lawless innovation. They were men of genius, but they had no perception of what is just and lawful in music; raging like Bacchanals and possessed with inordinate delights—mingling lamentations with hymns, and paens with dithyrambs; imitating the sounds of the flute and the lyre, and making one general confusion; ignorantly affirming that music has no truth, and, whether good or bad, can only be judged of rightly by the pleasure of the hearer. (Republic III, 397ff.)

Indeed, both Plato and Aristotle (Politics, VIII, 6) condemn flute playing and the new “evil theatocracy” which had appeared in Athens; they do not want the voice to be weakened, the words of lyrics to become subordinate to instrumental effects (which, indeed, occurred in the 4th century).

We should also recall the long traditional alliance between the lyric and soothsaying, that is, the belief that the vates sang the truth. This is the tradition, exemplified by Pindar, that Plato favors, for in such song the god (Muse) is always present. In fact, for Pindar, there could be no proper music, dance, or song at all without this presence. Author(ity), law, and inspired song are the guarantors of truth:

Read ye where in my head is written the name of the son of Archestratos, the Olympian victor;
For I had forgotten I was his debtor for a sweet song.
But do thou, O Muse, and thou, O Goddess of Truth, daughter of God,
With righteous hand shield me from the liar’s reproach of sinning against my friend.
(Pindar, “Olympian” XI [X], 11, 1–5)

It should be noted that Pindar does not invoke the Muse for rhetorical purposes (the use of aporia—a feigning of helplessness—as a technical device), but that for him the poem is truthful because it is made possible, and informed, by divinity. If this is not an aporia, the question arises: Who really speaks, Pindar or the god? Who possesses the words? It is difficult to
attribute an origin, for there is a certain indeterminacy to the origin of the poetic words themselves. If Pindar speaks, is it a self or a persona, and if so, what is it that sounds through?

If there is a vatic voice present, the idea is that it would have to be delivered by the sound (phonē) of the voice; so sound is the “origin” from which everything flows, and, apparently, that which is inside (the heart) speaks—what the god has written inside. But we are dealing with (looking at, reading) typographical marks on the page, and in this culture we (re)mark/record writing and spoken words in the same way. We use identical marks for our own use (or speech) and for the writing of others. In Pindar, we have a rather bewildering locus—the heart is written on by the god(s) and speaks. The origin of “internal” speech, the voice of the self, is a space engraved by a transcendental subjectivity. So the subject’s words are and are not his own. The writing of the god is supplemented by the song, the words of the poetic subject. But do they supplant or maintain the god’s script? How can we decide? We could answer that voice is a representation of the god’s writing or the god writing. If so, the poetic subject’s words are from the start citations, words in quotation marks, and so iterability takes over, which means that even the “inner” voice is first textualized: The Muse is a writer, after all, and this scriptor in the form of presence ontologically secures the category of the “self.” Faith in a transcendental subjectivity keeps the subject from being overwhelmed by absence. In the instances under analysis, the identity or unity of the self with a transcendental subjectivity secures the space: an ideal space, because it eradicates the difference of time—of and for the self. Yet it must be stressed that transcendence can never escape textualization, and therefore the “self” is not localizable but is dissolved in dissemination. Thus, in writing, it is not possible to attribute an origin even when, as in Pindar’s case, an origin is assigned to the voice. In fact, writing is incapable of recovering the origin or source, just as it is incapable of reaching its telos. The author(ity) does not have full control of writing; so, in the case of Pindar, we must conclude that the god is only a proprietas of absence. It does not matter how hard the author(ity) tries to bring the god into unity with the voice, in an effort to re-present the voice textually; for, in the end, we have only the written figure—prosopopoieia. So, what we can say about the vates is that he (Pindar) is involved in a “citational grafting” (appropriating and appropriated “context”) which denies proprietas, since citing as such belongs à la structure de toute marque, parlée ou écrite, et qui constitue toute marque en écriture avant même et en dehors de tout horizon de communication sémiolinguistique; en écriture, c’est-à-dire en possibilité de fonctionnement coupé, en un certain point, de son vouloir-dire ‘originel’ et de son appartenance à un
contexte saturable et contraignant. Tout signe, linguistique ou non linguistique, parlé ou écrit, (au sens courant de cette opposition), en petite ou en grande unité, peut être cité, mais mis entre guillemets; par là il peut rompre avec tout contexte donné, engendrer à l'infini de nouveaux contextes, de façon absolument non saturable. Cela ne suppose pas que la marque vaut hors contexte, mais au contraire qu'il n'y a que des contextes sans aucun centre d'ancrage absolu. Cette citationnalité, cette duplication ou duplicité, cette itérabilité de la marque n'est pas un accident ou une anomalie, c'est ce (normal/anormal) sans quoi une marque ne pourrait même plus avoir de fonctionnement dit 'normal.' Que serait une marque que l'on ne pourrait pas citer? Et dont l'origine ne saurait être perdue en chemin? (Marges, 381)

Yet criticism, framed by the prejudice of presence, solves these problems by dissolving the voice back into a transcendental unity even as it maintains the category of the individual subject or the self, as the aftereffect of "internal" writing. Hegel, for instance, believes that the lyric poet's sole expression consists in mysteriously lending words to his inner life; and he, too, uses the figure of the heart: "Denn der lyrische Dichter ist gedrungen, alles, was sich in seinem Gemüt und Bewußtein poetisch gestaltet, im Liede auszusprechen." Words reveal the poet's spiritual sense, and expression is, accordingly, self-portrayal. I shall have more to say later about the poet's expression of his inner life, his "true" self, and how this relates to the phoné and to hearing, as we carefully explore the complicity between sound (the voice-ear of the self) and ideality. I shall return to Hegel; for now, let me simply remark that Derrida shows that Hegel has been the philosopher most attentive to the complicity between the voice and ideality (VP, 86-87). Commenting on La Voix et la phénomène and on De la gramma
tologie, he articulates the historical implications of the relationship when he asks:

What is 'meaning,' what are its historical relationships to what is purportedly identified under the rubric 'voice' as a value of presence, presence of the object, presence of meaning to consciousness, self-presence in so-called living speech and in self-consciousness? (Pos, 5)

I now wish to link the two classical instances of Plato and Aristotle to the problematic. The first verse of "Olympian XI [X]" has a most interesting relationship to Plato. For example, Johnson notes that Pindar was widely revered in his day: "They sought him because he did for them what he claimed he could do for them: he revealed to them, he brought them into contact with, the invisible real world of past and future on which the visible real world of the present, their existence, depended for its vitality and its truth." This intersects perfectly with Plato's philosophy. In Philebus 38, he has Socrates ask: "And do not opinion and the endeavor to form an opinion always spring from memory and perception?" Plato is
trying to establish the difference between the true (good) opinion and false (bad) opinion. Memory and perception (in the most ample use of the term—observation, mental image or concept, awareness of environment through physical sensation, interpretation of sensation in the light of experience, direct or intuitive cognition, discernment, and, of course, consciousness) are then related to the voice; for if the perceiver "has a companion, he repeats his thoughts to him in articulate sounds, and what was before an opinion, has now become a proposition" (Philebus, 38). If the perceiver is alone, however, he may keep his thoughts in his mind for a long time. The explanation of this phenomenon is given by Socrates:

I think the soul at such times is like a book. Memory and perception meet, and they and their attendant feelings seem to me almost to write down words in the soul, and when the inscribing feeling writes truly, then true opinion and true propositions which are the expressions of opinion, come into our souls—but when the scribe within us writes falsely, the result is false. (Philebus, 38–39)

The soul is a locus of imitation:

And may we not say that the good, being friends of the gods, have generally true pictures presented to them, and the bad false pictures? (Philebus, 40)

The voice (song), as in Pindar, is involved in an "internal" circuit of textualization. The internal writing on the soul is either an imitation of the true (good) or the false (bad), whose aftereffect is "voiced" (Philebus, 39–40).

How can the soul be like a book? This book is an instance of logos, an obviously silent, internal logos (discourse), internalized speech or thinking (dianoia). Therefore, dianoia and logos are identical, but the former does not require the voice (spoken sound). The thinking of the self, by the self, is the mind "talking" to itself. In the Philebus, feeling and opinion (doxa) spring up spontaneously inside and relate to an appearance of truth. This is before discourse. Having passed through sound, it becomes discourse. There is an instant, then, when logos can take form as dialogue; but if one is alone, the aphonie discourse is addressed to the self: it lacks outward voice. This is viewed as a deficiency

This "dialogue" has no literal voice(s). Writing is needed here because of a lack: the presence of a companion (or other) gives rise to the need for
writing, the book, the deficient *logos*. Writing, therefore, is seen as a substitute, as it reconstitutes the presence of a companion, and thus repairs the voice. Derrida also notes:

> Le livre métaphorique a ainsi tous les caractéres que, jusqu'à Mallarmé, l'on aura toujours assignés au livre, quelque démenti que la pratique littéraire ait pu ou dû lui apporter. Livre, donc comme substitut du dialogue soi-disant, soi-disant vivant. (Diss, 210)

The metaphor of the book means that it, as writing, is a copy, a reproduction, an imitation or re-presentation of the *present logos* or vibrant voice. In Plato, *logos* is only valuable as truth, and it is writing which imitates it. And truth is self-presence and can therefore best be conveyed by speech. In this way, then—recall Derrida's notion of *krinein*—the book's truth/falsity is decidable. The book of the soul, as inscribed by the "writer" within (*par hemin grammateus*), imprints either truth or falsehood. Derrida notes:

> La valeur du livre, en tant que *logos* mis à plat, est en raison, en fonction (*logos* aussi), en proportion de sa vérité. . . . L'écriture psychique comparait en dernière instance devant le tribunal de la dialectique, de l'ontologie. Elle ne vaut que son pesant de vérité et telle est sa seule mesure. La recours à la vérité de ce qui est, des choses mêmes, permet toujours de décider, si oui ou non, l'écriture est vraie, si elle est conforme ou 'contraire' au vraie. (Diss, 210–11)

In this kind of "book," truth/falsity are only possible at the time when the "writer" *makes* a written copy of an inner speaking voice—that (*logos*) discourse which has already occurred. This already occurred discourse, therefore, stands in a relation of truth-similarity—or untruth-dissimilarity—with that which *is*: things themselves.

What happens if we leave this metaphorical book of Plato's? Obviously, the "writer" here is in the domain of the proper—that is, of meaning. In the outer book, the writer transcribes

> ce qu'il aura auparavant gravé dans l'écorce psychique. C'est au sujet de cette première gravure que l'on devra trancher entre le vrai et le faux. Le livre, qui copie, reproduit, imite le discours vivant, ne vaut que ce discours. Il peut valoir moins, dans la mesure où il s'est privé de la vie du *logos*; il ne peut valoir plus. (Diss, 211)

Derrida's main point here is that writing *in general* is viewed as mimesis: it imitates, is the double, of present *logos*. At this point, an important conjunction between *logos* and *mimesis* makes itself felt, which requires a sharp articulation. I will amplify on *logos* first and then discuss mimesis in its Platonic (ontological) formulation.

The devolution of Western thought began with Plato, according to Heidegger. For in Plato *noein* (thinking as purely intellectual apprehen-
sion) no longer has the sense of containing the movement of *physis* (emergent-abiding Power) as overpowering but is given a privileged relation to idea; this evolved into *Vernunft* (*PLW*, 35ff.). Heidegger is not concerned here with how Plato uses *noein*: he is interested in examining the implications of *idea* since he believes that this is how Plato understood the Being which the pre-Socratics understood as *physis*. Plato's conception of Being, then, is decisive in the "founding" of Western metaphysics. *Physis*, before Plato, was the process of truth; the transformation of *physis* into *idea* generates a new understanding of truth. It is not my intention to recapitulate fully Heidegger's reading of Plato's famous metaphor of the cave (*Politeia*, VII, 514, 2–517 a, 7); however, I do want to point out the importance of light in the cave metaphor—"Alles liegt am Scheinen des Erscheinenden und an der Ermöglichen seiner Sichtbarkeit . . ." (*PLW*, 34)—for the four levels of unconcealment (world of shadows, world of fire, world of sun, and, again, the world of shadows) are distinguished by Plato in order to give an explanation of what makes accessible to sight that which comes into appearance. And we learn that this is the function of Idea. The essence of Idea is to be found in *appearing*; in this way, it accounts for the coming-to-presence of beings as *what they are*. For Plato, Being consists in the *quidditas*, the *essentia*, the what(ness) rather than the *existentia*. Hence, *essentia* (Idea) is the visibleness of beings. Idea renders beings "accessible" because it makes it possible for beings to be seen. Actual access is to be had only by *idein* (to see) as a viewing. Accessibility intrinsically refers to this seeing. Accordingly, Idea offers a view which is "ordered" thereby toward a viewing. Idea is for this viewing the truth (unconcealment) of what is viewed. The unconcealed thus becomes understood as that which is perceived in the *Vernehmen* of the Idea: what is known in the very process of knowing. Heidegger feels that, for the first time, *noein* and *nous* are made to assume an essential reference to Idea, and reference to Ideas will henceforth determine the essence of perceiving and, eventually, the essence of *Vernunft*. The Supreme Idea, which holds fast both *viewing* and *viewed*, and which grounds not only the visibility of the Ideas but also the power of vision to respond to the Ideas by perceiving this light, itself remains (is) still Idea; that is, something seen, something viewed. Thus un-concealment becomes Idea, something seen (*idein, eidos*) by a seeing. This, according to Heidegger, gives us a unique sense of Being: visibility of see-ability. The consequence of this is striking; if the essence of a being's Being consists in its Idea, then it is the *what* (ness) of the being that is authentic. Idea is raised to the level of what alone authentically is. Properly speaking, therefore, Plato can say that the things of experience *are not*, but merely participate in that being which is pure essence.

In Plato, as we have just noted, *noein* and *nous* are made to assume an
essential reference to Idea. Derrida notes that *logos* can be grasped as apophantic speech, and interprets *logos* as a supplement for *nous* (which in its perfection is a form of intellectual intention of itself as intuition). In Derrida, *logos* is read from *nous*. *Nous* constitutes a perfect interiority of the soul present to itself. In *nous*, we have, ontologically and epistemologically, a principle of identity. Being is perfect identity and clarity. For "the self" this means: to be is to be translucent to "the self." The degree of self-clarity determines the transparency of everything else. *Nous*, as intellectual intuition of itself as intuition, is a ruling identity of perfect luminosity and rest which "flows" from the apex down to the lower, less perfect levels. God, as light, as the unobscure, contains in perfect identity *nous* and *noumenon*. In human being, obscurity and clarity are mixed, and so *nous* is imperfect; also, since *nous* here is not perfect rest, it must move through (*dianoia*) the complex relationship of things in a discursive process toward clarity and stability. Obviously, *dianoia* is in a secondary position to pure intellection and, as *mimesis logou*, *logos* as imperfect human knowledge, it is ruled by *nous* and takes the form of *nous poietikos*, which is empowered "to make" (*poiein*) things clear in a special way: *nous poietikos* can bring things from nonbeing into being or into visible presence. *Nous poietikos* functions to bring things (beings) to light, and it can do this, essentially light up the world, because it is empowered as agent-intellect to anticipate the perfect qualities of *nous*.

*Nous*, although diminished in human being, is still divine. The logocentrism of metaphysics is, in this way, a deferred noucentrism, which can best be described as onto-theology. Heidegger, in *Identität und Differenz*, shows how ontology and theology both insist on a common foundation and a universal view of Being, as *archê* or first cause and as *telos* or final reason to beings. Onto-theology as a unity, obviously, first grounds its unity—a difference manqué—in *nous*, and the discursive metaphysical tradition subsequently asserts this unity (a transcendent being) under different names or concepts.

Derrida's work reveals the far-reaching implications of this theological status of the West's dominant concept of meaning: meaning as absolute identity or as pure identity.

The instance of the *logos* is inseparable from the signification of the truth. The metaphysical determinations of truth are inscribed in this long tradition of the *logos*, and the *logos* and the *phonê* are essentially linked in the tradition. As I have demonstrated in the foregoing, the essence of the *phonê* is conceptualized as being proximate—i.e., without mediation—to "internal" thought as *logos*, which in turn "reads" or receives meaning, or "produces" it in order to voice it.

It is no wonder, then, that mimesis in Plato must signify (1) the self-
presentation of a being present and (2) a correspondence between the imitator and what is imitated. Mimesis is, as such, firmly linked to the ontological:

... la possibilité présumée d'un discours sur ce qui est, d'un logos décidant et décidable de ou sur l'on (étant-présent). Ce qui est, l'étant-présent (forme matricielle de la substance, de la réalité, des oppositions de la forme et de la matière, de l'essence et de l'existence, de l'objectivité et de la subjectivité, etc.) se distingue de l'apparence, de l'image, du phénomène, etc., c'est-à-dire de ce qui, le présentant comme étant-présent, le redouble, le re-présente et dès lors le remplace et le dé-présente. (Diss, 217)

The image is always, in this scheme, a supervention upon the “real.” The representation supervenes upon the present—in presentation. The logic demands that, first, there be the “real,” that, second (afterward), there be either the transcription or the inscription. The (“thing”) imitated is always more profound, more real—i.e., truer—than what imitates. The process of truth orders mimesis. Accordingly, Derrida writes that mimesis signifies

la présentation de la chose même, de la nature, de la physis qui se produit, s'engendre et (s'apparaît telle qu'elle est, dans la présence de son image, de son aspect visible, dans son visage: le masque théâtral, en tant que référence essentielle du mimeisthai, révèle autant qu'il cache. La mimesis est alors le mouvement de la physis, mouvement en quelque sorte naturel (au sens non dérivé de ce mot) par lequel la physis, n'ayant ni autre ni dehors, doit se dédoubler pour apparaître, (s') apparaître, (se) produire, (se) dévoiler, pour sortir de la crypte où elle se préfère, pour briller dans son aletheia. En ce sens, mnèmè et mimesis vont de pair, puisque mnèmè est aussi dévoilement (non-oubli), aletheia. (Diss, 219)

The stress on memory in Plato's phenomenology, when viewed in this way, is striking; and the linkage to Mnemosyne and the nine Muses in the “arts” in general allows us to grasp Pindar’s “invocation” and his allegiance to truth more easily. The imitator must be in an adequate relationship to the imitated. The imitated is pure meaning: presence manifesting it-self.

In sum, Derrida shows that the conceptual system of the epoch (1) presupposes presence, (2) depends on the logic of identity which Plato uses to control contradiction, and (3) depends on the reference to god as a transcendental subject who warrants the truth (good). It is obvious in the Philebus that god has an identity distinct from that of Socrates. Truth is, obviously, at first in god’s possession. The very existence of such a transcendental subjectivity guarantees the discourse of Socrates. How? Just as in Pindar, through the presupposition of presence and the identity between god and the poet or, in Plato, Socrates as philosopher. Transcendental subjectivity—God, the One, Spirit, etc.—is by definition its own self-identity. Thus, the unity of the subject, Pindar as vates or Socrates as
philosopher, with the transcendental subjectivity creates an identity that abolishes difference altogether. Again, this is done in the interest of guaranteeing truth and of showing that everything, including language, is derived from the transcendental subject. In the epoch, then, theology is wed to both poetry and philosophy. Plato, for this reason, cannot accept the "sweetened muse" in lyric (Republic 10, 607 A). Comedy and tragedy, in a sense, disperse the voice, for pure imitation allows the poet to disappear into his creation; the same holds for epic, although to a lesser degree, since mixed imitation makes of the poet a mingler, mitigating haplè diègesis. Both result in bad imitation. It would seem, then, that only the poet speaking directly, identified with a transcendental subjectivity, rather than dispersed or mingled—having nothing to hide, being "artless," as it were—can speak the good in candor. Thus the agent is ultimately not simply the poet per se but the good man speaking the Good; and the lyric vox is granted a primacy which, while modulated, has continued to this day.

Derrida reminds us of Plato's condemnation of writing as childish play (paidia): "[Il] opposait cet enfantillage à la gravité sérieuse et adulte (spoudé) de la parole" (Gramm, 73). In "La Pharmacie de Platon," he analyzes Socrates' attack on writing in the Phaedrus, where the speech/writing binary sharply emerges. Socrates argues that writing is but a mere image of living speech; thus, speech is preferable. In this regard, Blanchot also brilliantly notes that Socrates does not like writing because it is like

la parole sacrée, ce qui est écrit vient on ne sait d'où, c'est sans auteur, sans origine et, par là, renvoie à quelque chose de plus originel. Derrière la parole de l'écrit, personne n'est présent, mais elle donne voix à l'absence, comme dans l'oracle où parle le divin, le dieu lui-même n'est jamais présent en sa parole, et c'est l'absence de dieu qui alors parle. Et l'oracle, pas plus que l'écriture, ne se justifie, ne s'explique, ne se défend: pas de dialogue avec l'écrit et pas de dialogue avec le dieu. Socrate reste étonné de ce silence qui parle.40

Socrates, it should be recalled in view of what has been said regarding mimesis, not only desires to dismiss writing but wants ultimately to dismiss art as well. Both writing and art, according to Blanchot and Heidegger, are silent. Blanchot argues that Socrates, the champion of dialogue, of the living voice, is nonplussed by this silence which can open up the mind of man to strange regions. Since the silence appears inhuman, it inspires awe. Hence, for Socrates:

Rien de plus impressionnant que cette surprise devant le silence de l'art, ce malaise de l'amateur de paroles, de l'homme fidèle à l'honnêteté de la parole vivante: qu'est-ce que cela qui a l'immutabilité des choses éternelles et qui pourtant n'est qu'apparence, qui dit des choses vraies, mais derrière quoi il n'y a que le vide, l'impossibilité de parler, de telle manière qu'ici le vrai n'a rien
Language, for Heidegger, itself “speaks,” the author is never a presence. This impersonality of language is of great significance, as we shall see when we scrutinize the lyric voice more closely. But I note for now that this view of language implies that the work is not there to convey meaning—to refer. Rather, it does not really say anything, nor does it conceal anything; it is but the possibility of a gathering, an “opening,” which Blanchot calls “l’espace littéraire.” Socrates demands a word that says something, that reveals something in the form of truth. Thus, he demands the word vouched for by the voice—a living presence. Given Plato’s views on memory and perception, it is not surprising that Socrates thinks writing weakens memory. He notes that the writer cannot control his writings, and thus is susceptible to misreading or misinterpretation. The proper function of writing, therefore, is to serve as a reminder of the truth already understood by the “reader” (Phaedrus, 274c–276e). This view, according to Derrida, dominates subsequent Western history: “... l’écriture, la lettre, l’inscription sensible ont toujours été considérées par la tradition occidentale comme le corps et la matière extérieurs à l’esprit, au souffle, au verbe et au logos” (Gramm, 52).

The Platonism of the modern world-historical situation demands that speech stands for immediacy, that is, for intelligibility and, as we have seen, for possible contact with the truth (the transcendental signified). Speech and presence (das Anwesende, which is gegenwärtig) go together while writing denies presence (das Abwesende, which is ungegenwärtig). The immediacy of the voice is preferred to writing, which is mediate, and is by definition able to separate itself, and yet preserve itself, from its “source”; as such, writing is

moyen mnémotechnique, suppléant la bonne mémoire, la mémoire spontanée, signifie l’oubli. C’est très précisément ce que disait Platon dans le Phèdre, comparant l’écriture à la parole comme l’hypomnèse à la mnémè, l’auxiliaire aide-mémoire à la mémoire vivante. Oubli parce que médiation et sortie hors de soi du logos. Sans l’écriture, celui-ci resterait en soi. L’écriture est la dissimulation de la présence naturelle et première et immédiate du sens à l’âme dans le logos. Sa violence survient à l’âme comme inconscience. (Gramm, 55)

Without writing, the logos would remain-be-(an) in itself.

Aristotle, in spite of important differences with Plato’s moral-ontological aesthetics, is still firmly in the grasp of Plato’s episteme. In fact, he only very slightly reformulates Plato’s triad:
Deconstruction and the Lyric

Epic and tragic poetry, comedy and dithyrambic, and most music for flute or lyre are all, generally considered, varieties of mimesis, differing from each other in three respects, the media, the objects, and the mode of mimesis. (Poetics, 1447a)

I note in passing that “mode of mimesis” equals agent: “media” equals harmony, verse, rhythm; “object” equals behavior (human beings in the performance of actions). It is important, however, that Aristotle stresses agency when considering generic differentiae; the mode of presentation is critical for him:

For one can represent the same objects in the same media
1. sometimes in narration and sometimes becoming someone else, as Homer does, or
2. speaking in one’s own person without change, or
3. with all the people engaged in the mimesis actually doing things. (Poetics, 1448a; my emphasis)

Aristotle simply reduces the means of literary mimesis (as known to him) to dramatic and narrative by fusing pure and mixed imitation. But what about the lyric? Does he not neglect it? Perhaps, but what I want to stress is this: The agents of mimesis are central to Aristotle’s genre theory and for him all are theoretically valid. Therefore, his silence on—and apparent devaluation of—the lyric does not obviate the stress on presence implied by the speaking subject, who speaks in its “own person.” There is, in the theory, a sanctioning of the propriety of the voice, the proprius, whose traces are evident in subsequent notions of decorum in the lyric; and it is no wonder, since Aristotle’s thought was of major importance for the Alexandrians—e.g., for Aristophanes of Byzantium, that indefatigable philologue, classifier, and “editor” of Pindar’s poetry.

But what is of more importance is the episteme. Derrida makes the linkage via Aristotle’s De interpretatione when he notes:

Si, pour Aristote . . . ‘les sons émis par la voix (ta en té phoné) sont les symboles des états de l’âme (pathêmata tê psychê) et les mots écrits les symboles des mots émis par la voix’ (De l’interprétation 1, 16, a 3), c’est que la voix, productrice des mimesis symboles, a un rapport de proximité essentielle et immédiate avec l’âme. Productrice du premier signifiant, elle n’est pas un simple signifiant parmi d’autres. Elle signifie ‘l’état d’âme’ qui lui-même reflète ou réfléchit les choses et les affections, il y aurait un rapport de traduction ou de signification naturelle; entre l’âme et le logos, un rapport de symbolisation conventionnelle. (Gramm, 21–22)

The important point is that the establishment of the first convention would be spoken language because of its immediate relationship to the order of “la signification naturelle et universelle.” It would seem, then, that the
“inside” feelings of l’âme (which constitute the universal language that effaces itself) are capable of expressing things naturally. In each instance, the voice of necessity is closest to the signified in all its determinations. The written signifier again is re-presentative. Writing is technique. It can never have constitutive meaning. The concept of the sign carries within it a division—signifier/signified. Subsequent notions of the sign, therefore, are the heirs of logo-phonocentrism. Voice is always proximate to being and, thus, to the meaning of being; hence, voice and the ideality of meaning merge. Heidegger notes that Aristotle’s conception of logos is informed by a theory of expression. For him, ultimately, truth is found in direct expression, in what is pressed out from inside the mind. In a sense he has transformed the locus of truth of the pre-Socratics from being to expression. Also, to the degree that he is still under the sway of Plato, the essence of truth changes from aletheia (nonconcealment) to correctness (EM, 141–42). My earlier remarks on krinein, when placed in this context, become especially significant, for Heidegger shows how Aussage links not only verbal locution but the judgment expressed in expression. Thus, truth comes to be lodged in expression, or, later, in its devolution in the understanding conceived as reason; that is, reason articulates the expression, which in truth statements consists in the conformity of judgment as expression to judged as expressed. Presentative thought, from these modal points, has a most interesting history, and it receives its most important (re)formulation in Descartes and, thence, in Hegel. For, in Descartes, the conformity between the knower and the known is more than just conformity; it is transformed into certitude, that is, known conformity. Descartes’s philosophy, which stands on its own, a fundamentum (subiectum) inconcussum (absolutum) veritatis, was of crucial importance to the philosophy of subjectivism. This calls for a strategic enchainment indicated by the name Hegel:

Wir kommen eigentlich jetzt erst zur Philosophie der neuen Welt und fangen diese mit Cartesius an. Mit ihm treten wir eigentlich in eine selbständige Philosophie ein, welche weiß, daß sie selbständig aus der Vernunft kommt und daß das Selbstbewußtsein wesentliches Moment des Wahren ist. Hier, können wir sagen, sind wir zu Hause, und können, wie der Schiffer nach langer Umherfahrt auf der ungestümen See, ‘Land’ rufen. . . . In dieser neuen Periode ist das Prinzip das Denken, das von sich ausgehende Denken, . . . 44

Descartes only sighted land: the discovery of the kind of presentation, consciousness of the self, that allows for absolute knowing. Hegel landed with absolute certainty and vigor, in order to take possession of the absolute character of Wissen.
IV

Derrida notes that "Hegel montre très bien l'étrange privilège du son dans l'idéalisation, la production du concept et la présence à soi du sujet" (Gramm, 23). As suggested previously, this privilege in all its modulations—and Hegel's is a major one—is not an accident of history but a necessity. The conceptions of history and consciousness produce the privilege of the phoné. Voice and mind are essentially linked. Hegel remarks that, along with das Gesicht, the other "theoretische Sinn ist das Gehör," and goes on to describe the movement of idealization:

Diese ideelle Bewegung, in welcher sich durch ihr Klingen gleichsam die einfache Subjektivität, die Seele der Körper äußert, faßt das Ohr ebenso theoretisch auf als das Auge Gestalt oder Farbe und läßt dadurch das Innere der Gegenstände für das Innere selbst werden.^[45]

Derrida notes that a fortiori what is said of sound at the most general level is also valid for the phoné—"par laquelle, en vertu du s'entendre-parler—système indissociable—le sujet s'affecte lui-même et se rapporte à soi dans l'élément de l'idéalité" (Gramm, 23). The conception of presence and plenitude: homology: Being is breath and breath is Being. The homology of a common origin (homo-logos): the mind of the One contains Ideas—in the beginning—and the Ideas are made manifest in the world, and history is the unfolding of the Ideas: the mind of man contains Ideas, and the Ideas are made manifest in the voice, and articulate speech is their unfolding. To experience an idea means to "feel" something (first) inside. The mind is inhabited and expresses itself immediately as voice. The mind speaks. This reassured Descartes and inspired Hegel. How wonderful that there is no in-between thought and self; hence, the certitude of identity. To speak is to confirm I am: I am a particular self, a specific identity. Such a relation of the full self, and breath, means that a life (story) can be articulated. Since ideas are immaterial, breath is conceived as spiritual in substance. Voice sounds an interior distance, a silent space. Voice manifests the transcendental signified.

This is why Hegel, in discussing das lyrische Kunstwerk, can insist:

Als den eigentlichen Einheitspunkt des lyrischen Gedichts müssen wir deshalb das subjektive Innere ansehen. Die Innerlichkeit als solche jedoch ist teils die ganz formelle Einheit des Subjekts mit sich, teils zerstückt und zerstreut sie sich zur buntesten Besonderung und verschiedenartigsten Mannigfaltigkeit der Vorstellungen, Gefühle, Eindrücke, Anschauungen usw., deren Verknüpfung nur darin besteht, daß ein und dasselbe Ich sie als bloßes Gefäß gleichsam in sich trägt. Um den zusammenhaltenden Mittelpunkt des lyrischen Kunstwerks abgeben zu können, muß deshalb das Subjekt einerseits zur konkreten Bestimmtheit der Stimmung oder Situation fortgeschritten sein, andererseits sich mit dieser Besonderung seiner als mit sich selber zusamme-
In Hegel, the lyric poet as a “self-bounded subjective entirety” is he who hears and understands himself speak. Such a system demands identity and immediacy and places, as we shall see, a premium on consciousness. Let us now cite a series of analogues; I purposely select several examples that seem to be far removed from Hegel’s views.

First, John Stuart Mill:

Eloquence is heard, poetry is over-heard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude. In Hegel, there is a notion of self-expression; in Mill, there is a notion that somebody speaks in solitude to himself. There is the firm belief that the poet somehow speaks, frozen in a moment of time. (In a very real sense, Mill specifies Aristotle’s theory of poetry as imitation of action; here, the action is soliloquy.)

Second, T. S. Eliot. In *The Three Voices of Poetry*, he designates the voices of the lyric as (1) meditative, (2) didactic, and (3) dramatic. The first voice he feels is the only appropriate voice for the lyric, and he characterizes it as “the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody.” Eliot claims to follow Gottfried Benn’s views in *Probleme der Lyrik*; indeed, he claims to have gone “a little further” than Benn. For a New Critic, this is certainly a strange claim. For Benn (perhaps one of a handful of writers who understood the implications of Mallarmé’s contributions at this time) diverges rather widely from Eliot’s stance. Benn takes a radical position when it comes to the questions of expression and consciousness (in certain respects, he intersects with some of Derrida’s views), but Eliot interprets Benn’s *dumpfer schöpferischer Keim* as “creative germ” only to surrender it to a poetic subject that does the expressing in a clear and correct way:

What I am maintaining is that the first effort of the poet should be to achieve clarity for himself, to assure himself that the poem is the right outcome of the process that has taken place. The most bungling form of obscurity is that of the poet who has not been able to express himself to himself; the shoddiest form is found when the poet is trying to persuade himself that he has something to say when he hasn’t.

Eliot’s demand for self-clarity requires an ideal unity of the *logos* and the *phonē*. Once again, the system is: to speak to oneself is to hear/understand oneself speak. The demand is that the poetic subject represent itself truth-
fully to itself. Eliot's theory ultimately requires the construction of an ideal voice responsible, in and to a (new) critical reading, for all the complexities of the original clear expression as poem, that is, the correct, the "right outcome."

The classical formulations of M. H. Abrams and Northrop Frye sum up this metaphysical insistence on identity and presence. For Abrams, a lyric is "any fairly short, non-narrative poem presenting a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling." For Frye, the lyric is "preeminently the utterance that is overheard." The metaphysical, critical imperative of these positions is unwittingly rendered clear by Jonathan Culler, who notes:

Now when we overhear an utterance that engages our attention, what we characteristically do is to imagine or reconstruct a context: identifying a tone of voice, we infer the posture, situation, intention, concerns, and attitudes of a speaker.

There is in all of this the notion of self-certainty, of immediate self-identification. The movement is always from the inside to the outside. **Utter-ance—over-heard**: these strategic words carry an immense metaphysical burden, for they demand a crossing, a violation of a boundary, in order to reach, as it were, the "source" of the "I sound"; the over signifies across, *trans, meta*, but the idea of a demarcation merely marks a space that is determined by sound. The theory demands that something be crossed; the implication is that this "line" separates inner consciousness from its outer objects. A double-crossing is implied—to reach the second-order hearer (reader). In the process of crossing, however, the idea of the "line" itself remains dominant and unquestioned. Such a boundary can, in fact, only delineate a meridian or circle: the domain of utterer-auditor is equally an outside or an inside. There can be no question of crossing over. The implication is that consciousness is a screen of some kind; it separates voice and ear, subject and object. This suggests that consciousness is only a figure of speech. But, in any case, it should be noted that the screen has been projected by consciousness itself. Hence, its authority is discovered. It becomes obvious that the space of consciousness (and its objects) is somehow self-perficient. I am not making an appeal to a metacritique of consciousness; in deconstruction, the emphasis has to fall on time and writing as sources of unity and difference. The stress on consciousness forgets time and writing; both imply incessant differentiation. This alone would serve to keep consciousness from moving into the dimension designated as the metacritical. This has far-reaching implications in the case of Adorno.

The views just cited intersect with the more philosophical views of Adorno, for he, too, reconstructs a context (albeit a social-historical one—or so it appears). His basis is also the "I" radical of presentation, but
treated in terms of Hegel’s philosophy. Adorno informs us, in his “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft,” that one should not deduce the lyric from society. The lyric’s social content is das Spontane, which does not emerge from the conditions of the moment. He employs Hegel’s speculative proposition that the individual can be rendered from the general and vice versa. He takes this to mean that individual resistance to the general—social—pressure cannot be something absolutely individual. Rather, the individual is both a locus and a conduit:

[Es regen,] durchs Individuum und seine Spontaneität hindurch, künstlerisch sich die objektiven Kräfte, welche einen beengten und beengenden gesellschaftlichen Zustand über sich hinaustreiben zu einem menschenwürdigen hin . . . (R, 84)

The authentic lyric is in this way teleological. It is not merely a question of the individual blindly opposing the powerful, alien social forces, for these forces belong to an all-encompassing configuration (an emblem for Hegel’s totality). Hegel’s philosophy, at this point, forces Adorno into the following position on the lyric as genre:

Darf in der Tat der lyrische Gehalt als ein vermöge der eigenen Subjektivität objektiver angesprochen werden—und sonst wäre ja das Einfachste, das die Möglichkeit von Lyrik als einer Kunstgattung stiftet: ihre Wirkung auf andere als den monologisierenden Dichter, nicht zu erklären—dann nur, wenn das sich in sich selbst Zurück-, in sich selbst Hineinnehmen des lyrischen Kunstwerks, seine Entfernung von der gesellschaftlichen Oberfläche, über den Kopf des Autors hinweg gesellschaftlich motiviert ist. (R, 84–85)

This is a crucial moment in Adorno’s discourse. He is confronted with a paradox: the poet speaking his monologue must have an effect on other people (utterance—overheard again). And, as such, the lyric has its objectivity only by virtue of its withdrawal into itself and away from the social surface; that is, somehow a totality of forces is responsible. This entire complicated process is accomplished by means of language itself.

At this point, let me simply note that Adorno takes both the concept of the individual and of language as trouble-free: he knows what both of them are.

Language itself becomes the mediating force, since it is objectified by Adorno as having a double aspect. The consequences are startling:

Sie [i.e., language] bildet durch ihre Konfigurationen den subjektiven Regungen gänzlich sich ein; ja wenig fehlt, und man könnte denken, sie zeitigte sie überhaupt erst. Aber sie bleibt doch wiederum das Medium der Begriffe, das, was die unabdingbare Beziehung auf Allgemeines und die Gesellschaft herstellt. Die höchsten lyrischen Gebilde sind darum die, in denen das Subjekt, ohne Rest von bloßem Stoff, in der Sprache tönt, bis die Sprache selber laut wird. Die Selbstvergessenheit des Subjekts, das der Sprache als
The subject’s forgetting itself means that it, in a condition of abandonment to language, *seems* to devote itself entirely to an object. This movement and the immediate intimacy and spontaneity of the subject’s poetic expression are the *same*. Such is Adorno’s route to unity and closure: to tame difference, to attain repose, to wed poet and language, to wed society and language, to wed the poet to society and vice versa, to bind the innermost nature of the lyric to society. Therefore, the poem that does not echo society is the one most thoroughly integrated into society, for its language conveys no pronouncements. The speaking poetic subject, in such expressions, is in full accord with language itself. This is what the inner tendency of language makes possible. But language is not the voice of existence, for the subject’s personal expression is required to reach a level where the voice of historical existence may be heard. The subject, in its self-forgetting, becomes internal to the lyrical content. This, indeed, is the moment of authentic expression and reconciliation:

> erst dann redet die Sprache selber, wenn sie nicht länger als ein dem Subjekt Fremdes redet sondern als dessen eigene Stimme. Wo das Ich in der Sprache sich vergisst, ist es doch ganz gegenwärtig . . . (R, 86; my emphasis)

Adorno’s philosophical quest, the moment of reconciliation as one of presence, establishes for him the actual relation between the two poles—the individual (the poetic subject) and the general (society). Society, therefore, brings the subject into being (so his feelings and thoughts are also social in nature); and society, the other side of the coin, is brought into being by the individual (as collectivity). As such, it embodies the essence of the individual(s).

Adorno’s dialectic, quite obviously, demands that its “outcome” be productive of truth:

> Wenn einmal die große Philosophie die freilich heute von der Wissenschaftslogik verschmähte Wahrheit konstruierte, Subjekt und Objekt seien überhaupt keine starren und isolierten Pole, sondern könnten nur aus dem Prozeß bestimmt werden, in dem sie sich aneinander abarbeiten und verändern, dann ist die Lyrik die ästhetische Probe auf jenes dialektische Philosophem. (R, 86–87)

The lyric poem thus confirms the long-standing philosophical proposition or, specifically, Adorno’s negative dialectic: the subject is a principle of negation, negating both its isolated opposition to society and its simple functioning in modern, rationally organized, society—*vergesellschaftete Gesellschaft* (Adorno apparently posits a movement or transition from ear-
lier historical *Gemeinschaften* to the impersonal *Gesellschaft* of the modern industrial world).

Let me attempt to summarize Adorno’s theory (assertion). The lyric is the subjective expression of specific social antagonisms, but the objective (social) world that produces it is also in itself antagonistic. Therefore, the essence of the lyric cannot be explained as subjective expression rendered objective by virtue of language. The poetic subject, in its self-presentation, does not simply embody the social but sets itself apart from it, because the poet owes his poetic subjectivity to a special privilege—freedom or leisure; hence, such a subject can control the free expression of its own subjectivity. The nonpoetic individuals, therefore, have been victimized in the historical process, since they have been reduced to objects. And they also (like the poetic subject) “haben das gleiche oder größeres Recht, nach dem Laut zu tasten, in dem Leid und Traum sich verknüpfen” (R, 89). According to Adorno, this is an unvergängliches Recht. Thus, suffering humanity gropes for sounds (the authentic voice of language) in order to express itself authentically, too, and, perhaps, someday to come into contact with the logos, that is, hear itself speak in the true breath or spirit of freedom. This must be the case since a “kollektiver Unterstrom grundiert alle individuelle Lyrik” (R, 89). That is how and whence the individual lyric poem derives its substantiality—the infrastructure which also makes a language a medium wherein the subject becomes more than a subject. Lyrical expression (*Ausdruck*) is authentic if it exists as a “proof,” that is, if it manifests objectively in a particular form what was true subjectively. But the subject requires an inner dimension in Adorno’s logic. Its internality—mind, soul, spirit—is, we are asked to believe, at least somehow in part always connected to what is but lacks an objective referent to become conscious of its own content. From this we at once see that Adorno’s philosophical dualism, in spite of its radical pretensions, is very traditionally idealistic.

Adorno completely upholds the mind (soul-spirit) term of the tradition even as he tries to “materialize” it through the concept of the social (a metaphor for the general). His dualism is complex, because it seems that he wants to place “language itself” in the double aspect, ahead of both terms of the dualism. With this gesture, he strategically tries to send the inner world of the poetic subject out into the world, in order to render mind social (material). But in the restricted economy of Hegel’s philosophy this is simply not possible. The process is always reversible, for the outer world can also become the idealized inner world of the subject. Do both have equal value for Adorno? Obviously, he does not think so, as his telos confirms: a utopia or a more humane world—i.e., *what is not*. Thus, willy-nilly, the subjective assumes a higher value, for it “foresees,” if authentic, the future outer world. The hope is that the poetic spirit is in embryo the future. In the now, the historical present, the poem’s
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The poetic spirit, according to this logic, struggles to bring the alien materiality of things into a subjectively pure expression. Therefore, the mediation of language reveals itself as finally a smokescreen to hide the fact that Adorno accords first place to spirit. It governs the material world—if not in the historical present, then later. This term controls the entire process of the philosophical dualism. The inner—as in Plato, and in spite of Adorno's wavering—is first. Adorno's placing of language in the substratum calls for a ground which closes off difference. The demand is that difference be reconciled so that we can construct an essential organic totality which constitutes the poem and the commentary on it—the writing itself. As we have seen, the logocentrism of Adorno's "Rede" is grounded in hierarchizing oppositions (some announced, others not) such as inner/outer, spiritual/material, individual/society, truth/falsehood, intuition/signification—speech/writing. These oppositions, regardless of how dialectically tangled they may seem, uphold the notion of first and final causes. Here, subjective identity and conscious intuition are deemed essential, and an ideal metaphysical limit is thus established which makes the second term "morally" inferior. In short, the material world is debunked in the interest of the utopian. Adorno maintains the "speaking I" in the concept of the poet delivering a monologue. In the process, he either represses or forgets the second term—namely, writing, which is material—for it threatens the value system of the first term, speech, conceived as the poet speaking to himself.

Let's examine this further. Adorno assumes that, in the poem, there is an "I" that speaks: a meaningful "I," but one without as yet complete articulation. Adorno, through the dialectic, feels that he knows how the "I" can mean. But it can have meaning only by an elucidation of the principle of self-identity as a possibility of self-knowing. This is the ground. What seems to elude Adorno is that for the "I" to have meaning (as when he discusses Goethe's "Wanderers Nachtlied" and assumes that there is a speaking subject in it that feels) the "I" must already have come to be understood as something that is seen in advance. If this were not the case, one would have to maintain that the "I" has meaning in itself.

Moreover, since Adorno requires the presence of the poet in the poem—the "I"—the phonē is privileged as the signifying substance given to consciousness. The emphasis on the individual preserves, through mediation, the voice of consciousness, consciousness of itself being present (even
if only to forget itself). Adorno’s concept of the “I” (and the implicit notion of the sign) is inscribed within psychologism: the sign is presumed to be a transmitter of meaning. But such communication requires already constituted subjects and objects which have identities and intentions.

For Adorno, consciousness is crucial and must be saved at any cost, as his remarks on ideology reveal:

Denn Ideologie ist Unwahrheit, falsches Bewuβtsein, Lüge. Sie offenbart sich im Mißlingen der Kunstwerke, ihrem Falschen in sich und wird getroffen von Kritik. Großen Kunstwerken aber, die an Gestaltung und allein dadurch an tendenzieller Versöhnung tragender Widersprüche des realen Daseins ihr Wesen haben, nachzusagen, sie seien Ideologie, tut nicht bloβ ihrem eigenen Wahrheitsgehalt unrecht, sondern verfälscht auch den Ideologiebegriff. Dieser behauptet nicht, aller Geist tauge nur dazu, daß irgendwelche Menschen irgendwelche partikularen Interessen als allgemeine unterschieben, sondern will den bestimmten falschen Geist entlarven und ihn zugleich in seiner Notwendigkeit begreifen. Kunstwerke jedoch haben ihre Größe einzig daran, daß sie sprechen lassen, was die Ideologie verbirgt. Ihr Gelingen selber geht, mögen sie es wollen oder nicht, übers falsche Bewuβtsein hinaus. (R, 77)

The notion of true/false consciousness is grounded in an idealist model of the psychic apparatus. This model requires that “stimulations”—awareness of data and objects through the medium of the five senses—be projected upon consciousness itself, which thus serves to receive impressions, images, and, most important for Adorno, reflections from an outer material world. These reflections pass through consciousness into the storehouse of memory. Earlier, in discussing the overheard utterance, I characterized consciousness—through metaphor—as a screen. I mean by this to show that the model situates consciousness in a strategic position; that is, in the experiences of the subject, it is empowered ultimately to control perception. Consciousness is the mediator, overseeing what enters and what is projected. Stated differently, consciousness selects true/false significance for presentation. But where is consciousness located—and what of unconsciousness? Worse, and this is typical of the believers in true consciousness, Adorno cannot explain how we (can) know that the true “images” released by the poetic subject—in this case, Goethe—have transcended false consciousness. (He is adamant that criticism can discover the lies of artworks, so it is in a privileged position.) Moreover, how does consciousness relate to language, to the spoken voice, or to writing?

We note that Adorno attempts to skirt these and other problems through negativity. His definition of the lyric attests to this:

Was wir jedoch mit Lyrik meinen, ehe wir den Begriff sei’s historisch erweitern, sei’s kritisch gegen die individualistische Sphäre wenden, hat, ja, ‘reiner’ es sich gibt, das Moment des Bruches in sich. Das Ich, das in Lyrik laut
Notice that the rupture is between a subjective being that expresses itself in opposition to the objective world. It directs its expressive gesture outward to nature which is also ruptured from the social. So the subject quests (longs) for a pure but absent nature, which it seeks to re-create. This results in a transformation of nature (by human poet) into human form to renew nature—to return to it what man's rule has taken away. This negative subjective being (alienated poet who has the license to stand in for everyone) is indeed a powerful being, for the poetic evocation of such a being has the power to present us with an image of the natural world. But, as we have just seen, the status of such an image is at best questionable. This negative process is all very well and good until we remember that Adorno is forced to rely on the concepts of real existence (base and oppressive as it is). Is this an "unconditioned" signified? It must be; otherwise, the authentic lyric could not sustain its utopian flight. The negative quality of the poetic subjectivity must assume the possibility of transcendence. Thus, the quality of Adorno's break, or rupture, implies that the lyric's new signs, indeed lyrics, can free themselves from old signs and project a better future (alas, history and society must be aestheticized in order for it to be guaranteed). These images would then in turn be introjected by the receiver of the poem... but the danger would always be that a false consciousness might receive them. Adorno forgets that the poet's voice, if it is to be understood, requires articulation (writing): hence, time and not immediacy. This voice can never be completely there (in the text); it is always already written in a writing system the terms of which, by definition, cannot be coincidental and immediate. The voice is always already inscribed in the supplement, in the trace, in différance. The voice cannot issue forth differences, for in no case is it of transcendent origin. Rather, différance "inhabits" voice, and there is, therefore, no possibility of identity, for differences are also in différance—hence, deferred. In writing, there are only differences. Presence cannot be itself; it must also be an absence, that is, the trace.

Adorno, it would seem, has found in the monologue of the poet's voice an authentic interior consciousness: identity of voice, mind, and truth as presence remain rooted, undisturbed in his "Rede." His lyrical "I" is fully inscribed in onto-theology. What are we to do, then, with figures such as Mallarmé and Benn? After all, does not Benn most diligently take up the question of the meaning and very possibility of expression in the mod-
ern era? Perhaps, in terms of Adorno’s logic, one can simply impute to Benn a false consciousness or a biologism, and so dismiss him. But such an imputation would have to be made against the grain of Benn’s insistent questioning: namely, what does it mean to “express” (anything)? And who—a subject, for instance, or a mind—expresses? What, in short, is the origin of expression? In Benn’s case, to reply that the individual subject does the expressing is to say little. The individual does not exist beforehand but, indeed, is formed in the ceaseless act of expression, and that means, by and in language:

Wo dieser Zugehörige Ausdrucksmitte findet, spricht aus ihm der Schnittpunkt von deszendentem Prozeß und schweigendem, aber immer gegenwärtigem Keim oder, um mit den Begriffen der modernen Erblehre zu operieren: spricht aus ihm der Phänotyp, das heißt der aktuelle Ausschnitt des Genotyps, des Arttyps—der Phänotyp, der in bezug auf Veränderungen und Defekte die jeweilige Keimexistenz durchführt.\(^{55}\)

The position on “voicing” here is most instructive. For the “subject” is preceded by something like the sum total of the destiny of the “race,” which is shrouded in a kind of forgetfulness but which, at times, is retrievable. Thus, the individual is a kind of momentary instance where an already present, yet absent, language emerges: the individual and his expression are supplemental. The individual does not merely repeat what has already been “said,” nor possess a spontaneous power of creation. Rather, the power to retrieve or create is wholly subjected to time, which guarantees that the “what was” will never be equal to the “what is”—and yet, the two belong together. The retrieval is never equivalent to the “first” appearance of what is retrieved, but is marked by difference. Thought takes things over from the past—words, symbols, artifacts, implements—and brings them to “presence” again, but since it is a localized occurrence in an ungraspable totality conditioned by time, it can never reproduce the situation in which the forms had come to “presence” earlier: so it is not a matter of truth. As Benn insists time and again, thoughts cannot escape temporality, and that means that they, too, are subject to disappearance (just as is the phenotype):

If we consider for a moment that the thing we call time—which we do taste and breathe, which goes with our thinking, like the pain and love we feel—is presumably only a splinter of something utterly alien to us, a chip of veiled worlds drifting, a mere flash of mirrors and mirror images, and if we then tell ourselves that it is from such chips and fragments that we read off and play our human environment, our unique score of terrestrial history and racial existence—then it will cease to matter that our sense of time, our experience of time as truth, will never let us see yesterday as today. . . .\(^{56}\)
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Unique fois au monde, parce qu’en raison d’un événement toujours que j’expliquerai, il n’est pas de Présent, non—un présent n’existe pas... Faute que se déclare la Foule, faute—de tout. Mal informé celui qui se crierait son propre contemporain, désertant, usurpant, avec impudence égale, quand du passé cessa et que tarde un futur ou que les deux se remmêlent perplexement en vue de masquer l’écart.57

The gap cannot be (re)covered. There is no immediacy in language. Self-presence is a problem, since the immediate is always fissured. Time, which is a precondition for expression, does not reveal its essence as such, since our understanding of it is a small piece of something “utterly alien.” And so expression constitutes a way in which a local identity is formed by the individual, but the individual, through expression, has no original access to—or, better stated, no perception of—the things themselves, since there is an unavoidable gap between perception and the presence of anything.

Consciousness has no screening authority here. This is similar to Derrida’s notion of “the delayed effect.” Derrida derives it from Freud’s conception of Nachträglichkeit. Experiences, according to this conception, only “come” to “consciousness” in time, long after the actual event itself. In Derrida’s theory, there are no immediate experiences as such, no direct reflection of the outer into the inner. Seemingly, immediate experiences are but a contact made with what has always already been “written” (unconsciously) in the memory. A so-called perceptual image or impression is nothing more than, or is similar to, the perceptual impressions we get from reading. Perception is perpetually separated from the presence of “the things themselves.” Reference is trapped in indefiniteness, and this allows us to see that we are always dealing with a system of signs. Things themselves are signs. Following Pierce, Derrida notes:

... la manifestation elle-même ne révèle pas une présence, elle fait signe. On peut lire dans les Principles of phenomenology que ‘l’idée de manifestation est l’idée d’un signe.’ Il n’y a donc pas de phénoménalité réduisant le signe ou le représentant pour laisser enfin la chose signifiée briller dans l’éclat de sa présence. La dite ‘chose même’ est toujours déjà un representamen soustrait à la simplicité de l’évidence intuitive. Le representamen ne fonctionne qu’en suscitant un interprétant qui devient lui-même signe et ainsi à l’infini. L’identité à soi du signifié se dérobe et se déplace sans cesse. Le propre du representamen, c’est d’être soi et un autre, de se produire comme une structure de renvoi, de se distraire de soi. Le propre du representamen, c’est de n’être pas propre, c’est-à-dire absolument proche de soi (prope, proprius). Or le représenté est toujours déjà un representamen. (Gramm, 72)

Our sensory contact with the outside (world) is always ahead of us, as it were; this contact occurs in an actual moment of time, and, being in time,
we always arrive late at the moment, our now, at the present time of our experiences. Derrida follows Freud closely and concludes: “‘Memory’ or writing is the opening of that process of appearances itself. The ‘perceived’ may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it’ (WD, 224). The notion of a present moment is thus subverted by deconstruction; consciousness, as a locus of truth/untruth, is simply an illusion one needed to protect the concept of mind-soul-spirit and, thus, presence. For Derrida, mind is a signified that is attributed to the material brain: simply another version or instance of logos.

This perhaps places us in a position to begin to grasp Benn’s and Mallarmé’s positions. Writing implies disappearance; hence, Mallarmé could write:

L’œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s’allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feux sur des pierreris, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l’ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase.58

The sign, as supplement, substitutes for a substitute, not a thing, whose syntheses and referrals forbid at any moment that a simple element be present. There is no subject that is agent, author, and master of the system of differences; rather, the play of differences and the spacing, by means of which elements are related to one another, are prior to subjectivity and make it possible. The subject, a nonsubject, can only be a subject because of the economic and semiotic functions of différence. Benn writes:

Ein Wort—ein Glanz, ein Flug, ein Feuer,
ein Flammenwurf, ein Sternenstrich—
und wieder Dunkel, ungeheuer,
im leeren Raum um Welt und Ich.59

In the instances of Mallarmé and Benn, the “I” disappears. Its “destiny” is profound darkness and empty space—la página en blanco. Black/white spacing—rather than presence. Writing. In Mallarmé there is a knowledge that the ideal opposition of voice/writing produces the privilege of the phoné which sees writing as a physical mark, fully dependent on voice. Writing is reduced to the status of an inadequate representation of the voice. Derrida, following Mallarmé, effects a reversal of the terms, but writing is divested of any metaphysical value. It does not (re)establish a new transcendental signified. It is not rendered “internal”—as so-called mind-soul-spirit.

This is Mallarmé’s version of the death of God, and Benn and Derrida are among the few who have recognized it and have attempted to think the problem through. They, unlike Adorno who offers nostos and algos but in
the mode of teleology in all of its implications, offer—or so it seems—nothing in the place of this death. To offer nothing as something is the ultimate gesture of nihilism. Nietzsche’s “death of God,” it should be remarked, is thought metaphysically as the name for the realm of Ideas and ideals as values. Unfortunately, in trying to pose the question of nihilism, he thought its essence as a Weltanschauung; thus, it, too, is a representation of the world as produced by the subject, that is, by human being. As such, it has no necessity and is, like any other worldview, arbitrary. Yet Nietzsche invests it with necessity: It is the fundamental movement of the history of the West, not simply another historical phenomenon.

Nietzsche, and this is of singular importance, also noted that nihilism was the uncanniest of guests, one who made himself at home in language. But, as we know, language runs into difficulties when it attempts to treat the nothing or the nonessence of no-thing. Derrida notes that Heidegger begins to write the word Being, whose long tradition is that of the word that means, that “says,” the opposite of no-thing, and so might be a key term in overcoming (metaphysics) nihilism, under erasure or crossed out (kreuzweise Durchstreichung). Derrida writes:

Cette rature est la dernière écriture d’une époque. Sous ses traits s’efface en restant lisible la présence d’un signifié transcendantal. S’efface en restant lisible, se détruit en se donnant à voir l’idée même de signe. En tant qu’elle délimite l’onto-théologie, la métaphysique de la présence et le logocentrisme, cette dernière écriture est aussi la première écriture. (Gramm, 38)

Heidegger’s “double-crossing” is crucial for Derrida, for the “first” is the epoch of writing. For Derrida, writing is the Other of voice, but this Other has no other (does no-thing have an Other?), for il n’y a pas de hors-texte. No outside text. Interpretans-interpretandum. And so César Vallejo:

Y no me digan nada,
que uno puede matar perfectamente,
ya que, sudando tinta,
uno hace cuanto puede, no me digan . . .

(Don’t tell me nothing,
that one can kill with perfect ease,
since, sweating ink,
one does what one can, don’t tell me . . .)

Writing negates the I-You, the ego-tu or ego-vos; its telos is ellipsis—three dots . . . Black disappearing into the whiteness of the page. The lyric “I” is a silence written as a leftover: “Quedeme a calentar la tinta en que me ahogo” (“I was left heating the ink in which I drown”). Writing is the pursuit of black on white, of differentiation. As in Benn’s “Ein Wort,” the words of the lyric have no final point—of reference. Other than the dot or
the ellipsis. Verse, (re)marked by the line, as discontinuity, is, if anything, ironically continuity, time and space, différance, a distance to where the “I” inscribed cannot be.

Notes

2 Theodor W. Adorno, “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft,” in his Noten zur Literatur (Berlin and Frankfurt, 1958), pp. 79–80. (It should be pointed out, however, that Adorno was not interested in overcoming these conceptions, for his theory of the lyric is in many ways derived from Romanticism.)
3 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Ästhetik II (Frankfurt, 1842), p. 471.
4 Ibid., p. 487.
5 Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Freiburg, 1927), p. 152. Henceforth, citations from Heidegger will be bracketed within the text, with reference and page numbers. The following abbreviations will be observed: EM = Einführung in die Metaphysik (Tübingen, 1953); ID = Identity and Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, 1974); PLW = Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit, mit einem Brief über den “Humanismus” (2d ed., Bern, 1954); SVG = Der Satz vom Grund (Pfullingen, 1957); SZ = Sein und Zeit; TB = On Time and Being, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, 1972).
6 Jacques Derrida, De la Grammatologie (Paris, 1974), p. 150. Henceforth, citations from Derrida will be bracketed within the text. The references will include, wherever necessary, essay title and text in which the essay is published, or the larger work and page numbers. The following abbreviations will be observed: Diss = La Dissémination (Paris, 1972); Gramm = De la Grammatologie (Paris, 1974); Linc = “Limited Inc.,” Glyph 2 (1977); LoG = “The Law of Genre,” Critical Inquiry 7/1 (Autumn, 1980); Marges = Marges de la philosophie (Paris, 1972); Pos = Positions, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1981); Sec = “Signature Event Context,” Glyph 1 (1977); VenP = La Vérité en peinture (Paris, 1978); VP = La Voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl (Paris, 1967).
9 Parerga. par: around; erga: works. Parerga: around the works. Kant defines parerga as ornaments: “those things which do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements, but only externally as complements,” the frames of pictures, the draperies of statues, or the colonnades of palaces, for example. The parergon is not the primary subject; it is not central to the work of art. Yet it is essential to it because it defines its boundaries. And in so doing, it delimits it as well.

In Vérité en peinture, Derrida develops his notion of the parergon. He thinks of it as a frame (cadre) and shows how the Critique of Judgment, which he treats as a “work of art,” is framed by the four perspectives from which the judgment of taste is examined: the quality, the quantity, the relations of ends (or telos), and the modality. Since Kant’s discourse on the beautiful and on art rests on his theory of the judgment of taste, it is likewise framed—limited by the parergon.

Implicit in both Kant’s and Derrida’s formulations of the parergon is a notion of
marginality. In the case of the latter, what is suggested is that on the margins of any discourse there are other philosophical or critical discourses which "contain" it just as a frame "contains" a picture. The cadre is an "undecided" line, simultaneously essential and not essential. The belonging together of critical discourses presents a similar cadre.


11 Ibid., p. 151.

12 Ibid. On the contrary, someone like Barbara Johnson is extremely rigorous; cf. her The Critical Difference or, in Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism, her "Les Fleurs du mal armé: Some Reflections on Intertextuality" where, with great learning and critical focus, she deconstructs properness and notions of linear development in lyric texts. The new signifying possibilities that her practice of intertextuality renders are amazing. For the intertextualist, the poem and the poet are the historical products of intertextuality. The subject is no longer seen as creating its own world; it is no longer like Sartre's "shut imaginary consciousness." It is, instead, and in very complex ways, inscribed inter spatially, temporally. As a consequence, the language of the poem is not the property of an autotelic subjectivity.

13 Patterson, p. 151 (my emphasis).


15 Ibid.

16 Hölderlin's views are instructive; for him, poetic language is its own ground and functions without recourse to a surrounding reality or to other language. Poetry, as essentially self- reflexive, transcends all other dimensions. It depends on itself for its meaning as it shuns preestablished meaning and usual notions of truth. Poetic language seems to suspend predication itself: "Indem sich nämlich der Dichter mit dem reinen Ton seiner ursprünglichen Empfindung in seinem ganzen inneren und äußeren Leben begriffen fühlt und sich umsieht in seiner Welt, ist ihm diese ebenso neu und unbekannt, die Summe aller seiner Erfahrungen, seines Wissens, seines Anschauens, seines Gedenkens, Kunst und Natur, wie sie in ihm und außer ihm sich darstellt, alles ist wie zum erstenmale, eben deswegen unbegriffen, unbestimmt, in lauter Stoff und Leben aufgelöst, ihm gegenwärtig. Und es ist vorzüglich wichtig, daß er in diesem Augenblicke nichts als gegeben annehme, von nichts Positivem ausgehe, daß die Natur und Kunst so wie er sie früher gelernt hat und sieht, nicht eher spreche, ehe für ihn eine Sprache da ist." Cited by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik, 3d ed. (Tübingen, 1975), pp. 445–46.


19 Ibid.; see esp. the "Introduction" by Wallace Martin, who shows how the Yale Critics have attempted to influence and change the practice of literary criticism. Martin also reflects on the implications of the transformation of Derrida's philosophy into a new vocabulary/rhetoric (pp. xv–xxvii); Paul A. Bové's "Variations on Authority: Some Deconstructive Transformations of the New Criticism" provocatively argues that Yale School deconstruction mirrors New Criticism (pp. 3–19); and Wlad Godzich's hard hitting "The Domestication of Derrida" shows how Derrida's notion of production is replaced by the key term reading.

20 Arac et al., Yale Critics, pp. 177–78.


23 Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism, p. 122.


26 [Recent theorists of the lyric] do not so much surpass New Criticism as renovate it through revision: less 'Beyond the New Criticism' than a 'New New Criticism.' From Culler's contrast of Cleanth Brooks and Paul de Man on Yeats's "Among School Children," it emerges clearly that the new new criticism shares with the old New Criticism an
emphasis that is textual and technical, more concerned with method than with scholarship, and fundamentally ahistorical, especially in its confidence about the extensive applicability of its operative terms”; ibid., p. 346.

27 Derrida takes up the problematic of the essence of literature in La Dissémination. He deconstructs the question “What is literature?” and situates it metaphorically in “son coin entre la littérature et la vérité, entre la littérature et ce qu’il faut répondre à la question qu’est-ce que?” (Diss, 203).

28 Arac et al., Yale Critics, p. 180.


33 Parra, Emergency Poems, pp. 26–27.


38 Hegel, Ästhetik II, p. 487.


41 Ibid., p. 13.

42 After Aristotle, the Alexandrian critics (especially Aristophanes of Byantium in his astounding collection of Pindar) seem to have used decorum as a guiding principle in editing and classifying archaic and classical Greek lyric. Lyrics—paems, hymns, dithyrambs, encomia, threnoi, maiden songs, victory songs, etc.—in a sense became particular instances of decorum. Central to the analytical method of decorum is the idea of voicing, that is, the appropriateness of the poet’s voice for a given kind of poem. Decorum, the domain of the proper, always insists on the propriety of the voice for a proper understanding of the lyric. These critics relied only on writing; they were completely immersed in the “book,” for lyric performance (as music and poetry were separated) had become obsolete. Yet the idea of the “proper voice” remained unquestioned, and so the philosophy of presence, in the most bookish of circumstances, continued to inhere through the concept of the correct voice.

43 Historically, the privileging of the voice undergoes complex modulations. After the Alexandrian critics, we would have to turn to the spectacular appropriation and dissemination of the problem by Horace, a pivotal intertextualist. It could be argued that Horace’s lyric poetry is a rewriting of ancient Greek lyric, for he single-handedly revived, under the most difficult circumstances, a nearly dead genre, the lyric. It is a commonplace that in Horace’s lyrics the ancient Greek “voices” are re-created. Horace, the Latinus fidicen often seen as a mere imitator, shrewdly understood that even Sappho and Alcaeus had “imitated” Archilochus. It is important to note, in this context, that Horace, like Plato, exalted Pindar. It would be interesting to study the history of the lyric from the Greeks to the Alexandrians and Horace intertextually, and to theorize the voice(s) of Horace as figures of speech—with special attention given to the figure of the vatic voice.

44 As cited by Heidegger in Holzwege (Frankfurt, 1950), p. 118.


46 Hegel, Ästhetik II (Frankfurt, 1842), pp. 491–2.


49 Ibid., p. 31.


53 Theodor W. Adorno, “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft” (henceforth, all page references
will be indicated in the text in parentheses). Lest I seem too ungracious, let me point to what I consider to be potentially valuable in the “Rede.” Adorno (cf. note 2) knows that his view of the lyric is neo-Romantic, and that it has a rather limited historical application. Significantly, therefore, and broadly implied throughout the “Rede” is the idea that lyric has now come to mean the possibility of a specific kind of response or a specific kind of reading. I would characterize this kind of reading as utopian (cf. the complicated remarks on pp. 77–79). I cannot develop this here, but it is critically highly suggestive—yet subverted by Adorno’s Hegelianism, which forces him at crucial junctures into an uneasy compromise between the tenets of New Criticism (in 1957, its influence was formidable) and Marxism. There are too many passages to cite where Adorno clearly employs the lexicon of both discourses; perhaps the following best illustrates the difficulty of his historical positioning: “Man pflegt zu sagen, ein vollkommenes lyrisches Gedicht müsse Totalität oder Universalität besitzen, müsse in seiner Begrenzung das Ganze, in seiner Endlichkeit das Unendliche geben. Soll das mehr sein als ein Gemeinplatz aus jener Ästhetik, die da als Allerweltsmittel den Begriff des Symbolischen zur Hand hat, dann zeigt es an, daß in jedem lyrischen Gedicht das geschichtliche Verhältnis des Subjekts zur Objektivität, des Einzelnen zur Gesellschaft im Medium des subjektiven, auf sich zurückgeworfenen Geistes seinen Niederschlag muß gefunden haben. Er wird um so vollkommener sein, je weniger das Gebilde das Verhältnis von Ich und Gesellschaft thematisch macht, je unwillkürlicher es vielmehr im Gebilde von sich aus sich kristallisiert” (pp. 82–83).

Adorno treats language, in what he sees as its double aspect, as a fact, as something rendered ready-to-hand. He, with little hesitation, tells us what language is. In this way, he raises the question of the Being of language and simultaneously silences it (R, 86); but the silencing of the question does not make it go away. The question persists, for a question means to inquire after something—its what—and thus to bring to presence that-it-is. The question of the Being of language is by no means ready-to-hand. In fact, it is most distant from us, and this is why the question is difficult. Yet language is also what is nearest to us. The Being of language is implied in every single sentence, in every reference to anything—it is. I do not have time to develop this further, except to say that Adorno has not interrogated the problem of presencing in its relation to language. Yet his (pre)comprehension of the Being of language must be somehow grounded in finitude, that is, the problematic of transcendence and its essence as temporality. Presencing, it would seem, brings the two together: that which emerges does so in a certain determination of time, which is called the present. This requires difference, differentiation, which Adorno cannot afford, partly because he situates the voice close to logos (language carries us in this way to the essence of logos) in his forgetfulness of writing. For Derrida, language is writing; behind writing, there is nothing, or language is permeated with nothing (différance). Adorno, of course, must have a source, a metaphysical ground, which he vaguely designates as Unterstrom.

57 Ibid., p. 366.
58 Benn, Primal Visions, p. 250.
59 César Vallejo, “Y no me digan nada,” in his The Complete Posthumous Poetry, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman and José Rubía Barcia (Berkeley, 1980), p. 50 (in the first line, I have stressed the double negative of the Spanish).
60 Vallejo, “Quedeme a calentar la tinta en que me ahogo,” ibid., p. 120.