JARKKO TOIKKANEN

The Break of Paul de Man

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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For a while there is a slight pang. Then it turns away and I go on walking, untroubled in my dreams now.

– P. N. Kouta 1997, 2007

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In the four and a half years it has taken me to complete this project, I have enjoyed many privileges, some of which I want to acknowledge here. As nothing is conceived in a void – not even the break of Paul de Man – it is of utmost importance to try to recognise the factors that influence one's decisions and the elements that endow their making. For without them, either in the academia or elsewhere, even the most valiant attempt to get one's thoughts out into the open will fail. And for that outcome there would be no-one else to blame other than oneself: one must understand that learning to respond to changing situations and demands is not a compromise of any kind. Instead, the lesson is one of critical awareness; it is something that, ideally, requires a skill of its own. Even if one remains unable, as one will, to mold everything according to his or her wishes, be that literary texts or cultural circumstances, the lesson spoken of herein is something one needs to have. It is not a divine law from above, or a dirty manipulation from below, but it is a skill one can learn in order to become aware of things. That is part of its theory. As for me with this project, together with the outcome presented in these pages, so for the reader the knowledge of such a possibility is an immensely exciting prospect. And for that chance already, I am thankful to a number of people.

First and most importantly, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my Ph. D. supervisor Dr. Nigel Mapp. There really are no words for the extent of his aid to my work: the thoughts are mine but so much of the rest, including presentation and structuring, has been essentially shaped by his careful and patient channelling of my at times ethereal outbursts of creative effort. His presence has been an invaluable asset to my fledgling scholarly career so far, and, bearing a certain aesthetics project in mind, I am certain that our cooperation will prove to be even more fruitful in the future.

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I dedicate this book to Kati and the kids – you truly are the shine of the day and the starlight.

Tampere 23 June 2008

TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirjassani pohdin kriittisesti muutamia kieleen ja kirjallisuuteen liittyviä ilmiöitä. Lähtökohtani on, että kieli on väline (*medium*), jota kaikki käyttävät mutta jota useimmat eivät tunne tarpeelliseksi ajatella sen tarkemmin. Tästä seuraa tietokatkoksia ja harhaluuloja, joiden alkuperän kuvitellaan olevan jossakin muualla kuin niihin johtaneessa kommunikaatiossa. Kielellinen tilanne unohtuu ja trivialisoituu: jonkin ulkopuolisen olion koetaan määräävän hetken todellisuuden. Olio voi olla abstrakti idea tai konkreettinen tekijä, jota joko pelätään ja syytetään tapahtuneesta tai päinvastoin kaivataan avuksi helpottamaan tilannetta. Jumala, järki, itse ja "joku muu kuin minä" ovat esimerkkejä näistä kuvitelluista kielen ulkopuolisista olioista.

Väitöskirjani tavoite on tutkia, miksi ja miten tämä kuvittelu tapahtuu ja mitä siitä seuraa. Kohteenani ovat belgialaissyntyisen kirjallisuusteoreetikon Paul de Manin (1919–1983) näkemykset aiheesta. De Man oli alkujaan luonnontieteistä kiinnostunut lehtimies, jonka ura johti hänet miehitetystä Euroopasta Yhdysvaltoihin. Hän nousi erityiseen kuuluisuuteen 1970-luvulla Yalen yliopiston dekonstruktivistisen koulukunnan esikuvana. Dekonstruktio nähtiin yleisesti pahansuopana, lähes "epäinhimillisenä" ajattelutapana, joka ei piitannut kirjallisuuden moraalis-esteettisistä arvoista vaan puhui mekaanisesti kielestä kielenä painottamalla sen hallitsemattomia ristiriitoja ja sattumanvaraisuutta. Ideologiat ja eettiset herkistelyt siirrettiin sivuun.

De Mania arvostettiin pedagogina mutta hänen tekstejään lähestyttiin pelonsekaisin tuntein, sillä niiden lukijaa tuntui aina odottavan sama johtopäätös: jonkin inhimillisen totuuden tai moraalisen opetuksen peruuttamaton särkymä. Tässä mielessä de Man käsitteli kirjallisuutta kuin kovapintainen tiedemies koeasemallaan, ja kirjallisuus oli hänen paras tutkimuskohteensa, koska se ei koskaan unohtanut olevansa *vain kieltä*. Omassa tutkimuksessani otan huomioon tämän lähtökohdan ja jaan de Manin intellektuaalin uran kolmeen vaiheeseen, joiden avulla tarkastelen hänen kielikäsityksensä kehittymistä mm. Baudelairen, Mallarmén, Hölderlinin, Heideggerin, Wordsworthin, Rousseaun, Hegelin ja Kantin ohjaamana. Vaikutteita on monia, ja kaikilla on eri tehtävänsä.

Tärkeimpiä löydöksiä ovat ensinnäkin havainto de Manin tarjoamasta lukemisen oppitunnista, joka on ehdottoman vakuuttava kielellisessä antaumuksessaan, ja toisaalta johtopäätös hänen kaikista teksteistä vääjäämättä paikantamansa särkymän perimmäisestä luonteesta. Onko Paul de Manin särkymä todellakin kova tieteellinen tosiasia, jolla ei itsellään ole moraalis-esteettistä ääntä? Vai onko de Manin särkymä itsetietoisuudestaan huolimatta vain yksi kielellinen myytti muiden joukossa? Mitä tästä kuvitelmasta seuraa? Mikä "myytti" edes on?

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ABBREVIATIONS

References to books and essays by Paul de Man are given in the text and abbreviated as follows:

A	"Allegory (*Julie*)" in AR 188–220.
AI	*Aesthetic Ideology*. Ed. Andrzej Warminski. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
AR	*Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.
ARe	"Allegories of Reading (*Profession de foi*)" in AR 221–245.
BI	*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 1983.
CCR	"The Contemporary Criticism of Romanticism" in RCC 3–24.
CI	"The Concept of Irony" in AI 163–84.
CW	*Critical Writings 1953–1978*. Ed. Lindsay Waters. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
E	"Excuses (*Confessions*)" AR 278–301.
FI	"Form and Intent in the American New Criticism" in BI 20–35.
HEH	"Heideggers Exegeses of Hölderlin" in BI 246–66.
HEW	"Heaven and Earth in Wordsworth and Hölderlin" in RCC 137–46.
HS	"Hegel on the Sublime" in AI 105–18.
IR	"The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Hölderlin" in RR 19–45. Transl. by Andrzej Warminski.
KM	"Kant's Materialism" in AI 119–128.
KS	"Kant and Schiller" in AI 129–162.
LH	"Literary History and Literary Modernity" in BI 142–65.
M	"Metaphor" in AR 135–59.
P	"Promises (*Social Contract*)" in AR 246–277.
PMK	"Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" in AI 70–90.
PT	"Patterns of Temporality in Hölderlin's 'Wie wenn am Feiertage…'" in RCC 50–73.
RB	"The Rhetoric of Blindness" BI 102–41.

RCC	*Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*. Eds. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark and Andrzej Warminski. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
RH	"The Riddle of Hölderlin" in CW 198–213.
RHi	"Reading and History" in RT 54–72.
RR	*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
RT	*The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
RTe	"The Rhetoric of Temporality" in BI 187–228.
RTS	"Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self" in RCC 25–49.
S	"Self (*Pygmalion*)" in AR 160–87.
SD	"Shelley Disfigured" in RR 93-123.
SS	"Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" in AI 91–104.
TH	"Time and History in Wordsworth" in RCC 74–94.
TP	"The Temptation of Permanence" in CW 30–40. Transl. by Dan Latimer.
TT	"Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'" in RT 73–105.
WH	"Wordsworth and Hölderlin" in RR 47–65. Transl. by Timothy Bahti.
WJ	*Wartime Journalism, 1939–1943*. Eds. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

It should be noted that further abbreviations of references to books by authors other than de Man may also appear in the course of the study. These are indicated in pertinent footnotes.

1 Introduction

Language is a thing that everyone uses but few care to know much about. At the same time, most people are every day confronted with problems which they do not know how to deal with and where they originate from. We fail to understand why things happen, we fail to communicate our failure to others, and instead we come up with excuses, rational and less rational, to help us forget about it. The aim of this Ph. D. thesis is to resist this memory loss. It is concerned with one thinker's critical thoughts about us and our failures and attempts to provide a certain continuation of them. It finds the chance to do this in a careful thinking of language, the "thing" that we all share for a fact. It finds it specifically in the language of literature, just like Paul de Man, the thinker concerned, did. This is not, however, to say that the general everyday world, with its disregard for musty academic exercises, would need to be abandoned in order to pursue such an interest. On the contrary, a good understanding of literature, and the particular forms it appears in, demands that the exact opposite be true. It is only, as I intend to show, that such an understanding is very difficult to arrive at.

In this short introduction I set up the scenario for starting to approach that difficulty. In order to compensate for the terseness of the main title of the thesis, which is intentional, the reader needs to be allowed to formulate his or her own mindset for how to deal with this equivocality: this will be part of the reading lesson reached by the eventual conclusion. In the same spirit, the audience will not be forced to adhere to the positing, or excusing, of any one critical method – instead the issues on display here will make it possible for them to change their own preconceptions about language and literature as the theoretical exposition goes on. In a way, it will be an adventure, an adventure of thinking, and one cannot truly embark on an adventure if one knows exactly what to expect and which troubles to prepare for.

Paul de Man was born in Belgium in 1919 from where he emigrated to the U.S. in the 1940s and made a long, controversial academic career for himself.[1] Holding

[1] See, for example, Jonathan Arac, et al.: *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer: *Rhetoric and Form: Deconstruction at Yale* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); Harold Bloom, et al.: *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).

appointments at several major universities, Yale in particular, he eventually became best known as the leading light of American deconstruction – as which he has remained even though the popularity of deconstruction itself has ebbed and flowed ever since. Therefore, in the current state of the critical scene, the prudent thing to do is to recognise the influence de Man and deconstruction have had on present theory (which is profound) and acknowledge its limitations (which remain elusive). These are obviously all claims which must be accounted for, and that is one intention of the thesis. Specifically, I will take the critical thrust of the theory involved seriously enough to push it to the eventual breaking point, much as Paul de Man did, but I will not stop where he did. In terms of my own contribution to the field of literary research, and in terms of how my work is different from previous work on the topic, this is by far the most important aspect of the study.

What is "the break of Paul de Man"? That is the research question to begin with, exposed in all its profundity at the start of the following chapter. The break, as is to be demonstrated, concerns not only theory and/of literature, and the kind of results we may expect from studying it, but the possibility of human understanding in its most general sense. How *can* something be known, and known for certain? This classical philosophical concern already shows that we will be entering perilous territory with the survey. There, in the shifting realms of epistemology and essence, nothing can be taken for granted and the very truth of the things around us is at stake, both rhetorically and for real. And, as the break of Paul de Man is made conscious in this manner, both in this study and in our everyday use of language, poetry and literature will be the "things" which always seem to be the most aware of the nature of the predicament. That is then the reason why the critical eye here constantly tends in that particular direction, providing us with unique views from the course of our journey.

Literature is a linguistic phenomenon, just as many other things are, and that is why de Man is attracted by it. Since he seeks to express through his theory a certain break of human understanding in its ultimate terms, this seeking guides the objective of my study too. In the second chapter, I will account for my claim that the research question ("What is the break of Paul de Man?") can be made to apply universally beyond "mere" theory and/of literature. This will be done by re-asking the question in the form of a question about language itself, much as de Man does. Poetic evidence for the inquiry will be found in the modernism of Baudelaire and Mallarmé early in de Man's career. In the third chapter, I will look into his finding of the break in his discussions of the philosophy of Heidegger as they meet the

Romantic aspirations of Hölderlin. Also Wordsworth has his part to play in this context. In the fourth chapter, the break surfaces in the various cognitive models of Rousseau and Nietzsche, and, in the fifth, in Hegel, Jauss, Schlegel, and Kant. These eleven authors make up some of de Man's most important sources as his career evolves, and, in addition to them, other significant names such as Derrida, Benjamin, and Schiller come to appear in the course of the study, as well. The movement is formidable, even intimidating, but it is also logically consistent – and necessary too because, without it, the journey could not continue. Meeting this requirement, my presentation will be ordered chronologically in accordance with de Man's own writings to show how his understanding (along with the conceptual toolkit resorted to) develops on the way. Nonetheless, at the end of the argument, I claim that, paradoxically and against the grain of de Man's own desired truth, his understanding stays lodged exactly where it started out, unable to speak *against* anything or anyone. It will be the main burden of the conclusion to exhibit that inertia: to show at the same time both the inevitability and the limits set for it. Further ways will be pointed to *sense* truth and nature differently, to ask the big questions again. That critical insight, however, or any eagerness to embrace it, will always remain conditioned by the de Manian warning which forever cautions against believing too soon in what appears in the blinding light of language.

2 Paul de Man and the Question of Language

As a critical thinker, Paul de Man makes a lot of claims as to why things go wrong in the sphere of human thinking. But when it is so much easier and it feels better to think that things can and do work, like neat gadgets, why should one invest all of one's energy in asserting that things do not work? And do that by asserting that they do not work because they *cannot* work, even if at times they appear to, simply because there is something so intrinsically problematic and difficult to grasp in the way our thinking works that things literally (and figuratively) fall apart when we try to make them stay together? In great literature, both classical and modern, this failure inevitably results in death and tragedy; in the prosaic everyday, both then and now, the woe is often covered for either by individual disregard ("who cares?") or a persisting circle of blame and guilt. And it goes on: other people fail to understand us, they do not get our meaning, the gadget breaks, we feel sad and hurt and frustrated, we fight and argue and even start wars over seemingly trifling matters, all kinds of evil things happen in the world, criminals and madmen are turned loose, career opportunities falter, families are broken apart, our kids do not listen to us and act crazy, governments are corrupt and states unjust, and even *you* who *I* thought I could trust have betrayed me and perhaps you never even understood. De Man might not always express the snowball effect as dramatically, or as palpably in the everyday, but the momentum is certainly inherent in his texts, and it does inspire, to use a famous example, Archie Bunker's frustration with his wife in "Semiology and Rhetoric" (1973). In asking him which way he wants his bowling shoes laced, over or under, she mistakes his rhetorical retort "What's the difference?" for a real question and that enrages him:

> [T]he very anger [Bunker] displays is indicative of more than impatience; it reveals his despair when confronted with a structure of linguistic meaning that he cannot control and that holds the discouraging prospect of an infinity of similar future confusions, all of them potentially catastrophic in their consequences.[1]

[1] "Semiology and Rhetoric" AR 10.

Nevertheless, even with this "discouraging prospect" in the horizon, it does not satisfy our intellect merely to relent and try to make do with the inadequacies of everyday communication either. So we must prepare ourselves, rebel and reach out to those responsible for our plight, challenge their oppression and break the source of iniquity thus identified, in order really to become ourselves as free individuals who know and have the strength to do better than "them". Yet, as might have been predicted, in the view of the next generation, it invariably turns out that we too got it all wrong on our turn, with useless sound and fury, and now it is their desire to cast us out. Our once vibrant dreams are declared obsolete, and we are found guilty with no redeeming excuse to our name:

> Far from seeing language as an instrument in the service of a psychic energy, the possibility now arises that the entire construction of drives, substitutions, repressions, and representations is the aberrant, metaphorical correlative of the absolute randomness of language, prior to any figuration or meaning. It is no longer certain that language, as excuse, exists because of a prior guilt but just as possible that since language, as a machine, performs anyway, we have to produce guilt (and all its train of psychic consequences) in order to make the excuse meaningful.[2]

The cycle is mechanically repeated and it will be repeated time and again afterwards, meaninglessly, and nothing about one's societal status or professional vocation – whether scientist, politician, farmer, waitress, or student – can do anything to halt it or alter its form. Only the situations change, correlate to "the absolute randomness of language".

It follows that for someone taking the care to analyse the nature of this persistent human predicament, the weight of the study gravitates towards an unchanging mass at its core. Consequently, instead of haplessly attempting to catalogue the infinite situations of life and literature, the question proper must be allowed to fall along the same lines which trace the formulation back to its source: the unimaginable "black hole" of the mind, the proverbial "origin of all evil" that unremittingly infects the possibility of all understanding despite *and* because of our best wishes. By realising this, the problem of radical disparity that occupies the thinking mind becomes a given that throughout directs the doing of *any* analysis, a practical and theoretical given that says a study is being performed at any time, an unspeakable break between the thought and the action that actually *makes up* the question being asked, the question of "why". The problem inherent in this, the radical disparity that both creates and gives rise to the question "why", becomes

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essential to the tracing itself, to simply being aware that a question is being asked and a study performed. Like Satan in *Paradise Lost* who is at once created as Satan as he is cast down from heaven to give rise to his new "project" down below, or like Friedrich Schiller who on the worldly level blocks the project of modern poetry from unity with nature by dividing its very creation in two modes in *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795), the gist of any inquiry will always be its differentiating posing of questions and concerns. Put like this, the (research) problem comes to be a linguistic one, among other things: the predicament of things working and things not working, the open-ended problem of theodicy which the thinker-writer wishes to address in their own language is foreclosed from thinking it as absolutely closed. As long as the question "why" can be asked, in any language, the predicament will still be there, because the question *is* the predicament, whether spoken, written, or simply thought. The infinity of possible "hows", of theoretical conclusions establishing scientific truths or providing practical clues for making do with the inadequacies of everyday communication, takes nothing away from the preponderance of "why" since there is no awareness of a solution reached ("how") without an problem imagined ("why") always already. As long as there is another equation for the scientist to solve and another situation for the common sense man to cope with, the fact of the logical priority of "why" remains in effect. The language of thinking, and its source, is the unchanging expressing of this formal necessity.

Argued along these lines, it is not a bad idea to think that all one needs is one question only. What can this one question then be, containing in the radical disparity of its "what" both the "why" and "how" of its own reasoning, the two daemons of Archie Bunker's despair? Obviously, as a skim through the pages of history shows, there have been countless hopeful answers to this conundrum, with God or gods, nature and physical laws, state and culture, human suffering and desires figuring prominently among them, changing reality as they go. No one in their right mind would contest the mark left by Christianity on Western thinking, and no one with any kind of philosophical talent would deny the impact of the major figureheads. Take Hegel, for example. His one idea is that things *just are* but that all of them, as certain signs of finitude, are saturated by the mind which allows for their general existence but never fails to move away from the particular instance. But I did say "idea" there, not "question", and the point that needs to be made about such ideas from the off is that, whenever they pose as answers, they become their own respective "whats". As unstable entities consisting of their own "why" and "how" rolled into one, these made-up subjects

go on to fabricate further "whys" and "hows" of their own existence, their own imagined source and *telos*, their own categorical imperatives, laws of causality, and so on. And so Hegel is inspired to write many volumes on the subject. A similar consequence happens with all ideas taking place, all things "just existing", regardless of whether what generally occurs to them is falling apart or coming together. In each of the particular instances of history, the idea-things have been and continue to be the endpoints of thinking; they have remained and remain as entities mute about their own form (their inherent disparity) and empty us of ours should we try to realise our own. Which, in other words, means that we are unable to grasp God, a cultural climate, or a law of nature because these things can only act *upon* us: a blank form affecting a blank form with all kinds of heated arguments spent in the middle. The very same can be said of our thought of ourselves as individual subjects, or subjective individuals; in that imagining the thinking ends at *what we think we are*, standing out of ourselves when set with our limits. Mute, frightened, or possibly ecstatic in face of what we find to be outside us, apart from our isolated selves, our thinking of ourselves as independent selves each with our own free will thus follows the exact same logic as all other endpoint-oriented, teleological schemes do. It should be stressed though that this is strictly not a judgment of value, an exhortation of either absolute or relative subjectivity or any other such scheme; it is a critical observation based on a linguistic analysis of how throughout history people everywhere have sought to come up with the one question only, to find answer to the radical disparity of the "what". As the temptation always instantly arises to turn the questioning into an idea of what happens and how it comes about, and eagerly try to stick with that, instead of continuing to remember the "why" that makes up the idea in the first place, it is very easy to forget to be aware of the problem of our being.

For Paul de Man, however, the one question is the question of language and he never forgets to trace all his conclusions, theoretical, philosophical, or simply critical, back to this single question, with a perennial awareness of the necessity of its radical disparity never leaving his (writing) mind. But, if the stakes are as high as the truth of being, why call this question a "mere" question of language instead of, say, a socio-cultural or maybe a metaphysical one? The initial answer to this is that there is nothing "mere" about language understood in that way; what is being effected is rather an *a fortiori* expansion of language to the level of culture and metaphysics rather than an *a posteriori* reduction of culture and metaphysics to the level of language. By being perpetually conscious of the break of language that he senses in the ceaseless positing of the one question, de Man

then moves through a welter of shifting paradigms, disciplines and terminologies in the course of his career just to arrive at the very same boundless place he never leaves. Ortwin de Graef, one of his most astute and thoroughgoing readers, as well as the revealer of his posthumous infamy,[3] frames this consciousness starkly. De Man is forever "back in the laboratory"[4] which this young chemistry and civil engineering student forsook in the 1940s in order first to pursue social studies, then journalism, and finally literary theory. As we imagine it, the laboratory is a place for testing and compounding materials, for seeing whether they add up to anything new or useful, for proving in clear scientific terms the validity of a result, and it is that imagination which perhaps most profitably characterises the de Manian mindset for us. As in these sixty-odd years since the young de Man's switching between academic subjects (or in the twenty-odd years since his death) the laboratory mindset has not disappeared (we still need the same type of argument and proof, clinical and empirical, to be truly convinced), we might well expect to find traces of the selfsame mindset at work in current trends and theoretical methods. And certainly the past, with thinkers, trends, and methods of its own, may not escape this qualification either.

"Why?" one might ask, and answer the question just by the asking. Language returns to test us; the laboratory mindset finds its form as compounded of the expected materials, that is, the expected questions. The form returns as literature, for instance, since as literature, language never ceases to be aware of itself as language. It is a vast resource for the aware reader, and Paul de Man, as he gains in understanding, certainly comes to make the most of it:

> For the statement about language, that sign and meaning can never coincide, is what is precisely taken for granted in the kind of language we call literary. Literature, unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of this knowledge; it is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression.[5]

[3] A host of articles written by de Man for the Belgian collaborationist newspapers *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land* during WW2 surfaced in 1987, tainting his name posthumously. An outrage followed in the academia and the press, and went on for some time. For the best coverage, see WJ (*Wartime Journalism, 1939–1943*), and Werner Hamacher (ed.): *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1989).

[4] Ortwin de Graef: *Serenity in Crisis: A Preface to Paul de Man 1939–1960* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) 11.

[5] "Criticism and Crisis" BI 17.

If we accept at face value de Man's own "confession" in an interview that he "never had an idea of [his] own",[6] the suggestion is that he would not like to be credited as a self or a subject who adds or takes anything away from (the) language (of literature) itself. In this manner, the potential spoils of working with this particular one question are at least intended to emerge as forms of the proclaimed source itself – that is, as forms of language, instead of something transcending or standing beside its power. Ironically, as we are then bounded within this source even when we attempt to understand it, it follows that we remain forever at a distance from the source, displaced from it as fictions, because without the radical break we, as understanders of ourselves, would not exist in the world at all:

> The reflective disjunction not only occurs *by means of* language as a privileged category, but it transfers the self out of the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language – a language that it finds in the world like one entity among others, but that remains unique in being the only entity by means of which it can differentiate itself from the world. (RTe 213)

This differentiation, however, is not a happy process; it is rather a "painful knowledge" constituted by the self's awareness of never becoming one with other selves who are ineluctably removed from "me". This is because, as tales of themselves, these others are mere "allegorical signs", much like "I" am, and we "can never coincide" with each other because, in striving to do so, we merely repeat our differentiation, slip into the non-fictional past, become "pure anteriority" to one another (RTe 207). And when this is the case, no gods, natural laws or human subjects using or making possible the gift of language for their own purposes, their own selves, can be said to escape the question of language and its stipulations. Neither does the literary theorist or the critical thinker, but for them, the upside is having asked the question, and continuing to ask it, rather than pre-empting the important work with an overriding, transcendent answer in place in advance.

De Man's project with the question of language should thus be understood from the start as something which, laboratory-like, forever tests itself but refrains from giving any results which would not similarly be subject to the very same testing which led to them. Language never stops anywhere, it goes on and on, comes back to itself without ever actually departing, and it does this not as a self-contained automaton or an organic form (as the formalists and New Critics might have thought), or as a self-positing contextual device (as readers of cultural

6 "An Interview with Paul de Man" (by Stefano Rosso) RT 118.

discourses might claim) or as a tool in the service of communication (as the common sense and/or grammarian approach might say). It does it for the *sake* of nothing, as the *goal* of nothing, but, in spite of or precisely because of that, it can do *anything*. The implications of this thought, apart from all the philosophies and critical theories of the last millennia, are seemingly still waiting to be grasped. Or perhaps this is a delusion. Yet, should it be one, that could actually make up the point: it is in language that a delusion is affirmed as a delusion (such as thinking that dreams are real) but so is the affirming of a non-delusion (thinking that reality is real). This ambiguity affects the logic with which I will be following de Man in this thesis, and it does not leave the status of either affirmation, or "affirmation", unchanged. Only the situations change, as do the words or terms involved. De Man, his critical affiliations, the philosophical tradition behind him, and the theoretical field which he chose to resist will all have their say in how the form of this intention will come about and be presented. Since neither literature nor criticism will stop at any given time, being powered by language, there is always still room left for a new view and a new sensation there.

The relevance of de Man to the current academic scene, as well his impact upon it, needs to be articulated in exactly this way, or risk failing its own questioning immanency by turning "de Man" into an idea of what he was and what he did. The form of the (reading) theory (being read) is what matters, not the transposition of perceived de Manian endpoints to thinking, good or bad, into a public field – that would be mere repetition of simple error, the inability to unclose thinking and inquire beyond the "how". But, in order not to fall in the same trap in a different way, a repetition of de Man's "own" lesson transposed into a method of reading (literary) texts must also be avoided: disciplehood, whether complete or just opportunist, will not work either, or, better phrased, it will not work the way intended by the logic of the question being asked. In de Man's wake, "de Manian" criticism must recognise this fact; it must be conscious of its own reading of de Man and further the awareness of the problem being sensed. It is not enough, for instance, to read de Man as one recent critic and find in his texts a "model" which "allows us to bring singularities into an assemblage, or at the human level, assembly and community" of all sorts of broken figures (Arkady Plotnitsky): no such happy gathering is possible within the de Manian "model".[7] Furthermore, it is not enough to keep defending de Man from his detractors

[7] Arkady Plotnitsky: "Thinking Singularity with Immanuel Kant and Paul de Man: Aesthetics, Epistemology, History, and Politics" *Legacies of Paul de Man* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) 161.

time after time by identifying *for* them either "the radical singularity of aesthetic judgment" contained therein (Marc Redfield), or the "singularly unreadable and incomprehensible" rhetoricity employed by de Man (Andrzej Warminski), or a critical "double-take" which surprises us as we read both de Man and Derrida, prompting within us a "deepening uneasiness" about a language we took for granted (Cynthia Chase).[8] All this is valuable work but, in the de Manian sense, it is not enough, it does not further the problem: the predicament is merely repeated, it is trapped within itself, identifying nothing *for* no-one. In contrast, to accomplish something new, we have to start from the understanding that de Man's method needs no defending, it is capable of doing that for itself: it is "already there" as we begin to read. And with that in mind, we can focus on other things, on problems overlooked, as will be shown in the course of this thesis. De Man's own endpoints to thinking come to the light of insight, out of blindness, only then; the analogy of the laboratory, the scientist's mindset, the presupposed but never attained results, the edge of language never left, the dark and nihilistic rhetoric which characterises his writing,[9] for all the statements these things (break and) produce, they still come across as limits, things that transcend and stand beside us, things that we have nothing to *do with* but which only *act upon* us. All through his academic career, this is the "law" which de Man seeks to articulate, by way of the various names, processes and paradoxes that mark his endeavour in the different decades. Somehow literature just fails to connect, radically against E. M. Forster's famous maxim ("only connect!"), but so do all the other entities of language, as well, and it is at least literature's triumph to be aware of this and make it known.[10] This de

[8] Marc Redfield: "Professing Literature: John Guillory's Misreading of Paul de Man" 126; Andrzej Warminski: "Discontinuous Shifts: History Reading History" 73; Cynthia Chase: "Double-Take: Reading de Man and Derrida Writing on Tropes" 28. All are essays in *Legacies of Paul de Man*. On the theme of defending de Man from his opponents, Derrida's essay "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" is probably the most famous text attempting to do that, as "a matter of memories and responsibility" making sense of Man's posthumous infamy. Jacques Derrida: *Memoires for Paul de Man* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1989) xii. Preface to the French edition translated by Peggy Kamuf.

[9] From de Man's early critique of Modernist nihilism (as "the most insidious and persistent form of nihilism" which "appears generally in the misleading shape of a refreshing relief" in the works of authors such as Malraux, Jünger, Pound, and Hemingway) ("The Inward Generation", 1955, CW 17) to his later crystallisation of the thought's dark movement in Benjamin ("at least a nihilistic stance at that moment is possibly preparatory to a historical act, 1983, TT 103), we will pay attention to the problem of history, nihilistic historicity and what it means to be "prepared" for it consistently in the course of this thesis.

[10] Suzanne Gearhart has understood the consequences of this for de Man in saying that, for him, literature (or "literature") occupies a commanding position from which it cannot be moved. "Philosophy *before* Literature: Deconstruction, Historicity, and the Work of Paul de Man" *diacritics* 13.4 (winter 1983) 71.

Manian aporia, the unsolvable riddle of language, together with the recognition of him as someone who truly asks one powerful question to begin with and continues to stir the critical pot today, is also the start of this thesis.

(i) In the Laboratory of Nothing

One way of attempting to understand de Man's "laboratory mindset" and how it is reflected upon the texts he reads may, to start with, be to apply the biographical method. In *Serenity in Crisis*, Ortwin de Graef does this very thing in order to show what de Man's rather unrefined understanding of different types of prose literature adds up to in his early years. Finding two such types, the "sociological" and the "psychological", in de Man's article "Le Roman anglais contemporain" published in *Cahiers du Libre Examen* in January 1940, de Graef concludes:

> The difference between these productions is that between cooking and chemistry: sociological truth consists of types that, "like recipes for cooking", confirm the existing ideology (of taste); psychological truth consists of types that exaggerate in order to understand normality. Cooking is amateur chemistry, chemistry is critical cooking, but ultimately both are intent on the reproduction of the norm in the name of the type.[11]

According to this scheme, basically, what are called sociological novels are naïve because they forego literature for a social condition and what are called psychological novels are mature because they question their own environment by refracting the contradictions of their story and characters back into it. De Man writes himself, clearly endorsing the "truth" of the latter:

> Les romanciers [contemporaines] se sont donc transformés en psychologues impitoyables, ennemis de toute simplification qui fausserait la vérité sur la nature humaine.
>
> The [contemporary] novelists have transformed themselves into ruthless psychologists, enemies of any simplification which would falsify the truth on human nature.[12]

Subsequently, a psychological author like James Joyce may be classified as the "prototypical" modern novelist "in whom nearly all the characteristics mentioned are almost excessively present" ("celui chez qui les caractéristiques citées existent

11 De Graef 9–10.

12 "Le Roman anglais contemporain" WJ 17. Translated by de Graef in de Graef 7.

presque à outrance"). His writings provide a convincing analogy with scientific procedures:

> Dans les laboratoires on montre parfois de ces phénomènes développés jusqu'a la monstruosité pour aider à comprendre les faits normaux. Joyce assume un peu ce rôle, dans la domaine qui nous occupe.
>
> In laboratories one sometimes displays phenomena developed up to monstrosity as an aid to understand normal facts. To some extent, Joyce fulfills this role in the field that occupies us.[13]

Joyce's identification with the scientist's role "to some extent" ("un peu") thus clarifies our understanding of what art might be able to achieve by presenting its "truth" in an unusual way.

But this insight does not suffice for de Man two years later. In his March 1942 review of A. E. Brinckmann's *Geist der Nationen* (1938) written in Dutch, he finds, according to de Graef, that the "isolation of the pure [natural] phenomenon is not feasible in the study of human beings, and the specific powers of prediction proper to the pure sciences".[14] By realising this, the literary observer moves from the reductive "hair-splitting" ("haarklieverij") of analytical truth to the "deep" pursuit of "synthetic" truths, assuming a newly qualified role in the laboratory. Therefore, although "art can be a valid object for the study of human beings", it is not the *artist* who is "the 'appropriate person' to undertake such a study" any longer. In steps the scientist, the "art-historical" scientist, in the place of Joyce et al.[15] In confronting a domain completely alien to his common sense of space and subject matter, he will proceed with the laboratorial investigation by a scientific method that measures up the new world: the world of art and literature subjected to the "acid bath of the 'specialist'".[16] The mindset acknowledges it, however, that as all human activity happens by way of human thinking, there are no kinds of thinking that would be radically alien to one another, or the kinds would know nothing of each other and so be lost. De Man recognises this necessity in the line between sociology and literature, among other places:

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13 ibid. Translated by de Graef in de Graef 9.

14 De Graef 18.

15 ibid. De Man quoted in the quotations.

16 ibid. 22. De Man quotation from "Chronique littéraire: *Le Solstice de juin*, par Henri de Montherlant (1)" (Nov 1941) WJ 163. The original French admonition warns of "dabbling dilettantes" mixing up "the work of the specialists": "C'est là oeuvre des spécialistes qualifiés et non pas de dilettantes touche-à-tout".

> "[The] conclusion of [total arbitrariness] is too negative to be true and is moreover contradicted by the facts. So there has to be a possibility to discover sociological knowledge, not along purely rational, natural-scientific paths, but by other means." The proof of this possibility can be found in "modern German sociology" and in "the traces it has left in literature".[17]

As a result, in testing his procedure, de Man actually comes to find more than "traces" of such proof; in the work of Ernst Jünger he finds "sociological insights" which may now be "recognized for the first time" in literary terms "as a legitimate agent in the production of knowledge".[18] And with that accomplishment, the evolution of de Man's early wartime writings draws to an end.

Before going on to chart out his later career, let us push the speculation about the "truth" of the "art-historical" a bit further. Conceiving that as the premise, the scientist is able to deduce that the domain of art and literature may be thought of in the way that science is – much in accordance with transcendental forms of Kantian apriority that legislate thinking or the logic of Hegelian reason that finds itself implicitly present in all things in the world. From that idea, it is only a short step to suggesting that the domain of art and literature *must be* thought of in this way, and, subsequently, what is urgently required is a painstaking analysis of its very truths, such as the enigma of poetry:

> Poetry is concerned with the rediscovery of whatever makes its existence possible, and it tends to look to the past to reassure itself that there have been times in which it could be. What it keeps and shelters, however, is not the immediate, the stable or the primitive. Instead of seeking protection from painful consciousness, it tries to expose itself completely to a total awareness that can only be the result of the most intense mental concentration. It thinks of truth not as stability and rest but as a balance of extreme tensions that, like a drawn bow, achieves immobility when it is bent to the point of breaking. It needs all the consciousness it can find and shuns whatever tries to dim the vision it has left.[19]

For de Man, this "most intense" mindset means that, without the valid scientific results based on laboratorial testing to back them up, art and literature mean *nothing*. In consequence, de Man will spend a lot of time puzzling over what the form of this "nothing" might be – whether it is something for which we "give up our awareness of ourselves" in order to have something "to fall back on", or

17 De Graef 24. De Man quotations from "Literatuur en sociologie" (Sep 1942) WJ 331. Translated by de Graef.

18 ibid.

19 "The Inward Generation" CW 17.

whether it is something we eagerly embrace in order to make *this* world appear "more desirable and precious" than usual.[20] And it does not stop the puzzlement if somebody urges or tells us to think that the arts do mean something, and should be applied to make a point about humanity, if they cannot prove their case scientifically. By this demand, should they remain unable to respond, entire systems of received values and dogmatic morals lose their first right of veto power on issues often understood as belonging to them. For instance, in terms of de Man's collaboratory shame, this loss confirms nothing of whether he actually hated Jews or supported Nazi values, it merely points out that there would have been no valid scientific reason *not* to adapt to the hostile regime in the given circumstances. His later critique of credulous Romanticisms and other aesthetic ideologies is a further variation of this logic. The schema sounds cold and ignoble (which, in reality, it is, if we desire to pass such judgment), but the theoretical mechanism powering it does not lose any steam even if we felt that way. It would operate similarly in the different (caring and courageous) instance, as well, since within the model it is only the particular situations that change, not their general source: the "why" of language that makes up the unpredictable problems of both value and truth in the first place.

Yet this sensing of shifting significances (from good to bad and back) must not be neglected either, because, as I will argue, it returns to the mechanism something the hard scientist de Man, in shifting "science" over "art", rational "truth" over sentimental "value", has prematurely overlooked. The rule of the goodness and badness of judgments (of people tempered into moralistic tastes) will not, however, be regained in doing this, and neither will the image of a utopian society (of things being better in the future or having been better in the past) nor the spell of fantastic escapism ("it's better somewhere else than here") be given the licence to limit our thinking. As forms of language, these dreams have great power, greater than de Man would happily allow to them, but, in their explicit manifestations, they do not end (or begin) anything that would not have become something different the second they are sensed. The fact that we attempt to know the world's things, want to know them, but somehow seem to be apart from them, means that we are united only in our outward sensing of these things – we are not united as subjects, independent or acted upon, or as inward entities endowed with a tacit total form. The "nothingness of human matters" ("le néant des choses humaines") which the eponymous heroine of Rousseau's *Julie* senses

[20] ibid. 15. Latter quote from "Poetic Nothingness: On a Hermetic Sonnet by Mallarmé". Translated by Richard Howard. CW 23.

in her surroundings and which later becomes one of de Man's favourite phrases, feeds off this unhappy experience. We do make up our own world, or the lack of it, but this thought forever risks incomprehension, sets up dangerous temptations, and so becomes settled, fixates itself, gets snared in its own wild imaginings. De Man's theory constantly cautions us against this and finds the lever to do so: art and, specifically, literature, the explicitly linguistic medium of art. Going into the 1950s, he finds the true state of human awareness being expressed palpably in the ceaseless ironies of a Montaigne and the anxious warning songs of a Hölderlin. Jan Rosiek sketches this developing sensibility as de Man's move from an early existentialism derived from Kojève and Sartre, and from the advanced psychologist reading of literature described by de Graef, to a "hopeless struggle" against the turbulent chaos of linguistic understanding which appears more acutely in poetry than it does in prose. And in this precarious state, the "fictive temporality" of language comes to provide the only "pocket of resistance", the only piece of figurative shelter, that remains of "the grand project of unity" disenchanted by now by the scientist looking for the ultimate truth.[21]

If we now return to specific pieces in de Man's developing oeuvre, culling out some examples, we find that in some of his relatively early American essays ("The Double Aspect of Symbolism", 1954–56, and "Process and Poetry", 1956), the monitory sensibility described by Rosiek comes into light in the comparative analysis of Baudelaire and Mallarmé's work. The suggested result is that the former "develops a poetics that would result in a sacrifice of consciousness" whereas the latter's "enterprise would result in a sacrifice of the object".[22] What could this apparently simple division of poetry into two categories, into two "'alternate roads' between which poets can choose",[23] mean in face of the scientific method being executed, the question being asked, in the attempt to "validate" any one of them? What is the sacrifice being spoken of, who offers what to whom and what does the offerer expect to receive from having done this? *Why* do it at all in the first place?

Baudelaire and Mallarmé write poetry because they sense that the world's things (some or most) do not work, in theory and in practice, and this is not a special claim about their psyche or character, it is merely a definition of the poet. So, if we feel the same way about things, we do well to read the poetry. And so we

21 Jan Rosiek: *Figures of Failure: Paul de Man's Criticism 1953–1970*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992. 51.

22 De Graef 64.

23 ibid. 65.

come across the "sacrifice" spoken of and we need to understand its significance, interpret its meaning. By such an introduction, we start reading the poems and can begin to address the topic given – although in this particular instance we will not be encountering the poems for ourselves but only de Man's reading of them. (The poems involved, in familiar cycles of death and reflection, include Baudelaire's "Le Rêve d'un curieux" and "La Chambre double" and Mallarmé's *Igitur* and *Un Coup de Dés*). Just how we do this, is by attending to the texts involved. Why we do it, because there *is* something to read, for us and de Man. We feel a need about things, sense that something can be tested and (hopefully) attained, like the poets have done. Hence, regardless of their symbolist themes, whether triumphs over time or swans frozen in the lake, both Baudelaire and Mallarmé make a "sacrifice" in order to clarify something by way of their poetry. De Man claims that both of them harbour an "acute awareness of an essential separation"[24] which does not differ between them in essence but only in the way they wish to address it ("Baudelaire's entire work is driven by a desire for direct, unmediated contact with being, which for Mallarmé is precisely what the poet should reject"[25]). In this way, the being or becoming of knowledge comes to depend on the gesture made by the poetry of the two authors. De Man says:

> But if, on the one hand, the concept of becoming allows for an extremely acute form of self-consciousness, this clarity, on the other hand, is made possible only by a necessary sacrifice of the sensuous object. Rather than establishing correspondences that would make the movements of consciousness look like the sensuous phenomena of the natural world, the Mallarmean metaphor transforms the physical world into operations of the mind… Starting from an experience of alienation or separation that is universal, it tries to suspend it by safeguarding the movement of consciousness at the expense of the object, to save consciousness by killing the object. On the other hand, an eternalistic poetry, such as Baudelaire's, sacrifices consciousness to a certain extent, since it gives up trying to account for its own necessity to be and, in agreement with Nietzsche, succeeds in partly forgetting what it is. But it does preserve a sensuous materiality, for it is beyond doubt that Baudelaire's poem exhibits a material texture that is infinitely richer than Mallarmé's (though it should be obvious that there is no question of value judgments here).[26]

De Man's reading of the Frenchmen establishes that, to know anything, Baudelaire sacrifices his consciousness of himself *as a writing subject* (a poet aware of himself

[24] "The Double Aspect of Symbolism" RCC 150.

[25] ibid. 158.

[26] "Process and Poetry" CW 70–1. Translated by Kevin Newmark and Andrzej Warminski.

as a poet) in order to reach unity with the world's things, that is, everything around us. Mallarmé, on the other hand, adopts a different poetics; he *gives away and renounces* the world's things in order to turn everything into consciousness, or language, which, in Mallarmé's case, is symbolic language in which linguistic signs become the mystery of their own being. These are their attempts to know differently from what we are used to, their exertions to make things work at least a little better. Who do they do it for? By being a non-subject, a senser of things going wrong, a poet writes for nobody in particular; the poet writes in-and-for the world, and the question of language that haunts his or her mind is a non-specific, unchanging form which concerns everyone, reader or critic, in equal measure. That gives ample cause, and desire, for their writing even if the actual results, free of value judgments, added up to nothing practically applicable in the end.

The problem with the 1950s de Man then returns to a logical fact, discovered by de Graef. For even if Baudelaire and Mallarmé *intend* to sacrifice different things (of themselves or the world) in order to gain something new (of the world or themselves), and de Man is right in pointing out between the two the "puzzling pattern of symmetries and ultimately superior dissymmetries" which spring from the "unavoidable principle of the superiority of natural being"[27] to be found in each of their poetic "choices", they are both still deeply entangled in the mechanism which has them sacrificing *something*. Instead of offering nothing, the tested result of their work in the world outside literature, they offer something (consciousness and natural objects) within the world of their own fictions, or their own poetic endpoints. (Jan Rosiek notes a similar exchange being consistently emblematic of de Man, too, as he says that "the gesture of renunciation remains one of the major principles through all the terminological changes", while Minae Mizumura concurs that "the notion of renunciation" as a "structure continues to persist in [de Man's] text even after the 'turn'" of his later career.[28]) It looks as if the "nothingness of human matters" still clings on to some kind of afterlife in this curious place, and so it must: the question of language extends everywhere and collapses the boundaries of any simple division of an "inside" and "outside". By having to write, the poet's heightened sense of the predicament, or the

27 De Graef 65.

28 Rosiek 40. Mizumura also identifies, in the context of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, de Man's "act of renunciation" as "a privileged place of knowledge where the negative insight is most directly named" (88). One may begin to approach the poetic gesture of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, as well, with this helpful thought. Minae Mizumura: "Renunciation" *The Lesson of Paul de Man* (Yale French Studies 69, 1985) 94.

"barren" beckoning towards "the road of truth",[29] becomes the apotheosis of true understanding, whereas the scientist's laboratory mindset disfigures the act of sacrifice in the form of a superior moment of clarity. However, the trouble with the criticism that verifies this gesture, as de Graef points out, is that de Man says the poets are able to decide on the choice they make, to pick out the poetic something they go on to sacrifice. Can it be as simple as that? If I write a poem about giving away either my self-consciousness or the world around me, does that redeem me like it did Baudelaire and Mallarmé? And, if I ascribe to the early de Manian motif of there being nothing at the end of things, and of this "nothing" being most tangibly contained in the lyrical image of a void or death, does that help me in placating the misconceived tumult of the real world?

Following the critical logic, this cannot be the case: there is no finding refuge in a more illumined world because the isolated haven does not exist. There is no special sanctuary for poets, as de Man would keenly opine at all stages of his career, but, in discussing Baudelaire and Mallarmé, he fails to see that his own criticism establishes a kind of "anti-sanctuary" for them in the way it preserves "a sensuous materiality" for Baudelaire and "transforms the physical world into operations of the mind" for Mallarmé. He does this by giving them the power to choose their way of reaching it in a world that seems all but dead to them, by letting them pick up the pen for a reason. The poets reverse the principle of "the superiority of natural being" in using artful symmetries and non-traditional images but that does not mean they would be intentionally escaping nature into literature, into their own idiosyncratic invention. Instead, the principle of nature remains a thing-in-itself, whether "real" or not. The poems constitute natural objects within the iconoclastic realm of their awareness in order to sacrifice them, with an eye to regaining at least *something* in return, something to look forward to. The mechanism establishes an abstract reality which goes beyond and leaves us behind, at least in part. This, however, should not be possible in a non-transcendent world, as de Man has exposited, and that is why his reading of symbolism fails in its own logic.

His critical awareness does evolve over time though, and we will see more of this topic later as we approach his middle phase. Some direction for this new development, however, can already be seen in the 1955 essay "The Temptation of Permanence" in which (together with "Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin" from the same year) the strife with Heidegger's (allegedly pathos-ridden) way of thinking is really brought to the fore for the first time. This conflict will be

[29] "The Double Aspect of Symbolism" RCC 163.

discussed in detail in the next section. Moreover, in 1960, in "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image", de Man extends his own separation from the (French Symbolist) state of wilful sacrifice not by valorising the poet's "natural" choice anymore but by projecting his own (theoretically non-organic) imagination into the sky along with the raptures of Rousseau's Saint-Preux and Hölderlin's linguistic flowers. Five years later, in "The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Hölderlin" and a number of other essays from around that time, he returns to the earth to celebrate its temporal resistance to human cognition, its questioning-breaking power, to mediate the rule of this natural disruption as the force of "le néant des choses humaines" which, in its own form, perpetuates the question of language by failing each and every test of any understanding that claims completion. The predicament will find itself in new places, in celebrations of mortality and finitude, among other events, and, having eventually exhausted itself there, it becomes displaced as the spent allegory of its own rhetorical figuration, the sheerly mechanical utterance of its own lamentation.

(ii) An Unhappy Philosophy

There is a certain established philosophical tradition which influenced and motivated Paul de Man, and it needs to be discussed before moving any further with the de Manian project, which slips ever further away from any traditional line of thinking as it goes on. As nothing and nobody is formed in a void,[30] it may be claimed that de Man's main philosophical thrust is derived from the (Romantic analytic) tension between Kant and Hegel's systems. This was earlier implied in connection with the scientific mindset applying its own method of thinking in the domain of art and literature. De Graef says:

> [De Man] retain[s] what is essential to [Kant and Hegel] while lifting it up to a level on which the movement of consciousness can be thought as an incessant becoming (Hegel) rendered incessant precisely by consciousness's inability to fully sublate natural being (Kant).[31]

[30] This can be either a naive or a complex thought: of course we are influenced by things around us but, then again, also the lack of things is an influence and therefore a "void" is a form, as well, either abstract or concrete. What this means is that a "real" void, of tradition or society's impact, can never be experienced and no one can truthfully claim to have moved away from one or embraced one.

[31] De Graef 114.

On one hand, in a manner of critical choice, Hegel is the philosophical Mallarmé who seeks no unity with anything but becomes aware of the world with each passing instant, projecting nothing but the absolute endowment of the becoming (Spirit) itself to make up the things we find in it, to sacrifice without co-ordination the matter of their own mystery to mere signs of the Spirit. On the other hand, Kant is the philosophical Baudelaire who strives with all his might to resolve the predicament of being, to reconcile the predicament of the questioning self with the universe of whose logical form it is transcendentally part and which it legislates by judgment. As the tension between the two systems is thus found, de Man resolves not to let it go. What happens is that the laboratory mindset comes to prefer Kant (because situations available for full testing can only occur where such situations are imagined to be conceptually possible at all) but the philosophical need for validation finds itself on Hegel's side (one cannot "test" sheer becoming but one can be incessantly aware of the necessity of its ongoing process). In other words, de Man tries to grasp Hegelian immanence *through* Kantian concepts; attempts to understand are expressed in categorical terms but the drive to perform them forever finds the effort invalid. The de Manian tension springs from this one source, and it is from the epistemological fault lines of Kantian-cum-Hegelian thinking that poetry and criticism then appear. The cognition gained of the tension is forever broken, by way of its sheer linguistic nature, but it is also unchangeable. What this state is, why it and its things (continue to) exist, and how it all works, is the one and only question which de Man ever provides any kind of method for observing.

Noticing this, it is perhaps not surprising that de Man's antagonists have been unable to refute or even contest the soundness of his theoretical arguments, and so, in retribution, he has been dragged through the metaphorical mud in an attempt to cast doubts on his morality and to excavate a possible agenda of "hidden intentions" by dubbing him as an intellectual fraud.[32] This only confirms and (ironically) precipitates the powerful adoption of the paradox that is the epitome

[32] Although it does not go quite so far in its explicit branding (and also makes a point about doing that), David Lehman's book *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (1991) is perhaps the most famous and (somewhat) ambitious attempt to turn de Man's theory against himself in order to "deconstruct" aspects of his life and readings. Says Lehman at the end of his book: "Many [signs of the times] are ambiguous, some are confusing, but they can all be interpreted, and interpreted correctly… [i]t would be a mistake to think that we cannot by conscious action do anything about them" (268, see end of note). The problem with Lehman's book is then that what he does interpret, he interprets incorrectly – having obviously "read" only one or two of de Man's more polemical essays. In contrast to his approach, critics like Walter Jackson Bate and Jon Wiener have found it unnecessary even to feign courteousness.

of de Manian criticism; the question of language as something which performs the opposite of what it intends, to a greater or lesser extent. Since things do not work, another breakdown is always just round the corner. And even if the failure comes here from there, nothing will change except the situation which would have changed by then already, by always being beyond our complete understanding of it. The way we feel it, this lack of control, whether theoretical *or* pragmatic, can do different things to us: we might hold on steadfastly to the promise of a future assurance, or we might get panicked and find ignorance to be bliss, or we might become apathetic ("what's the use?") or hyperanxious (neurotic "seize-the-day" mentality), or we might begin to see the world plaintively, beautiful in appearance only because removed from us. Even with the sordid state of affairs we find ourselves in, unable truly to turn any corner, we have all these different mindsets available to us.

Tracing the historical source of this consciousness, Hegel writes in *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* (1795–1800) that, once upon an ancient time, the "image of the state as a product of his activity disappeared from the soul of the citizen".[33] Disillusionment and disheartenment welled up as the result from the widening gap between thought and action, and the triumph of Christianity in civilisation was the ultimate result of this gradual process. The pagan religions died out because they promised unity and connectedness *in this world* and failed to deliver, the new monotheism won because it promised it *somewhere else*, after this one. The state and its image were found to be broken; the failure of things to work here remained totally incompatible with the divine perfection of the other place. The "how" of here was comprehensively ruled over by the "why" of there. For Hegel's system, this other place does not really exist (since it can only be perfect as pure becoming, as something that has no existence for itself), and so the positive element of its being a certain "what", a particular place awaiting us, is discarded. Consequently, the spirit of Christianity remains, but only as Spirit, as the general endowment which is neither "here" nor "there" except in a locally mediated form, an idea cognitively separate from the absolute givenness which allows the form to manifest. For Hegel, this split cannot be prevented, and the unavoidable result of the awareness of separation is the lingering feeling of malcontent, the sensation of utter inadequacy, the "unhappy consciousness" which is the mark of human

[33] G. W. F. Hegel: *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* (extracted and transl. by Michael N. Forster) published as an appendix in Michael N. Forster: *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) 575. Elements of the "unhappy consciousness" are treated more expansively in this essay than they are in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* itself.

finitude and may only be forgotten about in the idea of Spirit which sublates it. As a theme, the split is not something one feels comfortable reading or thinking about since it is not normally considered good or healthy to brood on sorrows and punishment. But perhaps that might be the point then: to make one think beyond the normal.

For his part, de Man apparently has no such qualms at all, and that unhesitatingness may well make him hard to take. Throughout his writings, dark and nihilistic overtones label and direct the way his criticism is put into words, even if there is no inherent logic to validate this strategy. As a matter of fact, should the de Manian logic be taken to its extreme and turned against himself, it would not matter at all which words he actually used, just as long as there remained someone to be influenced and motivated by them. Yet, unlike his detractors/antagonists/shunners (who might say what they say just because they dislike the tenor) would have us believe, this characteristic is not a thing to be feared or lamented (or, least of all, moralistically condemned), but rather an issue to be analysed. That possibility, however, might only be part of the rhetorical strategy to give de Man the edge in all matters pathetic, and religious. There is a curious price to pay for it, though. In line with the painful emotive empowerment that his atheist criticism leaves unsaid but allows to affect us beyond its own logic, the rhetoric appears to connect all too easily with the traditional Hegelian theme. By denouncing "the naive certainty of natural consciousness" in the present which would make us experience words at face value (or on the level of "Being", as Heidegger does in "Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin"), de Man speaks, with Hegel, "in the name of the absolute truth of the consciousness-of-the-self" (HEH 251) which supposedly strips the words of their dark pathos and offers them as mere signs of the truth instead. In the blink of an eye, feeling is turned into rhetoric, nature into language, and what happens in consequence is that the negative tactic creates an unbroken connection between the pathetic theme of the "unhappy consciousness" and an actual linguistic awareness:

> For us, however, the sorrow of mediation lies in finitude, and we are able to conceive of it only under the form of death. As long as we remain within the human sphere, which is also the sphere of the poetic word, we can think of divine sorrow only in the form of God's death. The poet's task is then to interiorize this death, to "think-of" God's death. (HEH 262)

What is thus forged is a true poetico-philosophical link, a mediating aesthetic residue, between infinite history and the finite things which appear in it, divine

or secular. Of course, the drama might be for the show on the surface level only, as something which cannot be avoided, but, if so, the asserting comes to contradict itself even more: it shows that de Man *wants* to believe in his continued asking of the one question raised, the question of language. In the wake of Hegel, the aftermath of Western thinking, this is not an unprecedented event.

Bruce Baugh's *French Hegel* shows clearly how the initial understanding of Hegel as a synthetic logician deteriorates in the late 1800s only to be revived through people like Jean Wahl in the 1920s as a precursor to a modern type of philosophical anthropology. By "confining the [Hegelian] dialectic to history",[34] this revival discovers the significance of Hegel in studying the troubled nature of human consciousness which, quite understandably amid the disillusionment of the interwar period, was a pressing topic for the intellectuals of the time. In discussing Alexandre Koyré's concept of time, Baugh articulates the "pan-tragicism" that results from existing within the historico-temporal predicament of uncertain becoming thus:

> If the future synthesis [of the concept of time] can never be attained, then neither can the origin it founds: the origin recedes along with the future, both of which remain "to come"… [the system is thus] affected with the indeterminacy of the future, rather than being established as "determinate differences" in relation to a totality (or synthesis). This constitutes a breach creating an unrest or "unhappiness" that affects the system as a whole, setting its entire structure adrift.[35]

Hence, by being something cognitively unchangeable, that is, something natural, what follows from this irreducible "breach" is the asserted superiority of a certain kind of awareness:[36] the philosophical ontology of the "unhappy consciousness" updated for the purposes of the 20th century. And, as it turns out, these purposes are not at all an obscure local (French) phenomenon. As far as both modern and postmodern critical theory in *any* of the human sciences is concerned, the Hegelian heritage looms large not only behind the (less famous) early names of Wahl, Koyré, Kojève and Hyppolite, but also the hulking figures of Sartre,

34 Bruce Baugh: *French Hegel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003) 16.

35 ibid. 28.

36 This awareness could be seen in another form in Baudelaire and Mallarmé, for whom the principle of "the superiority of natural being" resulted in the committed act of poetic sacrifice. Had there not been anything to be gained from the act (something natural), there would not have been any sense or purpose to their effort, and they would not have done it.

Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze.[37] To recognise this is vitally important for any theoretical scholar, whether social scientific, literary, or cultural; to overlook it out of neglect or canonical condemnation is not a wise choice at all. Its importance was certainly not lost on Paul de Man or the "breach" he sensed there: even if the laboratory mindset of testing things in themselves springs from a well-sourced way of thinking which is disposed towards (or starts from) an utter separation of the self from what surrounds it, there is always a scene against which it happens. The laboratory is part of the facility, even if the facility turns out to be Kafka's castle. Under de Man's scrutiny, scientific results about literature are reported in the form of statements about the nature of poetic cognition, literary rhetoric, historical materiality, and the question of language forever haunting the final successful completion of any human enterprise.

In other parts of the facility, in the positive humanists' quarters, there are scholars getting closer to the completion (and perfection) of our moral and aesthetic selves through learning and progress. These antagonists of de Man prefer to think that, instead of yielding to ontological despondency or inhuman nihilism, we need to read and understand literature and the world's things so that we establish "a scene in which language… is the most human of things, and *makes* its meanings, to which it cannot be opposed".[38] This thought expressed by M. H. Abrams seems to sum up most of the fears and dislikes the traditionalists had (and continue to have, bequeathed to a contemporary crop of theorists) about criticism like de Man's. However, even though the authenticity of this sentiment must not be belittled, or its thrust blunted, it is hardly a useful method for getting into and producing theory if the starting point is the rejection of an influential school of thought. After all, that sentiment is where criticism should start, not end, and so if the sheer feeling of animosity is enough to decide one's opinions (and possible theoretical findings) in advance, the final result is bound to suffer. This is not to say that the traditionalists, from Wellek, Warren and Abrams to Frank Kermode or Mark Edmundson, among others, would be uninteresting or obtuse, quite the opposite in fact; the point is merely that hostile negligence never does anyone critical favours. This is so even if, admittedly, de Man often comes across in his own writings as he if was walking all over the other authors and the results of

[37] Apart from the straight Hegelian impact, the directions of these different ways (of which Baugh foregrounds the "new empiricism" of Foucault and Deleuze in the end) are qualified not only by the influence of the tradition against which Hegel for his own part set himself but also those thinkers who rigorously opposed Hegel in their own time (such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Frege and Russell, and the Frankfurt School).

[38] M. H. Abrams quoted in TT 99.

their thinking, but at least he is a meticulous reader and, eventually, the dismissal he effects remains a rhetorical gesture, one that immediately reflects back into de Man's own statements, and breaks their own validity by way of succumbing to the same blindness and resistance that he pretends to have the audacity to criticise in others. The *problem* of reading is thus identified, not its solution, and the question of language maintains the inquiry. The brash and presumptous aura covering the gesture lingers as a feeling, as does the unhappy power of the nihilist terms used, but this residual pathos does not compromise the intellectual acuity on display.

In fact, it might only add to it, and this is one of our ongoing concerns here. How may we articulate the pathos as de Man himself refused to do so? Can we state the enigma of affects without resorting to worn out oppositions between reason and feeling, understanding and intuition? Since language, and the question asked of it, is not "some kind of mystery"[39] that we might solve in order to complete a particular historical relationship between people (such as the feud between de Man and his antagonists), or in order to reveal the final truth about someone else's thoughts (such as me speaking the truth of Paul de Man here), all we can do is to strive to show similar acuity in our own work along similar lines of interest and focus. As a "thing" that exists in nature, or because of nature, language will retain itself in being regardless of whether think we have attained it "perfectly" or not, and so we need not worry about solving it, as a mystery or something else. The one thing we do not ever need to do is to think we have reached any endpoint of thinking about thinking, or language. But as even de Man has his discernible limits in this respect, and they are here in my view, it is the limits of that unbounded half-mystery that I will be able to push. To do that, however, as has been said, knowledge of language is needed on its most general level, together with rigorous attention on its specific forms.

(iii) The Language of Philology

In terms of academic discipline, de Man encouraged the showing of such scholarly talent which has historically gone under the name of philology. The "return to philology" that the late de Man espoused in an essay of the same name in 1982 called for a sharper focus among students on the "analytical rigor of their own discourse about literature", on the critical lucidity and theoretical insight about the methods and materials put to use, and the historical import of the work

[39] ibid. 96.

executed properly. Inspired by such teachers as Reuben Brower (and later turning their New Critical lesson against them) de Man saw this as the definitive criterion which separated "the consumers from the *professors* of literature, the chit-chat of evaluation from actual perception".[40] The pedagogical lesson learned of the premise would see him carry out his own university teaching career in this very close-reading fashion, much against the grain of the normative values and ideas received from the earlier generations of American academia. No wonder then that he left nobody in the field cold or indifferent to him during the "theory wars" of the 1980s, targeted against deconstruction and other forms of "rampant" poststructuralism. Unflinching attention to one question can do that. In that respect, it makes no difference whether the one question is the sheerly philological de Manian question of language, or if the question is how de Man is wrong, or if the question is how de Man is wrong and saying the other thing opposed to him makes the consciousness happy by making the world's things finally work and its texts shine either transparently or mysteriously. He says this already in the 1950s:

> As a control discipline, equally scornful of arbitrariness and pseudo-science, philology represents a store of established knowledge; to seek to supersede it, and it is far from obvious that that is possible, is without merit. When it is negated by equally excessive mysticism or scientism, it gains in increased self-awareness and provokes the development of methodological movements within the discipline itself, which ultimately reinforce it. (HEH 264)

It might be considered noble to use the items from the "store of established knowledge" for gradually building a complete image of the world but, as de Man points out, such thinking betrays its own total form, its ideation, directly from the off. By "superseding" the items purchased, the building blocks put to use, the idea of the world's image fails immediately *by failing its own self-awareness*, by zooming out from what went into creating it to enjoying the imagined result. Philology, in contrast, does not commit this mistake. Already Friedrich Schlegel appreciated it in his time, allowing it to "aid" his reading of other linguistic discourses:

> To read means to satisfy the philological drive, to make a literary impression on oneself. To read out of an impulse for pure philosophy or poetry, unaided by philology, is probably impossible.[41]

[40] "Return to Philology" RT 24.

[41] *Athenaeum* fragment 391. All fragments henceforth from Friedrich Schlegel: *Philosophical Fragments*, transl. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press,

By always already having thought itself, by having immediately posed the question of its own form, philology never fails to strengthen its own existence. Within the discipline, the "why" of "why do things work?" is grammatically the same as the "why" of the same question in the negative, and the projected answer, the "how" of each of the inquiries is found to spring from their non-original non-terminal source: language. Whether cognised naturally or naturalised cognitively, language remains the one unchangeable mechanism of our thinking, and it is only its forms, the situations that change. Philology takes notice of this and makes it into its forte. In this way, the passing instants of other realms of thought – religious, scientific, or cultural – make up no endpoints to philological thinking apart from those imagined; the zooming out might reveal great (in)sights but, subjected to the language discipline, the particular building materials may be shown to have exploded into all directions. The momentum is always that of expansion, not reduction. The real-cum-rhetorical break that constitutes human understanding grants this limitlessness, and the de Manian laboratory, with its unceasingly failing linguistic tests, shows us the vexing dominion of its sphere: the place of "le néant des choses humaines", the "nothingness" of our thinking as an unconstructive power which *connects* no-thing with no-thing and is only out there to collide with (the world's) things without plan or completion.

However, this cognitive premise does not kill off reality or the experience of it, quite the opposite as a matter of fact, but it radically reforms (or "deconstructs") the way we understand it: *anything* can follow from *something*, and we need to be aware of this lest we lapse into self-righteous assumptions about ourselves (which Kant criticised) or automatic servitude to other people's ideas (which Hegel exposed). Locating this resistance specifically in the language of literature, de Man says:

> That there is a nonhuman aspect of language is a perennial awareness from which we cannot escape, because language does things which are so radically out of our control that they cannot be assimilated to the human at all, against which one fights constantly.[42]

1991). Of more contemporary critics, Peter Szondi (1929–71) should be noted as someone who endorsed an explicitly philological method during his career. We will encounter some of his readings in the contexts of Hölderlin, Benjamin, Hegel, and Schlegel. For Szondi's views on philology, the essay "Treatise on Philological Knowledge" ("Traktat über philologische Erkenntnis", 1962) is useful.

42 TT 101.

In this thesis, I intend to observe this "perennial awareness", which plagued Archie Bunker too, as closely and cohesively as possible by reading and criticising the readings and criticisms of de Man in the different stages of his career. As stated earlier, the idea is not to embrace de Man's philosophy as a "whole", or to dip into his writings for this or that theoretical tool, but even less is the idea to read him to reject him or the one question asked therein. Instead, the idea, as a non-total form of thinking, is to follow up on the line of inquiry passed along by de Man and the philosophical tradition behind him, to push the "things" which still act upon and limit "us" (tests, results, dark poetics), and in doing so attempt to sense something new and different, to think the myth that allows them. That is a foreshadowing on my part, an attempt to see what de Man might have overlooked with his insistent method that collapses both reason and religion. As everything linguistic is always able to appear again, whether out of blind hope or a careful reading, the non-concept of myth makes it possible without showing "itself" in the process. As an unsolved form of thought that contains the literal and the figurative dimensions of language, the narratives of both fact and fiction, and the break of thought from action wedged between them, myth holds the power of language in being without seizing it for itself, without turning it into an idea of its own. In this way, the break that Paul de Man finds in others becomes another mythical action ordered in advance, validated only by its own impressive logic which prevails just because the others play the same game too. Baudelaire took part in it by hurling himself away from it, Mallarmé perused the rulebook until its words shone with their own power. More examples like this will be given in the following sections. Pushed somewhere else, out of the usual ballpark, the game might just not be the "game" one thought it was anymore, and the "rules" could be written differently.

3 Early de Man: A Temporal Ontology

One modern philosopher who could be said to have tried to rewrite some of the rules of thinking is Martin Heidegger, and de Man noticed this too; he is greatly concerned with the German particularly in the early part of his career. Much of his criticism of Heidegger has to do with the latter's reading of Friedrich Hölderlin's poems, which makes that a good place to observe their encounter. Heidegger says of Hölderlin that his poems are "like a bell which hangs in the open air and is already becoming out of tune through a light snowfall that is covering it"; after that he describes his own interpretations (exegeses, "elucidations") of the poems as a kind of "snowfall on the bell".[1] De Man, affirming the pros and cons of the approach, retorts to the gentle image thus:

> The matter [of interpretation] becomes even more complicated insofar as Heidegger's interpretation is based in turn upon a notion of the poetic that seeks to assert the fundamental impossibility of applying objective discourse to a work of art. Heidegger reduced philology to a subordinate position, although he does not hesitate to call upon it when his cause requires it; and he declares himself free of the restrictions it has imposed upon itself. Such violence has been found shocking, and rightly so, but it must be seen that it derives directly from Heidegger's conception of the poetic, which he claims to have deduced from Hölderlin's thought. To accept this poetics is to accept its consequences. (HEH 249)

A page later, de Man judges Heidegger's (at times violent) meditations as "heresies against the most elementary rules of text analysis" which, in all philological likelihood, rather mute than shade the Hölderlin tune, but they do that because "they rely upon a poetic that permits, or even requires, arbitrariness" (HEH 250). And so it is de Man's job to study that poetics to see where and how it goes wrong. A distance between the two different readers becomes apparent and leaves any third party needing to take both of the roads, at least to some distance, if any originary cause for the conflict is to be traced. This is important for my ongoing project because this is one of the head-to-head clashes which played a prominent

[1] Martin Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, transl. Keith Hoeller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000) 22.

role in de Man's critical development towards the 1970s and 1980s, and which brings into the open some of the richest de Manian issues that, in shifting forms, he was concerned with to the end.

The reason de Man nonetheless acknowledged that he very much appreciated Heidegger's contribution to Hölderlin studies was because, in it, any exegetic approach was discarded that was "not aimed at an understanding of poetic language in terms of its own essence" (PT 55). The recognition had a pedagogical usefulness, as well, since, in their presented form, Heidegger's "poetical exegeses [were] of particular interest to students of literature because they provide[d] a philosophical bases for the act of exegesis itself".[2] Had Heidegger not been thus disposed, his criticism would have been met with utter indifference by de Man (or not met at all), which only goes to show that, for there to be a conflict, a common site of confrontation must first be agreed on. In this case, this place was to be nothing less than language itself, with Hölderlin as the specimen. De Man ascribes to Heidegger the conviction of history being "the concrete manifestation of the very movement of being, a movement whose fundamental ambiguity is the origin of the historicity of our destiny" (TP 34). This a motion that de Man seeks to identify with but which is, apparently, betrayed and left behind by Heidegger as his thought turns from the maelstrom of temporal strife (exhibited up until the time of "The Origin of the Work of Art" in 1935–37) to the more patient visions of his post-WW2 writings, "educated"[3] by the poetry of Hölderlin.

What kind of "education" is it then that de Man so disliked? Is it a classic *Bildung* or something else? Afterthoughts of Schiller being educated by and turning Kant's philosophy into aesthetic guidelines for the advancement of the nation clearly linger here, and since de Man did not appreciate Schiller's contribution either (see section 5), some of the same resistance may noticeably raise its head here. The entire issue of aesthetics and its "learning" impact looks very different, though, in the Heideggerian context than it does in Kant and Schiller. As Heidegger despises the concept of modern aesthetics as an enervating scientification that is diametrically opposed to the "radiance" of arts ("*techné*") in ancient times, in its stead he stresses the impetuous "bringing-forth" ("*poiesis*"), or "the arising of something from out of itself" ("*physis*"), as the authentic revealing of truth.[4]

2 "Heidegger Reconsidered" CW 105.

3 Julian Young: *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 72.

4 ibid. 10. While "*poiesis*" as a linguistic phenomenon has to do with the primary concern, or the question of language, of this entire study, the terms "*techné*" (or "*tekhne*") and "*physis*" ("*phusis*") are introduced here as they will also show up in many instances later on in the

And this aim of truth-revealing that happens in the correct mode of "*aletheia*" inherently empowers Being even in the technologically challenged epoch of the present.[5] That modern aesthetics is not the right choice to opt for is made very clear:

> In Greece, at the outset of the destining of the West, the arts soared to the supreme height of the revealing granted them. They brought the presence [*Gegenwart*] of the gods, brought the dialogue of divine and human destinings, to radiance. And art was simply called *techné*. It was a single, manifold revealing… The arts were not derived from the artistic. Art works were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity.[6]

This kind of thinking is clearly at odds with any schematic categories or idealist precepts on the beautiful, educationally and otherwise, and so it would be quite unfair to classify Heidegger under the same general heading with his precursor compatriots. It should be noted though, however cursorily in this context, that it is by no means unthinkable that the outward differences between the parties would vanish on a deeper level, like that of language, which is claimed as the focus of the study anyway. Whether this pursuit would then find that Heidegger shuns modern "aesthetics" just because it so named – and overlooks many of its more profound aspects in doing so – poses an interesting question about the "danger" involved in our thinking too much about the "blocked" possibility of becoming "admitted more and sooner and ever more primally to the essence"[7] of our Being. The peril is that of loose identification and careless thinking which prevents us from really looking "into the danger" and seeing there "the growth of the saving power", which it is crucial to observe but through which,

thesis. As de Man's application (and argumentation) of them changes over the course of his writings, so does the understanding of the particular words. The main dichotomy signalled by them, however, remains that which breaks nature from "non-nature".

5 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has described Heidegger's attempts at the time to define the relationship between "*techné*" and "*physis*" diversely as the former being for and of the latter either the "revelation", the "sur-plus", or the "representation in the full sense of the word, i.e. in the sense of *making present*". What these various characterisations entail for the actual "bringing-forth", or "*poiesis*", of any given moment in actuality is obviously hard to pin down, but at least they show how differently the moment can at once be understood. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, transl. Chris Turner (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990). Pages 66, 69, and 83–4 respectively.

6 Martin Heidegger: "The Question Concerning Technology" *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, transl. William Lovitt (New York and Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1977) 34.

7 ibid. 26.

regardless, "we are not yet saved".[8] This is because the status of "being saved" can never be accomplished and the "thing" thought to effect it cannot be grasped. For Heidegger, to understand this endless state of waiting, occurring in the all-presence of "*parousia*", is to understand Being. (And this is how he understands Hölderlin's "poetic dwelling", as we will see.) However, as far as the bane of modern aesthetics is concerned, it seems as if the "danger" involved in thinking about it is based on a loose identification on Heidegger's part, *not* that of Kant or Schiller, as it senses no necessary danger (of careful thinking) there but only a barren jungle of linguistic labels. One might wonder if that should not be the "enframing" question (*Ge-stell*) then: What are such "labels", and who gives them or passes them on to others? If "Homer's *word* gave Greece its gods" and it granted them strictly as "myth" which allows "a people to accede to its own language and thereby to situate itself as such in History",[9] should that not turn label-giving too into an essential bringing-forth of truth, into authentic "*poiesis*"?

These are all very important questions, even if it is not our place to answer them here. What we should recall instead is that the approach to interpretation we have with Heidegger is a self-confessed, anti-aesthetic one which considers the objects of language it encounters "in terms of its own essence" – the language, not the objects it appears to own. That is the critical mood to be in when one starts to read for the truth, in the mode of "*aletheia*". However, since Heidegger in his uncompromising pursuit for the truth does still get to be "educated" by Hölderlin's poetry, the fact that this happens is something de Man for his part must feel compelled to deal with. The paradox involved in the case is the fact that the more serene the later Heidegger grows, the more concerned he becomes with the question of language – that very question about which we have been arguing as well. To someone with a radical philological tilt (such as de Man) this kind of intrusion (by what has in his eyes revealed itself as another reactionary form of hermeneutic philosophy) must be unacceptable. No serene "founding of being in the word"[10] which did not come trailing the essential awareness of the linguistic break could remain uncontested – especially when the work of an author of Hölderlin's stature was in question. Critical terminology had to be put to methodical use in order to show where Heidegger went wrong once and for all, perhaps repeating the mistakes of his precursors, and to offer instead such a

8 ibid. 33.

9 Lacoue-Labarthe 56. Here "myth" translates for "Sage", a word used in other instances also for "Saying".

10 Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 59.

dialectical understanding of poetry and being which resonated more truthfully (and implacably) with Hölderlin both now and in his own time.

Some of the key terms in achieving this were the concepts of mediation and temporality. Since at this point de Man still thought it possible for an author voluntarily to exert some degree of control over his or her own text by way of a proper representation of literary awareness (which would not quite be the case later on), there had to be something else which disrupted the representation at its core. As the author was still able to possess a "degree of transparence of a consciousness to its own light" (CCR 9) while choosing to write in a pattern more "interpretative or hermeneutic" than "apocalyptic" (geared at "a single culminating moment") or "interpersonal" (taking place "between two subjects or within a single self") (CCR 21), this meant he or she could consciously choose to drive towards unity and poetic totalisation – even if the attempt was bound to fail in advance. The disruption effected by mediation and temporality was inherent to the unfortunate event and the author's awareness of it remained as the sole saving grace against the "warped desire" (CCR 7) which duped the hapless mind into believing the power to choose could result in something other than failure. There are ideas in that line of thinking which stand in stark contrast to New Critical and structuralist arguments at the time, such as the formal unavoidability of intention and the non-autonomy of the literary mind; and de Man expressed his criticism of such sciences (including Saussurian linguistics and Barthesian semiology) in terms of their becoming "unable to understand [their] own discourse" through too much reductive self-referentiality. By turning literature into pure fiction, the science reading the texts becomes blind to itself, and, as a result, "a science unable to read itself can no longer be called a science".[11] This is de Man's criticism of many of his contemporaries, but it has to be noticed that there remain also some presuppositions in his own ideas, such as the contrasting, intentional residue of a real author, and the hidden possibility of a factual element in literature awaiting

[11] "Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism" RCC 174. For another example of de Man's criticism of structuralism, one can consider his views on the dreamy "over-perception" of such a fringe French critic as Serge Doubrovsky, who takes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perceptual model (in which, according to de Man, "the intent and the content of the act can be co-extensive", FI 35) and transposes it into literature as such. For de Man, this is a huge mistake because, as he says, literature "does not fulfill a plenitude but originates in the void that separates intent from reality. The imagination takes its flight only after the void, the inauthenticity of the existential project has been revealed; literature begins where the existential demystification ends and the critic has no need to linger over this preliminary stage" (FI 35). Criticism thus only begins when the factual inevitability of imaginative intention has already been shown always to start only from itself, not from any wishful thought of rejoining with something lost or foreseeing a prize to be gained. To believe in the latter is to perpetuate the fallacy of originary autonomy in poetic fiction.

interpretation beyond the "light" of consciousness. The later de Man would eagerly dispense with these notions, but the fact that early on he was able to hold on to these notions and remain able to articulate the cognitive break, adds an interesting strain to his theoretical development and it needs to be looked at. The question, as will be shown, comes down to this: What is good literary concealedness and what bad? And what does de Man himself reveal?

Quickly put, the main point of conflict between the hermeneutics of Heidegger and the early de Man stems from the closure of the interpretive circle. But how to understand this enigmatic site? In "The Contemporary Criticism of Romanticism" (1967), de Man works his way towards it by analysing René Girard's view of the temporal structures of literature. As a result, about how the ending of a work relates to its beginning according to such a pattern, he comes to the conclusion that, whenever an understanding of truth is at stake, the hermeneutic circle "will never close perfectly" (CCR 22), as Girard discovers too, but that this imperfection is *not* due to the end having fallen short of the unlimited promise of the beginning, as Girard would have us believe. It is rather the very opposite that occurs in literature; according to de Man, the inevitability of the end's failure to reconcile and harmonise is the dialectical pre-requirement of any beginning, and, within the bounds of that linguistic law ("the beginning promises nothing but the end's failure"), no twisting of the hermeneutic circle aimed at denying it must be allowed in the understanding of poetry. Just because the ending fails to close off interpretation, that does not mean the beginning would have an unlimited potential: instead, the beginning happens *because* the ending fails. In "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" (1960) de Man puts it like this:

> Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again; it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness. The word is always a free presence to the mind, the means by which the permanence of natural entities can be put into question and thus negated, time and again, in the endlessly widening spiral of the dialectic.[12]

It is interesting, however, that elsewhere de Man admits that the circle *can* present and contain its own failure, "albeit in a hidden form" (CCR 22). The analysis done might take him beyond Girard (in the sense of stripping the circle's beginning of its potential) but it still leaves his argument exposed to Heidegger, whose idea of the law of interpretation is more ambiguous. This is because, at this point, de

[12] "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" RR 6.

Man allows for the closure (or non-closure in this case) of an interpretation to occur in its hiding, allegorically, without making itself manifest on the surface. As a consequence, it must be that Heidegger holds the advantage on the nature of linguistic being: existence *is* something which encloses the possibility of its own solution within itself, "albeit in a hidden form"; it *is* an ontological mystery, however non-coincidental, instead of a linguistic riddle stripped of its mystic power. And to express this would be to speak the undeniable truth. De Man would be right in saying what he says about poetry, but so would Heidegger, and since it would be the latter's totalising philosophy which granted the possibility of them both being right, the claim of radical non-closure, of non-coincidence "spiralling" into a negative infinity, would lose all its power and merely become another perspective within the general endowment, both in language and in reality.[13] Naturally this is unacceptable for de Man and thus he must find a way of showing where Heidegger's powerful hermeneutics goes critically wrong.

The following quotation articulates the disagreement at the root of it:

> Critics who speak of a "happy relationship" between matter and consciousness fail to realize that the very fact that the relationship has to be established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in actuality.[14]

In the context, de Man denounces those symbolist, formalist, structuralist and other post-romantic critics who look to the literary text in order to find there some kind of link (organic, structural, or simply communicative) which brings its different parts together naturally in the union of mind and matter, longed for by Coleridge and perpetually since. In its stead, this kind of "happy relationship" is replaced by another "spiralling" understanding of what Romanticism really was about ("nostalgia for [an] object [that] has become a nostalgia for an entity that could never, by its very nature, become a particularized presence"[15]). Mixed together with a Hegelian awareness, this deeply "nostalgic" sentiment ends

[13] Allan Stoekl, though, understands with de Man's "endless spiral" the "announcement of a beginning of a new kind of poetry (a poetry aware of the true nature of the word)" which also "implies the discontinuity of death" (38, see end of note), and he seems to prefer this discovery over the "complacency" (41) of Heideggerian Being. However, the grounds for Stoekl's enthusiasm – we are encouraged not only to rethink de Man's critical background but also to "misread his work strongly and productively" (44) – become shaky when we recall what de Man just did to the idea of a "beginning" promising anything in reward. Allan Stoekl: "De Man and the Dialectic of Being" *diacritics* 15.3 (autumn 1985).

[14] "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" RR 8.

[15] ibid. 15.

up drawing explicitly, and because it promotes the emotion it does that quite strikingly, on the unhappy tradition of philosophy which asserts the objective supremacy of language-mediated existence over the inherent subjectivity of its nature-immediate counterpart.[16] After many (linguistic) twists and turns Heidegger's hermeneutic model still ends up bivouacking in the latter camp, argues de Man; and it is this settling down that then becomes the place eagerly looked for by de Man in order to attack the validity of the model.

Thus, observing the process of particular readings instead of thematising poetry as a general entity provides de Man with a point of entry into literature which is different from Heidegger's. The objective of the rigorous, "non-heretical" approach is to mirror no prior imaginings and claim no foreknowledge of the final result apart from its own anticipated failure to do just that:

> Art is not an imitation (or a repetition) but an endless longing for imitation, which by virtue of imitating itself, hopes finally to find a model. In other words, poetic language is not an originary language, but is derived from an originary language it does not know; consequently, as a language, it is mediate and temporal.[17]

This happens because, in de Man's view, in real philology no linguistic terminus is ever reached and no imaginary origin therefore departed from, and in committing itself to this law, literature refrains from totalising anything about its own form except the inevitable attempt to understand the (unhappy) process. In this way, there is nothing suspect or contradictory in terms of defining what is "process" and what "result" for de Man, and he needs to be clear about them in order to validate his own non-closing hermeneutic model over the totalising circle of Heidegger. The disclaimer is that the latter's critical method remains completely operable and coherent, for which it has been lauded, but that the method belongs to a system which is based on bad faith. The patient gesture of happily waiting

[16] It is good to keep in mind this apparent lapse of de Man's into an authentication of "nostalgic" sentiment when the concept of memory is discussed later on in the thesis. In addition, it is also good to recall here the (Schillerian) split between the "sentimentality" of linguistic mediation and the "naivety" of natural immediacy. This division, however, needs to be distinguished, at least for de Man's point of view, from the Longinian one in which, as well, the mediated conventionality of the linguistic sign is emphasised. The distinguishing is necessary though because the writers of that tradition (such as Edmund Burke and a number of more recent authors criticised by de Man as late as "The Resistance to Theory") find cause to cherish language *because of* its pleasing fictions and imitations, whereas for de Man the arbitrary quality of language goes from lament to madness to learning to read the madness (and it is reduced to that chain of successive events because it still finds itself dominated by the principle of the superiority of natural being).

[17] "Thematic Criticism and the Theme of Faust" CW 87. Translated by Dan Latimer.

for an apocalyptic union of mind and matter (the Romantic error) is for de Man a static fallacy which betrays the true flow of dynamic temporality and which, in language, corresponds with a "state of beatitude which properly speaking is a lethargy" (TP 39). In that sense then, in the end, there is no real difference between Girard and Heidegger, because both of them (with different degrees of critical lucidity) are driven towards this pathetic state by their attempt to totalise the process of interpretation. It is not totalisation by stating unequivocal meanings, far from it, but by wholly allowing them to exist in their hiding, and by preserving their meaning in the light too. De Man sees Heidegger reading this out of Hölderlin:

> With respect to himself, Heidegger is not so sure that he has seen Being and, in any case, he knows that he has nothing to say about it beyond the fact that it conceals itself. Yet he does not intend to give up discourse since it is still his intention to collect and found Being by means of language. And he intends to remain a thinker and not turn to mysticism. The experience of Being must be sayable; in fact, it is in language that it is preserved…. Language – Hölderlin's language – is the immediate presence of Being. (HEH 253)

With this understanding in place, and with Heidegger never failing to maintain its possibility despite of perpetual disruptions to it such as language and temporality (which actually turn into endowments rather than impediments), de Man is compelled to return to its philosophy over and over again in order to hone his own method and to reassess the arguments he has made.

We may postulate that being apocalyptic means being happy, or at least being able to hope for happiness. But if, according to de Man, this kind of being is based on an incorrect understanding of the true nature of being, it follows that all meanings springing from apocalyptic being are definitely false. In the literary sense, such an idea of temporality is Aristotelian and refers to a length of time running from a fixed beginning to a fixed end which satisfies the course of an "inward or mythological language".[18] De Man, however, says that any such completion lacks "real tension" (PT 64) and that, in reality, it is the kind of literature linked only "by a duration that the mind can encompass in both directions" and with "the reader… constantly making such temporal reversions" (CCR 21) which may be said to flee from the totalising clutches of apocalyptic understanding. Hölderlin (with his rivers) is the prime example of this escape and Heidegger the one who escapes the escape (from the poetic rivers), and the fact

[18] "Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition" RCC 130.

that de Man is able to reveal all this in present terms is a further escapist paradox: it is as if he went with Heidegger to the rivers to show that they did not actually exist.[19] The following lines of Julian Young about Heidegger's temporal thinking in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) may be thought about here:

> Most people, however, like the "last man" in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, are oblivious to the conditions of their times. […] This is because… they inhabit "inauthentic temporality". "Forgetting" the past and so unable to "project" into the future, the horizon of their life options is confined to the (specious) present.[20]

In terms of revealing the "inauthenticity" of apocalyptic revealingness and replacing it with the "happy unhappiness" of any interpretation gaining its poetic power from the sheer process of its temporal duration, the early de Man comes dangerously close to being confined to an oblivious poetic present within the general concept of the hermeneutic circle. We will see this more clearly in the discussion of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" (and in the next sections we will see what the later de Man does with it), but here it is important to understand its critical motivation for the de Man of the 1950s and 1960s.

If it is the case that in Heidegger's self-claimed "ideal commentary" (FI 30) on Hölderlin's poetry an "implicit foreknowledge" always precedes the act of actual reading, it is also the case that the said "foreknowledge" is "always temporally ahead of the explicit interpretative statement that tries to catch up with it" (FI 31).

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19 It is very easy to locate paradoxical things like this in de Man (of any period), and it might be well argued that they are a necessary by-product of his reading method. His own awareness of them, however, is a much more complicated matter; because while it is certainly true that he is alive to their presence (in the form of thesis statements such as "[t]he only literal statement that says what it means to say is the assertion that there can be no literal statements", RB 133), and he knows that their saying instantiates the temporal disruption he is trying to articulate (and thus in a way proves his case), the fact remains that he is not interested in putting the *paradoxes themselves* to test. In terms of being, a paradox is forever non-paradoxical in itself, and thus a positive totalisation; if de Man is aware of this and does nothing about it, he undercuts himself because his logic does not allow for it (no cognition of any opposition extends there); if he is unaware of it, he is merely blind. In either case, it is like telling in detail what happens *in* the instant while (intentionally) forgetting *about* the instant, and it is this presupposition which does validate the method but at the same time establishes its own limits. The later concept of "undecidability" is the highest expression of this restraint for de Man, and it would be a show of bad faith to insist it was not a concept, albeit a bewildering one. This would also be true even if one did not rate highly Frank Lentricchia's "Yale Mafia" account on de Man where he contends that "de Man's rhetorical perspective will not allow him the position" of "such confident determinacy" as is proposed by the concept of "undecidability". Although Lentricchia's report reduces to a rant, his concern is understandable. Frank Lentricchia: "Paul de Man: The Rhetoric of Authority" *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980). 315.

20 Young 74.

In this way, the weakness of Heidegger's reading is revealed: in de Man's world, there are no secrets to be hidden in time and no meanings awaiting their preserver anywhere. However, something similar refracts instantly back on de Man too: it becomes the case that no (linguistic) foreknowledge of images and intentions lost in time, and no riddles stripped of mystery can remain logically valid for de Man either. The calling of understanding "complete… when it becomes aware of its own temporal predicament and realizes that the horizon within which the totalization can take place is time itself" (FI 32) becomes an inadequate aporia which finally fails to keep in motion the project of the de Manian break, and he would see this later on in the 1970s. This does not mean that his temporal "horizon" was "inauthentic" (as it is for Nietzsche's "last man") in the sense of being false or based on bad faith but it does create a clear contour to his literary theory at the time.[21]

Philosophically speaking, however, in the context of Heidegger de Man's pushing of the essential break contained in the concept of any closure is already nearing the limits of what he would ever come to say about it. As there are no secrets or mysteries, only riddles, and as a riddle is "a device of language that can, in turn, be deciphered only by another operation of language" (RH 206), one of these riddles for de Man is how Heidegger's "founding of being in the word", comes to fail in any given instance. It fails at once and completely, even beyond literary interpretive circularity, insofar as its intention is to bring *anything* into the open, as something to be met in the "horizon of disclosure"[22] of the Heideggerian world. As stated in somewhat different terms earlier, that this happens is proof for de Man that any such appropriation of content on the intentional level is sheer error designed to escape the "painful knowledge" which, unhappily and ineluctably, results from the "pure anteriority" (RTe 207) of the dynamic form of temporality, the distance between the imaginary and the perceived, mind and matter. Siting Hölderlin in this "realm of the between"[23] with the belief of his poetry representing the possibility of its self-reconciliation is not a gentle "snowfall" but an apocalyptic blizzard which freezes the sonorous bell in its place, suffocating its essentially temporal chime. This chronic de Manian insight,[24] however, is not the

[21] Some of the terms mentioned here (such as "horizon") turn into explicit objects of criticism for de Man later on in his career. See the chapter on Jauss in section 5, for example.

[22] Young 23.

[23] Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 64.

[24] Certainly this is not an exclusively de Manian insight, as similar grievances against Heidegger can be found, among others, in Adorno's famous essay "Parataxis" where he polemically condemns Heidegger's "intellectual short-circuit" (115, see end of note) in failing to attend "to

resounding of another Heideggerian mystery, but it is merely the renewing of the riddle – the riddle of language. In reading, there is no stopping anywhere.

In de Man's view of it, then, there *is* an understanding, but it is nothing one might expect:

> This inner understanding does not alleviate our present predicament, nor does it imply any knowledge or control over what will happen in the future. True wisdom begins in the knowledge of its own historical ineffectiveness. […] Nothing could be more remote from schemes that conceive of history as either apocalyptic failure or salvation. (RH 212)

What this means for Heidegger's philosophy is that de Man acknowledges many of its finer aspects (like its historical ambiguity and cognitive imperfection) but he also points diametrically away from its unwarranted endowment as a system which discloses rather than disrupts being. In this way, it is strictly the same kind of error either to dwell in mourning or nostalgia for a lost paradise ("apocalyptic failure") *or* gallantly to believe in its return ("salvation"). Only the systematic disrupting of any such disclosure can help us in seeing past the error – as opposed to any such concept of disruption that only makes the disclosing possible in the first place by diaphorically traversing the entire world at all times (as Heidegger's "primal strife" does in "The Origin of the Work of Art", 1935–37). Moreover, for de Man, the disrupting must be done without ever having to resort to such "methodological consequences of… attitude [that] go against the very foundation of philological science". The attitude mentioned here is Heidegger's, and de Man grants him as much, seeking to refute the his claims on the very grounds they are made, understanding Heidegger's interpretive "violence" as a natural offset of his philosophy, as the self-engendering "*phusis*" of his sophisticated "*tekhne*": "[t]o accept this poetics is to accept its consequences" (HEH 249). Hölderlin's poetry provides an excellent nexus for this.

what is specifically poetic" (114) in Hölderlin. At times Adorno and de Man do not seem that far apart (de Man acknowledges this in "Patterns of Temporality in Hölderlin's 'Wie wenn am Feiertage…'") with the former naming the truth of a poem as "a structure of aesthetic semblance" (112) with its meaning shattered, and the latter, as discussed, as an (unhappy) residue left over by the temporal reversals. Theodor W. Adorno: "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry" *Notes to Literature, vol. 2*, transl. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

(i) Hölderlin's "Wie wenn am Feiertage…"

Hölderlin's poem "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" (1799–1803; see appendix I on pages 257–8 for the German original) and its readings by de Man and Heidegger show many of the issues so far discussed in action. In his essay "Patterns of Temporality in Hölderlin's 'Wie wenn am Feiertage…'", originally delivered as a lecture at the Gauss seminar in 1967, de Man takes the first few pages to expound the problem of romantic criticism, the linguistic hold of the aesthetic self over the empirical self, the premises of philology, and the critical promise shown by the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*. He concludes this part by stating how we "could thus legitimately expect from the Heideggerian premises a clarifying analysis of poetic temporality, as it is seen to act within the poetic form". These expectations, however, are then promptly "disappointed" (PT 58) and de Man goes on to analyse why this happens. After many twists and turns (more about them in a while), de Man arrives at the end result of the ending itself – which connects it circularly with the beginning – and the poem's wisdom is to be found in this shattered event, one where the reader is warned not to believe that the "kind of enthusiasm that animates a heroic act is identical with the predominant mood of a poetic consciousness" (PT 67).[25] The thematic of heroism (of the poem's "fellow poets" whom it "behoves to stand / Bareheaded beneath God's thunder-storms"[26]), along with the important opposition of shelter and violence, thus receives a full treatment from de Man.

The entire point of Heidegger's reading of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" is to stress the need of "the sons of the earth" to have "the mediation of the holy through the gift of a song without danger".[27] As life-preserving sanctity is immediately granted to us by god, the "danger" is that its anxiously awaited birth in song "threatens to invert the essence of the holy into its opposite"[28] which will destroy it. In other words, should we seek to grasp holiness in its immediate form, the threat is that we would either be doomed in the attempt or simply fail to understand it, falling prey to either blasphemy or barbarianism. In order to prevent this "unholy" negation from taking place (which would forever cleave us from its divine "origin" and

[25] Heidegger completes his reading of the poem (based on a later version) with a decisive tone, whereas de Man makes use of an earlier draft in which the poem ends in a much more disbelieving way. De Man's attitude in doing this as a philologist comes across rather smugly – the "embarrassing fact remains that [the earlier lines] always had been destined to be the concluding part (PT 65).

[26] **"Doch uns gebührt es, unter Gottes Gewittern, / Ihr Dichter! mit entblösstem Haupte zu** stehen"

[27] Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 94.

[28] ibid.

annihilate its presence in actuality), the immediate is immediately turned into the mediate which both keeps us and our sagacious song in its truth, allowing us to disclose it in the open. It could be argued, in terms of the general philosophical tradition, that Heidegger here criticises (and attempts to top) both rationalism (in the way of not positively identifying with a simple subject-object dichotomy) and idealism (in the way of not identifying with it negatively either), and instead seeks to establish mediation itself as essentially positive (or "holy"), a phenomenal entity escaping conceptual accounting. That this establishment can (and should) be done then opens (or "originates") the world for poetry and art. In this kind of reading, interpretation does indeed stop at the "steadfastness with which the poets are able to endure the approach of the gods" (PT 59) and there is no need to be detained by, or perhaps even to consider, the "self-inflicted wound" found in the last lines of the original version.[29] To de Man, however, these lines are everything the poem ever points at, right from the beginning, and they turn back on themselves in a breaking action which rescinds any claim that might have been made in the course of the poem's duration and culminates in a hermeneutic blaze in which "the ending makes the hidden meaning of the beginning explicit" by interpreting it "in a language that has accumulated the experience necessary to bring out what was there from the beginning, but in a neutral, non-conscious state" (PT 70).

In the way it emphasises the importance of philological knowledge (the "necessary experience"), this formulation not only recalls the radically non-coincidental hermeneutic circle discussed earlier, but it also, interestingly, describes the both model and the knowledge in terms which actually impregnate it with a residual subjective intention. For who else is there to experience the "neutral, non-conscious state" but *a* subject, whether the poem itself or the human mind encountering it? As it turns out, de Man does not elaborate on the implications of the "non-conscious state" in this context, but he does oppose it sharply with

[29] "But, oh, my shame! when of / My shame! / And let me say at once / That I approached the Heavenly, / And they themselves cast me down, deep down / Before the living, into the dark cast down / The false priest that I am, to sing, / For those who have ears to hear, the warning song. / There". See lines 67–74 in the German original. The "self-inflicted wound" quotation from is from the prose draft of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" to which Peter Szondi frequently refers to (32 in Szondi, PT 66 in de Man) in his attempt to get the metrical version "reconstructed" (37) philologically. Szondi's eventual conclusion about the "element of personal suffering" in the hymnic Hölderlin and his poetic "ego… no longer recogni[sing] any arrow other than the god's" (42) is brushed aside by de Man (Hölderlin "could never have felt very close to the problem Szondi mentions as crucial", PT 67), and it is debatable whether it really deals philosophical damage to Heidegger. Peter Szondi: "The Other Arrow: On the Genesis of the Late Hymnic Style" *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, transl. Harvey Mendelsohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Heidegger's "foreknowledge, a prefiguration that the later, 'ideal' statement makes explicit but never supersedes" (PT 71). The accusation is that Heidegger's awaiting of the holy in Hölderlin's poem is an uncritical fantasy which betrays the temporal dynamic of being suggested by his own earlier philosophy, forsaking real insight for a shelter of patience and pathos,[30] which remains content in illuminating itself. And since this accusation is entirely pinned on the poetic fact about "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" that its disruptive ending is already spoken by its beginning (another thing which never supersedes its own figuration for de Man but rather remains at a distance from itself), a look at that fact is in order.

The first stanza of the poem begins with the lines:

> As on a holiday, to see the field
> A countryman goes out, at morning, when
> Out of hot night the cooling flashes had fallen
> For hours on end, and thunder still rumbles afar

And the second stanza structurally complements the first one with:

> So now in favourable weather they stand
> Whom no mere master teaches, but in
> A light embrace, miraculously omnipresent,
> God-like in power and beauty, Nature brings up.[31]

The situation is that of daybreak after a stormy night with the countryman going out to see how it looks now, and with the enigmatic "them" still divining somewhere in nature. This is the poetic premise on which there is no disagreement; problems start to crop up only when, in his elucidation of the poem, Heidegger identifies the "sie" of line 10 with the "Dichter" of line 16 and connects them with the countryman, save for the poets' ability to receive and be brought up by "another kind of upbringing", that is, education by nature.[32] Without any apparent need

[30] Julian Young refers to this patience as Heidegger's transition from the alleged "superfluity of Nikeism" (Fascist go-getting more or less) to the waiting quality of his later "*Ereignis*-thinking" (112, the very thing that did not sit well with de Man). De Man does not directly ridicule Heidegger for having done this, but his reference to the less polite Adorno seems to do the talking for him. George Pattison's wondering whether this is a justified judgment about a philosophy seeking to stay us from both "blasphemy… a presumption as to our own god-likeness" *and* "the superficiality of idle talk" is a question of its own. George Pattison: *The Later Heidegger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 175.

[31] See lines 1–4 and 10–13 in the German original.

[32] De Man follows Heidegger's double action halfway through, that is, he too identifies the "sie" with the "Dichter" but, along with Peter Szondi, goes on his separate way after that. The action is of suspect validity, and it is interesting that it should go unnoticed here, especially with a similar debate surrounding the elusive "prince of the feast-day" ("den Fürsten des

for further figuration, the opening for the embrace by the holy is thus endowed, as long as it is understood in its mediate form and non-identical divinity. Song is born out of that; and de Man turns against it. Calling on Hölderlin's other work (the play *Empedokles*, among others) to characterise such noble role-casting as "a sacrificial urge" which is "a form of hubris" and its ironic reversal through the last lines of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" as a "metaheroic tonality [which] Hölderlin calls the 'ideal' tone" (PT 69), de Man attacks Heidegger's easy connecting of the poets with the countryman. As that figure has been safe at night, de Man wonders whether it would be truer to the poem if we agreed with Peter Szondi[33] and linked the "sie" (the poets) with the "exposed trees, objects that were never sheltered from the direct impact of the lightning" on lines 5–9, instead of having them first stand outside nature and, like the countryman, come out only "after the moment of greatest danger" (PT 61). The focal question is not that of any socio-historical reference (as de Man grants to Heidegger), because Hölderlin's "nature" contains within it and admits all such speculations (including knowledge of war and mythology), but it is that of identification and the function of the thing identified with. If the poets are such initial absentees as de Man reads Heidegger's poets to be, there is no basis for arguing that they are in the reception of anything immediate like Heidegger would have us believe. As their being collapses in an original outsideness, they should rather serve as a warning against the delusion.

If, on the other hand, the poets risk nature as trees do, they are bound to be consumed in the violence of their own heroism, unable to preserve or

Fests") of Hölderlin's late-discovered "Friedensfeier". Quotation from Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 75.

33 In referring to the "sie" of line 10, Szondi states in no unclear terms that "'[t]hey' means the poets. It is necessary to guard against a misapprehension right at the start" ("The Other Arrow" 27). As Szondi makes frequent use of the prose draft of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" in explicating the hymn itself, and in this instance he quotes the draft as having had the future line 10 ("So stehn sie unter günstiger Witterung") originally sketched down as "So stehen sie jetzt unter günstiger Witterung die Dichter" (endnote 8), which, had it ended up in the poem, would naturally have given it a very different look. It did not, however, end up there, much in the same way the "self-inflicted wound" of the prose draft did not, and it is crucial to recognise this fact. For all of Szondi's remonstrations on how "philological proof" ("On Textual Understanding" *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, 16) is given, his reliance on the "genetic" reconstruction of an "ultimate" work of literature through earlier versions and other bits and pieces contradicts and finally compromises the unique and ambiguous nature of poetic creation. (Even though there are other places where he apparently endorses it; in talking about a tricky passage in Kleist's *Amphitryon* with different interpretive possibilities he says that the "important question to ask is *whether any decision is called for here at all*, i. e., whether the alternative does not lie within the subject matter itself", ibid. 19, my emphasis.) As it happens, in the case of the hymn "Wie wenn am Feiertage…", the absence of "Dichter" from line 10 makes it into a very different poem – quite like the additional fragmentary final stanza does.

communicate anything to the rest of us. And therein lies the deepest breach of Hölderlin's poetry: neither of these two options, the choice of shelter or the choice of violence, can be articulated in a way which would endow us with any control over our own destiny or command of Heideggerian Being. We either die fast in the "violent temporality (*reissende Zeit*) of action" or wither away in the "sheltering temporality (*schützende Zeit*) of interpretation"[34] and so, as the de Manian project would have us understand it, the only way to survive into another future is to be aware of the madness which we are caught in. If this linguistic wisdom is not grasped, all the "happy" readers of the world are able to go on insisting on a fallacious understanding of poetry that "does not coincide with the mode of totalization of the poem's own language" (PT 65), and their readings are left as either worthless or wildly erroneous. Whereas in de Man's reality, the oblivious poetic present has us tossing back and forth in a vortex of temporal reversals which we hold on to for dear life and its aesthetic illusions.

However, since both Heidegger and de Man immediately identify Hölderlin's "sie" of the first line of the second stanza with the "Dichter" on the seventh, it proves a burden not only to the former's elucidation of the poem as an all-too-easy embracing of (or connecting with) the holy, but also to the latter's total dependence on this identification in trying to disrupt the totalising reading. The fact that in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" de Man links the poets with the trees (as natural things which in themselves escape cognition) rather than the countryman is a decision necessary for this line of thought. The final fragmentary stanza can be read in a similar way and, by bringing it back together with the "neutral" beginning, de Man is able to validate his own non-closing hermeneutic reading while also asserting its critical superiority over Heidegger's. And yet there is a problem to this method, no matter how convincing it may sound – the fact remains that, in this version of the hymn, there is no formal grammatical reason to identify the "sie" of line 10 with the "Dichter" of line 16. The expression "So now in favourable weather they stand / Whom no mere master teaches" can also float free of the explicit reference to the poets five lines later (the first one of its kind in the poem); "The poets' faces likewise are sad, they seem to be alone".[35] Prosodically it is interesting that de Man does note the grammatical connective "Wie… so" between the beginnings of the first and the second stanza – which has one "certainly tempted" (PT 61) to agree with the connection Heidegger makes – but he disregards the "so" at the beginning of line 16 in the German original

[34] WH 63.

[35] See lines 16–17 in the German original.

(Hamburger's translation pulls it up to line 14 but does not lose it). This "so" gives a strong feeling of alternation and difference between the two halves of the second stanza divided by the full stop on line 13. What's more, the other full stop on line 17, neglected by Hamburger, makes it four lines for each of the first two parts and leaves the final Pindaric line[36] as something of a final lingering before the "breaking" of the day and the "my word" ("mein wort") speaking in the subjunctive in the first two lines of the third stanza. (And by that lingering, a stark division is again established between the restlessly creating poets of the day, unreliable in the truth of their word, and the mighty elusive "them" brought up by sleeplessly creating omnipresent nature.) Yet all this is not to say, by any criteria, that in the second stanza "they" *could* not mean the poets but, more importantly, it does not say that "they" *must* mean the poets.[37] Moreover, it does not say that, if the above is the case, "they" should be then primarily identified with something else, such as the countryman or the trees or the combination of either of these in connection with the poets. To make any identification or combination like that, and to be concerned with it and its hermeneutic consequences exclusively, arguably misses the main point of the poem.

As a result, it can be claimed that the first critical question in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" is what it means for the faceless, not-alone, not-seeming "sie" to float free[38] and whether the stepping into someone's shoes (like the "Dichter" form) can be warranted at all, and what follows from that – be it sad divining or unreliable speaking of the word. Moreover, apart from the beginning of the poem, there are other places in the poem where the same issue emerges; "they who smiling worked our fields for us, / Assuming the shape of labourers" in the fourth stanza, and "Do you ask where they are? In song their spirit wafts"[39] in the fifth; and it

[36] Line 18: "Denn ahnend ruhet sie selbst auch." / "For divining too she herself is at rest."

[37] As a matter of fact, the poets may indeed be the most "commonsensical" thing for the "sie" on line 10 to be identified with (as it would be also possible to identify the "sie" with the trees themselves without connecting them with the poets at all, but this alternative might be considered obscurely symbolic) but, in criticism, this action must not take place as peremptorily as it does for Heidegger, de Man and Szondi.

[38] Hölderlin's use of the German "sie" is as wide and complex as the language allows; the second stanza in the poem, for example, has it referring in at least three different ways: the totally ambiguous, free-floating "sie", the feminine pronoun "sie" (to connote Nature in the singular form on lines 14 and 18 but not, crucially, on line 10), and the identified-with-poets "sie". This wide use of the word and the formal deictic structure it is part of is highly interesting in Hölderlin as it suggests the kind of poetic reference which forever brings together but nowhere lets itself be reached.

[39] See lines 34–5 and 37 in the German original. In "Friedensfeier", the same idea of elusive shape emerges in the figure of "the prince of the feast-day" who is addressed in the second person to "Cast down your eyes, oblivious, lightly shaded / Assuming the shape of a friend,

is the same overruling concern for the *possibility* of identificatory thinking (and not its misuse, either positively or negatively), as well as it still having its source in unattainable nature, which is to be experienced here and now. And *that* it is. In a sense, Hölderlin plays into the hands of both Heidegger and de Man but not quite in the manner either of them thinks he does; the fact that they work from the general identification of "*sie*" with the "poets" steers their own decisive readings in parallel ways which close down the poem's world from others. For the former, the way is the poets' ability to receive the holy that separates them from the countryman's tendency towards "use and service"[40] only, while for the latter the direction goes towards a vertiginious reading of "metaheroic" indecision between withering in shelter or dying in violence.[41] Should, however, the "*sie*" be left on its non-identical own and allowed to float free in its various contexts (including that of its own context), a kind of reading may emerge which contains each of the conflicted positions. Then the unquestionable "*sie*" does become the "miraculously omnipresent" ("die wunderbar / Allgegenwärtig" of lines 11–12 in the original) which for Hölderlin animates, unavoidably, not only the poets (before and after) and the countryman (in the present), but also non-temporal nature (the trees), "high Aether" and "low abyss" ("Aether" and "Abgrund", line 24). It allows daredevil standing in the storm or cries of warning against doing that or being able to sound such a warning in the first place. Given the chance, the Romantic never fails to find nature but he falls away from it immediately as he does so; yet even the fall is a finding and so nature. And the awareness of this is eternally that which is holy.

It follows that the cognitive mish-mash which directs the reflecting on these different things does not extend to the endowment (nature, that is) which grants them all but which cannot be revealed, except in a deictic, free-floating form.[42] In Hölderlin, this form may refer to *anything*, and when it does, it both does and does not: the dialectic thus constituted is subsumed in the possibility of its inevitable coming to the (poetic) open, whether established *a posteriori* as authentic figures or not. That this brings down Heideggerian separations between holy being or

you known to all men" ("Dein Auge senkst, vergessen, leichtbeschattet, / Und Freundesgestalt annimmst, du Allbekannter"). Here the utter elusiveness is expressed through the "you".

40 Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 87.

41 For de Man there really is no middle state between these two extremes except for the "solution" he himself is claiming. This pops up at different places in his writings, and it is often connected not only to Hölderlin and Heidegger but also Rousseau (see next section) and Wordsworth.

42 Another such form in Hölderlin is the notion of the "Feiertage"; "holiday" ("holy-day"), "festival", or "celebration". Heidegger finds it appealing in many of his later writings.

being of "use and service" only, as well as the cognitive identification of reception with preparedness, is something that does happen, but it also happens that de Manian temporal reversals lose their essential madness: they are parts of one and the same thing, the indifference of "*parousia*". In that sense, Heidegger's pursuit of Being *is* always valid, but it is also always bound to disappoint in its waiting for a revelation for us to preserve, and this de Man criticises well. However, that does not mean his own appropriation of the same state would simply succeed. He takes the figures that appear in it to show us that they add up to nothing in the end, that the ontological synecdoche they appear to suggest does not exist. But then he re-commits the error of figurative identification himself by showing us, and dedicating himself to, these locally interpreted forms he has identified (such as the exposed natural objects). As a result, as the hermeneutic circle turns ever on, the forms continue to live on behind his back as meaningful poetic matter, as given semantic units, each time he appears to have banished them, and so it turns out that the early de Man comes to require something more radical in order to keep his understanding-breaking project critically in motion. Treating the concept of mediation may help us in seeing the matter more clearly.

(ii) The Mediate and the Immediate

While elucidating "Wie wenn am Feiertage…", Heidegger says the following:

> The open mediates the connections between all actual things. These latter are constituted only because of such mediation, and are therefore mediated. […] Thus, mediatedness must be present in all. The open itself, however, though it first gives the region for all belonging-to and -with each other, does not arise from any mediation. The open itself is the immediate. Nothing mediated, be it a god or a man, is ever capable of directly attaining the immediate.[43]

In a philosophical rebuttal, de Man answers the argument thus:

> [Heidegger] states that mediation is possible thanks to the very immediate that is its agent; indeed, in this movement, it is the immediate that appears as the positive and moving element. It does not follow, though, that the immediate, as the sole agent of action, must be identifiable to mediation itself, which defines the multiple structure of the action. […] To say that the immediate contains the possibility of the mediation of the mediate

[43] Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 83.

> because it permits mediation in its being, is correct, but it is not correct to go on to the conclusion that the immediate *is*, therefore, itself the mediating intercession. (HEH 260)

Trying to understand what is at stake in these excerpts is highly significant in trying to understand the source of the conflict between Heidegger and de Man as described and addressed in the course of this section. The two excerpts may at first seem somewhat overwhelming, not to mention tautological, but that often happens when things or ideas underlying the things and ideas themselves are in question. When articulation is, literally speaking, locked beyond itself, a mantric, repetitive quality often rises to the surface. It is the mediation of the mediate in the open and, as Heidegger argues, that it can arise at all proves it is endowed by something unattainable – the immediate. The fact that this givenness can be thought and acknowledged as "the positive and moving element" of all things happening is then what de Man rebels against. If the immediate were the "sole agent of action", that is, the vessel which carried the mediated thing in the open, it would be identical with the thing itself as it is understood and perceived. As a result, in essence, it would be a *single* thing without any "multiple structure" for its action in reality; and the monadic thing would preserve within itself its own potential content. Consequently, the radical disparity between possible being and actual movement (nature and language, ultimately) would be killed off and buried in the image of the mediated thing.

For de Man, as one might imagine, the truth of things cannot be stated this way; for him, the split between given being and conditional movement remains essential for an event to mean something other than it appears to. That is why he refuses to accept the immediate itself as the split, as "the mediating intercession", because that would transform it into a single element which, all appearances to the contrary, would unify rather than separate things. (And that truth would also reflect back on de Man's own thinking as something subsumed by Heidegger's thought.) What de Man, then, has to do, in order to prevent the transformation, is to find a way of presenting the immediate in a form which posits it *against* the mediate, instead of nesting within it. That is why he conceptualises the immediate as an "agent" of the mediate, as an "element" of its own that is able to "appear" and "permit" on its own when represented in language. De Man gives a face and a voice to Heidegger's inherent essence of being, which is supposed to *possess* none as it can appear and resound as anything, in order to destroy the self-created anthropomorphism which he dedicates to his adversary. Consequently, having

assumed the advantage, he is able to claim that because Heidegger's being may be uttered as a single form, as something which "permits" another one to appear, Heidegger is not wrong in the sense of having licensed the action (as that is the correct way of putting it into motion), but he is wrong in having turned the form into a single unity of being. The "open itself" is *not* the immediate; and this is exactly, according to de Man, what the language of Romanticism (of Hölderlin and others) wants to express: to communicate its own ineffectiveness, historical and individual, against the dream of given ideas and first principles.[44] The easy self-laughs, status concerns and subjective ironies that mark our media society today are a far cry from that unhappy awareness, and, fortunately, there is no hiding under any such pretense for either Heidegger or de Man.

But is de Man then right? Is Heidegger's "open itself" as "the immediate" a wrongful reduction of human cognition into a force of identification which, tragically, betrays not only temporality but also the true nature of Being? The issue must be developed further, and one place where this can be done is the idea of "nearness". Hölderlin's hymn "Patmos" begins with "Near is / And difficult to grasp, the God",[45] a pronouncement which de Man understands as one of his linguistic "riddles whose answers can only be found in other parts of the poems in which they appear" (RH 203), making the figure thus fit a preconceived mould. David Constantine, on the other hand, says that, "ideally speaking, ["Patmos"] *is* to be the image or body of God, it is to be that, the metaphor, through which divinity manifests itself, but only as illusion or, better, only negatively, through our longing".[46] On a strictly technical level, there is nothing in Constantine's claim

[44] Manfred Frank describes the spirit of Hölderlin's own time in terms of a proto-Romantic understanding which resulted in "the turn away from philosophizing based on a supreme first principle" (66, see end of note). He attributes its beginnings to Jacobi and Reinhold by whom the young Hölderlin was impressed, along with many other notable thinkers of the time. In an idealist philosophical retrospect, Hegel is the most famous of them. Manfred Frank: "Philosophical Foundations of Early Romanticism" *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, transl. Günter Zöller and Karl Ameriks (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1995).

[45] "Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen, der Gott". It must be mentioned too that the fragments of a later version of the poem have the beginning lines as "Most kind is; but no one by himself / Can grasp God" ("Voll Güt' ist; keiner aber fasset / Allein Gott") which appear to abandon the explicit theme of nearness for contemplation on lonesomeness or being-alone – the very same idea that characterised the face-given, plaintive "Dichter" in line 17 of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…". For this reason, rather than being undermined, the connection between these two issues ("nearness" and "being-alone") becomes stronger. Moreover, when the later Heidegger says that the English "lonesome" actually means "the same in what unites that which belongs together" (*On the Way to Language*, 134), another potential insight is revealed: we are one *by* being apart.

[46] David Constantine: *Hölderlin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 260.

that would refute de Man, but the fact that he feels it is "better" to describe "the image or body of God" of "Patmos" as something that happens "only negatively, through our longing" rather than "only as illusion" challenges the formal de Manian balance which, in terms of veracity, rules out the chance of linguistic riddles being solved by anything other than a linguistic riddle. This happens because de Man's model does not admit (in fact, disdains completely) the affective potentiality of "negative longing" unless it is presented, strictly poetically, as an "illusion", a trope available for cognitive mediation. And the model makes sure it *will* be presented as such, by inserting it into an irrefutable system of exchange, that of language and its split images.

In consequence, the trope's being within the poem's system of exchange makes it into an aesthetic commodity which tempts the reader with its promise of identity and emotion – in the case of "Patmos", mortality and waiting (for God's presence to overwhelm us). The hymn becomes a disenchanted form that is subject only to the temporal demands mediating it. It is another linguistic vessel which does carry its own lost meaning in the open but which perpetuates no other truth than the unhappy awareness of its being an illusion. Now you see it, now you don't. There is, however, a problem with this line of thinking. For if all the figures within the system are riddles, how can they be identified as such? Calling something a mediated riddle entails immediate awareness of its status as a riddle, and to affirm it as being one, the awareness needs to forget itself. This is also the case when it *appears* (as it is condemned to) to be aware of itself: the riddle continues to demand its understanding as a self-critical entity, even if undecidably so. In a certain negative way, this is then the power of the identified entity, but the truth is that *identification was supposed to be unnecessary* and the incorrect course of action to take anyway. De Man, nonetheless, goes ahead with it anyway, and what this means to his identifying something as a "riddle" instead of a "mystery" is that the action becomes the affirmative perpetuation of language's own vicious circle of forgetting and remembering.[47] As a result, the mediated device of "riddle", as the ever-spiralling reference of language, does *not* become a radical paradox of being but rather an immediate paradox of being-in-Being which fails to distance itself from the Heideggerian open, or the promised nearness of "Patmos". The poetic device, with the desire of a purpose, simultaneously remembers and forgets its function within the system: it is permeated with its power. It laments over a

[47] Ideas of forgetting and remembering will be further discussed in connection with the concept of memory later on.

tempest in a teacup which, for all intents and purposes, in the end appears only for the show.

It can be argued that, were it not too eager to take the easy way in many of its readings (like in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…"), Heidegger's Being would contain all this movement without losing anything of its truth (loss being a truth in itself). Because of language, it would not do this through any "positive and moving element" as this would result in the god of "Patmos" being "too near to be easily grasped",[48] but it would do it immediately negatively. The knowing of *this* is what poets are needed for. Constantine's "negative longing", then, as far as it discloses no worlds in the open or switches between particular aesthetic semblances, would be a non-becoming action of truth, complete in itself and unchangeable for something else, like the "god" that "Patmos" is. De Man does not see this because his own reading of "Patmos" is like that god, too, uncritical of itself, and therefore, in this respect, he is not a poetic reader at all but a totalising force *par excellence*. He is only bound by the placeholding concept of literature, and in the custody of this domain, if anywhere, the word of the "mediating intercession" becomes the divine riddle for him, and it is only natural for de Man to deny it. Maurice Blanchot once said of Hölderlin that, in his poetry, "the reconciliation of the Sacred with speech demanded that the poet's existence come *nearest* to nonexistence",[49] but that this "reconciliation" was in the end "impossible". The same sentiment could now be extended towards de Man and Heidegger too – at least in terms of sought-after proximity to truth (or "Truth") since that is what they both are looking for. Moreover, for the sake of their attempt, when "[r]eality and potentiality are distinguished like mediate and immediate consciousness",[50] as Hölderlin himself says, a specific kind of thinking draws near to any seeker, regardless of the aim either to unify or to separate. Accordingly, each attempted action is a mediated reality but, in terms of consciousness, its being as action is an immediate potentiality – like de Man being reconciled with the sheer possibility of

[48] Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 213. The difficult "grasp" that Heidegger suggests he might have on Hölderlin sounds like another warning against thinking technologically, that is, against thinking strictly (in the name of) a system of exchange which neglects the Being of that system. As has been implied, the dialectical logic behind this thought is self-contradictory but its strength is different from that: it proves the system as something which by necessity is a non-dialectical whole, and this proof may be known but not shown. No amount of exchanges can destroy the "parousia, the absolute presence of Being" (HEH 250) which cannot be explicitly observed anywhere.

[49] Maurice Blanchot: *The Work of Fire*, transl. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 131. My emphasis.

[50] Thomas Pfau (transl. and ed.): *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988) 37.

demanding his impossible case to be heard. Nothing else than linguistic criticism is needed for this argument. However, more needs to be said why.

If in de Man's reading the identification of the mediate with the immediate kills off the disparity between nature and language (or, perhaps, "*phusis*" and "*tekhne*"), as has been claimed, it is an argument which applies differently to his own thinking and that of the Heideggerian principle he criticises: the de Manian application is positive and immediate (because it authenticates the killing off as a real danger), the Heideggerian one is negative and mediate (because we are warned about it through criticism). That both of these things can occur is a potentiality which Heidegger, in much of his later writing, calls "appropriation" ("*Ereignis*");[51] it "grants to mortals their abode within their nature, so that they may be capable of being those who speak"; and it "is *the* law because it gathers mortals into the appropriateness of their nature and there holds them".[52] It is "*the* law" (of Being) because it is the way in which both "Saying" and "showing of Saying" occur as linguistic action, pointing "toward the concealed".[53] It holds the negative to the positive without being one or the other: it is the "underlying Same which, in terms of the oneness that is the distinctive property of language, holds together what is kept separate in the formula".[54] This "Same" is what the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* would not see, perhaps due to its being destroyed when disclosed in the open, and it is the "stillness" (*Ruhe*) of Being that de Man refuses to grant, because it apparently transcends the system and dominates it as another metaphysical principle. This, however, is not a necessity: relating back to the idea of "nearness", Heidegger says that if poetry and thinking, as "two modes of saying", are "to be neighborly in virtue of their nearness, then nearness itself must act in the manner of Saying" (as it does through language in Being), and

[51] The German word can also denote "event" or "occurrence". The implications are diverse for de Man too, but his main reference to it is the second version of Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne": "Es ereignet sich aber das Wahre". By that expression he understands the reading of poetry (and reading in general) as something which does not establish "some abstract universal" (as it would if the poem cited "die Wahrheit" instead of "das Wahre") but instead marks "the fact that it has to occur regardless of other considerations". This kind of rigorous inevitability then not only removes the possibility of "a true reading" but, through "Mnemosyne", it also establishes that "no reading is conceived in which the question of its truth or falsehood is not primarily involved". Thus *"Ereignis"* becomes for de Man something appropriated in the service of this epistemology. "Foreword to Carol Jacobs, *The Dissimulating Harmony*" CW 221–2.

[52] Martin Heidegger: *On the Way to Language* (New York-Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1971) 128.

[53] ibid. 129.

[54] ibid. 112.

so "nearness and Saying would be the Same".[55] This could be read to mean that something negative joined with the disclosing of something negative results in the affirmation of something negative still (a lonesome freedom meets a lonesome freedom to speak the lonesomeness of their freedoms), but, since as a whole, as the "Same", it is still a singular positive action (something which really took place and thus pre-empted the skepticism of it), the kind of madness (of "temporal reversals") that de Man seeks is actually established by it. So, unless he were ready to understand his own thinking as reliant on another metaphysical principle, and go through the motions of thinking-harder once again, de Man would have to grant the Heideggerian "Same" as something held on to by his own system as well. He would have to concede that his process of radical mediatedness, of the question of language posed to infinity, was something immediately observed by Heidegger's law. Naturally de Man would not do that, and the rule would not allow for an easy surrender anyway; according to Heidegger, the "demand to think this is still a flagrant imposition [but the] flagrancy must not be softened in the least".[56] Thinking is never as easy as it seems.

Pertinent to the ongoing topic of mediation, and heeding not only de Man's criticism of it, Heidegger's thought may be found at odds with the relentlessly dialectical nature of Hölderlin's "Same", as well. Briefly described, with quotations from the collection of essays edited by Thomas Pfau, the difference between Hölderlin and Heidegger is that for the former Being "expresses the connection between subject and object" in the sense it seeks imaginary reconciliation with Nature by the structure of this "connection" and not the truth of its Being.[57] Hölderlin says, in the first person, that by "this natural state of imagination, by this lawlessness, I mean a moral one; by this law, [I mean] the law of freedom".[58] The "moral lawlessness" is an anti-Kantian anarchy which denotes the objective possibility of anything being judged *and* opted for, and the "law of freedom" is an anti-Fichtean intellect which refuses to fix itself against other subjects without collapsing them into itself. What the freedom of imagination instead denotes is the subject's impossibility of ever remaining at large from any possible object, the impossibility of every (mediately) expressing anything, moral or immoral, without having naturally (immediately) everything to choose from. For Hölderlin, the

[55] ibid. 95. Being the "Same" in this way, which is the same as being "neighborly", suggests a non-identical joinedness which only happens in language and thus reveals its sameness with it, similar to the manner in which "Saying" acts.

[56] Heidegger: *On the Way to Language* 95.

[57] Pfau 37.

[58] ibid. 33.

cognitive awareness and inevitable appropriation of this freedom, of "evil acts", is "punishment":[59] the understanding of nature as something that we always fail, and it seems that "punishment" is all there is to be experienced. This is tragic, for certain, but as it is also creates a "harmonious opposition" happening by "free choice" because it *is* Nature, it is "infinite, beautiful reflection which, in the sustained delimitation, is at once continuously relating and unifying".[60] Hence, a whole "Same" exists for Hölderlin too, after all. In *The Work of Fire*, Blanchot realises something similar (as long as we understand his "All" as Hölderlin's "Nature"):

> In the beginning, there was no poet yet, because he needed the All to exist and the All needed his mediation to be the All. Now, existing as "not yet", he has grasped, foreseen the arrival of the Sacred, which is the principle of this very arrival, which is arrival anterior to any "something is coming" and by which "all" comes, the All comes.[61]

However, even with this discovery, Hölderlin's proximity to poetry is more acute than Heidegger's because it never forfeits either its emotive power sourced from guilt or the relentlessness of its imaginary freedom. As Pfau says in his introduction, any look at the "Same", as a "glance at Being afforded by an intellectual intuition", is forever fated to be "only one of analepse", the flashback image of an unapprehended truth.[62] This, in turn, instantiates the punishment, but Hölderlin leaves it unclear just why this action (or its ideal failure) *should* be considered a moral penalty or a necessary tragedy in a sense that makes us want haplessly to avoid it. De Man, for his part, makes the cause very clear: he claims it as our predicament. Yet he represents it only on the disenchanted level of the signifier, while Hölderlin expresses it in the poetic figures bedevilling his imagination.

In talking about the concept, we have seen how mediation is opposed not only in its own tension of the mediate and the immediate, but also how this opposition is reflected in other conceptual pairings such as the positive and the negative, shelter and violence, as well as nature and language. With Hölderlin and his readers on the table here, another such pairing, and thematically perhaps a more

59 ibid. 35.

60 ibid. 74 and 82.

61 Blanchot 122.

62 Pfau 16.

literary one, is that of sky and earth. This constant thread ties together much of the material at hand. Discussing Hölderlin's "Greece", Heidegger says the following:

> The earth, as the structure of the heavenly ones, shelters and supports the holy, the sphere of the god. The earth is earth only as the earth of heaven; the heaven is heaven only insofar as it acts downward upon the earth.[63]

With their "athletic character" which is the heroic, "shining appearance of the spirit",[64] the ancient Greeks, or the ones endowed as poets ("the heavenly ones"), are able to inhabit the earth in its truth, thus allowing the radiance of the divine ("the holy") to act on it. For Heidegger, this complexion of Being should be known as the "Same" that "moves the encounter of the four world regions: earth and sky, god and man – the world play".[65] It is the highest recognition of human essence: George Pattison calls it the "the appropriating event, the destining in which we come into possession of what is proper to us, namely, to dwell on earth, as mortals, beneath the open vault the sky, before the face of the gods".[66] What this rather florid language wants to say is that our ontological place between sky and earth (*under* the sky but *on* the earth), gods and mortals (deathbound yet divinely animated) is something which does divide into these four regions, unendingly, but which does it by belonging "*in*-finitely to one another in the relation which 'thoroughly' holds them together from its center".[67] This in-division is the law of Being; a "neighborly" recognition of finitude which does not exist as a terminal Finitude which would spell the end of thinking.

The rivers of many of Hölderlin's poems (such as "Der Rhine" and "Die Ister") are reminiscent of the in-division principle, with their "now" being "metaphorically represented in the river itself, ceaselessly flowing, vanishing away in endless flux, yet, in doing so, preserving its identity as just this river that it is".[68] In this way, by making "paths on the previously pathless earth", the fourfold is joined with, not

63 Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 186.

64 ibid. 185.

65 Heidegger: *On the Way to Language* 106.

66 Pattison 183.

67 Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 188.

68 Pattison 177. While it is asking for trouble relating it to a preservation of an identity, the expression "as just this river that it is" is extremely interesting because it evokes ideas not only about de Man's take on Kant's aesthetics and materiality (see section 5) but also about the development of his literary criticism from disruption by mediation and temporality to disruption by reading and figurality and, finally, to disruption by the parabasis of rhetoric. As I will argue, it shows a thing he could never do away with, not even in his most radical formulations of its dissolution.

singled out or made use of. For Hölderlin this line of thinking represents the idea of "pure life" where "nature and art are only opposed harmoniously", and the "more organic, artistic man [that] is the blossom of nature" is able to speak "the more aorgic nature" (that is, its non-representation) with "the feeling of perfection". However, as "this life exists only in sentiment and not for knowledge",[69] it can never be thought or known. The rivers themselves toss and turn restlessly, longing without real direction, and finally surrender their unreality to what is actual: the between-place of their own present, reaching no destiny (of either sky or earth) but still flowing on infinitely and incompletely.

How is a finite entity such as man then to think himself? In an obscure verse from his years of madness, Hölderlin writes: "Full of merit, but poetically, man / Dwells on this earth";[70] and de Man leaps off from it in his criticism of Heidegger in "The Temptation of Permanence". Whereas the latter seeks to reconcile being with Being by allowing "Dichtung" as the fourfold world of this appropriation, de Man pins down the meaning of "poetic dwelling" as that of its linguistic functioning: the hermeneutic between-place of temporal mediation which forecloses the chance of its own closure. In this "world" the spatial opposition of sky and earth is instantly obscured by its components not standing outside one another but, since the opposition remains in being *within time*, the separation is stopped from collapsing. In a symbolic relationship the formal plane thus reached resists us "with opacity and passivity" which we try to appropriate to "the transparency of the sky [for] the model of total liberty" (TP 31) that we long for. De Man calls this attempt "the eternal conflict… in which consciousness is founded" and identifies Heidegger as another actuator of that struggle. Whatever sky and earth are said to stand for, they remain disrupted by the very form of their unattainability.[71] Any seemingly "perfect approximation" (TP 31) of them in a principle of Being is a "negation of the sky in the desire for the earth", the temporal

69 Pfau 53. Hölderlin makes it clear here that feeling has no thinking-value for him.

70 **"Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnet / Der Mensch auf dieser Erde." (TP 36) De Man** speculates in a footnote on the cryptic origins of the verse which at the time were unestablished. Even if he could not prove them conclusively, in his essay "Das Wohnen des Menschen" (1970), Heidegger did however track down some possible sources. The essay can be found in *Denkerfahrungen 1910–1976* (Frankfurt-on-Main: Klostermann, 1983) 153–160.

71 They might be said to stand for language and nature, free thought and unpredictable action, even language and reality. They could be argued to represent the last option in the sense that even though de Man wards off spatial ideas about "inside" and "outside" in a way that collapses natural ideas about reality (such as sky and earth) into language, as well, the remaining temporal form confirms their dialectical survival. The fact that language happens within time but reality happens neither "in" nor "out" of time means that the former becomes a parasitic entity feeding on the non-entity of the latter. The separation is authentic and undeniable.

"inversion [which] is the characteristic of all dialectic" and which "excludes all permanent unity" (TP 35). Nothing is reconciled in Heidegger's search for the truth of sky and earth which, as "Aether" and "abyss" in "Wie wenn am Feiertage", name more than "the most extreme domains of reality" – they also name "the supreme divinities" which, despite completing the fourfold, remain forever out of our reach.[72] Similarly, in the essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken" ("Building Dwelling Thinking") further discussed by de Man, when Heidegger talks about building a poetic "bridge" (TP 37) between sky and earth in order to reconcile them in Being, he, in another succumbing to the temptation of permanence, repeats the same kind of falling short. Heidegger misunderstands what it means for "two entities" to be "separated by a distance, by an abyss" (TP 37). The very necessity of there having to be a "bridge" to get us to sky from earth (over the "abyss"), means the bridge itself is nothing but "an extension of earth fabricated by man" (TP 38) and this, in turn, entails the anti-sheltering warning of thoughtless thinking.[73] With Heidegger's ontological "interrogation" having thus "reopen[ed] its circle to infinity", no hermeneutic claim of reconciliation (whether about Hölderlin or about the riddle of Being) can survive in its space. This then, for de Man, is what poetic dwelling on earth, although "Full of merit", is all about.

To round out our treatment of the thematic of sky and earth, the other related antinomies, and the general concept of mediation, one last look is in order at the ontological status of "earth" as a space inhabited by us all. Whether it is something which anything can be known of is the perpetual critical question, but that there *is* "earth" is probably recognised by all. If we stick with the name given to it by Hölderlin, "abyss", in a number of his poems, more can be thought about its being as nature and its nature as Being. David Constantine, for instance,

[72] Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 83. Heidegger further describes the "divinities" with "Aether" as "the name for the father of light and the all-enlivening, enlightening air" and with "Abyss" as "the all-enclosing which is borne by 'mother earth'" (83). In Hölderlin's words, in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…", they give space to Nature; "According to fixed law, begotten, as in the past, on holy Chaos" ("Nach vestem Gesetze, wie einst, aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt"). The passage could be read as allowing unity and disruption alike.

[73] "[A] thought that only protects is not the thought of being. It is more dangerous than technical thought since instead of attacking an earth that is quite capable of defending itself, it betrays the movement of being". (TP 38) Earth's natural resistance is a wondersome thing for de Man. Elsewhere he describes it against the "consciousness" which "sees itself suspended ephemerally upon an earth in whose stability it does not share, hung from a heaven that has cast it out" (HEW 143). The idea of being "suspended" or "hung" in mid-air is a recurring theme in de Man's discussions of Wordsworth; it defines the move from "the eternalistic world of analogical thought into the temporal world of imagination" where the "contact between heaven and earth occurs literally as a spot *of time*, authentic time disrupting for an instant the false texture of everyday existence" (HEW 145). For de Man, this move is similar to grasping the warning in Hölderlin.

describes the attitude of the early Hölderlin as one with "[a]bysses of bathos under every flight, and no irony or humour for a safety net";[74] and what this would seem to imply is a thinking which sees itself as able to lift off from the mundane and do this earnestly, without fear of ridicule, for a flight towards an ideal. There is a dialectic but it is one which is unified passionately. That Hölderlin should, when "[o]lder and wiser", observe the need for the "gravity of cool thinking" ("die Schwerkraft, die in nüchternem Besinnen liegt"[75]) in place of passion, is a conventional development normally expected of any creditable thinker, but it is its assumed superiority over the "natural", or the more "earthly" perhaps, which might be seen as a critical problem in this context: where and how to draw the line between youthful, affective passion and seasoned, disenchanting reason? The "abyss", after all, always stays the same, whether understood or not. And even if Hölderlin would have us thinking about Being as a dialectical system, in that he does not allow for Kantian "notions of reflexivity, synthesis and identity [which] are already derivatives of the 'presupposition of a whole'", there still remains the derivation of Being and its "essence" before the "immanent reflexivity of the *Wechselbestimmung*",[76] which as an idea asserts the unilluminable opacity of the earth but which, nevertheless, confirms its unquestioned existence.

In spite of the imagined temporal knot, the "essence" then stands out "from" the "abyss", is the abyss, and shows itself as sky; it is the "open in which everything has its coming to presence". These are, of course, Heidegger's words. They create a fundamental scene in which things appear ever again, collapse themselves by becoming one another, linguistically, and *in doing so* hold open the very site of their continued being. As a non-concept, the site is not a thinkable open but thinking shows it as being; the "enduring" of this "towers over the realm of all domains", all the way "from high aether down to the abyss".[77] The towering, which is the Same as bridging, is not a question of going from here to there but of having always been "here", on earth. The "abyss", because it is the "all-creative" (the "Allerschaffende" in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…") as well as the "all-enclosing", does not really separate even when it separates; to use a natural scientific metaphor, saying that it does separate would be equivalent to arguing

74 Constantine 12.

75 Hölderlin quoted in Constantine 12. Relatedly, in the essay "Reflection", Hölderlin says that "[o]ne can fall upward just as well as downward" and that the "latter is prevented by the flexible spirit, the former by the gravity that lies in temperate presence of mind" (Pfau 45). We will see more of the concept of "gravity" in connection with Kant.

76 Pfau 21–2.

77 Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 83.

that air was not sky. There is no "extension" of distance apart from that which we "fabricate"; that is the law of "*parousia*", the all-presence that contains it. If we can know this, what in actuality is left to us is the matter of "enduring the necessity for the naming saying of the advent of the present gods" and "bearing this saying 'quietly'".[78] That is, patiently awaiting for the unfolding of history in our Being, never stepping out of the possibility of any possibility, but never thinking of knowing them in their separate essences either. This all takes place as mediated by language:

> Ever since time arose and was brought to stand, since then we are historical. Both – to be one conversation and to be historical – are equally ancient, they belong together, and they are the same.[79]

This kind of awareness shows itself (to a degree) even in de Man's puzzling over what Heidegger might mean with his "enigmatic reservation" of the elemental "bridge" as "gather[ing] *in its way* the earth and the sky". De Man asks whether "*in its way*" signifies "that its manner is that of a struggle" and, if indeed it does, whether one can then speak of "dwelling" on the bridge as signifying "being satisfied, being at peace" (TP 38, my emphasis). There is no "way" around this riddle for de Man as there is for Heidegger but this does not mean their thoughts would really fall apart from each other; the difference between them lies in a "state about which there is, after all, nothing to say" (HEH 256). As for Hegel's idea of "*nur Sein*", so apparently for de Man the "all-presence" of the unspeakable state is "a matter of indifference". De Man senses it as the resistance of the earth, but, in this case, the "matter" remained mute about generates a strange cycle of violence which, by thrusting out to the sky, perpetually attacks everything in sight but never really destroys anything because, as a mere idea, it cannot annihilate anything real. De Man says it, the Heideggerian Being allows it, and no perusal of any of their texts reveals this, for it is the perusal itself which holds it, and *that* is never revealed in the text. The world thus disclosed can only mediate to us the chance of knowing differently from the negation being enacted by the knowledge. This is a huge turn in thinking, but it is what the poet is for: to call out "toward the turning of time"[80] and to have us see past it. For the deathbound, ruled over by higher powers, the idealisation of this difficult thought would mean the non-idealisation of the divine, an idea which, in terms of Being, is not really an ideal at

78 ibid. 218.

79 ibid. 57.

80 Heidegger: *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* 226.

all but a necessary possibility and the law of singular in-division. In other words, the human was always the divine: nothing less, nothing more. For Hölderlin, among others, this could mean that "Mortals would sooner / Reach toward the abyss. With them / The echo turns".[81] How to sense the echo then?

One way of answering this question is to renew the affinity between de Man and Heidegger. If it is thought that the main reason for their vastly divergent readings of Hölderlin is a question of sensing the system in which the question takes place, as well as the philosophical validity of that sense, it seems as if both are right, having stated their respective cases. Poetry *is* a linguistic thing which lives off its exchange, as exchange, and this side of it does make it into a tropological system. To bypass this is a violation of its movement similar to any dogmatic imposition of religion and ideology; and that is not a "snowfall" but a deadly avalanche. The "bell" sounds on its own, untouched, non-identical to any self imagined or conceptualised into being, and the revealing of this through attentive reading is the (philological) stuff of hermeneutic poetics which both de Man and Heidegger can appreciate as such even in their disagreement. At the same time, however, we need to remember that the bare fact that a "bell" *can* be revealed shows something else: a place of non-exchange does exist for the figure, after all, and no imposition to make it violate itself over and over again (in being labelled the radical "other" or the surplus "more-than" of itself) suffices to undo it. This is what Heidegger's (sense of) being is all about; it is something we cannot master but it is *all we have*, also in its way of being known everywhere in the (four-fold) world it creates. Knowing is different from thinking only in the sense that thinking shows (that is, mediates) knowing as being. It is not a simple identification ("I think, therefore I can know what I see"), far from it, but de Man seems to think it is: he echoes the Heideggerian sense of things (which is more like "I think, therefore I can know *that* I see") in a way necessary for him to oppose it with his own system. For him, in contrast, knowing is different from thinking only in the sense that it is *in error* if it claims to be different – the proposition "I think, therefore I can know what I see" is wrong because it claims to understand the correspondence between the seen and the known. If the argument was not erroneous, the correctness of all

[81] The second version of Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne" quoted in Adorno 149. Adorno uses it himself, against Heidegger, to call out for "[t]hat which would be different" as a possibility of what is called "peace, reconciliation" and what "does not eradicate the era of violence" but "rescues it as it perishes, in the anamnesis of *echo*" (148, my emphasis). This "Other" is non-identical to nature but not beyond it. Interestingly, there is something of the same in de Man's defining of Wordsworthian temporality as "the very moment that the analogical *echo* fails us" (HEW 142, my emphasis).

things could be stated unequivocally and with one interpretation even if they "in themselves" remained out of our reach.

But this is obviously unallowable for de Man. For him, nothing exists for us except the immediate equivocality of empty form: what we see are spectres hung in space, suspended by time. The truth de Man knows is static in its essence, the void as law-giver, the "nothing" at the end of things which forever denies itself. In speaking eloquently of "poets of the earthly soul, of consciousness, and of historical time" (HEW 146), de Man is swept away by a maudlin wishfulness which has nothing to do with the cosmic dominion of his theory.[82] This loss is exactly what Heidegger's more difficult take on elemental thinking wants to resist, what it is geared towards combatting, and what, apart from the dubious cataloguing of particular rights and wrongs, it seeks to teach us to think. Being must be questioned, not left on its own in the fear of getting it wrong; mere correctness is a horrible requirement. Mediation cannot be tampered with because it cannot be tampered with. In all things there is sense, echo or non-echo, and so sensing is more than the thought of it.[83] It would be tempting to speculate about just how literally maddening this was to Hölderlin who allows no way towards it but still thinks his perpetual way there because of the given freedom. Now, regardless of the results of that effort, the confrontation of de Man and Heidegger on the site is certainly able to "constitute the center of a valid poetics" (HEH 263) for critical study in literature and philosophy; the case of Heidegger reading Hölderlin, and de Man reading both Hölderlin and Heidegger reading Hölderlin, shows that (the Romantic) awareness works in each of these ways. There must be something very special in that consciousness and the next chapter will focus on the compelling aporetic image it gives rise to.

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82 The coldly mechanical rhetoric of the later de Man appears to be much more in line with the general tenor of his suggestion but, as will be discussed later in connection with these "nihilistic images", whether this makes a critical difference is an open question.

83 "Sensing" extends here not only to making use by reason but also to its philosophically less-celebrated counterpart, feeling. In critical theory, the whole study of feeling and affects as something with cognitive potential is very much a current one, and this will be frequently reflected in this project too. Right now it could be said that, for his part, de Man's apparent critical dislike for feeling and sensible intuition might be understood as an antipathy to what he, together with Heidegger as a matter of fact, considered as aesthetic interpretation, "applicable only to metaphysicians" (HEH 253). The difference was that whereas for Heidegger such aesthetics would have been an empty philosophical obscenity, another forgetting of Being, for de Man they would have represented another instance of earthly powers subject to mediation and temporality being inverted into an eternalistic analogy. Feeling has no real understanding value for either of them; it is just something of a strange bonus. However, seeing how Heidegger thinks knowing (incompletely, that is), a shadow of sensing as potentially cognitive does appear to hint at itself.

(iii) The Aporia of Romanticism

Much has already been implied about the aporia (a "pathless path" literally in Greek) inherent in the thought of the "school" or "idea" of Romanticism which, according to de Man, has been either overcome or misread by generations of literary scholars since the mid-19th century, all the way from the early days of Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater through late Victorians like Leslie Stephen to more current critics such as René Wellek and M. H. Abrams. Shoals of other writers (both literary and theoretical) are said to fall among their post-Romantic ranks, from realists and symbolists to various formalists and structuralists. As might be inferred from such a vast legacy, de Man on many occasions considers the influence of Romanticism as having shown, and continuing to show, an emblematic quality of the modern mind. For example, in "The Literature of Nihilism" (1966, CW) he says this:

> In any interpretation of Romanticism, the question of motive is of determining importance: the presence of negative components in the romantic mind becomes indeed a sign of weakness if they are the compensatory fantasies of an overreaching spirit. If, on the other hand, they result from a genuine experience of reality, then we can only praise these writers and thinkers for having come closer to showing us our condition as it really is.[84]

Elsewhere, it is claimed that "[t]he main points around which contemporary methodological and ideological arguments circle can almost always be traced directly back to the romantic heritage" (WH 48), and that we are bound to repeat the gesture anyway because we, as finite creatures, are concerned with the experience of our finitude and its expression:

> We carry [the Romantic memory] within ourselves as the experience of an *act* in which, up to a certain point, we ourselves have participated. Perhaps this obtains for every attempt at understanding the past, but it nonetheless remains the case that with romanticism we are not separated from the past by that layer of forgetfulness and that temporal opacity that could awaken in us the illusion of detachment. To interpret romanticism means quite literally to interpret the past as such, our past precisely to the extent that we are beings who want to be defined and, as such, interpreted in relation to a totality of experiences that slip into the past. (WH 50)

[84] "The Literature of Nihilism" CW 169.

What these announcements mean for de Man's idea of Romanticism is that they not only guide his interpretation of the literary figures found therein (as either doomed or failing ones) but they also anchor his reading mentality strictly in a precognitive experience of temporality and the laboratory mindset that conducts its tests within it. Many of the notions harboured at this time – "Wordsworth and Hölderlin" dates from 1962 – would sink into oblivion later on (such as memory as "the experience of an *act*" or people as beings able to "carry" and "participate"), but this is not something which puts them at a disadvantage. Instead, the fact of their existence in the early de Man must be noted, just as we did with the hermeneutic circle, and placed in the correct context.

This context is again that of the unhappy consciousness and its representation in literature. De Man claims that the aporia of Romanticism has gone unnoticed for such a long time because the critics concerned with it have overlooked "the presence of negative components in the romantic mind" and instead made up for them with "compensatory fantasies of an overreaching spirit" (in a possible allusion to Hegel). The critics fooled by Romanticism have disregarded the fact that "[t]o interpret romanticism means quite literally to interpret the past *as such*" (my emphasis), and they have thus refused the recognise the experience as an unhappy one, as something irretrievably lost, and instead they have figured it as something that enlivens the mind and the soul by joining up with the present reading. This last tendency recalls the earlier discussed idea of the "happy relationship" between mind and matter – the apocalyptic (or revelatory) union which ensures the connectedness of human action with nature, without actually considering whether such confluence is possible or not, or whether the linking succeeds or fails in a given instance.

Against this unity, de Man pitted the image of the "pathless path", or aporia, found at the heart of Romanticism. The figure was understood as constituting within itself two mutually exclusive ideas or *topoi* which were epistemologically incompatible but which, nonetheless, the linguistic device attempted to bring together. In de Man's view, the (post-)Romantic critics were bound not to share the insight of such incompatibility because, had they done so, there would not have been any meaning to their making claims about understanding the inner nature of things or being educated about them either morally or truth-objectively. It was for the good of these claims that the Romantics were to be regarded as "nature poets", able to create a true link between nature and the human in and through their work, differing from other literary "movements" in their sense of being at one with existence itself. This sense was imbued with a poetic understanding

of mystical similitude between empirical objects and sensible intuitions which brought about cosmic harmony, and it drew its enchantment from a feeling of the whole in inner and outer reality and the incremental beauty of the subject being driven towards it. Since Friedrich Schiller's vision of the aesthetic education of the state, this had more or less been the heritage within which readers had approached Romanticism, adapted to reflect certain national traits in the different Western countries (such as the utilitarian sophistication of people like Arnold or John Stuart Mill in England). But it is precisely this heritage which de Man wants to turn on its head.

As it would be rather pointless for him to try and do it on his own terms, merely seeking a perspective different from the other contemporary critics, he instead goes back to the authors themselves who are said to have figured (and pre-figured) Romanticism as a literary phenomenon: among them, Rousseau, Hölderlin and Wordsworth. For the purposes of this chapter, which seeks to bring the aporia inherent in Romantic thought to light, I will concentrate on de Man's essay "The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Hölderlin" (1965) from *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, while also drawing on a number of his other essays from the 1960s and the early 1970s, most notably on those that deal with Hölderlin and Wordsworth.[85] In discussing Heidegger in the previous chapters under the general concepts of mediation and temporality we came to the conclusion that, for de Man, nothing of the ontological immediate could exist in linguistic actuality for us to know, in either poetry or philosophy. In comparison, what we attempt to discover here is how this thought was originally reflected in prototypical Romantic literature and what this communicates to us about the "historical ineffectiveness" (RH 212) that it, in de Man's words, consists of. The benefit of doing this can be found not only in a clarifying of the dispositional premises of the early de Man as he strides towards his own time in literary critical history but also in the reflecting of what his work changes in how we (should) understand the compelling image aroused by Romanticism.

In "The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Hölderlin" de Man starts out from the "enlightened but negative verdict on Rousseau [which] founds a veritable school of thought in Germany" (IR 21). He offers Schiller as the perfect example of this judgment. In *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795), Schiller is said to be giving "qualified praise" to Rousseau "for possessing… to the greatest degree the specific virtues of the poet" (IR 21) but that his poetic "anthropology is stunted

[85] For de Graef's account of de Man's essay, and more, see *Titanic Light: Paul de Man's Post-Romanticism 1960–1969* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

and vitiated from the start" (IR 22), insisting "too much on the limits and not enough on the possibilities of man".[86] At its core, the revealed discrepancy comes down to the choice of taking action for the moral betterment of humanity or whether such an act can be taken in the first place, and it is the duty of literature to try to address this question. De Man broaches the issue and brings Hölderlin into the fray, after which he proceeds to emphasise the poet's great admiration for Schiller – save for his divergent reading of Rousseau. There the disagreement emerged between whether Rousseau was able to provide the poetic resolution that would encourage men to moral action or only such dreamy reverie in a "repose of inwardness" (IR 28) that would, in effect, prevent them from doing that. De Man's view of it is that Hölderlin sides with the latter idea (and therefore with Rousseau in general), and he goes on with his argument using Hölderlin's *Hyperion* as proof of this kind of development: in his reading of the novel, de Man sharply contrasts the depicted Alpine "internal landscape, where the god we carry within us dwells" (IR 25) with the more explicitly "active heroism" of Hölderlin's early poems.

By the time of *Hyperion*, Rousseau's influence (particularly through *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Rêveries*) is said to be a staple in Hölderlin's work. Ultimately de Man comes to the conclusion that, instead of perpetuating an illusion of heroic tragedy, the novel reflects the structure of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (where the heroine Julie dies a "sacrificial death") to realise narratival "inwardness as a dialectical moment in history" which, consequently, "preserv[es] its ontological priority" (IR 28) over its eternalistic history-redeeming counterpart. In other words, a necessary awareness of death breaks the triumphant delusion of the present. The failure of the hero Hyperion to reinstate "the grandeur of Greece on our Earth" *and* to establish spiritual union with his beloved, perished Diotima has him addressing nothing but "the void" (IR 27) in his invitations to an everlasting life:

> In the case of Hyperion, the defeat of the reverie of repose marks the obligation to think of human destiny as an essentially temporal unfolding, within which cyclical repetitions are no longer possible and which knows only transitory rebirths. (IR 28)

What this means for claims for strong moral action, as the upshot of a traditional reading of the epic, is that they are necessarily in error,[87] and that Schiller

[86] Schiller translated and quoted in IR 22, with the original German there in endnote 9 ("auf die Schranken derselben zuviel, auf ihr Vermögen zu wenig"). We will see more about Schiller in connection with Kant in section 5.

[87] M. H. Abrams, for example, finds in the novel "a union between the disalienated mind and a rehumanized nature" which can be "unstable and unenduring" but nonetheless preserves the

is wrong in accusing Rousseau of intentionally "vitiating" humanity of its possibilities. Instead of crashing and burning in a heroic blaze that accomplishes nothing, sensible thinkers of "internalized consciousness", which in Romantic thought "contains time *within itself*, and language", understand that only in being thus aware they will "remain standing on the shore of the future… isolated and locked into their inaction" (IR 29) which is not a surrendering but a human truth. Philosophical exposition of this predicament may give specious shelter to it for a while, disguising it as an addressable problem, but nothing can stop it from streaming through in poetry, as Hölderlin is said to know.

Having dealt with Schiller's objections to Rousseau and established Hölderlin's critical precedence over the former, de Man feels confident enough to move on from a defence of Rousseau to consolidating the link between the French precursor and Hölderlin. To achieve this, the poem "Der Rhein" is discussed. De Man breaks it down into three parts, of which the last one is dismissed as largely irrelevant, being the stage of "ideal" cognition (IR 35) which introduces nothing new into the poem, whereas the first two are said to comprise the essence of the poem's "lesson". The very first part (the six opening strophes) describes the river Rhine itself as he springs forth from the Alps and tears rendingly towards Asia in "a jubilant roar" ("ein Jauchzen") before he becomes aware of his fate ("A god, however, wishes to spare his sons / A life so fleeting"[88]) and turns back towards the German lands, allowing them to prosper. The wilful lenience of this natural "god" or "demi-god" ("Halbgott"), who is the son of "Mother Earth and the Thunderer" ("die Mutter Erd'" and "den Donnerer"), sets him starkly apart from the mythological warlike semi-divinities in the following two strophes in the first half of the second part. These seething entities are contemptuous of "the heavenly fire" ("des himmlischen Feuers") and strive "to become the equals of gods" ("den Göttern gleich zu werden"), refusing to cease their destruction of the earth.[89] Although they are similar to the Rhine in being metapoetic entities that "fulfill completely their destiny on earth" (IR 31), as well as manifestations of the Hölderlinian sacred that is "essentially parousia, an all-presence that envelops and subtends all subsequent polarities" (IR 32) and thus being full objects rather than man-god hybrids in themselves, they must be deemed "criminals" – simply

hero's truth beyond his own predicament. M. H. Abrams: *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971) 241–3.

88 "Ein Gott will aber sparen den Söhnen / Das eilende Leben" in strophe six.

89 Quotations from the poems in German are in their original cases.

because their fate is to violate the earth.[90] In that sense, even if they are necessary, they are not the proper role models to anyone.

However, neither is the Rhine. As a conscious entity, there is nothing human about him: as a poem, his ways are unknown to us and the temptations and restraints we assign to him are strictly our own. Yet the tendency towards calmness we gather from the description is a lesson we can learn if we understand it correctly. It is this possibility for true inward consciousness that consolidates the last (ninth) strophe before the important second half of the second part, and provides a bridge from the past Promethean signification of "heroic action" which "calls down upon us the sacred lightning which reduces us to ashes" (IR 36) to the inward memory of destruction in the present. The movement is analogous to that of the Rhine, it calms both the poet and the reader: the knowledge of tumultuous events in the past is alleviated through the possibility to reflect on them in the present, "blissfully humble" ("seeligbescheiden") and "uncompelled" ("unbezwungen"). In de Man's reading of Hölderlin, this kind of "[s]elf-consciousness is… what preserves us on the earth and protects us from a catastrophe like the one that destroyed Greece" (IR 36), and all we really need is thinkers able to point out this fact for us. In the tenth strophe of the poem, then, Rousseau appears.

Eventually, the image of Rousseau in the poetry of Hölderlin (whether in "Der Rhein" or other pieces) comes to be presented as such at the end of de Man's essay:

> There was a man who, in reaffirming the ontological priority of consciousness over the sensuous object, put the thought and the destiny of the West back onto its authentic path; the same man had the wisdom and the patience to remain faithful to the limits that this knowledge, in accordance with its own laws, imposes upon the human spirit. He was thus able to safeguard the future of mankind. (IR 45)

Granted this is a rather magnanimous description which, even if we imagined de Man was here speaking "just" for Hölderlin, belies the moderate nature of the kind of criticism it advocates; rhetorically speaking, however, the hyperbole could be there merely to highlight itself and the pre-deconstructionist paradox it suggests. Language always reaches for something it cannot possibly attain. And, in the de Manian way, this is what Rousseau and his presented image can teach us if we just

[90] Earlier discussed in connection with Hölderlin's deictic forms of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" (as well as the manifestations of Heidegger's "world"), the fullness of the manifestations reiterates the notion of the essential aporia being for Hölderlin that of the "sacred", complex in structure and rich in content.

want to learn: the compelling, aporetic image of Romanticism which, instead of cementing our harmonious union with nature, conveys to us the linguistic break profoundly embedded in it. Philosophy-wise this again represents the move away from thought based on a supreme universal principle and towards "the ontological priority of *consciousness* over the object" in a system which does not acknowledge absolute subjects either (because that would merely substitute the former "natural" object with another natural object, that is, a "subject" claiming power over its own agenda), and it is this lack of cognitive absoluteness that allegedly endears Rousseau to Hölderlin and, in turn, endears them both to de Man. In this scenario, Schiller's foolhardy trumpeting of Romantic moral harmony and an aesthetic education of the state is nothing but a distant memory (and thus in dialectical actuality illuminative of its own inherent break) latently charged with the possibility of even becoming dangerous if the flawed premise on which it was based was forgotten about but implemented nonetheless. That flawed premise is the objective primacy of sense perception that subjective knowledge totalises into a fusion of man and nature, and thus has us imagining domination over its use.

De Man, with the aid of his reading of Rousseau in Hölderlin, wants us to grasp what is being wagered when Rousseau in his own work talks of "*le sentiment de l'existence*" and Hölderlin recognises in "Der Rhein" that "The most Blessed in themselves feel nothing" ("Die Seeligsten nichts fühlen von selbst"). He sets up the scenario by saying that, as the German "fühlen" can denote "sense perception as well as 'sentiment'", that leaves nothing less than the "fate of thought… at stake in this ambiguity" (IR 38). Consequently, if we read "fühlen" to mean sense perception, we drastically affirm Schiller's view, but if we read it as "sentiment", we prioritise consciousness over objectified nature.[91] As de Man would say, that is what we should do. In "Der Rhein", the poetic Rousseau's "sweet gift of hearing" ("süsse Gaabe zu hören") in the tenth strophe and his sentimental sylvan learning "from nightingales" ("bei Nachtigallen") in the eleventh, because of the distancing aesthetic element intended in them, show the strength of this reading as the correct one – as far as the formal "meaning" of Romanticism and its inherent

[91] It is interesting here that again, when reading Hölderlin, we are asked to make a choice the poet does not really have to. If in this context we are asked to prefer "sentiment" over "sensation", what kind of an effect does that then have on "[t]he most Blessed"? After all, they appear capable of going both ways, and it is only of "themselves" that they know or sense "nothing". This makes "them" (that is what "[t]he most Blessed" are, in essence, because they are not identified for anything else than their sanctity) into a poetic all-presence able to subsume dialectical oppositions. The very same problem plagued not only the open-ended identity of the "sie" in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" but also the ontological limbo of sky and earth (or Aether and abyss) which appeared to endow them both in Nature, regardless of anything being manifested or not.

condition is concerned. As de Man argues elsewhere, in a world like this, the "natural aspect" of any literary site is "in fact the result of extreme artifice" and, in contemplating it aporetically, "we are entirely in the realm of art and not that of nature" (RTe 202).

Moreover, since the Romantic image is nonetheless a "longing of the language toward nature, not an identity with nature", it does contain within it the essence of a type of "tragic failure", but it is far from being heroic or providing catharsis for the awaiting audience in the Aristotelian sense. Instead, it is a forever self-undermining, anti-primitive unnatural entity consisting of "two irreconcilable ways of being"[92] whose poetic perpetuity is a distressing aporia for the subject who simultaneously experiences both its necessity and impossibility: in spite of being aware of its artificiality, the figure must emerge time and again because without it there would be nothing to become aware of. As de Man says, "consciousness is founded by colliding with sensuously apprehended things which keep us at a distance from being" (IR 38), and this means that while things do exist, to be experienced by the senses, we cannot take hold of them: the thought of their existence defines *them* in opposition to *us*. According to de Man, this aporetic awareness is that of a de-subjectified "self caught up entirely within mutability" (RTe 197) and it corresponds perfectly with Rousseau and Hölderlin's poetic "sentiment", as well as the letter of Hegel's philosophical system. We may not, however, think that this "mutability" was something that could be eternalised, or detached from its understanding of radical pastness. We may not naturalise the predicament as if we were "like" nature, like Wordsworth seems to suggest in much of his poetry; "paradoxical assertions of eternity in motion can be applied to nature" (RTe 197), as they frequently are in *The Prelude*, but they cannot be applied to our mutable selves. We are not *like* nature, and our self-awareness does not correspond with that of an entity's which our thought defines in opposition to us, either in Wordsworth or somewhere else. Laws of mediation and temporality are at their full function here, giving and taking poetic form as they are bound to, and what this all adds up to is a convincing case for a profound re-interpretation of a major epoch in Western thought with a significant heritage.

Examples of this new understanding can actually be seen in effect in de Man's discussions of Wordsworth whom he often treats as England's answer to Rousseau and Hölderlin, and whose friend Coleridge would be the Schiller-esque villain who did not quite get it. To illuminate the aporia of Romanticism from that aspect, too, a short detour might therefore be acceptable. In the 1965 essay

92 "Hölderlin and the Romantic Tradition" RCC 130.

"Heaven and Earth in Wordsworth and Hölderlin" (the poets are often paired up), de Man says the following:

> Being a truly dialectical mind, Hölderlin escaped the tendency toward analogical thought easily, but the apocalyptic always remained a strong temptation for him. Wordsworth's truly Kantian rationality, on the other hand, shelters him from the apocalyptic mood that is certainly present in other English Romantics, but he had to disengage himself gradually from the trappings of analogical thought. (HEW 146)

While Hölderlin's apocalyptic "temptation" and his side of the story are the ongoing topic of this chapter, the idea of Wordsworth's "analogical thought" adds to the tale by figuring a kind of Romantic tendency that has conventionally been interpreted as the creation of a link between the human and nature through comparative identification of different levels of existence. For example, the boy of Winander in Book V of *The Prelude* would thereby become one with nature by understanding its *similarity* with him (as when he responds to it by blowing "mimic hootings to the silent owls") and by this similitude happily relate to life in general.

In de Man's view of it, much of English Romantic poetry functions this way, but to Wordsworth he assigns a special value in ultimately coming to know the error contained in it. For instance, in his reading of the Lucy Gray poem "A slumber did my spirit seal", de Man finds the "successive description of two stages of consciousness" (RTe 224) in the poem's two stanzas go from a mystified past into a non-deluded present which Wordsworth, instead of declaring such a movement possible, actually breaks down as an ironic allegory of the event's "radical discontinuity". The speaking voice remains unable to move from "error" to "wisdom", as it would if we understood the temporal analogy without any "real disjunction of the subject" (RTe 224) existing in the separate moments. De Man understands the difference between the "two stages of consciousness" to be more radical than that: it claws its way out of the image of "self-created temporality engendered by the language of the poem" by splitting up the event "within the actual temporality of experience" (RTe 225); that is, in terms of non-poetic temporality unrepresentable as the self's movement from error to truth. And he considers that as Wordsworth's critical advantage over Coleridge:

> It could very well be argued that Coleridge's own concept of organic unity as a dynamic principle is derived from the movements of nature, not from those of the self. Wordsworth is more clearly conscious of what is involved

> here when he sees the same dialectic between the self and nature in temporal terms. (RTe 196)

As the organic analogy breaks up as an allegorical dialectic, the subject actually leaves no image behind, and reaches nothing new, but instead remains their captive. By realising the difference between "the imaginative and the analogical", the sensible poet is thus able to see the inherent disruption between the comparative levels of existence, brought about and effected by the temporal mind that mediates them via the faculty of imagination. As suggested earlier,[93] this event is embodied in Wordsworth's metaphor of being "suspended" or "hung" (like the Winander boy remaining "hung / Listening"). Apart from defending the mortal earth from the divine heaven that would besiege it, the metaphor represents the uncrossable separation of man from god which, when accepted for what it is, leads to an "inner absorption of mortality" (WH 64) trapped *between* sky and earth. And this historical consciousness, which can freeze the Romantic image into "the generalized statement of the human predicament, man stifled by the awareness of his mortality",[94] then becomes the sorrowful realisation of a finitude which "lends duration to a past that otherwise would immediately sink into the nonbeing of a future that withdraws itself from consciousness" (WH 64). Even Hölderlin's Titans of apocalyptic destiny are aware of this sorry requirement – the "deeper theme of man's temporal contingency"[95] also shown by Keats's mythological figures – and they yield to it, dying out. So who should Wordsworth's humble folk be to resist it, bowing before their fate at the height of mundane awareness? The aporia of Romanticism expresses this very break.

Some problems, however, also surface when the literature in question is read this way. For instance, de Man upbraids Geoffrey Hartman for having found in *The Prelude* "a movement toward an umediated contact with a divine principle" (TH 90) whereas what should be found there is "not a truth about objects in nature but a truth about the self" (TH 93). And this truth, the "experience of mortality", should awaken within us "a consciousness of time that is more than merely natural… so powerful that no language could ever name time for what it is"; and this is so because "time itself lies beyond language and beyond the reach of imagination" (TH 93–4). The problem here is, as Simon Jarvis has recently indicated, that, according to de Man's logic, it should be impossible to imagine

93 See footnote 73.

94 "Introduction to the Poetry of John Keats" CW 186.

95 ibid. 187.

such unimaginability without partaking, at least to some degree, of such a movement as Hartman's. Moreover, it should be impossible to force consciousness to think, poetically or otherwise, that it cannot think something *because* of an unimaginable force:

> Certainly, [according to de Man], Hartman "has noticed, more clearly than most other interpreters, that the imagination in Wordsworth is independent of nature and that it leads him to write a language, at his best moments, that is entirely unrelated to the exterior stimuli of the sense." This is what is to be praised in Hartman's reading. This absence of an invocation of "immediate vision" thus accepts Hartman's qualifications to the notion that everything subjective is always found to be mediated by "nature" in Wordsworth but uses them to move instead to a further mediation, the mediation of consciousness itself by a peculiar kind of time or history, and thus, implicitly, the impossibility of ever finding a point at which consciousness is present to itself. The absence of an immediate vision of divinity is thus linked to the absence of immediate self-presence of any kind.[96]

Jarvis's description of de Man's paradoxical gesture (of renouncing poetic mediation in the name of a peculiar "further mediation") is appropriate because it shows a break in the latter's logic. It allows for the imagining of the absent self as the absence of "an immediate vision of divinity"; and it does this even as the image appears to hide itself in the pronounced themes of finitude and non-presence.

Similar problems crop up elsewhere in de Man's Wordsworth readings too. When the poet describes the cloister of the Grande Chartreuse in Book VI of *The Prelude* (recording a journey taken by him "on foot on the continent in July 1790, a short time after the outbreak of the French Revolution", WH 55), he is worried about the treat posed to the sacred edifice by the ebullient joy of the insurgents (described as "the undiscriminating sweep / And rage of one State-whirlwind", ll. 487–8) who see it as a symbol of the obsolete reign. At first Wordsworth and his companion share for one evening a merry rapport with the "proud company" (l. 394), but then they leave them the next day to rest within the "awful 'solitude"' (l. 419) of the religious residence. Subsequently, in de Man's reading, Wordsworth's cloister comes to represent "something much more worthy of consideration than a particular religious symbol" – it represents "a thing that is so capacious as to take in faith and reason, but also nature in its most universal form" (WH 55–6). It is a place that is "nature as the principle in which time finds itself preserved"

[96] Simon Jarvis: *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 157. TH 89 quoted in the quotation.

(WH 56) and thus a mysterious entity of faith which consists of more than its expression. In effect, it menaces both common language and insurgent zeal by a natural paradox that creates its own self-same appearance in the language of poetry. For Wordsworth, this supernal epiphany goes unrealised for anyone not thinking about it enough, quite like his companion:

> Not seldom since that moment have I wished
> That thou, O Friend! the trouble or the calm
> Hadst shared, when, from profane regards apart,
> In sympathetic reverence we trod
> The floors of those dim cloisters, till that hour,
> From their foundation, strangers to the presence
> Of unrestricted and unthinking man. (ll. 472–8)

What de Man does in this situation, and he credits Wordsworth with the same insight, is that he negates the threat to the convent in a very specific manner. He overcomes the dangerous enthusiasm of the "unthinking" throng by forgetting about the paradox of the cloister itself as a meaningful symbol of its own, and instead he posits it as a puzzling "natural" sign with which we, as pretenders to the throne, have actually nothing to do. Removed from our whims, the ancient priory remains unresponsive to any projected desire, like Nature herself does; and the denied caprices include not only poetic reflection and hubristic joy (rebellion "against the grasp of time", WH 57), but also faith. By tolling us back into "the temporal nature of our existence" (WH 56) and by re-thematising the plight back into the poetry at hand, like Keats is in the Nightingale Ode, de Man forsakes the contemplation of what it might mean to sense the cloister in its "awful 'solitude'" and perhaps gain new understanding of poetic language in doing so ("for the sake / Of conquest over sense, hourly achieved / Through faith and meditative reason, resting / Upon the word of heaven-imparted truth", ll. 457–60). And thus Wordsworth's imaginative zeal for faith *qua* the form of the sacred edifice, however finite in actual reality, is corrected as its aporetic impossibility in language, and the poet's striving comes to next to nothing.

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that although de Man proceeds through the example with customary verve, there still appears to be some eyewash applied to what reads as de Man and what reads as Wordsworth. For example, it is uncertain whether the "enduring thing" de Man refers to really belongs to Wordsworth's vision, either as enthusiasm or the threatened edifice:

> [The insurgents] mean to possess something that endures which they fashion according to the intoxication of the act, and yet this thing that

> endures exists only in a nature that endures precisely because it negates the instant, just as reflection must negate the act that nonetheless constitutes its origin. (WH 56)

The attribution is uncertain because for Wordsworth such "negatings of the instant", intoxicated or not, do not *matter* within the sacred residence:

> Yes, for even then no other than a place
> Of soul-affecting 'solitude' appeared
> That far-famed region, though our eyes had seen,
> As toward the sacred mansion we advanced,
> Arms flashing, and a military glare
> Of riotous men commissioned to expel
> The blameless inmates, and belike subvert
> That frame of social being, which so long
> Had bodied forth the ghostliness of things
> In silence visible and perpetual calm. (ll. 420–9)

The unsullied cloister is a mother of ghosts which may be "subverted" but which cannot lose its thing-procreating, thought-evoking character. And this realisation, which is clearly Wordsworth's, allows the place with more preserving power, both poetic and pious, than de Man's blunt extraction of understanding would admit. His effort is coherent and convincing, but it is extremely reductive too; and he makes himself speak through other people's mouths. The strategy can be more than a bit troubling at times, and the reader needs to take stock of the ambiguities as the encounter with de Man and the poets goes on, even if the issues at hand were never resolved completely.

One of these issues concerns the slight over-eagerness which haunts de Man's need to identify Rousseau in Hölderlin at certain times, and, although the identificatory process is far from being as questionable as it was in the example of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…", it still feels as if something is being smoothed over. As far as explicitness is concerned, in the Rousseau strophes of "Der Rhein" this might not be the case as the reference appears fairly consistent, but it still takes something away from the poetic complexity of "the sons of Earth" ("Die Söhne der Erde") and "the mortal man" ("den sterblichen Mann"), to whom "it seems best / Almost wholly forgotten to be / Where the beam does not sear",[97] to make them identify exclusively with Rousseau's lesson and restrict their signification to that. Within a world of Hölderlinian non-affirmation where there are no fixed figures,

[97] The lines "scheint… oft das Beste, / Fast ganz vergessen da, / Wo der Stral nicht brennt" in strophe 11.

this is quite a demand even if a case to the contrary were rather weak. In relation to it, however, a much stronger issue can be raised about de Man's volunteering of Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne" (third version) at the end "The Image of Rousseau in the Poetry of Hölderlin" to prove his point; there he quotes from the last lines of that poem ("For the Heavenly, when / Someone has failed the collect his soul, to spare it, / Are angry, for still he must"[98]) and says that "the 'one' ('einer') designated in these lines *can be none other* than Rousseau" (IR 45, my emphasis). And yet Rousseau appears nowhere in the third version of "Mnemosyne".

What's more, as if this was not curious enough, elsewhere de Man (drawing on the second version of the poem) even goes to the length of arguing that if, in the lines "High up, in anger, distantly divining / A traveller walks / With the other",[99] we think we have to identify "this other with a particular divine or human being" we actually "understand Hölderlin poorly" (WH 62). The reader is perplexed by now, but what apparently makes the difference in this case is literally a decision between "one" (Rousseau) and the "other" (dialectical formality), and that in itself opens the door for a host of further questions about the reading discussed here. Yet the fact that de Man can remain convincing regardless marks him as a skilful philologist and scholar of Hölderlin, even if the need to find the Frenchman hardly meets the requirements of his own brand of literary theory, supposedly scornful of such overarching referential fallacies already at this early stage in his career. Even if Rousseau *is* a figure of self-reading, and in that sense inherently illuminative of the aporia of Romanticism, it can be argued that making Rousseau pop up at different places in Hölderlin's oeuvre is more of a question of practical tendency for de Man rather than of real critical analysis (which would have me missing the point in a sense). However, in my view of it, the issues of praxis and theory cannot really be severed from one another in any clean-cut manner, for me or de Man, and thus the Rousseaus in Hölderlin can never be authoritatively stated to being just this or just that. As has been insisted on before, the problem is not that it *could* not be done, far from it, but whether it *should* be done and what it means either way.

The passage above reiterates things that have already been suggested earlier, and it leads us on to other questions about de Man's reading of Rousseau in Hölderlin. One of these issues concerns his off-hand dismissal of the third part of "Der

[98] "Himmlische nemlich sind / Unwillig, wenn einer nicht die Seele schonend sich / Zusammengenommen, aber er muss doch".

[99] "Ein Wandersmann geht zornig, / Fern ahnend mit / Dem andern". The wording is different in the second version of the poem but the reference to an "other" is the same.

Rhein" which he calls the "ideal" stage, or the "fulfillment" of the "two distinct experiences of consciousness" (IR 35) preceding it, or the "generalized version of Rousseau's exemplary destiny" (IR 44). It is true that the last three strophes of the poem may come across as more "replete" (in the sense of appearing full by themselves) or perhaps somewhat less didactic than the ones coming before them; but it is not at all sure that this should undermine their importance to the complete hymn. After all, in "Wie wenn am Feiertage…", it was the last fragment of a stanza that decided de Man's reading in its hermeneutic circular entirety, idealising the disruption inherent in the "non-conscious state" (PT 70) of its beginning with the explicit breakdown of its ending. No such abrupt measures are available at the end of "Der Rhein", and that might be why de Man is inclined to "hardly mention" (IR 34) them. What the strophes do describe is a pastoral world of rather elegiac proportions ("The eternal gods are full / Of life at all times; but until death / A mortal too can retain / And bear in mind what is best / And then is supremely favoured"[100]) which goes from night to day and from day to night without losing its essence or the assurance that, as expressed to Isaac von Sinclair to whom the poem is dedicated: "never from you / The smile of the Ruler is hidden".[101] Based on that, at least two points can be made about the function of the third part.

On one hand, as a thematic articulation of human fate, it can hardly be regarded as an artifice-ridden, purely inward linguistic submission, but rather a celebration of nature that is aware of its own limits and indulgent of its heroes too. On the other hand, as far as the formal balance of "Der Rhein" is concerned, Hölderlin's own elaboration of "*cesura*, the pure word" comes in handy here. Describing the common metrical break or pause as the "counter-rhythmic rupture" that meets "the onrushing change of representations at its highest point in such a manner that very soon there does not appear the change of representation but the representation itself",[102] Hölderlin claims that the cesura is actually "counteracting". Therefore it reverses the poem's equilibrium away from itself, towards the opposite side of its own appearance, pressured there by "the calculable law" of literature.[103] And,

[100] "Die ewigen Götter sind / Voll Lebens allzeit; bis in den Tod / Kann aber ein Mensch auch / Im Gedächtniss doch das Beste behalten, / Und dann erlebt er das Höchste" in strophe 14.

[101] The lines "nimmer ist dir / Verborgen das Lächeln des Herrschers" in strophe 15.

[102] Pfau 102. The "representation itself" might be considered as an internal metalinguistic moment, as well. This would draw it near to that Romantic notion of language which, among other things, celebrates the expressing of "fragments" (pieces whole in themselves without constituting parts of anything larger). See the chapter on Schlegel in section 5.

[103] ibid. 102.

as the point here is, the fact that this happens is not a coincidence or something of negligible consequence. Technical exactitude, as would be most extremely demonstrated by his Sophocles translations, is always of utmost importance to Hölderlin's work:

> The abundance and the beauty of the images, the richness and diversity of the rhymes entrance us, but this ebullience is always accompanied by a thought and an expression that are always in search of the extreme rigor and meticulousness. Through erasures, drafts, reworked fragments, Hölderlin seeks an ever truer and more correct expression. (HEH 247)

What this precision then means for a hymn like "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" is that, because the caesura appears as the last fragmentary stanza, the poem *is* focused on its very beginning, thus validating our emphasis on it, as well as de Man's. For "Der Rhein", on the other hand, it means that the hymn gravitates towards the inner conflict of the middle part (which recounts to us the deeds of the heroes and mortals) because the metrical break appears as the ninth strophe (the bridge from heroic action to inward consciousness) and is only followed up with the explicit naming of Rousseau in the tenth. This technical find then affects the reading of the entire poem.

Now, if the scheme of the poem divided into three parts is maintained, this means that all the action, quite plausibly read as another warning against heroic endeavour, takes place in the middle of the poem, with the beginning and the end left out of that clash. For the poem to balance out, it must then be that the significance of the third part equals that of the first, and from this follows that de Man's cursory treatment of it is actually a terrible oversight; the Rhine of the beginning cannot be compared to the heroes and the mortal man of the middle part in terms of consciousness in the hope of elucidating anything about its "motives" (such as the wilful lenience of the elderly Rhine mentioned earlier) or "ideal" non-humanity unless *the same possibility is granted* to the "exemplary destiny" of the pastoral world at the end, as well. In itself, that world is just as unmotivated and non-human as the material Rhine is said to be; it is not the "fulfillment" or the fantastical result of anything; it is *what is*. Mortal poets and heroes live there, endowed as nature, and, for Hölderlin, the awareness of this is the saying of the Sacred – much like the naturally paradoxical expression of the timeless cloister of the Grande Chartreuse was for Wordsworth. No break from beyond, by language or something else, can ever disrupt it, and it is that sheer poetic fact that makes de Man's dragging of Romanticism towards his own critical shores founder.

Consequently, in the case of Rousseau and Hölderlin, it could be argued that, in spite of their valorisation of reflection over conscious action, the language used to protect us is powerful enough to make their own poetic volitions appear heroic. The "retraction" (IR 42) and the "profound fidelity" (IR 43) to human nature that accompanies it is in itself a heralding action and the escape from the sacred lightning a legendary birth. The contemplating spirit, no matter how tragically artificial or unnaturally resigned, is a magnificent life force which endures to future ages. In its inwardness, it runs parallel to its "actively heroic" counterpart, that of Schiller, and the colliding of the two keeps alive the enchanted, paradoxical whole of the Romantic mind. This poetic rhetoric, however, puts us back in de Man's lap. Whereas his tone and conclusions at first appear to echo the sentiments of Hölderlin and Rousseau exactly, it soon becomes clear that he is bound to intensify their acuity in a number of ways and thus re-read the aporia of Romanticism in a radical fashion. By never failing to warn us of the threat of critical lethargy which follows not only from believing in an "apocalyptic salvation" in the future but also from waxing nostalgic or mournful in a state of postlapsarian "apocalyptic failure" (RH 212), de Man establishes a theory in which the Rousseauan repose or the Hölderlinian sacred (or the Heideggerian immediate) are all things whose truth cannot be stated. Declared unutterable, they cannot be correctly understood at *any* conscious level (not even that of literature) and hence need to be retracted from a language of experience which would give the lie to them.[104] For all intents and purposes, they do not exist; and it is instead the strictly formal devices of language, the aporias of our finite awareness, which mediately shelter us from their non-existence and thus immediately safeguard our continued being on this temporal soil. And *that* is the meaning of Romanticism – as well as our part in belonging to it.

While this might be technically true also for Rousseau and Hölderlin, and significantly so, the ontology of their poetry allows for a different reading; and it is here that de Man finally makes his break from the both of them in finding nothing restful in their suggestion and no place for enchanted contemplation of the human condition. He does not see it like that though; such an "aestheticism" would either "let the consciousness repose tranquilly within a static self-

[104] De Man finishes his later foreword to Rilke's poetry (1972) with a corresponding sentiment. In locating Rilke's "promise" within "the dissolving perspective of the lie", de Man claims that "Rilke can only be understood if one realizes the urgency of this promise together with the equally urgent, and equally poetic, need of retracting it at the very instant he seems to be on the point of offering it to us." Thus, by withholding the lie from appearing in language, Rilke's poetry may maintain a residue of truth. "Tropes (Rilke)" AR 56.

immanence that [was] contradictory to its very nature" (PT 52), or it could become even "more dangerous" than the thought which criticises it simply by betraying the very "movement of being" (TP 38) in the way Heidegger does. As none of this is acceptable in critical thinking, the reflective self reached must be rather one of active immersion in the madness of inward consciousness. In this understanding there is nothing "transcendent":

> Transcendence means that the self has to get outside its own immanence, that it has to find another entity in which it can structure its own intentionality in such a manner that it can contemplate it as a total figure, instead of being caught up in the inevitable shortsightedness of lived desire. (PT 52)

For de Man, no such overreaching "entity" exists in the way it arguably does for Schiller and Heidegger (and the images of Rousseau and Hölderlin within their own worlds). What he rather wants to do is make the blanket illusion of static sensuous objects, which tempts us to believe in the larger entity, destroy itself over and over again by reflecting on the aporia of Romanticism.[105] The paradoxical figure comes into dynamic clarity by the breaking forces of mediation and temporality which the early de Man insists upon, and, should we remain unaware of this, we will be blind to the pain of knowledge which we thus resist. But is it really any different being blind *from* the pain? After all, we would not be feeling any sensations at all if the referential madness giving rise to them did not affect us in another certain and unavoidable way. How to imagine that insistent "us" then, in the strict sense, or the singular "self" contained in the plural? To think that, de Man must undergo a considerable change.

[105] In psychoanalytical terms we might be here reminded of the Lacanian "mirror-stage" with its impressively permanent (subconscious) images which compete with the ego's self-image and may only find reconciliation with it through identification. While for Lacan this process represents a solution to the predicament, in de Man's terms it would stand for another conforming to a sustained illusion. Discussing the "particular oddity of mirrors" in connection with Rilke's poetry as "objects that have the power to make an object and its reflection identical", he rather emphasises the becoming "conscious by contrast of the discrepancy that exists in ourselves", and prefers to remain in *that* state. His stance cannot be budged even if Rilke's poems at times evoke instants "during which this discrepancy disappears" and thus "reveals a hidden potential of our being", akin perhaps to Lacan's "ideal" ego. This is because, in (post-)Romantic consciousness, the predicament can never be left behind. "The Literature of Nihilism" CW 167.

4 Middle de Man: Reading and Figurality

De Man says in the preface to his second book *Allegories of Reading* (1979) that the work on it began as a "preparation for a historical reflection on Romanticism" but that the initial idea got stalled in "local difficulties of interpretation" (AR ix). He does not elaborate on these difficulties so it remains up to the comparative reader of early and middle de Man to find out what he might have meant by them and how his theoretical discourse was shaped by the failure. One might speculate that he got frustrated with his inability really to erase the hidden spaces available for hermeneutic readings, and with his failure actually to establish "a truth about the self" that imagines natural objects, as revealed in the context of *The Prelude*:

> This truth [of Wordsworth's language of imagination] is not a truth about objects in nature but a truth about the self… A truth about the self is best described, not in terms of accuracy, but in terms of authenticity; true knowledge of a self is knowledge that understands the self as it really is. And since the self never exists in isolation, but always in relation to entities, since it is not a thing but the common center of a system of relationships or intents, an authentic understanding of a self means first of all a description of the entities toward which it relates, and of the order of priority that exists among these entities. (TH 93)

As the mapping of these "relationships or intents" fails by becoming stuck in poetic details whose "authentic understanding" remains hidden in the dark, illuminated only falsely, the option of clarifying such a melancholy scene in terms of a general "historical reflection" is pre-empted in advance. And so the early de Man ultimately falters in his attempt to shatter the (Romantic) interpreter's chance to found unity between nature and the human in literature because the possibility still exists in hiding. His aim was to collapse the division between fact and fiction, by acknowledging the ambiguous inwardness and intentionality of any linguistic utterance, and in doing this determine the existence of the erratic subject who only had a stunted ability to reflect on, and identify with, this state. In a world of mediated (no-)things, we were to be the medium of truth but the truth was forever banned from us because temporality intervened. The literary figure attempting to break free from this limbo was doomed to violent destruction

(as befell the Greeks), while the one merely taking refuge in the recognition betrayed the very movement of immanent consciousness. The reflection, whether tragically disposed or not, had to be acted out unceasingly, re-closing and re-opening the imaginary world whose comprehension forever eluded us. Failing really to clear the stage, this would be one way of describing the early de Manian critical drama.

How severe must these "local difficulties of interpretation" then have been for de Man, seeing that they were enough to persuade him to abandon the project of what *Allegories of Reading* was first planned to be? They must truly have been formidable since, four years later still, in the preface to *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1983) he admits that, in spite of all the hard work to the contrary, Hölderlin remained "the obvious stumbling block" (RR ix) of his own enterprise. There is not much talk of the enigmatic German (or Heidegger for that matter) after the outward terminological about-face of the 1970s which had him taking "refuge in more theoretical inquiries into the problems of figural language" (RR viii) and transported him to other battlefronts. Jacques Derrida's influence on this happening is certainly a big factor, even if not necessarily a determining one. For although de Man has said that in Derrida's writings he "consciously came across 'deconstruction' for the first time" (AR x), it cannot be insignificant that the ill-famed term is emphasised as just that – as a term. What, however, all these occurrences signal even to this day is something radical, as indicated by the endless critical altercations spawned in their wake. But none of this might have happened without de Man sympathising with Derrida, or without later becoming affiliated with the Yale School, and it is the express intention of this section to study how it all unfolded in the change of de Man's texts during the 1970s.

As the power of temporality as a breaking force *par excellence* wanes for de Man into a mere poetic trope of duration subject to its own paradoxicality (into something unable to mediate anything), the model of imperfect hermeneutics no longer provides any way beyond historical "local difficulties of interpretation" because, applied as such, the model needs to assume itself existing fully in each single local instance. In effect, this would entail the ineffable universality of the model with only the instances (and their "local difficulties") as variable, and, of them, some would provide the astute reader with insight, others with blindness. At the centre of this process, at the heart of the hermeneutic circle, regardless of the dramatic outcome, there would still remain the *logos* of the relative knowledge gained. (And, as we know, this very logocentrism is what Derrida totally resists.) The possibility of this epistemology then becomes the core question for the middle

de Man and, characteristically enough, as soon as the trouble brews, any future answer is *a priori* declared invalid. We will see this in this section by focusing, along with de Man, on the *reading* of Rousseau, with all the technical complications the term implies. Necessary contrast is provided by Derrida's *writing* of Rousseau, with interpretations of the clash between the readings and writings of both de Man and Derrida added to the mix. It is a field which to this day has incited much response but it remains to be seen how faithful this discourse has been to the question of *language* de Man is relentlessly preoccupied with.

As earlier partly excerpted, in his first lecture at the Gauss seminar of 1967, transcribed as the essay "The Contemporary Criticism of Romanticism" in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, de Man says that, in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, "[s]tarting point and end point are linked by a duration that the mind can encompass in both directions; the reader of the novel is in fact constantly making such temporal reversals". By this activity a "prefigurative system of signs" is unfolded and each event in the novel can be located "at the intersection of this double temporal movement that takes place between beginning and end interacting upon each other". In addition, it is said that only a "subject capable of encompassing within its scope a consciousness [of such movement]" can make sure this knowledge is passed on to the reader: in other words, it is not the fictional characters who have the ability but "only the author" (CCR 21). This supports our notion of the image of the conscious subject (whether Hölderlin or Proust, the latter of whom he returns to in *Allegories of Reading*) remaining at the centre of the early de Man's theory, and it also affirms the then-universal applicability of the proposed hermeneutic model (the "prefigurative system of signs"); from that point on in the lecture, de Man can continue to his stated denunciation of the apocalyptic pattern I have discussed in the previous section. However, the most interesting thing about this particular passage in the transcribed essay is the note the editors have inserted in the middle of it. Thus we read in endnote 10:

> On the back of the manuscript page the following note appears:
>
> Ceci est faux. L'origine comme pré-savoir, doit se mettre en question en tant qu'origine (cf. Poulet). Elle est fictive, et conduit à une regression infinie. C'est la structure du roman de Proust mais la conclusion est encore bien moins que l'origine, qui n'est rien. La fin est moins que *rien*. [This is false. The origin as foreknowledge must put itself into question insofar as it is an origin (cf. Poulet). It is fictitious and leads to an infinite regress. This is the structure of Proust's novel, but the conclusion is even less than the origin, which is nothing. The end is less than *nothing*.] (RCC 196n)

What might this erasing of the beginning ("which is nothing") and the end ("less than *nothing*") mean to the "double temporal movement", fixed in Proust between two points in time and encompassed by an enduring mind, concurrently being theorised on the front of the manuscript and lectured to those attending the Gauss seminar? Is it not shocking to witness de Man hiding from his listeners the fact that "[t]his is false"? For someone with less than the best of intentions the holding back of this kind of confession (we will return to this notion later) could be enough first to do away with the lesson of the entire Gauss seminar and then to continue from there, in a cumulative effect, to undermine everything de Man ever said.

After all, that is precisely what he himself did to anyone worth the trouble. Might we too be excused for doing that? Is there any other way for us but to mimic the gesture? Does the mind, deprived of the fixity of knowledge through its fixated disruption, have any other recourse apart from its mechanical functioning? De Man says Rousseau reads in the affirmative for these questions, but it remains to be seen how the effect reciprocates, whatever its upshot. The early de Man, pressured by unseen forces of existence, has moved on and, apparently, always already broken himself on the other side of what he seemed to be saying back in 1967. By the innovation of "deconstruction", the "local difficulties" of yore now come to a head and give themselves up to a new kind of history which has no place for such considerations anymore, no matter how diachronic their poetic (re)presentation was. The talk of temporality creating such obstacles must fall silent and be replaced by a new declaration: enter figurality of reading and the institution of allegory. The paradox is of course the ostensible spatialisation of the terminology involved. Whereas it could be argued that the concepts of mediation, temporality and intentionality, among others, had implied a kind of disrupted cognition within a universal language that was still able to perform the dynamic imagining of the real if unreachable figure at its centre (like moths drawn towards light), the new batch set out to disrupt in general the universality of language and the ability to perform it at all (like moth-ghosts trapped in the dream of light). And this static entrapment was a spatial state. In this section, the difference between these two "planes" of understanding the ultimate nature of language will be clarified in the reading of Rousseau and eventually pointed towards their theoretical culmination in the late de Man of the 1980s, who adds little new but speaks what he knows with amazing, ever-expanding ability. By then, reading will equal history, allegory the zero degree of formal materiality, and the figurality of reading (that is, allegory broken down into its linguistic

components) will enact the irony of irony (a spectral event that discloses nothing but undecidability). It will be the apex of the imagination of human intelligence: the break of Paul de Man at work with the question of language.

Here, however, reaching towards the late 1970s, we do not need to go that far just yet; the journey there is far from being mapped. Our ability to reflect on the disrupted nature of our restless wandering on this earth has not exactly been discounted yet. There are still localities to visit, stars to navigate by, and something to record all of this: "[l]iterature can be represented as a movement and is, in essence, the fictional narration of this movement" (LH 159). This is a thought of de Man from 1969 in an essay that is interesting in how it anticipates certain future evolutions of his theory. Through the "absolute forgetting" (LH 147) of Nietzsche, the concept of "history" is on the brink of collapsing from convention: "writing" asserts its ambivalence not only as a broken cognition of subjective intention but also as the linguistic displacement of its own performance ("an act and an interpretative process that follows after an act with which it cannot coincide", LH 152).[1] In effect, the stressing of the "nature of literary language as an entity, not as an event", regardless of how the terms "writing" and "entity" were just removed from one another, begins to blot out the stars from the poetic sky – not by casting the images into oblivion but by judging them into a half-life. And beneath this sky, "imaginary motions between fictional points cannot be located, dated, and represented as if they were places in a geography or events in a genetic history" (LH 163). This spectrality is what de Man salvages from Nietzsche, redeeming the dauntless spirit of "modernity" from the reactionary ruins of "history". In some powerful way the "new" suggestion runs counter to his earlier observations about the poet's choice to renounce either consciousness or the world's things in order to receive "something" out of the deathly "nothing" surrounding us (Baudelaire

[1] This convention, of history simply being thought as the record of past events and as the discipline devoted to studying it, comes under scrutiny because, in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy, the thought of something being in the past occurs itself within history and is therefore already part of the past. What is now is here no more and the "newness" (or "modernity") of anything is a mere illusion; the record of events remains but the hope of adding to it is nothing but a "gamble" (LH 151) which might or might not change something. Our best bet of surviving this uncertainty is forever to forget it; the essay "Literary History and Literary Modernity" begins to map out the possibility. De Man says that since "history is not fiction" (LH 163), we might possibly revise our notion of it and "beyond that… the notion of time on which our idea of history is based", and who knows what would follow if we were just able to steer clear of each and every "positivistic history that sees literature only as what it is not" (LH 164). These "histories" are those that claim the explaining of literature in terms other (objective, empirical, transcendental) than its own, and Nietzsche's "genetic pattern" (understanding of the "gamble" passed down from father to son), despite its apparent radicality, is one of them. Its impact on the early de Man is nonetheless unquestionable and he returns to it in more detail in *Allegories of Reading*.

and Mallarmé); it runs counter to the history-preserving sacrifice of the demigod Rhine who relinquishes action for reflection (Hölderlin); and it runs counter to the warning of the poets of "Wie wenn am Feiertage…" not to risk "themselves" as temporal nature does (Hölderlin). Now the suggestion is different because, in the "new" world, there is much more than "nothing" to interpret but there is less time either to act or reflect on the sensations met on the way. The stars are still there, as the story unfolds, but now they exist only in their self-erasure: as de Man says in another essay of the time, in such modernist poetics the natural images remain because they are "an indispensable element in the development of the dramatic action" but that their "deluding appearance" as mimetic representations only results in "an enigma which never stops asking for the unreachable answer to its own riddle".[2] The stars exist as they must but that *means* nothing.

In the space of this prospective waiting (or the "present contain[ing] the prospective self-knowledge of its end", LH 159), which is the twofold movement of literature, the spectre of the subject becomes the allegory of his or her own experience. This "story" resembles the "fantôme" (LH 158) of the painter Constantin Guys in Baudelaire's "Painter of Modern Life" (1863). For Guys, as a non-fictional figure, the spectral figures of art more than fail: they cannot be said really to exist. As nothing but "*metaphors* of duration" (LH 159), the narratively mediated events, or diachronic stories, which make up the disincarnated self of Guys become, like the perfect "carriage" sketched by him, "allegorized into nothingness and [exist] as the purely temporal vibration of a successive movement that has only linguistic existence" (LH 160).[3] Mediation and temporality as forces

[2] "Lyric and Modernity" BI 181 and 186. The essay is highly interesting for its update on de Man's critique of Mallarméan symbolism. Whereas in the early days Baudelaire and Mallarmé came across one another mainly in the form of their respective acts of sacrifice, here de Man briefly glances at the latter poet's "oddly unsatisfying" *Tombeaux* sonnet on his predecessor – a quality not present in any of the others in the sequence (on Poe, Gautier, Verlaine and Wagner). It is de Man's conclusion that this is because Baudelaire remains for Mallarmé "a dark zone into which he could never penetrate" and that this happens because the relationship between them is "not the genetic movement of a historical process", as has often been argued (Karlheinz Stierle, Hugo Friedrich), but "more like the uneasy and shifting border line that separates poetic truth from poetic falsehood" (184–5). Much is at stake in this division.

[3] "Even if we consider the character [Constantin Guys] in the essay to be a mediator used to formulate the prospective vision of Baudelaire's own work, we can still witness in this vision a similar disincarnation and reduction of meaning [into a phantom]" (LH 158). Hans-Jost Frey finds the (dis)incarnation theme operative also in the late de Man's reading of Wordsworth in "Autobiography as De-Facement" (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*). There de Man is "not satisfied to show that Wordsworth's language is not the language of incarnation; instead, he negates the difference between incarnation and clothing that Wordsworth insists upon" (126, see end of note). By this extension, de Man is able to maintain his logic against Wordsworth's insistence and show how autobiography as "veiling" (125) is disrupted by the disincarnation

that break cognitive representation become thereby something sensuous and completely unintelligible (pure "vibration"), and the way to theory is instead opened through the figure of allegory inhabiting a displaced inert space.[4] A journey, whether of man, god, or demigod, can still be recorded but it cannot be located anywhere on earth, and its "memory", like that of Baudelaire, "comes to apply *more naturally to the present* than it does to the past" (LH 156, my emphasis). This naturalised present, however, should not be surrendered to as a momentary seduction, but it should rather serve as a permanent realisation of "a successive movement that involves at least two distinct moments", a form of language which assumes "an interdependence between past and future that prevents any present from coming into being" (LH 161). Only with this understanding may art be adumbrated as the site of any kind of knowledge – as the images of Guys do for Baudelaire.

At first sight, the idea of the naturalised present might appear similar to de Man's "oblivious poetic present", discussed in the previous section, by which the tragic "last man" of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* inhabited "inauthentic temporality" confining him to an illusionary present. But the difference is that there the focus was on the full "pastness" of knowledge, with the present cognition permanently separated from it just as sky is separated from earth, with no chance of bridging the divide. Here, in this "natural present" of Baudelaire, it is the past that is an illusion and the present a full displacement: a double break, so to speak. In "De l'essence du rire" (1855), for example, the current instant appears as the ironic *dédoublement* of the empirical and the reflective self at once caught in a single act of falling which "they" cannot control but only laugh at. The developing critical strategy of de Man, as a similar "disjunction" which is "by no means a reassuring and serene process" (RTe 214), is in strict agreement with this. When space, the *a priori* condition of allegory, is the thing being talked about, time, the mechanical movement of language, needs only to catch up with in order to disrupt it; and that is what it certainly does.[5] Nothing states this more bewilderingly

motif. Hans-Jost Frey: "Undecidability" *The Lesson of Paul de Man* (Yale French Studies 69, 1985).

4 According to de Man, this figure, whether that of "the political destiny of man" (as described by Rousseau in the second *Discourse*) or of any other such ideal, "coincides with the blind metaphorization called 'passion,' and this metaphorization *is not an intentional act*" (M 156, my emphasis).

5 It might be that the discrepancy between de Man and Derrida (the former always concerned with *whether it is possible* to know anything and the latter with *how* we know something) derives in essence from their respective understanding of the interrelations of space and time. Neither of them denies the existence of either, rather the contrary, but whereas for Derrida they seem to support each other, de Man finds them at endless odds with one another.

than the inscription of the "pure optics" of the *Augenschein* scene of Kant (see 5.iv) or the phenomenal de-relating of *everything* of Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" (see Conclusion). Yet some of this can be seen in the 1969 essay too, as the quotations above attest; the step away from the troublesome "local difficulties of interpretation" is already beginning to be taken. Temporal talk provides no way out of them because *it creates them* by admitting that the entities to be interpreted exist hidden in history; and so they can only be blown open by forgetting they are supposed to mediate anything, by utterly displacing them from meaning. This is the realisation towards which de Man begins to turn in "Literary History and Literary Modernity" and elsewhere in *Blindness and Insight* – the gears of radical deconstruction are certainly in motion.

However, in these essays, despite great innovation and suggestiveness, de Man still somehow seems to lack the real authority to outline his new-found project. He is able to confront several important authors (Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Wordsworth, Stendhal) and diagnose with great verve a number of criticisms they have been subjected to, but a consolidating voice is missing. What he appears to need is someone like Hölderlin in dealing with Heidegger and then he finds him: Rousseau. Who better to articulate his thoughts for him, the critic "who never had an idea of [his] own",[6] than the spiritual mentor of Hölderlin who had already been a great asset in taking on Heidegger too? A new reading, a new understanding of Rousseau was certainly required for the purpose (moving on from the necessity of inward reflection to the very impossibility of that reflection), and that is exactly what the project of *Allegories of Reading* transformed into after its somewhat inauspicious beginnings.

For the purpose, the scope of "literature" also needed to be expanded (again reminding us of Nietzsche who always spoke his lesson "in the most general sense possible", LH 151) but the plan needed to be executed with great discretion. As an author of far and wide aspirations but perhaps most celebrated as a literary writer, Rousseau proved a good specimen in that respect, as well, because the problem of the human enterprise "becomes more intricate when it is restricted to literature" (LH 151). From that (absence of) origin one can go anywhere. Suzanne Gearhart recognises the ploy in terms of her observation that "for de Man, literature (or 'literature') occupies a commanding position from which it cannot be moved";[7] and she criticises Rodolphe Gasché for not having understood this in attempting

6 "An Interview with Paul de Man" (by Stefano Rosso) in *The Resistance to Theory*, 118.

7 Gearhart 71. See footnote 10 in section 2.

to establish de Man's later work as "radically different from his earlier work"[8] just because the newer stuff appears to intrude on philosophy more forcefully. This is obviously true to a certain extent, but we will see how the larger ramifications of the debate unfold, and how they might relate to the "overemphasis" on the "break between reversal and reinscription"[9] (that is, loosely defined, between the loss and gain of cognition) that Gasché finds in de Man. The reading of Rousseau is the key to all this and the trick is to encounter it, in the way that we only as readers can. And since we all seem to have a reading "self" to do that, as will be demonstrated, it could turn out that something is going to happen to it. Apart from the overt shift towards philosophy noted by Gasché, there appears in de Man's writings in the 1970s a simultaneous change in "the conception of the source of error", of the origin of the mind's failure to settle things once and for all, and according to Jan Rosiek, that change is the shifting of the source "from self to language".[10] And that is why it, the previously ontological "me" pressured around by secret forces, just will not be the same afterwards.

As can be inferred from previous responses, one good way of highlighting de Man's evolving sense of deconstruction by way of Rousseau in the 1970s is to look at the difference between the essays "The Rhetoric of Blindness" in *Blindness and Insight* and "Metaphor" in *Allegories of Reading*. Here the change from the one to the other occurs in an interacting feedback with Derrida (*Of Grammatology*, 1967, and the essay "White Mythology", originally published in 1971, among others), tracing the subtleties of a new kind of reading with flair and conviction. With the hope of having something of the same to himself, de Man grants as much to Derrida unhesitatingly:

> Jacques Derrida makes the movements of his own reading an integral part of a major statement about the nature of language in general. His knowledge stems from an actual encounter with texts, with a full awareness of the complexities involved in such an encounter. The discrepancy implicitly present in the other critics here becomes the explicit center of the reflection. (RB 111–12)

To be able to say this of another critic, without having merely to bash him for the blindness exhibited, even if that was said to be a good thing, goes a long way in retrieving some authority for wisdom in the world of epistemology. De Man follows Derrida as his "reading of Rousseau diverges fundamentally from the traditional

8 ibid. 65.

9 ibid. 71.

10 Rosiek 15.

interpretation" and "Rousseau's bad faith toward literary language… cannot be reduced to psychological causes" (RB 114); on the way, Jean Starobinski is offered equivocal praise as the most efficient, "perhaps less enlightened" (RB 116) realiser of this reduction and Claude Lévi-Strauss as the most "naïve" (RB 115) re-enactor of the "bad faith" being professed. However, as one might imagine, this following does not take place all the way through. Inevitable problems start to crop up when de Man affirms that the "key to the status of Rousseau's language… can only be found in the knowledge that this language, as language, conveys about itself" (RB 119) but that Derrida, even though he agrees with the priority of language, does not seem to be satisfied with this line of inquiry only:

> The question remains why [Derrida] postulates within Rousseau a metaphysics of presence which can then be shown not to operate, or to be dependent on the implicit power of a language which disrupts it and tears it away from its foundation. (RB 119)

What we have here is allegedly the core of the continued discrepancy between the two main deconstructive writers, and a veritable horn of theoretical plenty for the critics coming in their wake, as well.[11] All thought is language but can the condition of that truth be "postulated" in any way? De Man would deny this, with ever-increasing (rhetorical) vehemence; Derrida would allow for it because thought (or "writing") was just as *incapable of denying the truth* as it was of confirming it, and that would make up the decision. For de Man, however, the validation of this decision in any cognitive way at all was another "story" (RB 119) designed to deflect our attention from the linguistic form of its occurrence.[12]

[11] According to Wlad Godzich, "Derrida's deconstructive enterprise, as radical as it may seem to us, is not radical enough for de Man" because, when all is said and done, it ends up neglecting both "the question of reading" (36, see end of note) and "the question of knowledge" (33). This is obviously a flaw to anyone of de Manian mindset. Wlad Godzich: "The Domestication of Derrida" *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

[12] Robert Bernasconi says de Man disallows any such validation because "he disdains to address directly the question of the nature of philosophical criticism", choosing rather to stay within the bounds of literary criticism, the "tradition of philosophical critique" (142, see end of note) which apparently does not concern itself with the greater ramifications. Bernasconi defends Derrida's reading of Rousseau in explicating its different levels and states that the "story of logocentrism" Derrida might come to extract from there "is not his" (157) and he is not blind to it. Ultimately, the reading event is that of an "ethical situation", like Derrida defending de Man after his posthumous defamation, and for the critic this means "the parasitic character of deconstructive criticism [is to be] renounced in order that he can take responsibility for the language he employs" (159). In Bernasconi's case, this is the (critically suspicious) objective of the above-mentioned ramifications. Robert Bernasconi: "No More Stories, Good or Bad: de Man's Criticisms of Derrida on Rousseau" *Derrida: A Critical Reader* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

Thus it appears as if the Derrida of the 1970s had assumed the role of Heidegger in early de Man (someone with a "full awareness" of the complexities of language but ultimately transfixing the ongoing event as a metaphysical phenomenon) and done his reading somewhat erratically, whereas, to get to the truth, Rousseau needed to be read *consistently* right, as Hölderlin might be said to have done.

The motifs implemented to keep the dialogue going include the dichotomies of voice and silence, speech and writing, need and passion, mimesis and metaphor – all abundantly reflected on in Rousseau's posthumously published *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. The presence or the non-presence of the concepts in and after the language of Rousseau, along with the reader's awareness of this, is the key to understanding the text. To de Man, the *Essai* has "no blind spots" (RB 139) and its lesson is, for all (expressed) intents and purposes, perfectly transparent after one learns to read it. At first sight, this might appear a terrible simplification but it becomes a completely different story once one attempts the learning required; the transparency becomes the natural obstruction of any linguistic endeavour. For someone like Starobinski, this (psychological) failure to achieve total relation might have triggered a manic depression of sorts, but for de Man and Derrida the predicament represents the necessary functioning of language as language which is nonetheless all that we ever have, and this will be discussed next. The difference between the two is whether the existence of this necessity is an enabling or a disabling thing for the reader's point of view, even if any certainty about it remained forever impossible. An example from Rousseau will illumine all this.

In the third chapter of the *Essai*, titled "That the First Language Had to Be Figurative", Rousseau presents the example of a scene which demonstrates to us why the title of the chapter should be a true proposition. To begin with, he recaps his own claim that man's motives for beginning to use language in the first place were passions born out of the need to communicate those passions to others around us: love me, help me, understand me, and so on. In the third chapter, however, he qualifies the nature of this communication by saying that man's first expressions were actually tropes, figurative verbal entities without any literal truth value to them. The claim is that the illusionary image always precedes the correct word and, what this means for linguistic thinking, the way of human understanding, is that before there is anything true or right, first there is falsity and error. Rousseau demonstrates the process, as he is compelled to do, with an example of the savage resorting to language for the first time:

> Upon meeting others, a savage man will initially be frightened. Because of his fear he sees the others as bigger and stronger as himself. He calls them

> *giants*. After many experiences, he recognises that these so-called giants are neither bigger nor stronger than he. Their stature does not approach the idea he had initially attached to the word giant. So he invents another name common to them and to him, such as the name *man*, for example, and leaves *giant* to the fictitious object that had impressed him during his illusion. That is how the figurative word is born before the literal word, when our gaze is held in passionate fascination; and how it is that the first idea it conveys to us is not that of the truth.[13]

In the way this scene is figured, what we have is an encounter in which the primitive is inspired into using language, into naming other confronted entities, in a chain of successive linguistic substitutions. First there arises the word "giant" because of the fear experienced at the encounter. The expression itself, the phonetic entity, is apparently totally arbitrary in the way it blurts out of the mind's mouth because it is the *idea* about certain entities involved in the event which actually frames it, the blurting. And this primary framing is being spaced by the sensation of fear which keeps the event going for its time. If we employ a familiar Derridean device to clarify the dynamic and reiterate the same process in his terms of *ergon* ("work") and *parergon* ("frame-work"),[14] it could be argued that the *ergon* of the spontaneous expression is constantly being taken hold of by the *parergon* of the idea that attempts to contain and understand it. Once the word "giant" has been coined, and the others met have left, the actual event subsides and only the attempted idea remains, as an *ergon* of its own now, bombarded by succeeding lateral framings. And so the new idea-work is then, further over time, exposed to other new events, new experiences, which, in turn, attempt to attach themselves to the initial idea had of the original sensation. The savage encounters the others again and again, and eventually the fear felt at first is lost, and the idea attached to the primary experience becomes deprived of its meaning. As the non-frightening, non-passionate truth about the others is revealed, the word "man" is coined in the stead of "giant" and a correct understanding of the nature of the linguistic process is reached. Literal truth has superseded figurative impression, and Rousseau may move on to tracing its subsequent developments in the history of mankind.

Derrida discusses Rousseau's example in *Of Grammatology* as he retrieves the *Essai* from the mists of critical history. If it is true that the way language works and turns into understanding consists of both literal and figurative elements, it must

13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Essay on the Origin of Languages" *On the Origin of Language*, transl. John H. Moran (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966) 13.

14 Jacques Derrida: "The Parergon" *The Truth in Painting*, transl. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

be that neither of these elements may ever disappear from any event taking place at any time. Instead they both remain in existence supplemented by one another. But this is not an easy cohabitation. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida attributes the recognition of this radical difficulty to Rousseau, against the "continuous transition" of authors like Warburton and Condillac for whom figurative speech segues into literal action naturally, without any disruptive mediation. In their stead, "Rousseau [is]… the only to indicate an absolute break between the language of action or the language of need, and speech or the language of passion"[15] and, in the scene of the first encounter, this is reflected in the fact that the figurative word came first and was only later proved to be in error. The understanding did not develop positivistically by building on an original truth but found itself only by declaring that truth invalid. And in that way, by making this retrieved dialectic part of Rousseau's legacy, Derrida can talk about his "age", the "age of Rousseau", also in the contexts of theory today. For those studying how historical cognition works, this is a profound insight, and it works for de Man too.[16]

The criticism, the question posed by de Man to Derrida is then whether it is right to think that, in Rousseau, there is actually a kind of movement which is able to free the mind from the false to the true. Derrida seems to think so, by way of deconstructing, by showing how Rousseau's linguistic process can "be shown not to operate", not to work in its liberating purpose after all. Derrida's criticism of Rousseau is said to acknowledge and appreciate the fact that Rousseau understands the inherent complication between the figurative and the literal but that he then misapprehends what can be done with it. Derrida seems to think that, for Rousseau, it is possible to leave behind the false, the passionate fascination, and to move from its place into the site of true understanding. This is the claimed "metaphysics of presence" de Man does not like about Derrida's reading of Rousseau and whose forcing upon the latter he does not really appreciate. In other words, de Man thinks Derrida's points of interest are all good and focused on the right questions, those of language and disrupted cognitions. What he, however,

15 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 273.

16 In "White Mythology" Derrida delineates this kind of original metaphoricity (the "self-destruction" which "still has the form of a generalization" but which is "no longer a question of extending and confirming a philosopheme, but rather, of unfolding it without limit, and wresting its borders of propriety from it", 270, see end of note) in opposition to the Aristotelian one which, as "the manifestation of analogy, will be a means of knowledge, a means that is subordinate, but certain" (238). Derrida's general tenor of "explosive" plasticity is never anything if not exhilarating. Jacques Derrida: "White Mythology" *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).

sees as happening in Rousseau, instead of the metaphysical possibility of moving from the false to the true, wrong to right, is something even more radical than that, more radical for its own time, the "age of Rousseau". De Man claims that Derrida's case on Rousseau is just another "story" of tales being told about what might happen if we finally got our heads straight, and de Man says that, to find this type of logocentrism taking place in Rousseau's example of the savage, Derrida has to go "out of his way" (RB 122) to find "Rousseau's theory of representation… directed toward meaning as presence and plenitude". Whereas, in de Man's words, Rousseau's theory is actually directed "toward meaning as void" (RB 127). What this eventually results in is the error that Derrida ends up misconstruing "as blindness what is instead a *transposition* from the literal to the figural level of discourse" (RB 139) in Rousseau. And because what we thus have in our hands is an epistemological transposition rather than a metaphysical blindness, Rousseau, de Man claims, remains deeply aware of the complications involved, and rules over Derrida because he *knows* that freeing oneself consciously from falsity into authenticity is impossible. The tangles of language remain just as knotted in the next place of naming things as they were in the first place, which was the site of the primitive man's encounter with others. The appellation "man" is just as much in error as "giant" was, and de Man says Rousseau knows this. Derrida knows it too but what he does not know is that Rousseau knows it. Why is this so?

Let us re-employ Derrida's framing device. Locating the elusive *erga* and *parerga*, works and frame-works, of the original primitive's event is a complicated task but one which all three of the authors discussed, Rousseau, de Man and Derrida, nonetheless pursue each in their own way. The process starts up from the arbitrary phonetic expression that makes up the primary "work" to which other lateral ideas come to attach themselves while the event is powered and sustained by the fear being sensed. Later on, the name "giant" takes over as the *ergon* and becomes thus exposed to further *parerga* occurring in relation to it, the motion being repeated *ad infinitum* but with each new naming establishing itself as a next-step truth. This process we have already described, but what has not been stressed yet is that much of the framed dialogue at its core, of the framing anxiety that keeps the event itself going, hinges on a pre-existing idea of "fear". In de Man and Derrida's understanding, Rousseau's fear turns into the main parergonal axis, the prime mover of the primal occasion of meeting others, which refuses to dissipate as the original lie but may be overcome by the truth. Derrida recognises the positing (of fear as the axis) but stops short of explaining away the dynamic of the process as fear exclusively. This is due to the fact that even though

the sensation of fear does originally give rise to language, and in that manner allows the site of the encounter to be forever spaced for further actions, as "the first passion, the mistaken face of pity", the power of fear "always compounds with its contrary", is supplemented by another sensation.[17] This means that fear, Rousseau's prime *parergon*, is itself always already conditioned by something else in advance; and thus it is Derrida's idea that fear is nothing unique, cannot be framed as the "truth" (of Rousseau or anyone else's). The sensation is single and natural but the other passion gained simultaneously is "pity", the necessary "force of reconciliation and presence" which forever qualifies fear and prevents it from holding in isolation its irreducible "force of dispersion".[18] In other words, to experience fear is to sense pity, as well; and it would be a mistake to think that one of the sentiments was right and the other was wrong.

Therefore, in Derrida's understanding of Rousseau, there is at play a pre-existing scheme of inherent otherness (also the *parergon* has a *parergon* even before it actually occurs) which assumes the prior thinker's unawareness of it. De Man, for his part, has an idea of fear too (which he claims as Rousseau's, not his own), which he posits against Derrida's postulated "metaphysics of presence". Instead of philosophically conditioning the prime *parergon* in a state of nature with a supplementing force in advance, de Man prevents the reader's attention from wandering off into such endowments by focusing on the linguistic exchange at hand. "Fear" is a trope, just as "giant" is, which the primitive identifies with falsity and thus attempts to switch for the truth of the next one, "man". One trope goes, another one arrives, but no attempt is successful in preferring one over the other, because nothing was left of the previous one already lost in the present. But the framing process is always nonetheless there: one might say that for de Man, as it goes on, the eye is fixed on the displaced *ergon*, while Derrida focuses it on the present *parergon*. (And that difference explains de Man's concern with Derrida's postulated "presence", as well.) Judith Still characterises the split as Derrida's refusal "to locate the relation of transference, as Rousseau does, in a *relation* between signifiers *dependent* on a *relation* between mental images".[19] Because Derrida takes the relation for granted, as he must in order to keep the law of the supplement functional, he fails to see that Rousseau does not. As a consequence, de Man claims, Derrida misunderstands the fact that Rousseau is

17 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* 278.

18 ibid.

19 Judith Still: "The Disfigured Savage: Rousseau and de Man" *Nottingham French Studies* 24.1 (May 1985) 3.

not really concerned with the *nature* of the linguistic relations but with the *validity* of those relations purchased by language – the truths that from the beginning constitute the primitive self, whether frightened or feeling at ease.[20] This means, in so many words, that Derrida does not discuss "fear" or "pity" in quite the same way de Man does. Because the material phoneme, the blurting, which made up the original *ergon* of the savage's encounter was significant only as a parting shot, the meaningful weight of the movement was at once swung in the direction of the inherent passions which naturally framed the expression. And Derrida's error in following along, although perfectly in line with his own philosophy, was to think that Rousseau concurred; de Man would rather believe that the latter knew there was nothing natural about the movement which kept itself going only out of linguistic necessity.

Represented thus, as various processes of thought, it can be argued that the approaches of both de Man and Derrida remain at odds with the claim that they, or Rousseau's savage, would have "started out" from the actual oral sound. For Derrida the origin has been deferred into infinite nature, and for de Man it has been displaced in the present language. This is clearly a discrepancy, but there are similarities too: neither of them depends on (or returns to) the original utterance as an *ergon* of its own once it has been inserted in the process initiated. As it turns

[20] At a later point, in the 1981 essay "Hypogram and Inscription" (RT), de Man reiterates his ongoing concern with the validity of linguistic relations as the truth of any reading. For the purpose, he criticises Michael Riffaterre's reading of Hugo's poem "Ecrit sur la vitre d'une fenêtre flamande" as failing to grasp that, in language, sense perceptions such as the sound of Hugo's midday bells cannot be poeticised as material entities. What such events, or "phenomenal intuitions", instead effect is the putting into motion of linguistic signification which "all other substitutions follow as in a chain". And, for certain, this unstoppable momentum is the truth of the concepts substituting for another too: "For as most philosophers [such as Hegel and Descartes] well know, the very concept of certainty, which is the basis of all concepts, comes into being only *in relation* to sensory experience" (48, my emphasis). As the relations of Riffaterre's hypograms remain unverified, continually defaced as linguistic hallucinations, de Man grants them no formal edge over his own reading of the poem which asserts no "materiality of the mind or of time or of the carillon" but rather "the materiality of an inscription" (51) – that is, the non-relational mechanics of language. Riffaterre did later counter the claim as he felt it reduced his own understanding of the poetic figure's irreducibility into "a mutual substitutability of two descriptive systems or fragments of such systems" (113, see end of note); instead, he wanted to stress the figures' own "grammar", the "chiasmus predication" of poetic language, which preserved "the ghostly presence of their erstwhile symbolism" (120) even as they were sacrificed to the proceeding narrative. The act was inevitable, as the motion of linguistic signification, but so was the truthfulness of the figures committed to it. As vanishing remnants of their own artifice, they represented truth exactly in the appearing of their unreal faces: "Prosopopeia says the truth, as always in the lyric, through means that themselves do not have to suggest a reality or be credible" (122–3). Thus the relations between the comical figures were inconsequential in themselves; the formal chiasmus was all that mattered. Michael Riffaterre: "Prosopopeia" *The Lesson of Paul de Man* (Yale French Studies 69, 1985).

out, de Man actually accepts Derrida's premise of starting up from the passions which *a priori* legislate how the savage's subsequent meeting with others is going to figure. While Derrida is left playing with the mutually supplementing sensations of pity and fear, lamenting the fact that Rousseau thinks they can be set straight later on, de Man lines up at the same starting point, of ideal *a priori* passions, only to write them off as nothing but ceaselessly figurative entities, cherishing Rousseau's awareness of them as he goes. In "The Rhetoric of Blindness" he sees this happening in the form of Derrida's failure to grasp that Rousseau himself makes a mistake in choosing fear as his example to describe the birth of language:

> But the example is badly chosen… In Rousseau's vocabulary, language is a product of passion and not the expression of a need; fear, the reverse side of violence and aggression, is distinctively utilitarian and belongs to the world of "besoins" rather than "passions". Fear would hardly need language and would be best expressed by pantomime, by mere gesture. (RB 134)

De Man argues that Derrida goes literally "out of his way" with the ill-conceived example to claim Rousseau's language as born out of a present falsity of fear which would allow for true speech in the future. With his mistake, Rousseau puts one over Derrida whereas he should have taken his opportunity in the third chapter of the *Essai* to represent the birth of language as "centered on pity" (RB 135), a passion proficiently demonstrated as figural by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*. But this is not the last word of it. Eight years later, in time for "Metaphor", de Man has rethought his idea of "fear" to admit it as "a borderline case between passion and need" (M 150), and he is now able to waive his earlier pinning down of Derrida's blindness on a misreading of Rousseau that occurred just because, in the particular case of the trope of "fear", the latter had committed a mistake and Derrida "should have recognized as much and read the passage accordingly".[21] The figural origin of language was allegedly never in question; there was only the danger of representing it falsely. In "Metaphor", this rather suspect formulation is emended through the acknowledgement of "fear" as a "permanent hypothesis" (M 150), a "figural state of suspended meaning", and a "para-figural fiction" which "overlooks the fictional, textual element in the nature of the entity it connotes" (M 151). Characterised thus, "fear" becomes one of the true metaphors, lost from nature and displaced in the present: in domesticating his past fear with a new name, the jolted primitive has succeeded only in paralysing his current state. According to Suzanne Gearhart, the "fear" of the suspended entity enters into

[21] Gearhart 76.

the de Manian catalogue of concepts which she calls "the list of 'non-referential terms', along with passion and language", and which he is able to use against the common tradition on the other side of Derrida.[22] By this "non-referentiality" Gearhart apparently implicates the loss of fixed, coincident reference, not the event of its inevitable occurrence, and so, should we understand it as that, the project of reading Rousseau right has advanced another displacing pace.[23]

In "Metaphor", de Man's account is based on the second *Discourse* with the aim of modifying the idea of "man" meditated upon therein; the example of the "giants" remains, however, the same. And in the reading of Rousseau's example, when summed up, the friction between de Man and Derrida is each time engendered through a slightly varied understanding of what originally takes place in the savage's event when viewed from a subsequent point in time, an idea of how this present non-site of thinking linguistically is reached. To maintain this endless movement, a prior idea of a prior idea is always needed; in this case, the pre-ruling idea of Rousseau's passions. And to be sure, that is how Rousseau does put it in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*: passions are what make communication necessary in the first place. Derrida and de Man pick up on this and run away with it to debate whether Rousseau really knows what he demonstrates with his primal example: the possibility of metaphysics or broken epistemology. But to say all this, to juggle around with it, they need to rely on a certain prior, empty yet placeholding idea of "passions" themselves, lifted off from somewhere else than Rousseau's singular example. The use of the example in the context certainly makes this possible – and tempting too – but can that really be the whole "story"? As both de Man and Derrida parergonally follow up their critique of Rousseau directly from the ergonal premise of the primitive's first encounter with language *without finding it necessary to criticise the premise itself* (neither of them does this), it forces the entire subsequent play between fear and pity, need and passion, under the legislation of a prior conception. What's more, the process reduces the instant experience of the encounter into a tropological slur which immediately

22 ibid. 79.

23 Commenting on the "project", Judith Still notices that even in "Metaphor", "[d]e Man still feels the need to correct Rousseau's example of fear" but that there "the need is relegated to a footnote". What this signals for Still is "a mania for interpretation and systematisation" (12) in psychoanalytical terms. Now, although there is an unconscious truth in this, as well, it should be remembered that because for the late 1970s de Man "fear" is an explicit "borderline case" between literality and figurality, his balancing between the two may be an intentional part of the rhetorical strategy. Towards this purpose, by feeding us fictional examples (such as the insinuation of Rousseau's "giant" as a traditional mythological monster like Goliath or Polyphemos), he succeeds in poising the scale deliberately.

moves away from itself, in the sound of the blurting dying out. The assertion of the "savage man" being just "by himself" before the terrifying meeting of others is certainly in line with what Rousseau says in several places but it is interesting that this claim is not really opened up to reading.[24] The isolated self stands alone in the field of encountering, waiting for any prospective becoming. A certain uncritical givenness is echoed in a subject of this kind, imagined into existence from a dystopian point in future where its "natural innocence" has already been lost. And yet this self is unable to appreciate its own condition because reflection is unknown to it; unable to realise that it is a "self" even if (or because) that condition is the very grant of its being.

Could it then be that "fear" is actually its first stage of self-understanding and the one it must return to?[25] Could it be possible for the figure displaced in the present to grasp reality confident of purpose and achievement? As Rousseau's paranoia springs from the attempt to reconcile the self's staggering paradox within a common cognition of language and the social contract, the dream at least still lives on. In essence, his epistemology is that of absolute subjectivity which is forever undermined because the subject is unable to reflect and still remain itself. The objective literality or the figurality of the origin of language is neither the cause nor the consequence of this predicament but rather its frightened coming into being in speech *and* writing. In this absorbing condition, it accommodates both de Man and Derrida, and we will see this in the course of this section. To that aim, then, it is of highest importance to witness how de Man moves, with admirable insight, from dealing with metaphor and the original figurativity of language to discussing (and deconstructing) the "self" in Rousseau. Unfortunately, as we might predict in advance, it is just going to turn out another allegory, undermining the basis of its own institution through the "literalism that makes language possible [and hence] also makes the abuse of language inevitable"

[24] "He who imagines nothing is aware only of himself; he is isolated in the midst of mankind" ("Essay on the Origin of Languages" 32); "Each object was at first given a particular name, without regard to genus or species, which those originators were unable to distinguish. All individuals presented themselves to their minds in isolation, as they are in the spectacle of nature" ("Discourse on Inequality" 160, see end of note). Similar references can be found elsewhere too. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Essential Rousseau* (New York and London: Meridian, 1983).

[25] Understanding returns to its first step (the fear of imagined danger) when faced with the fear of danger in reality; and, "[f]rom this perspective, the metaphor [of real danger] appears as an attempt to master fear" (Frey 130). The reality of danger is always based on a prior figure which it attempts to master in order to overcome it. The play of the concepts is inexorable, and their endlessly substituting activity the locus of de Man; his "text is the metaphor of the fear of the undecidability of fear" (Frey 130). If we follow through the primitive's first encounter with language in this light, undecidability is the inevitable cognitive result, "fear" the condition.

(M 158). This abuse, whether due to neglect or error, cannot be resisted but only read proficiently.

(i) The Deconstruction of the Self

Some further observations of Rousseau from the second *Discourse* can be helpful in trying to imagine what kind of self it is that the natural primitive is endowed with. He says, among other things, that, in this state, "it is impossible for one man to enslave another without having first made himself necessary to him" and that, strictly speaking, "this cannot occur in the state of nature [because] everyone in that state is free of domination by others".[26] As the inequality among men has its roots in such "domination" (going from property to power and oppression), the natural state is essentially exactly the same for each and everyone. In effect, this means that it has no language since it is only with the birth of need and/or passion that language comes into being; that is, with the necessity of "the child [who has] to communicate all his needs to his mother".[27] The prospective self becomes available for interaction out of pure survival. This sense is, *ipso facto*, also that of domination; it cannot be guaranteed in any way without the recognition. How else would the child know that it needs were met unless it knew it had dominated the mother for the fulfillment? Or how would one know one had survived unless one knew to have escaped death, the ultimate dominion?

Consequently, this thought reflects, by its very imagination, onwards to the primal, non-linguistic self, as well; how else would we be able to hypothesise it (in language) unless we believed it to be alive? But it is exactly the nurturing of this thought which no longer constitutes a need but a passion and thus fails the original dichotomy (Derrida understands this as he argues that, in Rousseau, "[n]eed is permanently present within passion"[28]). What this means, at the very origin (of language), is that the self does not exist, never has, never will; and all that there can with any confidence be said to be is the distinction between "[b]eing and appearing… two quite different things".[29] Death and inequality spring forth from the break but so do their antitheses; vice and evil are naturally complemented by virtue and good. Although the primal self is fatally flawed, its denial commits

[26] Rousseau: "Discourse on Inequality" *The Essential Rousseau* 171.

[27] ibid. 158.

[28] Derrida: "Of Grammatology" 221.

[29] Rousseau: "Discourse on Inequality" *The Essential Rousseau* 183.

the greatest taboo; as Rousseau says of suicide, social or actual, "it is *at least doubtful* that anyone has a right to divest himself of [life and freedom]".[30] So the figure of the non-existent self must be maintained if Rousseau is to say anything about anything; the plan is therefore utterly precarious from the beginning and apparently quite intentionally pinned less on the through-and-through cognitive validity of the primal self than on the "peace and freedom" of the imagined savage man who "wants only to live and remain idle".[31] The restlessness of civilisation is inevitable and to be cherished in its own way for the ideal survival of society (or the "sovereign", as Rousseau calls the collective spirit of it), but that is not the primal dream. And dreaming, along with the memory of it, is in a certain sense about Rousseau's endeavour.[32]

The forgetting of this less than philosophical premise happens quite casually for de Man (and perhaps Derrida, albeit from a different angle) who discovers the deconstruction of the self in Rousseau by a proficient reading of its various levels; what we are to expect is the lifting of the primitive's first encounter with language into the field of its becoming. Once more, a trajectory of de Man's developing conception of the "self" from the late 1960s to the late 1970s can be demonstrated by a comparison of two essays: "Rousseau and the Transcendence of the Self" (the 1967 Gauss seminar, in RCC) and "Self" (in AR). Both of them have the same three main references: the critic Jean Starobinski and Rousseau's plays "Narcisse" and "Pygmalion", and in that order too. In the earlier essay, de Man sets his own hermeneutic interpretation of the works against that of Starobinski who is said to find in Rousseau not a "dialectical process of inwardness and objectivity" but instead an alternation which occurs "without mediation, between the two extreme antithetical poles of this process". One of these "poles" is called "obstacle" and the other "transparency"; and, in de Man's understanding of the reading in question, there is no middle ground between them. The obstacle is "beyond" the place of "reflective thought", a pure object appearing out of our reach, and the transparency is "before" (RTS 35) the domain, in perfect continuity with it. What

30 ibid. 191. My emphasis.

31 ibid. 199.

32 I will return to this claim when I discuss Rousseau's ultimate shift from despairing of the possibility of a solid epistemology ("nature") to living its possibility as life ("memory"). It will be shown that, in order to have critical force, this shift does not need to be discounted as a maudlin sentimentalism or a festival of naïvety. After all, between the "states" that divide the myth of primitive life from the reality of our modern society, "there is so little difference" (ibid. 198), and it is only "through habit" that we have "degenerated" (ibid. 177) from the idea. In other words, we have lost our conception of what we can be happy without.

Rousseau apparently does is switch between the two without respite, identifying with the one or the other. De Man quotes Starobinski at length:

> "Rousseau", writes Starobinski, "seems most of all to want to convince us that he was able to reach the truth without exposing himself to the dangers of reflection. We see him finding refuge before or beyond the domain of reflective thought: at times, he claims to be entirely separated from his own existence, pushing the reflexive disjunction (*dédoublement*) to the point where the reflected image would become, for the reflecting consciousness, an objective figure, kept at a distance and observable as from the outside; at other moments, he claims to be unable to depart from the undivided unity of unreflected feeling." (RTS 35)

Now, this shifting seems to correspond with an antithetical birth of origin where knowing and not-knowing encroach on the subject's world in order to disrupt it, and it constitutes the axis on which Starobinski operates. It has, however, an intrinsic danger to it. De Man states that, within this alternating model, the "oscillation is not even a true polarity, but merely a succession of flights from self-knowledge" and that is why, in spite of demanding active cognition, "[t]here is no real disjunction, since it is in fact always only the empirical self who governs the activity of the imagination for its own purposes" (RTS 38). The lack of "real disjunction" is the danger and betrays the original failure of Rousseau's primal self; "it" cannot be said to be in flight because it has never existed. Baudelaire's laughter rings in our ears.

What this reiterates is the early de Manian objection to conventional Romantic criticism: Starobinski is grouped with other Geneva critics such as René Girard, Marcel Raymond, and Georges Poulet whose desire for a "self-consuming identity" de Man brands, while praising it, as "a vulnerable and fragile subject whose voice can never become established as a presence".[33] This veiled animus then proves the main burden of the 1967 essay when he proceeds to discuss the examples. And these, apart from analysing Rousseau, are interesting for how well they underline de Man's articulations of his project at the time. For instance, the play "Narcisse" is described as "one of mutual mystification" where the protagonist falls in love with his own, slightly altered portrait (showing him as a woman) and as the whole "exchange" occurs within vanity (or "*amour-propre*"), the "self here never really becomes another but remains all too much its own interested self" (RTS 41). The failure of the hermeneutic circle to close properly is not staged dramatically enough because the interpretive dialectic stops at the non-referential figure of Narcissus.

[33] "The Literary Self as Origin: The Work of Georges Poulet" BI 101.

As a result, with certain elements aside, the play constitutes neither "a genuine work of art" (RTS 41) nor a true representation of "aesthetic consciousness". This, however, is not the case for "Pygmalion" whose end scene "symbolizes the full authenticity of the fictional figure" (RTS 42) and thus returns to the play a "movement of consciousness toward something that it has lost, toward something that it wants to possess in order to be complete". This movement is "desire" (RTS 45), and desire is "not the result of a dualism, of a body and soul or a subject-object relationship" which would make it into a force of fulfillment. Instead, desire "is a temporal predicament, the feeling of loss experienced at being removed from the source of one's own being" (RTS 46). Described thus, it reminds the reader of the early de Manian motif of uncontestable nothingness.

The somewhat psychoanalytical formulation of the above passage puts the experiencing subject that we find in the play (the "*moi!*" of "Pygmalion" who longs for "entire identification", RTS 47) at a non-transcendental distance from the "full pastness of knowledge" which he or she can never reach but which nonetheless exists. This might be a tragedy but it does not have to be – "Narcisse" implies something like this but the unreachable centre cannot be found there because the facileness of the drama does not allow it. The only figure to have the authority to change this is the image of the conscious subject caught in the middle of it, like the more mature Rousseau of "Pygmalion" or the more proficient de Man of the middle period. As the real figure is actually *lost* and not just let slip by, the pathos of the predicament truly comes to a head: the loss of the "loss" finally becomes the (questionable) gain of the feeling of loss.

By 1979, the criticism has developed to show "Narcisse" as a "self/other tension… [that] has become objectified in an autonomous entity, the portrait", and this entity "is not entirely fictional but exists in the mode of a simulacrum" (S 168). The dimension that actively operates imagination is no longer time because temporality, like mediation, is not an agent endowed with any such function anymore. The ruling dimension is now space but, in the reality of presence, the sensation we glean from the portrait is not even an illusion (because that implies full presence for the image somewhere else) but rather an inert displacement (existing because it must but without anything to validate it anytime or anywhere). This displacement is the figural entity of allegory, which, like Rousseau's "fear", is "an intolerably suspended state" (S 161). The intolerability is the result of its defying our sense of reason, and the singularity of selfhood is the original epitome of its dominion. De Man confirms this unsettling reading of Rousseau as he reiterates that the "[p]rimitive man is alone and has no conception of the other whatever",

but he also adds that "already in this absolute and inconceivable state of solitude, he can be the spectator, the concern and the judge of his own singular being" (S 165). In other words, the transparent kind of self-love ("*amour de soi*", a good thing for Rousseau) which enables the subject's reflection of his or her own self (and allows it to connect with other "selves") does not exist in this state because the self involved is unable to reflect in any such way. It can only "spectate". Just how this odd hypostasis of perception is possible is not de Man's concern because he reads it out of Rousseau (and finds incredible transpositions for it later on in his career) and is therefore just in the process of making do with it, of deconstructing it. I will argue in the course of the thesis that, among the parallel developments of de Man's theory, this reduction of the visual is one of the most salient: beginning from psychological refractiveness, it evolves first to isolated spectatorship, then to alienated watching, and finally to "mere" seeing.

At this stage, de Man feels completely validated with his reading of Rousseau by the truth of Rousseau pictured in the allegory displacing the play. As "the representation of a consciousness", the portrait of "Narcisse" is not "itself a misreading", or an open interpretation, because it does not question the "status of the representation… as such" (S 167). Instead, it recalls the full figure of vanity (or "*amour propre*") because the main character is not clever enough to understand what is going on. The intelligence to do that is the exclusive province of the reader. Trapped in the tale, the fictional entity of Rousseau's play remains ridiculous, bent on being in love with "resemblance… because it can be interpreted as identity as well as difference and is therefore unseizable, forever in flight" (S 167). But because he *is* a fictional entity, he remains blameless for his own ignorance; the same advantage, however, is not available to the reader. De Man uses the word "flight" to describe the foolish error of the protagonist, and, incidentally, the same word was used to refer to Starobinski's reading mistake in the earlier essay (where there was "a succession of flights from self-knowledge"). It is a damning verdict on the Genevan critic's brand of Romantic criticism, and this may be inspired by the fact that Starobinski addresses the question of language, as well:

> [For Starobinski], [t]he statement of the enigma that gives language its necessarily referential complexity might itself be no longer a representation but a single voice that, by the rigor of its negativity, finally coincides with what it asserts. (S 172)

The possibility of stating the "enigma" of literature *in* language, and the chance of re-establishing its unity *by way of* language (the "final coinciding"), sets off

an alarm and turns de Man against Starobinski – even though he finds his theoretical method operable. But since what Starobinski seems to understand by the speaking poetic self, and what power he allows to it, comes to involve something far more symbolically substantial and potentially telic than de Man is able to approve, the dialogue shuts down in the end. This happens regardless of Starobinski's claim that the "self" engaged in Rousseau's "allegories" of ego and truth is hardly substantial:

> [In Rousseau], consciousness manifests itself as an absolute beginning, an inaugural act totally distinct from the prior unveiling, which, being merely the end of an illusion, inaugurated nothing.[34]

One could respond to this that even though Starobinski agrees with the *images* of the self in Rousseau being necessarily self-deconstructive, Rousseau's self *in itself* remains essentially intact, furthering its own dramatic narrative. And, when it remains able to do that, the deconstruction of the self is just not taken far enough.

In de Man's advanced writings of the 1970s, "selfhood is not a substance but a figure" (S 170), and the awareness of this is the "wilful assertion of a likely aberration as a resignation to the possibility of this error" (S 172). In the case of Rousseau's "Pygmalion", a play which suspends all referentiality of any transparent self without question and which makes no exceptions for negative mystifications either, the "totalizing symmetry of the substitutive pattern is thrown out of balance: instead of merging into a higher, general Self, two selves remain confronted in a paralyzing *inequality*" (S 185, my emphasis). This state is the unavoidable eternity of inevitable inequality which language first gives rise to and which the singular self is unable to resist, simply because the resistance itself is its origin. This speaks the staggering paradox of Rousseau (and also the main concern of the famous "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality", known as the *Second Discourse*). In the play, the sculptor Pygmalion and the statue Galathea's meeting one another is intolerably conditioned by the subject's fear of a sense-defying state where the "selves" involved can do nothing but "spectate". That is all they are able to do. Unity between them is disallowed because there is no way of doing away with the spectating selves; "the attraction of the individual stems from its prior general model that is, in fact, an *emanation* of the self" (S 183, my emphasis). This allegorical emanation is the image of Rousseau's isolated

[34] Jean Starobinski: *Jean Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 79.

singular self and, in the case of Pygmalion and Galathea, it assumes the form of the uncanny and the awesome just because Galathea appears godlike and the sculptor himself becomes "paralyzed by the feeling of awe that is characteristic, to use Kantian terminology, of the sublime" (S 177). The sublime is the inconceivable residue of the divine or the appearance of it, and it draws its power from the figure of the fatally flawed original self which still exists displaced in space although it never existed in time or the reality of presence.

The play "Pygmalion" speaks this ontology with even more intensity since it plays not only on "fear" (like the *Essai*), or "love" (like "Narcisse") but on both of them, and it is this "combination" (S 176) which imbues it with greater maturity. According to de Man, the levels of awareness in "Pygmalion" are at a more advanced stage than anywhere else in Rousseau (so far). This is even more so as the text comes to achieve "a higher degree of dialectical complexity" and "the dialectics of desire are allowed to develop along consistent lines" (S 181). For the reader (or supposedly the theatre-goer), this leaving behind of the initial cognitive paralysis in a suspended state of awe being carried on to the next level by the otherworldly author ("Rousseau controls the rhetoric of totalization inherent in all supplementary systems", S 181), sounds like a fantastic experience, and, even better, in order to receive the "glorification" of its "holy fire" (S 184) one needs not to be a mystical Blakean "Sage". Yet, amidst it all, the potential rapture is broken down as soon as the temptation is resisted and the earlier mentioned "paralyzing inequality" is realised. The accelerating exclamations of the isolated selves slip away from ecstasy and settle into a tone of "resigned tolerance" (S 185); the sacrificial epiphany of Galathea coming alive to make two become one "does *not* occur" as anything else but the loss of transcendental hopes. The hope of recuperation lingers but gets smothered in an endless linguistic "sequence of reversals". In the end, it is only the "text-producing power" (S 186) of Rousseau's play that survives to interact with another text another day. It is the literary text itself which becomes Rousseau's self, hoping to meet other selves, other texts, waiting alone in its own undone, displaced space:

> The energy that succeeds at last in forcing the exchange is the deconstructive discourse of truth and falsehood that undoes selfhood as tragic metaphor and replaces it by the knowledge of its figural and epistemologically unreliable structure. When Galathea comes alive, Pygmalion is no longer a tragic figure but, like Ricoeur's Freud, a deconstructive interpretative process (a reading) that can no longer tolerate the pathos of the self. (S 187)

The veracity of the anthropomorphic allegory, the "self", is destroyed by the pathos of its isolation, no longer quickened by any wishful discourse of poetic unity or social equality flown from "the pure crystal of the fountains" at which the "festival" of nations was once born.[35] In their place, in the desolation of the artist's studio, burn the "colder fires" of the allegorical entity of the mechanical text. Yet even within that event, displaced and simulated, one still "speaks more effectively to the eye than to the ear".[36] As language breaks out of stone, *ut pictura poesis*, long live the new allegory. From this point of view, as de Man says at the end of his middle period, the primal, desiring self is definitely "not a privileged metaphor in Rousseau" (S 187). It is rather a blank ghost, the marginalised product of a technological *ekphrasis*, the totally automated description of meaningless visual images (however vivid) for which there is no off-switch. But the frightening thing about that is there is nothing else either – whether in society, nature, or the ongoing conventions of rhetoric lined up through the ever-present question of language.

(ii) Rousseau's Allegory of Nature

What kind of a society is such an originally flawed self then able to dream of, and what type of tools can it hope to have at its disposal? After all, the irreconcilable breach of its own inner unverifiability spells out that the self is unable to "heal" merely by "doing the right thing" (the morally virtuous, the legally correct) or by fleeing from itself to another state of awareness (the "return to nature"). Yet it seems that these two things, in constant succession, are all that Rousseau ever attempts. Starobinski's plan in dealing with this was to suppose a primal self nonetheless and dramatise the alternation it found itself locked into; Derrida's critique of Western logocentrism (an ism relying excessively on the unifying, "solar" quality of such suppositions instead of opening them up) was intended to show that Rousseau's dream of always going both ways still depended on a conviction that both of the ways truly existed. De Man, on the other hand, does not find this conviction in Rousseau, and he scolds Derrida for thinking so,

[35] Rousseau: "Essay on the Origin of Languages" 45. Derrida finds the page on which this passage appears as "no doubt the most beautiful in the *Essay*". In addition, his own references to the festival ("fête") and to Rousseau's description of the birth of society as "the continuous advent of *presence*" (Derrida: *Of Grammatalogy*, 262) in this context are very reminiscent of Hölderlin and Heidegger's related musings on "*parousia*" and the "nearness" of gods.

[36] Rousseau: "Essay on the Origin of Languages" 8.

because Rousseau is a master who truly knows the cause and effect of his broken dreams in the end. Figural language is both the *telos* and the origin of knowledge, and it is exactly for that reason that beginning and end do not actually exist at all: they are lost to their own displacement, like the gracefulness of Kleist's ephebe.[37] Because of that, they cannot be totalisingly re-placed. Time intervenes to provide the operation but nothing can be said of it because the saying would risk the truth being told about the event: that something was lost, that *something* is but only beyond our reach.

By reading Rousseau, the middle de Man knows the impossibility of any such statement and he finds it articulated in each story he criticises: the *Essai*, second *Discourse*, "Narcisse" and "Pygmalion", *Julie*, the *Profession de foi*, the *Social Contract*, *Confessions*, and *Rêveries*. To him, it really does not matter what the proclaimed genre or discipline of any of these writings is; the form of their occurrence in language is invariable and their metaphorisation around a disrupted cognitive objective exactly the same, whatever the systematising discourse. The primal self of the primitive's first encounter with language dominates each prospective meeting; the inert, spectating figure at the heart of the articulation remains as impotent as ever of fulfilling its aims. Nature does not work, it falls short of existence. Yet this is the premise upon which Rousseau begins to build his ideal society – that very dream for which he is renowned as a political philosopher. Chapter I of the *Social Contract* starts with the famous outcry "Man is born free, and is everywhere in chains",[38] which speaks well the predicament of the primal self. However, in the *Social Contract* it must be remembered that there the problem is consistently moored in questions of the perfect state and the institutional (as well as moral) wrongs which forever prevent the state from coming into being; and therefore the *Social Contract*, despite or perhaps precisely because of its utopianism, is only one side to the story. Elsewhere in Rousseau, other sides are looked at, but the predicament remains unchanged. Might we find an underlying intention or a specific mental disposition which leads to this? And how does that turn back on de Man?

[37] Kleist's story, which de Man discusses in "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*" (RR), tells the tale of a young man who loses the natural grace of his gestures when he glimpses himself in the mirror and is by his posture reminded of a certain statue. From that moment on the youth's ability to move gracefully is lost, reduced to a clumsy mimicking of a reflected idea. Rousseau's language may fall in line with a similar *mise en abîme* figuration.

[38] Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "The Social Contract" *The Essential Rousseau* 8.

Towards the end of the first *Discourse*, Rousseau states that "[t]he soul is gradually proportioned to the object with which it concerns itself, and it is great occasions that produce great men".[39] In a text otherwise permeated with wit and sarcasm, this expression appears quite striking in its total lack of irony; even though arts and sciences have, in the course of history, proved pernicious to the hope and virtue of nations, "greatness" has never disappeared. It is untaintable, undiscourageable. For people in high places, it should be their most magnificent asset (which it then usually is not); for common people, it should manifest as "the voice of our conscience while our passions are silent".[40] The dream is intact and imperishable in spite of its actual impossibility and disrupted cognitive potential; it traverses everything that Rousseau ever writes (about), as does the flawed primal self which the dream needs in order to end and to begin. It does not require verification for itself because, epistemologically, it says nothing about nothing. Or better, the dream says everything about everything in the dream and, in doing so, makes anything possible. This goes naturally against de Man's grain because for him no dream exists without the episteme of its counterpart; dreaming *must* be separate from waking because neither state can exist without the other. The solar opposition remains in full force for de Man with the somnambulant logocentric lost in the interstitial dead space. Rousseau knows this place too, along with Derrida, but he also knows that, basically, seeing is believing. Watching *must* be more than its own reduction into a concept; it has to occur without constituting an idea of sense perception (that is, the flawed self's idea of its own immanent consciousness), and it is this necessity that upholds the dreamy greatness of undiscourageable people. There is nothing mystic or religiously spiritual about the process (or there does not have to be), and the subject never loses anything completely or strides forth to transcend its limits. All things happen but their occurrence *cannot be planned* as anything else than "plans"; that is, the promise of plans. In this respect, Rousseau's "heart" is in the right place but his brain strays as he writes to forget the allegory of nature, and it is de Man who maps these wanderings for us.

Take the lesson of *Julie*, for example. De Man calls it the "articulation of the figural mode with the ethical tonality" (A 188), which means that, within the novel, it is the metaphorisation of ethics that takes place as the systematising discourse. From the fictional dialogue between Rousseau and the publishing

[39] Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences" *The Essential Rousseau* 226.

[40] ibid. 227. Derrida's term "neume" ("breath of language which is nonetheless inarticulate", *Of Grammatology*, 249) sounds quite similar to this.

editor of the novel, which raises questions of transparent authorship and the evil which reading books imposes on virtuous minds, to the exceedingly courtly and "didactic" (A 194) epistolary liaison between St. Preux (an alias) and Julie that eventually resigns into a kind of reflective contract with both of them swearing to uphold it, the lesson of *Julie* recounts not only the abdication of sensuous love but also the necessary impossibility of being able to let go of the allegory of its illusion. Within the story, the sacrificial death of Julie, together with the offering of her cousin Claire to assume her place, thematises this function; when something cannot be dominated in life (like Julie's love for St. Preux), it must be given over to death. The narrative moves from the enamoured heat of youth to the religious reflection of age but this changes nothing because, in death's dominion, because the essential breach between what can be felt and what can be possessed remains the same. For de Man, this entails the collapse of the whole story because in the end we have learned nothing; the allegorical narrative of the novel tells us only "the story of the failure to read" (A 205), set entirely within a world with nothing but "extreme artifice" (RTe 202) for its nature.[41] Ethics (the moral valorisation of a right and wrong) becomes "a discursive mode among others" (A 206) which is suspended and disrupted from its referential meaning while the figures still hold onto it ("every connotation has claim to referential authority but no statute in which to ground this claim", A 208).

Since there is no epistemological difference between the needs and passions of either youthful heat or seasoned reflection, and no separating of passion from need in either case, the progression of the narrative is broken and the reader reluctantly fails to glean anything valid from it; the "need for verification is itself unverifiable and therefore unfounded" (A 202). In these terms, Julie's late religious zeal is only another instance of "presence of desire replac[ing] the absence of identity" (A 198) which, by its own brand of "eudaemonic vocabulary" (A 209), by its own words of pleasure and pain, cannot escape its own meaning being still directed towards the void. It can hope but it cannot get away from it because "desire is organized *around* the moment that separates possession from its opposite" (A 215, my emphasis). And this moment is the displaced figure of the flawed primal self, transposed into text, now occurring as the allegory of the duration which the desire inhabits. *Julie* lasts only as long as the story does but, as we have found

[41] We heard this same idea suggested earlier in the context of Rousseau in Hölderlin's "Der Rhein"; a world where things are done in order to reflect on them is necessarily artificial and, for de Man, nothing symbolises this better in practice than the "wilded-up" garden of Clarens in *Julie*.

out, there really is no story there anyway, apart from the one that reveals to us its ethical failure. What wickedness is this imposed upon malleable minds?

In the larger sense of Rousseauan criticism, however, it is not enough to show linguistic understanding being disrupted by its original premise and in its ethical transposition into a literary text, no matter how ideal a place that might be for elucidating it. It is still a far too unpractical, pejoratively fictional locale for the intended message to have the authority to improve the people's quotidian lives, to right the wrongs of the real world, so to speak. And hence, in discussing the allegory of nature, we have to move from the pain of the individual to the burden of society. The dream of the primal self of meeting someone or something else *in actuality* carries over into the wish of society which takes place after the birth of nations (which is the same as the smallest of communities) flowed from the "crystal of the fountains", and it leaves the particular interiority of solitary reflection for the outer generality of the living world, hoping to fit into it in the most conducive way possible. The inside/outside dichotomy is thus an essential part of this transition, specifically in the sense of making the movement between the two poles that much more tangible than in the mode of pure self-love ("*amour de soi*"); in the dialectic of society, there are true realities apart from my own. This recognition is more than the sensation of a primordial encounter, or the crippling inequality of desiring selves, or the moral valorisation of good over bad; it is the voluntary acknowledgement of an interminable game we perhaps could stop playing but never will. The solar folly of society is not an essential phenomenon but it is one of the necessary upshots. The external truth of its existence, against the inner truth of literature, dictates that the dream of poetry has a waking counterpart where grief and suffering are more than a fundamental fear and the idle savage is loathe to stay idle because of the goodness of his or her nature.

That there are such unknown evils outside me is a certainty, both natural and religious:

> My sensations take place within me, since they make me aware of my existence; but their cause is external to me, since they affect whether I am willing or not, and I can neither produce nor abolish them of my own volition. I therefore clearly understand that a sensation, which is inside me, and its cause or object, which is outside of me, are not the same thing.
>
> Thus, not only do I exist, but other entities exist also, namely, the objects of my sensations; and even if those objects are only ideas, it is still truth that they are distinct from me.[42]

[42] Jean-Jacques Rousseau: **"The Creed of a Savoyard Priest"** *The Essential Rousseau*. 238.

Here the Savoyard priest, in the famous *Profession de foi* passage from *Emile*, not only confirms his classical (Platonic-cum-Cartesian) understanding of subject-object dualism but, just by being a priest giving a lesson to a young listener, also unveils the responsibility that "I" have over the "other entities" which exist outside me by necessity. This responsibility is more than ethical; it is the entire providence of society. The key to the discourse of the *Creed* is thus religion and the requirements it places on our nature; the loss of freedom we may experience there is part and parcel of its own natural design. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away.[43] For the priest, to start with, the Prime Mover of the natural state of rest ensures "the unity of intention manifested in the relations of all parts of that great whole"[44] and imbues it completely with that "justice" that comes from the "goodness [that] is the necessary effect of boundless power and the self-love that is an essential attribute of all sentient beings".[45] A total mimesis of the divine will thus dominates the earth from above, extending its license over each of its creatures. It is the apotheosis of religious illumination, in other words, and a good share of the priest's lesson unsurprisingly goes towards establishing this picture. Nevertheless, as the monologue continues, certain cracks in the conviction begin to appear.

Since nature in essence is at rest and beyond understanding, for Rousseau the organising Prime Mover must be separate from it, and this original division is what maintains the theological plan. (Masculine) God is thus "outside" (feminine) nature by default, even if the default itself remained forever incomprehensible to us; this is still part of the design. But if this is the case, and nature is an inert entity with nothing to teach us, why must we "be able to recognize and follow *her*"? How can she be a "guide" of any kind, helping "us find our way through the immense labyrinth of human opinions"? Is this not God's job? Or does he, the divinity, only speak to the common multitude while there are "so few who understand her", nature? Apparently in this role-casting God is the sweet talker, spewing out the vernacular unfazed by the public, while "she speaks to us in the language of nature, which everything has made us forget… she is dismayed by the noisy

[43] For Rousseau this loss is not a "bad" thing in itself because it reflects the movement of nature which is paradoxical anyway. We learn to appreciate it through our choices as a kind of theodicy; the same idea is later revisited by Kant for his moral teleology. For Hölderlin, on the other hand, the solution could not be so straightforward since for him even the "good" loss was a "punishment".

[44] Rousseau: "The Creed of a Savoyard Priest" *The Essential Rousseau*. 246.

[45] ibid. 253.

tumult of worldly affairs".[46] In the *Creed*, the mere admission of this possibly being so, of nature being the "guide" instead of the divinity, fractures the image of the divine will imposed on earth and subverts its rule over mundane wandering into a tedious chore which reveals its directionlessness as soon as the throng at God Square eases up and the listener returns from the rapturous spectacle of the social event to the desolation of the individual natural self.

Or are we getting ahead of ourselves here? In contrast to this scene, de Man finds in many places in Rousseau signs of "the uncanny timidity of the divine voice" (ARe 225) which seems somewhat uncertain of itself and prone to fading out. However, as these instances appear mainly in connection with the transition from the theological to the political order, it looks like the shy divinity described there is not the Prime Mover but his actual invocation within the particular individual; he is the avatar of society, the shift from reflection to action. In that sense, at the most crucial stage of the primal self becoming something, at the *becoming* itself where nations and histories are born, what we have is an act of cognition which measures our potential of carrying out the event. In the *Creed*, de Man finds this stage to occur "by means of an act of judgment" (ARe 228).[47] Nature, whatever her "guiding" abilities, and the Prime Mover, whatever his popular appeal, have to fall within the bounds of the event and obey its laws. The summoned individual quietens his or her own internal particularity, along with the voice which speaks the original flaw, and commits an action. In the moment within the shift from reflection to action history is made but, because the two dominions are "outside" one another by not being the same entity, judgment does not coincide with the event. From this follows that "thought and truth are not necessarily coextensive notions" (ARe 232); in the instance of society (or religion), "there can be no general will with a particular object… [a]ny such object must be either within the state or outside it" (33).[48] Hence the priest of the *Creed* ultimately ends up disavowing much of professed faith because he is unable to extend the truth of his own thinking with that of God. The cryptic guidance of nature only serves to heighten the sensation of isolation, returning from the rapture of the union to the isolation of the primitive's fear.

[46] ibid. 264.

[47] Considering how significant "judgment" will be in the Kantian aesthetic context in section 5, it is highly interesting, not to mention prefigurative, to see the concept being taken up here too.

[48] Rousseau: "The Social Contract" *The Essential Rousseau*. 33. For another de Manian critique of the notion of "coextension", see footnote 11 in section 3. There de Man criticises Serge Doubrovsky's "over-perceiving" misuse of the notion in connection with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological "intent" and "content" of the perceptual act (FI 35).

Finally, then, due to the ongoing sobering experience of silently reflecting on her, the "language of nature" loses even the last of its speech and becomes inscribed solely as the mute spectacle it is; the "only one that is open to all eyes: the book of nature".[49] As this tome knows no history but only displaces its events through the allegorical figures imprinted on its pages, the hapless individual cannot do justice to it in any other way than the priest's: "I carefully observe all the rites; I recite attentively, I do my best never to omit a single word or act".[50] The worship is that of sheer form, inflexible and mechanical; it is the profession of the priest's *Creed* "as God reads it in [his] heart".[51] The sensation of an inner particular remains dominated by the perception of an external generality whose "understanding can no longer be modeled on or derived from the experience of the senses" (ARe 234) and which does not function any differently from us. The seeing of God in the figures of the "book of nature" guarantees nothing anymore as the enigma of judgment has been blown open as a displaced event; and the volunteering for the purposes of building society (or religion) in spite of this disruption (which Rousseau is aware of) takes nothing away from its essentially aporetic nature even if "the mode of indeterminacy or undecidability may vary depending on whether one considers the aporia from a voluntaristic or from an epistemological point of view" (ARe 236). No adopted mode brings back together the scattering of the senses which has disrupted the understanding based on them. One sees, but that does not relate to anything. The mystery of the public God's "all too comprehensible… relation to man" (ARe 239) surrenders to the "suspended inability" of the prime mover (which has turned out to be just man) to know "whether or where it should go" (ARe 240). No guidance from nature is to be expected within the limits of reason because "she" is just an allegory, and the desire for her to be otherwise redeems no one else's belief or reality by the action. In the edification of faith (and society), the individual's judgment wishes for such an altruistic responsibility but, by its failure, finds itself eventually back in the "eudaemonic polarity of pleasure and pain" (ARe 243) just like Julie did, in the bare necessity of the ignorant articulation of the child's need which first gives rise to language. The systematising discourse of religion deconstructs itself and finally peels into mere "exhortative performatives that require the passage from sheer enunciation to action" (ARe 245). And these actions are not judgments guided by faith but events that judge the course of history without knowing what

[49] Rousseau: "The Creed of a Savoyard Priest" *The Essential Rousseau*. 285.

[50] ibid. 287.

[51] ibid. 289.

they do. As a statement, this sounds hyperbolical but that is just the ring of it. For de Man, relentlessly spectating, the sensation is muted by dying away in nature and that is the end of it, until it restarts elsewhere. Rousseau, on the other hand, takes the same echo further and further into other dominions of other discourses because a dream (broken or not) can never die and the sound is never anything else than the breath of indomitable conscience anyway.

Whether Rousseau really knows that he does this, that he pushes the communication of "exhortative performatives" beyond the event horizon of understanding, remains up for debate. For de Man there is no question about it because Rousseau is fully aware of it, as evinced by the systematic breaking of the various discourses that the citizen of Geneva's texts address. But is the knowing of this knowledge, of Rousseau's personal awareness, really that important to us? And how can de Man (or Derrida at the other end of it) actually go on to claim that there is knowledge to be gained there, if the spoils consist exclusively of the realisation that they never existed? For those who believe in the construction of epistemology in the Derridean solar, positive manner, such a doubly negative insight (that is, not only were the spoils not there but they did not exist to begin with) is undoubtedly a terrifyingly nihilistic view of things. And so the fear has them attacking the "school" of deconstruction. Meanwhile, those who openly enrol for the cause, or dip into it for this or that theoretical gimmick, simply repeat the ancient gesture that casts them as devil's advocates; and they do this out of the eudaemonic desire to establish (or court with) an antagonistic position. In this game, which we simply refuse not to play, we find the image of society. Whatever the reverberations or knowings of knowledge of Rousseau, de Man, and Derrida are beyond that image, we will never know because we constantly turn down the opportunity, and that is not anyone's personal failure because, as persons, we are locked within it. Paradoxically, however, that life sentence is exactly why Rousseau's conscious potentialities continue to matter; like Sisyphus in hell with his rock, they still dream of finishing their task one day.

Even de Man, in spite of all articulations to the contrary, plays by these very same rules; it is just that, for him, the task is that of critical reading which guarantees nothing else than its necessary reward in terms of how we live in and conceive our society. As far as this dream is concerned, de Man's "radical deconstruction", whatever its theoretical method, is no different from anyone else's, and *this is not a remark that would be "outside" theory.* The life of critical thought does not begin as one dons the academic guise to be applied in the professional situation and it does not end in the casual off-mode of taking a break from thinking while having

fun or watching a dream. Consequently, de Man (and his thought) also lives in more than his comprehensive invalidation of epistemology. As we understand it, society is what our life is, the ultimate prospect of the flawed primal self, but even though we cannot leave it behind or stop playing it, we may extend its bounds. And although this possibility may frighten us or arouse our desire, it is never as easy as that. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau speaks this very difficulty with his customary contradictoriness because that is the nature of the discourse. Pseudo-psychoanalytically speaking, the fears and desires becoming within it are the displaced condensation of the non-existent ego at the middle of it; society itself is the postulated presence of the id. In these terms, de Man's essential question to Derrida ("why… [does he postulate] within Rousseau a metaphysics of presence which can then be shown not to operate", RB 119) falls back into the validity of the existence of society without "society". But there de Man fails to appreciate the fact that his question would not exist *if it did not have something* to question; the metaphysical presence is postulated just by the asking. No answer is necessary – for any reason whatsoever as de Man's deconstruction of the various systematising discourses shows – but that there is one, or all of them, cannot be denied.

In Rousseau's utopia, to instate a new ruling concept, this truth is maintained by the "sovereign" which "[m]erely by virtue of existing… is always what it should be".[52] In effect, the sovereign is the collective spirit of the particular citizens gathered under the general aegis of the nation, and *it* cannot be harmed by any wrongdoing (the entropy of vice for the nation in decline) even if its laws (the rules of considering the collective figure of the whole from different points of view) were violated. The break of laws entails no disfiguration of the complete presence; it only results in the state of "invincible nature regain[ing] its dominion".[53] Systematic discourses and their extension into the presence of the particular will within the general dominion fail utterly, but the state which endows the possibility of this happening holds unchanged.[54] Yet nothing can be done to prevent the failure either because, like the loss of freedom in yielding to God's plan, that is part of the design too:

52 Rousseau: "The Social Contract" *The Essential Rousseau*. 19.

53 ibid. 46.

54 De Man too foresees this kind of space being kept open in Rousseau when he observes that the "encounter between one political unit and another is not a generalization in which a structure is extended on the basis of a principle of similarity (or of a proximity considered as similarity) to include both under its common aegis" (P 254). For him, however, the prospective "encounter" never loses *its own form* of always consisting of such an extension (even if it reached nothing or was unable to decide if it reached something), and that is what makes the difference in meeting it.

> In the natural order, however, [the] different wills become more vigorous as they are more concentrated. Thus the general will is always the weakest, the corporate will is in second place, and the particular will comes first, so that in the government each member is first himself, then a magistrate, and then a citizen. This sequence is the reverse of what is required by the social order.[55]

Rousseau's formulation courts contradiction here as one might well argue that it is in nature that the general dominates and the "reverse" should be true only of the artifice of a society based on arbitary relations (and therefore on the ability of the particular will arrogantly to place itself above others). However, similarly to what we heard earlier with "the uncanny timidity of the divine voice" (ARe 225) being pinpointed in a transition between "orders", we may just as well argue that "the natural order" is not the same as "nature" (where "she" speaks quietly and cryptically) but rather the discourse of it, moving towards and away from it, talking loudly and insolently about the needing individual. Within this discourse, the imagined "presence" at the middle of it (of society for "me") is the logocentric folly of its own absence and must be deconstructed. Within the other discourse (that "required by the social order" going from the whole to the part) the folly is *already reversed* by the non-existent negation of "me" which has only the breath of conscience for its voice and allows the prospective discourse of society to meet it. That is the only thing it can do, in all of its encounters of power to property and oppression and back.

"Society" does not need to be anything fixed, however. "Greatness" returns on the way to shape its course:

> The limits of possibility in the moral realm are less narrow than we think. It is our weaknesses, vices, and prejudices that constrict them. Base souls do not believe in great men; abject slaves smile mockingly at the word "freedom".[56]

Later Hölderlin chose this passage as the motto for his "Hymn to Humanity" and also de Man notes this in a few occasions. It appears to say something that keeps one coming back to it regardless of the possibility of any solid epistemological gains, and therefore it provides a crucial aspect for Rousseau's utopia in "How the Sovereign Authority Maintains Itself". With the establishment of its inexhaustible grandeur, the *Social Contract* can go on to consolidate the promise of its title, to

[55] Rousseau: "The Social Contract" *The Essential Rousseau* 54.

[56] ibid. 75.

lay out the act of instituting the government itself. At the same time, it recognises that "even the social pact itself… [could be] quite lawfully broken"[57] if the citizens' consensus demanded it, and it shows how the intermediary incorporation of the particular into the general (and dialectically vice versa) may be put into effective operation (of society as a political "society"). To achieve that, in the face of any established doctrine, what is necessary is a "purely civil creed whose tenets the sovereign is entitled to determine, not precisely as dogmas of religion, but as sentiments of sociability". It is this secular utopia of undiscourageable virtue which assures the triumph of the spirit, as well. In the mind of Rousseau, the great nations of Antiquity accomplished this but perished anyway. There too the life of the individual within the body politic of the nation eventually lost "the *self* common to the whole, the reciprocal sensibility and the internal connection between all the parts"; and it is when "this communication ceases" that "the formal unity disappears, and the contiguous parts are only related to one another by their juxtaposition". From this break of "*self*", it follows that "[t]he man is dead, or the state is dissolved".[58] What then is the significance of these ominous prospects to the validity of the "purely civil creed"?

Since the self (of the body politic) "does not remain in its condition of fragmented isolation" (P 256) and is instead "forced to enter steadily into comparison in order to know itself" (Rousseau quoted in P 256), which eventually results in wars and internal turmoil, what hope can it draw from the dream of its untainted spirit amidst the bloody lamentations of its people? Is the "synesthetic illusion of the common sensorium" merely "a mythical aberration of judgment devoid of truth and of virtue" (P 260)? For de Man there is not much argument about the answer because he is decided on the side of showing why nations fall. Nature cannot be reached and it remains forever short of being since the present, in which we think nature takes place, is eternally displaced from us by the allegory of its own existence. Nations come down because they do not know this, and they cannot hope to become "more present" or "more natural" by another thought of (the greatest of) particular wills extending organically into a coherent general scheme, guaranteeing the best possible results for everyone within the sovereign whole. This is the end of governments in a way. Apart from fleeting illusions to the contrary, de Man sees Rousseau confirming this (anarchistic) denial of hope when the Genevan "calls natural any stage of relational integration that precedes

[57] ibid. 84.

[58] Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Discourse on Political Economy" *Rousseau's Political Writings* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988). 61.

in degree the stage presently under examination" (P 249): nature is here in no presence whatsover and thus the "return" to it from the evils of corrupt arts, sciences and society is forever only a failure, an attempt doomed in advance in progress. Consequently, the existence of the "State"[59] is "based on the coexistence of two distinct rhetorical models, the first self-reflective or specular, the other estranged" (P 265), a formulation which echoes the primitive's first encounter with language in the sense that it reinscribes the powers of pure spectation (and nothing else) while also legislating the total displacement of any subsequent sensation possibly gained from the event.

In "Promises" and the reading of the *Social Contract* that inspires it, the existence of this kind of "State" is used as the example which breaks the aspirations of Rousseau's utopia but it does not do this unawares. The systematising discourse of politics performs the undoing of its own text by exploding the "transcendental signification that subverts the grammatical code to which the text owes its existence". De Man accomplishes this by showing the "tension between figural and grammatical language [being] duplicated in the differentiation between the State as a defined entity (Etat) and the State as a principle of action (Souverain)" (P 270). The images at the borderline cannot hope to weather this tension, storming in from both sides of the vacated present, and the avatar of the prospective society-builder must give in; he or she does not signify beyond the moment which was not understood anyway. Grasped in this relational way, Rousseau's utopia (never mind the dream of it) is certainly a non-existent entity, offering insight only into the figurality of its structure not being anything other than displaced form. However, to get where he is going, de Man has to resort to certain tricks on the way. One of them is the anthropomorphisation of "state" as "State"; the other is the identification of the "sovereign", which I have been calling the collective spirit of a nation, as "a principle of action". For the purposes of the project of *Allegories of Reading* focused for its part on the epistemology between the performative and constative dimensions of language, this little sleight-of-hand (which de Man nearly slips by us in a curious parenthetical remark that the "souverain" can "with some historical hindsight, be translated as the executive power", P 265) is anything but little in its consequences to the reading involved, and it cannot be ignored.

Because even if Rousseau does say that the State as "Etat" is "passive" (the resulting legality called nation) and "active" as "Souverain" (the building of nation, Rousseau quoted at P 265), this hardly suffices to turn the "sovereign"

[59] De Man apparently plays here on the metonymy of "state" (the indefinite spatial concept) and "State" (the nation as a proper, somewhat mythologised entity).

exclusively into "a principle of action". Because even though both "principle" and "action" are certainly part of it, the "sovereign" cannot be reduced merely to a "principle" relying on a concept of relational definiteness. This is so even if the concept thus conceived implied anything but the definite – whether ghostly, mechanical, or simply undecidable. In other words, such a reduction robs the "sovereign" of its unbounded richness which refuses to become stunned in a fixed opposition (or the error of it): as an idea, it refuses merely to watch and, as a myth, it gives promises which the idea will never fulfill. This does not mean that the things promised by (the political) Rousseau would not be real; it just means that the things he promises are *promises*. That is their illocutionary power, "future-oriented and prospective" in their persistently displaced presence. Unable to perish, for Rousseau they spell the keeping of the dream, whereas for de Man they erase themselves by "never apply[ing] as such to any particular present" (P 273). It follows that "[o]nly a subterfuge can put this paralysis in motion" (P 274), and this deceitful action is an aporia which "persists in performing what it has shown to be impossible to do". As such, it can be called "an allegory" (P 275).

This insight, the articulation of the promises of linguistic functions that "cannot be distinguished or reconciled" in any discourse or at any level of cognitive validity, concludes de Man's critical *reading* of Rousseau's dream society but even he cannot escape "experiencing the exhilarating *feeling* inspired by a firm promise" (P 276, my emphasis) that he finds there. Reading and feeling – these two receiving modes (or "states", or "States") are not the same for de Man and never would he wish them to be. One is theoretical, the other extra-theoretical. But, in the end, this keeping clean of each reads as a profession of bad faith in "Promises". By scolding the "sentimental or demagogical passages" of the *Social Contract*, de Man indulges in an amazing conceit when he claims that "[e]ven without these passages, [the text] would still promise by inference, perhaps more effectively than if Rousseau had not had the naïveté, or the good faith, to promise openly" (P 277). The claim sounds quite incredible against the realisation of Rousseau's promises as just what they are (promises, that is) – and by this thought naïve lapses are the same in nature as linguistic epiphanies are – but it becomes even more unbelievable when de Man suggests *he knows* how the text should be pruned in order to improve it. Yet his own essay, all the way through to its title, depends on Rousseau's text as it is and, like *Julie*, has its desire "organized around the moment that separates possession from its opposite" (A 215). This moment is that of the promise, and the desire is that of de Man wanting more complete fulfillment of wisdom, by writing again, by writing back to an age left behind

which was never there in the first place. The allegory of nature, as the middle de Man understands it, still holds in its displaced spatial void an unconfessed presence of disrupted dream. Remembering what could be and forgetting what should be operate in that dominion and make the fear of the flawed primal self (or the trauma of it) one necessary sensibility among many. But it is by no means the only one: through a multitude of impressions, an "I" knows only when an "I" is thought to exist, and the same can be said of the constant experiencing of the spectating ghost of an "I". Rousseau fears it, de Man asserts it; a nostalgia of knowing makes the difference.

(iii) From Nature to Memory

The main idea of the previous section was to show how the middle de Man of *Allegories of Reading* deconstructs Rousseau's various texts, or lets their discourses deconstruct themselves, in order to return them to the premise of the origin they all invariably begin from. The premise of the primal self, or the primitive subject, awaits there, forever prospective and bound to move within the space which is its condition but which cannot be expressed or made use of without betraying its immediacy. The space of this place can only be called "nature" if it is to suggest a given state of existence beyond human artifice, away from the mediation of reflection and the inevitable corruption of society. However, as this "nature" is then by default a product of imagination, an allegory, much as all the other "concepts" (origin, self, immediacy) necessary to its description are, its logic dictates that it is also always already a false proposition, unable either to verify itself analytically or, for that matter, to relinquish its need for such a verification because if it did, it would lose all its non-fictionality. Rousseau's task is thus a self-serving dead-end which escapes the recognition of its own death just by the sustained possibility of its own articulation; whatever the cognitive result of any given reflection (failure), it is only the fact of being able to *remember* both the failure and the pleasure preceding it that upholds the power of memory over the radically negative epistemological exchanges at work within it. And because the good part of the operation is universally prior to the bad one – the immediate pleasure of trying always comes before the mediated pain of failure – Rousseau's protests for an original innocence (which thus *must* be a fact of life) are only logical and in perfect complicity with the obsession over his own (or the "inner" Jean-Jacques's) blamelessness, beset by the evil threatening to invade from the outside.

The primal self lies at the heart of all, ageless and impeccable like a diamond, but also cracked beyond doubt.

The flaw in the jewel comes from the impossibility of the stone to watch (and so verify) itself; the perfectibility of its own destiny and potential can only be met by observing others. The self in itself is empty and petrified and has nothing else to look for but projections coming in from somewhere else. These are the discourses that de Man retrieves from Rousseau and allows to fall apart; as devoid of cognitive substantiation (hollowed out by the spectating subject), the resulting ancillary phenomena of the caprices of language and society (judged in the aesthetic moment of sensing them) have no power over the essential subject that confronts them. This is Rousseau's philosophy, combining the rational universality of Enlightenment with the spirit of Romantic uniqueness. The difference from the Cartesian tradition is obvious as analytic verification is considered to be impossible; the disagreement with the "true" Romantics remains tangible as nature's laws are still there to be established. This paradoxical chiasmus makes Rousseau the perfect specimen for de Man to work with keen linguistic acumen and display his own two-fold debt to the legacy of the Enlightenment: on one hand, he is able to demonstrate the solidity of its positive epistemology as an absorbing fallacy while, on the other hand, he is content to make do with those very same demands for knowledge which he simultaneously thoroughly deconstructs. At the end of *Allegories of Reading*, in the essay "Excuses", de Man accomplishes this by allowing Rousseau's late autobiographical text-model (the *Confessions* and *Reveries* in particular) to deconstruct its own discourse and thus remove the last shred of the illusion of the stony subject that speaks to establish itself. Once more, it is the unveiling that comes out in the end precisely as the illusion it was supposed to reveal, and the desire that sought to animate the action remains just as unwarranted and non-localised as it was to begin with. The figure of the subject writing about itself is left suspended in a limbo between the need for truth and the passion for expressing it, and the space where their convergence is supposed to happen does not permit any such planetary collision because that would mean the end of writing itself. For de Man, this is the essential trap of the "self".

The episode which de Man mainly focuses on in "Excuses" is the one from *Confessions* where the young Rousseau steals a ribbon and puts the blame on another servant, Marion; for the older Rousseau the incident seems mostly significant for the chance to confess and revisit the guilt in his autobiographical writings. In the first few pages of the essay, de Man muses on certain of the objects

and affects related to the episode (ribbon, guilt, pride, shame, etc.) and seems content to reduce their significations to "a chain of exchanges and possessions" in which they "can circulate symbolically" (E 283) but which has them lose their claim on any referential definiteness, freeing them up into an endless space of purely linguistic exchange where they may assume all kinds of different forms and guises.[60] The only "thing" about the incident which is not thus liberated is the sole "extraverbal moment" of it all; that is, the fact of "the knowledge that the utterance [of the verbal event] actually took place" (E 281). This reality is not open to language and so nothing can be said of *it* without making it part of the symbolic circulation of the signifying elements. Yet the state of its existence has to be acknowledged in some way, or we would never know that there was any such thing. For Rousseau, the state is manifested through the image of the self at the origin of language which nonetheless fears its own non-existence; survival is guaranteed immediately by remembering this. De Man appears to be in line with the truth of this to some extent – after all, he never forgets the factuality of real events taking place – but he is unable to remain content with it since that would turn the remaining itself into a non-factual event, that is, a verbal one. The excuse for doing that would consist in "recapitulating the exposure [of the factual event] in the guise of concealment" (E 286) which would fix the free signifier as a specific locality and thereby once again give rise to the illusion of definite referentiality.[61] That such fixing can and should be done in order to arrange our everyday lives does not really concern de Man (because it is obvious) but it must not provide the basis for critical theory.

Consequently, from here on in the essay, de Man leaves the chat of the symbolic domain to articulate the "estrangement between subject and utterance

[60] Imagining this kind of unrestrained descriptive space, de Man indulges in a bit of Freudian shtick when he finds shame as "primarily exhibitionistic" (E 285) and links this directly with Rousseau's desire for the ribbon (which Derrida describes as "already a fetish" in the "Typewriter Ribbon" essay, 322) being turned into desire for Marion being turned into desire for neither except desire itself which results in nothing really but allows itself to be paraded in writing. The riddle of the substituting activity is not thereby solved but it perpetuates itself in the space given to it, free-floating and atomistic. Narratively speaking, a similar scenario was being enacted in "Narcisse", with its protagonist such a fully free "atom" of "*amour-propre*" connecting nothing with nothing and without even trying to. But such entities are uninteresting and obvious – simply because they do not reach for anything else. This is also the reason why de Man reduces them completely, whereas Derrida allows them to be celebrated for their unboundedness. Jacques Derrida: "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) ('and within such limits')" *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, eds. Tom Cohen et al. (Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[61] As a passing reference, Heidegger's cognitive model of hiding and revealing is here criticised as committing exactly this type of error. It seems his thinking never ceased to trouble de Man.

[which] is then so radical that it escapes any mode of comprehension" (E 289). He departs from showing how the unrestrained descriptive space of language works symbolically to saying how *the thinking of its working symbolically* is essentially another illusion, or the unveiling of one, and therefore utterly non-constitutive of anything cognitively factual about it. By deconstructing the so-called performative dimension of language (the thinking of making language happen by performing it), de Man argues Rousseau's awareness of this at the far end of his confessional and autobiographical texts and has him stuck in the final impossibility of the avowed self to speak anything but the "estranged" nature of his own subjective madness. By fear and by haunting, the free signifiers return to the author but fulfill nothing except their own unverifiable, inexorable play. The desire and the pleasure gained turn into mere templates which allow the savage atoms to disseminate and inflict the "harshest mutilations", the unavoidable performatives of the "radical irresponsibility of fiction", on the "knowledge of radical innocence" (E 293) beseeched by the primal self. How to claim for virtue or goodness when each following statement is basically untrue? And how to claim for authorship (whether now or in the future) when "authorship" itself "remains ensconced within the figural delusion that separates knowing from doing" (E 297)? How will anyone know anything, or even think that they know?

De Man absolves Rousseau of none of these questions, going as far as saying that Jean-Jacques's excuses "generate the very guilt they exonerate, though always in excess or by default" (E 299). Hence Rousseau's anxiety is all his own doing, be it the result of real enigmas or mere automatic responses ("*l'effet machinal*") to everyday problems, and it is made all the worse by the attempts to alleviate it. The mechanism of language offers no reprieve but rather the escalation of the original fear. In this sense, the reading and writing of literature is "the evocation of the machine", the "unmotivated, fictional" (E 298) operation of an allegorical space whose cognitive presence is forever unverifiable. Yet the very "process of its own production" is "the only thing worth knowing" (E 300) and, without it, there would be no consciousness of any imaginable kind: "we" "are" "somewhere", as a factual event. In the tropological displacement by which we move, we inhabit the allegory of nature, as if it did have a solid basis for itself. This is the only permanence we can hope for. Now how's that for "irony" (E 301)?

In his relentless surveying of the cognitive operations underpinning Rousseau's writings and philosophy, de Man focuses on the moments that explode the epistemological desire leading up to them and thus reveal their invalidity as sound proof for the statements made. We have seen this happening with the various

discourses, geared towards the same ultimate failure and spoken as different kinds of speech acts (denomination, faith-profession, promise, excuse). We have also witnessed de Man making a convincing case, one that we should not merely overlook or dismiss as inhuman or crazy. There are, however, certain aspects of Rousseau's literature that appear to be beyond him, as pointed out by Derrida in the "Typewriter Ribbon" essay, specifically in the context of the ribbon-stealing episode. Without going too much into the details of the essay, it benefits us to lift a few thoughts out of it and consider them in the light of what has been said earlier in this section and how that relates to the "concept" of memory that is crucial here – also in the sense in which I argued its power to be indispensable for de Man too.

Derrida says, to quote at some length:

> The work will accomplish its work of work, *son oeuvre d'oeuvre* beyond its signatory and without [Rousseau's] living assistance, whatever may be the time required, whatever may be the time to come; for time itself no longer counts in the survival of this "sooner or later" [in the *Second Walk* of the *Reveries*]. It little matters the time that this will take, time is given, thus it no longer exists, it no longer costs anything, and since it no longer costs anything, it is graciously given in exchange for the labor of the work that operates all by itself, in a quasi-machine-like fashion, virtually, and thus without the author's work: as if, contrary to what is commonly thought, there were a secret affinity between grace and machine, between the heart and the automatism of the marionette, as if the excusing machine as writing machine and machine for establishing innocence worked all by itself. This would be Rousseau's grace but also his machine whereby he pardons himself in advance. He excuses himself by giving himself in advance the time needed and that he therefore annuls in a "sooner or later" that the work bears like a machine for killing time and redeeming the fault, a fault that seems therefore only apparent, whether this appearance be the malevolence of men or the secret of heaven. Sooner or later, grace will operate in the work, by the work of the work at work, in a machine-like fashion. Rousseau's innocence will shine forth.[62]

Timelessness of this kind ("time is given, thus it no longer exists") suggests a radically different idea from the universal absolute than is usually understood by the concept. As it is very easy to think of "time" as mere clock time (that is, as the "natural" succession of events lined up by the progression of the day) and only somewhat harder to theorise it as "temporality" (the abstract power of time without specifying the events contained in it), Derrida's "given" and thus "non-

[62] ibid. 291–2.

existent" time defies our common sense of thinking. First of all, it has to be noted that Derrida talks about "time" rather than "temporality", and that already implies a disparity of sorts with de Man. This might not be immediately obvious though: we remember that the latter used to rely heavily on "temporality" as the cognition-operating force within the given certainty of "time itself" (FI 32) during his early period, if only to get phase out the concepts later on in his career.[63] But in de Man's case, "time" was never "graciously given", there was no "secret affinity between grace and machine", and time *merely existed*, like it did for Hegel. Which is to say that time *did* exist, ineluctably, immediately turning into the endless operations of temporality completely at odds with Derrida's view. In addition, if we remind ourselves of "time" as one of Kant's two universal *a priori* conditions of intuition (the other being "space") by which it is generally "given" and thus assumes nothing particular about the things it contains but only allows for them, it almost seems as if Derrida doubles the implications of Kantian "time" and de Manian "temporality" with each other. By mutual non-particular containment, the Kantian condition of "time" becomes the space where the figures of de Manian "temporality" operate. Even though both concepts remain unable to dominate the other by either inclusion or takeover, they remain just as unable to exclude or comprehensively disrupt one another. This happens simply because the "given", "non-existent" timelessness fails to erase a single event taking place – or let it erase itself. This is the kind of non-conditional, *non-temporal* event horizon which, in Derrida's suggestion, will endow the general survival of Rousseau's memory (and accomplishment) into any particular "time" and which, if his innocence is to be preserved, is the entire stake of the "wager"[64] of his endeavour.

In contrast to this, the de Manian "machine", the evocation of the sheerly technical, tortuously unverifiable "nature" of writing, lives on and operates by the failure of Rousseau's enormous gamble to express its content or make itself present *in the now*. (The Nietzschean genealogy of tragic knowledge passed from fathers to sons, fails similarly, as will be seen later). By this point, in terms of temporality and time, we have gone from an early understanding of a general immediate condition to the guaranteed repetition of a contingent instant. The machine is eternal because it cannot die, but for de Man this existence signifies something other than ontological metaphysics or cognitive madness: it is supposed to be illimitable in the *technical* sense. But from that possible sentiment

63 De Man conducts the eventual act of exorcism perhaps most emphatically in his criticism of Jauss's hermeneutic criticism. See section 5.

64 ibid. 344.

of deathless relief, it is very easy to fall into re-imagining being actually relieved by it ("at least there is something for sure"); and it is exactly against that empirical relapse that de Man constantly warns us. As there is a "twilight" at the border that "separates knowing from doing" (E 297) – a zone which breaks up our thoughts from our actions and vice versa – the thinking of deathless relief is not the same as the being of it. Derrida's "non-twilight" logic would state, against de Man, that this is not *essentially* true (because there is no way of denying the existence of anything in time, thinking-as-being included) but that it is *necessarily* true (because nothing can be confirmed to be present at any given moment either). And, since it is a truth, we may never forget the possibility of finding even in that one particular time an "element that de Man would like to identify as purely cognitive, epistemological, as a moment of revealed truth".[65] This "element", alien atom, event-engendering fiction of non-verbal factuality is the source of de Man's incessant cautioning which, by virtue of being truthful, perpetually guards against cognitive laxity. Meanwhile, although not mutually exclusively, Derrida's reason-defying betting habits extend the bounds of ontology limitlessly, into "time" as given, and allow de Man and Rousseau's writings to happen and communicate.[66] It may be a somewhat strained effort on his part, and it remains an open question whether he succeeds in it, or if he does justice to his source materials. Christopher D. Morris for one has argued that he does not; in his mind, Derrida only takes the easy way out:

> While de Man accepts the impossibility of leaving the [linear Rousseauan] path created by the error-inducing ribbon, Derrida reassigns it to a place *before* the path, even before the trace. For de Man, there is no exit from the linear path of freely substitutable signs; for Derrida, an aporia can magically point the way to such an exit.[67]

65 ibid. 313.

66 If one set out to map the boundaries of the "placeless timelessnesses" of Derrida and Rousseau (as contrasted with the middle de Man's "non-temporal displacements"), one could argue that, despite "naturalising" time (that is, by removing the intuited condition from verbal existence both generally and particularly), neither of them dares to do the same to general space (of which "place" is the local manifestation). At first sight even the suggestion of such an attempt seems unspeakably baffling. This is perhaps precisely because of the solar material sensation, the Aristotelian *aistheton* which "does not yield upon command, and its presence is not to be mastered", even though the figure encountered "can always *not* present itself, can hide itself, absent itself" (250, see end of note) – the condition of which as a rule enforced on sense perception is odd to say the least. This is a good reservation to keep in mind. Derrida: "White Mythology" 250.

67 Christopher D. Morris: *The Figure of the Road: Deconstructive Studies in Humanities Disciplines* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007) 107.

Morris thinks that Derrida needs such magic tricks in order to import ethics in his deconstructive model against the de Manian lesson even though the signs themselves do not need it: instead, it is *because* Rousseau's figures shun all exits that they can survive and thrive on their own. The point is difficult, to be sure, but it is tempting to try and deal with it. "And the temptation suffices", Derrida says, talking about the metonymic force of a certain "nothing in the text" which, at that point, has de Man interpreting Rousseau in a very certain way without too much to support him.[68] Along these lines, the desire to make something survive might not always present itself openly (for better or worse), but it *is* there, directing and containing the charmed printing ribbon of a writing machine.

By showing us a "mechanical reverie",[69] Rousseau's late daydreams remember this procedure perfectly; all things considered, there is nothing paradoxical about them and the life ambitions that have led him there. In this place, like the dazed aftershock of the accident which had the old Rousseau land face first in the street cobblestones at Ménilmontant, every "first sensation [is] a moment of delight" simply because it is devoid of any cognitive interference of whats and whys and wheres, being "conscious of nothing else"[70] than the aesthetic second which makes it known. In this way, the "reverie" thus sensed is analogously "mechanical"; the moment arrives because it must, automatically, programmed and realised by the great engine of life which produces a never-ending string of such instants. As soon as understanding seeps back in, Rousseau's second is instantly transformed and replaced by another. The conjecture of the flawed primal self having the sensation and wanting to claim its meaning reasserts itself, trying to interpret and propose validity to the already lost original event which, solely for the sake of having occurred in reality, refuses to surrender its claim to potential meaning but nonetheless remains completely out of reach.

In consequence, this understanding becomes the obstruction of the perfect transparency of the now-imagined original sensation; Rousseau's vicious circle of knowing and not-knowing is given further momentum and the anxiety of the fearful primitive subject, who is unable to decide whether any of his "first sensations" actually amount to anything, is restored. De Man's instinct here

68 Derrida: "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) ('within such limits')" 297. See the essay for more on the point.

69 Starobinski 234. Starobinski also compares Rousseau's botanical walks filled with delusions and fantasies with those of Goethe for whom such outings represented a more "sane" pastime because it recalled the external world's realities.

70 Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004). 39.

states that they do not, that they are irrevocably gone, without disappearing yet, reduced to mere spectres of their original "selves", disrupted and emptied at the very moment of initiation. In his own way, Jean Starobinski agrees with this when he says that the "self" (the entity that desires to judge the sensation "it" has had) is "not the unattainable position of rest but the anxiety that makes tranquillity impossible".[71] The difference is that, for Starobinski reading Rousseau, this state of perpetually grasping for ghosts, of departing in fear and returning in joy, *does nothing* to the consciousness that ultimately resides at the heart of the restlessness – without it the activity would cease. In contrast, for de Man reading Rousseau, the consciousness itself, along with all the other images, falls within the space of the activity simply occurring; it is not saved from the break of understanding and it does not transcend its disrupted dominion. It does not matter (or perhaps it even proves the point) if Starobinski were right in saying that "self-knowledge… is the same as reminiscence"[72] for Rousseau; by being out of our cognitive reach, both "self" and "memory", together with "nature", have no critical presence for us except for the allegory put in place.

However, even with all things considered, if Rousseau's "certitude is that of memory… fortified by contact",[73] and if in his old age he is able to vacate what has by now been realised as the "unattainable position of rest" (forsaking his self's dreams of social/moral/natural utopia in harmony with other selves), and find a different kind of fulfillment for his passions and needs, can it be said that all dominions of all entities have really been disrupted? If "writing" is the curse that has destroyed all his earlier attempts at transparent communication but has, in spite of this, been the sole thing able to uphold his dream over the evil of "other men" and the abyss of time, can it instead turn out be a blessing in disguise? Starobinski says this:

> When there is no one left to turn to, no further hope of reconciliation, then the feeling of separation is also out of place. Even exile can no longer be called exile, because it is impossible to live anywhere else. In this situation one can speak calmly and interminably; words are freed from the curse of being intermediaries, means, mediating instruments. More precisely, the mediation of writing intervenes, but only within the self.[74]

71 Starobinski 57.

72 ibid. 18.

73 ibid. 15.

74 ibid. 141–2.

This terrible "situation" is obviously a place because one can live "there" and since it is an actual presence (of the state of writing), it is not an allegory of anything except the "things" written within it. Starobinski's argument requires that it be called "self" (de Man called it for him "no longer a representation but a single voice" which "by the rigor of its negativity, finally coincides with what it asserts", S 172) but this is an interpretation – although one Rousseau himself might agree with in his absolute subjectivist mood embodied as the primitive's first encounter with "others". However, if we think of the "situation" as a place that is *nothing but* "presence" without qualifying the thought any further, and try to conceive of Rousseau's "mechanical reverie" in this manner, we might come closer to returning to the state of the "first sensation" which, in the episode at Ménilmontant, was the original "moment of delight". At first sight, the suggestion might smack of an aestheticism (one that valorises the pleasurable by eudaemonic theorising[75]), but if we consider it in the way of Derrida's earlier discussed "timelessness" (an all-containing given), we may come to a different conclusion.

For in its instant, the "moment of delight" *belongs* neither to the "moment" nor to the "delight" but they *contain* each other. Genitive or other, there is no projection of signifiers (of "moment" to "delight" or vice versa), no separation of components of a Y from an X, and no displacement of the event into another through the idea of something being performed. The moment is full and specific, bound to its sensate appearance, and it (the "first sensation") becomes described as a "moment of delight" only after it has already been lost in trying to understand it. This denomination does not kill or mutilate "it"; *the denomination is in itself another such "first sensation"*, away from the previous one, and so the earlier moment is preserved into eternity. This survival is the power of Rousseau's memory, and, by being absolutely true, it cannot fail to legitimise the claim of his dream which, in the way he understands it, is salvaged from the evil of the "others" only by the cursed, terrifying gift of writing. Derrida agrees with him, and the implication is that the ever-anxious prospect of "*écriture*" is metaphorically the same as the fear that first gives rise to language and forces us to attempt to tame it. Yet, as soon as we do this, the fear turns back (not as the original but as another original), evoking fears that we might have lied in the first place. As our own scapegoats,

[75] This discourse of pleasure and pain is never very far from Rousseau's retrospective pastoral-esque musings in each of the reveries. As the discourse vacillates (whether perceived as inward dialectics or mere antithetical oppositions), so does the old Rousseau continue to waver between the valorization of "virtue" vs. "nature": "the pleasure of doing our duty is one which only the habit of virtue can produce in us; those pleasures which come to us directly from nature are less exalted" (Rousseau: *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 98). This, however, is only the surface of it.

or self-sacrificing "*pharmakoi*", we uneasily return to place of the fear of writing, maintaining the uninterrupted movement.[76] As the strongest emotion (or affect or sensation) we cannot explain and hope to do away with in writing, the return is a powerful reminder of there still being something in the world that reveals the basic tension of understanding. None of the "other" emotions are any less basic or powerful but those we tend to think we can explain, set down in memory, and so for most of the time they remain unrevealed, or unrevealing. They tend not to inspire the acutest sensations; and so fear becomes the strongest event to bring about memory. It flows into it, repeats it, gets forgotten as it gives way to the new event, and so on;[77] all the places visited on the way remain deathless, open to be visited again by remembering them but never as the same sensation. The negating keyword here is "sensation", not "the same", because the places *are* the same by being eternal, even if the moments of sensing them are not. Yet, since even the "moments" are given in timelessness, *they* do not exist for *themselves*, not as images or ghosts of their images in reality, but only as appearances unsupported by any underlying validity or form. They are the figures of Rousseau's art; and they might desire to know the truth beyond them only to learn that they cannot (whether due to full-blown disruption or subjective obstruction), but that does not mean they did not fully exist. It is just *inner* presence that they lack, empirical connection between two separate experiences – of the "self" and any "other" it meets. It is a self-created, self-sustaining dilemma which at all times resists its own resolution, of letting go of "me", because in the end it does not want to.

That is why Rousseau needs to find and be content with detours, with epiphanies and fleeting illuminations, to find relief to his own exigency. Hölderlin praised him for this in "Der Rhein". In the Fifth Walk of the *Reveries*, Rousseau

[76] Rousseau meditates on the theme of originary lying in the Fourth Walk of the *Reveries*, mainly to come to the conclusion that although in society lying is a vice, following one's own heart (regardless whether that involves lying or is insulting to other people) can only be a virtue. The sacrifice is necessary for the self's purification – as was the expiatory sacrifice of the "*pharmakoi*" in ancient Greece. The "*pharmakoi*" were men who were blameless in themselves but chosen to be treated harshly and expelled from the community at a certain time of the year for the continued welfare of the others. For Derrida's related critique of the word "*pharmakon*", ambivalently meaning both "poison" and "cure" within the same semantic act, see "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, transl. Barbara Johnson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[77] "If I did not experience it I might still fear it, but now that I have subdued it I have no more cause to fear" (ibid. 131). Rousseau says here that it is good to have feared because that has allowed him to "subdue" and move away from it. Although there is some self-deceit here (he knows that the fear will return anyhow), the point is that the power of memory has been enlivened and reinforced.

lets his calming sentiment of existence drift in the sublime daydream at the Lake of Bienne:

> Everything is in constant flux on this earth. Nothing keeps the same unchanging shape, and our affections, being attached to things outside us, necessarily change and pass away as they do. Always out ahead of us or lagging behind, they recall a past which is gone or anticipate a future which may never come into being; there is nothing solid there for the heart to attach itself to.[78]

Whereas the early de Man located here a reflection on temporal unreachability, the middle de Man encounters in it a lack of solidity even beyond the attempt of reaching itself. Rousseau's drifting announces a way for the timelessness of moments such as are given in existence ("in constant flux"), but it also imposes on them the necessity of being observed "outside us". The demand of the flawed primal self, the watching one, never truly relinquishes its authority to do this.[79] Therefore, the only final relief Rousseau can come to, the only utopia he can ultimately experience without giving up the heart and soul of his endeavour (his "self", that is), is not the perfect society or the re-naturalised virtuous man, but the absent-mindedly observing non-responsive subject. By its power of transcending event separation (although not sensation), memory awakens the life from beyond time: "[t]he memory of this state is enough to bring it back to life; if we completely ceased to experience it, we should soon lose all knowledge of it".[80]

Yet the awakened "thing", like the idea of the reverie itself, remains essentially "outside us", and so, if we are to approach it at all, if we are "to comprehend the transparency of the crystal ["self"] or the lake", what we must do is to "trust in their surface reflections, even though the presence of reflections betrays a lack of transparency".[81] In other words, we should come to believe in and surrender to appearances – a terrible thing for the young truth-building Rousseau – while at

78 ibid. 88.

79 Incidentally, the self is actually able to yield some of its esteem ("[m]y meditations are never more delightful than when I can forget myself"), but this seems to happen only with things that involve "the interests of [the] body" (ibid. 111) and a thorough surrendering is therefore not being considered. In addition, since for the old Rousseau his body is "now no more than an obstacle and a hindrance" (ibid. 33) anyway, the idea of forgetting one's self through disregarding the body sounds rather convenient.

80 ibid. 36. There is, however, also an inherent danger to the experience. Transporting Rousseau too intensely into a "past", the power of memory is able to *detain* him there and thus make him discriminate against new "presents": "Thus I reject all new ideas as fatal errors which have only a specious appearance of truth and are only fit to disturb my peace of mind" (ibid. 61).

81 Starobinski 260.

the same time forget that they are appearances. In theory, if one could do this, if one could relinquish the need for verification (that there must be some *other* truth in *this*) and simultaneously establish reality anew (*this* is the truth), might we not have something in our hands? Yet Rousseau seems to have it only in his eyes, his ideas being "hardly more than sensations now",[82] trying to watch, as in the beginning of *Julie*, "the scenery of *another* world, magically transformed by the transparency of the air… [with] the misfortune of *distance*… somehow attenuated".[83] And he attempts to verify it as that, with the aid of the "mnemonic signs" constellating in his "vast inner space".[84] Within him, he senses both natural images and signs with "a moral cause": the malice on "the faces of evil-doers", the "innocent joy" of a child, and "marks of pain and grief" arousing empathy.[85] By the power of these memories, the writer Rousseau is able to relive such sceneries to their fullest, such different worlds, ones he has known and continues to know. He does this *in spite of* them being radically outside "him", at a distance from the resisting, frightened self, and seeks only to come closer to the "others" that he, the paranoid ambling writing machine in his later day, forever hurries to meet. It is possible, through memory and watching, and the decision whether to hold on to something is based on these same powers: "[the] presence [of evil others] affects me in spite of myself, but never the memory of them… [w]hen I do not see them, it is as if they did not exist for me".[86] You remember only what you want, and that makes the sensation complete, but you cannot choose what you see and that means that a thing seen is a thing real. Rousseau both exalts and fears this truth and so continues to be drawn towards it *as if* there were something able to be thus lured.

In a sense, then, the point of this entire section has been to travel around Rousseau's writings with guidance from de Man (and Derrida and Starobinski) to find out how they map out the journey of his mind and how he finds himself turned down at every door he cares to knock at. With his heart on the sleeve of his numerous discourses through which he seeks acceptance, they (whatever "they" are in any given instance, good or bad) have him transported all over the place, now desiring living speech and sovereign society (immediate nature), now dreaming with stars reflecting in his eyes (mediate nature). It is all very dramatic,

82 Rousseau: *Reveries of the Solitary Walker.* 112.

83 Starobinski 81.

84 ibid. 166.

85 Rousseau: *Reveries of the Solitary Walker.* 147–8.

86 ibid. 100.

and articulating it like this makes me sound like that too. And therein lies the rub – in "me". Starobinski accepts it without further ado; de Man and Derrida locate the basis of Rousseau's reading in the impossible figure at its core. Their treatment of it is certainly very different: the allegorical de Man breaks the very space of (the figural) presence unconditionally, while Derrida allows the space to exist but writes it into a non-conditional givenness of presence supplemented (and displaced) by its own figures (which allow everything to exist without a doubt but not "as themselves"). The unison exists, though, about language – the "thing" which opens this difficult knowledge to awareness, with Rousseau standing at the threshold.

Throughout this thesis, nothing less has been asserted at any point, and it will continue to maintain its demand as the late de Man takes the allegorical mechanics of his deconstruction to another level in a move which might be characterised as a return to ontology – to renewed questions about the *phusis* of language instead of the *tekhne* of its mechanical functioning. At first, we will see this happening with the idea of "memory" in particular, going on from Rousseau to Nietzsche, Benjamin, Hegel, and Jauss. This will chart our way to the last place of de Manian theory where we just might be impressed with a familiar sensation. At that site, it will be the full-blown recognition of the "dark" rhetoric involved in this particular type of literary criticism that holds sway over imagination to drive out the last leagues of tropes (aesthetic judgment, history as catharsis) from its site. The figures are obstinate; they resiliently shelter themselves from the exclusion by all possible means, in any discourse imaginable, but in the end this fails to save them from a terrible fate. They are left suspended, petrified, and mutilated in a world which refuses to let them go after all. It must be remembered though – since remembering *is* always possible, as commemoration if nothing else – that such refusing requires that something be confronted each and every time, something irreducible to meet the senses. In Rousseau and his worlds, autobiographical or other, that thing was the flawed primal self, standing on the prospective field of its becoming, fearing fear, and never forgetting to return. De Man (and other critics too) needs this "thing" to express the criticism as he does, validating *his* reading of Rousseau on the way. That is all well and good; the break of understanding is there to be discovered for the one who looks, for the awaiter ready to fathom it in its unfathomableness.

One last thought, though: what if the "self" itself, the isolated natural primitive set in the frightening world, was let go? Never to return because "it" was never there to depart in the first place? With nothing to become because nothing awaited

or projected itself upon it, including "nothing"? Without the tension between "it" and "them", would not every illusion have been the same as every sensation and therefore the truth? How can such an understanding be thought without stopping to think, without ceasing to feel, or without accepting the world "as it is"? This is a useless fear (although a sensation can never be "useless") because language is always there in the middle to obviate the thought. Nothing linguistic is ever useless because uselessness is a linguistic thought, a forever critical, non-pragmatic expression of a cognitive instant already gone by. That is how the world is. Terms, words, images, impressions thought anew each time "within it" are not isolated but flowing,[87] making up the "outside" as they go, like the "real" event of the primordial man, or the real event of Rousseau thinking the primordial man. The memory of a glorious myth, that is.

(iv) Nietzsche and History

The second part of *Allegories of Reading*, as has been discussed, is dedicated in its entirety to Rousseau and the thoroughgoing allegorisations and deconstructions of discursivised non-cognitions that Rousseau needs to escape to, deeply inspired as he is by the fear of never actually reaching them. And that is then what happens; the ideas remain radically separate from the idea of the self which tries to grasp them and become one with them. Hence, the primal self comes to the awareness that, in order really to fulfill its desires, it must relinquish its demand to understand the objects of those desires and instead give in to the sensation of the immediate present. The aesthetic experience of nature thus becomes an utterly external perception, one upon which the experiencing self cannot have any kind of claim. The self does not vanish or die but it is emptied voluntarily into thin air. The de Man of the 1960s might have found in this activity the model of the ideal consciousness projected into the sky, akin to Saint-Preux's self-sustaining raptures in *Julie* and Hölderlin's linguistic flowers in the elegy "Brot und Wein".

87 Attempting to put into words this Heraclitean sensation, Philip Wheelwright says that, in this perspective, "things flow, in varying degrees and according to the emotional character of each occasion, into other things. Participation implies a partial but thoroughly real identity, a transcendence of either-or, an ontological tangency by which things empirically distinct blend into oneness". Philip Wheelwright: "Notes on Mythopoeia" *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966) 62. Like Rousseau's memory, Wheelwright's suggestion does have a unique "tangency" about it, even if a number of the terms employed ("emotional character", "transcendence of either-or") reveal the influence of I. A. Richards.

But this is not what the de Man of the late 1970s finds there. Instead, the earlier chance of a poetic choice is not in effect anymore for the cognitive mind to cleave itself from the positivistic fallacy of organic unity and so celebrate the superiority of unreachable natural being in a free and unhampered way. At this point, first through the awareness of earth as temporal resistance to any such projection into the sky (de Man up to *Blindness and Insight*) and, secondly, through the rejection of temporality as a total horizon for understanding (the deconstructionist de Man of the 1970s), the model of the Rousseauan self is not one of full existence somewhere else or one of resignation and retreat into a sheltering consciousness, but rather one of perpetually active, broken perception. Even time itself does not contain the wishes of the poet-critic-statesman any longer since, like for Baudelaire's painter of "perfection" Constantin Guys, the memory of things now applies naturally only in the present, and not in any fully imagined past or possible future. What this means is that not only is the understanding of things denied to us because they are locked away in another time (where they might have been understood, such as ancient Greece) but they are eternally broken away from us because of being displaced in the actual present. Consequently, the allegory with which we are left makes it so that even what we think we perceive right now and right here is always already a memory, a disrupted sign, an external aesthetic phenomenon which blurs its own outsideness only by still being *there* for the haplessly experiencing self. (This idea can be directly linked with the mechanics of the Hegelian deixis discussed later.) Rousseau wants to intoxicate himself with this opportunity; de Man mercilessly weans him from the habit, as has been shown.

Thus, it is only logical that the encounter constitutes a historical meeting of minds, a genetic confrontation. Does this mean then that there can be something yet which ensures a smooth continuous line of understanding between two separate points in time, beyond the sheer allegory and the assault on the common conception of human history? With due acuity, de Man takes up the issue in the first part of *Allegories of Reading*, in discussions of Nietzsche (along with Rilke and Proust). This is not surprising, perhaps: much of the weight of Nietzsche's philosophy hinges on the possibility to pass on in time the triumphant way of life he seeks to express through his writings. If Rousseau depends on a rather passive power of memory to sustain his vision, Nietzsche takes a more active approach in handing down his own legacy. This last chapter of the section shows how this (supposedly) happens and what de Man thinks about it. I will start by first recapitulating what has surfaced about Nietzsche in the thesis so far, and then go on to show how de Man deconstructs the genetic pattern the former's

philosophy apparently relies on. By doing this, the struggle found at the heart of Nietzschean thinking is reduced exactly into that – struggle – but it will not be able to communicate itself to anyone anymore.

It was described in section three how de Man's understanding of "history" developed before the late 1970s from his early ruminations on "inauthentic temporality" in connection with Heidegger and Hölderlin. Those thoughts explored an oblivious poetic present that ensured the full pastness of "authentic" temporality; and they made a "deconstructive" shift via the idea of a displaced allegorical present in the late sixties (the move is first evident in "Literary History and Literary Modernity", 1969). However, in the latter essay, literature was still able to represent "the fictional narration of [its own] movement" (LH 159) and provide the reader with something to navigate by, stars and linguistic signs, even if nothing representatively fixed or symbolically stable. In this way, (literary) history could remain a metaphysical kind of container for the modern wanderer, existing complete in its own temporal horizon, albeit one utterly beyond our actual reach. The irony of this awareness was the understanding of "awareness" itself as nothing but a "gamble" which Nietzsche could only hope would pass on (and be passed on by able thinkers) to those coming after us, in order for them to appreciate the irony themselves, the non-fiction of our forever becoming (in) history. This would be a daunting task for anyone, outlined with a nihilist seriousness;[88] and de Man, for his part, would certainly be attracted by the attempt.

In beginning to deconstruct Nietzsche's Herculean effort, one needs first to have an idea of its initial scope. One way of setting the stage up is by establishing his relationship to traditional science. Julian Young says this about Nietzsche's stance on "Socratism", the maintained belief in our (scientific) ability to "control both nature and human nature", as shown in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> And though nature, unaided by man, may lack teleology, it is nonetheless possible for us to remedy this by ourselves imparting progressive movement to world history. Theoretical man is even likely to welcome the terror and

[88] In his 1930s lectures on Nietzsche and his unfinished philosophical project, Heidegger says that "[i]n Nietzsche's view nihilism is not a *Weltanschauung* that occurs at some time and place or another; it is rather the basic character of what happens in Occidental history." In consequence, nihilism is more than "mere collapse, valuelessness, and destruction"; as "a basic mode of historical movement", it "even requires and further, for long stretches of time, a certain creative upswing". To sustain and uphold this insight, what is then required in history is "a breed of men who can bring a new attitude to the new valuation". Heidegger: *Nietzsche, Volumes I and II* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991) volume I, 26–7.

> aimlessness of nature as a challenge, a spur to scientific research and action, a source of excitement[.][89]

As far as the "spur" mentioned here is concerned, Nietzsche endorses the Socratic mindset unreservedly. But that is soon left behind as the disposition in question, the belief in "the unbounded power of science" is revealed as "a terrible error" which refuses to admit "the character of ultimate reality", the world as "ceaseless flux, a boiling sea of eternal 'becoming'" which establishes the "metaphysical certainty that history is a cycle of creation and destruction".[90] The transcendental truths and stable ideas of Kant and Schopenhauer are ripped apart and set aside as Socratic fallacies which remain necessarily blind to themselves. Into this "terrible" scene of historical turmoil enter then Nietzsche's two mythical strands of existence, the Apollonian and Dionysian. The former guarantees the world as nothing but representation and idea and the latter as *anything but* representation and (illusion of) idea. In this twofold semblance the world is guaranteed as that which is sensed and perceived, but nothing of that experiencing must be set down as idea or ideal because that enervates it. Instead, the becoming must remain unhampered in order to let reality live. As Heidegger says, as someone who appreciates Nietzsche's philosophical "distinctiveness" in elucidating *what is* even if the latter forgets to ask *what being* is for itself: in this living reality "[s]emblance itself is proper to essence of the real [and we] can readily see that in the perspectival character of the actual".[91] In this thoroughly dynamic, aesthetic environment, the will to power, as an agent of the experiencing self, operates between two antipodes (reason and intuition) which, in essence, are relative and non-dialectical (and thus completely existing in themselves and for each other). Subsequently, they are present in full force in each and every single manifestation of the world's becoming in history. The Nietzschean "cycle of creation and destruction" that inevitably follows and founds this perception is a drama of the highest order, forever kept going by its own inability to end itself while simultaneously kept in check by its rational need to observe itself and establish truths about its tragic nature. It is the privilege of great minds to be aware of this and finally to pass the knowledge on to future generations. However, this place of connection, this historic nexus, is exactly the

89 Julian Young: *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 40.

90 ibid. 41.

91 Heidegger: *Nietzsche*. Volume I, 213.

spot where de Man, spurred on by an apparently Socratic backlash, locates the inherent breaking point of Nietzsche's dramatic philosophical epic.

It is not too hard to see how de Man's laboratory mindset corresponds with what Young calls in Nietzsche "the Socratic belief in the unbounded power of science"; after all, de Man never stops testing philosophy and literature for valid scientific results. The presupposition of there *perhaps* being such results never comes into question, simply because without the presupposition there would be no question (of language) to be asked in the first place, whether literal or rhetorical. This mindset is what de Man then brings to Nietzsche, together with an understanding of Kant and Hegel that surreptitiously has the reader to understand that although Nietzsche had good reasons for opposing and criticising them, he somehow just got them wrong. It seems as if in his explicit rejection of Kantian truths and Hegelian abstractions, in order to find a more tangible feel of human existence, Nietzsche does manage to articulate something new (the genetic pattern of understanding) but in the end falls prey to his precursors – indeed ends up raving mad from "the endlessly repeated gesture of the artist" who is forced to relive each old mistake.[92] As a result, the "endless tension of a non-identity" hovers over the eternal recurrence of the exposed subject and "contaminates the very source of the will, the will as source".[93] In this way the affirmation that is supposed to validate the self's self-destructive experience of the endless manifestations of world becomes shaky and erratic ("because it still sees itself as the center that produces the affirmation"[94]) and thus falls short of founding an actual basis for the triumphant Nietzschean subject ("*Übermensch*") to enjoy the good life of Dionysian indulgence. And, even if the thought was transported from the phenomenon of tragic philosophy to literature or any other art which admitted its own non-affirmability straight from the off, the admission would not serve to validate the (non-)affirmation any more than it would in any other case; any linguistic mode or discourse is "not the less deceitful because it asserts its own deceitful properties".[95] This means to Nietzsche and the later (post)modern

92 "The Rhetoric of Tropes" AR 118.

93 "Genesis and Genealogy" AR 99.

94 "The Rhetoric of Tropes" AR 111.

95 ibid. 115. This failure of any cognitive discourse – artistic, cultural, or philosophical – to found itself in the "living" world has had great impact on critical theory since the early 20th century. Half of the effort involves post-Romantic self-positing of a self-destructive self within a discourse to prevent it from being lost; the other half strives to make the "voice" of the affected subject express, and so partly found, his or her own environment. Among others, in a filiation of Pearcean semiotics which grounds its subject(s) in the living world, as opposed to de Saussure, the ramifications of the failure can be seen in the linguistic theory of Bakhtin,

philosopher-artist seeking fulfillment or gratification in clever artistic tricks, such as metafiction for metafiction's sake and the audience's shock or stupefaction, that the question of language remains inherent there, too – perhaps more intensely than ever because of being toyed with. The happy melancholy or frivolous absurdity of much of 20th century art and poetry might turn out to be not so happy or frivolous after all.[96] Hedonism, or gothic melancholy as its counterpart at the other end, fails as a philosophy of life because essentially it abides by the very same logic and form as any other philosophy (whether of "concrete" and "practical" or of "abstract" and "theoretical" life) and is thus forever bound to the question of language that it never quits asking. Only the situations change.

This is the concept of history Nietzsche's thinking points towards but then mistakenly assumes to have arrived at, as if it were now able to pass on the knowledge to others without break or disruption. It was precisely this break and disruption that made up and enabled the functioning of the whole of Nietzschean philosophy in the first place. The formal living subject falls in the same cognitive trap time and again, beset and haunted by the burden of history which may only call itself "cyclical" and bequeath it if the metaphor is overlooked and simply believed in. The mechanism is exactly the same as it was with Rousseau and his discourses; the difference is just that Nietzsche, unlike Rousseau, is not obsessed with the epistemological validity of his cognitive self and the impressions from the "outside" experienced by "it" on the "inside". In contrast, Nietzsche has the faith to take the self's activity for granted, to forget "its" form absolutely, and take it as a given. In its essence, the self is not, in other words, a figure for him. Rousseau does not take anything essential for granted, his awareness extends everywhere, even to the figural necessity of the flawed primal self, and that is also why de Man appreciates the insight more.

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the heady literary meditations of Lawrence, and the cultural-rebel ideologies of Barthes, Foucault, and Deleuze. While Barthes became, rather self-contentedly, "unable to understand his own discourse" ("Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism" RCC 174), Foucault deproblematised the juxtaposition of complex critical notions by pointing the possibility out "as a mere historical fact" (PMK 70), and Deleuze failed to fathom that the diachronic symmetry of the Nietzschean narrative was "in fact an illusion" ruled over by "synchronic structures" ("Genesis and Genealogy" AR 85) which radically disrupted their founding in the surrounding world. In this way, the de Manian critique of Nietzsche extends into these areas, as well.

[96] On the more elegant side, one might think here of the work of a poet such as Wallace Stevens or playwrights like Beckett and Pinter. On the mass culture side, it would not be too far-fetched to consider the self-consciously pop lives and deaths of rock and movie stars, among others.

To sum up: on one hand, de Man's deconstruction of the Nietzschean genetic pattern (which the process of historical filiation has left "unaffected" by "the allegorization and ironization of the organic model"[97]) follows the affirmation of history as totally unconducive to positive growth or connection between the events that constitute it, but, on the other hand, it also exceeds and breaks it as having fallen short of its own ultimate promise. Because even if Nietzsche were "violently anti-Romantic in his cultural ideology" and seemingly set on the necessary illusion of the material aesthetic present, the conclusion cannot be avoided that, for him, "the history of the struggle between fathers and sons remains in essence divine" and therefore metaphysically removed from the material actuality of the critical present.[98] In the de Manian terminology of the time, the genetic pattern becomes another literary figure, one similar to Rousseau's daydreams, an allegory suspended in philosophy's service and inscribed as a trope *between* the Apollonian and Dionysian strands of existence, or the constative and performative dimensions of language (where "one claims and the other does"), in a manner akin to Rousseau's state-building vision of sovereignty. Both of these attempts, however glorious or noble, are displaced from "real" history by way of being nothing but linguistic events, the mute parataxes of their own memories.

In consequence, the fathers and sons are unable to speak the process of their own filiation, mythical or rational, simply because the syntax for it remains unknown; all they can do is *hope* that history will be served right by the communication exchanged. And in saying that also the reader of Nietzsche (and Rousseau and de Man) is actually provided with the sole critical alternative that he or she has in any given instance: either think or believe the promise of that hope. But this choice is not as straightforward as it seems. In Nietzsche's own way, as articulated by Heidegger, "[t]he thinking of the most difficult thought is a believing", and since "[a]s fixation, belief is the securing of permanence",[99] what actually remains of any such securing in worldly reality is just the most difficult thought imaginable, the "thought that inaugurates a new history",[100] the one that Nietzsche the father figure wants us to remember as radiant sons. However, at this point, on this very edge of memory, even such thinking is bound to remain

97 "Genesis and Genealogy" AR 80.

98 ibid. 81.

99 Heidegger: *Nietzsche*. Volume II, 129.

100 ibid. 131. Moreover, this "new history" of Nietzsche would not be merely "another series of happenstances", it would be different in its "*kind* of happening, acting, and creating". Heidegger's own stance in understanding being anew is clearly in agreement with Nietzsche in this respect.

undecidable and unbelievable, brought to bear on us from the past only by the revealed matter of (its) historical materiality. In his turn, as we will see in the next section, the late de Man founds, exposes, and passes on the consciousness of this rigorously "philological" insight by a renewed awareness of what it means to understand "in a world" now that the attempt has already disrupted the limits of "mere" mortal temporality (Hölderlin) and spatial displacement (Rousseau). By still encountering new events to resist and new authors to read, in ways other than those already rhetoricised, de Man returns from a site of sheer language-writing-itself to a place where the inevitability appears against what resists being written into it. Against the world, that is.

5 Late de Man: The Rhetorical Parabasis

De Man says in the essay "The Concept of Irony" in *Aesthetic Ideology* (transcribed from a 1977 lecture which predates the publishing of *Allegories of Reading*) that, in theory, parabasis marks "the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register" (CI 178). A while later he comes to conclude that "irony is the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes", and so we will have to see, what this formulation means in the de Manian context (CI 179). While in Greek comedy parabasis was an intermission during which the chorus delivered a song that was aimed directly at the audience and did not pertain to the play being performed at all,[1] and while in Italian *commedia dell'arte* the break was effected by the comic *buffo*, de Man develops the notion to discuss Friedrich Schlegel's thoughts on the ironic nature of language, with references to Hegel, Kierkegaard, Proust, and Benjamin. The jargon used reveals its affinity with the general tenor of the middle de Man, but it seems there is something even more pressing already going on here than the sheer "omni-rhetorisation" of the literary linguistic subject mechanised by de Man's deconstruction of Rousseau in *Allegories of Reading*. In a manner akin to the essay "Literary History and Literary Modernity" from 1969 which already started in its own time to break away from de Man's early understanding of history as a total temporal horizon, the "permanent parabasis" of language so heavily advanced in "The Concept of Irony" challenges some of the more localised displacements (apparently) restricted to literature that are to be found in *Allegories of Reading*. Keeping the de Manian momentum going, the human predicament that is the question of language is thus induced on to an even more expansive level, and returned to a world that contains it, beyond the rhetorical technicalities of the discipline. In so many words, the level is the (quasi-transcendental) place of all pertinent discourses relating to the cognitive use of language, which is to say *all* human discourses: philosophy, politics, and natural sciences among them. These are obviously the same things Rousseau wanted to make work and participate in, but in the end he remained unable to carry them beyond their original literary domain, failing in the transporting attempt. The

[1] Encyclopaedia Britannica – The Online Encyclopedia at <www.britannica.com>, 18 Jun 2008.

late de Man assumes the duty of articulating this breakdown for us in an even more comprehensive way.

This section in the thesis is concerned with the late de Man's crystallisations, as it were, of his own critical development in the course of his academic career. What these theoretical "gems" intend to communicate is their own ultimate incommunicability; the aporias involved in this paradoxical but inescapable process fail to make any sense of themselves but nonetheless persist in asking the question of their own being (and relation to other beings) because without it, there would not be awareness of any kind. As argued, this is the bewildering (para)basis of all cognition, and to question it is, once again, to ask the question of language. *That* is the only de Manian necessity there is, in life and literature, and in this section, we will see how this fact affects any idea of the allegorical present as more than cognitive displacement (Benjamin), the history of human Spirit as philosophical sublation (Hegel), the hermeneutic possibility of a poetic catharsis (Jauss), irony as a flash of true understanding (Schlegel), as well as the rational logic of being able to make voluntary judgments (the transcendental imperative of Kant's philosophy). We will witness de Man leaving no stone unturned in this sheer process of criticising by language; none of thought's domains will be able to stand apart. Eventually, the ghostly contours forming around de Man's critical theory in its different stages – from the 1940s literary anti-alchemist to the 1950s and 60s temporal ontologist to the 1970s automated allegorist to the 1980s maker of the material event – come into a consistent light along undrawn lines. What the stages show is the incomplete figure for what it is: a holding container of its own (and the other) power, similar with itself in language, an invaluable total form.

In the "Task of the Translator" (1921), written as a foreword to his own German translation of Baudelaire's "Tableaux parisiens", Walter Benjamin describes such a figure in terms of a "vessel". He is thinking the relation of translation to original text:

> Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.[2]

[2] Walter Benjamin: "The Task of the Translator", transl. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926* (Cambridge and London: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1997) 260.

Should this translation by Harry Zohn be taken at face value, it would seem that Benjamin here espouses the kind of recuperative linguistic reconstruction of a meaningful signification gone bad at some point (for one reason or another) which can be put back together in the translation of the original by a careful inspection and the "incorporation" of the results into the linguistic entity at hand. This idea would allow Benjamin to be thought of as a believer in the writer's chance to find "damaged" meaning in a similarly "damaged" text and to correct it in order to both improve upon it and express something of the original truth contained therein, in the concrete particulars of "a greater language". For de Man, who does not write specifically about Benjamin all that much over his academic career, this possibility is an unappealing one, since it would grant the writer the chance both to step out of the hermeneutic circle ruled over by temporal restraints (the "greater language" remaining unaffected by such limits) *and* to exceed the technical bounds of figural expression (as the "fragments", or rhetorical tropes, would finally coalesce into a whole). In other words, merely the suggesting of such a (mystical) possibility challenges everything he has been saying so far about how language and literature work.

How does this relate to de Man's late shift towards a "permanent parabasis" of language? In the essay "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'", delivered as the last of his six Messenger Lectures at Cornell University in 1983 (with others focused on Kant and Hegel, for instance, as will be discussed later), de Man takes up Benjamin's essay and Zohn's English translation of it (along with Maurice de Gandillac's French version), and subjects them to scrutiny. Consequently, he finds certain decisive mistakes in Zohn's translation of the quotation given above. For, according to de Man, and Carol Jacobs whose more literal rending of Benjamin's passage he cites, in talking about particular linguistic "fragments", Benjamin does not mention them being "part of a vessel" but the "broken parts" of such a container. Moreover, de Man says that when Zohn talks about "glueing together" and "matching" the pieces with one another, he endows the event with a "totally irrelevant concreteness" and a "metaphorical unifying pattern" which distort Benjamin's original "articulation" of a "metonymic, successive pattern": the parts "follow" ("*folgen*") rather than "match" ("*gleichen*") one another (TT 90). Instead of making possible the mystical reconstruction of a broken language, the revealing of its original, "essentially fragmentary" form only highlights and reinforces the permanence of the (translation's) basically shattered state:

> The translation is the fragment of a fragment, is breaking the fragment – so the vessel keeps breaking, constantly – and never reconstitutes it; there was no vessel in the first place, or we have no knowledge of this vessel, or no awareness, no access to it, so for all intents and purposes there has never been one. (TT 91)

De Man's concluding argument in the lecture tends towards establishing this aporetic insight,[3] which depends on a constant figuration of transcendent existence but which does not hesitate to smash it. He supports his characteristic reasoning on the way not only by criticising other translation mistakes made by Zohn and de Gandillac (related to organic metaphors and qualifying prefixes) but also by picking on those critics who are eager to write off Benjamin as a Messianist (the Konstanz School and Geoffrey Hartman being mentioned here), *and* by carrying along with him a few pairs of dichotomies he finds analogous to the decisive "part"/ "broken parts" aporia exposed above.

The metaphor/metonymy pair was set down as one of these oppositions, with others including poet/translator, poetry/criticism, nature/history, imitation/derivation, life/death (but also life/afterlife), human/inhuman, pathos/language, *logos*/*lexis*, meaning/way of meaning, *Wort* and *Satz*. (The last opposition seems to be given the wrong way around since de Man translates the terms as grammar and meaning respectively, but we will see about this.) Of these binaries, which the pairs more or less make up, the first term is nearly always the one which in its rush to dream up meaning forgets the ever-present condition of the second one, the genetic technical necessity of its own constitution.[4] In the list, however, there are

[3] "Fragments" will be discussed further in the Romantic context in connection with Schlegel below. Benjamin mentions him too, even if never exactly glowingly, as an "eminent translator" but a "lesser" poet or creative writer. And Benjamin should know, too: his Ph. D. thesis "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism" (1920) had Schlegel as one of its main targets. Benjamin: "The Task of the Translator" 258.

[4] In "Ending Up/Taking Back", Andrzej Warminski reproves such forgetting in de Man's terms of its consequent "confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" (quoted from "The Resistance to Theory" RT 11). Warminski says: "In the case of the inside/outside metaphor as a textual model, the confusion consists in thinking of the text, a linguistic artifact, in terms consistent with a phenomenology of the self and its experience of the "natural", phenomenal world: here, as though the text were a box with an inside and an outside" (26). In other words, should one forego the awareness of an linguistic text for a "boxed" understanding of "me" relating to "the world", one also foregoes a true sense of historical reality: such an understanding is "not historical" and it assumes as language "what is only its represented, alienated, ideological, ghostly self and not that which is its material reality" (ibid.). However, it must also be noted that Warminski is unable to forget about the "box" himself – instead he pins the entire weight of his argument on its true existence as a disrupted binary. The gesture is iconoclastic; it actually believes in the truth of the "confused" model before deconstructing it. As will be shown, the same need haunts de Man's theory. Andrzej Warminski: "Ending Up/Taking Back" *Critical Encounters: Reference*

two exceptions to this, and they might prove crucial to understanding something of de Man's own writing make-up. Firstly, de Man's tactic of hurrying on to talking about "death" as opposed to the connotations of "life" normally implied in the usage of words such as "human" and "pathos" always seems to catch the reader (or members of the listening audience in this case) abruptly and unexpectedly, and one cannot help but think that the rhetorical effect is an intentional device on de Man's part. Being hit on the head about how human discourses, in truth, work – "They kill the original, by discovering that the original was already dead" (TT 84) – certainly succeeds in making a memorable (pedagogical) point, but it remains questionable whether such shock tactics can be *validated* within the rigorous logic of the theory being articulated. De Man would probably have brushed the question aside, and simply made use of it as an effective tool, but the fact that such effectiveness does exist, and it helps to express something totally contrary, is a clear marker of de Man's own dependency on it. He would have *refused* to have it any other way, to think the question of language any differently, because that would have left him stranded without recourse to "life". It would have cleanly severed him from a voluntary symbiosis with an involuntary host: the impossible organic trope, such as the reconstructible human vessel, would have expunged the possible rhetorical trope from its meaningless body and continued to live on in a different way, without the cognitive parasite. De Man needs the aesthetic residue (aesthetic because it depends on sensate impressions) involved in this language for his own expressing of it in the form of a particular criticism. Without the irreducible residue, there would be no "original" to any translation to be read "from the perspective of a pure language (*reine Sprache*), a language… entirely freed of the illusion of meaning". What this kind of reading reveals, or "brings to light", in its strictly technical functioning, is "a dismembrance, a de-canonization which was already there in the original from the beginning". This ontological "dismembrance", or "a particular alienation, a particular suffering" (TT 84), "*Wehen*" in Benjamin's terms, then derives from nothing but a natural, possibly organic essence beyond our understanding. The difference between de Man and Benjamin though is that whereas the former imitates, in the form of rhetorical deconstruction, the dual effect of the essence and the pain in language,

and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing, eds. Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

the latter erodes the opposition in just showing it to us, by being able to remain "melancholy" in his "afterlife" beyond death.[5]

The second exception to the binaries list of de Man's essay becomes apparent in doing that. Since Benjamin does not have his discourse "die" immutably but rather keeps it living on (or "over-living", "*überleben*") in the alienated present, there is a reason why the former needs to exert some pressure on Wort and Satz in order to translate them as grammar and meaning, and make them serve the argument in doing so. With de Man describing *Satz* both as "the most fundamental statement" (linked up with Heidegger) and "the way in which you state", and *Wort* both "as syntax and as grammar" and "in terms of the grammatical relationships between [particular] words" (TT 88), he may posit them in a way in which "[t]he two are absolutely independent of each other" but in which they still remain feeding on the parasitic symbiosis required for the particular "intralinguistic" (TT 84) expression. Benjamin, on the other hand, says this (in Zohn's translation):

> Fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully reproduce the sense they have in the original. For this sense, in its poetic significance for the original, is not limited to what is meant but rather wins such significance to the degree that what is meant is bound to the way of meaning of the individual word.[6]

With "significance" being "bound to the way of meaning ("Art des Meinens") of the individual word", the possibility of there ever being cognitive meaning in the world totally depends on what the "way of meaning" may be said to be. For de Man, this saying cannot be done because the way of saying the meaning can never be said: a permanent break exists right there. Benjamin would agree with this in so far the meaning was being said intentionally, either consciously or non-

[5] Benjamin's difference to de Man in this respect may be illustrated with a theoretical example. When Warminski challenges, with the help of Marx's reading of Feuerbach, the philosophy of "the (Hegelian or Young Hegelian) primacy of consciousness" (ibid. 31) as "one, simple determined negation *of* consciousness" which places itself on "the side of real life" and thus "alienates language from itself by occulting, covering up, its material, over-determined contradictions", he comes to the conclusion that the problem of such philosophy is, as identified by Marx, that it turns "the problem of descending from the world of thoughts… into the problem of descending from language to life" (ibid. 33). The image of the "descent" is thus crucial to Warminski; he enthuses that those committed to it fail to understand that, even without it, "language was already life, already living!". By first believing in the image, and then deconstructing it, Warminski effects his own de Manian "reverse descent", remaining within the figuration. Benjamin, on the other hand, would not need to hang on to the conscious image in terms of its truth or untruth, because for him, it would just represent another finite, melancholy sign of his own natural "afterlife".

[6] Benjamin: "The Task of the Translator" 260.

consciously,[7] but he would not agree with the claim that "meaning" and "way of meaning" were "absolutely independent of each other". This is because, for him, the former is "*bound*" to the latter in its particular instance: significant meaning may only be gleaned in the *form* of the moment which "ties" them together. Hölderlin's "monstrous" translations of Sophocles are examples of just such moments, of such literalness which has no interest "in retaining the meaning" in translation. But since "the demand for literalness" is not extinguished by such experiments, it must be the *form* in which language works that keeps hold of both of its signifying dimensions – allowing both monsters and dead things to appear – and in doing so decides each and every instance in which something is stated about its way of meaning.[8] And, in order to be there for the next instance, that form must be like that extraordinary, "broken", non-existent vessel imaged by Benjamin.

Which means that the recuperative Messianism often attributed to Benjamin (maybe by himself as well) does not really fit the allegorical scene in which he figures his own alienated present. A saviour is unable to come *there* where *he* exists, and so he remains content in reading the displaced signs of the saviour in his time-ridden reality.[9] (De Man overlooks, or misunderstands, the fact that even if for Benjamin nothing can commit this melancholy act of historical nihilism "by its own volition" (Benjamin quoted in TT 93), it is still a state of remaining whole.) In this way, Hölderlin's literal translations of Sophocles also may be experienced on a different level; "[i]n them the harmony of the languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind".[10] The mythical image thus conjured up is imbued with an aura of stillness and given to the elements in an existing displaced space,

7 It may be noted here that even though the early de Man too would have enthusiastically agreed that there could be no conscious meaning-saying in literature, he would have vehemently argued that non-conscious intention was still possible (as was seen with the "experience" of the disrupted ending of Hölderlin's hymn being prefigured in the poem from the beginning in a "neutral, non-conscious state", PT 70). By this late point, however, that insight had become obsolete for de Man.

8 Benjamin: "The Task of the Translator" 260.

9 Peter Szondi describes this sensibility of Benjamin's against that of Proust in terms of the former not wanting "to free himself from temporality" and not wishing "to see things in their ahistorical essence". Since the return of the Messiah would mean the end of time (the end of the world), Benjamin *needs* to stand at a distance from his own present (if he did not, he might begin to see the Messiah there), and thus find his (apocalyptic) consolation in allegorically reading, and experiencing, the signs of the "other" present located elsewhere. To help him do this, in his writings, he is "sent back into the past" which, however, is "open, not completed, and which promises the future". Peter Szondi: "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin" *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays* 153.

10 Benjamin: "The Task of the Translator" 262.

which brushes against us constantly but which never comes *here* from *there*. The incomprehensible literalness of Hölderlin becomes for Benjamin a touchstone of formal consciousness which, in its rigorous way of meaning makes it sure that meaning does exist but *not here*, not in this instance. Should we begin to think the opposite (that meaning *is* actually here) we place ourselves in danger of starting to plunge the meaning "from abyss to abyss until it threaten[ed] to become lost in the bottomless depths of language".[11] De Man exhorts us take this warning strictly in "the non-pathetic, technical sense" (TT 86), in the non-illusionary way of meaning the text itself is made to figure. But then he also says that "pure language" (*reine Sprache*), the immediate power of divine creation, is "perhaps more present in the translation than in the original, but in the mode of trope" (TT 92). That does not really sound as if poetics and Holy Writ were "absolutely independent of each other", after all. It might also be that de Man has simply forgotten about such sayings, since the contiguity between the two (translation and original, grammar and scripture) does break every time he remembers to look their way. But still they remain there, pure, to be looked at.

What this means, then, is that any saying done in a way of meaning ("Art des Meinens") expressing an object at a distance ("das Gemeinte") is a remembering. For Wordsworth poetry came spontaneously into being through "emotion recollected in tranquillity"; for Rousseau the memory of events witnessed guaranteed the survival of his sentiment into the future; and for Nietzsche the "radiant sons" of the next generation never forgot the philosophical lesson of their fathers. For Benjamin, on his part, there is in the baroque *Trauerspiel* of the displaced present a corpse-like deadness which, "seen from the point of view of death", turns into its opposite: "the product of the corpse is life".[12] We have an enlivening experience and, in our heads, we understand why. The memory is alive on the stage, as we can see, and it is not brought to bear on us from the outside by a higher law or a greater idea – instead the remembering remains rooted in the instant at hand. The particular moment is given by nature in general but blown to pieces by time, salvaged only prophetically in the afterlife of the present corpse:

[11] ibid.

[12] Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, transl. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998) 218. Benjamin finds similar lines of such reverse life-generation in Baudelaire too: "What speaks to us in his poetry is not the reprehensible confusion of [moral] judgment but the permissible reversal of perception" Walter Benjamin: "Baudelaire (II, III)" *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, transl. Rodney Livingstone. 362.

> It is no accident that precisely nails and hair, which are cut away as dead matter from the living body, continue to grow on the corpse. There is in the physis, in the memory itself, a *memento mori*.[13]

No pathos is lost on the image of the corpse which, in its theatrical afterlife, nonetheless continues to remind the watchers in the audience of their mortality, their naturalness, their life. The truth of memory (*phusis*) is embodied in the language of art (*tekhne*) which *does not* plunge "from abyss to abyss" but stays rather dead on the stage, figuring its "greater" meaning (or dramatic semantics) only by the remembrance of its once having been alive.[14] Which, in aesthetic actuality, it still is: the corpse lives on in us, beyond our own deaths ("*überleben*"), and in that sense we, together with Benjamin, may forever hold on to the hope of reading the fragmented, residual, life-generating signs shown to us in the art. De Man denies this possibility because for him the residue remains unshown, out of sight, and, against Benjamin's view, there is no essential "continua of transformation" in the signs being formally translated from a material sensation to another. Instead, there are "abstract areas of identity and similarity"[15] between which tropological referentiality necessarily operates and perpetually fails, as de Man has shown. For him the death of the dramatic figure denotes the death of memory and the watching sensation, as well; and as the single character on the stage there remains only the linguistic disruption to step forth.

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13 Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. 218.

14 "For this much is self-evident: the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse. And the characters of the Trauerspiel die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory." ibid. 217. However, the characters do not even have to be necessarily dead (yet) to achieve this. Howard Caygill finds this allowance as the "mark of the mutual dependence of death in life and life in death"; in Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (1809), it is the *shape* of the character Ottilie's which shows that "death in life… is being undergone: the absolute as death is not abstract and removed but is present and leaves its mark on finite existence" (51). Caygill's account is altogether convincing on this point, especially when considered in the light of his understanding of Benjamin's post-Kantian situating of "the particularity of the transcendental condition of experience within the speculative context of the infinite configuration of surfaces or 'absolute composition'" (4). Thus the allegorical presence of death on the stage is certainly an "infinitely configurable" experience. Howard Caygill: *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). See also Caygill: "The Significance of Allegory in the 'Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels'" *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeeth Century. Proceedings of the Essex Conference in the Sociology of Literature*, eds. Francis Barker et al. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1981).

15 Walter Benjamin: "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, transl. Edmund Jephcott. 70. De Man never refers to this essay specifically in his discussion of Benjamin, which, given the explicit title and content of it (in which the "translatability of languages into one another" is established by the "continua of transformation" mentioned in the text), is a rather curious choice.

The stance of active historical nihilism which says that nothing remains in time and we must know this (and let others know it too) in order to be prepared for it and make something happen is one which appealed to both Benjamin and de Man, but, as may be claimed, it is also the one thing which de Man clearly misunderstood about Benjamin. It was said earlier that the crucial difference between de Man and Benjamin's "ways of meaning" is that whereas the former imitates the desired effect of the "dismembrance" he finds in language in the form of rhetorical deconstruction, the latter remains content (or "melancholy" in the "afterlife") in just showing the "dismembrance" to us, along with the pains ("*Wehen*") that follow the discovery. Now it can be said, in the light of the entire scene of their encounter, that Benjamin's kind of "*memento mori*" memory is not on a par with the de Manian memory as a mechanical faculty of maddening signs. For the former finds memory and meaning (the *phusis* of Benjamin) in the fragmentary understanding of the cognitively displaced, allegorical present which torments him with its time-riddenness. Whereas the latter reduces memory and meaning into the rhetorical understanding (the *tekhne* of de Man) of an ontologically disrupted cognition – which ironically grounds itself only beside itself, in parabasis. That ground, strictly speaking, is nowhere, except at the site of the haplessly attempted cognition. Benjamin would not have been troubled by the predicament, as that would have been for him *the way things are*, but de Man refuses to rest in that insight. He will not acquiesce with the "symbol of the noncommunicable"[16] in which God's word, the "paradox" of aesthetic criticism that "must have the last word",[17] unfolds its signs to Benjamin. And so he turns to Hegel's word instead.

(i) Hegel and History

In the context of Hegel, it will firstly be very useful to see what happened to de Manian "history" in the wake of his deconstruction of Nietzsche and the idea of literary history (as opposed to literary modernity) which had already been heavily undermined early on in de Man's career. Tracing the evolution of the aporia of history in these terms (as something which both permits and breaks human understanding), on one hand, Kevin Newmark says that in late essays like "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" (in AI) de Man harbours "a very

16 Walter Benjamin: "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" 74.

17 Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. 216.

strong sense of rejection" of historical schemes "based ultimately on *organic* (that is, nonlinguistic) referential models".[18] This is indeed what de Man does express both there (with Hegel's notorious end-of-art thesis as the ultimate "irony of literary history", SS 94) and in the older, already discussed "Literary History and Literary Modernity", in which every single "positivistic history that sees literature only as what it is not"[19] gets scrapped. On the other hand, there lingers in the late de Man also a different kind of history, brought into the open in essays like "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric" (in RR). This alternative history Newmark calls "a history that is neither genetic nor empirical, but [one] that also does not represent a refusal to acknowledge the complexities of language",[20] and what better way to observe the de Manian mindset than by exposing such critical interests?

For its materials, the essay revisits Baudelaire and the reading of two of his most famous poems, "Correspondances" and "Obsession". What Newmark finds de Man to be concerned with there pivots on the particular form of the "temple" imaged in the first lyric:

> A temple is a *verbal* building because it stands on consecrated ground, on ground that has been marked out *verbally*… a temple is holy only so long as it is verbally marked as such and such a temple. In other words, there can be no temple without an *act* of language that marks out its ground as the site for a temple, and some form of *memory* or text in which the act is inscribed. Such an act which, like the temple, establishes the limit for all else in the poem, and because it is indisputable and infinitely iterable, is the only thing in the poem that is truly *historical* in the sense of being an actual occurrence necessary for any reading of the text.[21]

With history thus being "a linguistic event, the arrangement of verbal buildings, a syntax of inscriptions that exists to be memorized and then read",[22] the ambiguous tropes of "*comme*" and "*transports*" in Baudelaire's poem become deprived of any organic (natural) or sacred function. They become unable to either ground or connect the different levels of the poem's subject matter in "one deep

18 Kevin Newmark: "The History of Paul de Man" *Reading de Man Reading*, eds. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 122.

19 "Literary History and Literary Modernity" BI 164.

20 Newmark 122.

21 ibid. 132.

22 ibid. 133.

and shadowy unison / as limitless as darkness and as day",[23] and the experience of profound correspondences striven towards is lost. No sacrifice of the poet's consciousness, or melancholy idea an "afterlife", is enough to redeem this state anymore. "History" has become a breaking force *par excellence*, ultimate inhuman performativity, kept in necessary check, in our awareness, only by its never-ending glances (Newmark's "acts of language") against our individual experience – our obligation to "memorize" and "read" the "indisputable and infinitely iterable" acts suddenly encountered. Poetic figures are said to be "truly *historical*" only in this kind of intractably material existence, and Newmark's de Manian reading of de Man reading Baudelaire is admirable in its repeating of this deconstructionist concern, and it shows it perhaps in its most mature form. Towards the end, the name of Hegel is again raised, and brought into the fray at its very climax.

One way of crossing over there from de Man's historical Baudelaire is by way of the trope of movement itself. In Newmark's discussion of Baudelaire's "*transports*" (a lexical compound of "beyond" and "carrying"), he muses over the possibility of reading the metaphor as just that, literally as "metaphor", as a semantic unit which allows for the "carrying" ("-port", "-phor") to be "its own subject and leave the "beyond" ("trans-", "meta-") as "its somewhat redundant attribute". Read this way, the syntactic movement of a poem, a work of art, or any linguistic event would be "truly dialectical" and by its "series of discrete negations" guarantee "at once to have itself as subject"[24] – in a way reminiscent of Heidegger's self-opening revealings of the world or Nietzsche's eternal return. However, this is obviously not an attractive choice if one wants to hold open the question of language; the "beyond" of "*transports*" cannot be forgotten about as a "redundant attribute", lexically *or* semantically, if there is to be sheer philological rigour. In Newmark's words, if a poem's "movement is [to be] truly based on something that is itself not yet meaningful as dialectical movement, then the *trans* here has to be taken seriously", as well. Read this way, the "beyond" becomes a subject unit, a blank piece of grammatical data, of its own:

> [The "beyond" becomes] a purely lexical element whose relation to the movement of meaning has not yet been established, [and so] the text prevents the carrying from going on its predetermined path, prevents the carrying from ever becoming a homogenous movement and cuts itself off from its own meaning as metaphor.[25]

[23] In Baudelaire's original, "une ténébreuse et profonde unité / Vaste comme la nuit and comme la clarté" on lines 6–7. English translation by Richard Howard.

[24] ibid. 130.

[25] ibid.

In this reading, no linguistic subject remains "at once" having itself as a meaningful subject, and the movement of syntax that still indescribably exists has *nothing* to do with it, *nothing* to "carry" somewhere else. The "beyond" of language is literally "beyond" any understanding, like Benjamin's fragmented "vessel". The awareness of this predicament is being aware of the question of language which thus impresses "us", in a truly (de Manian) historical manner, with all that this entails to existing "within" it: *everything* remains broken away from our understanding, everything is broken, *nothing* works the way we think it does, nothing is the prize to be won or pieced together at the end. In this sense, Baudelaire's iconic temple is a redundant figuration of a non-organic fallacy, the (poetic) correspondences observed remain incomprehensible also "beyond" the poem, in all the different discourses, or fixed grammars, of human activity.

Nonetheless, even with that being said, there is still a certain (reading) choice involved in the theory, and this Newmark arguably fails to recognise. As we remember of Baudelaire and Mallarmé in de Man's early writings, there was already there a quasi-transcendental, phenomenal condition (of emergent language) which allowed the poets to choose what they wanted to sacrifice for the accomplishment of their art, and de Graef criticised de Man for this special right. Yet, also at this late point, the latter apparently still dwells in the very same place that he did back then. What might this entail in Hegelian terms, seeing how "most of us are Hegelians and quite orthodox ones at that" (SS 92), falling back as de Man does from the start to the break of understanding, the unhappy consciousness, and the need for truth which still defines us, only in the "beyond" of language? Following the selfsame logic in his reading of Hegel's *Aesthetics*[26] as in Baudelaire's poetry, de Man sees the concepts of sign and symbol clarified therein become jumbled. They cross into and disrupt each other, ultimately reducing the traditional function of the symbol as a dialectical trope, a "principle of signification… animated by the tensions between its dual poles [of sign and meaning]", into a "preordained motion of its own position". They reduce the figure into the jammed mechanics of its own constitution, into the failed beyond of its own imagined "beyond", into the "stutter, or a broken record, [which] makes what it keeps repeating worthless and meaningless" (HS 116). In other words, as the aestheticist's dream is jarred awake, the symbol becomes a pure material inscription which points at nothing beyond itself, a thing which remains illiterate about its own syntax. As it occurs, it exists only by way of the "disjunction" which "will always, as it did in Hegel,

[26] Hegel delivered his aesthetics lectures in person over the period 1817–1829 but they were published only after his death (in 1831) between 1835–1838.

manifest itself as soon as experience shades into thought, history into theory" (SS 104). The things of perception do exist but they may never be connected either for a similarity or resemblance.

The de Manian split between cognitive content (*logos*) and linguistic form (*lexis*) ensures that mere appearances are never enough to presuppose any kind of contiguity, whether hidden or revealed, between them, and instead brings to (blinding) light the broken nature of things that exist for certain. As argued above, he also finds this happening in Hegel, for whom any "thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*".[27] This is the Hegelian premise of sense-certainty, which up to a point is similar with de Man's. It is the basic deictic template in which his philosophy figures: any "This" is always already conditioned by a space-time dialectic which both disrupts its meaning *and* preserves its form. Since things do exist, as objects to be sensed, "regardless of whether [they are] known or not",[28] and nature in this way stays rationally separate from man, there is only one (non-natural) thing left for him to confront the separation with. This "thing" is the faculty of intelligence:

> Intelligence *finds* itself determined: this is its apparent aspect from which in its immediacy it starts. But as knowledge, intelligence consists in treating what it found as its own. Its activity has to do with the empty form – the pretence of *finding* reason: and its aim is to realize its concept or to be reason actual, along with which the content is realized as rational. This activity is *cognition*.[29]

Established thus, "inside" human intelligence becomes the apparatus through which "outside" natural perceptions are processed without legislating the laws of the latter into logical categories (Kant's pure reason) *and* without giving the former the ability to harmonise itself with the latter (aesthetic judgment). Instead, intelligence ensures that each "pointing-out", each deictic moment of using human intuition, or "intelligent perception", is never reconciled with any other one, but, precisely because of that failure, each of the moments, "Nows", becomes sublated in the idealistic universality of the "plurality of Nows all taken together".[30] Spirit enters at this point, and may assume its name by being thus determined, but for

27 G. W. F. Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A. V. Miller (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 58.

28 ibid. 59.

29 G. W. F. Hegel: *Philosophy of Mind*, transl. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 188.

30 G. W. F. Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit*. 64.

de Man, this is one idealistic assumption too far. By this point, the concern with truth, which should have remained within its confines of instantaneous sense-certainty,[31] has been compromised too severely, experienced too rationally:

> The truth is all around us; for Hegel, who, in this respect, is as much of an empiricist as Locke or Hume, the truth is what happens, but how can we be certain to recognize the truth when it occurs? (SS 99)

De Man's imperative to test things is opposed to Hegel's empirical assurance about things; and that dispute always triggers his laboratory mindset, awakens his Kantian need to know for absolutely sure. For that reason, he follows Hegel only where the word is uttered, refusing to go further.

In this fashion, as de Man's critique of Hegel divests his philosophy of its historical power to sublate the world in the form of synthetic judgments, for which the latter is most famous, he shows them as self-circuitous disruptions of their claimed source (Spirit). And although Hegel's understanding of the complications of figural language is said to run deeper than that of a symbolist aesthetician such as Peter Szondi – de Man says that Hegel's symbol is "completely devoid of aura or *éclat*" and "it offers nothing to please anyone" which "deeply distresses the aesthetic sensibilities" (HS 116) of critics like Szondi – even *that* is not enough in de Man's cosmic view of things. This happens because the break of Paul de Man is the break by which anything historical ever exists at all, *including* name-giving and word-uttering; and the arguing of this could well be read as another radically disjunct symbol which is embroiled in the same aporias of self-signification it nonetheless attempts to elucidate. As intuitions of material sense-perceptions (from the "outside") become processed by the linguistic intelligence that marks the text (on the "inside"), a significant placeholder still stands vigil at the shift: the grammatical subject unit of "I". This "I" is not a narratively real, temporally mortal, or primally flawed figure of desired meaning anymore; instead it is "the most specifically deictic, self-pointing of words" (SS 98) and "the most entirely abstract generality'" (Hegel quoted in SS 98). It is the existent universal that includes all subjects within itself by excluding itself (the grammatical subject unit) from the other subjects; according to de Man's reading of Hegel, Fichte's

[31] In discussing the "coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*" as the basis of the individual's education, Hegel actually clearly denounces this radical kind of "*sense-consciousness*" by describing how, "like a shot from the pistol", it "begins straight away with absolute knowledge, and makes short work of other standpoints by declaring that it takes no notice of them". Although de Man's clinical approach hardly seems to fall prey to such "rapturous enthusiasm" which Hegel despises, the criticism seems pertinent in its content. ibid. 15–16.

theory of the absolute self (I = I) is logically flawed because "I" is exactly what I am not. This is because only the intelligence within me allows me to be aware of the absolute self, but my "understanding" of "me" is immediately reduced into the "stutter" of the non-identical "I" thus located.

What this reveals is a bewildering hypostasis of cognition within the intuiting subject, one that leaves no sign, symbol or trope of any imagined subject unaffected, and least of all "me". Because am I not to be the guarantor of any meaning found by me, lest I be ruled over by a divine will? Yet the "I" – Hegel's, de Man's, or mine – is apparently nothing but a truly abstract universality which does include "me" (if it did not, there would be nothing to sense) but from which I remain forever excluded (if I did not, I would not be aware of anything opposed to myself).[32] Understood in this manner, "the otherness of [the Hegelian] *jeder* does not designate in any way a specular subject, the mirror image of the I, but precisely that which cannot have a thing in common with myself" (SS 98). For de Man this means that, ultimately, Hegel's "I" remains unable to speak itself ("I cannot say I"), and philosophically this is very disturbing because, for Hegel, "the very possibility of thought depends on the possibility of saying "I" (SS 98). Breaking thus, the visual sensation of the watching "I" becomes an intelligently perceived, or intuited, experience of pure otherness which reminds us of Rousseau's alienated self but lacks the subjective impetus driving it. In its final form, Hegel's purely intelligent "I" fails to found itself rationally, unable to create a reliable empirical deixis of actual "mes and yous" or "this and thats" for itself. In doing so, it refuses to become settled in fixed patterns of stable cognitive reference.

As the self-figure finds itself in a world it cannot possibly hope to grasp in any concrete manner, and also one which it cannot simply "sublate away" as Hegel does in the end, the ceaseless activity of its intelligence becomes realised not only as "both a freedom, since it is arbitrary, and a coercion, since it does violence, as it were, to the world" (SS 96), but also as a purely historical circumstance which forgets its lesson as soon as it occurs. The intelligent thought "projects the

[32] Szondi describes Hegel's premise for an "absolute idea of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]" somewhat similarly when he says that Hegel "seeks to replace the abstract concept of ethics with a real one that presents the universal and the particular in their identity, for their opposition is caused by formalism's process of abstraction" (15, see end of note). The result is that Hegel is eventually able to introduce ethics at the far end of the ongoing dialectic, without having to care for what happens to particular subjects who fall out on the way, or without taking real interest in the continuity of the experience involved in "getting there". Benjamin understood this oversight as resulting from too much attention on "abstract areas of identity and similarity", the thinking of which clouded the essential "continua of transformation" affecting the entire form ("On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" 70). See Peter Szondi: *An Essay on the Tragic*, transl. Paul Fleming (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) 15.

hypothesis of its possibility into a future, in the hyperbolic expectation that the process that made thought possible will eventually catch up with this projection" (SS 99) – it is "proleptic" in that sense, or necessarily tending towards a "lapse", or, perhaps, a "failure". The de Manian insistence on reading history as this kind of unavoidable disruption is derived from precisely such an understanding, and from it follows the de Manian reading of memory as a strictly automated faculty which, in the context of Hegel, turns the idea of "memory" into a rhetorical device within a purely notational system. At this point in de Man's writings, there is no haunting residue anymore of what Timothy Bahti calls "either more pathos or a *via temporaliter negativa*" which would establish a "straight line from life to death" by a Gadamerian form of memory that "prematurely straightens out" the movement between the present and the past, totalising it "as linearity".[33] There is no such residue left in the 1980s de Man, as there might have been at an earlier time when time itself maintained a crooked totalising power over its dominions, for now no "real" figures exist anymore to inhabit such a world, whether they are mortal or merely disoriented. What we have in their place instead is a history (*histoire*) which by deictic inscription ("I", "this", "now") fools the linguistic subject units scattered on its pages into believing they are something other than blank mnemonic signs of "themselves" – such as organic "symbols" which may connect with one another or grasp nature.[34]

Hegel's related concepts of representation (*Vorstellung*), recollection (*Erinnerung*), imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), memory (*Gedächtnis*) and thinking (*Denken*) help de Man achieve this stunningly nihilistic insight. Apart from *Gedächtnis*, Hegel defines these concepts as still having to do with intuition (or intelligent perception) in various ways,[35] and they are thus burdened with the ongoing task of navigating between mind and nature, *tekhne* and *phusis*, in however immediately incomplete manner. But in *Gedächtnis* we have an "intellectual activity" which "has ceased to deal with an image derived from intuition" and so "has rather to do with an object which is the product of intelligence itself". What

33 Timothy Bahti: "Lessons of Remembering and Forgetting" *Reading de Man Reading* 247.

34 We might want to recall here, however, the discovery of Hölderlin as a poet whose deixis of expression did not seek to connect (or identify) with anything, nor did it entertain any misguided notion of being able to take hold of nature.

35 *Vorstellung* is defined as the "recollected and inwardized intuition" (201, see end of note); *Erinnerung* as the transiently represented image "stored up out of consciousness" (204); *Einbildungskraft* as the power of intelligence to intuit "self-sprung ideas" spontaneously that have "pictorial existence" (210); and *Denken* as the "double signification of the universal as such" (224) which includes intuition-cognising intelligence within it and which as a result determines itself in the overlapping of its own being. G. W. F. Hegel: *Philosophy of Mind*.

this means for de Man, in his discussion of how we may evoke the past in the present, is that *Erinnerung* is identified as "the inner gathering and preserving of experience" which "brings history and beauty together in the coherence of the system" (SS 101) while *Gedächtnis* is defined as "the learning by rote of *names*, or of words considered as names, and it can therefore not be separated from the notation, or inscription, or writing down of these names". Having been reduced to this intra-intellectual device ("a mental faculty that is mechanical through and through", SS 102) that recognises no connection whatsoever with an analogous "outside", memory loses all its significance in preserving anything in thought. In certain terms, *Erinnerung* becomes the lie of the symbol and *Gedächtnis* the truth of the sign. Paradoxically stated, as nature fails to mediate anything, should one want to remember something, "one is forced to write down what one is likely to forget" (SS 102). And, by the incontestable force of this insight, forgetting becomes the emblem of true knowledge for de Man, shattering both the site of the event of realisation and the world within which it takes place. Nothing comes in to "redeem" the irreversibly fragmented reality in the commemorative form of a continuously re-forming mourning (Benjamin) all-inclusive Spirit (Hegel), or a secret wisdom embedded in the act of the forgetting itself (see the next subchapter on Jauss). Instead what remains in the world after the past generations have been blown off the face of it, along with their possibly future-wagering dreams of preserving their names in either truth or beauty, is sheer linguistic "acts" that "mark out" their "ground as the site" for the figuration they (choose to) represent. Kevin Newmark defined Baudelaire's "temple" in "Correspondances" in this manner. He also said that the chosen figuration depended on "some form of *memory* or text" in which the linguistic act was "inscribed" and that this was what made the poem (or any text for that matter) "*historical*".[36] I believe this description catches the de Manian disruption of aesthetic understanding perfectly: the memory of beauty in the past and the symbolic unity in the present is now shown, by the independent power of (Hegelian) intelligence "beyond" the grammatical unit of "I", as nothing but a forgotten, conventional sign which "by rote" acts upon a thing of radically separate nature. And the ultimate irony of it, as in the allegory of Hegel,[37] is that the place where this knowledge is finally learned is the *Lectures on Aesthetics* – the one book that should have had the opposite effect. Instead,

[36] Newmark 132

[37] This sentiment of Timothy Bahti's may be thought about here: "If allegory for de Man designates an unremembering memory, irony displays a dismembering forgetting". Bahti: "Lessons of Remembering and Forgetting" 248.

the lesson is grounded "beyond" it, in the resisted realisation of language: in the rhetorical parabasis of its understanding.

What follows, all at once, is that Hegelian syntheses falter for de Man, along with the universal possibility of them: the *Vorlesungen* overthrow whatever unity the previous philosophy might have endeavoured to establish, and the infamous end-of-art thesis is seen as the confirmation of this:

> We can now assert that the two statements "art is for us a thing of the past" and "the beautiful is the sensory manifestation of the idea" are in fact the same. To the extent that the paradigm for art is thought rather than perception, the sign rather than the symbol, writing rather than painting or music, it will also be memorization rather than recollection. As such, it belongs indeed to a past which, in Proust's words, could never be recaptured, *retrouvé*. Art is "of the past" in a radical sense, in that, like memorization, it leaves the interiorization of experience forever behind. It is of the past to the extent that it materially inscribes, and thus forever forgets, its ideal content. (SS 103)

The usual interpretation of Hegel's thesis is that because art had given up its claim on truth in modern times, it had forfeited the power to illuminate human existence, as well. For that reason art as such belonged in the past, whereas science and religion did not – they were still able to light up the present. In de Man's interpretation, however, art not only becomes a thing "of the past" but it becomes that "in a radical sense". According to him, art is removed from us more acutely than by a Romantic anachronism, a hermeneutic discrepancy of intention, a total temporal horizon, or an allegory of its own unstoppable figurality. Rather than being *something* in isolation mediated by time, space, or unrevealed understanding, together with everything else cognisable, art is *a thing*, the incomprehensibly material object (perceived) of natural being. In our attempts to come to terms with this supremely ironic thought, we forever lose sight *of* it, resist the insight *into* it, "forever forget" the idea of its meaning, and simply bestow it with meaning, automatically hurried onwards in time by the mnemonic signs involuntarily encountered. What de Man seems to think is that to be subject to this clearly ontological condition (it is that because there still exist "sites" for events to occur and "experiences" to meet the intelligence) is only human; not to be aware of the necessity is just ignorant; to refuse to be aware of the inevitability (and do "something else" instead) is plain stupid. The boon of art is to allow for intellectual improvement from the lows of such states, even if

the cognised "content" of art was nothing substantial, or if "art" as a concept ever existed.

Yet it must be immediately noted that a certain art takes place in de Man's own readings too in a world that remains tangible and very much in existence. Since it is still possible for him to observe in Hegel "the progression from perception to thought" and how it "depends crucially on the mental faculty of memorization", and to base his particular findings about the nature of understanding sign and symbol on this general process, there is still a certain way of representation which allows him to write down his criticism in a style which is both formal *and* aesthetic, and which is founded in a single source. This "style" is that of ritual and the ritualistic – the "learning by rote of *names*" (SS 102). The emphasis in the quotation reveals de Man's intention to deflect the reader's attention from his own chosen method of rhetorical expression which, following the logic of the theory on show, should not be warranted as having grasped "truth" on any level. The trope of "truth" is just as slippery (and undecidable) as any other, and so there is no special critical sense in claiming that truth may be realised in or through the ritualistic "progression" founded in a certain "mental faculty of memorization". (It is interesting to see how de Man lets the concept of "faculty" get away in Hegel but attacks it elsewhere, in Kant for example, as we will see later on.) For one would think, as far as sources of intellectual activity are being named, that surely learning to read by heart and without a single omission – following the lead of Rousseau's Savoyard priest – partakes of that kind of cognitive continuity which is informed by a sense of formal wholeness, even if "wholeness" as a figure was never attained. This would also be the case if, in reverse, the figure was proclaimed essentially non-existent and only learned of through a necessary force:

> To read poets or philosophers thoughtfully, on the level of their thought rather than of one's or their desires, is to read them by rote. Every poem (*Gedicht*) is a *Lehrgedicht*… whose knowledge is forgotten as it is read. (SS 117)

The lesson undoes the lesson, that much is true. But neither the negation nor the radical disruption of the relations of its constitutive components is able to annul the sense of the whole. Quite the opposite occurs, in fact, as the world made up in and through the ritual that was performed continues to hold up the desires of faith, the Savoyard priest's eudaemonic expressions of pain and pleasure, which were supposed to cancel it. Of course the objects of the ritual, or the thoughts we read, forever keep their distance from us (since our encountering of them was

actually their origin[38]) but this does not mean that the ritual thus acted out, the lesson of both religion and poetry, would fall to pieces in itself. It cannot do that because "it" was never "there", the event simply occurred, in the total aesthetic awareness of a whole form in change. It is this alterable form that makes up the figures we experience, as both signs and symbols, in history which is the storied site of their linguistic existence. De Man should know this because, without the understanding, there is never any point to any of his lessons. But this truth he forever refrains from saying.

What he does say, instead, is that sheer immersion in the opposite of unconscious saying, the total acceptance of the intelligent idea of consciousness, brings along with it true critical power – in de Man's words, the power of the slave. With this historical realisation, which is another divination of a rhetorical trope having more force than any "pure original" fantasised about, masters are usurped and authority assumed in its rightful place, the Hegelian slave: "The infrastructures of language, such as grammar and tropes, account for the occurrence of the poetic superstructure, such as genres, as the devices needed for their oppression" (HS 118). Ultimately, the radical exchange between the WORD and the word, the forceful trope of the performed event and the pure fantasy of the constant referent, neither establishes certain results or goals to look forward to, nor does it hold up as a genuine dialectic of values and/or meanings to the end. Instead, the historical parabasis of the question of language continuing to be asked guarantees it, in a rhetorical triumph of irony, that the success of the shifting itself stays forever undecidable and unverifiable and the mind desiring aesthetic *jeux d'esprit* in the present remains ungrounded. And further, says de Man, we must not fail to remember *this* irreducibility, *this* non-ironic awareness in its actual linguistic turns – we must not mystify ourselves with the fictional, indulgent possibility of its perhaps being unnecessary for anything to be sensed instantaneously as a form of truth.

[38] The "symbolist aesthetician" Peter Szondi finds this rather hard-to-accept realisation only really dawn on Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the subsequent writings (of which the *Aesthetics* is described as the "formalized echo" of its predecessor, 20). As Hegel comes, says Szondi, to recognise in all of its ramifications the "fundamental, tragic conflict" which lies at the heart of human understanding, he begins to see it as "precisely the conflict that necessarily arises between the origin of the dialectic and the realm from which it distanced itself in its coming to be" (21). In other words, there is no origin (of anything) without the distance that separates us from it. The gap cannot be crossed *in any way or to any extent* because that would destroy the origin as it was. Similarly, we must not imagine that there is an original "somewhere out there" for us to meet because the "origin" is always already here, in the sense-certainty of "now". Szondi: *An Essay on the Tragic*.

(ii) Jauss and Hermeneutics[39]*

May "truth" ever be left unsaid then, is there any text worth revisiting in trying to get a different view on how the fictions of literature could be read? What kind of texts are there outside the fact laboratory which could help us do this? De Man would obviously have none of this, because for him the primary value of a reading was always appraised by its involvement with "the question of its truth or falsehood";[40] and we have seen how this quite anti-fictional sentiment had already moulded, among other things, his readings of Rousseau and Barthesian structuralism. But it was not as if it was a finished business in the 1980s. Some critics bold enough to inspire further thoughts about it appeared for scrutiny in *The Resistance to Theory*, to be subjected to a kind of direct criticism of their own criticism (a metacritical approach de Man had cut down on after *Blindness and Insight*). Two of these candidates, or exemplary current theorists, were Michael Riffaterre and Hans Robert Jauss. The former attempts to base the potential of a literary reading in the cryptic configurations of meaningful signifiers retrieved out of the text at hand and sprinkled around a single (however difficult) organising axis that the text seems to be making up by talking about it; Riffaterre calls these configurations "hypograms". (Saussure's later search for such the same entities, for meaningful cognitive totalities arbitrarily scattered across language, is also referred to as an emphatic model for Riffaterre's pursuit.) Jauss, on the other hand, does something different with his reading, something hermeneutically fuelled, and that sparks up a dialogue with de Man who has not been a stranger to such considerations in the past.

Drawing on a wide variety of Continental philosophical strands, and criticising the aesthetic stasis evident to him in many of the opposing 20th-century lines of thinking, Hans Robert Jauss considered the Marxist and Formalist schools of theory to be the two main culprits in the failure of literary study to face up to the essentially dynamic nature of textual interpretation. The mistake of the former (among them Benjamin and the Frankfurt School) was to presuppose an unavoidable "role" for each reader – one based on given rules of "material production" and a

[39] * An earlier version of the text in this subchapter was first published as an article under the name of "Possible Fiction and Impossible Fact: The 'History' of Hans Robert Jauss and Paul de Man" in Lehtimäki, Markku, et al.: *Real Stories, Imagined Realities: Fictionality and Non-fictionality in Literary Constructs and Historical Contexts*, Tampere Studies in Language, Translation and Culture, Series A Vol.3 (Vaajakoski: Tampere University Press, 2008) 129–143.

[40] "Foreword to Carol Jacobs, *The Dissimulating Harmony*" CW 222.

certain "social praxis"[41] that decided the experience gained and reduced it to a static copying function. The mistake of the latter (Russian Formalists and the New Critics), on the other hand, was to establish an "opposition between poetic and practical language" which duly severed the connection between literature and the "nonliterary series" of "historical and social conditioning"[42] and left art standing dead on its feet. To Jauss, both of these mistakes represented the striving evident in classicist humanism to dictate and objectify creative diversity; in his view, people were far too active in shaping up and deciding their own experiences to be left to the mercy of any cosmological fact. Such eternal truths were to be exposed as just fictions.

For his pieces expounding a new theory of reception (originally published in 1970), Jauss drew inspiration from his cooperation with Wolfgang Iser and other colleagues at the University of Konstanz, and he was also able to benefit from the phenomenological legacy of Heidegger, Roman Ingarden and Hans-Georg Gadamer, as well as the evolved structuralist work of Felix V. Vodicka and Jan Mukarovsky, of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Based on the former's "notion of reception as concretization of a linguistic sign structure",[43] Jauss theorised the idea of an active historical environment which, in de Man's words, was able to maintain its "dialectic of understanding, between knowing and not-knowing" (RHi 58) despite the ongoing change, and thus remain essentially unchanged. The spatial image in which all this took place was the "horizon of expectations" and it was powered by history as its dynamic force. The perception of the horizon was aesthetic, its understanding hermeneutic, and the reflection upon it dialectical, eventually conditioning the "lived praxis" of the individual and so keeping the connection with social reality integral. In literary critical terms, the three-fold method of Jaussian analysis thus went from the perception of "now" (where the reader was) first to understanding "then" (where the work originally emerged) and then to reflecting on "from then to now" – which, in return, had an altering effect on how the "now" and the "reader" were consequently perceived. And none of this would have happened without the temporal energy of the historic distance which qualified the direction and recognition of any horizon. The structure of the event was self-engendering and non-teleological, a mediation of

41 Hans Robert Jauss: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, transl. Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982) 10.

42 ibid. 16.

43 Hans Robert Jauss: "Response to Paul de Man" *Reading de Man Reading*, transl. Andreas Michel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) 204.

"question and answer",[44] which in its own meaninglessness and irreplaceability was the only eternal truth there was: the "historical appearance of works and their immortality as the result of aesthetic activities of mankind".[45] Old facts from positivist progression to scientific objectivity and universal genres were concretised as particular answers to their own fictions, while the historic process and its individual reception were posited as new non-fictions which aesthetically engendered the general questions.

Having de Man introduce *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), Timothy Bahti's English translation of Jauss's perhaps most important theoretical essays, is an interesting choice bearing in mind the antagonism that de Man, obviously harbours for some of the things that the essays rely on. Even though de Man greatly appreciated Jauss's critical astuteness, a clash feels predestined. By the early 1980s, de Man had taken his view on literary deconstruction to a level where any obvious positing of theoretical facts, such as temporal history and the receiving subject in Jauss's case, could not be accepted for their claiming alone. Nearly ten years earlier, at the time of *Blindness and Insight*, de Man might have appeared more prone to agree, with the "horizon" of "complete" understanding then said to be, in contrast to Heidegger's world-opening temporality, the nothingness of "time itself" (FI 32). But all this had been in overhaul since then, as was traced in the previous section with de Man and Derrida's counterbalanced concepts of time mutually contained by one another in the context of Rousseau, and with Jauss now providing a temporal horizon for a different hermeneutics than would have previously been imagined by de Man. Since the early days, the place of theory had undergone an upheaval, and the reader at its site blown into a linguistic whirlwind.

Although Jauss saw his theory as severed from the classicist humanist tradition of mimetic imitation, de Man sees Jauss still deeply entangled in the same tradition. The latter's profound basing of his theory on the categories of the aesthetic together with the hermeneutic were at the heart of this discrepancy. According to de Man, the "ultimate aim of a hermeneutically successful reading is to do away with reading altogether" (RHi 56), to turn a blind eye to the question of language itself, and when that is done, the concept of the canon dealt with may "transcend history" by encompassing the "totality of its tensions within itself" (RHi 57). The aesthetic result of this perception is the hermeneutic understanding of a unity which is then said to circulate forwards into the dialectical process, ensuring its

[44] ibid. 68.

[45] ibid. 75.

survival into another future. The polymorphous otherness of an interpretation does not matter as the complete process redeems the essential discontinuity of history, as Rousseau's memory did. To de Man this is a fallacy; history, by not being time, is something which breaks rather than something which flows. By the same token, the receiving subject must also be affected; temporality and agency turn into rampant fictions under the fact of language.

De Man pays further attention to Jauss's model by describing how through "elements of genuine paradigmatic similarity" which circulate "freely" (RHi 60) to reach any reader of any age, literature is able to ensure both its synchronic and diachronic appeal, and any text can hide within itself the keys to its understanding. As we have already implied, in the spatial image of the "horizon of expectations" each "individual perception" stood "foregrounded and silhouetted" against the "general and undifferentiated" (RHi 59) background from which the individual derived a particular response. As a structure of consciousness and pre-consciousness, the horizon engendered its own "abyssal frames" of question and answer "without end or telos" (RHi 60); and consequently the structure itself was meaningless but each single response received from it was not. As the collective shadow of the background contained each single earlier answer, the individual in the light of the foreground added to it by posing a new question and, in doing so, metamorphosed to become "like an individual" (RHi 59) in response. Moreover, in contrast to the earlier versions of a similar structure (from T. S. Eliot to Vodicka), as Jauss's model was complicated by the general indeterminacy of the collective background, its "sequence of apparent syntheses" was able to convey "an impression of methodological mastery" (RHi 60) between the historical past and its incorporation into the historic future. De Man is duly impressed with the "impression" but not with the fact that "reading" (that is, language) is in this process neglected.

It follows that de Man's entire disagreement with Jauss stems from his unwillingness to allow the reading event to be transmogrified into a phenomenal experience of meaning within any fictional "horizon of expectations". Such horizons are not powered by history; instead, they violate it. Jauss has been right to discount positivism, objectivism and the notion of universal genres but, in doing so, he has not been able to escape the classicist humanistic trap of positing other linguistic imitations: in the case of the theory of reception, time and subject. Their aesthetic and hermeneutic categories fall under the jurisdiction of language which breaks them. He recognises no such failure in himself, because the "rejection of a conception of poetry as message or reception is not the result of an essentialist

conception of literature but of the critique of such a conception" (RHi 62). De Man is adamant in not making any concessions to the contrary; he obsessively shuns the mimesis which would root him in the "classical phenomenalism of an aesthetics of representation" (RHi 67). That would be a "turning away from literature, a breaking of the link between poetics and history" (de Man RHi 68) such as he understands them; he might refer to the Frankfurt School[46] for support. History is not clock time or temporality in general but the impossible occurrence of the non-phenomenal poetics of language and, therefore, language in itself. The event is material and the outcome undecidable which reduces it to the promise of fiction. Any assertion not conforming to that factuality is a delusion – even the one which remembers it as a delusion or as something beautiful. For de Man, Jauss has none of the conformity but all of the delusion.

In practice, Jauss and de Man challenge one another by interpreting Baudelaire's "Spleen (II)" (see appendix II on pages 259–60 for the French original and the English translation[47]). To demonstrate Jauss's entrapment in classical humanism, de Man reads the poem whereas Jauss is said to mime it. For the latter, by the power of meaning, "Spleen (II)" is ultimately a song of "sublimation" and an "emblem of recollection" (RHi 70); it recovers itself "from the most extreme of alienations" (RHi 69), that of world-anxious language, through the performance of the sphinx which is the "final song of revolt on the side of life".[48] The decay of rotted "souvenirs", maggot-eaten "secrets", and faded and butchered sensations,[49] may surround the "mortal clay" with the slow indifference of "a nameless dread" ("une vague épouvante"), forgotten again in ages, but the "fierce moods" ("l'humeur farouche") exhibited by the "rock" assure the perpetual cathartic recovery (as memory). The "horizon of expectations" in which the poem stands answers the individual question by foregrounding that particular

46 Closely read, a much more dynamic (and aesthetically thoroughgoing) historical materialism escaping typical left-wing pigeon-holing (and in all likelihood Jauss) can be found in many of their writings. We have already seen this with Benjamin and Adorno.

47 The second of the four Spleen poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). Translated by Richard Howard. In his version there is one curiosity that should be pointed out: the rendering of Baudelaire's "un immense caveau" ("tomb" or "vault") as "This branching catacombs" appears to be grammatically erroneous. However, should it be part of Howard's interpretation of Baudelaire, the famous Catacombs of Paris can be correctly referred to with the singular verb.

48 Jauss: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* 161.

49 The French noun Boucher (capitalised in this instance after the 18th-century French rococo painter whose popularity proved a bit thin in the end) means "Butcher" in English; the verb means "to cork" (a bottle for example). The textual function is debated over by Jauss and de Man.

response from the collective background, and it is as methodologically valid a conclusion as Jauss's theory is able to establish. However, for his part, de Man rejects this pseudo-dialectic by returning us from the meaning to the reading. In that domain, which is constant alienation by language, the "terror of encrypted death" (RHi 69), cannot be escaped, the decay and death is not overcome even if the speaker "*had* lived a thousand years" (my emphasis), and the singing sphinx is no "sublimation" but the "inscription of a sign" (RHi 70) who is "omitted from the map" and whose "fierce moods" do not matter.[50] In this horizon, the background consists of nothing for there is none, and no shadow of "not-knowing" (RHi 63) is able to make any meaning for none exists. There is no secret historical catharsis but only sheer historic madness. In its "boredom" the song of the sphinx is the "forgetting, by inscription, of terror, the dismemberment of the aesthetic whole into the unpredictable play of the literary letter" (RHi 70). This conclusion is not a silhouette but the entire horizon – so much there is to be read.

Now, whatever one thinks of these two interpretations, and whichever one prefers (each with its own claims to reconsider[51]), the aesthetic impact of either of them can hardly be refuted. For even if Jauss, for example, seems to pin much of optimism on the *hope* of the sphinx's "fierce moods" being the embodiment of a redeeming hermeneutics, and even if de Man in his reading overlooks the advantage held by the saturnine "brain" over the "unpredictable" material evidence ("documents, / love-letters…"), both of them focus intently on the question of poetry in time which deeply affects how it meets our senses. Two different ideas of "history" emerge: one in which the historic event becomes a human historical experience as an enabled fiction (Jauss), and one in which the historic event denies such an experience as a disabled fact (de Man). The tendencies could not be further apart from each other, but what they both do show is a keen sensitivity towards poetic freeing and a willingness to push to the edge of extreme textuality to find what resides there.

50 The original poem begins with "J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans" correspondingly. The phrase "omitted from the map" is in French "oublié sur la carte" which could signify not only omission but also forgetting without being left off. Howard's translation overlooks the distinction in the passive and lets the forgetting be done actively "by the world", whereas in the original the world ignores; "Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux". The ambiguity ("ignoré" can be both active and passive in French) might be particularly important to de Man.

51 Jauss, for example, seems to pin much of his optimism on the *hope* of the "fierce moods" being something non-textually redeeming while de Man, in espousing his reading of formal inscription, overlooks the advantage held by the saturnine "brain" over the material evidence ("documents,/ love-letters…"). Moreover, de Man seems perfectly happy to take the "nameless dread" for granted, perhaps even as something non-textually anti-redeeming.

To reiterate, the source of disagreement between Jauss and de Man wells up with the former questioning the latter about literary theory being able to uncover the "latent horizons of a literary work" by seeing the "cathartic effect of poetry [as] its power" (that is, its aesthetic sublimation) and not as its "weakness".[52] Jauss therefore admits the uncertainty of his own position, but states it nonetheless that the power of poetry *can* be attained, without subjective pre-positing, in history through a reading in the remembered interplay of light and shadow, made possible by the collective unconscious background, the "not yet known".[53] For de Man, such a Freudian-esque background does not exist, as all is known – to be undecidably impossible. This is the crucial empirical difference that sets the two thinkers apart from one another. De Man knows Jauss's blindness – and has the "courtesy" to restrict his praise to the "rigor of its theoretical questioning" (RHi 70) – but the latter is unable to return the favour other than in the suggestion of the non-dialectical "not yet known". Jauss cannot resist de Man's resistance as far as he is aware of the break between reading and history, art and life, language and reality, as well. However, he can point past it, to things neglected by de Man, and by the mere pointing ask if the "deconstructivist sphinx [may] be allowed to sing at all if it denies the hermeneutic sphinx the right to sing".[54] And it would be a valid inquiry. For even if the pointing is directed at an impossibility occurring in reality, any denial of another possibility is "a meaning to be performed".[55] Hence, in that sense, beyond the mnemonic terror of material inscription, the figure of the background appears in language, as well, making it exist. It might not be "history", "time", or "subject" as ventured by Jauss and vetoed by de Man, but it is still something, something non-conditionally given. In language, it is the possibility (of the impossibility) of the possibility which commemoratively expresses the fiction and the fact of the pointing, the shadow and the light of the horizon: not the truth of the WORD but the power of its saying. Whether this "power" then means that fiction is possible or fact (that is, non-fiction) is impossible, or the other way around, or that we should experience madness rather than catharsis, like de Man suggests we should, it does not erase the site where it occurs. Instead, it remains active, historically unrestrained, ceaselessly voiding general ideas in search of particular question-answers. For the individual, the

52 Hans Robert Jauss: "Response to Paul de Man" 208.

53 ibid. 204.

54 ibid. 208.

55 Hans Robert Jauss: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* 145.

experience is moving, thoroughly aesthetic, and kind of unsocial because it is received alone.

What does the individual's search mean then, in any of the countless contexts, fictional and non-fictional, it finds itself in? What kind of answers do these textual entities provide to concerns about "real" reality being separated from "untrue" language, about the horizons of the world being separated from the words that express it? After all, in the individual's search for literary meaning, social actuality does appear to give way to wilful solitude in a fashion which establishes the whole opposition in advance. It makes up a picture of history in which there are isolate sensations but no common positions; and, as we have already seen in many instances, the power of this aesthetic primacy then turns into a question about understanding itself: can it know or cannot it? The duty of criticism is to articulate this predicament, as both Jauss and de Man know; their expressions about the individual's search are formed by the awareness. But what do their efforts *mean* then, both in their differences and shared concerns? Maybe they mean nothing apart from the fact that I am writing about them, reliving the sphinx's fierceness and repeating Archie Bunker's curse, just like Jauss and de Man in their own time. If this is the truth, then, one cannot but appreciate the irony: the meaning is *there*, in the effort *itself*, but the effort itself is always beside the point. It is directed at something, at the meaning which does exist, but it does not exist *for* me. It may be a linguistically disrupted parabasis, as de Man contends, but it is also something in the hermeneutic horizon, as Jauss counters. If it was not, we would not be aware of the possibility at all. Aesthetic questions of fiction and non-fiction, the particular and the general, poetry and discourse, remember this truth in the rhetorical form of the unhidden answers they appear as.

(iii) Schlegel and Irony

What if that which came to light, then, was something so unsettling that, even for its very first manifestation, it had to contradict itself? And what if the source which spawned it was so incomprehensible that it was a useless effort to try to receive and experience it even as an individual? Friedrich Schlegel's unusual ideas of irony and myth show flashes of such revelations:

> Da finde ich nun eine grosse Ähnlichkeit mit jenem grossen Witz der romantischen Poesie, der nicht in einzelnen Einfällen, sondern in der

> Konstruktion des Ganzen sich zeigt… Ja, diese künstlich geordnete Verwirrung, diese reizende Symmetrie von Widersprüchen, dieser wunderbare ewige Wechsel von Enthusiasmus und Ironie, der selbst in den kleinsten Gliedern des Ganzen lebt, scheinen mir schon selbst eine indirekte Mythologie zu sein. Die Organisation ist dieselbe, und gewiss ist die Arabeske die älteste und ursprünglichste Form der menschlichen Phantasie. Weder dieser Witz noch eine Mythologie können bestehen ohne ein erstes Ursprüngliches und Unnachahmliches, was schlechthin unauflöslich ist, *was* nach allen Umbildungen noch die alte Natur und Kraft durschschimmern lässt, *wo* der naïve Tiefsinn den Schein des Verkehrten und Verrückten oder des Einfältigen und Dummen durchschimmern lässt. Denn das ist der Anfang aller Poesie, den Gang und die Gesetze der vernünftig denkenden Vernunft aufzuheben und uns wieder in die schöne Verwirrung der Phantasie, in das ursprüngliche Chaos der menschlichen Natur zu versetzen, für das ich kein schöneres Symbol bis jetzt kenne, als das bunte Gewimmel der alten Götter.
>
> I find there now a large similarity with that prominent wit of Romantic Poetry which does not manifest itself in particular ideas but rather in the construction of the whole… Yes, this artfully arranged confusion, this gracious symmetry of contradictions, this marvellous eternal exchange of enthusiasm and irony that lives even in the smallest part of the whole; to me it appears to be an indirect mythology. It is organised similarly, and exactly the arabesque is the oldest and most original form of human fantasy. Neither this wit nor any mythology may exist without a first one which is original and inimitable, absolutely insoluble, *which* allows old nature and force shine through still after all transformations, and *where* the naive profundity allows the glow of the mad and deranged or the simpleminded and stupid shine through. For it is the beginning of all poetry, to suspend the motion and the law of the rationally thinking reason and to fling us back into the beautiful confusion of the fantasy, into the original chaos of human nature. For this I do not know a more beautiful symbol till now than the colourful throng of the old gods.[56]

[56] Friedrich Schlegel: "Rede über die Mythologie", printed in Ronald Taylor: *The Romantic Tradition in Germany: An Anthology* (London: Methuen, 1970) 170. My emphasis and translation. I was unable to obtain the translation "Talk on Mythology" by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc in *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), so I decided to do the work myself. Ville Salo from ARG provided help in this. I am also aware that there is a translation of the piece in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, eds. and transl. by Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). J. M. Bernstein quotes from it in his essay "Poesy and the arbitrariness of the sign: notes for a critique of Jena romanticism" in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (London and New York: Routledge, 2006). However, at least in Bernstein's quotation, there is a large mistake in the translation: the phrase "Weder dieser Witz noch eine Mythologie können bestehen ohne ein erstes Ursprüngliches und Unnachahmliches" has been translated as "Neither this wit nor a mythology can exist *with* something primal and inimitable" (162, my emphasis). The passage

The above is taken from Schlegel's "Rede über die Mythologie" (1800) which de Man discusses, as mentioned above, with extensive implications in "The Concept of Irony" (1977, AI). Having introduced three different critical interpretations of the concept earlier in the text, de Man eventually employs the quotation above to reveal a kind of irony that signifies something much more radical and deep-reaching than any of the conventional uses identified. The first one of these variations is irony as "aesthetic practice or artistic device" (CI 169), with Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs and Wayne Booth being implied in this context a few pages earlier; the second one is irony as "reflexive patterns of consciousness" concerned with "duplications of a self, specular structures within the self" (CI 169) reminiscent of Rousseau and Starobinski; and the third, most developed one is irony as the "dialectical pattern of history" (CI 170) found in the works of Kierkegaard, Hegel and Benjamin. In Schlegel's thought of irony there is, however, apparently something even more disturbing than this, something more self-mythifying; and de Man traces its source via a detour through Fichte's philosophy of the absolute self. He notes that, in Fichte, "the self is not a dialectical notion, but is the necessity or the condition of any dialectical development at all… [t]he self, in Fichte, is a logical category" (CI 172). What this entails is that Fichte's self is different from what de Man in 1977 calls Hegel's "antithetical" self (which hardly is its status in the 1980s anymore). Instead of projecting itself into a ready relationship or environment in opposition to its own negation, the Fichtean self is "a purely empty, positional act": "no acts of judgment can be made about it"(CI 173). In its own right, this singular self is already very different from the poetic selves of the Romantic heroes swathed in the human linguistic predicament surveyed by the early de Man, and from the allegorically displaced present dramatised by him in the middle stage, and in doing so it prepares his evolution towards a late phase.

What follows is that the traditional reasonings of synthetic versus analytical judgments are voided of true philosophical force by way of demonstrating a dead-end symmetry between them – "one works like this, the other works the opposite way" – and focus is instead placed on the purely "thetic judgment" (CI 175) of the grounds of freedom. The judgment is self-argumentative because when "humans are free", humans *are* free; it is not necessary to judge the claim synthetically as implying that "therefore, some humans are not *free*"; and it is not necessary to judge the claim analytically as implying that "therefore, *not only humans* are free". For even if neither of these syllogisms can be logically contested, for Fichte they

is turned upside down with this mistake and made to function completely differently from the original.

do not stay focused on the actual event (the "being free" in this case) but rather stray off to unnecessary comparisons and distinctions between classes. Observed closely enough along these lines, as de Man says, the final statement of Fichtean philosophy then comes to a point where "freedom is structured as an *asymptote*", an entity "toward which he [*der Mensch*] comes closer and closer, as a kind of infinite movement of ascent (or descent, it doesn't matter), toward which man is under way" (CI 175). In mathematics, an asymptote is "a line whose distance to a given curve tends to zero" and it "may or may not intersect its associated curve";[57] in other words, it is a hypothetical event horizon for an entity in movement which consistently draws towards another entity without necessarily intersecting it – like Zeno's Achilles forever failing to catch the turtle. What's more, in nature the movement may also be three-dimensional, in the manner of gravity.

Now, in many of Schlegel's fragments, in *Lyceum*, *Athenaeum*, and *Ideas*, not only is Fichte praised frequently but there are also many adumbrations of just such an asymptote, conceived in and for the literary sense. For instance, it is said that "[o]nly in relation to the infinite is there meaning and purpose; whatever lacks such a relation is absolutely meaningless and pointless" (*Ideas* fragment 3), and, based on this and his other writings, it can be argued that what Schlegel has in mind with what constitutes "relation" in the first place is the sensible thinking of the rational thinking subject (another translation of "der vernünftig denkenden Vernunft" in the quotation above). Tending towards the infinity beyond itself, the thinking subject thinks up a particular entity, the asymptote, which eternally gravitates towards the limitlessness of the non-particular entity, the "beautiful confusion of fantasy" ("die schöne Verwirrung der Phantasie") of both poetry and philosophy. The logic of the creative event is ruled over by nothing but the "mythology" of its own original wholeness which comprises naivety and profundity, madness and stupidity, beauty and colour, wit and philosophy.[58] Romantic consciousness is founded on these terms (with its "poetry" famously "a progressive, universal" one in *Athenaeum* fragment 116) and it forms its awareness by its own idea as "a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts" (*Athenaeum* fragment 121).

57 The Free Dictionary by Farlex at <www.thefreedictionary.com>, 18 Jun 2008.

58 *Athenaeum* fragment 220: "If wit in all its manifestation is the principle and the organ of universal philosophy, and if all philosophy is nothing but the spirit of universality, the science of all the eternally uniting and dividing sciences, a logical chemistry: then the value and importance of that absolute, enthusiastic, thoroughly material wit is infinite". Furthermore, in *Lyceum* fragment 56, it is said that "[w]it is logical sociability".

As we can see, in some way we are still in the very same "abyss" of earth and heaven, building bridges ("self-creating interchanges") over the great divide, as we arguably were with Hölderlin, and with Heidegger's elucidations of him, and in some way we are also still very close to Rousseau who in his daydreams attempts to forget the "interchange" that constitutes them in order to let the world's poetry progress, and in some further way we have not yet deserted, among other things, the Jaussian horizon of secretly shared expectations either. Not everything has changed for de Man with these authors; much of the critical concern remains the same. In terms of the question of *language*, however, Schlegel makes a much more (academically) explicit case than most of the others. To refresh the memory, I re-quote here from the *Athenaeum* fragments:

> To read means to satisfy the philological drive, to make a literary impression on oneself. To read out of an impulse for pure philosophy or poetry, unaided by philology, is probably impossible.[59]

When we remember the late de Man's signposting for a "return to philology", there must be a distinct satisfaction gained for him in the reading of Schlegel's fragments. What follows it that the task does gravitate, both in style and content, towards such an achievement in the latter part of "The Concept of Irony". Setting up the Fichtean "self" as "a narrative line" which makes up "the story of the comparison and the distinction, the story of the exchange of the properties, the turn where the relation is to the self, and the project of the infinite self" (CI 176), de Man asserts Fichte's philosophy as another instance of formal tropology, a strictly linguistic entity making use of and being constituted by a system of tropes.[60] In consequence, Fichte's "story" of movement is ultimately suspended by the radical notion of irony found in Schlegel, in "Rede über die Mythologie" and "Über die Unverständlichkeit" ("On Incomprehensibility"), whose function de Man moves to observe. And, even though he never catches up with the entity completely, de Man does get close enough to the notion of irony in order to disrupt the project of authentic language ("reelle Sprache") Schlegel himself apparently tends towards (CI 179). Does this feat manage to provide any kind of an answer to the aporia of the Romantic consciousness then?

In the last few pages of "The Concept of Irony", de Man talks about irony as "the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes" (CI 179, a statement based

59 *Athenaeum* fragment 391.

60 Since "[t]rope means 'to turn'" (CI 164), or to curve, to deviate, it is inherent in the movement of language tending towards the Fichtean-Schlegelian infinite, as well.

on and developed from one of Schlegel's in "Zur Philosophie"). To make sense of this, de Man demonstrates how in Schlegel's notorious novel *Lucinde* "the inner mood being described is completely disrupted by the exterior form", and by referring the related discussion to the question of (or quest for) "authentic language" (CI 179) which would ensure and make real, even if not validate cognitively, the Romantic view of the world. We have already seen in this section what this kind of quest(ion)ing, in all its irony, has meant for Benjamin's hopes of historical recuperation and the mnemotechnics of the Hegelian idea. Now, what is at stake with Schlegel in similar terms can be read in the passage quoted in the beginning of this chapter. De Man finds there the paradoxical confirmation of the infinite asymptote of irony, the tropic turn of language away from itself by itself in a self-deviating action and the irony of irony wondrously escaping all conceptualisation ("this artfully arranged confusion, this gracious symmetry of contradictions, this marvellous eternal exchange of enthusiasm"). Moreover, since for Schlegel "[i]rony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos" (*Ideas* fragment 69) and the possibility of "this entire, unending world constructed by the understanding out of incomprehensibility or chaos",[61] it follows that the "thing" named as "chaos" is for Schlegel the infinite, the zero towards which creative language tends. It is the natural parabasis of all understanding against which we (re)act.

As such, if "chaos" is the "place" where constructing begins, there is nothing radical about its nature *as a source* yet; after all, theological mysticism and rational empiricism come into being the same way, springing from one given origin. However, as soon as that has been said, it has to be acknowledged that as a source Schlegel's "chaos" is very much different from any established deity or natural phenomenon. The variance, however, is not countered with a simple inversion of such entities: "chaos" does not get to be glorified as an entity of hidden or distorted meaning. And Schlegel does not constitute it strictly historically either, as a negative dialectics of a lost origin afflicting us severely. Schlegel's intention is more complex than that: as a source, "chaos" mediates *nothing* (nothing is established, revealed, or given a historic sense) but exactly because "chaos" does that, everything is allowed to shine through. The resulting forms may be a mythical stream of bad metaphors and disrupted sentences, stupid catachreses and mad anacolutha, but, in nature and power still, the "chaos" and holds in

[61] Friedrich Schlegel: "On Incomprehensibility", printed in *Friedrich Schlegel's* Lucinde *and the Fragments*, transl. and ed. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971) 268.

all forms their uniqueness and unreproducibility. It is a baffling thought, to be sure, but that is an inherent part of its wit and logic. The thought completes the intention by its own incomprehensibility, the "beautiful confusion"; and the glow ("Schein") contains and makes real the chaos that is guaranteed as the absolute towards which the idea tends.

While in my opinion this approximation provides the reader with a tangible sensation of Schlegel's unusual ideas of irony and myth, for de Man it is not enough. Let us have a stepwise look at this turn of events. With it de Man finally arcs away, once more, from the thematic asymptote of the critical philosophy of Friedrich Schlegel, and he achieves this by reducing the latter's infinitely fragmenting gathering impulse into a quest for an "authentic language". The idea for this de Man seems to borrow from critics already discredited in the essay:[62]

> This comes up frequently in the discussion of Friedrich Schlegel, where the claim is generally made, especially by aesthetic critics like Strohschneider-Kohrs and others, that Schlegel had an intuition of authentic language (*reelle Sprache*) and that he saw it to be present in myths, for example. (CI 179–80)

A few lines later, after prompting Schlegel over Novalis, de Man says that the former "treats authentic language in the 'Rede über die Mythologie', and he does so in the passage where he discusses the similarity between the wit which is characteristic of Romantic poetry… and mythology". The passage is the one quoted in the beginning of this chapter. Then, again a few lines further down, de Man translates Schlegel, probably himself:

> "The structure of wit and mythology is the same," he says. "The arabesque is the oldest and the most original form of the human imagination. But they [wit and mythology] could not exist without without something primal and original (*that seems to be the authentic language*) that cannot

[62] There are in "On Incomprehensibility" at least two references to a "real language" in Firchow's translation but they both occur in instances which sting with a sarcastic wit that is hardly urgent enough to set up a "quest" of any kind. In the first one Schlegel has "resolved" to show that "the purest and most genuine incomprehension emanates precisely from science and the arts" and that, in the post-Kantian times, this is now possible with the help of "a real language" with which "we can stop rummaging about for words and pay attention to the power and source of all activity" (ibid. 260). The second reference recalls the first one in a "thought of a real language" about Christoph Girtanner's strong belief, an 18th-century medical author and physician, that "in the nineteenth century man will be able to make gold" (ibid. 261) and thus remain beautiful and unspoiled in doing so. I was not able to find any further examples, and the only clues de Man himself gives in "The Concept of Irony" are restricted to a passing remark on Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881) as an example of "authentic language [as] the language of madness", and on the Girtanner reference as "reelle Sprache" being "not just gold but much more like money" (CI 181) – something circulated and less valuable.

> be imitated, that lets the original nature and the original force [*Kraft*] shine through, despite the transformation which it undergoes, and that allows," he says, "with naive profundity, the glow (*of this original language*) to shine through." (CI 180, my emphasis)

What de Man does here is alarming: by slipping the "authentic language" into the passage ever so furtively, and making it identify with Schlegel's "chaos", he puts words in someone else's mouth again. But he needs to do that in order next to claim this:

> In the first version [Schlegel] wrote of this, he had written that what shines through as *reelle Sprache* was "the strange (*das Sonderbare*), even the absurd [*das Widersinnige*], as well as a childlike yet sophisticated naiveté [*geistreiche* naiveté]"… When Schlegel rewrote this, he took those terms out (*Sonderbare*, *Widersinnige*, *geistreiche* naiveté), and instead of them he put three other terms. What re*elle Sprache* allows to light, to shine through, is "error, madness, and simpleminded stupidity". (CI 180–1)

Having supported Schlegel's witty ironies against the other uses of the concept up till now, de Man finally turns his back to him. By suspending "the beginning of all poetry, the motion and the law of the rationally thinking reason" merely in the "error, madness, and simpleminded stupidity" of all possible forms of "authentic language", de Man reduces Schlegel's colourful linguistic chaos ("mythology") into a cosmic singularity with which this and that uncorrectable expression may never coincide. The zero, the hypothetical other entity, disrupts the movement and devours the asymptote. The "glow" ("Schein") of any "reelle Sprache" out of chaos guarantees no creative sentiment or sensation about the workings of the Romantic consciousness; the reassuring ties of progressive universal relation are cut and left radically beyond any effort to reconstruct them.[63]

[63] This is the Schlegelian upshot also for Peter Szondi but he establishes it as the poet's predicament, as "his tragedy" (68). The plight results from the "basic thrust" of Schlegel's thought which deeply "strive[s] for unity, communication, universality, and infinity" (61) but nonetheless leaves him stranded. Peter Szondi: "Friedrich Schlegel and Romantic Irony" *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*. Moreover, on the note of "striving" for something, although J. M. Bernstein (apart from his discussion of de Man) is not directly concerned with the idea of an "authentic language" in his critique of Jena Romanticism, he too finds in Schlegel a quest for "pure art" (Bernstein 151), mainly based on his reading of *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (1795). What Bernstein, however, is concerned with is "the systematic undoing of the claim of the idea of painting" through Schlegel's linguistic concepts of fragment and irony (158); for him, the capacity of the imaginative mind for "infinite perfectibility" damages the potential meaningfulness of "intuition and sensibility" limited to individual works (151). This is obviously a very different undertaking from de Man's, whose meaning-making mind Bernstein founds not as "freedom" but as an "eternal mechanism" (163).

This is very much what Paul de Man does, at times surreptitiously, with all forms of the question of language; and, certainly, it does make up for his intention to break down the forgetting of awareness as awareness, chaotic or not. If nothing else, this always happens – ironically, if in no other way, as Schlegel apparently remembers.[64] And yet, to aver this about Schlegel, about how he breaks in his quest for an authentic language, de Man must resort to a few tricks of his own. First, he smuggles in the harrowing concern with a "reelle Sprache" from other critics. Then he identifies the phrase "ein erstes Ursprüngliches und Unnachahmliches" as its source, and goes on with his analysis at full tilt. One concern wilfully introduced and allowed to spread everywhere – with all the weight of the essay hanging in the balance. And yet in a critically warped, comically counterproductive way, one could understand this as de Man's whole point, his invading intention. Maybe "The Concept of Irony" is to de Man what the novel *Lucinde* is to Schlegel – a mischievous toying with the uncontrollable trajectories of language, an intense messing with the reader's mind? If so, it is certainly an unsettling rhetorical parabasis but, *if so*, it is far too comprehensible not to have been rationally planned as that. As a systematic judgment, it remembers to perform exactly what it promises. And it never forgets it is able to shine through other people's judgments, as well.

(iv) Kant and Aesthetics

One major place for this shining in de Man's oeuvre is Kant and his aesthetic system. It has been said earlier that Kant's philosophy relies on transcendental forms that legislate thinking *a priori* and in doing so provide the direction thinking *ought* to take despite being endowed with the ability to make voluntary judgments of any kind. The (perhaps happy) fate of mankind is thus pre-posited as a given which allows for individual differences but does not require the subject to submit either to dogmatic rationalism (such as Leibniz's) or to skeptical relativism (Hume's). This premise could be taken as a first place on which to confront Kant, and, sure enough, that is what de Man does. His reading of the *Critiques* and in

[64] "But, unlike Novalis (who is always held up as the example of the successful poet, the poet who produced real work, as compared to Schlegel who produced nothing but fragments), who also saw authentic language in myth, Schlegel somehow drew back from it, didn't have the power, or the confidence, or the love, to abandon himself to it, and he retreated from it." (CI 180)

particular the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,[65] was essential to his late views on what could remain of the (transcendental) possibility of our understanding after its break in language. The chance of legislating the cognitive direction of mankind without resorting to religious or natural scientific doctrine, and without falling back to an aesthetic or empirical resignation of any kind, must have seemed appealing to him. Having been driven by the very same concern all through his career, de Man's entry to the area of Kant studies introduced the academic public to a staggering interpretation of another major European author. Almost as a side-note to the occurrence, Friedrich Schiller ended up taking the blame for having got Kant so terribly wrong in the first place. But how exactly did it all unfold?

Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s de Man had been fighting somewhat different battles against somewhat different enemies (symbol, immediacy, metaphor), by the 1980s and the time of the project of *Aesthetics*, *Rhetoric*, *Ideology* (which was never completed and published as *Aesthetic Ideology* in its current extent only in 1996), de Man had identified the first and the last entity named in the title of that project as the final target(s) of his criticism. The opposition of poetics to hermeneutics was also subsumed under the same general aegis, as there was still the need to banish once and for all the hermeneutic traces of de Man's early work (left lingering, as we saw earlier, by a number of the Heidegger essays from the 1960s). By coming up with the astonishing concept of "formal materialism" on the basis of his reading of Kant, de Man discovered there was no reason to leave anything lurking in the shadow. Working from the foundation (or "inscription") of sheer linguistic principles, each and every thing could now be *accounted for*, even if not comprehensively explained or decided on.[66] With such critical discovering the ideals of Enlightenment are taken to their furthest boundaries – a place where they eternally cave in on themselves all over again. What is notable here is that even after everything the rational urge to be able to account for each thing systematically is never given up, not even in de Man. Let us now discuss this radical revision.

65 Immanuel Kant: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, transl. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Henceforth referred to as CPJ.

66 In a sense, de Man's achievement goes even further than what has been called the "hyper-Kantian thought experiment" (Critchley, 85, see end of note) of Nietzsche, whose philosophy left the subject severed from God and morality in a world defined by a seething stammer of never-ending impulsion. Simon Critchley: *Continental Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

De Man begins his discussion in "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" (1983) with the difference between the transcendental and the metaphysical. The move is a warranted one since it is crucial to understanding one of Kant's premises: he too wanted to establish a clean break between his own philosophy (which was to be *a priori* transcendentally ideal) and any metaphysical plan that built on an uncritical experience of the "real". In their various ways, the old theologies, dualities (atheist or not), and logical rationalist systems all seemed to operate out of such an experience, and for Kant this was not acceptable. The question of metaphysics, which nonetheless remained necessary because it employed "the same cognitive power as is employed in commonsense and scientific judgments about the world of experience"[67], had to be approached differently, and, since the problem of metaphysics was "ultimately a matter of reason's relation to itself", this approach had to be "reflexive"[68] and "make cognition itself an object of philosophical enquiry".[69] Therefore, in order to be able to answer the question of metaphysics, philosophy could not work *out of* it, it had to work *within* it, and only transcendental deduction would achieve that.

Since for de Man the question of language and critical deduction function quite similarly, it is vital for him in his essay to get started on the right side of things. Kant himself makes the base philosophical difference between transcendental and metaphysical principles in the following terms:

> A transcendental principle is one through which the universal *a priori* condition under which alone things can become objects of our cognition at all is represented. By contrast, a principle is called metaphysical if it represents the *a priori* condition under which alone objects whose concept must be given empirically can be further determined *a priori*. (CPJ 68)

De Man's interpretation of this is that whereas "metaphysical principles lead to the identification and definition, to the knowledge, of a natural principle that is not itself a concept", "transcendental principles lead to the definition of a conceptual principle of possible existence" (PMK 71). The emphasis here falls on the phrases "*natural* principle" in the former and "*possible* existence" (my emphasis) in the latter. A "natural principle" in this context implies an uncritical experience of the "real" as was targeted by Kant earlier, and such a principle skips over the observation of its own conditions (the process of understanding itself):

67 Sebastian Gardner: *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 21.

68 ibid. 22.

69 ibid. 23.

it cannot be made into an independent, intuitable object which simply waits for us to experience it out there somewhere. Newton's natural phenomena falter, Leibniz's descent from the abstract to the concrete falls short of founding itself, and Humean skeptical empiricism (where nature forever escapes reason) fails because a philosophy *can* be elaborated in which metaphysics is not only possible but also necessary. This is the gift of transcendental idealism in which "intuition takes place only in so far as the object is given to us"[70] and no object is ever given to us in experience without first having been intuited, aesthetically judged, and cognitively understood by us. The object (natural or abstract) does not precede the experience; the process of knowing might be cyclic[71] but it does not begin from where it ends; all such action is *further* determining which only responds to *a priori* conditions which themselves are fully analysable. De Man agrees with this when he says metaphysical principles "take for granted an objectivity" when they themselves are direly "in need of critical analysis" (PMK 71) which is then provided by the transcendental principles whose *possibility* bears the full load of Kant's entire philosophical enterprise. They are its crux.

Early in the essay, de Man admits this much but he also interlaces the discussion quite interestingly with Kant's "empirical concept of the body (as a movable thing in space)" (CPJ 68). This appears to foreshadow its nascent equation with ideology, with "body, corpus, or canon" (PMK 72), an entity having "an *external* cause" (PMK 71). The body therefore comes across as another metaphysical principle or a phenomenon with a sustained lack of reflexivity, but it does so without Kant apparently seizing upon it. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the thought arises when it is argued in the inaugural section on space and time that whereas "[t]ime and space, taken together, are the pure forms of all sensible intuition… they apply to objects only in so far as objects are viewed as appearances" and that should we pass beyond this field of validity, "no objective use can be made of them" (CPR A39/B56). This transcendental subjectivisation, supported by the notion that "[m]otion presupposes the perception of something movable" (CPR A41/B58), cancels out the metaphysical view of "absolutely real, self-subsistent"[72] space and the objective gravitation of bodies within it. Moreover, for de Man it also puts

[70] Immanuel Kant: *The Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929) 65. Henceforth referred to as CPR.

[71] The cyclic nature of the Kantian process is at this point suggested as a way of conceiving how intuitions of sensible objects, before they are understood as concepts, can already have been *a priori* cognised, represented, and apperceived in experience through a "special act of synthesis of the manifold" (CPR B139) which claims the object for the act of understanding still underway.

[72] Gardner 70.

at risk Kant's own analogous "body" of transcendental idealism made real by *a priori* principles. This looks forward to the *Augenschein* scene discussed below and it presents another instance of him using Kant to his own advantage.

Unsurprisingly, de Man goes on with his argument in the essay by identifying the metaphysical, which by now has been discounted as a flawed critical premise, first with (the body politic of) the ideological – because "it is the transcendental system, as substance or as structure, that determines the ideology and not the reverse" (PMK 72) – and then with phenomenality as the determining mode of ideological discourse, as the "phenomenalized, empirically manifest principle of cognition" (PMK 73). However, as the determinant of cognition, the latter is as much to be depended on as it is to be criticised, and the phenomenal is therefore divided between two camps: that of the villains (the metaphysical and the ideological) and that of the heroes (the transcendental and the critical). It is a true Damocles' sword scenario – one that leaves Kant to find something else to ensure the completeness and cohesion of his system beyond the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What he then did, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, was to introduce a new "a priori principle" that could "give us confidence in the validity of our judgments without directly giving us new concepts of objects" (CPJ, xxi) and would in doing so create a "causal link between critical philosophy and ideology" (or the transcendental and the metaphysical). This link was the "phenomenalized principle" (PMK 73) of the aesthetic, and it was "causal" because, without it, critical thought would have never resulted in empirical action, and vice versa. Cathy Caruth says:

> Just as significant as [the] conceptual distinction between [empirical and philosophical discourse], however, is also, in de Man's analysis, the way in which philosophy uses an example – the example of bodies in motion – to define its conceptual purity. Kant illustrates the distinction between metaphysics and transcendental philosophy with the example of how each relates the phenomenon of bodies in motion to causality.[73]

The illustrative principle straddles both sides of its intrinsically two-fold nature in the form of its examples, and it thus pins the very survival of Kant's philosophy on a demiurge concept that can only attempt to bridge over the "incalculable gulf" (CPJ 63) spread between the phenomenon of formal nature and the phenomenon of moral freedom. This gulf is the same thing which constitutes the break in Paul de Man's texts (between immaterial language and material reality) but there it is

[73] Cathy Caruth: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 78.

neither a thing to be bridged over nor something that any phenomenalisation can affect – no amount of apparent two-foldness is able to change that. The tenor is set for reading Kant: the pinning of the transcendental on the aesthetic will sooner or later fail as another metaphysical ideology which one can, and should, become critically aware of. In the essay "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", this ruling is ineluctably declared when the aesthetic is defined as a "phenomenalized principle"; in a space of just three pages, de Man foreshadows the overthrow of the entire Kantian enterprise.

Before moving on, it might be worthwhile to have a sideways look at the concept of "hypotyposis" and how it can be said to come into play in this context. In his *A Kant Dictionary*, Howard Caygill defines the Kantian hypotyposis as something "in the guise of 'presentation' or the rendering of concepts and ideas in 'terms of sense'".[74] It could well be construed as the underlying support upon which all communication, philosophy included, is founded: language. This linguistic "rendering" then further divides into the "schematic" and "symbolic" hypotyposes, of which, in Kant's words, the first contains "direct" and the second "indirect representations of the concept". Moreover, as the schemata do the presentation "demonstratively" and the symbolic "by means of an analogy" (CPJ 226) which acts as a "transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond" (CPJ 226–7), the gulf between the formal and the moral is once again spread out in front of us. For Kant, a schematic hypotyposis appears to be performing the transcendental function of bringing the pure concepts of understanding in line with their *a priori* principle. This happens directly and can be linguistically demonstrated.

A symbolic hypotyposis, on the other hand, is a more curious entity – one that, like art, indirectly transports any reflection upon it to "another, quite different concept". In the essay "The Epistemology of Metaphor", de Man plays off Kant in dismissing Locke and Condillac's related musings but finds himself in an interesting situation when he quotes the very same sentence that I did above, with the exception of his having used a different translation, as well as having highlighted the word "perhaps". The interesting thing here is that de Man uses the "perhaps" not to wear down the authority of the symbolic hypotyposis (which, supposedly, is done anyway) but that of the schematic: when the impossibility of direct correspondence is "said, even in passing, to be 'perhaps' possible, the theory

74 Howard Caygill: *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) 231.

of a schematic hypotyposis loses much of its power of conviction".[75] After all, how can we believe in the rendering of a "clean category of epistemologically reliable tropes"[76] with the help of a particular concept if its less reliable counterpart is able to perform the same function? Seizing on this observation,[77] de Man makes a Hegelian turn in which the loss of the symbolic is countered by a loss of signification which reduces the schematic hypotyposis to a "mere mnemotechnic device", the user of which is always "guilty of reification" – which is just as bad as (if not worse than) as being guilty of the "aestheticism" that is the result of using the "purely symbolic".[78] With a sleight of hand, it appears de Man manages to throw the entire schematism section of Kant's plan into a dubious light; it now suggests itself as another "phenomenalized principle" which, erroneously and in vain, tries to keep the transcendental system intact.

What de Man overlooks though is that for Kant the schemata remain "in a *special* sense hard to grasp" because they occur "*qua* activity" and not *qua* what happens *in* the activity, while it is underlined that for the occurrence to come about "a mediating representation which has a sensible aspect" is required.[79] It is a de Manian rhetorical ploy which serves to emphasise the notion of each linguistic concept being of a thing which "is *not* an object of sensible intuition"[80] – just like all things are in the realm of such thinking. After the "elimination of every sensible condition" a "purely logical" meaning does remain but it does not signify the Kantian schematic "bare unity of the representations" (CPR A147/B186); what remains is a bare scattering of representations, actually *and* transcendentally. The schematic hypotyposis is a phenomenal judgment which betrays the formal, inscribed basis of language lying well beyond its reach. Such a difference can a "*vielleicht*", Kant's "perhaps", allegedly make. From now on, de Man will be aware of "language" as his blanket defence term against just about any concept philosophy is able to fling at him, and this awareness is also the valorisation of

75 "The Epistemology of Metaphor" AI 47.

76 Jonathan Loesberg: "Materialism and Aesthetics: Paul de Man's 'Aesthetic Ideology'" *diacritics* 27.4 (1997) 90.

77 The argument is dubious in the sense of its sudden shift from the symbolic to the schematic hypotyposis. The failure of the imaginary symbol 'perhaps' ever directly to correspond to an intuition is turned into a systematic failure of its schematic counterpart, when the 'perhaps' could also refer to something symbolic which *our* understanding cannot ever have direct intuition of – not an infrequent reference in Kant. In this reading, the transcendental angle would hold good.

78 "The Epistemology of Metaphor" AI 48.

79 Sebastian Gardner: *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). Pages 170, 167 and 169 respectively.

80 ibid. 203.

literature (and critical theory) as a further logical advantage over its unwittingly sophistic counterpart.

Having identified the aesthetic as a "phenomenalized principle", and having elevated language to a status above transcendental philosophy in the other essay, de Man turns his attentions to the concept of the sublime in Kant. He observes that, in connection with the "main theme of the third *Critique*, the problem of teleological judgment or of purposiveness without purpose, the consideration of the sublime seems almost superfluous" (PMK 73). So why do it, then? On one hand, it could be that Kant did not want to leave any epistemological stone unturned – everything systemisable had to be incorporated into the system. De Man, on the other hand, offers no direct answer, but he does come up with a solution to the quandary between the sublime and the beautiful as divided by Kant: "whereas the beautiful is a metaphysical and ideological principle, the sublime aspires to being a transcendental one, with all that this entails" (PMK 73). This means that in judging the beautiful, only intellect is needed (to agree or to disagree), whereas in judging the sublime, truth must be at stake. In doing so, critical interest in the beautiful is drastically reduced (since it *begins* in the experience of being "all of a piece", PMK 73), and the duty of defending the transcendental system falls on the sublime, a concept "shot through with dialectical complication" (PMK 73) which "knows of no limits or borders" yet "has to appear as a determined totality", a thing "something of a monster, or, rather, a ghost" (PMK 74). It is a wretched part to play, and de Man continues from this complicated casting to discussing the mathematical and the dynamic sublime.

His attempt to find dialectical resolution within the concept lands in an impasse though, in the conclusion that the "sublime cannot be defined as the failure of the sublime, for this failure deprives it of its identifying principle" (PMK 75), which is the result of the sublime always escaping any type of conceptualisation, including the conceptualisation of the failure of conceptualisation. All scales are thrown out the cognitive window because the sublime is "not 'the large' but 'the largest'" and because the "infinite is not comparable to any finite magnitude, [so] the articulation cannot occur" (PMK 75). A concept(ualisation), the concept(ualisation) of its own failure included, is always a "finite magnitude" and that is exactly what the sublime cannot ever be. The concept caves in on itself, as another "phenomenalized principle", "closer to extension than to number" (PMK 75). Out of this radical incongruity, "out of the pain of the failure to constitute the sublime by making the infinite apparent" is "born the pleasure of the imagination", in which the failure "to connect with the sensory" (PMK 76) elevates the non-

sensible above the sensible. Pleasure is thus identified with the intellectual break itself, and just as the Kantian schemata were earlier debunked as being dependent on sensible objects in their upholding of the transcendental plan (even though they should have remained "irreducibly sensible-*and*-intellectual"[81]), de Man here debunks the possibility of the sublime to bridge over from nature to imagination as a fallacy of manifold "subreption".[82] By another critical dub, the principle of the sublime gets labelled as "a metaphysical principle that mistakes itself for a transcendental one" (PMK 76), and it is here that the formalness of linguistic thinking is shown as constituting the phenomenality of sublime knowledge, as well. The "monstrous" zero blows open each articulation of the formal "infinity of number" as a sublime "totality of extension" (PMK 77) and leaves understanding pinned on thought rather than knowledge.[83] "Was heißt denken?" de Man then feels compelled to ask.

Breaching the linguistic domain, de Man feels that "formal rather than philosophical" (PMK 77) descriptions are now justified. He retrieves from Kant the terms of "apprehension" and "comprehension", and founds with them the differentiation between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime. Working swiftly, de Man lays down apprehension as a successive procession, "as a syntagmatic, consecutive motion along an axis [which] can proceed ad infinitum without difficulty". The mathematical failure only happens when the magnitude involved becomes too great. In opposition to this, comprehension is linguistically defined as "a paradigmatic totalization of the apprehended trajectory" which soon reaches "a point at which it is saturated" (PMK 77) and which, extended and cut off in turns, lands up in a "system of substitutions" which generates "partial totalizations within an economy of profit and loss" (PMK 78). This is the way the mathematical sublime functions, modelled on a synecdoche which forever contradicts itself; "the exchange from part to whole generates wholes that turn out to be only parts" (PMK 77). The potentiality of synthetic imagination is lost in its own incoherence and dissolved "in the aporias of intellectual and sensory

81 ibid. 170.

82 The confusing of "what is sensible with what belongs to the understanding" and, in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the "attribution to an object of nature of our own moral vocation which gives rise to the feeling of the sublime". Caygill 380.

83 In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, "[a]n object is monstrous if by its magnitude it annihilates the end which its concept constitutes" (CPJ 136). In consequence, for the late de Man "the zero" becomes just such an "object", disrupting "*at all points*" the system itself appears in: "Whereas one is and is not a number at the same time, zero is radically not a number, absolutely heterogenous to the order of number" ("Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion" AI 59).

appearance" that are the "model of discourse as a tropological system" (PMK 78) away from human cognition. Now exclusively dealing with his *a priori* descriptions of figural language (as an aporetic legion of uncontrollable tropes), and having attained that familiar position through the reading of an "easy to grasp" passage, de Man grounds in his own terms the establishment of the Kantian sublime as a strictly "linguistic principle" (PMK 78) which no longer needs to be considered as a philosophical dilemma or as a problem of any type of critical thought other than the de Manian one – which by now is already recognised for its own characteristic method.

Consequently, de Man turns to the question of the sublime as performance. He remarks that, had the principles of the medieval quadrivium[84] been followed, we "could have expected a kinetic rather than a dynamic sublime" (PMK 78) in studying its motion in space and time. However, as kinetics implies bodies gravitating and as that kind of Newtonian performance was discounted early in the essay, de Man repeats Kant's gesture (with an air of pleasant surprise) and proceeds to account for the transcendental motion of the *dynamic* sublime in terms of "power", "violence", and "force". The warlike terminology (in which connection Austinian speech acts are also mentioned) allows de Man to define its sudden linguistic appearance in Kant as the "saturation of the tropological field as language frees itself of its constraints" (PMK 79); and, further, to surmise the occurrence as signalling the "deep, perhaps fatal, break or discontinuity" (PMK 79) at the heart of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The constative dimension of the transcendental project is thereby ultimately lost, its performative aspect included. This event interminably disrupts the epistemological comprehension of Kantian philosophy and leaves the concept of the sublime (dis)articulated as an aporia which now has to look outside the "rational principles" (PMK 80) of reason and understanding in one final attempt to preserve its transcendental possibility. Under the strain of the sublime as a powerful force, the aesthetic of "affects, moods and feelings" (PMK 80) is evoked as the last resort and the last hope of bridging over the dialectic from nature to freedom pinned on it.

84 The quadrivium, along with the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic), completed the seven liberal arts of medieval education. In it arithmetic represented number in itself, geometry number in space, music number in time, and astronomy number in space and time. It is therefore basically the study of number, and it is also the system that underscores the form and structure of Kantian philosophy. For de Man to make the transition from the "literary" trivium to the "scientific" quadrivium is a late mark of his tendency to widen the scope of the question of language and to display the universality of the break that it brings. The concept of the zero is immanent to it (see previous footnote).

De Man has come to this place in the essay first by way of rejecting the metaphysical, ideological, and the empirically phenomenal as false premises for critical philosophy, and then by turning Kant's own transcendental rationalism against him. He has done this by showing how it fails endlessly in space (by the "geometry" of its null magnitude), in time (by the "music" of its "economy of profit and loss"), and in space *and* time (by the "astronomy" of its violent dynamicity), and, last, by revealing the failings as an *a priori* of formal language (non-schematic, non-symbolic language) with no constative dimension of performance. Afterwards, de Man stands at the last shore of redeeming the "arithmetic" of the transcendental judgment in itself. Enter the vision of the aesthetic imagination. For the remainder of "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", de Man discusses what has since been famous as the *Augenschein* passage in the third *Critique*, its significance interwoven with affects and disinterestedness, and its relation to Romantic and post-Kantian philosophical figuration, before eventually retrieving the rhetoric of the body – formally disarticulated and mutilated to his own purposes by then. The overthrow of the entire Kantian enterprise happens almost on the side, as the "critical power of a transcendental philosophy undoes the very project of such a philosophy" (PMK 89), and it is by that event, true to the spirit of his latter writings, that de Man's unique concept of what he calls Kantian "materialism" or "materiality" comes to dominate. In contrast to the first half of the essay which can be read as an academic, point-by-point progression to a real spot of intent, the second half (beginning at the bottom of page 79) comes across as single entity. It exhibits a congenial magnitude, however "monstrous", which one must (*muß*) comprehend as a whole (like Kant) if the critical impact of de Man is to be experienced (or transmitted) in any way. Without that schematic hypotyposis, *thinking* about de Man can never materialise in *knowing* anything of the suggestion carried by his deconstruction. It is at this phenomenal place of looking that each sensed premise must be not only accounted for but also warranted, each idea sounded, every judgment imaged.

The so-called *Augenschein* passage appears in the third *Critique* in the "General remark on the exposition of aesthetic reflective judgments" concluding the Analytic of the Sublime. The scene with which we are there presented is one with a "sight of the starry heavens" above the "sight of the ocean" (CPJ 152) cut off from any teleological consideration or agreeable sensation one might glean from it. Whatever effect such a scene might have "for the benefit of the land" (CPJ 153) is stultified as either an "aesthetic" or "merely formal purposiveness" (CPJ 152) as all such benefits are voided by the "clear watery mirror" of the ocean

"bounded only by the heavens". The sublimity of the vision comes from the scene being seen "as the poets do" (CPJ 153), "merely as a broad, all-embracing vault", and it is this "architectonic" vision which warrants the "pure aesthetic judgment" (CPJ 152) needed to complete the transcendental plan. True to his example, Kant then juxtaposes "the human figure" in similar terms of sublimity, as well, by severing the body from any kind of an organic end where "all its members exist for determining grounds of our judgment" (CPJ 153). In doing so, he elevates mind over matter.[85] Moreover, in accompanying terms of affect, the viewing of the sublime scene might come with the negative satisfaction of "horror" and "astonishment" were it not for the aesthetic imagination which immediately "sacrifices" its own sensible freedom to acquire the reason of "an enlargement and power which is greater" than that which it deprives itself of. In "view of the safety" in which the looker then "knows himself to be", the scene is felt in "calmness" (CPJ 152), which, true to the transcendental system, is actually "antecedent" to all other feelings because it is the only one that shows the "object of a pure and unconditioned intellectual satisfaction" as the "moral law in all its power" (CPJ 153). Since "every affect is blind", the only transcendentally sublime mood[86] is "affectlessness (*apatheia, phlegma in significatu bono*)", and it is then "through the dominion that reason exercises over sensibility" (CPJ 154) that the aesthetic judgment of the affectless imagination can be declared *a priori* valid. The formal, non-teleological *Augenschein* is thus claimed for the "intrinsically purposive (moral) good" (CPJ 153) towards which the Kantian sublime is geared. However, it is precisely here that de Man locates the final breaking point of his transcendental philosophy.

De Man's take on this point has been an inspiration for quite some study, and the continued fascination among academics means it is far from being an exhausted source. Basically, the de Manian reading of the Kantian *Augenschein* revises it radically to collapse the possibility of any kind of transcendentalisation which would validate the concept of aesthetic judgment as anything other than a phenomenal, ideologised, metaphysical principle which philosophy attempts to hide under a hermeneutic guise of transcendental idealism. The formal thrust of

[85] Towards the end of the "General remark" Kant interestingly somewhat relents in this de-elevation of the body by saying that for "the promotion or inhibition of the powers of life", consciousness of "the mind for itself" is not enough. Instead, such "hindrances or promotions must be sought outside it, though in the human being itself, hence *in combination* with his body" (CPJ 159, my emphasis). This thought could provide a different lead for studying Kant.

[86] "Mood" here understood as a state of affectivity in duration.

the system betrays its own intent at critical points and leaves it irretrievably adrift from its own announced aspirations. The locations of these points, however, need some mapping. At the "architectonic" vision, de Man is happy to see as Kant appears to (or "as the poets do") – breaking and severing each single facet of the scene (and, later on, the body) from one another, leaving the viewer with nothing but how the view "turns out to be completely dis-junct from any mind whatsoever", only with what Andrzej Warminski has called "the pure optics of what the *Augenschein* shows or what only meets the eye".[87] In this respect, de Man's critique in "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" proceeds mercilessly through the formal scene to critical rulings such as "[n]o mind is involved in the Kantian vision of ocean and heaven" (PMK 82) which, supported by Kant's figure of the wild man from the *Logik* who does not see prior to the concept (of the "dwelling"), "but merely sees" (PMK 81), forever precludes the possibility of any "figuralization or symbolization by an act of judgment" in this "flat, third-person world" (PMK 82). At the architectonic vault, at this sky and sea "devoid of any suggestion of depth", the only "thing", or the only pure intuition, we are left with is the "formal mathematization or geometrization" of the scene – and the only response, the "only word that comes to mind is that of a *material* vision" (PMK 83). The deep (Romantic) worlds of Schiller, Heidegger, and the young Hegelians, among others, fail this "material" vision immediately, and so do Rousseau's late reveries reflected off the surface of natural things and turned into a nostalgic sentiment of memory and vision. In Kant, instead of any pathetic fantasy, one finds a "formal materialism that runs counter to all values and characteristics associated with aesthetic experience" (PMK 83), and that radically changes the face of critical theory for good.

It should, however, be noted that at this point de Man has not yet really turned the material vision *against* Kant – only its empirical incommensurability with the aesthetic judgment of the sublime has been implied. It can therefore be argued it is not materiality *in itself* that collapses the Kantian plan; it is not the "material trace or the material inscription that would be the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of the text 'itself'"[88] that short-circuits the system, because this condition (or schema) can be transcendentally *contained*. This is an aspect which I want to emphasise significantly because it allows a view of the

87 Andrzej Warminski: "'As the Poets Do It': On the Material Sublime" *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory* Tom Cohen et al. (eds.) (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 16.

88 ibid. 28.

question of language which de Man's ruthless criticism only *seems* to undermine, as becomes clear in his case against Schiller. It can be claimed that it really is not the possibility or the impossibility of the two-dimensional architectonic vision as an arithmetic entity which determines the pure aesthetic judgment of the sublime, there is another facet to the event which does that. That other facet might be called the dynamic of its transportation from the imaginary to the rational, and that is more than sheerly material. More critical mapping in this particular field must therefore be done.

In this area, then, another angle is found with the "theory of moral affect" (PMK 83). Rodolphe Gasché finds much the same thing when he says that although de Man's essay "Kant's Materialism" (1981) "overlaps to some degree" with "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", the former piece "pursues a question not addressed in that essay", centring on the "issue of the affects and affectivity".[89] It is true the discussion of affects in the 1983 essay comes across as rather compacted; from the mentioning of the "theory of moral affect" it takes only the space of three pages for de Man to prove his case, which, briefly put, disrupts the possibility of "affectlessness" of being *a priori*, and it is *this* disruption (and not the material vision) which ultimately breaks the Kantian transcendental system. For without the "calmness" provided by affectlessness, by the apathetic and phlegmatic intellect, *no aesthetic judgment can be made*. Without the "safety" inherent in the formal material vision (which converts into a superior tool), the "intrinsically purposive (moral) good" can never come to dominate imagination. In de Man's words, "disinterestedness becomes necessarily polluted… with positively valorized experiences" (PMK 84) that are not fearsomely beautiful but tranquilly sublime. When the rush of sensibility gives way to the aesthetic judgment of the affectless imagination, the free intuition lets its apathetic substitute take over, and it is only "by this anti- or unnatural act" (PMK 86) that moral reason is able to conquer material nature.

The boon gifted at the successful completion of this "sacrifice" (which brings to mind the intentional renunciations of Baudelaire and Mallarmé) would be the dialectical preservation of the transcendental plan, but, as de Manian critique shows – by the disarticulation exerted through the radical allegorisation of the *Augenschein* scene – there is nothing formally *a priori* in that economy of substitutions, and because the system is instantly morphed into mere "descriptions of tropological transformations" (PMK 87), affectlessness fails as a linguistic figure. And because that happens, there is an unpreventable failure all throughout Kant's

[89] Rodolphe Gasché: *The Wild Card of Reading* (Harvard University Press, 1998) 96.

system; thought is wedged off from action, nature cherishes no moral vocation. Kant is condemned to falling without gravity within his own vision; the material scene survives but all possible judgments are cancelled. Finally cut off from any last semblance of an objectual entity, Kant's body (of work) is mutilated and his limbs (as textual organs) dismembered; only blind performance remains. At the utterly singular vision of sky and sea, there is a "truly aporetic incompatibility between the failure of the imagination to grasp magnitude with what becomes"; and the scene is lost from safety, morality, and reason. And, to establish this for the ages, with a monstrous spectrality, de Man says that "no degree of obfuscation or ideology can transform this materiality into the phenomenal cognition of aesthetic judgment" (PMK 90). Echoing hollowly in the deconstructed space of Kantian affectlessness, the critic can do no more than repeat the material superiority of this dark existence. But since it *is* still possible to repeat it, still possible to say reach the same judgment at another site of *Augenschein*, further looks into Kant (at "*the same being* from two points of view"[90]) are therefore very much in order.

It has been suggested above that in de Man's deconstruction of the total Kantian plan, and the legacy of the "formal materialist" theory left behind by him, the perpetual linguistic disruption embodied in the phenomenalised *Augenschein* scene is in itself not enough ultimately to break the pure aesthetic judgment of the transcendental system, despite the arguments of commentators such as Warminski and Redfield.[91] For it has to be realised that the scene, no matter how allegorically or "parabasically" it were read, is due to be contained by that very reading; it is my claim that, when not being aesthetically judged and transformed into its own phenomenal cognition, the concept of formal materialism and its senseless performativity survives. The real world makes do with the philosophy and the entities caught within it are guaranteed their ghostly afterlife. If they were not, they would never be seen or spoken about again. As a result, when conceived along these lines, the system strings together questions about sensory perception which de Man reduces to taken-for-granted tokens of blank nature and dissimulates as

90 Lewis White Beck (ed.): *Kant: Selections* (New York and London: Scribner/MacMillan, 1988) 20.

91 Warminski might counter with the idea of an "emergence of a language of power out of a language of cognition" ("'As the Poets Do It': On the Material Sublime", 28) which characterises the senseless performativity of formal materialism broken free of all tropological constraints, and Redfield might point out that "the condition of signification for de Man is that signification be undecidable" (44, see end of note). However, the very fact that Warminski can locate an "emergence" and Redfield a "condition of signification" shows them as coming off short. Marc W. Redfield: "Humanizing de Man" *diacritics* 19.2 (1989).

actual experience which would only cognitively refer us somewhere else (ideas of sky and sea) rather than sensately affect us on the spot.[92] The last part of "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" makes this point very clear but remains permeated with its own aesthetic residue which makes the baleful imagery possible. This even the late de Man cannot do away with, here or elsewhere; and he claims nothing else. But because there still is a claim, a very tangible one, which we can relate to and attempt to understand, there is a containing power in play as well. This again releases de Man's own materialist trap, as well as his (quasi-)transcendental "*impossible condition of possibility*"[93] which always returns him to it. The spectres of the metaphysical and the ideological, as well as each representation of any ideal, remain deathless in its realm. They are "dead" only to positive intuition and no power of negative thinking can ground their existence even as an abstract concept. Their sheer senselessness guarantees them as nothing but formal inscriptions which depend on their materiality for a *semblance* of life. This is the haunted residue of the dialectic of Enlightenment which manifests itself, perpetually evoked, as the monster of linguistic undecidability. All this is pure de Manian talk, and the very fact it can be spoken so intensely, repeated time and again, underscores it containability within a baffling phenomenology which the *Augenschein* scene enacts. Sharing the same vision from another point of view, the real grievance de Man actually has with Kant is that, for him, things (should) remain non-intuitable and because they do that, they remain forever *a priori* severed from one another. The logic of rationality is exactly the same and so is the morality of truth; it is actually the feeling of sense in the two critical theorists that makes the difference.

So it seems then that the real difficulty of "rescuing" aesthetic judgment from the dominion of radical disarticulation does fall on the dim and elusive area of affects and affectivity. It was said about Kant that for him, at least in the time of his masterpieces, only affectlessness (the apathetic and phlegmatic judgment) could justify the universal validity of transcendental idealism. When the astonishment (*Verwunderung*) turns into admiration (*Bewunderung*),[94] the shock subsides

[92] Nigel Mapp wonderfully pins down this de Manian tendency when, in discussing de Man's criticism of Andrew Marvell's poetry, he finds him "bleaching the chlorophyll from Marvell's reflective consciousness" (131, see end of note) by reducing the colour green in the poems into an instant metaphor. Nigel Mapp: *Critical Disenchantment: Rhetoric and Ideology in Paul de Man*, Ph. D. Thesis (Cardiff: University College of Cardiff, 2002).

[93] Gasché 37.

[94] De Man plays around with these two words as if it was only their mutual similarity which endeared them to Kant. Such metonymical horseplay would of course strengthen de Man's case.

into calmness, and for the while when the aesthetic imagination substitutes (sacrifices) itself for moral reason, the judgment is completed and guaranteed *a priori*. It was then seen how de Man harped on precisely about this moment and deconstructed it as a linguistic exchange which could be modelled on the violent performativity of the *Augenschein* scene. For Kant's system, this spelled doom (of which Kant might have been aware or unaware), but it did leave a number of questions unanswered: where did Kant get his idea of affects from and what was his overall view of them? How does the discussion of affects fit with the model of violent performativity and what remains after the linguistic tropes have (been) broken? If the remnants of the phenomenal cognitions – whether metaphysical, ideological, or merely schematic in technical terms – continue to hang around posthumously in aesthetic terms, having been disrupted by the formal material scene, is it the same for affects? What is a de Manian affect? Is it an "unhappy" one? And, in theory, if it is, what happens then? (I will be using the term "affect" as my blanket reference in the following discussion. The decision not to use "emotion" or "feeling" is largely based on the fact that both de Man and Kant also frequently employ "affect" in this context, even if there is no exclusive reason why the other terms would not apply. It does seem, though, that "affect" is often used with the notion of some kind of "body" attached to or embodied by it, and since bodies, both organic and theoretical, have been a recurring theme for me too, the choice appears prudent.)

The question of where Kant got his idea of affects from and how he viewed them in general is addressed by de Man in the following:

> Kant is never as bland as when he discusses the emotions. He frequently seems to be using the dictionary rather than his own experience as a starting point, and he is often guided by external resemblances between words rather than by the inner resonances of emotion. (KM 123)

The "external resemblance between words" recalls Kant's preference of *Bewunderung* over *Verwunderung*, and leads de Man to bemoan such "a reduction from symbolic feeling to mere words, such a loss of pathos" as something "not easy to interpret and very easy to misjudge" (KM 123). Kant's strategy on affects is further described as sometimes drawing on "eighteenth-century provincial platitudes" which are delivered with a "categorical self-assurance that borders on the ludicrous" (KM 123), sometimes relying on "distressing commonplaces" and "highly stylized character silhouettes or caricatures" (KM 124) which reveal the lack of "actual observation" and thus highlight the strategy as being based

"entirely on words" (KM 124) in a nearly metaphysical fashion. Gasché calls it the Kantian "typology of affects" with "absolutely no suturing power".[95] This is of course a crucial advantage to de Man and the claims he is making; it also gives him the opportunity to point back to the Hegelian "loss of the symbolic" (KM 124) which overshadowed the distinction between the schematic and symbolic hypotyposes in "The Epistemology of Metaphor", with the "perhaps" blurring the possibility of definite referentiality in the schematic mode and thus turning all linguistic bodies into aesthetic phenomena subject to the power of the material letter. And such materiality is what comprises the Kantian affects.

They are "specifically different from passions" by being "tumultuous and unpremeditated" while the latter are "sustained and considered" (CPJ 154), and the reason they (but not passions) can still be called sublime (and hence objects of pure aesthetic judgment) is precisely their remaining connected with "freedom of the mind", even if in a somewhat "hampered" way (CPJ 154). Within the Kantian transcendental plan, this links and endows the affects with a decisive power over and beyond both rational understanding and moral reason which, in order to be fulfilled, require the aesthetic judgment to mediate between them. However, as it was already established that for Kant "every affect" was "blind" (CPJ 154) and that the negative satisfaction of astonishment needed to turn into the intellectually positive admiration as soon as possible in order to become transcendentally valid, it was actually "affectlessness" which became the prime linguistic figure to fail and let Kant fall within his own vision. Affectlessness was revealed as another instance of the inscribed letter, simply another word, which formally broke the body of its own cognition, and left the contained material scene open for senseless performativity.

It should therefore be acknowledged that, as the final resort of aesthetic judgment, affects are critically crucial. Having introduced most of the traditional premises of philosophy in the first half of "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", de Man leads them up to the *Augenschein* scene which not only breaks them but also the Kantian theory of affects – further developed in the earlier "Kant's Materialism". It is shown that although affects (feelings and emotions) are epistemologically similar to rational cognitions, they remain the hardest to pin down – unless subjected to as "bland" a presentation as Kant affords them. By working along these lines, the thrashing of affects (affectlessness included) seems all too easy for de Man. This is also the reason why it is rather difficult to read de Man's tenor between his formal elucidation of *Augenschein* and his

[95] Gasché 99.

related allusions to the Romantic depths of Wordsworth, Shelley, Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Which one does he prefer, theoretically and affectively? Does it matter? Stripping Kant down seems to contribute more to the positive growth of negative knowledge but, having done that, there is just as much (if not more) to be found in the negative depths of positive delusion, too. The ghosts of phenomenal cognitions, whether theoretical tropes or affective words, are just as violently performative and formally dominant in each instance, and they are also those which keep the material scene enacted. This is the pinnacle, the poetic vista of the Romantic aporia which, in this form, maintains the non-subjective thrust of de Manian deconstruction.

Rei Terada describes the thrust as feeling that is "unsupported by a larger coherence",[96] as emotionality unreached by the tropological system. Of de Man's relation to it, she says this:

> But [de Man] does share Heidegger's belief in their continuousness [of emotion and pathos] as "phenomenal fact". Nietzsche's affective freedom, Julie's desire for self-criticism, and Kant's sublime *apatheia* describe what it like to feel the difference between the concept and the actuality of emotion's negation.[97]

Terada's suggestion is compelling, and certainly significant to a theory of affects, but it remains questionable in its ultimate commensurability with de Man – for reasons we will come to shortly. Similar doubts linger over the feeling-rescuing readings of Neil Hertz (who conjures up "an unmotivated pathos" out of the "gesture of disfiguration"[98] which frequently crops up in de Man's essays) and Lindsay Waters who, in the rather foolhardily named essay "On Paul de Man's Effort to Re-Anchor a True Aesthetics in Our Feelings" (1999), attempts to set down a secure place for criticism in the exclusive mooring of linguistic materiality which shelters us from the threat of identification and symbolic control. At first this sounds like a thing de Man would do – after all, he did come from a tradition of unhappy philosophy and vehemently sought "to undermine the pretensions of modern subjectivity"[99] – but when we hear it claimed that "this is the way to put feelings, and not ideas, back at the center of aesthetics",[100] Waters's case

96 Rei Terada: *Feeling in Theory* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001) 85.

97 ibid. 87–8.

98 Neil Hertz: "Lurid Figures" *Reading de Man Reading* 91.

99 Lindsay Waters: "On Paul de Man's Effort to Re-Anchor a True Aesthetics in Our Feelings" *boundary 2* 26.2 (1999) 151.

100 ibid. 149.

becomes highly dubious. For, given the omnipresent break, what is the centre at which to put anything – and least of all something that can be named? Waters makes formulations like "the *instruments we use* to do *such things as language* are *in the world first* and *only later in the head*"[101] in which nearly every expression flies in the face of both Kant and de Man. The "world" of Waters projects a place of Humean metaphysics where nature steps away from reason and the empirical (non-)subject circumscribes the cognitive horizon, and there is nothing left to combat rational skepticism with, apart from the "true aesthetic experience" being "re-anchored" in the ghost of the subject. And since that experience is "not about gaining control over our reactions to a work but about the loss of control", the revenant remains aimless and wandering, albeit with a fixed inner flame, never to return to anything else than illusion and failure. According to Waters (and perhaps Hertz and Terada), in this plangent, "disinterested" state "we learn what it is to own our feelings – to have them and to know them".[102] In other words, in our sheer subjectlessness and awareness of linguistic materiality we find *shelter* from the *threat* of the symbolic which would have us identify with something. This smacks of Romanticism but it must be noted Paul de Man is not about espousing the Romantic he is about deconstructing them (although sympathetically) – and Waters's essay deconstructs just like that. Hertz and Terada are nowhere quite as obvious as Waters is but their "deep worlds" might be suspect to a similar tendency being overlooked there.

How can one name and locate a thing of affectivity such as pathos or feeling "beyond" cognition without resorting to a tool of language which, by default, subverts and destroys that thing? This kind of residue cannot be Benjamin-esquely speculated on – least of all in saying it is something that should be looked out for – without throwing the entire background project (de Manian deconstruction in this case) in a questionable light. One cannot bend the method to receive something it does not allow for, and de Man certainly does not allow his ghosts to rove with any kind of heart or flame clinging to them in their afterlife. It is only human to be aware of the image (or non-image) but that is the end of it; not even an unhappy philosophy may retrieve them anymore. As his essay closes, Waters goes back to "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" to retrieve de Man's thought about the Kantian imagination remaining "pure affect rather than cognition" (PMK 86) in its contact with nature, and he hopes this will vindicate him. The only problem is that the contact is linguistic and the affect itself, though

[101] ibid. 146. My emphasis.

[102] ibid. 155.

identified with a moral purposiveness, is a disrupted aesthetic judgment with no final purpose at all.

However, it should be remembered that when de Man turns to the Kantian affects, he does speak of a "theory of *moral* affect" (PMK 83, my emphasis), not of "pure affect". From the aspect of completing the transcendental plan between the cognitive and the practical this is the valid move; in any other case the aesthetic judgment would remain stuck where it is – not unlike the understanding gained from pure reason which does not *lead* anywhere. Therefore it seems that any affect participating in the performative imagination of the aesthetic judgment is bound to be "moral" (that is, purposive) whereas a "pure" affect would be on par with the intuited concepts of pure reason, subject to the hypotyposis of sheer inscription, disrupted not as aesthetic transitions but as schematic singularities. Rodolphe Gasché (at whom Rei Terada actually launches her comments about the undue philosophical need for coherence and systematicity) grasps this when he says that the de Manian "linguistic atoms" (into which formal materialism reduces each element of language, affects included) are "so inflexible that they *cannot lend themselves* to forming or entering meaningful, orderly relations".[103] Terada criticises this, against the Kantian grain, as resulting from "a classical view of feeling"[104] which depends on the illusion of the subject for knowledge, and it does seem that, conflated within her own theory of affects, she makes an intense point. However, under the aegis of the general de Manian project, it would seem a bit short-sighted to stop there; it is, after all, the madness of words that is being exposed here, over and over again, without any cognitive respite for emotional interludes.

Gasché on his part sees this and he attempts to articulate its extremity thus:

> All great thinkers, Heidegger contends, have only *one* thought that gives unity to their thinking and to which they return in the repeated attempts to think it. If such a thought informs de Man's thinking, it is one that is so singular as to destroy its oneness and with it, the unifying power that thought must be able to exercise to be the one thought in the first place. It is therefore a thought so singular that it risks incomprehensibility.[105]

For Gasché, the impact of de Manian formal materialism is something which one ultimately cannot think, of which no worlds can be born, and which leaves

[103] Gasché 104.

[104] Terada 88. It is interesting to note how de Man levelled the same accusation against Jauss's hermeneutics.

[105] Gasché 113.

no eudaemonic leftover of any possible episteme (like Terada and the others would suggest). The lesson teaches nothing but the rhetoric offers the kind of adventure no thinker should miss. For a full view of deconstruction, this thought is invaluable, and it is so because it offers the chance to read, not carelessly, but without care for meaning. This type of reading, however, comes at a high risk – like it did when de Man warned about Kant's loss of pathos being "very easy to misjudge" and apparently very easy to contort into disallowed shapes. It seems that among the Romantics of the first generation, Friedrich Schiller was the most misjudging of all.

In "Kant and Schiller" (first delivered as part of the same Messenger lecture series at Cornell in 1983 as "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant"), de Man assaults the critical transgressions of Schiller in interpreting Kant. He begins by quipping that, in Schiller, he is now dealing with "a much easier text" and as such "there is no need for such detailed textual analysis" (KS 129); a certain bias thus exists from the very beginning. Throughout the essay, de Man's main grievance with Schiller comes from the latter's chiasmic schematisation of Kantian concepts in neat polarities which produce idealised end results easily understood and applicable without complication in pragmatic terms. De Man's immanent claim is of course that this is completely against the letter of the irreversible, overlapping Kantian system whose critical thrust betrays its own totality; there is no way that Kant would have meant to oppose things like nature and reason or terror and tranquillity to one another in such a clean-cut, tropological manner as Schiller does. Moreover, the latter also has the audacity to take Kant's concepts of the mathematical and the dynamic sublime and transpose them into his own concepts called the theoretical and the pragmatic sublime, the (non-)dialectical use of which (particularly the latter) is totally at odds with Kant. De Man follows this line of presentation all through the essay, demeaning his target not-so-surreptitiously as he goes: Schiller is said to have an "amazing lack of philosophical concern" and only to be concerned with how, as a playwright, to "fill his theater" (KS 141). At the very end, as an instance of his trademark polemical legerdemain, de Man even suggests a filiation between the aesthetic states of Schiller and Goebbels, which, however, "Wilkinson and Willoughby… are certainly right in pointing out [as] a grievous misreading" (KS 155) on Goebbels's part. It should be noted that de Man does not provide the correction, or the "pointing out", himself but that he borrows it from the two other authors referred to (Wilkinson and Willoghby). And so the feeling lingers that, in doing so, Schiller's name is not much salvaged after all. Subsequently, affects work their way into the discussion again; they overshadow

the entire scene of Schiller-bashing. It has to be looked at what this means to the de Manian "critique" of Schiller in general.

In moving from the beautiful to the sublime, Kant says the following:

> [W]hat is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy, which does allow of sensible presentation. (CPJ 129)

This is one of the places in which the feud between Schiller and de Man can be traced. As far as the Kantian mathematical sublime (the failure to apprehend magnitude) is concerned, which the former renames as the theoretical sublime, there is no disagreement yet because, as de Man says, there Schiller has got the "correct interpretation" (KS 139). The trouble only begins with the dynamic sublime, renamed the practical sublime by Schiller, for whom the concept is identified with "our desire for self-preservation" (Schiller quoted in KS 138). De Man jumps on this because of its apparent betrayal of the Kantian concept which, instead of telling us "how to achieve self-preservation… or how to protect ourselves, so to speak, psychologically, from danger", speaks "something about the structure of the imagination" (KS 139). And it was seen earlier that the way imagination was structured (leaping from natural sensibility to moral reason through affectless aesthetic judgment) ensured that the presentation, or hypotyposis, of any whole in the process (such as the self to be preserved or the danger threatening that self) was bound to remain inadequate and a subject of that very inadequacy. For de Man, none of this critical understanding can be found in Schiller; nothing takes place on the dialectical level of exchange and instead everything takes place on the antithetical level of reversible concepts which remain tropologically fixed no matter what went on between them. Nature induces Terror, Terror gives way to Reason, Reason induces Understanding, and there is no need for an agent of judgment (or imagination) for these events to occur, not even if they were reversed. Relatedly, Knowledge happens as Representation, Representation endows Self-Preservation, Self-Preservation commits to Reality, and this marks the experience of life. It is a bit like connecting the dots, and it is the touting of this patchy, illusionary organicity that arouses de Man's ire.

De Man says of Schiller that it is the drives (*Triebe*) of desire on the part of the human – "defined as a certain principle of closure which is no longer accessible to rational critical analysis" (KS 151) – which prevent any disruptive thrust from entering his thinking, whereas a true philosophy would have no need for a telos of

"morally or ethically necessary" humanity.[106] For between "the tropological and the performative there is a separation which allows for no mediation whatsover" (KS 133), and within that fallen space nothing can be either sensed or cognised. It is the break which this thesis discusses. But is not the break also a "certain principle of closure", to the edge of which "rational critical analysis" forever leads us? Do we not still have the ghosts of Nature, Terror, Reason, Understanding, Knowledge, Representation, Self-Preservation and Reality hovering around us *like* dots (*as if* connecting things) when we are there? It is only that in that place there is no connecting to do, save for the perpetual attempt. Is not this irreversibility of separate entities another instance of Kantian inadequacy which is called to mind because it allows of material representation? In this formal scenario, the de Manian critical thrust turns against itself – it repeats the loss of the symbolic (as well as its schematic transposition) of the Hegelian dialectic in an acute fashion but, simultaneously, it also repeats the gain of the non-symbolic traditionally attributed to the theistic (as the other side of the coin). So de Man finally destroys nothing but he cuts the links between the sensible and the intellectual, even though the cutting itself is highly "sensible-*and*-intellectual". It is what he feels has to be done in criticism and what he shows us how to do.

That is why he seems rash when he berates Schiller for his inevitable shift from the sensible impact of the practical sublime, where first the "terror must move us more vividly and more pleasantly in an aesthetic representation than the infinite" (KS 140), to its culmination in the secondary intellectual denouement (of the practical sublime), in "a greater stress on the abstract powers" (KS 141), which idealises (and completes) the human experience. De Man calls this "apparent practicality… a total loss of contact with reality" in which the sensible is severed from the intellectual "in a total idealism" (KS 142). What does this mean for his own cutting then, which performs the very same severance from the beginning to the end but ultimately brings it together in the necessity of the cutting itself? Is not his presentation of the sublime as disruption just as inadequate as that of Schiller? Identifying with Kant, de Man himself says that in Schiller "pure intellect comes in, as imagination comes in, to remedy our incapacity"; whereas in Kant "it is the failure of the imagination that leads to aesthetic contemplation" (KS 146). Jonathan Loesberg calls the latter option one where "neither the truth of nature nor the truth of language" is revealed; instead what is revealed is "a chosen mode of construing".[107] For the one alternative there is success and for the other there is

[106] ibid. 29.

[107] Loesberg 102.

failure. Both are end results of a process at the end of which there is an intellectual break. The difference is that, for Schiller, along the way there live things called tropes, concepts supposedly agreed on, the end results of an educating process. For de Man, the very same tropes are there but they are "dead", lost, displaced, ground into oblivion. The judgment between life and death is made through an aesthetic judgment but, if we follow the Kantian system, one cannot be chosen over the other. Both are possible and impossible at the same time. In this sense, both Schiller and de Man are right *and* wrong: Schiller's mistake is to build on uncritical epistemes shot with purposiveness, while de Man's error is to think he is doing something aesthetically different. His attempt to import the formal materiality of the *Augenschein* scene to decide the "disruption" of the Kantian system in his favour does not succeed once and for all because it plays by familiar schemata of affectivity. His reading of the Schillerian reading of Kant as a "dualism" (KS 149) is far from convincing, because he overlooks the fact that Schiller speaks about *desire* for form and sensory *desire* rather than form itself (the intellectual) and the sensory itself (the sensible); he overlooks the disruption which is intrinsic to Schiller's epistemological model, too, and he does that because it does not *appear* as that, as a disruption. Martin Jay describes it thus:

> Understood as a model for human development at its highest, aesthetic experience could be hailed as the totalizer of man's various capacities, or in Schiller's famous formulation as the sublation of the sense impulse, which is "life", and the form impulse, which is "shape", into the play impulse.[108]

For de Man this understanding is not good enough because he rejects the playful, totalising force of "desire" from the off – something which, in "Kant and Schiller", he nowhere really criticises. (It could be that de Man here simply interprets "desire" as a tool of moral reason, which it is in Kant, but in the context of Schiller, without any further analysis, the effort remains inadequate.) That is, he does not criticise the force but instead repeats its totalising gesture himself, in the form of his own aesthetic judgment, which he thinks suffices to overthrow Schiller without further ado.

In strictly linguistic terms this might be true, but in Kantian terms it remains doubtful. De Man does not desire immortality, at least in terms of self-righteous subjectivity, but he does desire critical impeccability by the laboratory mindset that drives him. Says Lindsay Waters:

[108] Martin Jay: *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) 147–8.

> De Man does not deny the desire for connection, for harmony, and for articulation, which has been the hallmark of the aesthetic. He is not saying there is nothing to the desire, but he is saying that we have to inspect our desire and the gap between it and what can be achieved of it. We have to take alienation as a first principle.[109]

Yet de Man rejects this tendency in himself because he sees it as radically different from Schiller's desire, for whom it is said to be something that only takes place "between the sacred and the discourse of humanity" (KS 145). He sees the difference, is able to point at it, even though he has just established the "discourse of humanity" as a necessary error which makes no sense to us, and even though the criticism that makes the error clear, nearly sanctifying it, cannot be influenced by us. The contradiction is obvious; de Man should have no logical basis to reject any other expression for the sake of his own discourse. The real critical question should here address the "pragmatics of desire" in itself, not the reversible or irreversible tropes that it plays with; these *contained* objects are epistemologically broken nonetheless. The only thing is that the de Manian method is unable to confront such a model *for itself*, as a non-trope; that is, in the words of J. M. Bernstein, as a "lodging of human meaningfulness in the ether of aesthetic appearance".[110] Schiller's model is that of affective illusion, or material finitude:

> For Schiller the finitude of the work of art, its mortal being, depends on its being mere semblance, its posing of the materiality of meaning, of nature as meaningful and freedom as materially realized, as both necessary and impossible. Nothing supports the possibility in general of the materiality of meaning other than aesthetic meaning, the compellingness of the works themselves.[111]

De Man's failure to share this model comes to the fore a while later when he says that, for Schiller, only "people who are very stupid" or "people who are extraordinarily smart" (KS 152) do not have use for the illusionary kind of *Schein* he talks about – Kant being attributed as the stupid man who sees the world as it is and Hegel as the smart man who saturates the world with his intellect. Subsequently, this thought is passed by as a kind of remark which simply undoes itself by saying such bad things about such good men, and it looks as if the different, affect-driven

[109] Waters 150.

[110] Bernstein 167.

[111] ibid. 166.

kind of mimesis suggested by Schiller is shrugged off as another example of the classical view of imitating art.

Its similarity with, for instance, Kant's *sense* of transcendental completion, Benjamin's "afterlife", Schlegel's "glow", or the Nietzschean model of the Apollonian and the Dionysian free-playing necessity of both human and divine illusion is left unsaid. Yet the Schillerian system of never-ending reversibility in a never-ending motion does hint both at the kind of endless negation (within the Whole) that Hegel defines or the kind of ceaseless becoming (without a Whole) that is apparent in Nietzsche. In the transcribed questions section at the end of "Kant and Schiller", M. H. Abrams makes much the same observation when he says that, in Schiller, there is a "kind of movement, a self-movement of the Spirit in Hegel where nothing stands still, everything moves" (KS 158). The Schillerian aesthetic uses the tropes of life (anthropomorphised Nature, Terror, and Reason) but the aesthetic performs, and is driven by, the same affective function as it would if it used the tropes of death (anti-nature, intellect, inscription). Sure there are "tropes" but they are in a constant motion, linguistically, unable to be decided on without a certain consensus – it is the *desire* that powers between the imagined object and the imagined subject, not the given materiality of either of them.[112] The difference between Schiller and Nietzsche, for instance, is that for the former the end result points back to a moral teleology, whereas for the latter there is no such objective to look out for (and there should not be). It is certainly a valid move for de Man to attack Schiller on the basis of this, but the grounds for the assault do not lie in the region of Kantian form or structure: they originate in the general realm of desire and affectivity which comes in the dominate the aesthetic judgment of the particular mindset, laboratory or otherwise. No pathos is lost there on the part of either the subject or the non-subject. Moreover, in de Man that realm is one of curiously intense uncriticality which, even in discussing Kant, he engages through a lame repeating, a schematic hypotyposis in itself, of affects lifted out of an old dictionary. With Romanticism in sight and in writing, de Man thus appears bound to find the continued promise of its aesthetic depths

[112] "In a transcendental philosophy… where everything aspires to free form from content, and to cleanse necessity from all chance and random elements, one gets quickly accustomed to considering anything material as an obstacle, and to represent the sensory, which functions in this case as an impediment, in a necessary contradiction with reason. Such an approach is certainly not in the spirit of the Kantian system, but it could well be attributed to the letter of this system." (Schiller quoted in KS 149). De Man uses this quotation to reject Schiller's "dualistic" interpretation of Kant; while it can also be used to articulate de Man's failure to criticise his own desire for *parti pris* materiality.

impossible to resist, no matter how broken or beside themselves the contents analysed inevitably turned out as.

To sum up both his treatment of Kant and the rhetorical parabasis thus effected: for de Man in his mature phase the question of language boils down to an understanding of what materiality is. But at this point there is no need to discuss, as there would have been earlier, the nothingness of linguistic essences ("le néant des choses humaines") anymore, because such a sentiment depends on there being "*choses humaines*" somewhere beyond our reach. Moreover, at this point, there is no need even to discuss displaced figurality anymore, because even the harshest allegory of human machine-likeness fails to expel the possibility of being redeemed in some way – as memory, if nothing else. Hence, as we have demonstrated with the help of Benjamin, Hegel, Jauss, Schlegel, Kant, and Schiller in this section, what the late de Man does to express the break of Paul de Man even more bewilderingly, is that he founds such a materiality of the linguistic letter beyond the aesthetic play of language. Through his insistent questioning, both temporality and presence are disrupted as conventional categories whose concepts need not be relied on in order to disrupt understanding; instead, we are removed from nature already in the form(s) of our material nature. The *phusis* of immediate matter therefore remains unknown to the inexorable *tekhne* of its rhetorical figuration, and all that poetry and criticism may do is repeatedly express the predicament. With de Man thus having removed the spiritual, the metaphysical, and the transcendental out of the sphere of truth,[113] the view cannot be avoided that the materiality theme which dominates and is taken for granted in his later writings bears the full weight of his career-long argument. For that reason alone, it needs to be questioned to its core. Can the ontology of materiality really be linguistically separated from other ontological concerns, such as the spiritual, the metaphysical and the transcendental? In the moment of understanding, does the ontological matter, or the material "thing" encountered, immediately need to refer *beyond* itself, turning instantly back *towards* itself, as the shining mnemonic sign of its own constitution? Or could there after all be something else about the material "thing" which would compel us to stay with "it", instead of going somewhere else without pause, into the next representation of the predicament – could there be something about the thing to hold our incomplete reading/interpretations/

[113] Along with them have gone, in addition to what there has been despatched in Kant and Schiller, virtually all hallmarks of Western thought – among them the Wordsworthian "moods", the Hegelian negation as affirmation, and Nietzsche's "becoming", to name but a few. De Man of course would not see it that way but rather as a teasing out of something that was always already there – which is a clever tactic, of course.

sensations of it?[114] I would like to argue that there is. And obviously de Man, after all, must feel that way too since he is compelled to write ever more criticism about the stuff of literary experience, in all the different discourses of human activity. This is something that is not usually said about him. Schiller knew the need, or he would not have been driven to define the components of the desire, and so does de Man: it is only that, in conclusion, he refuses to express it that way. The atomistic trope of "linguistic corpuscles" playing on the senseless matter of the world which they permanently break remains too strong a temptation for him. The "atoms" of his imagination renounce "all possibility of anything happening to *them*, the possibility of being possible elements of possible worlds as well",[115] performing the systematic disruption of their own aesthetic figuration. Paradoxically, they then continue to shine through the rhetorical storm of their own remembrance, with the eye that witnesses it only too glad just to watch. For the understanding of what actually goes on, and for the Rousseauan wish to tell it to others too, any "direct, immediate, royal road to the performative, to action and the act, political or otherwise"[116] *is* effectively razed – by the judgment of a mightier aporia, the parabasis of language. But this does not mean that the experience of the particular event, or understanding in the general sense, would have been levelled for good. In fact, they have been made all the more keen, indomitable by the other one: the lesson of Paul de Man continued in and beyond his own word.

[114] This could happen, as Simon Jarvis has noted, if the human "subject [was] no longer to be understood as *defined* by being what affectivity and substance are *given to*". This means that the understanding to be "left behind" was precisely the one where affects and impressions came to the subject from the "outside", or from "external" references "beyond" the subject's "internal" language, and that the understanding to be moved towards would be one which sensed that the subject was being *made up* of, instead of being defined by, the affects and impressions experienced at all times (12, see end of note). The de Manian method does not effect this transposition, although it does freeze the subject into a suspended sensation, since it remains so eager to warn against the misunderstanding easily lapsed into with the move. (The consequences of which can be seen in that kind of affects theory which, regressively, defines emotions and experiences as natural phenomena given to our physical bodies which we may share and communicate with others.) Simon Jarvis: "An Undeleter for Criticism" *diacritics* 32.1 (2002).

[115] Gasché 105. My emphasis.

[116] Warminski: "'As the Poets Do It': On the Material Sublime" 28.

6 Conclusion: The Break of Paul de Man

Having come this far in our journey, it is not the simplest or most straightforward of tasks to recapitulate and provide judgments of the discussion in this thesis: the intensity of the reading experience itself has been powerful enough to make this difficult. As a matter of fact, at times it is tricky even to be quite certain what exactly the claims and critical analyses have been arguing about their subject matter, and in whose voice I have been speaking in a given instance. The unpredictable play of the textual letter has mixed up the common stage of generic expectations. This, however, should not be considered as a fatal weakness or shortcoming of the work done but rather as a welcome difficulty and an inevitability; part of the weight of the argument and the point made, both of de Manian criticism and the attempted continuation of critical deconstruction, demands that no thinking (and reading) about (and in) language be made too simple. To be sure, this should not be seen as a justification of intentional obscurity or haphazard argumentation either. Instead, the very core of the thesis has been formed around a very clear set of research questions: What is the break of Paul de Man? Where does his thinking come from and what does it lead up to? And, in practice, what does the study of this kind of question mean for literary theory and critical thinking in general? The intuition is that de Man does think differently than most but not all that differently; to get to grips with the idea, however, one needs to follow him the hard way and at times appear as outrageous (and dramatic) as he does. Only then can the questioning at hand be awarded the appreciation it deserves, and *only then* can the lesson learned be understood in any way adequately. The mere cataloguing of methods and statements, all done in terms of a predetermined theoretical purpose, would be a double-crossing of the original intention, and it would merely perpetuate the false understanding of the error of linguistic referentiality so distasteful to – but also cherished by – de Man. Obviously there was no escape from it for him either, as this thesis has striven to show in ways more than one (and in ways beyond those that de Man's own thinking appears to be aware of), and it is the duty of this concluding chapter to run all these roads back together.

From the re-asking of the originary question of language to the critical deconstructions of Baudelaire, Heidegger, Hölderlin, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Hegel,

Jauss, Schlegel, and Kant, among others, in their various linguistic forms and literary valorisations, I here mirror the previous sections and reflect them onto a continuous movement which spans Paul de Man's entire academic career. I also provide one further elucidation (analogy, allegory, inscription) of this movement by transposing it onto a reading de Man himself provides of Shelley's long poem "The Triumph of Life" in the late essay "Shelley Disfigured". Selected references to related topics will help in determining its poetic philosophical significance. In doing this, the objective is to show that everything said (and surreptitiously hinted at) has actually served a single focus and an important discovery to begin with: that of language as something even more elusive and powerful a phenomenon than commonly assumed still in our day. The project of understanding this is still in the docks and perhaps always will be – whenever we think it is going to be different in the future, the next generations just repeat the same old mistake. It is a predicament, it cannot be denied, but it is a hand-wringing, tear-jerking state of affairs or a hateful outburst of critical elitism only for those who seek to emaciate experience by reducing it to a signifier easily exchangeable for another in a market of senseless hopes and dreams which refuse to become aware of their own reality. The road ahead is opened up to lead (or not to lead?) somewhere else just by resisting the refusal.

(i) Recapitulation: The Question of Language

> The main object of knowledge becomes the knowledge of its failure. Not of its limits; that would be a banal attitude. The limitation of knowledge is total, in simple as well as in complex problems, for that limitation is inscribed in the very constitution of knowledge, colors its every activity, great or small. But the lucid mind can know its own subjectivity, precisely at the point where subjectivity destroys its functioning. It recognizes that its life consists in an endless series of failures of this order, and it finds that it retains the power to take stock of them all. This power is asserted, thanks to an amazing change of sign, as a positive force; just when the mind falls into the despair of its impotence, it regains all its elasticity in perceiving this very impotence.[1]

It has been constantly argued in the course of this thesis that Paul de Man's theory and thought is throughout his career and in varying forms of expression, sustained by the need to provide an answer to one question only, the question of

[1] "Montaigne and Transcendence" (1953). Translated by Richard Howard. CW 7.

language. In a tangible way, against all his explicit arguments, that question then becomes the idiosyncratic tool and the method of his criticism. The underlying intention, however, does not appear so much heuristic (consciously devised towards a solution, that is) as it does plain inevitable. But how does this happen? Certainly not in any simple way. For all that can be said of him, and what he may be accused of, de Man cannot be blamed for writing in bad faith: for all intents and purposes, he *does* find in everything he reads the very thing then related to us. In that form – it cannot be denied – he truly is a subjective reader, one intending to express his own understanding. But that, in turn, does not imply a wild relativism which would make his insights about the nature of language (and literature) into something that could be happily overlooked or shrugged off without risk. There is no simple way of neglecting Paul de Man's thinking because *that kind of thinking applies to all of us*. At its core, that is its function. In actuality, de Man never speaks about isolated incidents or case study curiosities; he always teaches his lesson, like Nietzsche, "in the most general sense possible" (LH 151). This is not part of his outward oeuvre though; it looks like he is "just" studying individual authors, one after another. But who does not do this exactly? Which philosopher-humanist does not want to speak about things and their ultimate nature in general? As far as bad faith goes, to claim otherwise would be a glaring instance of precisely that. And, as it turns out, the same could be said of anyone, humanist or not. We want things to work, we want to make them work, plumber or prophet all the same. But there is always a question prior to that very desire: *Why* do things not work then, why are we constantly forced to think about them?

The original scenario returns, successions of generations repeat the earlier mistakes, and as a species, mankind is seen to have evolved very little after all. It is not a comforting thought but, since we keep hacking away at it regardless, there must still be a force which allows us to be aware of it. This sensation, together with the "endless series of failures" that are the manifestations of its order, is Paul de Man's sole concern at all points. A "lucid mind" is needed to appreciate its significance. By the power of being able to account for the events and phenomena involved, "thanks to an amazing change of sign", positive experience is in the end rescued from the (potentially dangerous) errors and entanglements of figural delusions. Early or late de Man, the Montaigne of (post)modernity, never says anything of the kind out loud in the course of his career; that would be the logical betraying of it. In this way, he forever pre-empts his own writing and any "message" gained from the reading of the writing, except, paradoxically, the way of reading itself. That is the only lesson to be taken home from him: reading, and particularly

close reading, is a vital skill, considered from any point of view or cognitive angle. As a haunted phenomenon, it teaches by not teaching while it makes one aware of things. That is its most valuable gift: making the reader aware of things and their relations involved in the cognitive event, any moment that takes place. Nothing is to be taken for granted except that something is happening, and happening to "me". As one of the greatest joys to be experienced, the broken nature of human understanding is in fact a burden only to those who seek an end to their asking. That is, those who seek to make things die. In a further twist of irony, against the grain of his nihilistic rhetoric, de Man paradoxically founds immortality by placing the figure in the "madness of words" (SD 122) which never lets anything die. Hence, in effect, also his antagonists keep playing his game, one after another scoring own goals by way of badly taken theoretical set-pieces. Their efforts are not intended as "an amazing change of sign" which powers our existence as it occurs but as a desperate cry against change and the wonder of bewilderment in general. They scream for the death of thinking born out of the fear of that very death.

However, before getting carried away with this portrait-painting, two things need to be recalled immediately. (Lindsay Waters could be referred to here as an instance of someone who apparently does get carried away.[2]) First of all, none of this rhetorical ascribing of intellectual qualities is exclusive to de Man but to the heritage of thinking as a whole. It is exclusive to nothing but our continued efforts to "think better". Differences between individuals emerge only in particular instances; it is only the situations that change. The question stays the same but different people are not all the same, no matter what their "common voice" was claimed to be. This thought, however, neither effects absolute relativism (because the thinking of that is a relativistic thought in itself) nor does it justify the oppression of one over another (as was the wish of Rousseau). Critical deconstruction shows the ludicrousness of these claims, much as it shows the same of all claims made in the name of language. In their stead, it "shows" the sameness of the underlying tension, the "cosmic vibration" of all things existing to begin with. But that is a ludicrous way of saying it, potentially even dangerous if the "vibration" ceases to pose as a question and becomes a New Age object of thought for its own sake. The danger is always that of stopping thinking. The

[2] We saw this above in the discussion of (Kantian) affects, but it should also be noted, though, that in his introduction to *Critical Writings 1953–1978*, Waters talks about the "ascetic" qualities that the critic needs to meet the "stringent conditions" of valuable literary study (CW lxiii). The recommendation is at odds with his own enthusiasm, but that does not mean that he was wrong; rather, it shows something neglected by the emotionless de Man.

second thing to be recalled immediately is, then, precisely that the *thinking* of Paul de Man should never turn into a "Paul de Man" which says this about that thing, and it should never turn into an empowering figure of how to do things, even if the opposite – do not do things like that – would be just as untrue. Instead, the tension sensed in the reading (event) is all that matters; the writing itself is not intended to *empower* any cognitive figuration, it just plain *powers* it. That is to say, the writing does not project itself upon something else in advance; it just occurs, in true material reality. That is the experience of it and about as real as experience ever gets, from any point of view, through any "amazing change of sign". How to think this then, how to interpret its enthusiastic lesson? To this there is no answer, only the question.

Early in his career, the former chemistry and civil engineering student de Man spends a lot of time in trying to learn how a preference for material reality (as opposed to abstract knowing) comes about in poetic form in the works of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. As has been argued, the laboratory mindset which conducts these investigations never lets go of the advance premise which holds that the natural object (that is, the thing of reality which intuits the "why") is superior to its form in cognition (the perceived result of the original intuition, that is, the empirical "what" understood through the presenting "how"); and this is the constant undertone of all of de Man's critical labour. From French symbolism back to its Romantic origins in German Idealism and elsewhere, and onwards to the unchecked currents of 20th-century thought, the natural object never surrenders its claim as a primary component of human awareness. Hegelian sense certainty charts the progression of this claim in the history of Western thinking in the name of the Spirit, but for de Man the naming is a step too far. It attempts to overcome the experience of alienation involved in the claim too rashly, even if commendably:

> There are two way of meeting the challenge this experience presents to the mind: one is defensive, the other confronts the problem. This second way attempts to save both life and consciousness in a new synthesis that Hegel had the audacity to name but that less imprudent minds limited themselves to foreseeing.[3]

Up to this point de Man appears to follow in Hegel's footsteps quite contently. After it, which is in a way the finishing line of "common sense" thinking and

[3] "Poetic Nothingness: On a Hermetic Sonnet by Mallarmé". Translated by Richard Howard. CW 28.

pragmatist politics (de Man nowhere denies the real existence and applicability of these concepts), things start to look different. When all the -isms, -ologies and -osophies of the world take over (including the eventual metaphysics and linguistic controlledness of Hegelian idealism) in an attempt to legislate the "how" of the "why" beyond the foreseeable line of material reality, the de Manian radar is alerted. For him, the awareness of the sound and the appearance of the signs involved *must* become purely linguistic at the moment of this very occurrence, and be tested, or else run the risk of becoming dangerous.

Indeed, even if logically the signs are then linguistic at other moments too (common sense and real life events), there the awareness of them being that is not very important (or interesting in actuality) because, as such, they involve no danger to thought. These moments are just to be taken care of, like physical needs; to stay confused or hallucinate over them is an unnecessary fantasy. In consequence, this means that a totalising ideology is to de Man just as much an anathema as real life madness is, and so it does not show great critical verve to keep blaming him for the opposite. The early deconstructions (although not dubbed that theoretically) of Baudelaire and Mallarmé already show this; both of the poets desire to sacrifice something (Baudelaire consciousness and Mallarmé natural objects) in order to receive something else (poetic being, that is) but in the end both of them remain unable to reconcile their desire with anything because actually it is the desire that is all they (will) ever have. They reach no completion beyond the threshold of the material reality being sensed but neither can they remain satisfied without attempting to go there. The world is just as strange and absurd as it can be corrupt and jaded; and no knowing differently from the commonplace suffices to redeem it. Paul de Man's formal intention is to show how this thought can be tested and literature provides the laboratory.

One of my main arguments has then been that this intention fails to be aware of its own form while the testing is being carried out. This is a point that cannot be stressed enough. In its turn, it leads to the perpetuation of exactly the same kind of blindness and resistance of thinking that de Man criticises in others, especially the "villains" of the Western canon: Heidegger, Schiller, Nietzsche, the misreaders of Rousseau, and more. Sure enough, in the form of paradoxical thesis statements, de Man does appear to confess to us the precariousness of his own position more often than he does not.[4] Yet he is able, motivated by his own theory, to hide it in

[4] One of de Man's most famous paradoxes states that "[t]he only literal statement that says what it means to say is the assertion that there can be no literal statements" ("The Rhetoric of Blindness" BI 133), while another claims that "[e]verything written has to be read and every reading is susceptible of logical verification, but the logic that established the need for

rhetorical pathos; it looks as if he is actually able to prove his theoretical point by making claims about not being able to make a claim – having his cake and eating it too. And, in addition, going that way is a self-circuitous road in any case; it just forever returns to where it really never left. That is the wayward gift of reading, the endowment of there being awareness, and for that de Man has to be given credit. Instead, what does need the attention of the critical eye about his writings is the erratic failure to be aware of that writing's own form. As has been suggested, most de Manian commentators fail to appreciate the radicality of this paradox: for even if there is argued-for kind of irony in de Man's relation to himself, there is *none of that* in his valorising of other thinkers' awarenesses (the good guys such as Hölderlin, Rousseau, Hegel, and Kant) over those of the others (the bad guys). This discovery already throws most of his statements about human awareness, which is mired in the linguistic predicament caused by the superiority of natural being, into a dubious light. The obscure non-irony of the valorising itself comes to contrast with the harsh lucidity of the criticism. The de Manian disciple might respond to this by referring back to the "concept" of radical undecidability spoken for by the master and say that such irreducible contrast is actually necessary for "undecidability" to keep on functioning.[5] It might even be said that, on the surface of it, the non-ironic shadow of the good guys in fact redeems the critical light of the lesson: their truth does really exist, de Man's included. But, in effect, to say that actually snuffs out all of their thinking, both rhetorically and for real, and it cancels the teachings of both them and the derived theory of deconstruction. All traces of "undecidability", radical or referential, are gone and forgotten from the world – there remains nothing that ever anywhere "redeems" anything linguistic, no matter how vestigial, in any figural interplay. It becomes impossible for the practising scholar to point at a text and claim that it either proves *or* disproves anything. This is (or should be, if read correctly) the sheer de Manian logic, far beyond any literary image of emptiness or paradox of mechanical language insistently jarring against the material world.

verification is itself unverifiable and therefore unfounded in its claim to truth" ("Allegory (*Julie*)" AR 202). Many questions about fact and fiction and the desire for truth emerge in the wake of such sentiments.

5 Martin McQuillan has expressed the fact of such irreducibility by saying that, for de Man, what remains "irreducible to each text" (95, see end of note), philosophical or otherwise, is the "material event of its disarticulation" (95–6) which comes in the wake of "a rhetorical reading of a text [which] is never sufficient in itself to account for a text" (95). Thus, in transposing reading to real life, the contrasting line between "reading" and "real life" remains forever unknown yet necessary in the everyday. Martin McQuillan: *Paul de Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

As a result, the day-like emergence of the de Manian break that transcends (or falls short of) the linguistic adventure finally breaks itself, as well. Left formless in the dark, in the brute becoming of its multiple structure with no memories to invoke, it no longer speaks anything about anything. It says nothing about the work of any author whosoever and it touches on no thought whatsoever. It knows no subject or self to erase at the heart of anything. It breaks nothing except the dialectical spectre of itself and it articulates nothing. In essence, we know nothing about it (or its "atoms") and, epistemologically, it does not matter in the slightest. Even these lines say nothing about it, and, perhaps worst of all, *it does not write anything about anything and it says nothing about reading it*. It is not a warning song, a temporal mediation of human mortality, a dramatic machine-like alienation, or a material vision-inscription. Least of all is it an event of any kind: the palpability of historic occurrence is annulled as all the pathos of anything ever existing anywhere is erased, time and memory included. As J. M. Bernstein says, "[o]nly the philosophical thought of meaning and its absence remains".[6] According to this stunning logic, whose failure to exist in actuality I seek to illuminate here, it will not matter at all if one against all odds continued to feel things:

> The statement of pathos, that it is in itself the form of meaningfulness, an unmediated bodying forth, is prone to the undecidability of all textual statements. Such moments are also possibly figural, not known to be literal or emptily fictional.[7]

Such undecidability as drives de Manian thinking on is bound to remain absent within its own affected pathos, trapped within its own worldly figurality because, in the end, that figurality is *the only thing external to it*. Internally, the logic of the thinking does not need it, but it makes use of the phenomenon out of an ontological necessity it has itself established – out of the philosophical assumption that *first there are things out there*, and *only secondly there is awareness of them*. It does this by *voluntarily* trapping itself into an inside and an outside, and so the old internal/external model remains in effect after all, even if in a bizarre intrauterine form, by feeding on the familiar Enlightenment model taken to its extreme and emptied of substantial content. From this it follows that there is no refuting of the stupefying logic within the same linguistic model: the dark de Manian sun cannot be revived by injecting ideas of warmth and growth into it.

6 Bernstein 163.

7 Mapp 191.

The mere turning around of the same paradigm will not suffice, and that is why mere antagonism, or reverse iconoclasm ("reconstruction"), will not do. Neither will disciplehood: to deny the shining of the familiar sun is a similar failure. And so, as I seek to do here, to find a different solution, and to keep the adventure going into unforeseen places, one is compelled to change one's thinking more radically. One is compelled to think of a model that breaks itself *as* it imagines another one.

Which means, as de Man must have known, that the superiority of natural being as a premise (that breaks and lets break) is as flawed as the next first principle to begin with. The truth discovered in the de Manian laboratory *is* "true", but it comes into being in the same way any other alleged truth does. The scenario reminds the reader of de Man's amicable relationship with Harold Bloom, who described it in a 1985 interview thus:

> The best critic and best human being I've known in my life was my dear friend Paul de Man. "The trouble with you, Harold," he would say with a smile, cupping my head in his hands, and looking at me with an affection that always made me want to weep, "is that you are crazy: you do not believe in the 'troot'." I would look at him, shake my head sadly and say:
>
> "No, I do not believe in the 'troot' because there is no 'troot,' dear Paul.
>
> "There is no method: there is yourself, and you are highly idiosyncratic.
>
> "And you clone, my dear: I dislike what you do as a teacher, because your students are as alike as two peas in a pod."[8]

The reason that de Man's testing appears to hold a particular advantage over its counterparts, such as Bloom's "highly idiosyncratic" individualism, results from the more clinical method. But that is the keyword then, it *appears* to, and of this sensible experience in itself, of the careful testing and the aesthetic enjoying of its transactions, de Man refuses to speak. He will not talk about "the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual anterior",[9] in terms other than those of the proclaimed break, as we have seen in many instances. Instead, he rushes on to think the next "truth", the next methodically disrupted referentiality, to provide us with ghostly insights which may only heighten our awareness of the linguistic predicament that defines us all equally. For him, this is the true movement of reality.

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8 Harold Bloom's interview in Imre Salusinszky: *Criticism in Society* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) 67.

9 Jay 6–7.

But what if we took the risk, as I would like to do here, and decided to understand reality differently, in the tangible form? What if human awareness was not the shotgun becoming of things-in-reality anymore but rather an ongoing form of thinking which made them up? And this form would not be the form *of* the things but a form that holds and contains them, in a manner revisiting the conflicted Heideggerian "open". With all the manifestations of its multiple structure forever creating it, the form would be the sensate and material reality of our thinking; not *in* the world, but *as* the world. No ideological or other pre-critical slants would need to guide our minds because they would have been already forgotten except for the ongoing awareness of their question(s). The weight of the argument in this thesis, by instance of its variations, has constantly leaned in this direction. This has not belittled Paul de Man in any way, rather the opposite, but neither has it presented an insight which would have reduced into a needless act of mimicry, or which would have been shrugged off without risk just because the thinking was uninteresting or restricted to a certain author. There has been no simple way of neglecting the formal insight because *this kind of thinking (as form) applies to all of us*, Paul de Man included. If it did not, and his theory were ultimately in line with its own logic, there would be no understanding him at all, no reading lessons learned, no ire aroused. The fact that these things *are* possible and *have* happened, together with the fact that I am able to repeat them, shows there is something else at work here than sheer disrupted existence; the unbroken "why" of the questioning proves it; the word from the pen of another author expresses it. Literature knows this full well, provided its language is not forced to deny it or, perhaps worse, solved to endorse it. That the "why" can have being after everything, after de Man, truthfully containing both nature and cognition, is the total mark of its undying myth. I say more about this below.

(ii) The Break of Paul de Man (Transitive)

The following few paragraphs rehearse the phenomenon of the break of Paul de Man in its transitive sense. This means that, in the formulations expressed, it is emphasised how de Man himself "breaks", that is, radically deconstructs, the writings of other thinkers in his own writings. After this, in the next subsection, necessary contrast will then be provided by the discussion of the selfsame break in its intransitive sense, implying the sustained form both in its way of reading poetry and speaking about it.

However, before doing that, it might be informative to recall the conflict between de Man and Derrida. It was speculated in section four how Derrida "postulate[d] within Rousseau a metaphysics of presence which [could] then be shown not to operate" (RB 119) and how de Man then turned this approximation against Derrida in his reading of Rousseau. Judith Still's comment on the latter deconstructionist's refusal "to locate the relation of transference, as Rousseau does, in a *relation* between signifiers *dependent* on a *relation* between mental images" is highly illuminative in this context because it touches precisely the spot of the (sympathetic) friction between Derrida and de Man. It reveals, as far as the hermeneutic metaphor allows, that here the claims at stake involve, in the ambiguity of the apparent friction, nothing less than the "fate of thought" (IR 38). It is the same scenario encountered in the form of the crucial sense perception/sentiment dichotomy (as read into the German "fühlen") debated over Schiller, Hölderlin and Rousseau in their own section; and it is the very same tension that could be lately sensed in Kant's need to write the third *Critique*. No philosophy ("why?") *a priori* directed towards a pure and practical reason (the "what?" and "how"?) could be written with a good conscience without feeling what resists just such a reason and first gives rise to it, and it is actually Kant's fortune to be beset with the need to express this. The "fate of thought" demands it; the "*relation* between signifiers *dependent* on a *relation* between mental images" comes to function as the sole possible link of validation that understanding anything for certain requires.

Language (as the ultimate system of exchange), imagination (as the visual exchange of linguistic images), and reading (as the linguistic act of mental inscription) all operate in this area, asserting total dominion over the realm of cognition. But this strange realm is neither a certain time nor a particular place, and it cannot be imagined or read without being lost by the attempt, the act of imagining and/or reading, itself. The *idea* of it being a "realm" forever breaks it, simply because the signifiers involved depended on nothing but their separate images and knew nothing of any specific "realm" they were supposed to rule over. Kings without being aware of it, these singular entities are like Oedipus without the Delphic Oracle or Christ without the voice of God. But yet it would be a Bloomian misprision to think we would all be "better" off (unspoiled and innocent) being Oedipuses and Christs unbeknownst to ourselves; for the fact remains that Oedipus would *not* have been "Oedipus" and Christ "Christ" unless they had come to learn their fate and become aware of things. Had they remained in their original tragic state, aloft in an original "metaphysics of presence" without

knowledge of it, the relation between the mental images of their own selves would not have come to figure either for them *or* for us trying to take heed of their lesson. The reader must feel their power as entities capable of simultaneously being caught in the web of figuration and somehow remaining out of it; if this does not happen, the result is utter indifference. The process of becoming aware of things, of learning and understanding *anything* new depends on just such a "fall" which happened to Oedipus and Christ – and humanity, if you like. The "fate of thought" is truly at stake here – the sentiment could not be any less ironic – and that is why de Man chastises Derrida for resisting Rousseau's awareness of the fate. The critical play between the two *is* a play (in the Derridean sense) as long as it just raises questions of the "how?" and "what?" (Rousseau's explicit claims and examples) but it becomes very serious (at least from the de Manian point of view) as soon as the "why?" is sensed to be broached. And that sentiment, in consequence, motivates the writing of the entire second half of *Allegories of Reading* in ways analysed earlier – the ceaseless deconstructing of the flawed primal self within the inevitable alienation from nature into which it nonetheless attempts to project its own figure. Whether Rousseau knows this or not, *that* is the question between Derrida and de Man, but the state of knowing, no matter how resolved, is still to be valorised as a trigger for criticism.

The trigger which sets de Man off early, middle and late in his career is the perpetual attempt of all understanding to transcend the sensible boundaries of material reality through totalised (or "naturalised") ways of thinking which are used to delude and influence people. The intellectual agendas of the world, philosophy, politics and art included, are all just such totalisations, and therefore they (and their objects) remain in dire need of methodical, laboratory-like scrutiny in order to test their validity. Beyond the form(s) of these phenomena, there is nothing certain apart from brute sense certainty (the superior fact that natural things just *are*). "Common things" are uninteresting because self-evident. What do all these premises then add up to? Is de Man a hard-as-nails realist skeptic who stops the wheels of imagination in order to have us kicking on stones and knocking on tables once again? This is obviously a crucial question and one which de Man himself apparently made use of – why else would he have been so keen to apply the dark and nihilistic rhetoric that he did?[10] The intention comes across loud and clear. By assuming (wantonly or not) the mask of the inhumane

[10] This is a crucial question from my own point of view too; I doubt I would have begun reading de Man with any real earnestness (or got started with this thesis project for that matter) if I had not been thus impressed with what I understood to be a balefully dogmatic rationalism. Relatedly, the stones and tables parable mentioned derives partly from Dr. Johnson's famous

nemesis, de Man deals us in advance cards from the bottom of his deck as we begin to read him. This gambling imagery recalls Nietzsche (with the fate of the genealogical axis hung upon it) but that is not a misfortune of any kind; instead we force only our own hand as the unorthodox reading lesson returns us to another deconstruction of another unorthodox reading lesson: Nietzsche. To be sure, de Man's dark nihilism certainly does not stop at that figure. It reaches across centuries, even millennia of Western civilisation to loom over the skies of distant times and places. The beauty (and the hook, line and sinker) of it is, however, that these distant times and places are not really distant at all; they are just broken away from us by the very form of their figure, the (ontological) perception of their (linguistic) existence. In de Man's view of it, *they are right here except that the "right here" does not exist in material actuality.*

To claim the contrary is the cardinal sin of Heidegger and his "elucidations" of Hölderlin; the essential immediacy of the necessary open (the world as it manifests to us) is an erroneous articulation which betrays the movement of its own being. In his way, Heidegger troubles de Man so much because in a sense (of things being inherently conflicted and removed from us) Heidegger is right but then he commits the error of reversing the radical sense of conflict for a sense (in both senses of the word) of the conflict being redeemed by way of its own inherent conflictedness. As a result, Heidegger's bad dialectics ends up sailing on dangerous waters: the pronounced phenomenology of the linguistically conflicted "sensism" forever steers the metaphorical boat off the edge of the actual world and sinks down into a deluded oblivion of either anxiously striving (*Sein und Zeit*) or patiently waiting (the later Heidegger) for the redeeming holy. In contrast to this, in de Man's view of it, Hölderlin succeeds in keeping the boat off the edge merely by virtue of the harsh light his *Dichtung* reminds (and warns) us of. The early de Man spends a lot of time elaborating this pressure in line with the concepts of mediation and temporality which later on, in the instances of Rousseau and Kant in particular, turn into a much less explicitly ontological phenomenon (that of disrupted reading of linguistic figures), but the original pressure never really sacrifices anything of itself. It is de Man's imperative not to say this, at any point of his career; that would be the logical (and poetic) betraying of it. However, as I have argued, it is just as imperative to realise that the mere not-saying of it does not suffice to kill off its meaning and significance, let alone annul its being. Deconstruction awakens the human, it does not eliminate it. The sustained form

refutation of Bishop Berkeley's material skepticism, partly from an unintelligent vindication of common sense reality.

of de Man's criticism, not the broken relation expressed between the singular signifiers of its various stages, proves this once and for all. And, in a sense, the form in question resembles very much that of ritual, as I will demonstrate.

(iii) The Break of Paul de Man (Intransitive)

As has been suggested in many instances, there appears to be a special affinity between a certain kind of form (containing the rhetorical expression and critical suggestion) and the content of criticism that the form makes possible. One of these cases for de Man was Wordsworth's representation of the cloister of the Grande Chartreuse which, in the form of "a particular religious symbol" (WH 55), apparently defied the boundaries of symbolic representation by way of "tak[ing] in faith and reason, but also nature in its most universal form" (WH 56) without either lapsing into enumeration of figures (Baudelairean "Correspondances"), placing it on another level of existence (Wordsworth's own boy of Winander), or smuggling it through history from the past to be experienced in this day (Jauss's sphinx). As discussing this "most universal form" in its own nature ("as the principle in which time finds itself preserved", WH 56) would have entailed for de Man the forgetting of dynamic temporality for the sake of a static containing principle, this would have smacked of (untestable) metaphysics to him, and therefore he needed, in the case of the Grande Chartreuse, to forget about the *cloister* and provide a reminder of *our* actual way of existence. This reminding, or (Wordsworthian) recollection, or, ultimately, sheer Hegelian "memorisation", is a crucial element of de Manian criticism. As demonstrated earlier, it corresponds with the "pure optics" of Kantian sense-perception being entitled a "material vision", and it fights with all its might against Schiller's model of aesthetic education (whose dynamic is claimed, as has been seen, on a false transfiguration of Kantian concepts). It turns up in many other instances of his ongoing theorisation of earlier theories. Since de Man himself is able to find residual correspondences between different sensate phenomena (the memory of a vision mnemotechnically taking part in both the present and the past) and also to posit fixed readings of other people's concepts, surely it must then be that an unsaid form holds together the singular content of his criticism, as well. In addition, it must be that certain terms (and concepts) which claim the contrary – that no such form exists – are actually expressions of this very form.

Many of these terms we have already witnessed in the thesis section titles and seen commented on in the light of the overarching question of language: temporality, mediation, reading, figurality, the parabases of irony. What results from this by no means debunks the de Manian method – instead it proves itself vital to reading alertly – but it re-forms the de Manian insight. It shows against him that the harsh light it observes in (and tests its materials in) is sourced from a single well, and the residual understanding of this returns it as a full aesthetic phenomenon. This understanding, however, is immensely more difficult than it first appears, and, as it always remains one step ahead, it never gives itself to be "understood", not even as negation or Augustinian negation of negation. It appears to talk about cold, dark, and lost objects killed off by our failure to ever appropriate them; it recounts the Platonic removedness of true reality and it re-cleaves the Cartesian cogito irredeemably in half. It does the same to all post-Romantic fallacies of attempting to overcome the inherited sensations of removedness and separation by way of pasting upon them another trope of such an overcoming ("poetry", "future", "culture", etc.), and it celebrates only the (Romantic) awareness of being able to be aware, or "to take stock", of the myriad figures. In understanding, it sees nothing but ghosts and blank sights everywhere, and to human desire it affords only its organising uncontrollability, whereas, in material reality, it experiences all its sensations in their unfathomable multitude. These sensations, however, are not "sensations", "feelings", "emotions", or "affects", because all these labels do away with the specificity of their intuiting, the "why" of their existence. That is why, for Paul de Man, they remain a complete myth, and, in a sense, it is worthless to carry on arguing to what extent "he himself" was aware of this. That would be beside the point.

Obviously, as one of my aims has been to show, his writing often refuses any such awareness (which would be the mark of the stupid if consciously done and of the ignorant if not) and so the nagging doubt of "what if he knew after all" is an uninteresting one. The insight is right here, right now, making up the break of Paul de Man. As a result, the break becomes a critical form which forever holds in its being the radically disrupted and undecidably singular events it reveals to us. In other words, the break becomes a containing phenomenon which may be defined as "mythic" because "myth" implies nothing but experiences and events which are sensed in full reality and imagination without care for the limits of reality and imagination. This does not mean that no limits existed but that they did not exist as "limits" dictated by a single understanding of "reality" and "imagination" in any instance of referring. In effect, the illegible de Manian limits would then be a

matter of our capacity to think the question of language. However, put like this, the attempt to think differently, of making a difference by thought, would not be an action open to understanding at all. And the scientist Paul de Man does duly stop at the attempt – at unsaying the myth that motivates it and pre-empting the reading action that makes the difference too. He does this because any thought of the attempt is wont to reach somewhere beyond itself time and again; and he does this in each of his essays and lectures even though the "somewhere beyond" reached for does not exist in any kind of actuality, material or linguistic. He only uses, and needs to use, the image as a conscious placeholder in the service of the myth expressed – the myth of the break of Paul de Man.

In turn, this instrumental action then becomes de Man's own break: it deconstructs the spectral dialectic of his natural being, as well, and this is not a critical result in line with his own logic. No paradoxical statement of the impossibility of statements suffices to redeem it; no concept of "undecidability" can escape becoming a concept when applied consciously. Much of the weight of my thesis rests upon this discovery. To reach his communicative aim, de Man observes all the laboratory rites and, just like the Savoyard priest about to lose his faith, recites the rhetoric attentively, doing his best never to omit a single critical word or act.[11] The pre-empting of the attempt is hence carried out *as* a ritual, not *like* a ritual. This is what happens in the world of Shelley's "The Triumph of Life", as well: what we enact or dream about is not a performance, or a ceremony or an official function with a certain role in mind – what we enact or dream about is simply what happens when certain words and acts transpire in certain surroundings and/or circumstances. These latter are not the "context" of the words and acts, not something that "completes" them, but they are a non-synecdochal (that is, not representing of anything larger) part of the whole "text". It is the event of the ritual, and, together with the form of myth, they make up the full totality of anything in language and cognition, complete or not. And, even though he refuses to think this because of his own break, of what he thinks *as* thought's "limits", Paul de Man is riven by this power insofar as myth and ritual necessarily hold apart the "things" contained in their being; each new thing is a new cataclysm in his universe, from literature and poetry to politics and the natural sciences.

[11] See "Hegel and History" in section five for thoughts on how de Man treats the concept of "faculty" differently in Kant and Hegel respectively. As a near-ritualistic phenomenon, the automatic faculty of memory seems to serve an actual function in the latter (as the lesson of the *Lehrgedicht* shows) whereas for the former it represents a fatal schematic complication of representation itself (hypotyposis). A twofold appropriation (and kind of understanding) of the concept of faculty is apparently therefore possible, even if admittedly doubtful.

His reading of "The Triumph of Life" shows this philosophy better than perhaps anything in his bibliography, and, in my view of it, the revealing is telling enough to finish this thesis with, too.

(iv) Shelley and "The Triumph of Life"

"The Triumph of Life" is a 25-page poem written in triplets with a progressive rhyme scheme of ABA BCB CDC and so on. The only aberration in the consistent form is found at the end of the poem; the very last line, "'Then, what is life? I cried.' –" is broken off as a stanza and left on its own. Considered as the final poem of Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Triumph of Life" thus apparently remained unfinished when he died in 1822 by drowning off the coast of Italy. (The form of the poem has never been established for certain. Because of Shelley's sudden death, the manuscript containing the work remained full of ambiguities which made the posthumous publishing of it far from definitive.) How do these technical and biographical details then relate to our experience and Paul de Man's reading of the remarkable poem?[12] Surely it cannot be satisfactory, even if tempting, simply to gloss over the "coincidence" of Shelley's death and the disrupted ending of the piece itself, and it seems reductive of the full import of the poem to compress it into a thematic consideration of life and death's caprices, chalking up the historic references, social concerns, and/or formal devices comprising it. Obviously there is much of all that in the mix, but such a study would probably end up steering well clear of the critical waters an attentive reading is bound to take us to. De Man, for his part, does not shy away from the adventure. In the next few pages, I intend to show the significance of his reading, together with a consideration of where its weight lies, and in doing so allow critical deconstruction as an indispensable way of thinking.

A close reading of "The Triumph of Life" reveals the weight of Shelley's poem in terms of how the de Manian break may be thought and experienced. There is no such freakish analogy here, however, as if "Shelley Disfigured" would have been the last of de Man's essays (it dates from 1979) in the way "Triumph" was the last of Shelley's poems, and there is no sense in trying to speak their respective "truths" with the purpose of fixing them for good. Similarly, there is no need to

[12] For examples of other readings of de Man's reading of Shelley, see Deborah Esch: "A Defence of Rhetoric / The Triumph of Reading" *Reading de Man Reading*, and James O'Rourke: "Death and Error in 'Shelley Disfigured'" *Criticism*, Vol. XXXIV, No 1 (winter 1992).

excavate any more details of either Shelley's or de Man's personal idiosyncrasies at different times of their lives in order to get into merely comparing (or condemning) what they might have in common or not.[13] There is an interesting analogy in the effort, though. It evolves out of the poem's original manuscript which, in contrast to the published text, actually had a few further lines at the very end of it,[14] and de Man characterises the uncertainty between the versions in a direct reference to Shelley's real fate: his "defaced body is present in the margin of the last manuscript page (SD 120). The fate is the then related to the poem by an actual "freak of chance" which shows itself, in the reading of the "The Triumph of Life", as the "mutilated textual model [that] exposes the *wound* of a fracture that lies *hidden* in all texts (SD 120, my emphasis). The highlighted words are clearly there for a rhetorical sake – with "wound" reanimating the "defaced body" for an instant, and with "hidden" maintaining the archaeological side theme (of discovering buried things) that runs through the essay. By being there, the words are able to maintain the illusion of the "Life" involved in Shelley's poem, in any possible version of it.[15]

As such, the insight of the matter and form involved is for the critic right here, right now, as the poem. It wells out of the question of language which de Man first and foremost asks of Shelley (as in literature it appears in its most explicit form) and which "Triumph" carries on its wings in an insistent progression. What the poem reveals to us is a continuous sequence of events which an I-narrator experiences while caught in a state between sleeping and waking:

> When a strange trance over my fancy grew
> Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread
> Was so transparent, that the scene came through
> As clear as when a veil of light is drawn
> O'er evening hills they glimmer"
> (ll. 29–33)

[13] This qualification applies particularly against the (at times anti-canonical) objection of Shelley and de Man being so historically removed from each other (and us) as to make it non-sensical or less than prudent to speak of their (possibly incorrect) way of thinking. The same criticism can be expressed as a critical suggestion to anyone who might be afraid of facing up to the challenge (of thinking *about thinking*).

[14] "Then, what is Life?" I said… the cripple cast / His eye upon the car which now had rolled / Onward, as if that look must be the last, / And answered… "Happy those for whom the fold / Of…"

[15] It is not, however, very prudent of de Man to do this: we recall his deconstruction of both organicist and hermeneutic methods immediately. With that in mind, figures making use of them (such as "wound" and "hidden") fail to make any kind of argumentative sense at all.

In terms of linguistic representation this state (of the "polarities of waking and sleeping" being "curiously scrambled", SD 104) is for de Man the aporetic "unbearable condition of indetermination which has to be repressed" (SD 105) and which defines the ongoing state of the human predicament in general. It goes, and has gone, by many names in the course of de Man's writings – suspension, allegory, entrapment – but here, as in the case of some Hölderlin poems, it names the overall state of being poetically in terms of, and within the world of, a single poem. This is a crucial point about both "Shelley Disfigured" and "Triumph" because what is revealed here is not an outspoken theoretical assertion about the (however valorised) awareness of this or that author, but rather the impressed exclamation of its necessity. In the state of the narrator of "Triumph", between "knowing and not knowing" (SD 104–5), Life comes and goes in its enchanted vehicle without leaving any fixed trace of the figures which make it up:

> Yet ere I can say where the chariot hath
> Past over them; nor other trace I find
> But as of foam after the Ocean's wrath
> Is spent upon the desert shore…"
> (ll. 160–4)

But these made-up figures at the same time fully ensure their occurring in actuality.

Shelley's narrator remains in his "unbearable" trance to witness the historical references and social concerns, as well as the natural phenomena and literary allusions which the shape of Life in the Chariot wheels along with it. The uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the reality or unreality of the experience never loosens its hold on how it is understood and it offers no respite to the cognitions so relentlessly stirred. The sensations encountered are myriad and actual but the ideas made out of them are doomed to fail in advance because Life has already moved elsewhere. Narratively speaking, the text has become "the successive and cumulative experience of [the] tangles of meaning and of figuration" (SD 99), and its structure has come to be understood as "not one of question and answer, but of a question whose meaning, as question, is effaced from the moment it is asked" (SD 98). The story that it is supposed to tell the reader, both about nature and the self of man, falls victim to its own failure to do just that: "the contradictory motions of 'gliding' [water] and 'treading' [Narcissus] which suspended [the poem's] gravity between rising and falling finally capsize" (SD 111). The question of language, of the necessary "why" of meaning and

figuration, annuls itself in each and every new manifestation of its form before (and in place of) yielding itself as a fixed conception in the mind of the witness. The "shape" that steers the Chariot is identified as no-one in particular – not even (or specifically not) as Rousseau who makes the narrator aware of Life's text – but "it" is marked out as "the model of figuration in general" (SD 115): the non-phenomenal, non-aesthetic phenomenon of language. The shape is non-phenomenal because it has no total form and it is (also) non-aesthetic because the transitions it brings about are based on an awareness of exchangeable signs rather than meaningful sensations:

> For it is the alignment of a signification with any principle of linguistic articulation whatsoever, sensory or not, which constitutes the figure. The iconic, sensory or, if one wishes, the aesthetic moment is not constitutive of figuration. (SD 114)

Since the awareness is of signs rather than sensations, the overall structure of the text in progression impinges on how one thinks one understands them, and, since they are doomed to fail in advance, each and every sign is thus reduced to nought at the moment they are thought to be understood. In this fashion, all images in "The Triumph of Life" stand apart from one another, stand over one another, and destroy themselves in "a single, and therefore violent, act of power achieved by the positional power of language considered by and in itself". In a cataclysmic train of events, "[t]he sun does not appear in conjunction with or in reaction to the night and the stars, but of its own unrelated power" (SD 116). By the "sheer power of utterance" of the poem's language the "previous occupants of the narrative space are expelled… and consequently at once forgotten". Being rather "repetitions" to be read than "beginnings" to be envisaged (SD 117), the events that come with the Chariot of Life are bound to please (or displease, it does not matter) the eye of the sleeping/waking witness but the thought of their understanding remains forever caught in the snare.

The de Manian reading persistently figures the poem along these lines. Speaking in the tenor of his late rhetoric, he shows us an imaginary world which functions by the rules he has set out in the course of his career. In this sense, in the sense of Shelley's "Life" being reduced to "the model of figuration in general" that dominates every particular instant, the essay "Shelley Disfigured" is lacking in nothing which any of the later writings on Hegel and Kant, among others, would have realised. In this ontological totality that is shown to be false by a critical rhetoric, "Life" does keep track of the events – until it abruptly ends, in

real life or literature, like Shelley's – by way of ineluctable inscription.[16] But that offers no relief of any kind for the one *who wants to think about the events*, to understand them in some way. The critical knowledge of this truth forever acts out "the aporias of signification and of performance" which keep asking the question of language and, in the case of "Triumph", forever pose "precisely the challenge to understanding that always again demands to be read" (SD 122). The shape in the Chariot beckons us to do just this; the witness is again caught in a tangle of imaginings. As this kind of reading "differs entirely from the recuperative and nihilistic allegories of historicism" (SD 122) which would banish images only to save something of them in the end,[17] in the de Manian universe each new act utterly destroys any single imagining once more: shape, self, universe. Total form ("Life") hides its face (because it does not exist as anything else than the model of exchange for what we read into "it") and the actual experience of the sensation remains in the entranced state of passive witnessing of which nothing can be said, in either history or literature. The de Manian expressing of questioning, whether about Shelley's poem or something else, always stops at this exact point:

> The imposition of meaning occurs in *The Triumph of Life* in the form of the questions that served as a point of departure for the reading. It is as a questioning entity, standing within the pathos of its own indetermination, that the human subject appears in the text, in the figures of the narrator who interrogates Rousseau and of Rousseau who interrogates the shape. But these figures do not coincide with the voice that narrates the poem in which they are represented; this voice does not question and does not share in their predicament. We can therefore not ask why it is that we, as subjects, choose to impose meaning, since we are ourselves defined by this very question. From the moment the subject thus asks, it has already foreclosed any alternative and has become the figural token of meaning, "Ein Zeichen sind wir / Deutungslos…" (Hölderlin). To question is to forget. (SD 118)

Relations between coincidences are cut, yet, strangely, both ends remain heard and looked at. The question "why" rules out the decision to keep asking because,

[16] As Rousseau's "brain" becomes "as sand" (l. 405) in Shelley's poem, it suggests, according to de Man, the "modification of a knowledge into the surface on which this knowledge ought to be recorded". The process of this "recording", however, remains extremely unreliable, even if necessary as an event, as its marks are already "more than half erased" (l. 406) when they are first met and then, as in a palimpsest, replaced by other ones.

[17] De Man has another stab at the "sacrifice" motif here, the logic of which would offer or get rid of something in order to gain something in return eventually. In the course of the thesis, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Benjamin, and Kant have all been shown as exhibiting a similar critical motif in their writings. See sections two and five.

as the only absolute, the asking itself constantly rules out each particular case.[18] In this place (which it still is because, among other things, "a point of departure" exists there for a subject to stand "within the pathos of its own indetermination") there are no more mysteries of existence or nothingness, or dreams of discourse and hope, or logical principles beyond the here and now. There is memory of them only by irreducible mistake. In de Man's word, nothing more remains to be said.

Except that is not entirely true: against the word, as I have claimed, there is a world still there, a place for events to occur. Things appear ever again, recognised constantly as mere things, broken, immediately replaced by others, then suspended, as de Man keeps on telling us. And that is the gist of his system then, the insistent tenor of his description of how language works. The gist may not be a "method" (since there is no pinpointing how it may be made use of) but it is a ritualistic "way" of reading which does *not* refuse "to be generalized into a system". It is a conclusion opposite to the one with which de Man credits Shelley's poem and his own reading of it. The reason why de Man's "way" of reading does not shrink back from becoming a system, which is both locatable and applicable at any linguistic "point of departure", is *exactly* because it grants Shelley's poem with the force to perform just the opposite function: to be a mythic force of "its own unrelated power". This is the power of the day, night, and the stars, none of which may be extracted from the poem without forgetting it.[19] And within its

[18] By this same logic, it makes no sense for de Man to keep asking whether the "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" question in Yeats's "Among School Children" should be read literally or rhetorically (as Archie Bunker-esque philosophical angst or a naïve jubilant remark). There is no sense in his making an argumentative point with the example, the questioning of which derives from neither of the alternatives existing "in the other's absence" (AR 12). There is no sense because, following the lead of "Shelley Disfigured", the questioning of the example is already decided as invalid as soon as it is started. There is no relation whatsoever between the literal and the rhetorical reading of the question, they know nothing of each other, and so the conscious juxtaposition elucidates nothing.

[19] One could speculate that de Man resists seeing his own systematicity as that might label him as "celebrating" language in some way, like Derrida, among others, could be said to have done. (Polemically put, such shading does not fit the tradition of unhappy philosophy.) There is no actual reason though why figural language could not be positively valorised and still kept at bay from encroaching on the strictly eudaemonic. Neil Hertz's brilliant essay "Freud and the Sandman" from 1979 shows this in its analysing of Freud's interpretation of Hoffmann's short story "The Sandman" and the cheeky transposing of that reading into Freud's own real life experiences. In doing this, Hertz picks apart the bigger concepts of Freudian theory (such as the death instinct and repetition-compulsion) by showing how, for example, they are first inspired by "a feeling of the uncanny" which does not mark the "becoming aware of some particular item in the unconscious" but comes about in "becoming aware of the process that is felt as eerie" (301, see end of note). This process is then that of *mise en abîme*, the "illusion of infinite regress" (ibid., 311) which, in Freud and "The Sandman", actually resists the grasp of real life pain and/or pleasure and destroys the "effect of domesticating the story" (ibid.,

story, Shelley's narrator forgets nothing, he tells the reader everything, manifested and maintained in a powerful rhyme. He stays in his trance until the end ("As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay / This was the tenour of my waking dream", ll. 41–2) to witness all the references and concerns that come his way. Offering no respite of the cognitions so relentlessly stirred, the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the reality or unreality of the persistent experience never loosens its hold on how it is understood, or supposed to be understood. Thus the sensations encountered are myriad and actual, then lost, with the ideas made out of them destined to remain incomplete in advance – also Life has already moved somewhere else. Narratively speaking, the story is bound together by the focalised vision of the eye-witness, both as an allegory of self-experience (of the "I-witness") and a deconstructed cognitive modality (the "trance of wondrous thought" between sleeping and waking). Now, what de Man achieves with his studious insight into "The Triumph of Life" is actually the opposite of what he intends; it is *because* he tells us that "self" and "thought" are much more difficult notions than we would care to imagine that he comes to show us a world where "we" may *try* to "think" such things somewhat differently. De Man does not say this, he forgets it as the question comes up, but he does sense it. If he did not, and his "rhetorical" theory were ultimately in line with its own "critical" logic (which sets up another bad dichotomy), there would be no understanding the lesson at all, no reading rewards reaped, no ire aroused. Just like the "model of figuration in general" too, or "The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep" (l. 428), is a "shape" which keeps "its obscure *tenour*" (l. 432, my emphasis) all through Life in the world where "it" lives and affects everyone and everything around "it" without care for identification, de Man's reading lives in that exact same world.[20]

313) of language, for Freud et al. The only difference to de Man (and his systematic denying of his own systematicity) lies strictly in the linguistic process being "felt as eerie", in the non-isolatable dominion of feelings overlooked by de Man, not in the happiness or unhappiness of failing conceptual thinking. Hertz's finding of "an unmotivated pathos" in de Man's insistent rhetorical "gesture of disfiguration" (Hertz: "Lurid Figures" 91) was earlier referred to in pointing out this tendency in the context of Kant and Schiller. Neil Hertz: "Freud and the Sandman" *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).

[20] Engaged in a well-known dialogue with Murray Krieger over Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", de Man asks, at the moment the symbolic dream of the poem is radically interrupted by the metonymy of a "material, 'very' word", if it is "possible to say whether Keats, in the present of that moment, is awake or asleep?". De Man then goes on to say that "[t]hematically speaking, it is the very moment at which the subject in the text states that it awakens; textually speaking, however, it is also the moment at which this same subject starts to dream", thus totally suspending any possibility of ever knowing for sure whether we wake or sleep. It should be noted, however, that Keats's subject keeps on living in its world, constant in tenor all through the "Ode", including the "radical" metonymy that falls within the dream play of its material

Our senses, ideas, and emotions are kept alert by such an existence, that much is granted, but can this ever be said out aloud?

I did say that de Man's questioning always stops at an exact point, breaks off somewhere, but this does not mean that "de Man" would stop, or break, at that point. As shown by the figure, both in real life and Shelley's world, in the deconstructions and the readings of poetry, both form and sensation do exist there, in the essays written and the poetry read, and, to speak the truth, so they must. They make up academic careers and Romantic poems and their critical recognition as such – as form and sensation which must not be neglected. They do all that simply because they both represent something (which holds them as *forms* that *show* form) and because they *are* the absolute, non-relative myth that contains and allows for the tenor of their reading ritual to continue. One can learn to be aware of these events, as long as one resists going to sleep under them and instead signs on to remain both sleeping and waking, in the insistent condition of a total aesthetic precaution:

> *The Triumph of Life* warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence. (SD 122)

Many have read this short passage to support the view of the utter inhumanity of de Manian criticism, but that is an understandable error – and one which de Man would not have sought to dispel. The desire it invests on the dangers of linguistic figuration may well seem intimidating, as may the difficult "universe" into which it launches us. As nothing "happens in relation", anything can be done, like death. But, on de Man's part, this is clearly not an exhortation; it is a *warning*, like Hölderlin's. And it is anything but "*Deutungslos*" as that. The sensation of deconstructive intention comes completely into being, without ever explicitly proclaiming it, just as all the total form (myth) and linguistic work (ritual) of any other residual cognition does. As a linguistic figure, the cognition is not

letter. De Man admits as much: "for as we also all know since Freud, such plays of the letter are also the work of the dream, accessible to us". That is immediately qualified though with the "non-aesthetic" disclaimer that the accessibility occurs "only within a system in which the difference between waking and dreaming cannot be decided and can, henceforth, not be assimilated to a symbolic reconciliation of opposites" ("Murray Krieger: A Commentary", RCC 187). Yet this Freudian undecidability fails to affect adversely the power of the poem's expressed vision. For Krieger's analysis, see "'A Waking Dream': The Symbolic Alternative to Allegory" Allegory, Myth and Symbol, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1981).

endowed with much power for it is recognised as an artificial construct, but, as an ontological "figure", the cognition carries out the deconstruction of its own figurality and is therefore invincible, full, and unique. That is the reformulated argument; it is just that the incomplete thought of it immediately turns on the awareness of the (human) predicament:

> Half to myself I said, "And what is this?
> Whose shape is that within the car? & why" –
> I would have added – "is all here amiss?"
> But a voice answered.. "Life" …I turned & knew
> (O Heaven have mercy on such wretchedness!)
> (ll. 177–81)

The predicament sparks the prayer, the half-saying to myself pre-forms the figures that will turn out as something other than I thought, but still "I *turned & knew*", that was done, the experience was true, the world allowed it as real. After every disfiguration, there *is* knowing and there *is* turning, as sheer myth if nothing else, and to say that is to sense experience, experience sense. This awareness is crucial to thinking – it keeps it in motion and drives it on, both in poetry and the everyday. Responding alertly to the objects we turn to, forever holding on to the limitless power of such sensation and experience – that makes up (the) myth and the ritual of understanding which returns, remembers, breaks, goes on.

(v) Postscript: Myth

What are such turnings, then, in the real world, and how may we know them without being fatally trapped by its figural machinations de Man time after time warns us about? We do, right here in the flesh every day; the thinking is as complex as that. And this is not (only) a commonsense conclusion as it is inherent to poetry and the arts. Myth emanates its objects, both exhilarating and infuriating, and resists becoming posited as the empty form of their external thing-ness because, at that point, myth has already moved elsewhere, into the next experience of the ritual. And so we become agitated once more, exasperated by the total incompleteness of our conceptual thinking. The thing stays out of reach and so, raptured by the distance, we express it by the power of myth which gives it in life. We use (the) language to make ourselves move (again). As has been suggested in the course of this thesis, this happens both in science and art, history and nature, fear and memory, writing and imagination – the residual thought

understood turns on the continued action. That is myth, and we do not *have* to choose between its forms unless we decide to.

And that is what we do then, in order to go somewhere else, sense something other. It is how we move ourselves in the world, and it only becomes a predicament if we think we *have* to choose to move. Which is what we do then because we tend to take certain mythic forms for granted, such as "I", "nature", and, perhaps, "God". These are endpoints of thinking which compel us to think that we *have* to choose to move. Given the power, they turn into permanent temptations, and we need de Man again to unsettle them. But even he thinks we have to *choose* to unsettle them; it is not enough to let them turn into something other by themselves, as they would. As a result, they stay hovering around, like the abject spectres of Yeats's "The Magi", longing for the lost temptation which is a duplicitous error in itself: nothing imagined can come back because nothing imagined was lost. The movement is continuous but our incomplete understanding of it compels us to think that an "I", "nature", or, perhaps, "God", is needed to make it move. While de Man said no to this but refused to give up the original thought, Hölderlin saw the motion floating freely in the world, which might have tested him too much, and Rousseau despaired with merely watching the locally manifested forms, to name but three instances. Elsewhere, a religious thinker such as Schleiermacher combined the choices of poetry and feeling into one:

> No poetry, no reality. Just as there is, despite all the senses, no external world without imagination, so too there is no spiritual world without feeling, no matter how much sense there is. Whoever only has sense can perceive no human being, but only what is human: all things disclose themselves to the magic wand of feeling alone. It fixes people and seizes them; like the eye, it looks on without being conscious of its own mathematical operation.[21]

In this intimation of unity, there is something deeply moving, but there is also something highly alarming. The idea of feeling is rich and luxurious and, *qua* poetry, its drive towards a coherent revealing of wholeness is unpreventable. It seems as if this could be the ultimate definition of myth.

If it was that, we might not be far from Northrop Frye's finding of Rousseau's "myth of the sleeping beauty" in society as "the source of the coherence of his argument";[22] and we might not be far from retracing the basis of our everyday thinking along newly qualified lines. But I do not think this is really true because

[21] Athenaeum fragment 350.

[22] Northrop Frye: *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957) 353–4.

myth is not the target of any definition, or argument. On one hand, resisting Schleiermacher's piety, myth is unable to "fix people and seize them", unless they choose to yield to it, and it does not function "like the eye" in the manner of being unconscious of "itself" while looking at something "other". Moreover, I do not find an equatable "mathematical operation" there either: on this matter, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's sentiment of all critical philosophy being "the substitute for an impossible *mathesis*" is a telling one.[23] (And I would locate the incalculable algorithm of the de Manian break at the same coordinates.) On the other hand, myth is not like Frye's coherent "source" in the sense of "reforging broken links between creation and knowledge, art and science, myth and concept": such thoughts are always already mythic *in themselves*, whether structural or surface level, non-fictional or fictional, critical or poetic. Being that, they cannot "fix" something else – what occurs instead is that we are affected with their sense of there being something to be fixed, "us" included. Why? Because *this* is the experience of language, one of many experiences, sensed on the spot. Yet only art appears to be aware of this difficult thought. The language of literature tends towards the understanding, however incompletely, to unforget the hard lesson of the ceaseless questioning. Such thinking might be horribly difficult, and prone to failure, but thus we are moved on once more, knees trembling, beckoned somewhere else, some other time. What the poets know, the critics show, and, through the transporting eye, the experiencer senses it in the bones. In this play the role is yours to unchoose.

[23] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, transl. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1988) 111.

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APPENDIX I

"Wie wenn am Feiertage..."

Wie wenn am Feiertage, das Feld zu sehn,
Ein Landmann geht, des Morgens, wenn
Aus heißer Nacht die kühlenden Blitze fielen
Die ganze Zeit und fern noch tönet der Donner,
In sein Gestade wieder tritt der Strom,
Und frisch der Boden grünt
Und von des Himmels erfreuendem Regen
Der Weinstock trauft und glänzend
In stiller Sonne stehn die Bäume des Haines:

So stehn sie unter günstiger Witterung,
Sie die kein Meister allein, die wunderbar
Allgegenwärtig erzieht in leichtem Umfangen
Die mächtige, die göttlichschöne Natur.
Drum wenn zu schlafen sie scheint zu Zeiten des Jahrs
Am Himmel oder unter den Pflanzen oder den Völkern
So trauert der Dichter Angesicht auch,
Sie scheinen allein zu seyn, doch ahnen sie immer.
Denn ahnend ruhet sie selbst auch.

Jetzt aber tagts! Ich harrt und sah es kommen,
Und was ich sah, das Heilige sei mein Wort.
Denn sie, sie selbst, die älter denn die Zeiten
Und über die Götter des Abends und Orients ist,
Die Natur ist jetzt mit Waffenklang erwacht,
Und hoch vom Aether bis zum Abgrund nieder
Nach festem Gesetze, wie einst, aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt,
Fühlt neu die Begeisterung sich,
Die Allerschaffende, wieder.

Und wie im Aug' ein Feuer dem Manne glänzt,
Wenn hohes er entwarf; so ist
Von neuem an den Zeichen, den Taten der Welt jetzt
Ein Feuer angezündet in Seelen der Dichter.
Und was zuvor geschah, doch kaum gefühlt,
Ist offenbar erst jetzt,
Und die uns lächelnd den Acker gebauet,
In Knechtsgestalt, sie sind erkannt,
Die Allebendigen, die Kräfte der Götter.

Erfrägst du sie? im Liede wehet ihr Geist
Wenn es der Sonne des Tags und warmer Erd
Entwächst, und Wettern, die in der Luft, und andern
Die vorbereiteter in Tiefen der Zeit,
Und deutungsvoller, und vernehmlicher uns
Hinwandeln zwischen Himmel und Erd und unter den Völkern
Des gemeinsamen Geistes Gedanken sind,
Still endend in der Seele des Dichters,

Daß schnellbetroffen sie, Unendlichem
Bekannt seit langer Zeit, von Erinnerung
Erbebt, und ihr, von heilgem Strahl entzündet,
Die Frucht in Liebe geboren, der Götter und Menschen Werk
Der Gesang, damit er beiden zeuge, glückt.
So fiel, wie Dichter sagen, da sie sichtbar
Den Gott zu sehen begehrte, sein Blitz auf Semeles Haus
Und die göttlichgetroffne gebar,
Die Frucht des Gewitters, den heiligen Bacchus.

Und daher trinken himmlisches Feuer jetzt
Die Erdensöhne ohne Gefahr.
Doch uns gebührt es, unter Gottes Gewittern,
Ihr Dichter! mit entblößtem Haupte zu stehen,
Des Vaters Strahl, ihn selbst, mit eigner Hand
Zu fassen und dem Volk ins Lied
Gehüllt die himmlische Gabe zu reichen.
Denn sind nur reinen Herzens,
Wie Kinder, wir, sind schuldlos unsere Hände,

Des Vaters Strahl, der reine, versengt es nicht
Und tieferschüttert, die Leiden des Stärkeren
Mitleidend, bleibt in den hochherstürzenden Stürmen
Des Gottes, wenn er nahet, das Herz doch fest.
Doch weh mir, wenn von

Weh mir!

Und sag ich gleich,

Ich sei genaht, die Himmlischen zu schauen,
Sie selbst, sie werfen mich tief unter die Lebenden,
Den falschen Priester, ins Dunkel, daß ich
Das warnende Lied den Gelehrigen singe,
Dort

APPENDIX II

Spleen (II)

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.

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 cimetière 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 gît tout un fouillis de modes surannées,
Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,
Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.

Rien n'égale en longueur les boiteuses journées,
Quand sous les lourds flocons des neigeuses années
L'ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité,
Prend les proportions de l'immortalité.
– Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante !
Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante,
Assoupi dans le fond d'un Saharah brumeux ;
Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde insoucieux,
Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.

Spleen (II)

Souvenirs?
More than if I had lived a thousand years!

No chest of drawers crammed with documents,
love-letters, wedding-invitations, wills,
a lock of someone's hair rolled up in a deed,
hides so many secrets as my brain.
This branching catacombs, this pyramid
contains more corpses than the potter's field:
I am a graveyard that the moon abhors
where long worms like regrets come out to feed
most ravenously on my dearest dead.
I am an old boudoir where a rack of gowns,
perfumed by withered roses, rots to dust;
where only faint pastels and pale Bouchers
inhale the scent of long-unstoppered flasks.

Nothing is slower than the limping days
when under the heavy weather of the years
Boredom, the fruit of glum indifference,
gains the dimension of eternity...
Hereafter, mortal clay, you are no more
than a rock encircled by a nameless dread,
an ancient sphinx omitted from the map,
forgotten by the world, and whose fierce moods
sing only to the rays of setting suns.