

A TRANSCENDENT VIEW OF THINGS: THE PERSISTENCE OF METAPHYSICS IN  
MODERN GERMAN LYRIC POETRY, 1771–1908

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## **ABSTRACT**

John Jolly: A Transcendent View of Things:  
The Persistence of Metaphysics in Modern German Lyric Poetry, 1771–1908  
(Under the direction of: Thomas Pfau)

My dissertation explores the lyric poetry of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Eduard Mörike, and Rainer Maria Rilke, and it contends that these modern poets retain, albeit uneasily, a view of things as symbols of the transcendent divine. It thus disputes the secularization theory of post-Enlightenment aesthetics. This study specifically challenges the view of symbolism as mere metaphor—an image constructed of arbitrary signs (Nietzsche)—by showing how the epiphanies of modern lyric poetry remain grounded in the metaphysics of analogia, even where (as in Mörike) the writer seems to have left such entanglements behind. The modern poet’s desire to unveil a significant reality beyond subjective impression reveals that symbolic vision necessarily unfolds within the difference between the visible world and the transcendent divine. If signification entails likeness, yet lyric poetry always signifies in and through difference, then a constitutive analogy—that is, the simultaneity of likeness and even greater difference—emerges from within the dynamism of the lyric image itself.

Part 1 begins by describing the symbolic image in Goethe’s lyric poetry to recover his view of things as expressing the “holy open mystery” of the cosmos. I show how his symbolism overcomes Enlightenment naturalism by drawing on the antecedent order of analogia. Thus, it reveals the partial yet indisputable relatedness of things to the transcendent. Turning to Mörike, part 2 charts his transition to an equivocal understanding of the symbol that would sever the image from its numinous source of significance by confining the image to the scope of the poet’s own gaze. Yet Mörike’s poetry also evinces a counter-veiling tendency to de-subjectivize the image, thus yielding a

vision of things as they are prior to epistemic concerns, sentiment, and subjective preference. Part 3 contends that Rilke's thing-poetry evinces a similar tendency to neutralize modernity's biases against metaphysics. For, his poetry recovers an apophatic understanding of symbolism that draws on Dionysian theology. His poems thus focus our attention on the thing's unfathomable capacity for initiating a vision of the divine, of which the thing itself is a partial and fleeting manifestation.

To Prof. Pfau, whose generosity and authority gave me the confidence to pursue this project.  
Thank you for making a space for metaphysics and theological aesthetics in German Studies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Argument and Chapter Overview.....	1
The Symbolic Image: A Brief Intellectual History .....	10
Between Plato’s and Gadamer’s Hermeneutics of the Image .....	19
CHAPTER ONE: SYMBOLISM AND THE SOURCE OF THE SELF IN GOETHE’S SESENHEIMER LIEDER AND GANYMED.....	28
Introduction.....	28
The Expressivist Turn in German Literature.....	32
Inwardness and Self-Transcendence in “Maifest” and “Ganymed” .....	44
CHAPTER TWO: GOETHEAN SYMBOLISM’S RECOVERY OF THE ANALOGY OF BEING .....	80
Introduction.....	80
Analogia and Symbol in Goethe’s Classical Period.....	81
The Deity’s Analogic Presence in “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen” .....	97
CHAPTER THREE: THE SECULARIZATION OF CHRISTIAN-NEOPLATONIC SYMBOLISM IN MÖRIKE’S <i>BILDER AUS BEBENHAUSEN</i> .....	132
Introduction.....	132
Mörke’s Enigmatic Response to Weimar Classicism .....	141
Divine Absence in <i>Bilder aus Bebenhausen</i> .....	159
A Protestant Dialectic of the Image .....	176

CHAPTER FOUR: ADUMBRATIONS OF MODERNISM: ANALOGIA AS THE BASIS OF THE MÖRIKEAN IMAGE'S AUTONOMY .....	189
Introduction.....	189
Imagism in Mörike's "An einem Wintermorgen, bevor Sonnenaufgang" .....	193
The Image's Autonomy in "Auf eine Lampe" and "Göttliche Reminiszenz" .....	229
CHAPTER FIVE: SIMILE AND SYMBOL IN RILKE'S <i>NEUE GEDICHTE</i> : A MODERNIST RECOVERY OF THE ANALOGIA ENTIS .....	261
Introduction.....	261
Apophysis and the analogia entis in "Die Fensterrose" .....	270
Symbol in <i>Das Stunden-Buch</i> and Rilke's Reception of Russian Orthodox Iconography.....	290
CHAPTER SIX: EQUIVOCITY VERSUS ANALOGIA: CONTRASTING VIEWS OF THE SYMBOLIC IMAGE IN RILKE'S LETTERS AND MONOGRAPHS ON THE VISUAL ARTS.....	301
Introduction.....	301
The Equivocal Symbolism of <i>Worpswede</i> and "Der Panther" .....	304
The Analogy of "Création" in <i>Auguste Rodin</i> and <i>Briefe an einen jungen Dichter</i> .....	316
Analogy, Methexis, and "Image-existence" in <i>Briefe über Cézanne</i> .....	327
CONCLUSION .....	345
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	348

## INTRODUCTION

### The Argument and Chapter Overview

This dissertation explores the lyric poetry of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Eduard Mörike, and Rainer Maria Rilke, and it contends that these modern poets retain, albeit uneasily, a view of things as symbols of the transcendent divine. The study thus disputes the secularization theory of post-Enlightenment aesthetics (Weber, M. H. Abrams). According to this still-prevalent narrative, modern lyric poetry secularizes the classical cosmos by replacing theocentricism with anthropocentrism, thereby reducing the symbol to a metaphor—an image constructed of arbitrary signs (Locke, Nietzsche, Saussure).<sup>1</sup> My dissertation challenges this conception of symbolism by showing how the epiphanies of modern lyric poetry remain grounded in an, in origins, Platonic principle of analogia, even where (as in the case of Mörike) the writer seems to have left such metaphysical entanglements behind. The modern poet's desire to unveil a significant reality beyond subjective impression reveals that symbolic vision necessarily unfolds within the difference between the visible world and the transcendent divine. If signification entails likeness, yet lyric poetry always signifies in and through difference, then a constitutive analogy—that is, the simultaneity of likeness and even greater difference—emerges from within the dynamism of the lyric image itself.

This principle of analogy is the key to my project. Institutionalized by the Fourth Lateran Council of the Catholic Church (1215), the *analogia entis* states that the likeness between visible creation and its invisible creator is tempered, though not negated, by a “greater dissimilarity”

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<sup>1</sup> On Locke's theory of language, see Daniel Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in an Amoral Sense,” in *Truth: Engagements across Philosophical Traditions*, ed. José Medina and David Wood, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 16.



between them.<sup>2</sup> Thus affirming both likeness and difference simultaneously, the principle of analogy frames all visible being as participating in the divine without either displacing or (in pantheist fashion) absorbing it. To speak with Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, the visible realm consists of “dissimilar symbols” obliquely disclosing the deity’s supereminent presence in and through all things. On this view, as developed variously by Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, John Scotus Eriugena, and Thomas Aquinas, all natural beings and finite productions, including human language, are symbolic images, or “words” (*logoi*) of God, because they share concretely in the divine *logos*.<sup>3</sup> The argument is therefore fundamentally theological in that, as Olivier Boulnois observes of Eriugena, the “rigorous concept of *logos*” that it unfolds “brings out, through analysis, a concept” of transcendent relation—*analogia*—“underlying ordinary language” and poetry.<sup>4</sup> By demonstrating where and how *analogia* is operative in the post-Enlightenment poetry of Goethe, Mörike, and Rilke, my project critiques a modern logic of strict immanence, according to which the symbol’s relation to the divine must be either univocal (likeness) or equivocal (difference). In so doing, the dissertation repudiates the relativization of symbol to a merely historical category—for instance, to “romantic,” “French,” or “neo-Kantian” symbolism—by describing the Platonic logic of mediation (*mimesis* and *methexis*) structuring the lyric image and its basis in the *analogia entis*.

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<sup>2</sup> T.J. White, O.P., *The Analogy of Being*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2011) 5. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) had articulated the metaphysical relation between both orders of being: “Between the Creator and the creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them” (cited in *ibid.*).

<sup>3</sup> Maximus affirms in *The Ambigua*, trans. and ed., Nicholas Constas, 2 vols., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1128D, that “that *Logos* and *logoi* are analogically related” yet that “it is not possible for the infinite and the finite to exist simultaneously on the same level of being” (A, 7: 1081B). Maximus, Cited in Pfau, “Seeing and Being Seen Coincide,” *Logos* 22, no. 4, (Fall 2019), 35. Maximus thus outlines what the Fourth Lateran Council comes to term the analogy of being: “All things are related to Him without being confused with Him, who is the essential and personally distinct *logos* of God the Father” (A, 7: 1077C). See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols., (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 1: 13: 5, 6, and 10.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Boulnois, “The Concept of Theology,” in Hampton and Kenney, eds., *Christian Platonism: A History*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2001), 115. Boulnois continues that theology in this sense is an “investigation into the essence of God and a logico-grammatical question [following an in origins Aristotelian theory of analogic predication] about how we apply attributes to it” (*ibid.*).

While analyzing the key role of analogical rhetoric in the modern German lyric, the study points to the metaphysical and theological significance that renders the literary symbol intelligible in the first place, and which modern critical methods have elided or forgotten. Careful consideration of the modern lyric image's metaphysical entanglements shows it to run counter to the secularization narrative that Western liberal culture of that period habitually tells about itself. Drawing on twentieth- and twenty-first century phenomenology and hermeneutics, particularly where these fields focus on the relation between theology and aesthetics, the dissertation recovers an epiphanic notion of symbol as pro-visionally—that is, transiently yet nonetheless constitutively—presenting (*darstellen*) the eternal by way of analogic predication. Hence it emerges that modern symbolism remains irreducible both to an ontotheological copy (Gadamer) and to allegorical signification (de Man), as presupposed by naturalism's immanent frame. On this basis, the study contends that poetry is only possible in a world bearing within itself the likeness of God. For, as D.C. Schindler observes, “it is only in such a world that things manifest a significance that is greater than they themselves are.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the dissertation claims that image and symbol in the modern German lyric, and by extension, in modern European literature more generally, remain (however unwittingly) grounded in the Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics of analogy as their indispensable, if also ineluctable premise.

Part I (chapters 1 and 2) begins by sketching a history of the symbol in Goethe's lyric poetry in order to recover his symbolic view of things as expressing the “holy open mystery” (“heilig öffentliches Geheimnis”) of the cosmos.<sup>6</sup> By drawing out the influence of Aristotle, Plotinus, and Pietism on his poetics, the argument shows that Goethe had still grasped how the concept of analogy permits the possibility of natural and cultural forms (*logoi*) participating in the divine logos

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<sup>5</sup> David C. Schindler, “Why We Need Paul Claudel,” *Communio* 34, (Spring 2007), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Epirrhema,” in *Goethes Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe*, vol. 1, (München: Verlag C.MKG. Beck 2005), 358. My translation. Henceforth, GHA.

without displacing it. Thus he writes in “The Metamorphosis of Plants” that, “Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleicht der andern;/ Und so deutet das Chor [of botanical phenomena] auf ein geheimes Gesetz,/ Auf ein heiliges Rätsel.”<sup>7</sup> Probing the implications of this tenet, the dissertation describes how his symbolism draws on an antecedent order (*kosmos*) transcending the “punctual ego” of modernity (Charles Taylor), and reveals thereby the metaphysical relatedness of things to their numinous source. A key theme in these chapters is Goethe’s recovery a notion of “formation” (Bildung) as *theosis* (divinization) in and through the natural order.<sup>8</sup> By contrast to many of Goethe’s romantic contemporaries, his recovery of the thing’s interior form never concedes to the prevailing view of nature as mere process. For Goethe, plant and animal formation and the resulting “Gestalten” (forms) are—like human persons and the love that may blossom between them—symbols of a numinous presence grounding in the analogia entis. This transcendent view of nature and culture emerges through close readings, in chapter 1, of Goethe’s early collection of *Sesenheimer Lieder* (1774) and, in chapter 2, of his lyric poetry and prose writings around 1800 on morphology.

While the study argues through literary-historical and philosophical analysis that all three poets draw on the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol, it recognizes they do so very differently and, hence, with varying degrees of metaphysical coherence. When Goethe’s early, Pietist-inflected Platonism is deepened during Weimar classicism by his studies in Neoplatonism (from Aristotle to Plotinus), Spinoza, and romantic *Naturphilosophie* (Kielmeyer, Kant, Schelling et. al.), his poetics of the symbol neither deviates into ontological equivocity nor univocity. Rather, we shall see, he was committed to a Neoplatonic understanding the intelligibility of appearances as the manifestation of a transcendent principle of unity (“das ewig Eine/ das sich vielfach offenbart”)—specifically inasmuch

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<sup>7</sup> Goethe, “Die Metamorphose der Planzen,” GHA 1: 199-201.

<sup>8</sup> See Jennifer Herdt’s, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2019).

as he viewed natural phenomena as evincing the divine law of analogia.<sup>9</sup> Goethe's lyric imagery and far-flung scientific writings almost invariably recall the key insight of Platonist philosophy that "like is only known by like" and, furthermore, the epistemic and ontological principle of participation (*methexis*). As we shall see, it was this participatory understanding of things that allowed him to overcome the Enlightenment disaggregation of meaning and being, which he had encountered in the nominalist philosophies of Newton, Leibniz, and Linné. For Goethe, symbolic meaning inheres in phenomena through their interior form, the timeless *eidos* subtending contingent appearances. Because, he believes, the eternal remains accessible to moderns through the principle of analogia, the indelible significance of things remains irreducible both to allegorical signification through concepts (Schiller) and to the thing's self-immanent being (Schelling). Despite the commonplace that Goethe was a pantheist, despite even his increasing aversion to Christianity (as he knew it), the "great heathen's" (Heine) view of things tenuously preserves the ontological difference between immanent being and its divine provenance, while stressing their constitutive identity: "Das Ewige," writes Goethe, "regt sich fort in allen:/ Denn alles muß in Nichts zerfallen,/ Wenn es im Sein beharren will."<sup>10</sup> We shall see that Goethean morphology and poetics describe a sense of transcendence commensurate with Christian-Neoplatonism's understanding of the *analogia entis*.

The prevalent view of symbolism's departure from the Christian tradition in the long nineteenth century and its subsequent devolution into strictly anthropomorphic metaphor was the result of the accelerating secularization of European society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Turning to the Lutheran pastor and poet Eduard Mörike, part II (chapters 3 and 4) charts the persistence—even through the prevailing winds of modernization—of analogia underpinning his poetics of the symbol. Although Mörike's lyric poetry is often troubled by the image's metaphysical

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<sup>9</sup> Goethe, "Parabase," GHA 1: 358.

<sup>10</sup> Goethe, "Eins und Alles," GHA 1: 368.

entanglements and appears to transition to an equivocal view of its meaning and being, it emerges that the lyric image as such cannot fully betray its relation to the divine. Having arisen in tandem with historical Biblical criticism (Strauß), Mörike's most iconoclastic view of things ostensibly severs the image from its source of significance in the transcendent by confining it to the scope of the poet's own gaze. It appears to become, as the *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* put it, "ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes."<sup>11</sup> Just as Kant's strictly formal conception of symbolic presentation ("symbolische Darstellung") plays foil to Goethe's and Herder's understanding of symbolism in the preceding chapters, Hegel's reduction of symbol and image to concepts (*Begriffe*) of the transcendental ego in the *Logic of Science* (1812) provides a hermeneutic key in chapter 3.<sup>12</sup>

Moving, in chapter 4, beyond the themes of critical philosophy and mainstream Protestantism's dialectic of the image, the study also finds a proto-modernist tendency in Mörike's best lyric poetry. This unfolds conversely insofar as the poet turns his gaze outwards, away from the "sentimental" ego (Schiller), towards nature—thus to describe a vision of things as they are prior to epistemic concerns, sentiment, and subjective preference. Where Mörike succeeds in suspending his vision *within* the image (rather than imposing it *on* an image), he offers a fine example of what Charles Taylor terms an "epiphany of interspaces" granting insight into an antecedent order transcending finite poësis.<sup>13</sup> Thus it happens that, in an early poem on time-consciousness "An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang" (1828), Mörike provisionally overcomes his skeptical view of the symbol. For, we shall see, the symbolic moment (*Augenblick*) depicted in verses such as,

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<sup>11</sup> Eduard Mörike, „Bilder aus Bebenhausen,“ *Eduard Mörike. Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1, eds., Hans-Henrik Krummacker, Herbert Meyer, and Bernhard Zeller, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1968), 293. Henceforth: MKG.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840*, (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press 2005), 260–261.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1989), 479.

“Auf einmal blitzt das Aug, und, wie ein Gott, der Tag/ Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel,” *only* signifies by tacitly drawing on a metaphysics of analogia that, if pressed, the faltering Lutheran pastor Mörike would rather disavow.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast to Goethe’s poetics of the symbol, then, Mörike’s was marked from the beginning by an iconoclastic strain inherited from Lutheranism, German Idealism (from Schiller to Schelling), and gleaned, however passively, from his confidants from the Tübinger Stift. A distinctly modern doubt thus lingers in his poems (even in some explicitly Christian images) concerning the divine presence disclosed through Mörike’s appropriation of classical symbolism.<sup>15</sup> The result is a view of the symbol that typically equivocates about the image’s relation to its numinous origins. Functioning instead in the manner of allegory (as defined, for instance, by de Man or Ricœur), which signifies the transcendent divine through sheer negation and therefore denies its real presence, Mörike’s imagery often suggests the tendency of twentieth-century philosophy and literature to wash away the ontological grounds of things in the river of time.<sup>16</sup> And yet, as Romano Guardini observes, the apostate minister remains nonetheless capable of a poem like “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1845), which employs a language of analogic predication recalling the riches of Christian-Neoplatonism, thus opening the image (here: a painting of Christ as a young boy) to its origins in the logos’ eternal act of creation:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mörike, “An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang,” MKG 1: 11–12: “Auf einmal blitzt das Aug, und, wie ein Gott, der Tag/ Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!”

<sup>15</sup> John Walker, “Culture, Society and Secularization: Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World 1830-1900,” in *Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World: From 1200 to the Present Day*, eds., Ian Cooper and John Walker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 167.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 463.

<sup>17</sup> Romano Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis: Eine Auslegung von fünf Gedichten Eduard Mörikes*, (Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1957), 52.

Durchdringend ewge Zeitenfernen, grenzenlos:  
Als wittre durch die überwolke Stirn ein Blitz  
Der Gottheit, ein Erinnern, das im gleichen Nu  
Erloschen sein wird; und das welterschaffende,  
Das Wort von Anfang, als ein spielend Erdenkind  
Mit Lächeln zeigt's unwissend dir sein eigen Werk.<sup>18</sup>

When Mörike's thing-poems and poetry on time-consciousness present the deity through such similes, they do so while foregrounding the unfathomable distension of time from the eternal and, hence, the infinite difference between the moment of finite poësis and its source in the transcendent. A rupture thus emerges in the symbolic image intimating the inbreaking and indwelling presence of the divine. At once classical and modernist, Mörike's oeuvre suggests, to speak with Adorno, "a historical sundial" indicating the transition of Western culture into the age to come;<sup>19</sup> yet it happens that the hour at hand still unfolds through the principle of analogia.

Rilke's lyric from 1902 to 1910 is similarly entangled in the processes of secularization. However, the study shows that his poetics from this period in Paris increasingly defies fin-de-siècle language skepticism's divorce of meaning and being by recovering, at first only partially, a vision of things as symbols participating in a coherent cosmos—namely, one grounding in the analogia entis. Part III (chapters 5 and 6) contends that Rilke's thing-poetry presents the metaphysical gestalt of phenomena as they emerge from their invisible source in the logos of creation. By de-subjectivizing the image through his recovery of the contemplative practice of apophasis, which neutralizes modernity's biases against the transcendent, Rilke's thing-poems attain a view of symbolism commensurate with Dionysian theology's sense of the "dissimilar symbol," which obliquely discloses the divine through the senses.<sup>20</sup> For instance, in a poem on a Marian rose-window either from the

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<sup>18</sup> Mörike, "Göttliche Reminiszenz," MKG 1: 258.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1958), 92. My translation.

<sup>20</sup> Hampton and Henney, *Christian Platonism*, 104.

cathedral at Sainte-Denis or Chartres, Rilke writes: Just “as” (“wie”) the compelling eye of a cat may engross us with the force of its dark presence, “So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein/ der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen/ ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.”<sup>21</sup> Stemming both from his engagement with Russian Orthodox iconography and, subsequently, with modernist visual aesthetics in the West (Rodin and Cézanne), his poetry focuses our attention on the thing’s unfathomable capacity for initiating a vision of the transcendent, of which the thing itself is a partial and fleeting manifestation. Specifically, the dissertation shows how such symbolic presentation (epiphany) unfolds through Rilke’s modernist use of similes stressing the greater dissimilarity between the image and its source while nonetheless affirming their identity through analogia.

The appropriation of Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism in Rilke’s thing-poetry is, to be sure, complicated by his aversion to the Catholic faith of his childhood and his affinity for Nietzsche and the French symbolists (above all, Baudelaire). However, beginning with his youthful enthusiasm for Russian things—if only, initially, with a superficial understanding of them—his modernist reimagination of the symbol unfolds in stages developing beyond the equivocal sense of transcendence predominant at the fin-de-siècle (as in Hofmannsthal). Through close readings of Rilke’s letters and prose on the visual arts alongside descriptive analyses of lyric poetry from *Das Stunden-Buch* (1905) and *Die Neue Gedichte*, the dissertation contends that Rilke’s recovery of symbolic view of the cosmos occurs insofar as he learns an apophatic manner of beholding things through contemplation (*Anschauen*). As we shall see, this yields an increasingly de-subjectivized yet emphatically participatory (methectic) and personal notion of poësis, which Rilke reaps from Rodin’s and Cézanne’s (vaguely Christian) Neoplatonism. For Rilke, Rodin’s statues and Cézanne’s paintings were pro-visional images of a unified cosmos, wherein appearances bear an analogic relation to their

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<sup>21</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden*, eds., Manfred Engel et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1996), 3: 29. Henceforth: WKA.



transcendent source of unity: the logos of creation. For instance, after his first visit to the sculptor's workshop in Meudon in the fall of 1902, Rilke wrote that, "Every one of these fragments"—the seemingly isolated hands, busts, and torsos "looking out through" the pavilion's "glass doors like the populace of an aquarium"—each symbolic part "is only conceivable on the basis of such a transcendent [*eminent*], seizing unity [*Einheit*], and it is so utterly not in need of completion [*Ergänzung*], that one forgets that they are only parts and often parts of different bodies."<sup>22</sup> With increasing clarity, Rilke's view of the metaphysical structure of things grasped them as symbols grounding in an apophatically conditioned principle of analogia. In on-going dialogue with Orthodox iconography and modernist visual aesthetics, Rilke develops a notion of vision that evokes "the divine ray of darkness" pervading Dionysius' symbolic theology. For like the Dionysian sense of symbol, Rilke's thing-poetry unfolds through a "radical short-circuit" that "brings us back to the Principle" of creation.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the poets addressed in this study develop their very different, historically conditioned, poetics of the symbol through a recovery of Christian-Neoplatonism's transcendent view of the cosmos: namely, as logoi relating, via analogia, to their eternal source in the divine word (logos) of creation. As a result, we shall see that each poet resists in varying degrees the accelerating abstraction of persons and things through modernization, just as each resists the slow creep of secularization.

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<sup>22</sup> Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, eds., Ruth Sieber-R. and Karl Altheim, (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag 1950), 35. My translation. Original quotation.

<sup>23</sup> Hampton and Henney, *Christian Platonism*, 104.

## The Symbolic Image: A Brief Intellectual History

In describing the modern German lyric image's structure as it emerges from the transcendent, the following readings also aspire to philosophical coherence. Beyond literary-historical and phenomenological description, this requires sustained reflection on the symbol's historical and ontological origins in Christian-Neoplatonism. In order to establish the hermeneutic frame of the argument, therefore, the final sections of this introduction explain the symbolic image's tenuous place in post-Reformation Europe before recalling its origins and function in the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition. In so doing, the introduction distinguishes between the Christian and Neoplatonic uses of symbol to show how Christianity decisively alters yet also advances upon Platonism. The final section then provides the dissertation's hermeneutic of the image—regarded as a symbol of the transcendent good—by scrutinizing the image's ontological structure in Plato and Hans Georg Gadamer. The aim is to indicate the symbolic image's basis in the principle of analogia.

Understanding the original meaning of the symbol (*symbolon*) sheds light on its relation to the image and its untimeliness and frequent opprobrium in the modern period. As Gadamer explains, “symbol” originally referred to a *tessera hospitalis*, “the half of an object (usually a bone or die) that a host had broken in two and delivered into the safekeeping of his guest while holding onto the other himself.”<sup>24</sup> A “token of the friendship that was formed through the act of hospitality,” the symbol “represented the abiding character of the bond” between two households.<sup>25</sup> Its purpose was, as D.C. observes, to reinforce and preserve communion. By the turn of the eighteenth century, such a bond between persons, things, and the divine—a bond based on the common good transcending finite interests—had become unbelievable to many Europeans. This was largely a consequence of the

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<sup>24</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 31. Cf. D.C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty*, (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press 2017), 151.

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 31.

univocal metaphysics supporting the hegemony of the modern sciences (Bacon, Descartes, Newton), the privatization of religion at the hand of liberal-secular state, and what Brad Gregory has recently termed “the subjectivization of morality” due to the loss of Aristotelian virtue ethics in Protestant theology. Through such protracted historical processes, which escalated during the Enlightenment, secularization accelerated in European society and precipitated the loss of Christianity’s sacramental view of the cosmos—namely, the understanding of all things as symbolic images of the divine.<sup>26</sup> As Gregory observes of post-Reformation Europeans in general, without symbols of the common good, one’s endeavors were “bound to be dissipated in desires, passions, and impulses that tended away from flourishing and toward individual self-absorption (if not self-destruction) and the erosion of community.”<sup>27</sup> This, then, was the post-revolutionary situation of the poets addressed in the following study: during the long nineteenth century, widespread cultural fragmentation resulting from the divorce of meaning and being had wrought isolation, devaluation (of things and traditions), and dehumanization on a cosmic scale.

As a result of these longitudinal processes shaping modernity, aesthetics was also in the agonizing process of severing itself from religion. “Art with respect to its high vocation” had, as Louis Dupré observes, purportedly “become ‘a thing of the past.’ Henceforth the artist finds his content in himself.”<sup>28</sup> When, however, the poetic image loses its basis in the cosmos of things rooted in the transcendent good, it becomes a sentimental projection fully in the power of subjective spirit. Thus confined to the scope of the poet’s own powers, the image is reduced to a simulacrum: a system of signification at best merely intimating transcendence and at worst displacing it altogether.

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<sup>26</sup> Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2012), 180-235.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Dupré, *The Quest of the Absolute in Art: Birth and Decline of European Romanticism*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2013). 126-27. See Cooper and Walker, eds., *Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World*, 161-162.

As we shall see, it was at the hand of modernity's autonomous, increasingly hermetic ego (e.g. the transcendental subject of critical philosophy) that Biblical and metaphysical realism was progressively jettisoned after 1800. And this was so, as Hans Frei observes, because of the rise of historicizing methods of scholarly inquiry (Hegelianism) that had begun, ironically, with Herder's genealogical accounts of the origins of poetry, in which he had sought to recover Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism for the present age.<sup>29</sup> A deeper though fundamentally related issue still was the legacy of Protestant iconoclasm. Although Herder and Goethe challenged the attenuated notion of symbol articulated in Kant's third *Critique*, the Pietist philosopher's highly subjective, idiosyncratic worldview was already widespread in Enlightenment culture—indeed Kant had simply expressed the long-standing Protestant critique of religious images in a philosophical idiom. If no longer predicated on the *analogia entis*, as per Lutheran theology, an image cannot *present* (*darsellen*) the divine without becoming a simulacrum (an idol).<sup>30</sup> Hence, the image can never function as a symbol, which, as D.C. Schindler argues, must be understood—and indeed is what it is—in light of an antecedent covenant.<sup>31</sup> If, on the other hand, the image is to be more than a contrivance, a picture, or an idol, it must be grounded in a reality that is not contingent on our representations of it.

This was the view of the ancient Neoplatonists and of the Christians who had developed their insights. For pagan philosophers such as Porphyry and Iamblichus, who, living in the third and fourth centuries, were among the first to adopt symbols from Chaldean religion into Neoplatonism,

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<sup>29</sup> Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 183-233.

<sup>30</sup> This critique began with Lutheranism's dismissal of the Roman Catholic notion of sacramentality, according to which the Eucharist is the type of all things, such that the cosmos really participates (*methexis*) in and presents (*mimesis*) the logos of creation. See Brad Gregory's historical account of this development in *The Unintended Reformation*, whereby the Reformation led to the exclusion of the transcendent God of Christianity from the philosophical and political arenas, thus paving the way for the hegemony of a disenchanted, univocal worldview after the age of Enlightenment (25-74).

<sup>31</sup> Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 151.

symbols were the creations of the gods bestowed upon humanity for the purpose of achieving *theosis*.<sup>32</sup> Whether in the form of liturgical objects or rites, spoken/written words, or nature, symbols were physical images (*logoi*) indirectly disclosing an aspect of the spiritual reality shaping all things from within. Thus, the symbolic image was regarded as a real medium of *theurgy*—divine action in the realm of contingency—and, therefore, as the locus of encounter between humanity and the deity (between the part and the whole, the One and the many) through which the human being was divinized. As a material phenomenon instituted by the gods (Iamblichus), the Neoplatonic symbol posed a profound challenge to the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus. For the philosopher’s way of achieving perfection was “no longer” regarded as “merely an intellectual activity” of distilling conceptual truth from the chaos of matter and time.<sup>33</sup> Because symbols were regarded as the work of a deity (namely the *Demiurge*) within the enduring order (*kosmos*) of things, which nonetheless remained in constant flux, they required that the finite intellect adopt a fundamentally passive disposition to receive their transformative power. As Tomasz Stepien explains, Iamblichus had claimed “that using the rites and symbols in a philosophical way of perfection” was irreducible to human reasoning,

but it was not due to [their] being less rational. On the contrary, [symbolic] rites should be conceived as exceeding the human capability of understanding. If they were [exhaustively] understandable they would only match the activity of man, but being beyond it, they are actions of the gods themselves.<sup>34</sup>

Accordingly, it was not primarily upon transcending the intellect (*Nous*) through the philosopher’s own efforts, as Plotinus had asserted—thus to achieve nameless communion (*henosis*) with the transcendent One—but from the very beginning of the philosopher’s ascent that the

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<sup>32</sup> Tomasz Stepien, “The Understanding of Symbols and Their Role in the Ascent of the Soul to God in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Nicholas of Cusa,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne*, 2, (2015), 85-103.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

active/passive conversion of dei-formation (*theosis*) unfolded.<sup>35</sup> As Norman Russell observes, “doing philosophy could no longer in itself raise the soul to the level of the divine because the divine essence transcends the essence of the human soul to such a degree.” Thus, it is “necessary for the divine to descend by a ‘providential love’ before the lower reality can be perfected through participation in the characteristics of the higher.”<sup>36</sup> We shall see that Christian-Neoplatonism’s understanding of *theosis* through symbols as something essentially received through bottom-up participation (*methexis*) in divine reality also characterizes Goethe’s poetics at dawn of the eighteenth century. After around 300 A.D., then, Western philosophy was conceived as a discipline dependent on symbolic images not fashioned (*facere*) by human hands but created by the One. Beholding the transcendent meaning of things—their eternal principle of intelligibility (*logos*)—consequently required graced contemplation (*theoria*) rather than sheer dialectical reasoning (*gnosis*). Hence it increasingly implied a theological and liturgical view of reality: from sensory perceptions and poetry to higher order phenomena such as numbers, appearances were faithfully received as symbolic images of their source in the transcendent. As Iamblichus observes, nature, art, and (above all) the liturgy imitate “the order of the gods, both the intelligible order and that in heaven;” for they possess “the eternal measures of beings and wondrous signatures which have been sent down here from the Demiurge and Father of Wholes, through which the inexpressible is revealed through ineffable symbols.”<sup>37</sup>

The subsequent appropriation of the Neoplatonic symbol into Christian theology in the fifth century, first by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, amended many of the Neoplatonist teachings on

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<sup>35</sup> Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

the symbol's place in the cosmos and its role in the divine liturgy. Because Dionysius (as a convert from Neoplatonism) no longer viewed the universe as an eternal emanation of the deity but confessed it the Triune God's finite creation, he developed a more thoroughly apophatic understanding of contemplation that disavowed Plotinus' and Porphyry's pantheistic view of nature. As such, Dionysius was the first to provide—using Neoplatonism's hermeneutic of the symbolic image—a philosophical account of Christianity's panentheistic understanding of the qualified relation of identity between God (the divine logos) and the cosmos of words and things (logoi). According to Dionysius, this relation of constitutive identity is characterized by the greater difference between creation and its source in the transcendent good (*thearchia*) beyond being: the One, who is God.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in confessing the Incarnation and Crucifixion, Dionysius and later Christian theologians such as Aquinas were better positioned to grasp the principle of analogia underpinning the dissimilitude between God—the eternally self-moved mover (*ho ou kinoúmenon kinei*)—and humanity qua self-moved (*te autokinēton*) agent, who is prone to “inconstancy and occasional moral failure.”<sup>39</sup> For according to the Christian tradition, “it does not belong to providence to destroy nature, but to preserve the nature of each.”<sup>40</sup> On this basis, Christian-Neoplatonic theologians could affirm 1) that prime matter (regarded a non-subsistent being) does not logically imply a fall from divine perfection, and 2) that human agency remains intact and free, even as its freedom is something essentially received. The natural symbols of the divine (as expressed in Psalms 72, 148, and more) consequently

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<sup>38</sup> See Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, “The Celestial Hierarchy,” *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Luibheid, (New York: Paulist Press 1987), 141 A, concerning his view of the sun's place in the cosmos: “The old myth used to describe the sun as the provident god and creator of this universe. I do not say this. But I do say that ever since the creation of the world, the invisible things of God, his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (“The Divine Names,” 700 C).

<sup>39</sup> Dionysius' metaphysics ultimately influenced the Fourth Lateran Council's (1215) formulation of the relationship between God and creation. See T.J. White, ed., *The Analogy of Being*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

imply that humanity and, indeed, all of creation provisionally participates in the perfect goodness and freedom of God.<sup>41</sup>

As Stepien observes, Dionysian theology nevertheless upholds the Neoplatonic distinction between natural and liturgical symbols. Although Dionysius had argued that “the name One means that God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of the one unity and that he is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness” and that “nothing in the world lacks its share of the One,” his theology also affirmed that “the only true ‘working symbols’ [were] those used in sacramental hierourgical [sacred-making] rites.”<sup>42</sup> Through the subsequent development of Christian-Neoplatonic philosophy and theology into the Middle Ages, however, it became increasingly clear that an analogy obtains between natural symbols and those of the liturgy: and, hence, that the cosmos is properly sacramental and grace-filled without itself being a sacrament capable of dispensing “sanctifying grace.”<sup>43</sup> After Maximus the Confessor, at the latest, who first recognized the principle of analogia in Dionysius’ writings—specifically, the similitude between God, regarded as “non-being” (the transcendent good beyond being), and prime matter—nature, for the Christian, becomes a symbolic image of the sacrament.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, the metaphysical principle of analogia became indispensable for the Western Church’s attempt to articulate the irreducible relation between the cosmos of things and their source in God. Theology, metaphysics, science, ethics, and art all served the end of expressing this principle of transcendent relationship. As

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<sup>41</sup> Hampton and Kenney, eds., *Christian Neoplatonism*, 136. According to Rudi A. te Velde, it was Aquinas who worked out the logical paradoxes of this position most fully.

<sup>42</sup> Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, “The Divine Names,” *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 592 C-D. Cited in Stepien, 92.

<sup>43</sup> See New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia on the difference between actual vs. sanctifying grace: Joseph Pohle, “Sanctifying Grace,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), accessed January 19, 2022, <<http://MKG.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm>>.

<sup>44</sup> Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas*, (New York: Brill, 1992), 94.



Andrew Willard Jones explains, it was analogia that had allowed Pope Innocent III (1161–1216) and his contemporaries to understand the cosmos liturgically and, thus, to view

the phenomenological world in a fractal manner, retaining its integrity as it structured human life at different levels of scale, from the totality of history, down to a single act of a single person. The plot line was a plot of ascent from the lower to the higher, through a hierarchy of increasing fulfillment through increasing participation in the life of God. This was not a linear ascent of ontological sameness, wherein one stage transitions to another, like an elevator slowly moving between floors. Rather, the ascent was one of analogical intervals, which could only be bridged from above, the ultimate foundation and type of which was, of course, the analogy between creation and God himself ... The movement of ascent was an ontological movement from less to more intense being, a movement deeper into participation in being itself.<sup>45</sup>

At every stage of the hierarchy of being, the medium through which this sacramental dynamic of ascent and intensification into the divine unfolds is the symbolic image. This was as true, we shall see, for post-Reformation Europeans seeking to recover the eternal *eidos* of things through lyric images as it was for the Scholastics of the twelfth century.

In brief, Christianity's shift towards a metaphysics of analogia had permitted theologians, philosophers, and artists to expand their understanding of the symbol beyond the liturgy to include natural phenomena. The subsequent rise, however, of univocal (John Duns Scotus) and equivocal (William of Ockham) ontologies in fourteenth-century Franciscan theology progressively troubled Christendom's appreciation of nature as a symbolic image of the divine. For as remains to be seen vis-a-vis their modern offshoots, these ontologies tend either to reduce the image to a copy or sign—neither of which constitutively presents (*darstellen*) the divine through an excess of meaning as disclosed in the image. If, as Stepien contends, symbolism in the ancient, Neoplatonic sense was reinvigorated after the rediscovery of the Plato's writings during the Renaissance, this stage of early modernity also saw a resurgence of pantheism in Protestant Christianity (for instance, Paracelsus and

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Willard Jones, "A Liturgical Cosmos," *New Polity* 1:2 (August 2020), accessed January 19, 2022, <<https://newpolity.com/blog/a-liturgical-cosmos>>.

Böhme) as well as deism and atheism amongst the new humanists (e.g. Machiavelli and Hobbes). And yet, this period also produced the likes of Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), whose idea of the “coincidence of opposites” (*coincidentia oppositorum*) emphatically preserves the infinite asymmetry (*major dissimilitudo*) characterizing the symbolic image’s basis in analogia.<sup>46</sup> In slight contrast to Dionysius, Stepien observes, yet in accord with his understanding of the dissimilar symbol, “we can observe” in Cusa’s theology “that he places stress on the reading of the beauty of nature,” such that beauty in nature again provides, as it had for Plato, “the path to unity with God.”<sup>47</sup> As we shall see in the following, it is this tradition of symbolism that the modern lyric poetry of Goethe, Mörike, and Rilke (if sometimes only tenuously) continues.

### **Between Plato’s and Gadamer’s Hermeneutics of the Image**

It is no coincidence that contemporary scholarship has often recognized the crucial role of analogia in modern poetry’s and philosophy’s uses of symbolism.<sup>48</sup> However, following the main intellectual currents of the twentieth-century, the scholarship persistently seeks to circumnavigate, if not reject outright, the metaphysical entanglements implied by the image’s symbolic manner of presentation (*Darstellung*). While the Platonic principle of mimesis (representation) often remains in effect—insofar as the images in question depict anything at all—contemporary scholarship tends to bristle at the metaphysics of methexis (participation): for this structural feature of the image implies a symbolic covenant between the phenomenon and its source in the divine logos. The eschewal of symbolism on these grounds corresponds, we shall see, to the predominant trend in Goethe,

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<sup>46</sup> See Nicolas of Cusa, “De Docta Ignorantia,” *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, (Hamburg: Felix Mainer 1932), II, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Stepien, “The Understanding of Symbols,” 95.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language*, 28.

Mörike, and Rilke scholarship to historicize the meaning of symbolism in their works by reducing it to a “romantic” or “modernist” category, which is either exhaustively explicable “in terms of its social function” or altogether hermetic. According to these immanentizing perspectives, the symbol in modern lyric is devoid of the deity’s mysterious presence.<sup>49</sup> A key point of this study’s argumentation is, by contrast, that the scholarship habitually misunderstands the metaphysical structure of the symbol operative in modern lyric poetry; for it typically regards the symbol as either as a totalizing and nonsensical *copy* or a strictly allegorical *sign* of the absolute. Rightly understood, the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol is neither copy nor sign but an *image* of divine reality.

Hans Georg Gadamer’s twentieth-century phenomenology of the image takes us a good way towards overcoming this misprision of the symbol. However, even he falls short of grasping symbolism’s basis in the metaphysics of analogia. For Gadamer, the image’s (*Bild*) ontological manner of presenting the prototype (*Urbild*) differs from the sign and symbol in that it implies an increase in the being of the prototype.<sup>50</sup> Whereas, according to Gadamer, the symbol remains a mere copy (*Abbild*), the image presents (*darstellen*) the prototype while remaining ontologically distinct from it—thus, for instance, the difference between a painting or lyric image representing (*darstellen*) a nation and the nation’s flag, which functions in the manner of a copy.<sup>51</sup> What Gadamer’s helpful distinction does not acknowledge is the possibility of a *symbolic image*: that is, an image ontologically identical to its source—through participation (*methexis*)—yet at once radically different from it. Despite his concerted efforts to recover the insights of Christian-Neoplatonism for twentieth-century phenomenology, Gadamer crucially overlooks the role that analogia plays in classical and

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 105.

<sup>50</sup> See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 7th ed., (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010), 158-159.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

contemporary symbolism. It is telling that, when Gadamer does acknowledge the importance of the *analogia entis* in Kantian aesthetics' account of symbolic presentation as strictly formal (non-constitutive) analogy, he does so only to explain the scholastic principle's purpose as of one of "keeping human concepts separate from God."<sup>52</sup> Hence, he elides the symbolic covenant between the image and the divine in disregarding its metaphysical grounds. As remains to be seen, this elision is evident even when Gadamer writes on the principle of *methexis* in Plato's works—that is, the relation of identity-in-difference (*analogia*) between the contingent image and the eternal that participation implies.

Two key terms from Plato's oeuvre—namely, *mimesis* and *methexis*—provide the basic parameters for the hermeneutic of the image developed in the following discussions symbolism in modern lyric poetry. Taken together, these terms form a polarity—a relation of irreducible opposition in asymmetrical communion—structuring the image and its presentation of mind, world, and the transcendent. *Mimesis* is an ambiguous term that can mean "imitation and representation," both of which are developed in numerous contexts through the course of Plato's dialogues.<sup>53</sup> While his disparagement of the pictorial and poetic image in the *Republic* as doubly derivative of true, divinely crafted forms perhaps gives the salient account of *mimesis* in his works, other dialogues express a more nuanced position: foremost, the *Sophist* (235d–236b) in which Plato distinguishes "an honest likeness" (*mimesis eikastike*) from the "illusory image" (*mimesis phantastike*).<sup>54</sup> As opposed to the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>53</sup> One example is *The Ion*, which distinguishes between the rhapsodist's doubly derivative representation of the poem's subject matter (as "representatives of representatives" [535a]) and the technical and practical knowledge that the charioteer, the doctor or the fisherman possesses (537a). *Plato, Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> See Lambert Wiesing's "Plato's Concept of Mimesis and Its Concealed Canon" in *Artificial Presence: Philosophical Studies in Image Theory*, trans. Nils F. Schott, (Stanford University: Stanford University Press 2010) 117.

fantastic images of poetry, which distort the proportions of the original, the images of the craftsman, the sculptor and the philosopher can, Plato contends, approximate a copy the original.

As Lambert Wiesing observes, Plato's apparent endorsement of the copy (*mimesis eikastike*) over the image here and in the *Republic* takes for granted that the copy achieves perfect imitation by representing something "without interpreting this something in a contingent manner."<sup>55</sup> Thus, "there is no mediating grammar of picturing [*Darstellung*] between copy and what is copied, no perspective of transformation, no distorting style, no language, no medium"—hence there is neither imagination nor image. According to Plato, the perfect likeness would merely be a copy, though no human art or craft can fully achieve this ideal. It is, rather, the signs of mathematics and the rational prose of dialectical philosophy that most closely approximate truth in terms of such a strict correspondence theory. By contrast, the poetic image (*mimesis phantastike*) only fails to adequately present the true insofar as it does so without foregrounding its artificiality; for the imperfect presentation of truth is an essential structural feature of the image, rendering it pro-visional in a twofold sense of being transient yet nonetheless revelatory of truth. As Hegel eventually puts it, the Platonic image must go to ground (*zu-Grunde-gehen*) by stressing its pro-visionality in order to reveal its source. This indicates the productive paradox at the core of both Plato's theory of mimesis and, we shall see, the symbolic images of the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition:

The maker of likenesses must picture perfectly in order to achieve a non-perfect mimesis that identifies itself as such, while the appearance-making illusionist without exception engages in bad, imprecise mimesis in order to bring about a perfect pictoriality, a pictoriality, that is, that is not recognizable as pictoriality...The non-imitation thus turns out to be a perfect imitation because the perfect imitation is no longer an imitation.<sup>56</sup>

When an image does not draw attention to itself as a provisional disclosure of truth but rather seeks to become a copy (or "symbol" in Gadamer's pejorative sense of the term) with the same

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<sup>55</sup> Wiesing, "Plato's Concept of Mimesis," 120

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 120

ontological status as its source, it commits the “error of phenomenism” (de Man) and becomes what Jean Luc Marion rightly terms an “idol.”<sup>57</sup> Contrarily, the more perfect, properly symbolic image foregrounds its transience while preserving the principle of participation—thus its identity in still greater difference from the source.

The second Platonic category that pertains to the ontological status of the image and subsequently shapes the discourses of symbolism in modern poetry, phenomenology and theological aesthetics is that of methexis, meaning “the part’s participation in the whole.”<sup>58</sup> For Plato and the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition, the term implies “transcendence,” because it “signifies the relationship between the changeable reality of the sense and the transcendent reality of the Forms.”<sup>59</sup> Hence, it “entails the presence of the higher in the lower, of the universal Form in the particular instance of that Form,” and it “explains why a particular thing is subject of a universal predicate.”<sup>60</sup> Plato’s understanding of methexis thus develops “the paradox of a participation,” which, as Gadamer observes, “does not take the part from the whole [through deduction], but takes part in the whole—like the day in the light of the sun” (*Parmenides*, 131b).<sup>61</sup> Plato’s conception of the part-whole dilemma characterizing participation recognizes that this relationship is one of identity-in-difference, such that likeness and unlikeness coincide in sensory phenomena without contradiction (*Parmenides*, 128e – 130). Inasmuch as methexis implies a concrete unity, one cannot abstract some

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<sup>57</sup> See Paul de Man, “Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche),” *Allegories of Reading*, (New Haven: Yale University Press 1979) and Jean Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, “The Prototype and the Type,” (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles* in *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, vol. 62, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag 1978), 11. My translation: “die Teilhabe des Einzelnen am Allgemeinen.”

<sup>59</sup> Hampton and Kenney, eds., *Christian Platonism*, 113.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. According to Plato, therefore, “when something is found to be beautiful, then it is beautiful because it participates in the absolute beauty” (*Phaedo*, 100c.)

<sup>61</sup> Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten*, 11. My translation. “Die Paradoxie einer Teilhabe, die nicht einen Teil nimmt, sondern am Ganzen teilhat – wie der Tag am Licht der Sonne.”

aspect of the part-whole relation so as to pit it in opposition to the others, namely, by considering one aspect in isolation from the others.<sup>62</sup> For the parts form a polarity like the asymmetrical tension between the unity and plurality of Socrates, who is one person with many anatomical parts as well as one member of the human species. Just *as* Socrates the person transcends the sum of his bodily parts, *so* the idea of humanity transcends the sum of the human beings, while only ever appearing through its individual members. Conceived as a relationship of identity-in-difference, methexis underpins the sensory realm of appearances, since all things are images manifesting universal forms. As Christian-Neoplatonic theologians will eventually recognize, it is specifically through the relationship of analogia that Platonic participation in the transcendent unfolds.

Gadamer's account of the relationship between the idea of the good and its sensory manifestation as beauty and truth in Plato's writings provides insight into the polar tension and unity between mimesis and methexis and, furthermore, into their basis in the analogia entis. Whereas mimesis foregrounds the ontological difference between the original and the image and ostensibly gives rise to the chorismos of Platonism as formulated by Aristotle, Gadamer observes that "methexis alternatively describes" the image with respect to "the being of pure relations."<sup>63</sup> To recall Plato's example from the *Parmenides* (131b), the day is irreducible to a particular being in the light of the sun; for the two are identical despite the differences between them (e.g., "day" regarded conceptually as the passage of time). Again, the day cannot be opposed to the light of the sun

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<sup>62</sup> See Robert Sokolowski's *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 24, which distinguishes between "moments" and "concreta": "A whole can be called a *concretum*, something that can exist and present itself and be experienced as a concrete individual. Moments, however, cannot become concreta. Whenever they exist and are experienced, they drag along their other moments with them; they exist only as blended with their complementary parts." When we refer to a moment in isolation from its concrete whole, then we run the risk of rendering it an "abstractum" (ibid.).

<sup>63</sup> Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten*, 12. My translation. "Methexis beschreibt dagegen von der andern Seite, vom Sein der reinen Verhältnisse aus und läßt dabei den ontologischen Status des Teilhabenden unbestimmt." For Gadamer, apparently, the principle of identity underpinning differences in the realm of contingency is not necessarily metaphysical.

without abstracting two moments from their concrete unity by considering them in isolation from their attendant parts.<sup>64</sup> According to Gadamer, however, methexis also “leaves the ontological status of the participant undetermined.”<sup>65</sup> Hence, he resists the metaphysical implications of participation, understood as “the being of pure relations.” Despite his phenomenological pre-convictions (as a disciple of Heidegger’s equivocal ontology), Gadamer tacitly draws on constitutive analogies to explain the “relation” of identity-in-difference (methexis) as Plato conceives it. It is in a similar manner that the following interpretations of modern German poetry recall the Platonic principles of mimesis and methexis by describing the language and metaphysical logic of analogia at work—sometimes despite authorial intentions—in the lyric image.

Gadamer’s contention is that the understanding of the transcendent good (*thearchia*) becomes increasingly coherent through Plato’s oeuvre inasmuch as methexis attains conceptual clarity and subsequently sheds light on the image’s mimetic structure. While the *Republic* and the *Symposium* primarily formulate the image’s relationship to the idea via allegories, the late dialogue the *Philebus* does so in terms of concrete participation. Through readings of the allegory of the cave and Diotima’s encomium on beauty, Gadamer argues that the middle dialogues conceive the good as a purely noumenal cause such that the idea remains abstracted beyond the phenomenal realm of beings, hence, with the chorismos ostensibly still in place. Yet he nonetheless finds a chain of analogies at work in them—namely, between the transcendent good, the light of the sun, and reason—which indicates to him that the concept of participation is already operative in the allegory’s more mimetic description of the image/original relationship.<sup>66</sup> Thus Gadamer observes:

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<sup>64</sup> The day “is one and the same, is in many places at once, and yet is not separated from itself” (*Parmenides*, 131b) Time and space would be an abstractum (Sokolowski) in this example.

<sup>65</sup> Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten*, 12. “...läßt dabei den ontologischen Status des Teilhabenden unbestimmt.“ My translation.

<sup>66</sup> Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*, 55. My translation. “Wie das Sehen und das Licht ‘sonnenartig’ sind, soll auch das Wissen und die ‘Wahrheit’ ‘gut-artig’ heißen, wenn auch noch nicht als ‘das Gute’ selbst gelten...Wie das Licht Sichtbares mit dem Sehen verbindet, so erscheint das wahrhafte Sein im Denken.”



Just as vision and light are [according to Plato] ‘sunlike,’ so should knowledge and ‘truth’ be termed ‘good-like,’ although they are not the same as ‘the good’ itself... Just as the light binds the visible with sight, so true being appears in thought.<sup>67</sup>

Gadamer’s understanding of the Platonic principles of representation and participation thus suggests that, although the transcendent light of the good first discloses beings for thought, the obverse is also implied: namely, that the idea only ever appears through its concrete (symbolic) images. Every presentation (even the allegorical) thus becomes, *by way of analogia*, an instance of participation. Although Gadamer elides the key point, this is because the principle of analogic relations subtends Platonic metaphysics.

Gadamer explains Plato’s mature understanding of methexis through an interpretation of the “mixture” proposed in the late dialogue the *Philebus* regarding limited (noumenal) and limitless (phenomenal) entities. According to Plato, just *as* the good life entails a mixture of reason and desire, understood as “abstract moments of a single actual life,” which are united in their orientation towards the good through practical reasoning (*phronesis*), *so* does the riddle of methexis only attain conceptual clarity “with regard to the concreteness of the human being.”<sup>68</sup> For it is in the realm of the mixed—“in the concretely appearing reality” of things—that the good is manifest;<sup>69</sup> through the constitutive analogy between the image (tacitly regarded as a symbol) and its timeless source.<sup>70</sup> Gadamer thus suggests that the “mixture” serves much like the sun as an analogue for the participation of polar opposites (transcendent *eidos* and image) in the concrete “genus of the real.”

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. My translation. “Wie das Sehen und das Licht ‘sonnenartig’ sind, soll auch das Wissen und die ‘Wahrheit’ ‘gut-artig’ heißen, wenn auch noch nicht als ‘das Gute’ selbst gelten... Wie das Licht Sichtbares mit dem Sehen verbindet, so erscheint das wahrhafte Sein im Denken.”

<sup>68</sup> Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*, 68–69. My translations. “Abstrakte Momente des einen wirklichen Lebens.” “Im Blick auf die Konkretion des Menschseins.”

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. My translation. “In der konkret erscheinenden Wirklichkeit.”

<sup>70</sup> *Philebus*, 61b: “We ought not to seek the good in the unmixed life but in the mixed one.”

Hence, he contends, it is “only when mixture is no longer considered a diminution and obfuscation of the pure, true, unmixed, but instead as its own genus, that the mixture is the place in which the ontological structure of the good and the true in themselves appears.”<sup>71</sup> For in so doing, the problem of the chorismos characterizing Platonic mimesis disappears. Instead of regarding the noetic and phenomenal realms as abstract moments (“separately appearing substances”) unto themselves, it emerges through the mixture—the symbolic image—how they participate, via analogia, in the image’s concrete presentation of things. Methexis is a structural feature of the image such that mimesis is necessarily concrete. Therefore, the Platonic image is a symbol that relates analogically to the transcendent light of being that it pro-visionally discloses.<sup>72</sup>

These key Platonic insights are foundational for the following interpretations of modern German lyric poetry. While familiarity with Plato’s works is only demonstrable in Goethe’s oeuvre, each of the poets knows this tradition of symbolism through their encounters with Christianity. Thus, this study of the role of the analogia entis in their symbolism unfolds in dialogue with both intellectual traditions.

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<sup>71</sup> Gadamer, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*, 68–69. My translation. “Nur wenn Mischung nicht mehr als eine Minderung und Trübung des Reinen, Wahren, Ungemischten, sondern als ein eigenes Genos gedacht wird, ist sie der Ort, an dem die Seinsverfassung des Guten und Wahren selber erscheint.”

<sup>72</sup> The analogy of the “mixture” also clarifies the relationship of methexis and mimesis. This is because Gadamer’s reading of the *Philebus* indicates that these terms must be viewed as a polar tension (much like allegory and symbol) unified within the concrete medium of the image. When taken alone, as purely logical moments of the image, mimesis and methexis become mere abstractions. As Gadamer observes, this solution to the dilemma of participation ultimately approaches “the truth of the self-evident” (“die Wahrheit des Selbstverständlichen”), which is precisely what makes it such a difficult concept. For the image’s participatory aspect is always already bound up with the mystery of the thing’s self-disclosure (mimesis). It is given in and through the image’s presentation.

## SYMBOLISM AND THE SOURCE OF THE SELF IN GOETHE'S *SESENHEIMER LIEDER* AND "GANYMED"

“Dichtkunst, sie ist ursprünglich Theologie gewesen, und  
die edelste, höchste Dichtkunst wird wie die Tonkunst  
ihrem Wesen nach immer Theologie bleiben.”

—Johann Gottlieb Herder, *An Prediger*

### Introduction

Often described as the beginning of modern German literature, the 1770s intellectual milieu in the Teutonic principalities of the Holy Roman Empire was a welter of conflicting philosophies, theologies, and literary forms. At this time, the prevailing culture of Enlightenment was giving way in the German lands to new forms of national and religious sensibilities and, therefore, to new forms of self-expression in the arts. As Nicholas Boyle has shown, this shift in the cultural consciousness from the antinomies characterizing Pietist Christianity, rationalist philosophy, and the poetics of genius associated with sentimentalism (*Empfindsamkeit*) is uniquely and paradigmatically manifest in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's development—as early as his period of study between Strasbourg and Sessenheim (1770–1771)—of a symbolist poetics.<sup>73</sup> For, Boyle contends, the Leibnizean view of the human soul as a monad without any means of transcending self-immanent inwardness, aside from an entirely extrinsicist conception of divine providence and grace, is decisively overturned by Goethean symbolism—and precisely where one might least expect it: namely, in the unfinished drama of Enlightenment: *Prometheus* (1773). According to Boyle, Goethe's play, which would remain

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<sup>73</sup> Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 156.

unpublished until the 1830 edition of Goethe's works, stages and resolves a dilemma that is of "the deepest significance in the history of modern sensibility."<sup>74</sup> Either, Boyle explains, the "the mortal, transient artist" is "the servant of an independent world-order" (the classical *kosmos*) "which stretches before and after him, to whose laws he acknowledges himself subject and parts of which are imitated in his works," or, the works crafted by "the autonomous" creator, who acknowledges "no ordering force except that which he finds within him," are imprisoned in their "dependence upon him."<sup>75</sup> Although Prometheus rebels against the Greek deities, as Goethe increasingly does against the Pietist understanding of God, he recognizes that his creations are but "frozen icons [images] of the artist's self."<sup>76</sup> Forever confined to the scope of the poet's own gaze—his subjective preferences and sentiments—the Promethean image can neither participate in nor depict (*darstellen*) its source in divine life. When, however, Jove offers to animate the finite artist's images, should the demi-god desist from his rebellion, Prometheus still spurns him. "But," Boyle observes, "the refusal is not what it seems: it does not finally shut off the fountain of life. For Prometheus is not wholly alone, the world of his activity is not wholly devoid of an objective principle" that, while transcending him, is co-active in his creation.<sup>77</sup> He finds this presence in the goddess Minerva:

Und du bist meinem Geist,  
 Was er sich selbst ist;  
 . . . . .  
 Immer als wenn meine Seele spräche zu sich selbst,  
 Sie sich eröffnete  
 Und mitgeborne Harmonieen  
 In ihr erklingen aus sich selbst:  
 Das waren deine Worte.  
 So war ich selbst nicht selbst, . . .<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Goethe, *Prometheus*, GHA, 4: 179.

“Ultimately,” Boyle concludes, “even creativity must have a source. Even Prometheus’ autonomous activity must appear to him a gift” from above.<sup>79</sup> In writing this early play, Goethe realizes that the modern artist’s images are ineluctably symbols of divine reality; for they reflect the wellspring of life issuing from within, yet at once wholly transcending, one’s sense of self.<sup>80</sup>

In the following chapters, we shall see that Goethean symbolism yields an understanding of selfhood, lyric imagery, and natural phenomena as constitutively presenting the cosmos’ transcendent source. By rejecting the philosophical and theological orthodoxies of his day, Goethe’s lyric poetry and far-flung prose reflections on the symbolic order of things remain resolutely open to what St. Paul had affirmed, upon speaking at the Areopagus in Athens, as a shadowy image of the Judeo-Christian Godhead: namely, the “Unknown Deity” (*Agnostos Theos*).<sup>81</sup> If, as Boyle observes, Goethe-Prometheus does not bow “to the gods, who are no more than his peers,” he nonetheless acknowledges “Fate, the unknown dispenser of all creativity, that is their master and his.”<sup>82</sup> However, the argument advanced in this and the next chapter is not merely that Goethe’s poetics somehow vaguely opens to the transcendent (that is to say, on the basis of an equivocal ontology), but that his symbolism specifically recalls the metaphysical principle of analogia as the supreme grounds of the realm of appearances—including but not exclusive to the poetic image. According to this core tenet of Catholic metaphysics, which Goethe unwittingly recovers, “there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between [the Creator and the creature].”<sup>83</sup> As symbols of the divine act of creation, all things (not least human language)

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<sup>79</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 1: 166.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Acts 17: 23, (RSVCE)

<sup>82</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 1: 166.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in T.J. White, O.P., ed., *The Analogy of Being*, 5.

participate in and depict the transcendent by way of a constitutive analogy. We shall see that, first in Sessenheim and then with increasing clarity in his Weimar period, Goethe's symbolic imagery invariably unfolds on this basis. What this contention means is that Goethe's poetics eschews the univocal ontology (pantheism) often attributed to his symbolism (typically by way of appeals to Spinoza), just as it avoids the prevailing, equivocal ontology (dualism) of modernity, according to which the image is severed from the divine—even as it elegiacally evokes its transcendent origins.<sup>84</sup>

What this thesis does not imply is that Goethe was a crypto-Catholic who intended to return to a specifically Christian understanding of epiphany. Although his aversion to Biblical religion rarely, if ever, matched the vitriol of his Enlightenment contemporaries (e.g. Voltaire), he was and remains the “great heathen” (Heine) that Goethe so cunningly makes himself out to be in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-1831).<sup>85</sup> However, the main-stream interpretation of Goethe's oeuvre as reflecting the slow creep of secularization in German culture and, furthermore, as advancing a “Promethean humanism” devoid of transcendence is altogether misconstrued.<sup>86</sup> This is because the scholarship almost invariably neglects to consider the metaphysical presuppositions (*Vorurteile*) underpinning the commonplace narrative of secularization prevailing in liberal modernity. In order to assess the Goethean symbol's standing vis-à-vis the transcendent source of creation, we must first be willing to recognize the persistent entanglement of his poetry and science in Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics. Goethe himself sets our precedent for adopting this stance. Secondly, we must look to the images themselves: to Goethe's poetic and prose descriptions of his visions into

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<sup>84</sup> If, as Boyle contends, this is an egregious misprision of the early poetry, we shall see that it is even more so for Goethe's classical period (*Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 1: 160). Boyle observes that “the fact that Goethe is known in 1773 to have become acquainted with some of the ideas of Spinoza is held to give colour to [the pantheist view of his symbolic imagery]. As late as 1785, however, Goethe confessed that he had never yet read Spinoza so methodically as to have an adequate grasp of his whole system” (ibid.).

<sup>85</sup> See Daniel DiMassa, “Varieties of Radical Enlightenment: Secularization as Translation in Goethe's Autobiography,” *Religion and Literature*, Spring 2016, 48:1, 51-69.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 64.

the symbolic order subtending phenomenality. We will thus look for the empirical yet nonetheless timeless *eidos* transcending the thing seen while also shaping it from within. In so doing, we shall see *how*—through the principle of analogia—Goethe’s images concretely present the interior form of things as they emerge from their numinous source.

## The Expressivist Turn in German Literature

Goethe’s early collection of love poems, *Sesenheimer Lieder* (1771), to which his first lyric masterpieces belong, give voice to the novel view of nature and culture emerging in late eighteenth-century Germany. Written after Goethe’s first meetings with Johann Gottfried Herder in August 1770 and amidst his growing discipleship to the accomplished theologian, this poetry overcomes the solipsistic sense of “genius” often associated with sentimentalism by drawing the image’s exuberant, forceful expression from a source transcending yet naturally interpenetrating the ego. As we shall see, however, the direct occasion for this breakthrough to Goethe’s first adult poetry—which decisively turns away from the anacreontic phantasies of his youth—was his having met a “self-sufficient, competent, humorous, even rather earthy, 18-year-old girl,” Friederike Brion, the daughter of a country pastor whom the young law student had no doubt intended to marry.<sup>87</sup> Unlike Goethe’s earlier love interests, “Friederike was no phantom.”<sup>88</sup> Rather, as Boyle observes, Goethe regarded her as “another, equal, human being” such that, for the symbolic moment (*Augenblick*) of their encounter, he “transcended the limits of the monadic soul and stood in a moral and literary world at which most of his contemporaries could hardly guess.”<sup>89</sup> And yet, Boyle contends, “with its fulfilment desire passes, and the essence of Goethe’s genius, the original magnetism of his poetry as

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<sup>87</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 1: 101.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

of his personality is desire—of no man, of no monad, would it be truer to say that he is not a substance, he is a force.”<sup>90</sup> As remains to be seen, Goethean desire seeks its fulfillment in something wholly transcendent. Despite having spent two joyful months (May and June) with Friederike and her family amidst the German-language *Volke* of Alsace, Goethe rather scandalously broke his relationship with her and left Sessenheim. But this grounding event in Goethe’s literary career changed forever him; for, according to Boyle, it had fit “the preexisting Herderian pattern” of symbolic experience, whereby the inner force of the poet’s self-expression is drawn from its origins in another: namely, from his personal relationship to the beloved, as nourished by the cosmic force (*Kraft*) subtending and shaping all things.<sup>91</sup> This understanding of poësis as organic formation (*Bildung*) would shape his poetry and prose for the next 60 years. Before turning our attention to the birth of Goethean symbolism in the *Sessenheimer Lieder*, we shall examine the complex philosophical and theological pattern that Herder established for Goethe in the early 1770s. Specifically, we shall see that Herder’s recovery of Aristotelian notions of *morphe* (form) and *telos* (goal) had prepared Goethe for the budding insight expressed in these love poems into his creativity’s dependence on the antecedent order of nature, culture, and divine reality.<sup>92</sup> Grasping this retrieval of ancient philosophy will cast light, in turn, on his suggestive confession to Herder—who was, after all, only five years older but was at this early stage much better informed about religion and literature—“that he [Goethe] would continue to wrestle with him as Jacob had wrestled with the angel of the Lord, but that he was prepared to become [Herder’s] satellite, a moon revolving round his earth, if need be.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> It is no coincidence that Goethe began his most explicitly theological works, *Faust I and II*, addressing among other things the reality of sin, derive from the period immediately following the young man’s break with Frau Brion.

<sup>93</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 1:94.



The revolution in German literature that ensues corresponds to what M. H. Abrams and, more recently, Charles Taylor have identified as the “expressivist turn” in literary history.<sup>94</sup> According to Taylor, the writings of Hamann, Herder, and Goethe, among others, ushered in an age of literature and the arts based on a novel understanding of nature as the “interior” source of the self. Not to be confused with Cartesian inwardness—which objectifies external reality by “disengaging reason” from the passions in an effort to attain self-sufficient certitude—expressivism draws on a notion of interiority developed by Augustine and the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition, for whom the self is imbedded within a cosmological order and dependent on the transcendent One.<sup>95</sup> By contrast to Descartes’ dualistic ontology, the late-eighteenth-century revival of Platonism tended to view human interiority as an expression of nature and divine reality.<sup>96</sup> Broadly delineated by the term “romanticism,” this new sensibility espoused “a picture of nature as a great current of sympathy running through all things. ‘Behold the whole of nature, observe the great *analogy of creation*. Everything has feeling and feels its likeness to all things; life surges to life.’”<sup>97</sup> Quoting, here, from Herder’s early essay “On the Cognition and Sensibility of the Human Soul” (1778), which had sought to establish the unity of thought and feeling on the basis of Neoplatonic epistemology, Taylor observes that the expressivist understanding of nature places humanity in a special position

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<sup>94</sup> See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1953) and Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 368-393.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 146. See also 156-157: “For Augustine, the path inward was only a step on the way upward. [...] The] thinker comes to sense more and more his lack of self-sufficiency, comes to see more and more that God acts within him. [...] In contrast, for Descartes the whole point of the reflexive turn is to achieve a quite self-sufficient certainty. [...] God’s existence has become a stage in my progress towards science through the methodological ordering of evident insight. [...] The center of gravity has shifted.”

<sup>96</sup> However, as we shall see with regard to “Maifest,” the ontological status of divine transcendence becomes increasingly ambiguous for Goethe to the extent that infinite nature (*Gott-Natur*) displaces the Judeo-Christian God of creation. Cf. Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2007), 404, 757–69, on the equivocal relationship of post-romantic lyric to noumenal realities.

<sup>97</sup> Cited in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 369: “Siehe die ganze Natur, betrachte die große *Analogie der Schöpfung*. Alles fühlt sich und seines Gleichen, Leben wallet zu Leben.“ My emphasis and translation.

among creation; the human being becomes, by way of analogy, the “sensorium of God in all the living beings of creation.”<sup>98</sup> Like his Creator, man is essentially a poet capable of expressing his transcendent relationship to the cosmos through co-active poësis—that is, through his participation in the divine act of creation.<sup>99</sup> According to Hamann’s extraordinary formulation, for instance, creation is itself God’s speech “to the creature through the creature.”<sup>100</sup> “Indeed,” as John Betz observes of Hamann’s *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762), “this is what constitutes the dignity of human beings as the crowns of God’s creation: our ability to express an invisible nature through a visible form and, in some way, like God himself, to shape the world by the words of our mouths.”<sup>101</sup> Hence, such penetrating, life-giving expression of the transcendent unfolds through forms co-created by both God and the human person.

The expressivist turn coincides with a new aesthetics of “genius” (one wholly diverging from sentimentalism) as grounding in the poet’s analogic relationship to the divinity, which he or she expresses through symbols received from nature.<sup>102</sup> As Abrams had observed, neoclassical and Enlightenment theories of mimesis, according to which art represents static, predetermined external

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. “Sensorium seines Gottes in allen Lebenden der Schöpfung.” My translation. The original draft of Herder’s “Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele,” which belongs to the period of his first encounter with Straßburg in 1770, was published in 1774 in response to the “Preisfrage der Berliner Akademie” on the difference between thinking and feeling. As Hans-Georg Kemper observes, Herder lost the competition, “weil [er] gerade umgekehrt bewies, daß beide Vermögen prinzipiell nicht zu trennen sind.” Kemper, “Herders Konzept einer Mythopoesie und Goethes ‘Ganymed,’” in *Von der Natur zur Kunst zurück: neue Beiträge zur Goethe-Forschung: Gotthart Wunberg zum 65. Geburtstag. Festschrift*, eds. Moritz Baßler, Christoph Brecht, and Dirk Niefanger (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), 44.

<sup>99</sup> See Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 85: “Herder’s philosophy of the history of humanity begins with the earth and stars and proceeds to discussing the organization of plants and animals in order to culminate in an account of the formation of the human person. In the case of human beings and, in a lesser way, of plants and animals, an initial constitution (*Bildung*) by Nature/God continues in time through a process of development (*Ausbildung*) which is also a further form of *Bildung*.”

<sup>100</sup> Georg Hamann, *Johann Georg Hamann Sämtliche Werke, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Nadler, (Vienna: Herder Verlag 1950), 204.

<sup>101</sup> John Betz, *After Enlightenment: the Post-Secular Vision of Hamann*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2009), 125. On Hamann’s Christological aesthetics of “genius,” see *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, vol. 3, eds. Hans Grimminger and Hans-Joachim Simm, (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 1980), 329-30. Henceforth: Hanser.

<sup>102</sup> *Hansers Sozialgeschichte*, 3: 328-32.

realities, were thus displaced by an organicist understanding of poetic language as *logoi* of the living God. This new paradigm of lyric expression discloses an interiority infused with primal passion and reason (*logos*). Thus Herder's contention in his prize-winning "Essay on the Origins of Language" (1772) that "there is [...] a language of feeling, which is the immediate law of nature."<sup>103</sup> Instead of viewing language and the arts as mechanical instruments of imitation, the expressivists understood them as symbolic presentations (*Darstellungen*)—hence as original "articulations" and "realizations"—of the inner form of nature: namely, the natural phenomenon's logical and affective origins in the divine.<sup>104</sup> Fundamentally dependent on the Aristotelian notions ofhylomorphism, entelechy, and final causation, expressivism's novel sense of lyric interiority develops organically through preformed (yet not readymade) symbols (*logoi*) charged with an inner potentiality, which the poetic word actuates and fulfills in accord with natural law.<sup>105</sup> Whereas, by contrast, Enlightenment allegory had sought to represent predetermined concepts and objects on the mathematical model underpinning rationalism and modern science, this early romantic view of the natural symbol discloses an irreducible, timeless *eidos* at work within nature and, as such, through the artist's affective medium of expression.<sup>106</sup> Thus, Herder contends in his essay on language that the human word was and remains a verb representing the irreducible *activity* of creation (e.g. the bleating

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<sup>103</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, "Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache," *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. 1, eds, Martin Bollacher et al., (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1985), 698. Henceforth DKV. "Es gibt [...] eine Sprache der Empfindung, die unmittelbares Naturgesetz ist." My translation.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 374-75.

<sup>105</sup> As Herdt observes, Herder and Goethe had much in common with medieval theologians, for whom "natural law was not an attempt to deduce action-guiding moral principles from empirical study of human nature but was instead a way of affirming the coherence of the eternal law, comprising the intrinsic principles according to which all created things operate, with the revealed divine law and, ideally, also with human law" (89). Cf. Thomas Pfau, "Romantic Philosophy and the Persistence of Teleology" in *Brill's Companion to German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Millán Brüssan, (Leiden: Brill 2019), 144.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Bengt Sørensen's account of the genesis of the romantic symbol and its relationship to the various contemporary senses of allegory in *Symbol und Symbolismus in den ästhetischen Theorien des 18. Jahrhunderts und der deutschen Romantik*, (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963).

of the sheep, the singing of the bird). Expressivist symbolism is therefore nothing like the dead sign systems of mathematics, which imposes form and meaning onto lifeless nature; for a thing's superabundant significance issues through a cascade of activity from its inmost being. According to the expressivist worldview, then, language is essentially symbolic imagery (*Bildersymbolik*) unifying thought and sentiment, the action of embodied reality and its invisible meaning, through the interior law (logos) of nature. And this necessarily unfolds, as Goethe and Herder fully grasped, through the metaphysical principle of analogia continually shaping the cosmos in the living image of its Creator.

Following Leibniz's partial appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics, the German expressivists viewed natural symbols as entelechies characterized by the classical dialectics of act and potency, matter and form, and mechanical and final causation. As Taylor observes, crucial for expressivism's view of things was the (in origins Aristotelian) idea that nature "actualizes its potential" according to an immanent yet nonetheless transcendent model of teleological growth known in eighteenth-century Germany as "Bildung" (formation).<sup>107</sup> Herder, for instance, sees both nature and poetry as "manifestation[s] of inner power [*Kräfte*], striving to realize itself externally" through a symbolic image expressing, by way of analogia, its divine origins and end.<sup>108</sup> Motivated by the nominalist crisis of modern science—which had divorced meaning from being and consequently evacuated things and persons of transcendent, interior significance—the early opponents of Enlightenment ontology developed a notion of language as symbolic expression by retrieving

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<sup>107</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 374-75.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* Drawing on Leibniz's definition of a substance as "self-transforming and dynamic," Herder effectively reoccupies the ancient notion of substantial forms, which Leibniz held to "consist in force ... so that we must conceive of them on the model of the notion we have of souls. ... Aristotle calls them first entelechies; I [Leibniz] call them [...] primitive forces, which contain not only act or the completion of possibility, but also an original activity." G. H. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989), 139. Notwithstanding Leibniz' conflation of final and material causation and his evacuation of Aristotelian teleology's ontological basis, these platonizing romantics eventually recovered a metaphysically robust understanding of form and *telos*. Cf. Pfau, "Romantic Philosophy and the Persistence of Teleology," 158.

classical philosophy's understanding of the concrete unity between the thing's transcendent, interior form and its materiality (*hylomorphism*) and, hence, of the thing's intrinsic purposiveness.<sup>109</sup> It was this retrieval that aided the expressivists' articulation—through their far-flung writings on philosophy, science, theology, and poetics—of a “self-transforming,” “self-actualizing” model of reason as organic *Bildung* grounding in the *analogia entis*.

Whereas early modern science (e.g. Bacon) and, eventually, the likes of Leibniz and Kant, had rejected the ontological realism of substantial forms and entelechies, the expressivist understanding of *Bildung* recognizes that the natural phenomenon rests on metaphysical buttressing through formal and final causation. Grasping that the methodological skepticism of modern philosophy “had denuded the world of appearances [...] of all reality and meaning” by stripping phenomena of innate ideas (Locke), German expressivism sought to rehabilitate the interiority of things by recovering Aristotle's embodied notions of “*morphe*” (form) and “*telos*” (final causation). As Thomas Pfau observes of Herder and Goethe, they took recourse to classical metaphysics because

only final causation can account for and, indeed, anticipate change that originates dynamically and, where human beings are concerned, volitionally *from within the very being* whose trajectory it defines [...]. Absent the notion of a final cause, a thing would remain but a passive receptacle of converging, external forces and circumstances and, thus, would lack all particularity and identity.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> On the nominalist crisis of early modern science, see Michael Hanby, “Creation as Aesthetic Analogy” in *The Analogy of Being*, ed. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., 353, 356. Hanby observes that “from a modern point of view, the world's inner nature and meaning are no longer deeply informed by its relation to God for the simple reason that, from within the scientific outlook governing modern thought and life, the world *has no* inner meaning and nature, no inherent unity, no being in itself that might make visible the invisible or provide (in principle) a limit to our ability to command it” (362). Beginning with Ockham, at the latest, this ontological disembedding of things from their source in divine reality rendered the universe an aggregate of heterogenous objects and resulted in the “loss of the being-in-itselfness—the interiority and unity—of nature.”

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., “Romantic Philosophy and the Persistence of Teleology,” 150. My emphasis. The passage continues to note that without a final cause, the thing “might be a random event, such as an earthquake or solar eclipse, but would lack all agency. Aristotle's notion of an organism capable of effecting changes within itself (*entelecheia*) constitutes not simply a description belatedly introduced but an intrinsic property of the thing, absent which it could not even be identified as such, let alone as the intentional correlate of philosophical inquiry. Whereas material and efficient causes remain incidental, final causes are, for Aristotle, ontologically necessary; they identify a condition of its being, and being this, particular thing.”

Foundational for the expressivist understanding of *Bildung* was, therefore, the axiom that a person's or a thing's agency implies a (meta)physics of final causation. Instead of viewing the phenomenon as "a strictly incidental point where external forces happen to converge," Herder and Goethe understood its identity as a dynamic result issuing from the thing itself: namely, from the entity's organic form. In thus postulating an inner telos, the expressivists would therefore recover an ontologically distinct notion of form (*morphe*) since, as Pfau observes, final causes "identify a condition of [something's] *being*, and being *this*, particular thing."<sup>111</sup> By growing a woolly fleece, bleating, and following the shepherd, the sheep identifies itself as this being and nothing besides. This animal's every action emanates from its interior form as sheep; and, supposing the being is healthy, its activity is bound to fulfill the end of becoming more perfectly sheep-like, which is its immanent good. Because (in stark contrast to Kant's rationalist conceptions of organic formation and symbolism) the expressivists understood natural symbols as Aristotelian entelechies, their view of things "advance[d] not only a formal but an ontological truth claim" about the entity's vital purpose.<sup>112</sup> As Pfau observes, "both in nature and art, form points back to a final cause guiding each particular being's internal mode of action, and it defines the result as a phenomenally distinctive entity."<sup>113</sup> It is, we shall see, specifically through expressivism's revival of this teleological conception

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 153. See Aristotle's proposition in *Physics* [199a30] that "nature is twofold, the matter and the form, of which the latter is the end (*telos*), and since all the rest is for the sake of the end, the form must be the cause in the sense of that 'for the sake of which.'"

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 149. That Goethe recognizes this ontological and transcendent character of the entelechy is evident in his *Maxims and Reflections*, Goethe, GHA 12: 371-72.: "[44] Die Griechen nannte Entelecheia ein Wesen, das immer in Funktion ist." "[45] Die Funktion ist das Dasein, in Tätigkeit gedacht." "[46] Die Frage über die Instinkte der Tiere läßt sich nur durch den Begriff von Monaden und Entelechien auflösen. Jede Monas ist eine Entelechie, die unter gewissen Bedingungen zur Erscheinung kommt. Ein gründliches Studium des Organismus läßt in die Geheimnisse..." "[47] Alles Lebendige bildet eine Atmosphäre um sich her." "[48] Daß die Natur, die uns zu schaffen macht, gar keine Natur mehr ist, sondern *ein ganz anderes Wesen* als dasjenige, womit sich die Griechen beschäftigten." My emphasis. As remains to be seen with regard to "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," Goethe's understanding of entelechy is symbolic inasmuch as it indirectly presents (*darstellen*) the irreducible, infinitely active idea—that is, the hidden, interior law (*logos*) of appearances. Cf. Goethe, GHA 12: 366: "[13] Was man Idee nennt: das, was immer zur Erscheinung kommt und daher als Gesetz aller Erscheinungen uns entgegentritt."

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 153. My emphasis.

of formation (*Bildung*) that it recovers the interiority of nature as the irreducible, analogic expression of divine goodness: hence as dei-formation (*theosis*) containing a transcendent end (*telos*) within its very being. Hence, for Herder and Goethe, teleology comes to mean something altogether different than it had for Aristotle. As Goethe eventually posits in concluding a series of reflections on entelechy in his *Maximen und Reflektionen*, “nature, which makes us create, is no longer ‘nature’ but instead a wholly different entity than that with which the Greeks were engaged.”<sup>114</sup> Neither Goethe nor his mentor espoused a univocal ontology, whereby individual being was wholly subsumed in nature (as had the Neoplatonists). Rather, they sensed (if with varying degrees of consistency) that the metaphysical principle of analogia undergirding their physics and poetics implies an ontological “difference” within and between the analogic intervals of creation, through which the irreducibly particular form of a thing first emerges.

This transcendent view follows from the fact that expressivism’s revival of classical metaphysics occurs in conjunction with a second intellectual current, which even more emphatically opens the immanent framework of nature, entelechy, and symbol to its transcendent source: namely, the imago Dei tradition. By adhering to the Judeo-Christian view of nature as an image of God (thus not as an eternal substance), the expressivists retained a sense of the cosmic origins as marked by transcendent difference. For insistently theological thinkers such as Hamann and, to a somewhat lesser degree, for his protégé, Herder, the expressivist recovery of classical metaphysics at once recalls Augustine’s “confession that God’s presence is more interior to the creature than the creature is to itself, a gift and presence made possible in both instances by God’s transcending and surpassing difference.”<sup>115</sup> Regarding Hamann’s *Londoner Schriften* (1758), which develop a theological aesthetics

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<sup>114</sup> Goethe, GHA, 12, 153. My translation. “[48] Daß die Natur, die uns zu schaffen macht, gar keine Natur mehr ist, sondern *ein ganz anderes Wesen* als dasjenige, womit sich die Griechen beschäftigten.”

<sup>115</sup> T.J. White, ed., *The Analogy of Being*, 360.

“in terms of the *kenotic presence of transcendence*,” Betz contends that “like Augustine [...], what Hamann found so astonishing about Christianity was the radical humility that Christianity proclaims—whereby God not only becomes incarnate, but is always already logos, intimately and [...] kenotically present to his creation.”<sup>116</sup> Following Hamann, Herder and Goethe also conceive of Bildung in terms of the imago Dei. Given Herder’s growing attractions to Enlightenment culture, however—from the naturalism that Hamann criticized in his friend’s prize-winning essay on the origins of language to his admiration for Spinoza’s *Ethics*—Herder’s philosophical commitment to the wholly transcendent deity are often less obvious.<sup>117</sup> In his *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (1793), for instance, Herder recognizes that “every good endeavor [...] has its purpose in itself.”<sup>118</sup> Commenting on this passage, Pfau observes that Herder “characteristically invests ‘good striving’ (*gutes Bestreben*) with an immanent telos [...]. And yet, by restricting the concept of entelechy to instances of ‘good’ striving, Herder implicitly concedes that the teleological underpinnings of Bildung serve not just purposes of descriptive correctness but have inherently normative and disclosive standing as truth.”<sup>119</sup> If Herder’s doggedly unsystematic writings sometimes tend towards naturalism, his pre-judgments (*Vorurteile*) are nevertheless consistently Christian-Neoplatonic, particularly as regards his understanding of transcendent telos as disclosed through natural symbols. As we shall in the following, this (perhaps in part unwitting) commitment to Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics similarly holds for Goethe’s love poetry from Sessenheim and his later writings on plant morphology.

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<sup>116</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 39.

<sup>117</sup> See *ibid.*, 141-165, on Hamann’s critique of the Berlin Academy, Herder, and the prize-winning essay on language.

<sup>118</sup> Herder, “Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität,” DKV 7: 266. “Jedes gute Bestreben [...] hat seinen Zweck in sich.” My translation.

<sup>119</sup> Pfau, “Romantic Philosophy and the Persistence of Teleology,” 149.



Echoing Pfau's observation about the teleology underpinning Herderian philosophy, Jennifer Herdt has similarly recognized that by naming humanity instead of God as the goal of *Bildung*, Herder seems to flatten the telos of natural law. She also points out, however, that "in some ways he was closer to the medieval natural lawyers" in that he nevertheless "saw humanity as directed toward a kind of self-transcendence."<sup>120</sup> Citing Herder's contention that "the human being has no more noble word by which to define himself than he himself is, in whom the image of our Earth's creator is livingly imprinted [*abgedruckt lebt*]," Herdt argues that, for Herder, "the humanity toward which we are developing is the *imago Dei*" and is "in some sense already impressed on human nature but in another sense [is] still to be realized as the perfection of the process of *Bildung*."<sup>121</sup> It through this complex dynamic of humanization as *dei*-formation—which Goethe magnificently dramatizes in *Iphigenie auf Taurus* (1779) as the deity's (*Diana*) *Bild* becomes increasingly manifest and perfect in and through the actions of the heroine—that the symbols of expressivist poetics unfold. In fundamental agreement with Taylor and Pfau, Herdt notes that the expressivists conceive "*Bildung* not just with reference back to an original constitution of human nature but also as an ongoing process in which something genuinely new emerges."<sup>122</sup> By voicing her inner self and source in nature, Herder contends, the poet sings a new song that contributes to the development of the cosmos and reflects the glory of the transcendent God within us.

Although Goethe progressively distances himself from Hamann's and Herder's explicitly Christian conceptions of *Bildung*, his poems and prose nevertheless consistently witnesses to the *imago Dei* tradition. This is evident, foremost, in his early lyric poetry's borrowings from the

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<sup>120</sup> Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 90.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

language of interiority and divine formation developed by Pietist spirituality. Yet we shall see that this pre-conviction also appears in his reflections on the symbol's analogic structure as an image expressing its source in nature while inwardly bearing the mark of the transcendent divine. In the following section, we shall describe how Goethe's most successful lyrics from the early period in Sessenheim and Strasbourg indicate the symbol's sheer dependence on a numinous source of significance.<sup>123</sup> Instead, therefore, of attributing the influence of Christianity on Goethe's poetics to accidental appropriations from the Pietist milieu that he had shared with Hamann and Herder—or, indeed, to intentional translations of its theology into a secular idiom—the argument homes in on the metaphysics of analogia shaping their symbolic imagery. This focus reveals expressivism's thorough-going reliance on both the *imago Dei* tradition and the Platonism, which Goethe had intensely studied since the early 1770s.<sup>124</sup> Each aspect of his symbolic imagery foregrounded in the following readings—its participatory (*methectic*), mimetic, and analogic *gesalt*—had figured prominently in both Christianity and Neoplatonic philosophy. Hence it is by drawing on both traditions that Goethe recovers a symbolic view of things and events from the rubble of the Newtonian universe which, as Hanby observes, had purportedly ceased to be “one” and no longer viewed creation as actively “turning” towards its transcendent source.<sup>125</sup> In the lyric poems “Maifest” (1771) and “Ganymed” (1774), Goethe renders nature a “new song” by investing it with an expressive force analogous to the deity's transcendent act of *poësis*. And in so doing, he follows Herder's teachings on the symbol and thus attains a notion of language and its supernatural origins.

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<sup>123</sup> Similar to other poets endowed with what Keats called the power of “negative capability”—Shakespeare foremost among them—Goethe gave voice to the contradictory impulses of his era.

<sup>124</sup> See Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 1: 58. See also Hans-Georg Kemper, ed., *Goethe und der Pietismus*, (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), 194-96.

<sup>125</sup> T.J. White, *The Analogy of Being*, 357.

## Inwardness and Self-Transcendence in Goethe's Early Poetry: "Maifest" and "Ganymed"

<i>Maifest</i> (1771)		Zu neuen Liedern Und Tänzen gibst. Sei ewig glücklich, Wie du mich liebst. <sup>126</sup>	35
Wie herrlich leuchtet Mir die Natur! Wie glänzt die Sonne! Wie lacht die Flur!		<i>Ganymed</i> (1774)	
Es dringen Blüten Aus jedem Zweig Und tausend Stimmen Aus dem Gesträuch	5	Wie im Morgenrot Du rings mich anglühst, Frühling, Geliebter! Mit tausendfacher Liebeswonne Sich an mein Herz drängt	5
Und Freud und Wonne Aus jeder Brust. O Erd, o Sonne, O Glück, o Lust,	10	Deiner ewigen Wärme Heilig Gefühl, Unendliche Schöne! Daß ich dich fassen möchte <sup>6</sup> In diesen Arm!	10
O Lieb, o Liebe, So golden schön, Wie Morgenwolken Auf jenen Höhn,	15	Ach, an deinem Busen Lieg ich, schmachte, Und deine Blumen, dein Gras Drängen sich an mein Herz. Du kühlst den brennenden Durst meines Busens, Lieblicher Morgenwind, Ruft drein die Nachtigall Liebend nach mir aus dem Nebeltal.	15
Du segnest herrlich Das frische Feld, Im Blütendampfe Die volle Welt!	20	Ich komm, ich komme! Wohin? Ach, wohin? Hinauf! Hinauf strebt's. Es schweben die Wolken Abwärts, die Wolken Neigen sich der sehnenden Liebe, Mir, Mir! In euerm Schoße Aufwärts, Umfangend umfassen! Aufwärts An deinem Busen, Alliebender Vater! <sup>127</sup>	20
O Mädchen, Mädchen, Wie lieb ich dich! Wie blinkt dein Auge, Wie liebst du mich!			
So liebt die Lerche Gesang und Luft, Und Morgenblumen Den Himmelsduft,	25		25
Wie ich dich liebe Mit warmem Blut, Die du mir Jugend Und Freud und Mut	30		30

<sup>126</sup> GHA 30-31.

<sup>127</sup> GHA 1: 46-47.

In his now classical, multi-volume study of Goethe's poetry, Emil Staiger observes that the natural landscape of "Maifest" is interior to the lyric persona. The poem's organic imagery presents meadows, bushes, and blossoms that have been "interiorized" (*verinnerlicht*) by the persona's having been absorbed into an "inmost feeling" (*innerste Fühlen*) through sympathetic identification (*Einfühlung*).<sup>128</sup> He feels at one with spring and his beloved, such that their source appears in the light of an all-encompassing "love" which wells up in his soul and finds expression in the organic symbols of his song. As Staiger puts it, "the mood [*Stimmung*] of his heart and the mood of his environment are"—by way of an implicit sequence of similes—"one":<sup>129</sup>

Wie herrlich leuchtet  
 Mir die Natur!  
 Wie glänzt die Sonne!  
 Wie lacht die Flur!<sup>130</sup>                      4

By opening the poem with a series of exclamations in response to nature's glory, Staiger claims, Goethe communicates the immediacy of the sunshine and the mood that it imparts to the lyric persona. Each outburst is a natural response like laughter to the light of the "sun" as reflected in "nature," which is itself described as laughing. The anthropomorphic language employed in this stanza ("herrlich" and "lacht") indicates that these symbols are also internal to the lyric persona, just as he participates in nature. The meadow laughs *through* him, nature shines like a lord ("herrlich") *in* him, and the poet thus laughs with delight in response to its glory. However, this symbolic immediacy is not founded on the univocal ontology often attributed to classical "epiphanies of being" (Taylor), whereby opposites—mind and world, immanence and transcendence—coincide in the manner of pantheism: namely as an absolute identity. Instead, we shall see that the images of

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<sup>128</sup> Emil Staiger, *Goethe, 1749-1786*, vol. I (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag 1952), 59.

<sup>129</sup> Staiger, *Goethe* 1: 58: "Die Stimmung seines Herzens und die Stimmung seiner Umgebung sind eins." My translation.

<sup>130</sup> Goethe, "Maifest," *GHA* 1: 30.

“Maifest” unfold through a veiled disclosure of the transcendent as mediated by analogia. This stanza’s emphasis on immediacy already intimates the expressivist symbol’s decisive characteristic: its oblique but nonetheless concrete presentation (*Darstellung*) of the divine idea through nature’s organic development. In so doing, this exuberant expression of participation (methexis) in nature raises the question as to the natural symbol’s provenance. For in describing the symbolic event, the rapt poet also wonders: “how” (*wie*) is it that nature shines so gloriously above and within me?<sup>131</sup> What subsequently unfolds from this naïve (in the precise Schillerian sense) disposition of wonder is that mind and world, self and other, embodied form and telos grow together through the poem’s symbolic imagery. Because, we shall see, the natural symbols of “Maifest” implicitly ground in the principle of analogia, they open both nature and art to their source of significance in the transcendent divine.

The poem’s opening images are not strictly anthropomorphic projections of meaning onto lifeless nature. Rather, the symbols employed here stem from the exuberant force of nature as expressed in the poet’s song, which remains wholly irreducible to the Cartesian subject’s domineering attitude towards *external* reality.<sup>132</sup> The images of laughter and illumination thus actualize a potential already present in nature by expressing—reshaping, realizing, and perfecting—a form that precedes it. As Herdt explains expressivist poetics, “the process is organic rather than mechanical; the one who imitates must have powers to take up what is communicated from the model into herself, to digest this and to incorporate it or transform it into her own nature.”<sup>133</sup> Thus,

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<sup>131</sup> See Augustine’s classic account of the charity underlying the Christian-Neoplatonic hermeneutic in *On Interpretation*.

<sup>132</sup> E.g., David Wellbery contends with regard to “Maifest” in *The Specular Moment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), 22, that nature, song, and source have been conflated with Cartesian selfhood: “The text enacts what I will call the aesthetic cogito, a self-affirmation that turns back into itself and that I would epitomize with the formula: ‘I am in that I sing that I am.’”

<sup>133</sup> Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 96.

she explains, “the models we imitate are like spiritual foods, which allow our imagination and reason to function and, indeed, to flourish.”<sup>134</sup> This receptive agency characterizing poësis through natural symbols is essentially participatory (methectic); for it draws the entire force of lyric expression from organic forms transcending the bourns of the ego. The humble disposition of receptive agency, which first opens the poet to the event (*Ereignis*) of wonder over nature and its source, comes through especially clearly in another of Goethe’s poems from the early period, “Ganymed” (1774). For this poem depicts the poet’s sheer, rapturous dependence on the divine source of spring—even as he remains fundamentally active in receiving the deity’s blessings. When Ganymede would clutch the “alliebender Vater” in his arms (“Daß ich dich fassen möcht/ In diesen Arm!”), the youth finds himself already embraced by the deity’s creation.<sup>135</sup>

Ach, an deinem Busen  
 Lieg’ ich, schmachte,  
 Und deine Blumen, dein Gras  
 Drängen sich an mein Herz.  
 Du kühlst den brennenden                      15  
 Durst meines Busens[.]<sup>136</sup>

Opposing the Promethean spirit of Enlightenment, this poem depicts what Goethe terms a “de-subjectivization” (*Entselbstigung*), whereby the poet nevertheless retains his active gestalt as “umfangend umfängen.”<sup>137</sup> To put the point in terms of Scholastic theology, divine grace does not

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Goethe, GHA 1: 47: “Daß ich dich fassen möcht’/ In diesen Arm!” My translation.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Goethe, GHA 1: 47: Staiger remarks in *Goethe*, 1, that Ganymede “does not lose himself in swooning surrender to the beloved. Such a development were more in keeping with later romanticism’s [e.g. Clemens Brentano’s and, ultimately, Schopenhauer’s] complete loss of the will than with the young Goethe” (66). See also Boyle, *Goethe* 1: 160–161. As Boyle rightly contends, “it is a serious misrepresentation of [the] poem to imply that at any point in it Ganymede loses his identity in that of some universal substance, Nature, or his ‘all-loving Father;’” for Ganymed “remains throughout the poem an independent individual whose ‘strength of soul’ is always equal to that of the surrounding world, never subordinate. Even at the climax of the poem it is as true to say that he absorbs the Other into himself, as that he is absorbed into the Other.”

destroy the nature of the finite entity but perfects it by nourishing its capacity to be godlike.<sup>138</sup> The poet's attitude of fundamental dependence, as a "formed former," on his transcendent source in nature and divine reality also characterizes the symbolic images of "Maifest."<sup>139</sup> For, in a manner cognate with "Ganymed," it depicts a participatory process of dei-formation (*Bildung*) through "the inmost interiority" of nature's organic forms and, thus, perforce of the divine power [*Kraft*] of love.<sup>140</sup>

Before turning our attention to the subsequent stanzas of "Maifest," we shall briefly consider Herder's quarrel in *Kalligone* (1800) with Immanuel Kant's critical account of symbolism, as articulated in §59 of his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Doing so casts light on the metaphysical gestalt of the symbolic image evident in Goethe's poetics. In *Kalligone*, Herder remarks that "the 'laughing meadows' would not laugh, if they neither greened nor blossomed" and thus affirms that the symbol's meaning actuates the potential of an antecedent (yet not ready-made) reality interior to both nature and the poet.<sup>141</sup> He explains that "*every thing means* something, i.e. it bears the form [*Gestalt*] of what it is;" and the most expressive, pregnant, and representative (*darstellendste*) among

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<sup>138</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1: 1: 8.

<sup>139</sup> Psalm 42: 1-2, (RSVCE). Cf. *Die Bibel nach Martin Luther* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibel Gesellschaft 1999), Psalm 42: 2-4: "Wie der Hirsch schreit nach frischem Wasser, so schreit meine Seele, Gott, zu dir./ Meine Seele dürstet nach Gott, nach dem lebendigen Gott. Wann werde ich dahin kommen, dass ich Gottes Angesicht schaue?/ Meine Tränen sind meine Speise Tag und Nacht, weil man täglich zu mir sagt: Wo ist nun dein Gott?" See Staiger, *Goethe* 1: 63, on Goethe's reception of tradition: "Auch wo sich Goethe selber überlieferter Vorstellungen bedient, eignet er sich auf seine Weise das Überlieferte an. Spinozas abstraktes Denken gewinnt eine eigene Herzlichkeit; Hamanns trübe Leidenschaft klärt sich zu evangelischer Milde; Christi Evangelium dringt in die brennenden Eingeweide ein." Herder uses the phrase "formed formers" to describe the expressivist attitude towards nature and cultural traditions: "Insofar as we do not simply stand aloof from others, clinging to some 'lofty watch-tower,' but commit ourselves to encountering them in all of their concrete particularity as historically formed formers, any judgments we make also open ourselves up for assessment and judgment, to a claim made on us by the other in the name of a truth or beauty or goodness we have not yet conceived" (110).

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Staiger, *Goethe* 1: 62.

<sup>141</sup> Herder, "Kalligone," DKV 8: 956: "Die 'lachenden Fluren' lachten nicht, wenn sie nicht grüntem, nicht blühtem." My translation.

them, he observes, are “*natural symbols*” (*Natursymbole*).<sup>142</sup> Although seemingly arbitrary linguistic conventions also have “[*their ground*] in *nature*,” the natural symbol is characterized by a unicity of meaning and being (it “signifies what it itself is”) that renders nature translucent—though never fully transparent—to its source.<sup>143</sup> Herder’s second postulate concerning beauty as the symbol of transcendent goodness thus contends that “*in all living organizations the interior, the soul of the thing, appears to us in the exterior.*”<sup>144</sup> The natural symbol’s interior depths appear through the medium of its organic form, which means itself, its source in nature, and the “spirit” (*Geist*) that transcends them. Hence, the symbol discloses “*spirit in the form, soul in the body.*”<sup>145</sup> According to Herder, it is “for this very reason” that,

... one sees nothing but pregnant *dispositions* in nature with greater or lesser *effect*; whether or not every tendency achieves an effect, whether, for example, in the multifaceted human organization the powers [*Kräfte*], which the body displays, are applied in reciprocal relation to a great or good end—this is decided by a finer form: *action*. Beginning with the bearing of the limbs and even with the habitual lineaments of the face, form commences as *action* and reaches through all postures up to the moment of the most difficult decision, the moment of interior affect, the moment of whole-hearted participation or abuse.<sup>146</sup>

Nature, as embodied form, abounds with meaning disclosed through the incessant activity of things issuing from within them. This is especially the case for human nature, whose actions are immediately related to “a great or good end” within yet altogether transcending his bodily existence.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. “*Jedes Ding bedeutet*, d. i. es trägt die Gestalt dessen was es ist.” My translation. All italics are Herder’s unless noted otherwise.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. “[*Ihren Grund*] in der *Natur*.” “[*Sie*] zeigt an, was sie selbst ist.” My translation.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. “*In allen lebendigen Organisationen erscheint uns also im Äußeren das Innere, die Seele des Gegenstandes.*” My translation.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. “*Geist in der Gestalt, Seele im Körper.*” My translation.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. “Eben deshalb aber schauet man nichts als prägnante *Anlagen* der Natur zu mehr oder minderer *Wirkung*; ob jede dieser Anlagen zur Wirkung gekommen, ob z. B. in der so vielseitigen menschlichen Organisation die Kräfte, die der Körper andeutet, zu einem großen oder guten Zweck, in gegenseitigem Verhältnis, angewandt worden, darüber entscheidet eine feinere Form, *Handlung*. Von Haltung der Glieder, selbst von denen zur Gewohnheit gewordenen Lineamenten des Gesichts fängt Form als *Handlung* an und reicht, alle Stellungen hindurch, bis zum Moment des schwersten Entschlusses, des innigsten Affekts, der herzlichsten Teilnahme oder Mißhandlung.” My translation.



And, Herder concludes, we may either whole-heartedly “participate” in this transcendent end shaping us from within, or we may “abuse” it.

Again recalling Aristotle’s teleological cosmos, this view of nature consists of expressive forms (entelechies) with internal “tendencies” or “dispositions” towards greater or lesser “effects.” Whether or not nature’s interior power (*Kraft*) of self-expression discloses more than empty gestures through the human spirit is determined by “actions” that may be finely attuned to the “great or good goal” motivating all things.<sup>147</sup> According to Herder, it is ultimately the act of poesis that renders everything translucent (if never fully transparent) to the source and through which, “*in most remarkable, spirit-filled, and meaningful Characters* [e.g. Christ or Shakespeare] *everything becomes significant.*”<sup>148</sup> The symbols of poetry “*themselves become what they mean*” inasmuch as “their sound, tenor, and rhythm not only mean but rather *are* vibrations of both the [poetic] medium and our feelings; hence their more interior [*innigere*] expression of truth, their deeper effect.”<sup>149</sup> Poetry, as an exalted form of human action, has the unique power to help us see through nature to its source in truth and divine goodness and, furthermore, to move us to this end. If only imperfectly, the great poet provisionally glimpses the telos of existence, since “all of his means are ends and all of his ends are means to greater ends, in which the infinite reveals itself in filling all things.”<sup>150</sup> As Herder observes of this passage from Herder’s *Ideen*, “the perfection of each [...] is ordered to a perfection that

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<sup>147</sup> See Herder, *Forming Humanity*, 88: Herder “argues that we can discern [the telos: i.e. the good] by examining our basic capacities, our original form (Gestalt) or initial constitution (*Bildung*): ‘our capacity for reason should be formed [gebildet] toward reason, our fine senses toward art, our drives to true freedom and beauty, our powers of movement to love of neighbor.’”

<sup>148</sup> Herder, “Kalligone,” DKV 8: 957. “*An sehr merkwürdigen, Geist- und Bedeutungsvollen Charakteren* [e.g. Christ or Shakespeare] *Alles bedeutend ward.*” My translation.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 959. “*Werden selbst, was sie bedeuten.*” “Ihr Klang und Gang und Rhythmus bedeuten nicht nur, sondern *sind* Schwingungen des Mediums sowohl als unsrer Empfindungen; daher ihre innigere Wahrheit, ihre tiefere Wirkung.” My translations

<sup>150</sup> Herder, “Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit,” DKV 6: 342. “Alle seine Mittel sind Zwecke; alle seine Zwecke Mittel zu größern Zwecken, in denen der Unendliche allerfüllend sich offenbaret.” My translation.

transcends itself.”<sup>151</sup> The question concluding Herder’s discussion of natural symbolism also drives at this end: If the poetic genius “*energetically* presents [his] *ideas, images, and essential forms* [*Gestalten*]; i.e. if he gives our souls the power [*Kraft*] that allows them to appear with interior stability and purpose before us; who may,” Herder demands, “set limits” to his expression?<sup>152</sup> Who would prescribe rules in the manner of neoclassical aesthetics that inhibit expressing one’s interior vision and, in so doing, void the symbol of ontological significance (as does §59 of Kant’s *Third Critique*)—thus precluding the communication of transcendent goodness and beauty through art?<sup>153</sup> Why should the poet’s use of symbolic imagery not constitutively present (*darstellen*) the divine source of mind and world?

According to the expressivist theory of symbol, the joyful laughter that “Maifest” depicts as a play of light through the meadows and the poet who perceives their beauty participate in the natural symbol’s immanent gestalt. Yet the meaning of the symbolic image also emphatically transcends the intrinsic organization of nature, not to mention the conventions of language, insofar as it discloses their teleological form. As we shall see, this telos progressively unfolds through the remainder of “Maifest” via an overarching simile: namely, the sunlight’s likeness to the human and divine love. The natural symbol thus entwines mind and world, image and numinous provenance through layers of analogic intervals, which opens a view of the spiritual realm of divine activity (poësis) at work within them.<sup>154</sup> As Goethe observes in an early essay (published in 1776) on the

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<sup>151</sup> Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 86.

<sup>152</sup> Herder, “Kalligone,” DKV 8: 959. “[Seine] *Ideen, Bilder, wesenhafte Gestalten* [...] *energisch* vor[führen], d. i. gibt er unsrer Seele Kraft, sie mit innrer Bestandtheit Zweckhaft vor sich erscheinen zu lassen; wer mag ihm Grenzen setzen?” My translation.

<sup>153</sup> For an account of the neoclassical dismissal of the paradigmatic “Naturdichter,” Shakespeare, by the likes of Voltaire and Gottsched, cf. Gregory Moore’s introduction to his Johann Gottfried Herder, *Shakespeare*, ed. and trans. Gregory Moore, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006), 8-10. See also *Hanser Sozialgeschichte* 3: 332-334.

<sup>154</sup> This chapter cannot address the question of Herder’s alleged Spinozism in *Gott: einige Gespräche* (1787) and, for instance, Goethe’s contention, cited by Emil Staiger in *Stilwandel*, (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1963), 150-151, that Herder’s analogic metaphysics collapses everything into identity without difference and, therefore, self-immanentism. Trained in the apophaticism of Heideggerian phenomenology, Staiger regards Herder’s metaphysical commitments to the immanent God with great skepticism. Hence, his account of the basis of Herder’s notion of the analogy between mind and world,

visual arts, the thing's inner form “diverges from [the arbitrary conventions of neoclassical formalism];” for it is “similar to the difference between interior and external sense“ in that it “has to be felt” interiorly as something intrinsically significant and, therefore, is never merely present in the sense of the lifeless objects/signs of Enlightenment science. Inner, organic form (the symbolic image) is, Goethe insists, “once and for all the glass through which we gather within the heart of humanity the holy rays of nature’s irradiant expanse and attain a brilliant insight” (*Feuerblick*).<sup>155</sup> Through the imaginative looking glass of interior forms, the poet sees, feels, and intensifies the divine light of the Creator:

The artist’s eye [...] finds form everywhere. May he enter the cobbler’s workshop or a stall, may he behold the face of his beloved, the surface of his boots, or an antiquity, he sees everywhere the holy vibrations and gentle tones, whereby nature combines all things. Every step opens for him the magical world, which had inwardly and constantly encompassed the great artists, whose works eternally enrapture the striving artist and fill him with awe.<sup>156</sup>

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human and the divine, reduces it to the pantheistic notion of identity-in-difference characteristic of pantheism instead of the panentheistic identity-in-difference of Christianity, which maintains the ever greater difference of God. Staiger remarks that, for Herder, “ein Gemeinsames waltet, das uns für beide die Gleichen Begriffe wie Kraft [...] aufdrängt” (150). This common source, which all nature and art express, “ist nicht subjektiv und nicht objektiv, sondern das ‘Innere’. Und nur weil das Innere beide Bereiche durchdrängt und einigt, vermag der Mensch die Schöpfung *unmittelbar* zu verstehen.“ “Das Gemeinsame” is, ultimately, the divine spirit (*Genie*) generating all things, “wo Gott *im* Innern [...] und] *als* Inneres waltet” (151). From this brief account of the theologian’s analogic conception of nature and language, Staiger asserts that Herder lacks a logical grasp of as well as an ethical and religious respect for “difference.” Space, time and “Gegenständlichkeit schwind[en]” as “das Innere tut sich auf.” By contrast, I follow Alexander Hampton in viewing Herder as a Christian-Neoplatonist who recognized the irreducible otherness of divine Being. Cf. Hampton’s essay “Indivisible, Inexplicable, and the Center of all Certainty: Herder’s Concept of Being” in *Herder’s Essay on Being* (Rochester: Camden House 2018), 108-119. As Hampton elsewhere observes, Herder’s primary interest in entering the Spinoza controversy was the rehabilitation of the philosopher’s materialist monism by means of Cambridge Platonism. Cf. Alexander J.B. Hampton, “An English Source of German Romanticism: Herder’s Cudworth Inspired Revision of Spinoza from ‘Plastik’ to ‘Kraft’,” *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 58:3, May 2017.

<sup>155</sup> Goethe, “Aus Goethes Brieftasche,” GHA 12: 23. “Deswegen gibt’s doch eine Form, die sich von jener—es war dort die Rede von der äußeren theatralischen Form—unterscheidet, wie der innere Sinn vom äußeren, die nicht mit Händen gegriffen, die gefühlt sein will. [...] Jede Form, auch die gefühlteste, hat etwas Unwahres; allein sie ist ein- und für allemal das Glas, wodurch wir die heiligen Strahlen der verbreiteten Natur an das Herz der Menschen zum Feuerblick sammeln.” My translations.

<sup>156</sup> Goethe, “Nach Falconet und über Falconet,” GHA 12: 24. “Das Aug’ des Künstlers [...] findet sie überall. Er mag die Werkstätte eines Schusters betreten oder einen Stall, er mag das Gesicht seiner Geliebten, seine Stiefel oder die Antike ansehen, überall sieht er die heiligen Schwingungen und leise Töne, womit die Natur alle Gegenstände verbindet. Bei jedem Tritte eröffnet sich ihm die magische Welt, die jene große Künstler innig und beständig umgab, deren Werke in Ewigkeit den wetteifernden Künstler zur Ehrfurcht hinreißen [...].” My translation.

According to Goethe, it is perforce (“Gewalt”) of the feelings evoked by the natural law (“die heiligen Schwingungen und leise Töne, womit die Natur alle Gegenstände verbindet”) that “the world around the poet is roused to life” from the origins of existence.<sup>157</sup> When entering a “holy forest,” when encompassed by the “enveloping night,” and, especially, when “in the presence of the beloved,” whose beauty makes “the whole world [shine] golden,” the poet perceives the thing’s source in divine reality: for, “who has not felt at the beloved’s arm how heaven and earth flow together in the most blissful harmonies?”<sup>158</sup> Hence it is through the interior harmony of form and feeling immanent to nature that the transcendent appears *within* the “striving artist” and his “works,” thus evoking awe and rapture and tearing him into the heart of things (“deren Werke in Ewigkeit den wetteifernden Künstler zur Ehrfurcht hinreißen”).<sup>159</sup> Thus, Goethe observes, “the artist does not merely feel the effects of [nature’s] harmony; rather he penetrates [*hineindringen*] to”—and, in so doing, is penetrated by—“the first causes” that set it in motion. “The world lies before him,” Goethe contends, “as it did before the Creator, who, in the moment that he delighted in his creation, also took pleasure in the cosmic harmonies through which he had created all things and by which they subsist.”<sup>160</sup> Goethe’s repeated use here of the dynamic verbs “dringen” (to penetrate) and “drängen” (to press) vis-à-vis the divine situates his expressivist poetics in the imago Dei tradition of

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. “Jeder Mensch hat mehrmal in seinem Leben die Gewalt dieser Zauberei gefühlt, die den Künstler allgegenwärtig faßt, dadurch die Welt ringsumher belebt.” My translation.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. “Wer ist nicht einmal beim Eintritt in einen heiligen Wald von Schauer überfallen worden? Wen hat die umfangende Nacht nicht mit einem unheimlichen Grausen geschüttelt? Wem hat nicht in Gegenwart seines Mädchens die ganze Welt golden geschienen? Wer fühlte nicht an ihrem Arme Himmel und Erde in wonnevollsten Harmonien zusammenfließen?”

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. Thus Goethe’s assertion that, “nur da, wo Vertraulichkeit, Bedürfnis, Innigkeit wohnen, wohnt alle Dichtungskraft...” (25).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 24. “Davon fühlt nun der Künstler nicht allein die Wirkungen, er *dringt* bis in die Ursachen *hinein*, die sie hervorbringen. Die Welt liegt vor ihm, möchte ich sagen, *wie vor ihrem Schöpfer*, der in dem Augenblick, da er sich des Geschaffnen freut, auch alle die Harmonien genießt, durch die er sie hervorbrachte und in denen sie besteht.” My emphasis and translation.

Pietist spiritualism. By likening the joyful, awe-inspired position of the poet before his work to that of the Creator before the cosmos, Goethe suggests that it is ultimately the deity's form which "incessantly weaves through the soul of the artist and that, little by little, presses [*drängen*] through him to the most insightful expression [*Ausdruck*]." <sup>161</sup>

Returning to "Maifest" now, we find that the poem's second and third stanzas depict and, in so doing, develop this cosmic "force" (*Drang*). For this sequence of images establishes a polar tension, at once vertical and horizontal, between the intensifying expressions of love through natural symbols—first through vegetal and then through human nature. This development of organic force culminates in the joy of the human heart, thus intimating the symbol's transcendent dynamic of disclosure through the power of love. Specifically, these stanzas elaborate the engrossing movement implicit in the opening exclamations ("Wie herrlich...Wie glänzt...Wie lacht...") by placing three images of self-expression in asymmetrical apposition:

Es dringen Blüten	5
Aus jedem Zweig	
Und tausend Stimmen	
Aus dem Gesträuch	
 Und Freud und Wonne	 9
Aus jeder Brust. <sup>162</sup>	

Each image depicts nature's drive towards the expression of an interior force transcending its particular vehicle through ever more intense, penetrating, and original manifestations of the source: 1) blossoms bursting from the branch, 2) voices shouting from the brush, and 3) joy erupting from every breast. The parallel syntactic units ("Aus"- and "Und"-clauses) implicitly establish an analogy

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 25. "Immer durch die Seele des Künstlers webt, was in ihm nach und nach sich zum verstandensten Ausdrucke drängt." My translation. Cf. Hamann's *Aesthetica in nuce*, (197): "Der erste Ausbruch der Schöpfung, und der erste Eindruck ihres Geschichtschreibers; – die erste Erscheinung und der erste Genuß der Natur vereinigen sich in dem Worte: Es werde Licht! Hiemit fängt sich die Empfindung von der Gegenwart der Dinge an," cited in Kemper, ed., *Goethe und der Pietismus*, 182.

<sup>162</sup> Goethe, "Maifest," GHA 1: 30.

between these natural and human symbols of expression, which is driven home by their grammatical link to the verb “to thrust”/ “penetrate” (*dringen*). For each symbol interpenetrates the other through analogic intervals by expressing their common origins in the life-force interior to both the human spirit and nature. A twofold process of interiorization and ascent consequently occurs through the course of “Maifest” corresponding to what Goethe later calls “intensification” (*Steigerung*) in his morphological writings on plants from the 1780s and 90s. In addition to suggesting deepening interiority, this term also indicates the dynamic of transcendence characterizing the natural symbol. According to Goethe, vertical intensification is one of the “two great driving wheels [*Triebräder*] of nature” alongside “polarity” (*Polarität*), which open its immanent forms to the transcendent (*das Empor*) appearing above and between its poles.<sup>163</sup> Whereas polar oppositions admitting analysis characterize materiality, intensification (*Steigerung*) always indicates the irreducibly spiritual aspect of existence. Thus Goethe conceives of the “concepts of *polarity* and *intensification*” as respectively “belonging to the realms matter and spirit; the former consists of ever-abiding attraction and repulsion, the latter of ever-striving ascension.”<sup>164</sup> In the same breath, however, he maintains that polarity characterizes intensification and vice versa, such that “matter is never without spirit, and spirit can never exist and be efficacious without matter.”<sup>165</sup> “Thus,” he explains, “matter is capable of ascent through intensification, just as spirit insists on attraction and repulsion.”<sup>166</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>163</sup> Goethe, “Erläuterung zu dem aphoristischen Aufsatz ‘Die Natur,’” GHA 13: 48. “Zwei großen Triebräder aller Natur.” My translation.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 48. “Begriff von *Polarität* und von *Steigerung*, jene der Materie, insofern wir sie materiell, diese ihr dagegen, insofern wir sie geistig denken, angehörig; jene ist in immerwährendem Anziehen und Abstoßen, diese in immerstrebendem Aufsteigen.” My translation.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. “Materie nie ohne Geist, der Geist nie ohne Materie existiert und wirksam sein kann.” My emphasis.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. “So vermag auch die Materie sich zu steigern, so wie sichs der Geist nicht nehmen läßt, anzuziehen und abzustoßen [...].” My translation.

just as this polar process of *Bildung* unfolds in nature, an analogous development occurs in the human spirit wrapped up in beholding it. As Goethe elsewhere observes,

A drive has emerged in the scientist of every era to recognize living formations [*Bildungen*], to apprehend their externally visible, tangible parts, to take them as intimations of the interior, and thus to realize [*beherrschen*] the whole, as it were, through interior vision [*Anschauung*].<sup>167</sup>

What Goethe describes here is humanity's innate drive (*Trieb*) to recognize the transcendent whole of the cosmos through the phenomenon's inner form—that is, through symbolic images. Although these observations come from the context of his scientific writings, Goethe posits that they have an essential bearing on his poetics: “how closely related the demand for knowledge is with the aesthetic and mimetic drives (*Triebe*) does not require extensive elaboration.”<sup>168</sup> As remains to be seen, such contemplative insight (*Anschauung*) into the inner workings of nature is precisely what “Maifest” affords.

Despite the clear analogy, for Goethe, between science and aesthetics, discerning the natural and spiritual drive's implication in the process of *dei*-formation in his writings remains a challenge. The difficulty lies in distinguishing his view of entelechy and symbol from the univocal ontology underpinning Aristotelian philosophy. For as Herdt and Kemper remark, Goethe's conception of *Bildung* draws on an effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) that he tends to elide: namely, the current of German theology focusing on the *imago Dei*—from Meister Eckhart's immensely influential Christian-Neoplatonic writings to the Pietist spiritualism originating from the poet's hometown,

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<sup>167</sup> Goethe, “Morphologie,” GHA, 13: 55. “Es hat sich [...] in dem wissenschaftlichen Menschen zu allen Zeiten ein Trieb hervorgetan, die lebendigen Bildungen als solche zu erkennen, ihre äußern sichtbaren, greiflichen Teile im Zusammenhange zu erfassen, sie als Andeutungen des Innern aufzunehmen und so das Ganze in der Anschauung gewissermaßen zu beherrschen.” My translation. As Herdt observes, Pietism and rationalism” are “deeply interconnected phenomena, however dramatic their differences” as evinced, especially, by Kant's rationalist endeavor to make room for faith in the Newtonian world-order” (*Forming Humanity*, 57).

<sup>168</sup> Goethe, GHA 13: 54. “Wie nah [das] wissenschaftliche Verlangen mit dem Kunst- und Nachahmungstriebe zusammenhänge, braucht wohl nicht umständlich ausgeführt zu werden.” My translation.

Frankfurt am Main.<sup>169</sup> Because Goethe shares the ethos, if not the ontological pre-convictions, of Enlightenment humanism, he decisively repudiates Pietism's and mystical theology's evacuation of human agency, insisting instead on the beholder's role in "receiving" (*aufnehmen*) and "realizing" (*beherrschen*) symbolic forms. Yet this does not entail that he rejects the imago Dei tradition tout court—much less that he secularizes it, as if natural and literary phenomena could somehow unfold outside of God's all-encompassing being. As Pfau has argued, Goethe's understanding of the human drive to behold the interior gestalt of nature places Goethean morphology and poetry within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, which—in contrast to Eckhart and the Pietists—emphasizes the beholder's active stance in acquiring knowledge of the divine.<sup>170</sup> Even as Goethe conceives

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<sup>169</sup> Goethe, *Faust I*, GHA 3: 110. When commenting on the analogy between organic and aesthetic Bildung, Goethe only implicitly alludes to the "Religionstrieb" so evident in *Urfaust* (1772–1775) and elsewhere in his art. Consider, for instance, Faust's answer to Gretchen, when she asks the Doctor if he believes in God:

Erfüll davon dein Herz, so groß es ist,  
 Und wenn du ganz in dem Gefühle selig bist,  
 Nenn das dann, wie du willst,  
 Nenn's Glück! Herz! Liebe! Gott!  
 Ich habe keinen Namen  
 Dafür. Gefühl ist alles,  
 Name Schall und Rauch,  
 Umnebelnd Himmelsglut.

Although Faust confesses his belief in the divine (the "invisible" source of the "visible"), he purports to do so only on the basis of an equivocal ontology, whereby "feeling" (desire) "is everything" and names count for nothing. In so doing, he risks displacing the presence of the source of his desire (Gretchen and God) with a simulacrum. Hence, what this drama stages is Faust's tragic reduction of the analogic interval between the human person and the other nourishing him to a symbolic copy (idol) bound to the scope of his own gaze: "Schau ich nicht Aug' in Auge dir?" Unlike Faust, however, Goethe neither espouses nominalism nor a univocal ontology because, we shall see, he considers symbolic language capable of expressing the inner form (logos) of things through analogia. As his later poetry and prose make increasingly clear (e.g. in "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" and *Faust II*, which we shall discuss in the next chapter), Goethe's understanding of symbol is predicated on the analogia entis. Similar to the interlocking chain of being in "Maifest" ("O Erd', o Sonne,/ O Glück, o Lust,/ O Lieb', o Liebe"), revelation unfolds in *Urfaust* at once inwardly and transcendently through analogic intervals ("Glück! Herz! Liebe! Gott!) that imply, whether or not Faust grants it, a greater difference between the image and its invisible source in the caritas of Christ.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas Pfau, *Incomprehensible Certainty: Writing the Image in Literature, Aesthetics, and Theology*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 448: "Aquinas acknowledges that what actuates and develops our intellect is our continuing, sensory appraisal of the world. If 'all knowledge comes by the form' (*omnis cogitation est per formam*), 'sight' — both intellectual and sensible — constitutes the moment where form 'appears,' constituting itself as an 'event' much in the way that Heidegger's etymological conjunction of 'event' and 'beholding' (*er-eignen* / *er-äugen*) means to draw out. As Aquinas puts it: "Two things are required both for sensible and for intellectual vision — viz., the power of sight and the union of the thing seen with the sight. For vision is made actual only when the thing seen is in a certain way in the seer (*unio rei visae cum visu, non enim fit visio in actu, nisi per hoc quod res visa quodammodo est in vidente*)" (*Summa theologiae* 1a: 12: 2)."



“Bildung” on the Aristotelian model “as an expression of autonomous human self-formative agency, [...] Pietist practices of introspection and its new language of feeling and inner experience were adopted” into his art.<sup>171</sup> As a consequence, the rhetorical-theological forms of Pietism emphatically open his view of the natural symbol to the transcendent. While poems such as “Ganymed” and “Maifest” evince Goethe’s debt to the imago Dei tradition through their language, mood, and formal structure, they also demonstrate his commitment to the coherence of human agency vis-à-vis the divine and, thus, his resistance to the dualistic opposition of nature and grace. The inspiration that Goethe found in Pietism is also manifest in the autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811), where Goethe recalls that from childhood on the Pietist “mindset attracted him because of its originality, geniality [*Herzlichkeit*], constancy, and independence.”<sup>172</sup> If these qualities refer to Pietism’s specific charisms—e.g. “the renewed idea of rebirth [of Christ], the edification [*Erbauung*] of the interior person, and...emotive piety”—they also prepared the way for expressivism’s understanding of “genius” as embedded within the natural order.<sup>173</sup> As noted, this transcendent view of spirit culminates in the expressive interiority (*Innigkeit*) of Goethe’s early poetry and poetics of the natural symbol, especially as intimated in his consistent use of the verb “dringen.” According to Langen’s *Wortschatz des deutschen Pietismus* (1968), the “use of verbs of motion,” particularly with “dynamizing and intensifying verbal components bound with goal-directed prefixes is the necessary linguistic expression of the force [*Wucht*] and intensity of the foundational polar tension” between humanity

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<sup>171</sup> Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 22.

<sup>172</sup> Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, GHA 9: 43. “Sinnesweise zog an durch Originalität, Herzlichkeit, Beharren und Selbständigkeit.” My translation. Cf. Kemper, ed., *Goethe und der Pietismus*, 180: Goethe’s early worldview especially drew on the unorthodox writings of Georg von Welling and certain radical Pietists whose sensibilities “schlugen sich [...] auf Seite des auch von Böhme her naheliegenden hermetischen Pantheismus mit seinem Hauptkennzeichen, dem dynamisch gefaßten ‘systema emanativum.’”

<sup>173</sup> Kemper, ed., *Goethe und der Pietismus*, 259. “Die wieder erneuerte Idee der Wiedergeburt [Christi, ...] die Erbauung des inneren Menschen und die gefühlvolle Frömmigkeit.” My translation.

and the divine.<sup>174</sup> Take this typical example of Pietism’s dynamic verbforms from Tersteegen’s *Geistliches Blumengärtlein inniger Seelen* (1727): “Give him [Jesus] the space und absolute power [Vollmacht] to form [bilden] you according to his desire, [...] then his power [Kraft] of love and life will evermore unimpededly penetrate [durchdringen] you and can thus reform [vergestalten] you in his image.”<sup>175</sup> Such language of interior Bildung into the imago Dei in and through transcendent love profoundly influenced Goethe’s early style, thus distinguishing it from Aristotelianism naturalism, even as the young poet’s philosophical commitments increasingly distanced his poetics from Pietism’s doctrine of absolute passivity before God.

Nowhere is Goethe’s debt to the language of Pietism more evident than in “Ganymed.” Similar to “Maifest,” this hymn expresses the transcendent yet fully immanent force of nature—divine love—through a litany of interpenetrated symbols. The lyric persona’s ecstatic outcries all reciprocate a “holy feeling” impressed upon him from the origins of creation:

Wie im Morgenrot, Du rings mich anglühst, Frühling, Geliebter! Mit tausendfacher Liebeswonne Sich an mein Herz <i>drängt</i> Deiner ewigen Wärme Heilig Gefühl [...]	5
Und deine Blumen, dein Gras <i>Drängen</i> sich an mein Herz [...]	14
Ruft <i>drein</i> die Nachtigall Liebend mir aus dem Nebeltal. <sup>176</sup>	19

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<sup>174</sup> August Langen, *Wortschatz des deutschen Pietismus*, (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer 1968), 386. “Die Verwendung von Bewegungsverben mit dynamisierenden und intensivierendem, meist zielstrebigem Präfix verbundene Verbalkomponente[,] ist der notwendige sprachliche Ausdruck der Wucht und Intensität [der] polaren Grundspannung” between humanity and the divine.” My translation.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 40. “Gib ihm [Jesus] raum, und unbedingte Vollmacht, dich zu bilden nach seinem Belieben, ... so wird seine Liebes- und Lebens-Kraft dich immer ungehinderter durchdringen, und in sein Bild vergestalten können.” My translation.

<sup>176</sup> Goethe, “Maifest,” GHA 1: 46-47. My emphasis.

Commenting on Goethe's description of "love" in this poem as "holy" (*heilig*) and "warm" (*Wärme*), Staiger recognizes its simultaneous dynamic of transcendence and immanentization. He observes that "with these words the writings of Pietism are turned towards terrestrial, human paths, just as erotic love moves into that transfigured region, which demands ultimate reverence and devotion."<sup>177</sup> At once erotic and agapeic this love corresponds, Staiger affirms, to 1 John 4:16 ("God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."); for "the interiority" of both Ganymede and nature, "which streams from the soul and shines through the images [*Gebilden*] of creation in the moment of inspiration, is the eternal One [*Ewig-eine*]."<sup>178</sup> Or to speak with Luke, the Apostle, the natural symbols of "Ganymed" evoke this basic tenet of the image Dei tradition: that it is "in" God's love that "we live and move and have our being."<sup>179</sup> This immanent source of nature and selfhood, which nonetheless infinitely transcends us, is Christian *caritas* understood as the synthesis of Platonic eros and the Triune God's gift of self (*agape*).<sup>180</sup> As D.C. Schindler observes in light of *The Phaedrus* 249c – 252b, the ecstasy of "divine madness" associated with eros "is ultimately, according to Plato, the way that human beings respond to goodness and beauty," such that "the intensity and apparent violence of it, the depth of its hold on us, is nothing but an expression of the genuine *goodness* of the good."<sup>181</sup> For the transcendent good fully yields itself, through kenosis, to the

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<sup>177</sup> Staiger, *Goethe* 1: 62. "Die Schriften des Pietismus [...] werden] so mit diesem Wort [d.i. heilige Wärme] in irdische, menschliche Bahnen geleitet, wie umgekehrt die Liebe damit in jene verklärte Zone rückt, die letzte Verehrung und Andacht fordert." My translation.

<sup>178</sup> 1 John 4:16 (RSVCE). Cf. *Die Bibel nach Martin Luther*, 1 Johannes 4:16: ("Gott ist die Liebe, und wer in der Liebe bleibt, der bleibt in Gott und Gott in ihm."). Staiger, *Goethe* 1: 62: "Das Innere, das im Augenblick der Begeisterung aus der Seele strömt und aus den Gebilden der Schöpfung leuchtet ist das Ewig-Eine." My translation.

<sup>179</sup> Acts 17:28, (RSVCE)

<sup>180</sup> Cf. D.C. Schindler, "The Redemption of Eros: Philosophical Reflections on Benedict XVI's First Encyclical," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Fall 2006, 376-77. Schindler notes that "eros" only appears twice within the Bible, both times meaning disordered sexual desire, but that Church Fathers such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Dionysius all affirmed the unity of eros and *agape*. The latter even dared to write in his *Divine Names* that God is eros.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

natural symbols formed in its image, thus to be known more completely through embodied experience and the passions of eros. Following Benedict XVI and a tradition of exegetes and theologians reaching back to Bernard of Clairvaux and Augustine, Schindler argues that although “eros and agape may set into relief different aspects of love, *in the end they do not represent different kinds of love.*”<sup>182</sup> To be sure, we must carefully de-synonymize eros from sexuality, “which is a physical image of eros.”<sup>183</sup> As the fuel animating and sustaining the spirit’s noetic activity, eros is “a more universal and thus comprehensive desire” than sexuality.<sup>184</sup> Thus, Schindler remarks, “the ascent of eros necessarily entails a kind of expansion and purification of desire: from an instance of physical beauty, to physical beauty universally, to the beauty of the soul, and so forth.”<sup>185</sup> Although Goethe’s poem leaves this ascetic side of *caritas* understated, the Triune God’s characteristic unification of ascending, receptive desire and descending, active self-gift comes through in the poem’s rapturous conclusion:

Hinauf! Hinauf strebt's,	
Es schweben die Wolken	
Abwärts, die Wolken	
Neigen sich der sehnenden Liebe,	25
Mir, Mir!	
In euerm Schoße	
Aufwärts,	
Umfangend umfassen!	
Aufwärts	30
An deinem Busen,	
Allliebender Vater!	<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>186</sup> Goethe, “Ganymed,” GHA 1: 47.

In fundamental opposition to Martin Luther's view of divine love, which "smashes to pieces" the caritas-synthesis by defining eros as essentially egocentric (ascending and receptive) and agape as totally gratuitous (active, oblation, and descending), Goethe's poem recovers the asymmetrically polar unity and the dynamic of intensification characterizing these ancient terms.<sup>187</sup> In so doing, the transcendent eros expressed in "Ganymed" becomes a "reminder [...] that we are dependent on what is other than ourselves;" for "even if desire essentially includes the aim of fulfilling the self, it is structurally other-oriented."<sup>188</sup>

Scholars from various intellectual traditions perennially contest this orientation of Goethean poetics and metaphysics towards the transcendent Other. According to theologian Anne Carpenter, the "distinct inner finitude" and "inner law of self-realization" characterizing Goethe's conception of form conflates finitude with the infinity of God-Nature.<sup>189</sup> "Goethe cannot really assign finitude and infinity to worldly reality," Carpenter contends, "without straying into pantheism."<sup>190</sup> This understanding of Goethean form as a contradiction collapsing the divine into the sphere of strict immanence—hence as espousing a univocal or equivocal ontology—echoes secular readings from the early twentieth-century by Ernst Cassirer and Georg Simmel. Cassirer peremptorily states in his essay "Goethe und Platon" (1932) that for Goethe "there is no longer a Beyond [in the Christian-Neoplatonic sense], no such 'transcendence' opposite the phenomenon of life."<sup>191</sup> Simmel similarly

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<sup>187</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 560.

<sup>188</sup> Schindler, "The Redemption of Eros," 392.

<sup>189</sup> Anne Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2015), 56.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* Supposing that Goethe's notion of form conflates these poles, Carpenter's observation is certainly correct. However, the extent to which his analogic metaphysics allows for or, alternatively, precludes such conflation is open for discussion.

<sup>191</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Goethe und die geschichtliche Welt*, (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Cassirer 1932), 117. "Es [gibt] gegenüber dem Phänomen des Leben kein [platonisches] Jenseits, keine derartige 'Transzendenz' mehr." My translation.

describes the poet's metaphysics as a leveling of transcendent and immanent form, though Simmel alternatively advances his claim on the basis of an equivocal metaphysics: "indeed, an infinite expanse separates us from the ultimate mysteries of nature, yet they also lie, as it were, on the same plane as intelligible nature—because, of course, there is nothing but nature, which is simultaneously spirit, idea, and the divine."<sup>192</sup> According to these influential accounts, Goethean metaphysics turns either on a univocal or an equivocal conception of being. However, as we shall see, particularly in the next section on Goethe's reflections on symbolism, his worldview is thoroughly analogic and thus retains a metaphysically robust (in origins Christian-Neoplatonic) understanding of the "greater difference" between the symbolic image and its source in the transcendent.

By contrast to Cassirer and Simmel, theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar grasps that the Goethean symbol's analogic gestalt coherently opens nature to the divine.<sup>193</sup> As Balthasar remarks in volume one of *Die Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, for Goethe, "everything finite is ecstatic."<sup>194</sup> Balthasar thus observes how the relation between "idea and existence" manifest in the natural symbol displays "the mysterious quality of directionality shared by all things in the state of becoming."<sup>195</sup> Finitude is, by virtue of its teleological form, oriented towards the transcendent. On this basis, Balthasar describes the vertical intensification (*Steigerung*) characterizing Goethean morphology as a mystical "way towards the illumination and crystallization of [finite] being" into a symbol of divine reality. The polar intensifications of nature are, furthermore, "the way towards [a]

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<sup>192</sup> Georg Simmel, *Kant und Goethe*, ed. Cornelius Gurlitt, (Berlin: Bard Marquardt 1916), 21. "Von den letzten Mysterien der Natur trennt uns freilich eine unendliche Entfernung, aber sie liegen doch gleichsam in derselben Ebene mit der erkennbaren Natur, weil es ja nichts als Natur gibt, die zugleich Geist, Idee, das Göttliche ist." My translation.

<sup>193</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*, vol. 1, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998) 437.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. "Idee und Existenz [...] die geheimnisvolle Richtungs-Eigenschaft alles Werdenden anzeigen." My translation.

being's becoming an eye and ear rapt in wonder—towards its becoming a spiritual person as ekstasis before the mystery, the 'magic' of being.”<sup>196</sup> While, according to Balthasar, horizontal polarization remains irreducible to vertical intensification, the dynamics yielding the natural symbol are nevertheless one transcendent motion: for “the interior illumination is the same ‘magic’ [noetically] glimpsed in listening beyond—to the mystery of the ‘on High’ [des ‘Empor’].”<sup>197</sup> In brief, Balthasar sees in Goethe's morphological writings, his “Studie nach Spinoza” (1784), and his poetics an opening of finitude to the transcendent inbreaking of a light *like* divine glory; namely, to what Thomas Aquinas terms the infinite “splendor” (*claritas*) of the artwork: its radiant intelligibility, the logos of the thing's inner being, as disclosed through finite form.<sup>198</sup> In a footnote on the meaning of Goethe's phrase “open to the mystery” (*offen ins Geheimnis*) from the *Maximen und Reflexionen*, Balthasar unambiguously states his view that neither Goethe nor even Schiller (!) held that achieving classical “perfection” implies the totalizing “self-enclosure” (univocity) of being.<sup>199</sup> Even the resignation (*Verzicht*) characterizing the symbolic imagery of Weimar classicism is, Balthasar suggests, thoroughly pro-visional—that is, transient yet nonetheless disclosive of divine reality. And this follows from the principle of analogia that, as Balthasar notes, underlies Goethean symbolism.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid. ““Der Weg zum inneren Licht- und Durchsichtigwerden des Seins [...] der Weg zu einem staunenden Aug- und Ohr-werden des Seins, seiner Geist-Personwerdung als Ekstase vor dem Geheimnis, dem ‘Zauber’ des Seins.“ My translation.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. “Und beides ist eins: das innere Lichtwerden ist derselbe ‘Zauber’, den das Hinaushören erblickt – das Geheimnis des ‘Empor’.” My translation.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: eine theologische Ästhetik*, vol. 1, *Schau der Gestalt*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1961), 10: “Wenn alles Schöne objektiv im Kreuzpunkt zweier Momente steht, die Thomas species und lumen, Gestalt und Glanz benennt, so ist seine Begegnung durch die beiden Momente des Erblickens und Entrücktwerdens gekennzeichnet.” The mystery of beauty as “unfassbarer Glanz, [das] das Doppelgestirn des Wahren und Guten und sein unauflösbares Zueinander umspielt,” turns at first glance on “das Geheimnis [...] des Gebildes,” “aber sogleich wird lebendig die Frage nach dem ‘großen Glanz von innen’, der die species zur speciosa durchklärt: splendor. Gleichzeitig ist da: das Gebilde und was von ihm ausstrahlt, es zu einem werten, liebwerten macht.”

<sup>199</sup> Balthasar, *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele*, 418. “‘Vollendung’ als Schließung in sich ist weder Goethes noch Schillers entscheidende Haltung.” My translation. Von Balthasar nevertheless recognizes the difference characterizing the analogic relationship of beauty, e.g. as Goethe conceives it, and divine glory.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 437.

More subtly than “Ganymed,” “Maifest” attests to the influence of Christian-Neoplatonism on Goethe’s early poetry. While, at first glance, the poem suggests “the ontological indeterminacy of the ‘subtler languages’ of post-romantic literature” (Taylor), more probing analysis of its symbols’ rhetorical and metaphysical gestalt reveals the analogic presence of the divine.<sup>201</sup> To be sure, the ensuing stanzas of the poem may suggest that Goethe leaves the extent to which he means to evoke the divine undecided. Where, after all, can we point to God amidst these manifold symbols? It must be admitted: we cannot do so directly through sheer signification, but only obliquely by way of the similes structuring these stanzas. As the vegetal symbols of the poem give way to expressions of human desire and, we shall see, the language of the Psalms, “Maifest” opens onto an interior realm in which mind, world, and the deity participate in the force of love (*caritas*) inwardly filling all things through the irreducible act of creation. The poem’s third and fourth stanzas thus depict the ecstatic dynamic of love as intensifying through the immanent gestalt of nature:

O Erd’, o Sonne, O Glück, o Lust,	
 O Lieb’, o Liebe, So golden schön Wie Morgenwolken Auf jenen Höhn,	15
 Du segnest herrlich Das frische Feld, Im Blütendampfe Die volle Welt! <sup>202</sup>	20

A climax of emotion (“O Lieb’, o Liebe”) in verse 13 follows two pairs of intensifying polarities: “O Erd’, o Sonne,/ O Glück, o Lust[.]” While the first polarity consists of physical phenomena and thus provisionally remains within the realm of nature, it also insinuates vertical distance and

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<sup>201</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 404.

<sup>202</sup> Goethe, “Maifest,” GHA 1: 31.



intensification (*Steigerung*) through the line's progression from opaque matter (*Erde*) to the visible/invisible energy of light (*Sonne*) from above. The second polarity linking desire ("Lust") and its telos, happiness ("Glück"), belongs to the invisible realm of spirit and thus intensifies the polar dynamic manifest in the (horizontal) polarity of the preceding verse. From the ascending tension generated by the asymmetrical opposition of matter and spirit, the vertical and the horizontal, a third intensified relation emerges. For in transitioning up the analogic chain of being from nature to human emotions, this teleologically oriented sequence of polarities presents nature's interior formation through and culmination in divine love. A momentum of twofold intensification upwards and inwards thus moves the poet to name the source and telos of this litany of symbols: "O Lieb', o Liebe." These verses consequently evoke the rapture of Platonic eros that, although born in and through physical realities, at once transcends the natural order.<sup>203</sup> As becomes increasingly clear in the ensuing stanzas, however, this moment of eros is conditioned by its fundamental dependence on the gaze of another, the beloved, whose beauty is the occasion for the poet's rapture in these natural symbols of the transcendent good. Hence, we shall see that "Maifest" actually unfolds through the caritas-synthesis, whereby eros and agape (loving self-gift) are simultaneously at work. Hans-Georg Kemper's interpretation of Goethe's early poetry with respect to Pietism misses this crucial point. For Kemper, love (eros) "replaces the function [that] Christ" had for the Pietist model of interior formation (*Bildung*).<sup>204</sup> Whereas Pietism is "wholly oriented towards Christ," Kemper asserts, Goethe's early love-poetry contrarily attempts to "unify [art] with the creative forces of nature."<sup>205</sup> What Kemper's secularizing reading overlooks is the possibility that the transcendent deity (logos) is

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<sup>203</sup> Kemper, ed., *Goethe und der Pietismus*, 194-96.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. "Ersetzt die Funktion Christi." My translation.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. "Diese richtet sich ganz auf Christus, [während jene] richtet sich nach einer Vereinigung mit den Schöpfungskräften in der Natur." My translation.

already kenotically present in nature, such that Goethean symbolism unifies art with a force (love) suffusing both nature and divine reality. To put the matter in terms of metaphysics, Kemper's perspective presupposes either a univocal or equivocal ontology; for it dichotomizes nature and its source in the transcendent divine. By contrast, we shall see that the natural symbols of "Maifest" in fact tacitly draw on the principle of analogia, which opens nature and art to the co-active presence of the transcendent by depicting things through an oblique (pro-visional) manner of disclosure.<sup>206</sup>

"Maifest" establishes an immanent frame of meaning that, more than merely opening to transcendence, suggests the natural symbol's sheer dependence on the transcendent divine. Similar to "Ganymed," this poem intimates that nature can only be experienced as intuitively significant inasmuch as it embodies and communicates its numinous source. Although the poet never explicitly locates the "love" of verse 13 above nature, it remains irreducible to the sphere of immanence to the extent that, via the principle of analogia, this love surpasses mere sentiment. The first explicit use of analogy in this poem comes with the simile in verses 13–16, where Goethe likens love to a natural symbol of the beautiful: dawn's radiant light ("So golden schön/ Wie Morgenwolken/ Auf jenen Höhen"). Echoing the images of the opening stanzas, this light's glorious reflection in the clouds indirectly discloses its source in the sun. Now, however, the light is no longer described as laughing on the surface of things. The tone of nature's beauty has become more serious here and its depiction more profound. Hence, this ecstatic manner of presenting the sunrise tears us still deeper into the heart the thing seen. As the litany polarities preceding this simile already suggests, the glory of natural light transcends the sun itself because its deepest source lies in the cosmic force of love. If, at first glance, the sunrise seems strictly immanent to nature, this image of its inner form obliquely presents, via analogia, the loving deity's fully transcendent light. Thus, Goethe's more pointed and

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<sup>206</sup> If, as Taylor observes of post-romantic poetry in general, Goethe's "language can be taken in more than one sense, ranging from the fullest ontological commitment to the transcendent to the most subjective, human-, even language-centred," his symbolic imagery does not therefore presuppose an equivocal ontology (*A Secular Age*, 757).

earnest depiction of the beautiful in these verses pro-visionally discloses the natural symbol's source in the goodness of God. This interpretation of the love represented here as both erotic and agapeic is confirmed by the resonance of Christian language in the following verses. For the next stanza refers to the love of the foregoing comparison as a person, "Du" ("Thou"), whose blessings descend on the meadow like the dewfall and transfigure the world with its grace: "Du segnest herrlich/ Das frische Welt/ Im Blütendampfe/ Die volle Welt." Similar to the descent of agapeic love at the conclusion of "Ganymed," this image recalls the *caritas*-synthesis of Christian-Neoplatonism. In so doing, it suggests that Christian *caritas* has implicitly shaped the ascending dynamic of *eros* thus far described in "Maifest." Like "Ganymed," which begins by recognizing the latent personhood of spring ("Wie im Morgenrot,/ *Du* rings mich anglühst,/ Frühling, Geliebter!"), the "Maifest"-poet's enraptured disposition before nature opens him to its personal alterity. This attitude of wonder in the beloved consequently places the poet in a receptive position vis-à-vis the deity's blessings ("An deinem Busen/ Lieg' ich, schmachte")—even as, through his participation in the divine act of *poësis*, he sings new songs to the beloved before him.<sup>207</sup>

The next stanza extends this dynamic of interior ascension (*Steigerung*), although it is now directed, so to speak, down to earth again as the poet turns his attention to the maiden inspiring his lyric poem. Specifically, it focuses on *how* ("wie") her brilliant eyes shine as a natural symbol reflecting both the light of the poet's loving gaze and an eidetic source that transcends their finite love. Thus, the maiden's eye becomes an imaginative "looking glass," as Goethe unforgettably puts it, "through which we gather within the heart of humanity the holy rays of nature's irradiant expanse and attain a brilliant insight"<sup>208</sup> —

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<sup>207</sup> As remains to be seen in this chapter's final section, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" also recognizes the latent personhood of nature and interiorly opens the beholder to a transcendent other, whether the beloved or the goddess.

<sup>208</sup> Goethe, "Aus Goethes Brieftasche," GHA 12: 23. "Das Glas wodurch wir die heiligen Strahlen der verbreiteten Natur an das Herz der Menschen zum Feuerblick sammeln." My translation.

O Mädchen, Mädchen,  
 Wie lieb' ich dich!  
 Wie blinkt dein Auge,  
 Wie liebst du mich!<sup>209</sup>

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As Wellbery observes, such images of reciprocal vision recur in Goethe's early poetry and form a key to understanding his poetics.<sup>210</sup> Wellbery astutely describes these "specular moments" as an "originary exchange, in which love and self-identity emerge."<sup>211</sup> Because they "set" the poet's active stance "in opposition" to the beloved's receptivity, such moments foreground the act of reciprocal reception occurring in the moment of symbolic insight (*Augenblick*). In the event of encounter, the poet's gaze upon the other who transcends him becomes similarly passive through the polar dynamic of co-action. The persona thus sees himself and his song emerging from their source(s) in nature, the beloved, and divine love. Regarding the concluding lines of "Willkommen und Abschied" ("Und doch, welch Glück, geliebt zu werden!/ Und lieben, Götter, welch ein Glück!"), Wellbery remarks that "the passive-active reversal of the verb ["lieben"] exemplifies the chiastic reciprocity of seeing/being seen" that occurs earlier in that poem.<sup>212</sup> It is precisely the active-passive reversal of "lieben" via analogia in verses 22 and 24 of "Maifest" (so reminiscent of the pivotal line in "Ganymed," "Umfangend umfängen") that guarantees the poem's openness to transcendence and, moreover, establishes its dependence on the other. This volte occurs through a natural symbol of love, the maiden's eyes, which has become translucent (yet not transparent) to their numinous source. But how? As we shall see, their presentation of the transcendent unfolds obliquely by way of

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<sup>209</sup> Goethe, "Maifest," GHA 1: 31.

<sup>210</sup> Wellbery, *The Specular Moment*, 51. The final two stanzas of "Willkommen und Abschied" are paradigmatic, here.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 49. He means the following verses: "Dich sah ich, und die milde Freude/Floß von dem süßen Blick auf mich;/ Ganz war mein Herz an deiner Seite/ Und jeder Atemzug für dich" (Goethe, "Willkommen und Abschied," GHA 1: 28).

analogia, such that the vision depicted here remains irreducible to the scope of the poet's own gaze. Although the beloved's eyes constitute another immanent frame, they also reflect, by way of an implicit chain of similes ("wie...wie...wie"), the light of grace from lines 13 – 20. For, their radiant beauty similarly blesses the lover through the beloved's act of self-gift (agape), which first gives the lover eyes to see his capacity for self-expression through a love transcending mere sentiment. In so doing, Goethe's symbolic depiction of the beloved's beauty indirectly discloses its source in the timeless logos of love: namely, the Triune God's loving act of self-gift to and through the logoi of creation.<sup>213</sup>

The beloved's eyes thus analogically (re)present the unity between eros and agape. Contrary to Wellbery's assertions, then, this symbol indicates the poet's dependence on the other transcending him—just as the poem implies the symbolic image's sheer dependence on the numinous source of significance. In sum, the lovers' interlocking glances open onto a shared realm of interiority that emerges from a source surpassing the poet and the maiden. This is a symbolic space of unity constituted in and through the analogic interval (similarity in greater difference) between them; moreover, it is a space encompassing all nature and spirit, self and other, and grounding them in the antecedent order (*kosmos*) of analogia. By responding in kind to the beloved's eyes with a series of exclamations—as he had regarding the sun in the opening stanza ("Wie glänzt die Sonne!")—the lover "receives" and "actualizes" a dynamic of love (caritas) that precedes him. Like the interior landscape in the opening verses, this image of the maiden's eyes is concretely present and interior to the persona's loving gaze, even as her eyes remain irreducibly other. He participates in them and the

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<sup>213</sup> The type of this specular moment in Christian poetry is found in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, when the poet encounters Beatrice upon passing the threshold from Purgatory to Heaven and the angels sing: "'Turn, Beatrice, O turn thy holy eyes,'/ Such was their song, 'unto thy faithful one,/ Who has to see thee ta'en so many steps./ In grace do us the grace that thou unveil/ Thy face to him, so that he may discern/ The second beauty which thou dost conceal.'/ O splendour of the living light eternal!" Dante, Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, trans. Longfellow, (New York: Dover Publications 2017), 380.

love they convey, such that he finds himself co-constituted in them. Analogous to the blessings of the divinity upon dew-fresh field, her grace opens the lover to his inmost self.

The concluding stanzas further underscore how the force of transcendent love constitutes the natural symbols of “Maifest.” This occurs through the principle of analogia underlying the images’ dynamic of intensification (*Steigerung*) as well as through allusion to the Psalms. In verses 25 – 34, Goethe employs another simile establishing a likeness (in greater difference) between two natural forms of love: first as expressed through vegetal and animal existence and then through the poet’s more intensely spiritual love for the maiden. In so doing, these concluding expressions of *caritas* yield “neue Lieder” (“new songs”) of praise hearkening back to the Biblical origins of poetry:

So liebt die Lerche	25
Gesang und Luft,	
Und Morgenblumen	
Den Himmelsduft,	

Wie ich dich liebe	
Mit warmem Blut,	30
Die du mir Jugend	
Und Freud’ und Mut	

Zu neuen Liedern	
Und Tänzén gibst.	
Sei ewig glücklich,	35
Wie du mich liebst. <sup>214</sup>	

For the eighteenth-century reader, the phrase “new songs” (“neuen Liedern”) would have immediately recalled the Psalms of praise, such as Psalm 96 (“O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.”) and Psalm 98, (“O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!”)<sup>215</sup> According to the

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<sup>214</sup> Goethe, “Maifest,” GHA 1: 31.

<sup>215</sup> Psalms 96, (RSVCE): 1-2, 98:1. Cf. LUTH: “Singet dem HERRN ein neues Lied; singet dem HERRN alle Welt! Singet dem HERRN und lobet seinen Namen; verkündiget von Tag zu Tage sein Heil!” and “Singet dem HERRN ein neues Lied; denn er tut Wunder.” Biblical literary forms were often regarded as paradigmatic for modern poetry. Cf. eighteenth-century Anglican Bishop and Oxford Professor of Poetry Robert Lowth’s 1753/1787 *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. The initial publication was in Latin, but the translation (by the German J. D. Michaelis) into English,

Biblical understanding of creation, new songs in praise of the loving God reciprocate His blessings; for the Psalmist expresses his love with the love that was first bestowed upon him. Echoing Hans Georg Gadamer's ontology of play, Robert Spaemann observes that liturgical prayers are like musical recitals (or, one might add, recitations of lyric poetry) in that each iteration is original: "the performance first breathes life into them."<sup>216</sup> Similarly, the Psalms require a "twofold actualization: firstly acoustic. Texts and melodies must be spoken aloud. Secondly, texts must become prayers through the inner appropriation of them, and this means that they must be restored [*zurückversetzt*] to the original situation of their genesis."<sup>217</sup> Instead of a historical reconstruction of the origins, however, this return to the source unfolds for the Christian in prayer "through the [inner] adoption [*Aneignung*] of their revealed contents as disclosed by Christ. Accordingly, the Psalm becomes a 'new song.'"<sup>218</sup> As with Herder's organicist poetics, the "Maifest"-poet's expression of the origins of existence actuates a potential for growth in nature. As a formed former, he articulates and realizes more intensely the gestalt of a form that precedes him. When, in the event of encounter, the beloved (Frau Brion) rouses the poet's passions, she incites him to express the interior, fully carnal force of love ("Mit warmem Blut") in original songs of praise and dance in her honor. This essential, asymmetrical reciprocity between matter and form, image and origins, conditions the final similes of "Maifest." Although Goethe does not explicitly reference Psalms, this song of praise precisely

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in 1787, greatly enhanced the resonance of Lowth's argument: viz., that the structures of modern poetry (e.g., parallelism, parabolic style, etc.) were essentially all derived from the Hebrew Bible (esp. the prophetic books). In Germany, of course, figures like Brockes and later Klopstock (and likewise in English, Christopher Smart's enormously popular *Song of David*), seemed to bear out a lot of Lowth's observations.

<sup>216</sup> Robert Spaemann, *Meditationen eines Christen*, vol. 2, *Eine Auswahl aus den Psalmen 52–150*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 2016), 285. "Erst die Aufführung haucht ihr mit Leben ein." My translation.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. "Der zweifachen Aktualisierung: erstens der akustischen. Texte und Melodien müssen ausgesprochen werden. Zweitens müssen die Texte durch ihre innere Aneignung zu Gebeten werden, und das heißt, sie müssen zurückversetzt werden in die Ursprungssituation ihrer Entstehung." My translation.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. "In der Weise der Aneignung ihres durch Christus geoffenbarten Inhalts. So wird der Psalm zum 'neuen Lied.'"

corresponds to the dynamic of love's intensification (*Steigerung*) through nature unfolding in these verses and the preceding stanzas:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights! [...] Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! [...] Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps [...] Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! [...] Young men and maidens together, old men and children!<sup>219</sup>

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming[.]<sup>220</sup>

Such Psalms establish a vertical polarity within the natural order that opens creation, by way of analogia, to its transcendent source in God. Through the lark's full-throated song, the flower's aroma, and the poet's passion, "Maifest" similarly (re)presents the cosmic force of love at work within nature, thus recalling the deity's original act of poësis.

The salient feature of this poem—and, we shall see in the next chapter, of his entire poetics and morphological science—is its analogic structure. As noted, the grammatical construction that renders the interlocking similes of "Maifest" more than abstractions and thus imbues them with life from the origins is the poet's emphatic use of "wie"-clauses. Whereas the English pronoun "how" can serve to express questions and exclamations, the German pronoun "wie" also means "as." Consider that the poet's repeated use of "wie" in the first stanza ("Wie herrlich leuchtet / Mir die Natur! / Wie glänzt die Sonne! / Wie lacht die Flur!"), which had primarily functioned as an adverbial intensifier, already indicates its analogic implications. Recall, furthermore, how the opening lines of "Maifest" also resonate with the questions, 'How *does* nature shine? How does it gleam? And how

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<sup>219</sup> Psalm 148, (RSVCE): 1–14. Cf. LUTH: "Halleluja! Lobet im Himmel den HERRN; lobet ihn in der Höhe! [...] Lobet ihn, Sonne und Mond; lobet ihn, alle leuchtenden Sterne! [...] Lobet den HERRN auf Erden, ihr Walfische und alle Tiefen; [...] fruchtbare Bäume und alle Zedern; Tiere und alles Vieh, Gewürm und Vögel; [...] Jünglinge und Jungfrauen, Alte mit den Jungen!"

<sup>220</sup> Psalm 96, (RSVCE): 11–12.



does it laugh?’ In tacitly posing the question, the poem also intimates an answer. For these initial “wie”-clauses already anticipate the ensuing depictions of the sun’s analogic relation to the radiant beauty of the beloved and, thus, to the divine love unfolding through these natural symbols. Again echoing to the opening verses of “Ganymed” (“Wie im Morgenrot,/ Du rings mich anglühst/ [...]!”), the wie-clauses of “Maifest” express the poet’s emotive response to nature’s glory as it appears within him—namely, as an interiorized landscape that at once fully transcends him. Consequently, the interwoven analogic intervals of “Maifest” suggest the poet’s participation in an encompassing light from the very origins of creation. How, then, does nature shine from this source? The language of the poem hints at an answer: it does so obliquely yet nonetheless constitutively through the analogy of being.

Through the course of the poem, the emotive expressions/questions (“Wie herrliche.../ Wie glänzt.../ Wie lacht...”) first depicting the world and its transcendent source as immediately present become more complex. Hence, definitive form and meaning of “wie” only gradually emerges as it develops in and through the ensuing images’ depiction of organic phenomena. For, we have seen, the “wie”-clauses become statements with increasingly complex rhetorical and syntactic structures. It takes four stanzas before the wonder-rapt, at first nearly speechless poet achieves a “so...wie”-construction establishing an explicit analogy between the visible world of creation and its source in the numinous. Whereas the initial verses depict by presenting the light’s almost overwhelming immediacy, the fourth stanza’s syntactical form intimates the poet’s distance (in continual identity) from nature and, even, his partial transcendence beyond it. After Goethe has named the numinous light source “love,” he employs a simile likening it to a natural symbol of beauty: “So golden schön/ Wie Morgenwolken/ Auf jenen Höhn.” Now the implicit analogic structure of the second and third stanza, which was already intimated in the first stanza’s exclamations, becomes emphatic. Thus, it is no longer viable to interpret these symbols on the basis

of either a univocal or equivocal ontology. If, because of their complex structure, this and the following simile (“So liebt die Lerche/...// Wie ich dich liebe) to be instances of self-conscious lyric speech, they remain firmly rooted in the poet’s naïve appropriation (*Aneignung*) of the images before him. Despite the heightened sense of difference and distance they express, these similes transcend sentiment and subjective projection: hence, they are not sentimental images conjuring the mere appearance of naïveté. This is, however, precisely the view of Goethean symbolism prevailing in secularizing readings of his poetics—as in, we shall see, Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*. Yet this jaundiced view of the symbolic image implies a hermeneutic of suspicion, which the spirit of charity (the *caritas*-synthesis) infusing every line of “Maifest” precludes. Because the concluding similes of this poem overcome the almost speechless immediacy of the poem’s opening exclamations, they invite further reflection on their form and truth-value. Yet, as we have seen, they also stress the analogic interval (the similarity in greater difference) underpinnings of this litany of natural symbols—thus distinguishing Goethe’s symbolism from the univocal ontology of Aristotelianism and modernity’s equivocal view. By implicitly drawing on the *imago-Dei* tradition, this love-poem asks the reader to consider just how its imagery is shaped by and reshapes divine *caritas*. At this moment of increased self-awareness, then, “let us see” with Herder “how nature has helped [Goethe] to apply the rule of beauty, thus, to make art, and how she fortifies [all of] us in this endeavor.”<sup>221</sup> As Herder suggests, grasping “the *general Type*, which nature not only *appears* to follow in the formation (*Bildung*) of living organisms but actually conforms to,” will “lead us” to this end.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Herder, “Kalligone,” DKV 8: 749: “Sehen wir wie die Natur uns zur Anwendung der Regel des Schönen, mithin zur Kunst half und uns auf diesem Wege befestigt.” My translation.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. “Der *allgemeine Typus*, den die Natur in Bildung lebendiger Organisationen nicht zu befolgen scheint, sondern wirklich befolgt, könnte uns darauf führen.” My translation.

Whereas a skeptical reading of Goethe's subtly wrought analogies might regard them as mere rhetoric, namely as an instance of parallel syntax employed for effect, a more fruitful interpretation remains open to the implicit question posed in the initial verses: 'How does nature shine?'<sup>223</sup> The question is whether a metaphysically robust conception of lyric speech's analogic form underpins the expressivist poetics of the image. Herder provides an answer in his argument from *Kalligone* concerning Kant's account of symbolic presentation ("symbolische Darstellung") in §59 of the *Critique of Judgement* (1790). Here Herder contends that Kant's perspective conflates the ancient distinction between "mnemonic (*erinnernde*) and presentational (*darstellende*) signs" and, therefore, between "image (*εἰκὼν*) and mere *figure of speech*."<sup>224</sup> By contrast to Kant's theory, then, according to which the intuition (*Anschauung*) of an idea through symbolic images is "merely analogic [...], hence, merely according to the form of reflection rather than its content," Herder's account of the natural symbol in *Kalligone* conceives the symbol's analogic structure in terms of organic form.<sup>225</sup> For Herder, we have seen, the natural symbol is an image concretely presenting (*darstellen*)—through the living dynamism of actions and sounds issuing from the symbol's interior form—the transcendent realm of ideas: above all, the divine goodness shaping all things from within. Underlying Herder's grasp of the symbolic image is a metaphysical conception of "the laws and analogies of nature" that regards humanity as "*a general participant, a hearkener [Akroatiker] of the universe*" —whereby, according to Herder,

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<sup>223</sup> Critics such as Rüdiger Campe and Wellbery have contended that these lines in fact belie the artificiality of the poem's symbols, which they regard as a linguistic sign-system masquerading as nature and, even, as the divine. See Rüdiger Campe, *Affekt und Ausdruck, zur Umwandlung der literarischen Rede im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer 1990), 537-555.

<sup>224</sup> Herder, "Kalligone," DKV 8: 953. "Erinnernde und darstellende Zeichen." "Bild (*εἰκὼν*) und bloße *Redefigur*." My translations.

<sup>225</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Die Kritik der Urteilskraft*, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 2009), 253. "Bloß analogisch [...] mithin bloß der Form der Reflexion, nicht dem Inhalte nach." My translation.

all elastic bodies make their *interior*, i.e. their aroused and self-replicating powers known by a thrust or stroke (more or less discernable to us). We refer to it as *sound* (*Schall*), and more finely stirred, *tone* (*Klang*); tone, which sets every similar organization in harmony with the same vibration, and in sensitive beings brings about an analogous feeling.<sup>226</sup>

Herder had already put the matter decisively in his essay on the unity of understanding and emotion from the 1770s: “What we know, we only know by analogy, from the creature to us and from us to the Creator.”<sup>227</sup> As Kemper observes, Herder’s theory of the natural symbol presupposes a realist ontology, namely, “the analogic referral of all things in creation to one another,” which grounds in the things themselves.<sup>228</sup> Hence it implies the *analogia entis*. For Herder, symbols disclose their source in things by analogic and synecdochic participation, whereby each part of nature discloses the transcendent whole through its living acts and sounds. There “evidence and certainty must lie,” Herder contends, “in the *things*, or else it lies nowhere: [...] it must therefore lie in the *whole, undissected, deep feeling of things*, or else it lies nowhere.”<sup>229</sup> Hence his assertion in *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (1774) (which Herder had already begun in Strasbourg upon first meeting Goethe): “Thus teaches God! Through *images! things!* the *whole of nature* – *with what power* and

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<sup>226</sup> Herder, “Kalligone,” DKV 8: 653, 811-12. “In der gesamten Natur alle elastischen Körper auf einen Stoß oder Strich (uns hörbar oder minder hörbar) ihr *Inneres*, d. i. ihre erregten und sich wieder herstellenden Kräfte zu *erkennen geben*. Dies nennen wir *Schall*, und feiner erregt, *Klang*, Klang, der jede ähnliche Organisation in gleiche Schwingung versetzt, und bei empfindenden Wesen eine analoge Empfindung wirkt.” My translations.

<sup>227</sup> Herder, “Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele,” DKV 4: 330-31. “Was wir wissen, wissen wir nur aus Analogie, von der Kreatur zu uns und von uns zum Schöpfer.” My translation. This extraordinary passage continues: “Soll ich also dem nicht trauen, der mich in diesen Kreis von Empfindungen und Ähnlichkeit setzte, mir keinen andern Schlüssel, in das Innere der Dinge einzudringen, gab, als mein Gepräge oder vielmehr das wiederglänzende Bild seines in meinem Geiste; wem soll ich denn trauen und glauben? [...] Ich schäme mich nicht, an den Brüsten dieser großen Mutter Natur nur als ein Kind zu saugen, laufe nach Bildern, nach Ähnlichkeiten, nach Gesetzen der Übereinstimmung zu Einem, weil ich kein andres Spiel meiner denkenden Kräfte (wenn ja gedacht werden muß) kenne[.]”

<sup>228</sup> Hans Georg Kemper, “Herders Konzept einer Mythopoesie und Goethes ‘Ganymed’,” 55. “Die beim Symbol erforderliche analogische Verweisbarkeit aller Sachen in der Schöpfung aufeinander.” My translation.

<sup>229</sup> Herder, “Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts,” DKV 5: 251. “Evidenz und Gewißheit muß in den *Sachen* liegen, oder sie liegt nirgends: [...] sie muß also im *ganzen, unzerstückten, tiefen Gefühl der Sachen* liegen, oder sie liegt Nirgends.” My translation.

*inner compulsion* [*Eindränge*].<sup>230</sup> Herder's dynamic, robustly metaphysical conception of analogia holds that divine reality is truly present in and through the images, sounds, and things of creation. This view is foundational for both Herder's and, as we shall see still more fully in the next chapter, Goethe's understandings of the natural symbol.

To conclude our discussion of "Maifest," we have seen that its symbolic language never reduces the image to mere sentiment; the poem never undermines it through epistemic concerns; and hence it is never reducible to the isolated gaze of the punctual ego. Any critical reading along these lines implies a hermeneutics of suspicion imposing ontological equivocation on things and images that, when received in kind (in wonder and charity), naturally yet only gradually and indirectly unfold their interior form through the transcendent power (*Kraft*) of *caritas*. Hence, Goethe's subtle use of language in this poem—above his manifold "wie-clauses"—never equivocates by suspending the ontological presence of the divine idea in the manner of Kantian aesthetics. Rather, the imagery of "Maifest" yields symbolic insight into the life-giving source of creation in divine charity, as obliquely emerges in and through nature by way of analogia. The poem's litany of similes ought to be viewed, therefore, as natural symbols with an analogic gestalt irreducible to logical or rhetorical form. Neither grounded on a univocal or equivocal ontology, the immanent forms and formation of love in "Maifest" indicate the symbolic images's co-active dependence on the transcendent and the finite poet; for, as we have seen, plant, animal, and human nature can only be experienced as intuitively significant through the poet's analogic communication the divine act of creation. As Hamann had felicitously put the issue, creation is itself a speech "to the creature through the

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 253. "So lehret Gott! Durch *Bilder! Sachen! Begebenheiten!* die ganze *Natur* – mit welcher *Kraft* und *Eindränge!*" My translation. Kemper contends in "Herders Konzept einer Mythopoesie und Goethes 'Ganymed'" that Goethe would likely have been aware of the ideas addressed in this work on such topics as Genesis, the Psalms, and symbolism from the Straßburg encounter; and he had definitely read *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* by June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1774 (66).

creature.”<sup>231</sup> In sum, we have seen that by drawing on the forms of the *imago Dei* and Aristotelian traditions of *Bildung*, Goethe’s early poetry recovers the inner form of nature from the formalism of neoclassical aesthetics and, furthermore, from the nominalism of Enlightenment culture. The interiorized images of nature—which are symbols *of* the world instead of statements *about* it—in “Maifest” and “Ganymed” consequently give us “new songs.” Particularly in the context of late eighteenth-century German culture, they are highly original expressions of the source of existence: they are living images that resound with, in, and through divine life and love, thus filling those with ears to hear with spring’s exuberant spirit and disclosing its source in Christian *caritas*.

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<sup>231</sup> Hamann, *Johann Georg Hamann Sämtliche Werke, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, 204.

## GOETHEAN SYMBOLISM'S RECOVERY OF THE ANALOGY OF BEING

### Introduction

Goethe's expressivist poetry from the 1770s inaugurates an era of literature often associated with the romantic style: namely, its probing search for the absolute—the one and all (*hen kai pan*)—in nature and art.<sup>232</sup> If the *Sesenheimer Lieder* were harbingers of a new sense of poetry as symbolic expression of the divine logos through creation, this (in origins Christian-Neoplatonic) understanding of poetics and physics came to fruition in Goethe's classical prose and poems on morphology—the descriptive science of the logos' transformations in the realm of appearances. Alongside Herder's theoretical writings, Goethe's early poetry inspired a generation of “romantics” to overcome the dualist semiotics, epistemologies, and sciences of the Enlightenment in search of the all-unifying source of things.<sup>233</sup> According to Nicholas Halmi's genealogy of the “romantic” symbol, however, it was not Herder's recovery of Christian-Neoplatonism but the romantic sciences (Blumenbach, Kiehmeyer, et al.) and, especially, the emergence of *Naturphilosophie* (Schelling) that had led Goethe to conceive of symbolism (in stark contrast to Kant's account) as “founded not on an analogy in the subject's mind, but on the properties in objects themselves.”<sup>234</sup> By empirically describing the interior, formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*) perpetuating the generation, nutrition, and reproduction of nature and unifying organic and inorganic matter, romantic science gave credence to

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<sup>232</sup> Wellbery, *The Specular Moment*, 7.

<sup>233</sup> See Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, 17, 64.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

two premises that, Halmi contends, underpin the “romantic” symbol: 1) that “the absolute and the universe are one and the same, consisting in a single, self-sufficient, infinite substance,” and 2) that “this substance in its totality is an organism.”<sup>235</sup> Halmi thus situates the symbol’s ontological status within the immanent frame established by Spinoza’s materialist, monist ontology (*deus sive natura*) and Leibnizean vitalism (*vis viva*), claiming that Goethe and the *Naturphilosophen* rejected “analogically for ontologically based symbolism.” If, Halmi insists, the romantics conceived of “nature as a living unity whose inherent tendency towards complexity was governed by law, the principle of development, and form, the pattern of development,” this logos does not unfold through the analogia but based on a univocal ontology.<sup>236</sup> In the following, we shall see that Halmi’s genealogy of “the romantic symbol” obscures both the legacy of the imago Dei and the increasing importance of Neoplatonism for Goethean morphology and poetics. This chapter argues that even after Goethe fully distances himself from Pietism and Herder during his years in Weimar, his understanding of symbol still accords with the Christian-Neoplatonic principle of analogia.

### **Analogia and Symbol in Goethe’s Classical Period**

In repudiating Kantian symbolism, expressivist poetics also jettisoned the “reflexive idea” underpinning Kantian aesthetics and ethics as an abstraction basing in concepts and arbitrary sign-systems. What Herder and Goethe favored instead was a philosophical aesthetics grounding in symbolic images (*logoi*) grasped as the real presentation of divine reason (*logos*), goodness, and life. While, as Halmi observes, the expressivist “corrective to Kant’s treatment of symbolism as analogically based representation” was a version of “epistemological realism,” their realism never

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 93.



disavowed the ancient maxim that knowing (noësis) presupposes analogic participation in the thing known.<sup>237</sup> This commitment to Christian-Neoplatonism's hermeneutic basis in analogia is everywhere evident in Goethe's works, especially after his Italian journey in 1776–78. Consider, for instance, his allusion to Plotinus' *Enneads* in this 1805 epigram, which was eventually placed in the introduction to his *Farbenlehre* (1810):

Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,  
Die Sonne könnte es nie erblicken;  
Läg nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,  
Wie könnte uns Göttliches entzücken?<sup>238</sup>

The natural symbols of “Maifest”—the sun and the eye—reappear within this lyric, this time with explicit reference to the divine; and they do so precisely in foregrounding the image's analogic structure. As Goethe remarks in his study of light, “here we recall the old school of Ionia, which always reiterated with such great significance: like is only known by like.”<sup>239</sup> Just as humanity perceives light through the eye's likeness to the sun, so we know the divine logos interior to nature and language through our likeness to it—namely, as thinking animals (*zoon logon ekon*) made in the deity's image. Echoing Herder's discussion in *Älteste Urkunde* of the divine “language of light” (*Lichtsprache*) expressed through creation—“the finest that a person could grasp, language from the throne of God”—Goethe's epigram also resonates with Genesis 1:3 (“And God said, ‘Let there be Light.’”) and, therefore, the imago Dei tradition.<sup>240</sup> For another example of Goethe's recovery of Christian-

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>238</sup> Goethe, *Zahmen Xenien III*, GHA 1: 367. See also Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 1.7.9. trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1969).

<sup>239</sup> GHA 1: 730: “Hierbei erinnern wir uns der alten ionischen Schule, welche mit so großer Bedeutsamkeit immer wiederholte: nur von Gleichem werde Gleiches erkannt.” My translation. Goethe first published this poem in the introduction to his *Farbenlehre* (1810). The poem was conceived as a poetic translation of the “Worte eines alten Mystikers, die wir in deutschen Reimen folgendermaßen ausdrücken möchten [...]” (GHA 1: 730). Trunz affirms that “Der alte Mystiker, auf den Goethe anspielt, ist Plotin” (ibid).

<sup>240</sup> Herder, “Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts,” DKV, 5: 252. “Die feinste, die ein Mensch fassen konnte, Sprache vom Throne Gottes.” My translation. The passage continues: “Sei Licht! und's war Licht! da steht mit einmal der Tempel

Neoplatonic metaphysics, consider the concluding chant of the *chorus mysticus* in *Faust II*, which begins with the verses, “Alles Vergängliche/ Ist nur ein Gleichnis;/ Das Unzulängliche,/ Hier wird’s Ereignis.”<sup>241</sup> After Faust’s apparent redemption through his encounter with the Virgin Mary, the choir indicates the provisional image-quality of existence as “likeness” or “allegory” (*Gleichnis*) that, despite its essential impoverishment, discloses “the indescribable” (*Unbeschreibliche*): the deity in its transcendent difference.

As Balthasar has observed, “analogy” may be regarded as “the final formula of Goethe’s worldview.”<sup>242</sup> Conclusive evidence of this lifelong commitment to the principle of analogia underpinning Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics comes in Goethe’s thesis from the posthumously published *Maximen und Reflexionen* (1833) that,

Every existing thing is an *analogon* of everything else in existence; for this reason, being always appears to us as simultaneously disparate and related. If one adheres too much to the principle of analogy, everything collapses into identity; yet if one dispenses with it entirely, everything scatters into infinity. Observation stagnates in both cases: either as hyper-alive [*überlebendig*] or dead.<sup>243</sup>

This passage suggests that Goethe was aware of the necessity of preserving the “greater difference” characterizing the analogic interval between the image and its timeless source. If only unwittingly, Goethe’s thesis recovers the ancient understanding of the *analogia entis* as articulated by the Fourth Lateran Council. Thus, the principle of analogia buttressing Goethe’s sense of symbolic participation in the transcendent implies a relation of identity-in-difference that neither collapses meaning and

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der Schöpfung eröffnet: durchs *Medium dieser Sprache* wölbt sich Himmel und Erde: die *Sonne kommt: siehst Alles, Alles! dich selbst* [...].“ Genesis 1:3 (RSVCE). See also LUTH: “Es werde Licht.”

<sup>241</sup> GHA 3: 364. The chant concludes with these lines: “Das Unbeschreibliche,/ Hier ist’s getan;/ Das Ewig-Weibliche/ Zieht uns hinan.”

<sup>242</sup> Balthasar, *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele*, 437. My translation.

<sup>243</sup> Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, GHA 12: 368. “Jedes Existierende ist ein Analogon alles Existierenden; daher erscheint uns das Dasein immer zu gleicher Zeit gesondert und verknüpft. Folgt man der Analogie zu sehr, so fällt alles identisch zusammen; meidet man sie, so zerstreut sich alles ins Unendliche. In beiden Fällen stagniert die Betrachtung, einmal als überlebendig, das andere Mal als getötet.” My translation.

being into univocal identity nor scatters them into sheer heterogeneity on the basis of an equivocal ontology. As the poet observes in another of his reflections, analogia has “the advantage that it neither concludes [*abschließen*] nor seeks to secure what is final.”<sup>244</sup> Again, this crucial grasp the transcendent difference characterizing the being of things underlies Goethe’s understanding of symbolic presence. While finite nature bears the deity’s form and final cause within it, the end (*telos*) is wholly irreducible to nature’s immanent being. Thus, the indwelling God remains fully supernatural, despite his analogic presence within all things. It follows that Goethean symbolism must not be conceived as an idolatrous copy of the transcendent but as a strictly pro-visional image. This is because it only ever obliquely—or, to use the language of Christian-Neoplatonism—apophatically presents the absolute. Yet apophatic vision (*Anschauung*) does not imply that the deity is, in the end, an airy nothing. Hence Goethe’s contention that “true symbolism may be found where the part represents the whole, not as a dream or shadow, but rather as the vivid, instantaneous revelation of the unfathomable [*lebendig- Augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen*].”<sup>245</sup> For Goethe, the transcendent deity is the deepest life of things as disclosed, via analogia, through the symbolic image.

Because of its basis in the principle of analogia, the Goethean symbol reflects the timeless *eidos* of nature that, notwithstanding its concrete presence, differs from (without strictly opposing) the real. This irreducible difference of the idea comes through in many of the *Maximen und Reflexionen* concerning symbolism, especially those distinguishing it from the Enlightenment conception of allegory. For instance, Goethe explains that “allegory transforms appearance into a

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 368. ““Den Vorteil, daß sie nicht abschließt und eigentlich nichts Letztes will.” My translation.

<sup>245</sup> Goethe, GHA 12: 471. “Die wahre Symbolik [ist] wo das Besondere das Allgemeinere repräsentiert, nicht als Traum und Schatten, sondern als lebendig- Augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen.” My translation. Cf. Goethe, GHA 12: 437: “Jede Erscheinung ist zugänglich wie ein Planum inclinatum, das bequem zu ersteigen ist, wenn der hintere Teil schroff und unerreichbar dasteht.”

*concept* and, then, the concept into an image, yet such that the concept is confined within the image and remains readily graspable and expressible by means of the image.”<sup>246</sup> By contrast to Enlightenment allegory, symbolism transforms “the appearance into an *idea* and the idea into an image, yet such that the idea remains infinitely active [*wirksam*] and unattainable and, even if it were expressed in every language, would remain ineffable.”<sup>247</sup> The frequently unacknowledged apophysis of Goethean symbolism clearly chimes with the Augustinian notion of the “*verbum interius*” (the inner Word [logos] of God), which is implicit in yet irreducible to any human tongue.<sup>248</sup> Whereas the allegorical method described by Goethe reduces appearance to a concept that dominates the image and constricts (“*begrenzt*”) its manner of disclosure to mere reference (since it only functions as a sign), the symbolic view of poësis opens appearances to the transcendent. For symbolic imagery obliquely presents (*darstellen*) the phenomenon’s emergent source in an idea (*eidos*) irreducible to the scope of the beholder’s own gaze. And it does so via the ancient metaphysics of analogia, which never constrains the phenomenon’s significance—as opposed to Hegelian or Schellingian naturalism—with conceptual conclusions. Reflecting on what distinguishes Schiller’s from his own poetics, Goethe thus observes that it makes a great difference “whether the poet seeks a particular that corresponds to the universal or beholds the universal within the particular” –

The first method produces allegory, whereby the particular only serves as an example of the universal. The latter corresponds, however, to the true nature of poetry; it expresses a particular without thinking of a universal or directly referring to it. Whoever vividly grasps this particular at once attains the universal without perceiving it, or only after the fact.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid. “Allegorie verwandelt die Erscheinung in einen Begriff, den Begriff in ein Bild, doch so, daß der Begriff im Bilde immer noch begrenzt und vollständig zu halten und zu haben und an demselben auszusprechen sei.” My translation and emphasis.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. “Die Symbolik verwandelt die Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild, und so, daß die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe.” My translation and emphasis.

<sup>248</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De trinitate* 15.5.23,43; *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A (New York: New York City Press, 1991), 433.

<sup>249</sup> Goethe, GHA 12: 471. “Ob der Dichter zum Allgemeinen das Besondere sucht oder im Besondern das Allgemeine schaut Aus jener Art entsteht Allegorie, wo das Besondere nur als Beispiel, als Exempel des Allgemeinen gilt; die letztere

Goethe recognizes that Schiller's aesthetics are reflexively oriented towards universals, whereby the a priori meaning of an image is only ever subjectively imposed upon it. According to this "allegorical" method, meaning never emerges from within the living form of things and images (*logoi*). For the allegorical image merely refers to their meaning in the manner of signs and concept, which necessarily implies, we shall see, an equivocal ontology of presence and absence. Thus, Enlightenment allegory refers to transcendent universal without ever truly depicting (*darstellen*) its presence *in* and *through* the a posteriori description of phenomena. According to Goethe's understanding of *poësis*, by contrast, symbolic imagery does not "refer" to the *eidos* of things through arbitrary signs but places the transcendent before the beholder's eyes. Thus, one must inwardly envision its numinous presence—through imagination, and, ultimately, what the ancients termed contemplation (*theoria*)—to understand the symbolic image. Because of symbolic imagery's difference from Enlightenment allegory, Goethe observes, one cannot decipher or deconstruct it by searching behind the image, "as would a child, which, upon looking in a mirror immediately turns it around in order to see what is on the other side."<sup>250</sup> Symbolism instead requires us to glimpse "the universal" manifest "in the part" through concrete yet pro-visional insights (*Augenblicke*) into the timeless *eidos* of things.

Despite Goethe's important distinction between symbol and allegory, the two terms are not—when rightly understood and utilized—in opposition. As Halmi has astutely observed, "the formation of the romantic concept of the symbol was not crucially dependent on a corresponding

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aber ist eigentlich die Natur der Poesie, sie spricht ein Besonderes aus, ohne ans Allgemeine zu denken oder darauf hinzuweisen. Wer nun dieses Besondere lebendig faßt, erhält zugleich das Allgemeine mit, ohne es gewahr zu werden, oder erst spät." My translation.

<sup>250</sup> Bengt Sørensen, *Symbol und Symbolismus in den ästhetischen Theorien des 18. Jahrhunderts und der deutschen Romantik*, (Copenhagen: Munksgaard 1963), 122.

denigration of allegory.”<sup>251</sup> What Goethe and Herder “objected to was not allegory in general, but allegory as defined and practised in the Enlightenment,” which “epitomized to them all that passed under the name of artificial signs: arbitrary, motivated, discursive, and contextually dependent representation.”<sup>252</sup> In fact, it is only insofar as Goethe grasps the congruity between allegorical and symbolism that the idea’s “greater difference” and, hence, its transcendent significance becomes fully evident. Because it employs a notion of presentation (*Darstellung*) grounding in the analogia entis, the Goethean symbol is, as Daniel Whistler observes, only “partially tautegorical.”<sup>253</sup> Instead of constituting an absolute unity of meaning and being, which would render the symbol wholly self-immanent, the meaning of things allegorically transcends their being by disclosing the idea’s mysterious depths within them.<sup>254</sup> Partially tautegorical, so to speak, partially allegorical, the symbol refers to something irreducibly beyond itself by stressing the greater difference (*major dissimilitudo*) between its being and meaning. As Whistler contends, “‘the romantic symbol’ evokes the ineffable. How? The answer for Goethe, Kant, and others is always—analogy.”<sup>255</sup> Noting that synecdoche (meaning the part’s participation in the whole) and analogy function in tandem to give the romantic symbol its characteristic gestalt, Whistler remarks that,

Analogy mirrors (and is even a result of) the paradoxes that hold between being and meaning when interpreted synecdochically. Analogy is defined by the very dialectic of being and non-being (of identity and difference) which characterizes the partial tautegory of ‘the romantic symbol’. Meaning is being and is more than being, just as the *analogatum* is and is

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<sup>251</sup> Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, 13.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> The term “tautegory” was originally coined by Coleridge and then used differently by Schelling to explain the symbol’s manner of disclosure. The Oxford English Dictionary explains that the word is comprised of the Greek prefix *ταὐτο-* (“the same”) and the stem of “allegory:” *ἡγορος* (“to speak”). < <https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/Entry/387803?redirectedFrom=tautegory#eid>>, visited 1/25/2022.

<sup>254</sup> The OED gives the etymology of allegory as a combination of the Greek prefix *ἄλλο* (“other or differently”) and - *ἡγορος* (“to speak”). < <https://www-oed-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/Entry/5230?rskey=0rHXx9&result=1#eid>>, visited 1/25/2022.

<sup>255</sup> Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language*, 28.

more than the analogous image. Therefore, 'the romantic symbol' is interpreted as evoking the ineffable by means of an operation of analogy.<sup>256</sup>

If Goethe's famous distinction between allegory and symbol came to define the era, a closer examination of his grasp of these modes of lyric speech reveals their similar manner of disclosure (*Seinsweise*) through analogia. As we have seen, Goethe's strongest distinction between these terms holds that the symbol "expresses a particular without thinking of a universal or directly referring to it," whereas Enlightenment allegory functions referentially by means of concepts and arbitrary signs.<sup>257</sup> In his brief essay "Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst" (1797), however, Goethe complicates this dichotomization of symbolic image and sign. For he observes that,

The things presented [*dargestellt*] in [the symbolic] manner appear to stand merely for themselves, yet the depths of their interiorities are nonetheless significant [*bedeutend*]; and this is because of the idea, which always carries a universal along with it. If the symbolic discloses something beyond concrete presentation [*Darstellung*], it will always occur in an indirect manner.<sup>258</sup>

This formulation of symbolic presentation recognizes that it shares the quality of referentiality with allegorical speech. The symbol means (*bedeutet*) something beyond its own being; for it indirectly refers (*deuten*) us outside its own being through apophysis. Insofar as this significant difference appears within the phenomenon's very being ("im Tiefsten bedeutend"), the thing seen becomes a symbolic image of the transcendent. Hence, it discloses the timeless of *eidos* by virtue of its analogic *gestalt*. Based upon this reevaluation of the symbol, Goethe further sharpens its distinction from Enlightenment allegory, observing that "the allegorical differs from the symbolic in that the former

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Goethe, *GHA* 12: 471.

<sup>258</sup> Goethe's essay "Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst" is provided in full in Sørensen, *Symbol und Symbolismus*, (129). "Die auf diese [symbolische] Weise dargestellten Gegenstände scheinen bloß für sich zu stehen und sind doch wieder im Tiefsten bedeutend, und das wegen des Idealen, das immer eine Allgemeinheit mit sich führt. Wenn das Symbolische außer der Darstellung noch etwas bezeugt, so wird es immer auf indirekte Weise geschehen." My translation.

signifies directly, the latter indirectly.”<sup>259</sup> The contrary modes of reference characterizing allegory and symbolism are therefore analogous; each purports to disclose something that differs from the being of the medium of communication (image, symbol, or sign). Because the symbolic image does so indirectly, via analogia, it can present the irreducible significance of the transcendent in its infinite action. By contrast, the arbitrary signs of Enlightenment allegory refer us directly and of necessity to the domineering concept.

In *Truth and Method* (1960), Gadamer recognizes the need to reassess romanticism’s preference for symbolism at the expense of allegory. There he regards the notion of the tautegorical symbol (copy) as “limited by the continued existence of the mythical, allegorical tradition.”<sup>260</sup> If this delimitation is recognized, Gadamer contends, the fixity of the conceptual opposition between “the symbol that has emerged ‘organically,’ and the cold, rational allegory, becomes less certain.”<sup>261</sup> The contrast “between symbol and allegory again becomes relative,” such that we can discern the similarity between them.<sup>262</sup> Recalling the mythical and religious discourses within which the term “symbol” originates, Gadamer observes that “a symbol is the coincidence of sensible appearance and supra-sensible meaning” — <sup>263</sup>

And this coincidence is, like the original significance of the Greek *symbolon* and its continuance in the terminological usage of the various religious denominations, not a subsequent coordination, as in the use of signs, but the union of two things that belong to each other: all symbolism, through which ‘the priesthood reflects higher knowledge’, rests, rather, on that ‘original connection’ between gods and men.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid. “Das Allegorische unterscheidet sich vom Symbolischen, dass dieses indirekt, jenes direkt bezeichnet.” My translation.

<sup>260</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 72.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.



While Gadamer's reflections on the cultic significance of the symbol overlook the crucial distinction between the analogic and equivocal ontologies conditioning the use of symbol amongst "the various religious denominations," he nevertheless recognizes the symbol's transcendent provenance.<sup>265</sup> Thus he echoes de Man's more recent contention that allegorical images should not be opposed to the symbolic in romantic and modernist lyric since "symbol and allegory alike have a common origin" in alterity.<sup>266</sup> Although symbols disclose a concrete unity between the visible and the numinous, they are characterized, Gadamer observes, by a "disproportion of image and meaning."<sup>267</sup> It is on this basis that he regards Goethe's opposition between symbol and allegory as "a special case in the general orientation towards the significant [*das Bedeutende*], which [Goethe] seeks in all appearances."<sup>268</sup> If both manners of signification refer us to the universal idea, it is however only symbolic imagery that depicts (*darstellen*) it as transcendent, infinitely active mystery. For only the symbol discloses the alterity of the thing's meaning *as present*. As evidence, Gadamer recalls Goethe's 1818 letter to Schubart, in which he asserts that "everything that takes place is a symbol, and, in fully representing [*darstellen*] itself, it points towards everything else."<sup>269</sup> According to Gadamer, then, symbol is "*not so much an aesthetic experience* [for Goethe] *as an experience of reality*"—namely an experience grounding (though Gadamer elides this key point) in the *analogia entis*.<sup>270</sup> The letter to

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<sup>265</sup> Gadamer speculates that Goethe's use of the term "symbol" comes "from early Protestant usage," which has the ring of truth given the poet's intense engagement with Pietism in the early 1770s (68).

<sup>266</sup> Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983) 192. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 84. Because it pits the material and noetic orders in absolute opposition (if not symbol and allegory), de Man's understanding of allegory nevertheless embraces dualism. It is telling that de Man posits a likeness between symbolic and allegorical speech only in order to undermine the logic of participation that the symbol presupposes by reducing it to a conventional system of arbitrary signification: i.e. mere allegory.

<sup>267</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 70.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 68. Translation altered.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 68.

Schubart fully accords with the concluding lines of *Faust II*, which assert the allegorical or parabolic nature of reality (“Alles Vergängliche/ Ist nur ein Gleichnis”). Taken together, these assertions suggest Goethe’s grasp of the similarity between symbolic and allegorical reference. For, to speak with Herder, Goethean poetry and science presupposes the “analogic referral of all things in creation to one another,” which is evident in the things and images themselves.<sup>271</sup>

Goethe’s most comprehensive account of the symbol comes from a 1797 letter composed in correspondence with Friedrich Schiller. After visiting his childhood home in Frankfurt, Goethe finds, much to his surprise, that his descriptions of certain objects were characterized by “a kind of sentimentality,” even though he had followed “the composed and cold manner of observation, indeed, of simply beholding [*des bloßen Sehens*]” associated with his scientific writings.<sup>272</sup> He is puzzled by the affective dimension of the phenomena in question, wondering “whence this apparent sentimentality arose, which is all the more conspicuous because I have long since felt no trace of it aside from the poetic mood [*Stimmung*]?” Might it not also be poetic mood?<sup>273</sup> The things that Goethe encounters in Frankfurt—his mother’s recently acquired house on the Rossmarkt and his grandfather’s ruined home, which was destroyed by French artillery in 1795—naturally resist the indifferent gaze of “mere observation.”<sup>274</sup> As Goethe proceeds to suggest, such things have a

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<sup>271</sup> Kemper, “Herders Konzept einer Mythopoesie und Goethes ‘Ganymed,’” 55.

<sup>272</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, “Brief an Friedrich Schiller, 16./17., August 1797,” *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche, Goethe mit Schiller: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche vom 24. Juni 1794 bis zum 9. Mai 1805*, eds., Dieter Borchmeyer et al. (Frankfurt am Main: *Deutscher Klassiker Verlag*, 1998), vol. 31: 388-391; here 388. Henceforth *FA*. “Eine Art Sentimentalität.” “Den ruhigen und kalten Weg des Beobachtens, ja des bloßen Sehens.” My translation.

<sup>273</sup> Goethe, *FA* 4.2: 389. “Woher denn also diese scheinbare Sentimentalität, die mir um so auffallender ist, weil ich seit langer Zeit in meinem Wesen gar keine Spur, außer der poetischen Stimmung, empfunden habe. Möchte nicht also hier selbst poetische Stimmung sein?” My translation.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

symbolic quality that, in total contrast to Descartes' view of empirical phenomena as intrinsically valueless *res existensa*, implicates the observer body and soul within their meaningful presence:

I have therefore given careful consideration to the things that arouse such an effect and noticed, to my astonishment, that they are actually symbolic; that is, as I hardly need say, they are eminent cases characterized by their variety, which stand as representatives for many others; contain a certain totality within themselves; require a certain succession; excite similar and diverse ideas in my spirit; and thus, from within and without, make a certain claim to unity and universality.<sup>275</sup>

The things encountered in Frankfurt thwart any outright distinction between nature and art.

Although the phenomena in question are cultural artifacts, their relationship to Goethe through his mother and grandfather gives them a visceral, affective character. They are, in brief, symbols of life and death reflecting the transcendent whole of existence (*ben kai pan*).

The formal characteristics of the symbol listed here were already evident in the images of “Maifest.” Goethe first notes the symbol’s “eminence” among the variety of things that it represents; this quality was manifest in the sunshine’s anticipation of the maiden’s glance. Before her gaze had ever appeared in the poem, it was analogically present in the light of the sun. The second quality of the symbol emphasized here is its organic form as a “certain totality in [itself],” which recalls the beloved’s eyes. “Unlike the [mere] sign or allegory,” Whistler observes, a symbol’s “referent is not [wholly] external to it;” symbols are rather parts of the whole of nature (*kosmos*); thus they resemble an organism bearing nature’s laws within itself.<sup>276</sup> As intimated, however, by Goethe’s

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<sup>275</sup> Goethe, FA 4.2: 389. “Ich habe daher die Gegenstände, die einen solchen Effect hervorbringen, genau betrachtet und zu meiner Verwunderung bemerkt daß sie eigentlich symbolisch sind, das heißt, wie ich kaum zu sagen brauche, es sind eminente Fälle, die, in einer charakteristischen Mannigfaltigkeit, als Repräsentanten von vielen andern dastehen, eine gewisse Totalität in sich schließen, eine gewisse Reihe fordern, ähnliches und fremdes in meinem Geiste aufregen und so von außen wie von innen an eine gewisse Einheit und Allheit Anspruch machen.“ My translation.

<sup>276</sup> Whistler, *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language* calls this character of the symbol “heautonomy,” borrowing from Kant’s use of the term in the third *Critique*. “‘Heautonomy’ is a term Kant employs in the third Kritik to designate a form of autonomous judgement that legislates only to itself. While a merely autonomous being governs itself with a law that need not be peculiar to itself (like the categorical imperative, for example, which applies to all rational beings), a ‘heautonomous’ being governs itself by means of a law specific to itself. The term was later appropriated by Schiller, where it becomes central to his aesthetics—indeed, it is the basic property of beauty” (15). However, Whistler acknowledges that many terms would suffice to describe this character of the symbol; “one such name,” he observes, “is organicism.” (ibid.).

verbal tic (“eine *gewisse* [...] eine *gewisse* [...] eine *gewisse*“), which suggests his certitude about the symbol’s gestalt and a “certain” qualification, its synecdochic character is not totalizing. Neither does the part displace the whole in the manner of a copy, nor does the idea of the whole negate the individual being of the part as though it were merely a sign. Goethe’s next remark on the symbol’s successive structure (“eine *gewisse* Reihe fordern”) confirms this insinuation; for it indicates that the symbol only ever pro-visionally discloses the whole.<sup>277</sup> Each symbolic disclosure is bound to be displaced in turn by another aspect of the eidetic thing seen. This quality of successiveness and, hence, transience underscores the symbol’s difference from the whole as a particular aspect of it. Consider how the similarity in “Maifest” between the lark’s “melody” (*Gesang*) and the poet’s “new songs” (*neue Lieder*) intimates the symbol’s pro-visionality: each expresses nature’s source in divine love, although the latter does so more fully as a recapitulation of nature through art and spirit.<sup>278</sup> As Goethe proceeds to observe in the letter to Schiller, symbols “are what a favorable subject is to the *poet*, and a befitting thing is for the *person*,” and “since one cannot give them a *poetic* form, he repeats and realizes [*recapituliert*]” its purpose by giving things “an *ideal* form, one that is *human* in a higher sense, which has been described with a term so often misused—‘sentimental.’”<sup>279</sup> Although the symbol involves the finite act of poësis in the disclosure its inner form and meaning, it is not therefore a mere contrivance. As we have seen, the poet is a “formed former” (Herdt) whose symbolic imagery is irreducible to human making, since it unfolds through the metaphysical

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<sup>277</sup> Cf. Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, GHA 12: 366: “Das Wahre ist gottähnlich: es erscheint nicht unmittelbar, wir müssen es aus seinen Manifestationen erraten.”

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Ibid, 367: “Die wahre Vermittlerin ist die Kunst,” thus suggesting that natural symbols require mediation through human art (because of its analogic and, hence, participatory gestalt) in order to express the fullness of truth.

<sup>279</sup> Goethe, FA 4.2: 389: “Sie sind also, was ein glückliches Sujet dem *Dichter* ist, glückliche Gegenstände für den *Menschen*, und weil man, indem man sie mit sich selbst recapitulirt, ihnen keine *poetische* Form geben kann, so muß man ihnen doch eine *ideale* geben, eine *menschliche* im höhern Sinn, das man auch mit einem so sehr mißbrauchten Ausdruck sentimental nannte[.]“ My translation.

principle of analogia. And, as Herder grasped, it is precisely this irreducibility that makes the poet's image more fully human.

By contrast to Schiller, Goethe does not conceive of the symbol's sentimental character as the domineering projection of finite spirit onto nature or divine reality but insists, instead, that one "cannot give [the symbol] a *poetic* form."<sup>280</sup> What he means by this counterintuitive assertion is that the poet cannot create form in an absolute sense. Rather, the poet's role in creation is, as we have seen, co-active participation. Poësis entails the realization and intensification of nature's pre-given yet not readymade forms. Because the poet creates by *reshaping* and *reimagining* an immanent form whose source and telos ultimately transcends his capacity to express it, his symbolic creations remain essentially pro-visional—that is, transient yet nonetheless revelatory of the essence of things. Although, as remains to be seen in "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," the symbolic phenomenon always discloses its source in the timeless *eidos* from a particular vantage point, the symbol's successiveness never devolves into relativism. This is indicated by Goethe's next remarks in the letter, which stress that the various aspects of the whole disclosed through symbolic imagery are never isolated or purely perspectival.<sup>281</sup> Goethe thus closes his account of the symbol with two crucial observations indicating that its relationship to the idea of the whole is analogic. First, he notes the symbol's capacity to "excite similar and diverse ideas" in the mind of the beholder, thus recalling the Plotinian maxim that one participates in the thing seen by way of analogy. The myriad ideas evoked by the symbol reflect its form as a relationship of identity-in-(greater)-difference; every aspect of the cosmos is "drawn together," as Goethe elsewhere put it, "in the mirror of the spirit."<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Goethe addresses this concern in an interesting fragment from his notebooks on morphology entitled "Probleme" (Goethe, *GHA* 13: 35).

<sup>282</sup> Goethe, *FA* 20: 540: The symbol is "ein im geistigen Spiegel zusammengezogenes Bild[.]" My translation.

As a consequence of the symbol's analogic gestalt, which internally and externally ("von innen und von außen") corresponds to the whole, Goethe attributes to it a "certain unity and universality." His assertion only makes sense, however, on the assumption that it presents (*darstellen*) the unity of the cosmos via analogy; for, as Goethe remarks in his notebooks on plant and animal morphology, the symbol's successive character would otherwise tend towards "formlessness" and "lose itself in the infinite."<sup>283</sup> This echoes his observation in the *Maximen und Reflexionen* that "if one dispenses with [analogy], everything scatters into infinity."<sup>284</sup> Contrary, then, to Halmi's claim that the gestalt of the Goethean symbol is exclusively synecdochic and, therefore, based on a univocal ontology, its organic form is predicated on the analogic relation of identity-in-difference between the beholder, the empirical object, and the eidetic thing seen. As a result, Goethe's notion of symbolic insight emphatically preserves the ontological difference between the finite image and its source in the transcendent.

Writing many years later in "Nachtrag zu Philostrats Gemälde" (1820)—an essay describing an engraving by Diana Scultore representing what Goethe takes to be an image of Luke 22: 55-62 yet might also depict Socrates—the poet addresses the analogic underpinnings of the symbol vis-a-vis its image-quality:

According to our manner of speech, [this image of Peter warming his hands in the court of Pontius Pilot] is a symbol. The natural fire is depicted [*vorge stellt*]; only it is intensely drawn together [*ins Enge gezogen*] to achieve an artistic end; and we rightly call such representations [*Vorstellungen*] symbolic. It is the thing [*Sache*] without being the thing, and yet it is the thing; it is an image [*Bild*] drawn together in the mirror of the spirit, and yet it is identical to the objective thing [*Gegenstand*].<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Goethe, "Probleme," GHA 13: 35: "Die Idee der Metamorphose ist eine höchst ehrwürdige, aber zugleich höchst gefährliche Gabe von oben. Sie führt ins Formlose, zerstört das Wissen, löst es auf. Sie ist gleich der vis centrifuga und würde sich ins Unendliche verlieren, wäre ihr nicht ein Gegengewicht zugegeben." My translation.

<sup>284</sup> Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, GHA 12: 368.

<sup>285</sup> Goethe, FA 20: 540: "Es ist nach unserem Ausdruck ein Symbol. Das natürliche Feuer wird vorgestellt, nur ins Enge gezogen, zu künstlerischem Zweck, und solche Vorstellungen nennen wir mit recht symbolisch. [...] Es ist die Sache, ohne die Sache zu seyn, und doch die Sache; ein im geistigen Spiegel zusammengezogenes Bild und doch mit dem Gegenstand identisch." My translation. Goethe does not assign a meaning to the Biblical image, but he might have

Echoing Herder's assertion that the symbol's "evidence and certainty must lie in the *things*, or else it lies nowhere," Goethe recognizes the image's source of significance within the thing itself. Yet he also insists—in a manner anticipating Husserl's lectures on phantasy and image consciousness—on the image's ontological distinction from its real and eidetic origins. The symbolic image is the thing seen without *being* the thing in an absolute manner; for instead of replacing the whole or substituting for it in the manner of a copy—that is, strictly by means of synecdoche—the symbol is an image that indirectly presents (*darstellen*) the whole on the basis of analogia. As Goethe had indicated in his *Maximen*, his metaphysics of the symbol fundamentally opposes a univocal ontology: "If one adheres too much to the principle of analogy, everything collapses into identity [...] and observation stagnates."<sup>286</sup> Goethe's notion of the symbol is neither a univocal nor an equivocal entity. The account of symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) given in "Nachtrag zu Philostrats Gemälde," which is perhaps his most incisive, instead foregrounds the fire's image-quality as an analogon of the thing seen: the fire. Thus this symbolic image is laden with meanings obliquely disclosing its numinous source of significance: the Empyrion, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the fires of Hell, all of which are intimated in Peter-Socrates' moment of trial.

As we shall see in the next section's discussion of "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," the Goethean symbol's basis in the metaphysical principle of analogia allows it to present the transcendent law (logos) of nature. The symbolic plant must not be construed as something notional

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observed how the fire intimates both heaven (perhaps foreshadowing the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost) and Hell in Peter's moment of trial. Goethe simply observes that the interpretation of the scene provided in Bartsch's *Le peintre graveur* (1802) as a young woman at table with Socrates and another philosopher, whom she astounds with the force of her argumentations also holds in light of his own. He contends that, although the Biblical episode "could not have been more meaningfully presented [*bedeutend dargestellt*]," the painting is an example of "true symbolism," specifically because of its openness to an irreducible meaning. It does not finally matter, Goethe insists, "whether Peter or Socrates was intended." It seems that both figures are represented in a moment of crisis: namely conversion to or rejection of truth through the fire of the young woman's speech.

<sup>286</sup> Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, GHA 12: 368.

or abstract but, on the contrary, is essentially bound up with visibility. It is the essence of the symbolic image to pro-visionally unveil significance and form emerging into visibility in the things which it presents (*darstellen*). In the following, we shall see that as this dynamic act of self-disclosure unfolds in the symbolic plant, via analogia, the poet's "sentimental" (in the Goethean sense) perception of plant-life transforms into an insight irreducible to the scope of the poet's own gaze. For it depicts the transcendent force of love (*Amor*) at work in plant formation (*Bildung*), in his own observations and lyric expressions, and in the beloved's education (*Bildung*). In brief, we behold the seer undergoing transformation into the thing seen and the lover and the beloved transforming into their numinous source in love. Although the symbols of this poem disclose a phenomenon on the order of an Aristotelian entelechy—the *Urpflanze*, the universal type of plants—they do so in a manner transcending univocal being. For, this concrete idea points beyond nature to a final cause in the transcendent yet nonetheless immanent deity guiding the plant's, the beholder's, and the beloved's actions. A summary presentation of Goethe's understanding of the natural symbol, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" exemplifies early romantic philosophy's retrieval of an onto-teleological conception of form—even as it recovers a view of nature's interiority commensurate with the imago Dei tradition: namely, as the force of divine self-expression.

### **The Deity's Analogic Presence in "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen"**

Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen (1798)

Dich verwirret, Geliebte, die tausendfältige Mischung  
 Dieses Blumengewühls über dem Garten umher;  
 Viele Namen hörst du an, und immer verdrängt  
 Mit barbarischem Klang einer den andern im Ohr.  
 Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleicht der andern;  
 Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz,  
 Auf ein heiliges Rätsel. O könnt ich dir, liebliche Freundin,  
 Überliefern sogleich glücklich das lösende Wort!  
 Werdend betrachte sie nun, wie nach und nach sich die Pflanze,  
 Stufenweise geführt, bildet zu Blüten und Frucht.

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Aus dem Samen entwickelt sie sich, sobald ihn der Erde  
 Stille befruchtender Schoß hold in das Leben entläßt,  
 Und dem Reize des Lichts, des heiligen, ewig bewegten,  
 Gleich den zärtesten Bau keimender Blätter empfiehlt.  
 Einfach schief in dem Samen die Kraft; ein beginnendes Vorbild  
 Lag, verschlossen in sich, unter die Hülle gebeugt,  
 Blatt und Wurzel und Keim, nur halb geformt und farblos;  
 Trocken erhält so der Kern ruhiges Leben bewahrt,  
 Quillet strebend empor, sich milder Feuchte vertrauend,  
 Und erhebt sich sogleich aus der umgebenden Nacht. 20  
 Aber einfach bleibt die Gestalt der ersten Erscheinung;  
 Und so bezeichnet sich auch unter den Pflanzen das Kind.  
 Gleich darauf ein folgender Trieb, sich erhebend, erneuet,  
 Knoten auf Knoten getürmt, immer das erste Gebild.  
 Zwar nicht immer das gleiche; denn mannigfaltig erzeugt sich,  
 Ausgebildet, du siehst's, immer das folgende Blatt,  
 Ausgedehnter, gekerbter, getrennter in Spitzen und Teile,  
 Die verwachsen vorher ruhten im untern Organ.  
 Und so erreicht es zuerst die höchst bestimmte Vollendung,  
 Die bei manchem Geschlecht dich zum Erstaunen bewegt. 30  
 Viel gerippt und gezackt, auf mastig strotzender Fläche,  
 Scheinet die Fülle des Triebs frei und unendlich zu sein.  
 Doch hier hält die Natur, mit mächtigen Händen, die Bildung  
 An und lenket sie sanft in das Vollkommnere hin.  
 Mäßiger leitet sie nun den Saft, verengt die Gefäße,  
 Und gleich zeigt die Gestalt zärtere Wirkungen an.  
 Stille zieht sich der Trieb der strebenden Ränder zurücke,  
 Und die Rippe des Stiels bildet sich völliger aus.  
 Blattlos aber und schnell erhebt sich der zärtere Stengel,  
 Und ein Wundergebild zieht den Betrachtenden an. 40  
 Rings im Kreise stellet sich nun, gezählet und ohne  
 Zahl, das kleinere Blatt neben dem ähnlichen hin.  
 Um die Achse gedrängt, entscheidet der bergende Kelch sich,  
 Der zur höchsten Gestalt farbige Kronen entläßt.  
 Also prangt die Natur in hoher, voller Erscheinung,  
 Und sie zeigt, gereiht, Glieder an Glieder gestuft.  
 Immer staunst du aufs neue, sobald sich am Stengel die Blume  
 Über dem schlanken Gerüst wechselnder Blätter bewegt.  
 Aber die Herrlichkeit wird des neuen Schaffens Verkündung.  
 Ja, das farbige Blatt fühlet die göttliche Hand, 50  
 Und zusammen zieht es sich schnell; die zärtesten Formen,  
 Zwiefach streben sie vor, sich zu vereinen bestimmt.  
 Traulich stehen sie nun, die holden Paare, beisammen,  
 Zahlreich ordnen sie sich um den geweihten Altar.  
 Hymen schwebet herbei, und herrliche Düfte, gewaltig,  
 Strömen süßen Geruch, alles belebend, umher.  
 Nun vereinzelt schwellen sogleich unzählige Keime,  
 Hold in den Mutterschoß schwellender Früchte gehüllt.

Und hier schließt die Natur den Ring der ewigen Kräfte;  
 Doch ein neuer sogleich fasset den vorigen an, 60  
 Daß die Kette sich fort durch alle Zeiten verlänge  
 Und das Ganze belebt, so wie das Einzelne, sei.  
 Wende nun, o Geliebte, den Blick zum bunten Gewimmel,  
 Das verwirrend nicht mehr sich vor dem Geiste bewegt.  
 Jede Pflanze verkündet dir nun die ew'gen Gesetze,  
 Jede Blume, sie spricht lauter und lauter mit dir.  
 Aber entzifferst du hier der Göttin heilige Lettern,  
 Überall siehst du sie dann, auch in verändertem Zug.  
 Kriechend zaudre die Raupe, der Schmetterling eile geschäftig,  
 Bildsam ändre der Mensch selbst die bestimmte Gestalt. 70  
 O gedenke denn auch, wie aus dem Keim der Bekanntschaft  
 Nach und nach in uns holde Gewohnheit entsproß,  
 Freundschaft sich mit Macht aus unserm Innern enthüllte,  
 Und wie Amor zuletzt Blüten und Früchte gezeugt.  
 Denke, wie mannigfach bald die, bald jene Gestalten,  
 Still entfaltend, Natur unsern Gefühlen geliehn!  
 Freue dich auch des heutigen Tags! Die heilige Liebe  
 Strebt zu der höchsten Frucht gleicher Gesinnungen auf,  
 Gleicher Ansicht der Dinge, damit in harmonischem Anschauen  
 Sich verbinde das Paar, finde die höhere Welt.<sup>287</sup>

In the letter to Schiller from 1797, Goethe repeatedly refers to the “sentimental” character of the symbol to persuade his friend of its participatory yet unpremeditated manner of presentation. He implicitly contests Schiller’s use of the term in his 1795 essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, according to which sentimental objects provoke an estranging, “retrospective glimpse of ourselves and of our unnaturalness [*Unnatur*].”<sup>288</sup> Goethe contrarily holds that lyric sentiment recapitulates natural forms by giving them an ideal expression. As a participant in nature, the poet elevates and intensifies its forms by means of the reason and imagination shaping the human spirit. According to Goethe’s letter, nature becomes human “in a higher sense” analogous to Herder’s understanding of humankind’s immanent divinity: namely, through its *likeness* to God. For Goethe, a symbol’s

<sup>287</sup> Goethe, “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen,” GHA 1: 199-201.

<sup>288</sup> Friedrich Schiller, “Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung,” *Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe*, vol. 20, (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger 1962), 416. Henceforth: *NA*. “Rückblick auf uns selbst und die Unnatur in uns.” My translation.

transcendent significance appears organically in the phenomenon through the beholder's imaginative participation in its interior dynamic of self-differentiation and self-identification. This unceasing process of transformation (*Bildung*) yields the symbol's provisional *gestalt*, which Goethean morphology aims to describe. As Goethe's didactic elegy on the metamorphosis of plants consummately demonstrates, the imaginative depictions (*Darstellungen*) of morphological description also aim at transforming the rapt beholder into an image of the timeless *eidos* as he becomes ever more deeply absorbed in its symbolic images.

"Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" precisely depicts this reciprocal, coactive process of growth into the divine light of being through descriptive observation. In the elegy's opening verses, Goethe implores the beloved (and the reader), "Werdend betrachte sie nun, wie nach und nach sich die Pflanze,/ Stufenweise geführt, bildet zu Blüten und Frucht."<sup>289</sup> As Boyle observes of this poem,

throughout [its] story of the growth of the plant, Goethe explicitly or implicitly, by words such as 'moves you to admiration' [...], keeps his reader aware that these stages are being presented, one by one, to an 'observing' person—and aware that, in the same measure, that person's understanding of what she is seeing is growing too.<sup>290</sup>

By discerning the thing's interior law of formation, the beholder realizes (*verwirklichen*) his or her own poetic capacity to recapitulate, understand, and express it. Thus, as Karl Richter remarks, "self-knowledge and knowledge of nature appear to be most intimately wed."<sup>291</sup> As remains to be seen, the symbolic unity of the self and its source in nature depicted through Goethean morphology ultimately discloses the wedding of mind with divine reality. Because this disclosure of the transcendent meaning of the phenomenon unfolds through analogy, it differs from both Aristotle's

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<sup>289</sup> Goethe, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," *GHA* 1: 199.

<sup>290</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, II: 675.

<sup>291</sup> Karl Richter, "Goethes Elegie 'Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen,'" *Gedichte und Interpretationen*, vol. 3: *Klassik und Romantik*, ed. von Wulf Segebrecht, (Stuttgart: Reclam 1984), 159. "Naturerkenntnis und Selbsterkenntnis erscheinen aufs engste verklammert." My translation.

univocal ontology and the equivocal ontology underpinning Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*. Regarding the latter, Boyle observes that “in ‘The Metamorphosis of Plants’ there is no [absolute] division between Nature and freedom such as is found in all the Idealist systems.”<sup>292</sup> Goethe’s poem instead envisions the interior unity of mind and world, in a manner cognate with the early hymns, by means of poetic sentiment. It is specifically the force of love (Goethe names it “Amor”) evoked by natural symbol that weds seer and the thing seen though this poetic yet nonetheless scientific depiction of dei-formation.<sup>293</sup> In so doing, the elegy reveals the symbolic image’s origins in the transcendent law (logos) of love. If only indirectly—namely, through apophasis—the symbolic plant’s development presents the natural law (analogia) common to the lover, the beloved, and the flower. For, Goethe writes, “Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleicht der andern;/ Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz,/ Auf ein heiliges Rätsel. [...]”<sup>294</sup> This holy logic of interior development intimates, in turn, the “mystery of the on High” (*das Geheimnis des Empor*): namely, the transcendent source of significance underlying and shaping the phenomenal realm from within.

Echoing the rehabilitation of interiority in “Maifest” and “Ganymed,” this didactic poem addresses the same phenomenon—the dynamic force of love (*caritas*) operative in nature—yet in a new idiom. Now Goethe does so through the lens of the descriptive science that he had been developing since the early 1790s in Weimar: “morphology.” According to Goethe’s definition of this romantic science, which he first coined in his notebooks in 1796, it bears strong resemblances to Christian-Neoplatonism and twentieth-century phenomenology. For,

Morphology rests on the conviction that everything that is must also manifest and show itself... The inorganic, the vegetable, the animal, the human, all manifests itself, appears as what it is, to our outer and inner sense.

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<sup>292</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 2: 675.

<sup>293</sup> Goethe, “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen,” GHA 1: 199.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

Form is something mobile, that comes into being and passes away. The science of form is the science of transformation. The doctrine of metamorphosis is the key to all of nature's signs.

In linking outer and inner sense through the phenomenon's symbolic manner of "manifestation" (*Seinsweise*), Goethean morphology involves time- and image-consciousness, phantasy, and sentiment in the self-presentation of the timeless *eidos* subtending "nature's signs."<sup>295</sup> Like his early poetics of the natural symbol, this science of transformation rests on Christian-Neoplatonic pre-convictions (*Vorurteile*). For morphology presupposes the beholder's participation in the transcendent being of the phenomenon, which is only ever obliquely presented through analogia. By contrast to Kant's conception of the "intuitional [*anschauende*] faculty of judgement," Goethe's writings on plant morphology contend "that, in beholding the perpetual creativity of nature, we become worthy of spiritual participation in her creations."<sup>296</sup> This seemingly effortless productivity through observation and co-active *poësis* is the effect achieved by Goethe's elegiac verse. Like the lover, the poet-morphologist is spurred "by an interior drive to penetrate [*dringen*] the realm of appearances unto the concrete type [*das Urbildliche*] in order to construct a presentation [*Darstellung*] corresponding to nature."<sup>297</sup> Thus it is that one gives birth to the idea in the flesh: namely, through a participatory (methectic) praxis propelled by *eros* yet, we shall see, at once tempered by *agape*.

Goethe's sense of praxis as co-active participation in the phenomenon shapes the method of morphology. For Goethe, the poetic and scientific treatment of things comes down to recognizing "the foundational truth, whose development is less easily displayed through speculation than in practice: for praxis is the touchstone of that which is received by the spirit and held to be true by the

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<sup>295</sup> See Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 2: 460.

<sup>296</sup> Goethe, "Anschauende Urteilskraft," GHA 13: 30-31. "Daß wir uns, durch das Anschauen einer immer schaffenden Natur, zur geistigen Teilnahme an ihren Produktionen würdig machen." My translation.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 31. "Aus innerem Trieb auf jenes Urbildliche rastlos [*dringen*], um eine naturgemäße Darstellung aufzubauen." My translation.

interior sense.”<sup>298</sup> Only in the order of action can the beholder’s interior vision of truth and his recognition of its participation in the idea’s “infinite activity” be fully realized. The metaphysical principle of analogia conditions the practical method of Goethean morphology. This is evident, for instance, in Goethe’s remarks that “intuition, observation, and reflection lead us closer to [the] mysteries [of nature]. We boldly venture and dare to pursue ideas, we humble ourselves and form conceptions that may be analogous to the transcendent origins [*Uranfängen*].”<sup>299</sup> Goethe recognizes with Kant “that a certain chasm appears to be entrenched between the idea and experience”—namely, the *major dissimilitudo* characterizing the analogia entis. Moreover, he even appeals to Kant’s account in the third *Critique* of the analogic basis of symbolic presentation, however attenuate it may be: “Finally we find that [...] the philosopher may have been right, who contends that no idea fully corresponds to experience yet doubtless acknowledges that the idea and experience can, indeed, must be analogous.”<sup>300</sup> Yet as we shall see with regard to “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen,” for

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<sup>298</sup> Goethe, “Naturphilosophie,” GHA 13: 44. “Das Grundwahre, dessen Entwicklung sich nicht so leicht in der Spekulation als in der Praxis zeigt: denn diese ist der Prüfstein des vom Geist Empfangenen, des von dem innern Sinn für wahr Gehaltenen.” My translation.

<sup>299</sup> Goethe, “Bedenken und Ergebung,” GHA 13: 31: “Anschauung, Betrachtung, Nachdenken führen uns näher an jene Geheimnisse. Wir erdreisten uns und wagen auch Ideen, wir bescheiden uns und bilden Begriffe, die *analog* jenen Uranfängen sein möchten.” My translation and emphasis.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.: “Endlich finden wir, bei redlich fortgesetzten Bemühungen, daß der Philosoph wohl möchte recht haben, welcher behauptet, daß keine Idee der Erfahrung völlig kongruiere, aber wohl zugibt, daß Idee und Erfahrung analog sein können, ja müssen.“ My translation. Contrary, then, to Simmel’s and Cassirer’s accounts of Goethean metaphysics as a version of monism characterized by sheer immanence, which opposes the purported preservation of transcendence by Kant’s dualistic philosophy, both Goethe and Kant attempt to think in terms of identity-in-difference (analogy) with regard to organic and aesthetic phenomena. Although, as we have seen, Kant’s understanding of the symbol’s gestalt reduces analogy to the reflexive act of subjective projection, Gadamer nevertheless praises his “Begriff der symbolischen Darstellung” as “eines der glänzendsten Resultate des kantischen Denkens” (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 81). For it partially recovers “die theologische Wahrheit [...], die sich im Gedanken der *analogia entis* ihr scholastische Gestalt gegeben hat, und hält von Gott die menschlichen Begriffe fern.” Inasmuch as Kant “den Analogiebegriff im besonderen an[wendet], um das Verhältnis des Schönen zum Sittliche-Guten zu beschreiben,” he attempts (however unsuccessfully) to think the unity in still greater difference between the ideas of reason and sensory experience. As Halmi has hinted, “Kant’s unwillingness to dissociate morality from sensibility altogether” and his appropriation of an ontologically impoverished version of the analogy between beauty and goodness, the phenomenal and noumenal orders, retrieves the apophaticism of Christian-Neoplatonic philosophy lost during early modernity and the Enlightenment (Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, 52). For “at issue in Kant’s conceptions of the sublime and the beautiful alike is, finally, less the inferiority of the senses to reason than the inadequacy of discursive representation. That both kinds of aesthetic experience [the beautiful and the sublime], notwithstanding their contrast to one another, are deemed to be symbolic of morality is due to their very lack of discursiveness: that is, the absence of a conceptualizable correspondence between the

Goethe, the greater difference through which the timeless *eidos* is analogically manifest in the realm of phenomena in no way undermines the idea's real presence.

Like "Maifest" and "Ganymed," Goethe's elegy on plant formation develops the analogy between finite acts of *poësis* in nature and the divine idea's "infinite activity." Hence, similar to the natural symbols of the early love poetry, this analogy unfolds through the participatory (*methectic*) process of *Bildung*—yet now as observed by the morphologist. The elegy's novelty thus lies in its fusion of the love poem with science. If it similarly weds nature, sentiment, and reason (*logos*), it does so far more explicitly than had the early hymns. A didactic poem formally influenced by Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) but altogether opposing its Epicurean doctrine, Goethe's elegy was conceived as a means of demonstrating the essential unity of poetry and morphology. Goethe's discovery of the "Urphänomen"—the numinous form or *logos* grounding all appearance—had convinced him of the symbolic imagination's role in the disclosure of final things.<sup>301</sup> More akin in content, then, to Barthold Brockes' descriptive poems (*Beschreibgedichte*) from his *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* (1748) than to *De rerum natura*, Goethe's elegy attempts to overcome the Enlightenment sciences' partial perspective on nature. By describing the idea's infinite activity within the phenomenon, Goethean science specifically counters the Enlightenment reduction of appearances to efficient causation, which had jettisoned formal and final causes along with nature's

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aesthetic object and the rational idea or ideas with which that object may ultimately be associated." Although Halmi repeatedly and, it must be added, unjustifiably asserts that the romantic and Christian-Neoplatonic understandings of the symbol have nothing in common, both Kant's and Goethe's notions of symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) entail the apophatic moment of indirect reference to the idea in its transcendent difference associated with St. Dionysius' *via negationis* (cf. *ibid.* 16: whereas St. Dionysius "and his successors had defined the relation between the image and its referent as one of dissimilarity, the romantics defined it as one of partialness: the one is purportedly purely synecdochical and the other analogic.") In brief, Kant and Goethe both recover the Scholastic doctrine of the *analogia entis*, even if unwittingly; for, by preserving the *chorismos* between experience and the idea, they conceive of the symbol's analogic gestalt in terms of identity in still greater difference. This echoes St. Dionysius' metaphysics, which ultimately influenced the Fourth Lateran Council's (1215) formulation of the relationship between God and creation: "For between the Creator and the creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them" (T.J. White, *The Analogy of Being*, 5).

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 2: 598.

likeness to divine and human spirit. In so doing, it countervails the looming fissure between the sciences and arts evinced in Schiller's "sentimental" view of the poetic image as essentially alienated from nature. Goethean morphology thus attempts, as Brockes' verse had exquisitely put it, "die Unempfindlichkeiten/ Der Gewohnheit auszureuten,/ Daß wir, wie sonst nicht geschehn,/ Sehen moegen, was wir sehn."<sup>302</sup> A remark by Kemper on Brockes' poetics of vision holds equally Goethe: it is by cultivating "the faculties of perception" and imagination that each "trains" (*einüben*) the reader to grasp the logic of "nature's aesthetic" and, in so doing, to see its transcendent meaning.<sup>303</sup> Ulrich Kittstein makes a similar observation about the similitude between Brockes' theological aesthetics and Goethe's elegy on plant formation, noting how the poem "means 'observation' in a twofold sense: an intensive vision [*Anschauen*] of nature is accompanied by the spiritual penetration [*Durchdringung*] of its deeper lawfulness, in which a divine order reveals itself."<sup>304</sup> It is, we shall see, the divine law of love (*caritas*) pervading the cosmos that guides the processes of plant formation, intellectual intuition, and erotic education.

According to Goethe's delicately ironic account of the didactic elegy's genesis, he was called to defend his morphological science of plants from some skeptical friends, including his future wife, Christiana Vulpius. For she had opined that "plants and flowers ought to be distinguished by form, color, and aroma; but these qualities now vanished [due to the scientific perspective] in an abstract

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<sup>302</sup> Barthold Brockes, *Physikalische und moralische Gedanken über die drey Reiche der Natur, nebst seinen übrigen nachgelassenen Gedichten, als des Irdischen Vergnügens in Gott*, vol. 9 (Hamburg: Grund, 1748), 3. "To eradicate the insensitivity of habituation, that, as would otherwise not occur, we may see what there truly is to see." My translation.

<sup>303</sup> Hans-Georg Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Aufklärung*, vol. 5/2 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1991), 115. "Mit solcher Schulung der Wahrnehmungsfähigkeit also in die 'Naturästhetik' einzuüben." My translation.

<sup>304</sup> Ulrich Kittstein, *Deutsche Naturlyrik: Ihre Geschichte in Einzelanalysen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 94. "Wie bei [...] Brockes geht es um eine ‚Betrachtung‘ im doppelten Sinne: Das intensive Anschauen der Natur wird begleitet von einer geistigen Durchdringung ihrer tieferen Gesetzmäßigkeiten, in denen sich wiederum eine göttliche Ordnung offenbart." My translation.



schema.”<sup>305</sup> In response, Goethe observes that the misprision that science is necessarily abstract arises only insofar as modernity has forgotten “that science develops from poetry.”<sup>306</sup> Hence it was to correct this common misunderstanding that he endeavored to demonstrate the shared sense of symbolism underpinning scientific description and the lyric image. According to Goethe, science and poetry “could meet again to the advantage of both and in an elevated position”—namely, we shall see, through their reciprocal support in presenting the transcendent meaning of things. To put the matter somewhat differently, poetry and science can become a kind of natural theology. As was the case for Brockes, who had “thoroughly dealt with and disputed the mechanical-deterministic explanation of the plant’s process of growth,” a principle motive of Goethe’s elegy was his own resolutely “anti-Cartesian conviction, that bodies ‘verklaeret, geistig werden koennen’ [*can be transfigured into spirit*].”<sup>307</sup> This chimes with Kittstein’s observation that “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen” evinces a chiastic polarization of matter and spirit, nature and culture: for if, at the elegy’s conclusion, “an interhuman relationship is illustrated through phenomena from the vegetative sphere, the middle of the poem conversely [depicts] the development of the plant with images drawn from the world of human beings.”<sup>308</sup> Furthermore, we shall see how the elegy’s polar intensifications (*Steigerungen*) of matter and spirit yield images of the divine idea’s co-action in plant formation. This lyric depiction of the plant’s interior law of development thus yields, via the

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<sup>305</sup> Goethe, GHA 1: 616. “Pflanzen und Blumen sollten sich durch Gestalt, Farbe, Geruch auszeichnen, nun verschwanden sie aber zu einem gespensterhaften Schemen.” My translation.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. “Daß Wissenschaft sich aus Poesie entwickelt.” “Beide sich zu beiderseitigem Vorteil auf höher Stelle gar wohl wieder begegnen könnten.” My translations.

<sup>307</sup> Kemper, *Deutsche Lyrik der frühen Aufklärung*, 117-119, 121. “Sich ausführlich mit der mechanistisch-deterministischen Erklärung des Wachstumsprozesses der Pflanzen auseinandersetzt.” “Die anti-cartesianische Überzeugung, daß die Körper ‘verklaeret, geistig werden koennen.’” My translations.

<sup>308</sup> Kittstein, *Deutsche Naturlyrik*, 95. “Wird [am Ende des Gedichts] ein zwischenmenschliches Verhältnis unter Rückgriff auf Phänomene der vegetativen Sphäre veranschaulicht, so hat der Mittelteil des Gedichts [...] gerade umgekehrt den Werdegang der Pflanze mit Metaphern aus der Menschenwelt illustriert.” My translation.

principle of analogia, the transformation of the plant, the beholder, and the beloved into their inmost source in love (*caritas*). As Kittstein observes, for Goethe (like Brockes before him), observing nature becomes a quasi-“sacramental act of unification with the numinous” origins of creation.<sup>309</sup>

Like the early poems from Sessenheim, the imagery of “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen” is irreducible to the scope of the poet’s own gaze. It gradually unveils the divine law shaping nature and the beholder from within through its attentive observation of the thing seen. As before, this necessarily unfolds in dialogue with another, who radically transcends the bourns of ego. This poem thus contrasts with the “sentimental” mood of Schiller’s didactic elegy from 1795, “Der Spaziergang,” which unfolds as a series of monologic reflections on nature.<sup>310</sup> Hence, Goethe repudiates the Schillerian ego’s essentially elegiac disposition, according to which “nature and the idea are objects of grief [*Trauer*],” since nature has purportedly been “lost” for the modern insofar as the divine idea infusing it has become forever “unattainable.”<sup>311</sup> Instead of writing an alienated

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid. “Sakramentaler Akt der Vereinigung mit dem Numinosen.” My translation.

<sup>310</sup> Schiller, “Der Spaziergang,” NA: 2.1, 308-314. Although verses 9-12 of “Der Spaziergang” describe the lyric persona’s purportedly “salvific” encounter with nature after long hours of study in the confines of his room (“Gefängnis”) and thus chimes in certain respects with Goethe’s nature lyric; however, the language here—and especially in the poem’s subsequent development—nevertheless evince Schiller’s Kantian pre-convictions. The following lines from Schiller’s elegy recall Goethe’s “naïve” sensibility: “Deiner Lüfte balsamischer Strom durchrinnt mich erquickend,/ Und den durstigen Blick labt das energische Licht./ Kräftig auf blühender Au erglänzen die wechselnden Farben,/ Aber der reizende Streit löset in Anmut sich auf.” It is especially the Schillerian understanding of “grace” (*Anmut*) from his essay “Anmut und Würde” as „eine Schönheit, die nicht von Natur gegeben, sondern von dem Subjekt selbst hervorgebracht wird“ (to which Goethe vehemently objected) that intimates the vast discrepancy between Schiller’s and Goethe’s elegies (NA 20: 255). His elegy remains “sentimental” in the sense described in the essay “Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung”: The appearance of nature is belated with respect to its origins in nature, history, and divine reality—hence, artificially constructed and estranged. Although Schiller’s use of the term has a positive aspect as the indication of how things out to be, its overriding significance is negative insofar as it presupposes the loss of the constitutive idea.

<sup>311</sup> Schiller, “Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung,” NA: 20.1, 448. “Setzt der Dichter die Natur der Kunst und das Ideal der Wirklichkeit so entgegen, daß die Darstellung des ersten überwiegt und das Wohlgefallen an demselben herrschende Empfindung wird, so nenne ich ihn elegisch. Auch diese Gattung hat, wie die Satire, zwei Klassen unter sich. Entweder ist die Natur und das Ideal ein Gegenstand der Trauer, wenn jene als verloren, dieses als unerreicht dargestellt wird. Oder beide sind ein Gegenstand der Freude, indem sie als wirklich vorgestellt werden. Das erste gibt die Elegie in engerer, das andere die Idylle in weitester Bedeutung.” My translation.

monolog, then, Goethe adopts the classical conventions of the genre. For the Romans, an elegy was a poem written in alternating lines of hexameter and pentameter on any subject, and it was as often about love as laments.<sup>312</sup> By framing the morphological depictions of plant formation within the context of a lover's dialogue, Goethe's poem approaches what Schiller terms the "idyllic" attitude, whereby "nature" and "the idea" are "objects of joy inasmuch as they are depicted as really present."<sup>313</sup> The idea shaping nature from within (*caritas*) is present to the beholder and the beloved, because it grows before their eyes and between them. Whereas Schiller's elegy takes place in isolation, Goethe's depicts the "creative idea" through "personal orientation towards the beloved."<sup>314</sup> In "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," both nature and the beloved are thus present from the outset as manifestations of a life-giving reality transcending him. However, we shall see that the poet only progressively recognizes the vegetal phenomena as symbols of the divine; for the symbolic presentation of the plant's source in the transcendent only unfolds indirectly through a series of epiphanic insights mediated by the lyric imagination.<sup>315</sup>

The poet must actively receive the insights as manifestation of the divine by first participating in the infinite activity of *Bildung* unfolding before him. In brief, he must behold (*Anschauen*) a vision transcending the scope of his own gaze. This presupposes a freedom before the

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<sup>312</sup> Gordon Braden and Elizabeth Fowler, "Elegy," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 397-399. Goethe's cycle *Römische Elegien* (1795) indicates a similar intention to return to a classical understanding of the genre; it echoes the conventions begun by Roman poets such as Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid.

<sup>313</sup> Schiller, "Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung," NA: 20.1, 448-449. "Entweder ist die Natur und das Ideal ein Gegenstand der Trauer, wenn jene als verloren, dieses als unerreicht dargestellt wird. Oder beide sind ein Gegenstand der Freude, indem sie als wirklich vorgestellt werden. Das erste gibt die *Elegie* in engerer, das andere die *Idylle* in weitester Bedeutung." My translation.

<sup>314</sup> Friedrich Beißner, *Geschichte der deutschen Elegie*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co. 1941), 145. "Persönliche Hinwendung zum Geliebten." "Gestaltende Idee." My translations.

<sup>315</sup> To speak with a later poet whose attention was similarly trained on the self-disclosure of the divine logos in nature, "These things, these things were here and but the beholder wanting," Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Hurrahing the Harvest," in *The Major Works*, ed. Phillips, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009), 134.

other and, ultimately, its numinous source in love that Schiller denies the persona of his poem. Hence Beißner's remark on the "sentimental" trajectory" of "Der Spaziergang," which "sets exact boundaries to the individual and his needs that" are supposed to "prevent the abuse of the subjectivity that essentially belong to the elegiac genre."<sup>316</sup> This (in origins) Kantian opposition of freedom and nature is absent from Goethe's elegy, which revealingly begins with a word addressed in confidence to the beloved. It is in hopes of teaching her to see the interior form of plants, and hence it is for her sake that he strives to show their transcendent significance. Despite the lover's active disposition before her, he nevertheless also recognizes that such insight is something received on the order of a blessing and love:

Dich verwirret, Geliebte, die tausendfältige Mischung	1
Dieses Blumengewühls über dem Garten umher;	
Viele Namen hörst du an, und immer verdrängt	
Mit barbarischem Klang einer den andern im Ohr.	
Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleicht der andern;	
Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz,	
Auf ein heiliges Rätsel. O, könnt ich dir, liebliche Freundin,	
Überliefern sogleich glücklich das lösende Wort!	
Werdend betrachte sie nun, wie nach und nach sich die Pflanze,	
Stufenweise geführt, bildet zu Blüten und Frucht.	

If an almost Faustian desire nourishes Goethean science, this endeavor is characterized by classical restraint and humility before the other. The force of love that shapes the manifold process of *Bildung* depicted in this poem is irreducible to eros and is therefore open to receiving love as the gift of another (agape). Hence, we shall see that, similar to the early love poetry, this elegy recovers the caritas-synthesis characterizing the God of Judeo-Christianity.

As intimated by the elegy's opening vignette, which depicts the beloved in a state of confusion, she cannot grasp the meaning of the plethora of botanical phenomena before her—

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<sup>316</sup> Beißner, *Geschichte der deutschen Elegie*, 145. "Den 'sentimentalischen' Weg." "Der Individualität und ihrem Bedürfnis sind genaue Schranken gesetzt, die es verhindern, daß die in der elegischen Gattung begründete Subjektivität mißbraucht werde. So spricht zwar der Spaziergänger oft von sich selbst, aber nur in einem Selbstgespräch." My translations.

especially not by my means of Enlightenment science. Beyond the garden's excess of complex sensations, the "thousand-fold mixture" of scents, it is the Latinate jargon of Linnaean taxonomy employed by way of explanation that exacerbates her bewilderment. For it only serves as an impediment to genuine communication, thus blinding her to the symbolic event (*Ereignis*) unfolding in the garden. This scene thus faintly alludes to the nominalist crisis of modern science and, in so doing, indicates that the Enlightenment's reductive notion of language (as an arbitrary system of signification) fails to convey the living and life-giving idea of things. In this respect, Goethe agrees with Christiana Vulpius' critique of science. Hence he observes in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that, as "a natural born poet, who strives to shape [*bilden*] his expressions with immediate respect to each and every thing," he recognized that the application of Linné's "fixed terminology" of "words and epithets" to organisms could only result in "a kind of mosaic" of nature.<sup>317</sup> For the scientist "puts one readymade peg next to another in order to create the illusion of an image from a thousand particulars."<sup>318</sup> According to Pfau, Linné had "committed what, for Goethe, is the cardinal sin of modern analysis—namely, to stray from the dynamic phenomenon by absorbing it into a static nomenclature."<sup>319</sup> In order to redress this disaggregation of sense and sensation, meaning and being, Goethe writes "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" in which he provides his beloved with the hermeneutic key to discerning the "holy open mystery" of creation: namely, the metaphysical law of

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<sup>317</sup> Goethe, "Morphologie," GHA 13: 160. "Als geborne[r] Dichter, der seine Worte, seine Ausdrücke unmittelbar an den jedesmaligen Gegenständen zu bilden trachtet." "Fertige Terminologie." "Wörter und Beiwörter." "Eine Art von Mosaik, wo man einen fertigen Stift neben den andern setzt, um aus tausend Einzelheiten endlich den Schein eines Bildes hervorzubringen." My translations. Cf. Ronald M.K.G. Brady, "The idea in Nature: Rereading Goethe's Organics," in *Goethe's Way of Science: a Phenomenology of Nature*, eds. David Seamon and Arthur Zajonc (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1998), 92-93

<sup>318</sup> Goethe, "Morphologie," GHA 13: 160.

<sup>319</sup> Pfau, *Incomprehensible Certainty*, (415). Linné had consequently failed "to grasp morphological differences as intrinsically purposive and, hence, as manifesting an integral, organic form."

analogia.<sup>320</sup> In fundamental agreement with Goethe's early poetics of the natural symbol, the lover formulates the logic of plant formation as a law of analogic relations ("Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich,/ und keine gleicht der andern"). It is from this axiomatic point of departure that he proceeds to describe the ideal plant (*Urpflanze*) by way of concrete analogies, or, symbols.

Goethe's key to the mystery of plant development—which, we have seen, accords in certain respects with Kant's account of symbolic description in the *Critique of Judgement*—more clearly chimes with the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of symbols as clothing the transcendent in "terms of being" by giving "shape and form" to numinous realities that "have neither."<sup>321</sup> This grounding tenet of plant morphology further presupposes a certain self-suspension and "epistemic humility" characteristic of Christian-Neoplatonism—a virtue notably lacking in later romantic conceptions of the idea (as in Schellingian and Hegelian idealism).<sup>322</sup> For Goethe, by contrast, the symbolic image remains a pro-visional presentation of the transcendent and is therefore irreducible to concepts constructed by finite spirit. Rather, the symbol is something essentially received, like the love of the heavenly Father. This humility is intimated by the poet's desire to help the beloved immediately understand ("O, könnt ich dir, liebliche Freundin,/ Überliefern sogleich das lösende Wort!"), which he nevertheless restrains in opting to convey a vision through a narrative series of images. As a result, the plant's morphological form cannot be reduced to a concept in his possession that he might impose upon her with a preconceived word. The idea's communication, recognition, and realization within the beloved instead require her participation in the event of disclosure

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<sup>320</sup> Goethe, "Epirrhema," GHA 1: 358: "Heilig öffentliches Geheimnis." Cf. also Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, GHA 12: 467. "[720] Wem die Natur ihr offenbares Geheimnis zu enthüllen anfängt, der empfindet eine unwiderstehliche Sehnsucht nach ihrer würdigsten Auslegerin, der Kunst."

<sup>321</sup> Pfau, *Incomprehensible Certainty*, 470. As Pfau observes, this tradition employs "numerous symbols [...] to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supra-natural simplicity." Though it belongs to the realm of nature, the *Urpflanze* similarly hints at the transcendent One.

<sup>322</sup> Pfau, *Incomprehensible Certainty*, 470.

(“Werdend betrachte sie nun [...]”). She, too, must learn to see in light of the phenomena and the idea at work within her; for she must grow, analogous to the plant, in understanding by putting her vision into practice. In fundamental agreement, then, with “the classical (in origin Aristotelian) framework according to which *episteme* and *praxis* are inextricably entwined,” Goethe’s approach to science “constitutes,” as Pfau remarks, “‘action’ in the strong, Aristotelian sense of *praxis*.”<sup>323</sup> For here “knowledge qua ‘observing’ (*Beobachten*) circumscribes and ‘organizes’ the human being as a continuous spectrum of discrete practices, from the most rudimentary instances of sense-perception to the most sophisticated [ways] of modeling [...] the phenomenon.”<sup>324</sup> Such action is, for Goethe, always already receptive co-action. This is because the principle of participatory *praxis* essential to both observation and plant formation is conditioned by the idea’s infinite activity.

As Pfau’s observation suggests, the morphological plant formations described in the elegy are indeed symbols of complex cultural models—namely, of courtship and religious worship—that organize the human person, orient him towards his telos, and allow for his fruition. In so doing, Goethean symbolism evinces a key similarity with Kant’s conception of symbolic presentation, which, as Gadamer observes, recovers “the theological truth that had found its scholastic form in the *analogia entis* and keeps human concepts separate from God.”<sup>325</sup> Crucially, the beloved’s formation can only be achieved if the lover keeps a certain distance from both the object of his affection and the divine idea that he means to convey to her. This requires him to affirm, if only implicitly, the “greater difference” in unity between them. Even as he and the beloved come to behold the idea, even as love begins to blossom between them, a difference obtains that is analogous

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<sup>323</sup> Thomas Pfau, “‘All is Leaf’: Difference, Metamorphosis, and Goethe’s Phenomenology of Knowledge,” in *SiR*, 49, (Spring 2010), 8-9.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 67.

to the distinction between the image and its numinous source of significance. Through synesthesia—an intensified (*gesteigert*) form of perception irreducible to empirical sensation—the “choir” (“Chor”) of redolent flowers lifts the beholders’ spirits, indirectly referring (*deuten*) them to “a hidden law, a holy mystery.”<sup>326</sup> If only unintentionally, this image echoes the Platonic notion of *Chôra*, the essentially receptive space of becoming between the *eidos*—“the essence, the invisible world of Being”—and the *eikon*: “the visible image of this Being, the known and ordered cosmos.”<sup>327</sup> By clothing the transcendent logos in successive, finite forms irreducible to the exterior senses, the symbolic flower entails an infinite distance between its invisible origins and the beholders’ perceptions of it, while also preserving the beloved’s freedom of assent. The flower’s presentation of the transcendent is wholly gratuitous. As Angelus Silesius had unforgettably put it, “Die Ros ist ohn warumb, sie blühet weil sie blühet.”<sup>328</sup> Its beauty is thus serendipitously given—just as is the beloved’s response, should she decide to respond in kind. Since the symbol’s numinous meaning (“Amor”) is given within the concrete realm of appearances, insight is something actively received, like assent to the grace of God.<sup>329</sup> Goethean science and poetry thus eschew the rigid conceptual

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<sup>326</sup> Concepts of reason cannot achieve this feat of transcendent disclosure; as Kant had recognized, their logic subsumes particulars under universals with strict necessity, such that the beholder finds herself compelled to affirm or deny their truth-claim. Kantian concepts of the understanding alternatively retain a *certain* distance between the beholder and the thing seen, since they are “freely” determined by the interplay of the finite subject’s faculties of imagination and reason; however, as we have seen, such constructs only present (*darstellen*) a formal analogy to the empirical phenomenon and the idea. The difference between the beholder and the thing seen becomes absolute.

<sup>327</sup> Maria M. Shevelkina, “The Chôra of Dionisy’s Wall-Painting (1500-1502) at the Nativity of the Mother of God sobor, Ferapontovo Monastery” (2020), *CUNY Academic Works*, <[https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc\\_sas\\_etds/548](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/hc_sas_etds/548)>, accessed 1/25/2022. The Platonic *Chôra* is a womb-like realm in between the *eidos* and the *eikon* characterized by pure dynamism as the invisible emerges into appearance. Shevelkina explains that “*Chôra* plays a key role in the process of creation in *Timeaus*. In order to enact the transition from the *eidos*—the essence, the invisible world of Being—to *eikon*—the visible image of this Being, the known and ordered cosmos—Plato requires a third entity for facilitating this transition: *Chôra*. Receiving *eidos* and *eikon*, *Chôra* is understood as the womb or matrix (*ekmageion*), within which creation forms. [...] Its constantly morphing edges are the periphery of the churning *eidos* and *eikon*, contained within *Chôra*’s ever-mutating womb” (17–18).

<sup>328</sup> Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Hans Urs von Balthasar, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980), 83: “Die Ros ist ohn warumb; sie blühet, weil sie blühet./ Sie acht nicht ihrer selbst, fragt nicht, ob man sie siehet.”

<sup>329</sup> The graceful clarity of purpose and insight characterizing Goethe’s distichs, which mirrors the effortless development of plant formation, belongs to the poem’s symbolic appeal as form (*Gestalt*) serendipitously received. For just as nature



systems of the Enlightenment, turning instead to the symbolic image's presentation of the mysterious law—analogue—underpinning animate and inanimate formation (*Bildung*).

Because the lover's method of conveying his knowledge of the symbolic plant is grounded in praxis, his interior insight (*noësis*) into the meaning of plant development unfolds through descriptions of the empirical thing seen. And yet, the vision disclosed by morphological observation emerges through the poet's imaginative participation in the thing seen. Despite, as Kittstein observes, the historical particularity and concreteness of Goethe's imagery, its "vivid pictorial power [*bildkräftige Anschaulichkeit*]" must not obscure the fact that [his images] depict a process, which could never be the object of observation" as defined by the precepts and equivocal metaphysics of modern science.<sup>330</sup> For it is only through a participatory (methetic) vision involving the beholders, body and soul, in the appearance of the thronging flowers ("Blumengewühl") that they attain insight into the divine force of love shaping morphological development as depicted in these lines:

Aus dem Samen entwickelt sie sich, sobald ihn der Erde  
Stille befruchtender Schoß hold in das Leben entläßt  
Und dem Reize des Lichts, des heiligen, ewig bewegten,  
Gleich den zärtesten Bau keimender Blätter empfiehlt.  
Einfach schlief in dem Samen die Kraft; ein beginnendes Vorbild  
Lag, verschlossen in sich, unter die Hülle gebeugt,  
Blatt und Wurzel und Keim, nur halb geformt und farblos;  
Trocken erhält so der Kern ruhiges Leben bewahrt,  
Quillet strebend empor, sich milder Feuchte vertrauend,  
Und erhebt sich sogleich aus der umgebenden Nacht.<sup>331</sup>

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Like "Maifest," this poem expresses nature's interior development through a litany of polarities (seed/womb, motion/stasis, light/earth) and intensifications (*Steigerungen*). The symbolic progression

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labors without self-conscious effort, Goethe's "naïve" art leisurely produces and reproduces itself through the idea's infinite activity. Conceived as a blessing bestowed on nature from the source in divine love, labor is not something alien to being, but as generativity belongs to its very essence.

<sup>330</sup> Kittstein, *Deutsche Naturlyrik*, 93. "Die bildkräftige Anschaulichkeit der Verse darf freilich nicht darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass sie einen Vorgang schildern, der in dieser Form unmöglich Gegenstand [of a strictly empirical, instantaneous] Beobachtung werden kann." My translation.

<sup>331</sup> Goethe, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanze," GHA 1: 199.

of images ascends, like the seed itself, into the heavens, even as it penetrates the earth to disclose “an incipient form [*Vorbild*].” Instead of giving a verse account of organic combustion or photosynthesis focusing exclusively on material causation, these and the ensuing verses describe the plant’s external and internal influences—its material and final causes—as a polarity guiding its growth from seed to fruit. This teleological development unfolds, as in the early hymns, through co-action grounding in the *analogia entis*. Upon receiving a material impetus from the still, nourishing earth, the kernel immediately (“gleich”) extends its green-golden leaves into the light through the inner power of final causation (“Einfach schief in dem Samen die Kraft”). An Aristotelian entelechy, the seed has an interior form—however “colorless and half-formed”—pre-figuring (*vorbilden*) its telos in the leaf.<sup>332</sup>

Even so, the seed’s power of development is not that of the Leibnizian monad. For it is essentially oriented towards and thus constituted by its relation to another through its dependence on a world of material causes. Hence, the symbolic plant stretches its roots into the dirt, without which its inner leaf would perish, just as it ascends into the daylight that transcends it. In so doing, the seed’s intrinsic telos and external influences are thus unified, by way of a hidden simile, as it transforms into the leaf. This is intimated by the word “gleich” in line 14, which primarily functions as a temporal adverb (“immediately”), yet also intimates an analogy (“like”) between the interior force that impels the “germinating leaves” and the quasi-divine motion of light: “Und dem Reize des Lichts, des heiligen, ewig bewegten,/ Gleich den zärtesten Bau keimender Blätter [...]” “The seed’s dynamic “power” of growth is thus linked, if only indirectly through the analogic interval (“gleich”) of similarity in greater difference, to both the masculine “womb of the earth” and the

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<sup>332</sup> As Goethe starkly puts it in note from Italy, where his studies in plant morphology began: “Alles ist Blatt [...]” (Goethe, GHA 13: 582.) See Pfau, *Incomprehensible Certainty*, 403: “What in his botanical writings Goethe calls ‘seeing the form’ involves a focused and attentive apprehension of organic form manifesting itself as gradual and purposive internal ‘transformation’ (*Umwandlung*) that is, as an entelechy rather than a product of contingent, externally induced ‘alteration.’”

feminine “attraction/charm [*Reiz*] of the sun.” Furthermore, the complex syntax of this sentence switches subjects from a suspended referent in verse 11—“it” (“*sie*”), which refers back to “the plant” (“*die Pflanze*”) and forwards to “the power” (“*die Kraft*”)—to “the womb” (“*[der] Schoß*”) in verse 12. This suggests that the seed’s dynamic of growth alternates from the active (“*entwickelt sie sich*”), interior power to a passive one (“*ihn [...] in das Leben entläßt*”) insofar as the plant also receives its life-force from external forces: first from the soil and, thereafter, the sun. If the seed sprouts through the dynamism of its own teleological form, its formation also depends on a power that wholly transcends it and conditions its appearance: ultimately, the “stimulus” of the “holy” sun, which is “eternally set in motion.” Beyond referring to the plant, the ambiguous pronoun (“*sie*”) of verse 11 also implicitly refers to the generative power (“*die Kraft*”) of two more feminine nouns, which form a polar dynamic that first gives the seed life: “the sun” (“*die Sonne*”) and “the earth” (“*[die] Erde*”).<sup>333</sup> Because, however, Goethe cunningly figures the latter as masculine (“*der Erde befruchtender Schoß*”), this vertical polarity at once suggests the charge of the sexual difference, which is symbolized by the earth being opened to the light of the heavens. In brief, inasmuch as the seed’s interior development into a leaf is always already determined by its environment—by the earth that bears it and the sunshine that draws it forth—the plant’s internal and external impetuses are symbolically the same (“*gleich*”). This complex fusion of the microcosm (the seed’s energy) and the macrocosm (the sun’s) thus recalls Plotinus’ account of the genesis of the world as an emanation through analogic intervals from a central luminous source:

There is, we may put it, something that is center; about it, a circle of light shed from it; round center and first circle alike, another circle, light from light; outside that again, not another circle of light but one which, lacking light of its own, must borrow. ... Thus all begins with the great light, shining, self-centered; in accordance with the reigning plan (that of emanation) this gives forth its brilliance; the later (divine) existents (souls) add their

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<sup>333</sup> This ambiguous space of pure dynamism between heaven, earth, and seed that Goethe intimates is also reminiscent of the Platonic *chôra* (*Timaeus* 51a).

radiation — some of them remaining above, while there are some that are drawn further downward, attracted by the splendor of the object they illuminate.<sup>334</sup>

The sun's "holy, eternal" motion is one with the symbolic leaf's interior source and telos: for this light—the divine light of being—is both immanent and transcendent, at once similar and altogether different.

The next passages of the elegy imaginatively follow this paradigm of polar intensification through the development of the plant's various forms (*Gestalten*). Although it may be subdivided into three distinct phases depicting the leaf, the flower, and the fruit, each is analogically interwoven with the next through intermediary forms (sepal, calyx, petal, corolla, stamen, and pistil). Each of these *gestalts* represents the principle of stasis yet simultaneously discloses a dynamic of incessant "formation" and "transformation."<sup>335</sup> Hence, each *gestalt* is a pro-visional image of the plant's telos and its timeless *eidos*. Notwithstanding the plant's internal differentiation, Goethean morphology envisions an ideal unity at work through its various forms—namely, the symbolic leaf.<sup>336</sup> It thus discerns the relation of the One and the many within the analogic intervals unfolding between the parts of the plant, the beholder, and their numinous source. As Pfau remarks regarding the theological writings of Nicholas of Cusa, nature's dynamic of differentiation and transformation corresponds to an analogous law of perception:

By its very nature, our sensible and intellectual participation in phenomena presupposes an underlying, ontological difference; that is, "inexplicable identity is unfolded variously and differently in otherness [*varie differenter in alteritate explicatur*]. For example, sight is partaken of

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<sup>334</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3.1.17, cited in Shevelkina, "The Chôra of Dionisy's Wall-Painting," 16.

<sup>335</sup> Goethe, "Betrachtung über Morphologie überhaupt," GHA 13: 124; "Bildung" and "Umbildung." Goethe elsewhere observes that "der Deutsche hat für den Komplex des Daseins eines wirklichen Wesens das Wort Gestalt. Er abstrahiert bei diesem Ausdruck von dem Beweglichen, er nimmt an, daß ein Zusammengehöriges festgestellt, abgeschlossen und in seinem Charakter fixiert sei. Betrachten wir aber alle Gestalten, besonders die organischen, so Enden wir, daß nirgend ein Bestehendes, nirgend ein Ruhendes, ein Abgeschlossenes vorkommt, sondern daß vielmehr alles in einer steten Bewegung schwanke. Daher unsere Sprache das Wort Bildung sowohl von dem Hervorgebrachten, als von dem Hervorgebrachtwerdenden gehörig genug zu brauchen pflegt" (Goethe, *Zur Morphologie*, GHA 13: 55).

<sup>336</sup> GHA 13: 582. "Alles ist Blatt und durch diese Einfachheit wird die größte Mannigfaltigkeit möglich..."

differently by various acts-of-sight, just as, also, the diversity of the acts-of-sight is contained concordantly in the oneness of absolute sight [*visibilium varietas in unitate visus concordanter complicatur*].” By its very nature, sense-based cognition always unfolds “in terms of otherness-of-variation [*in alteritate variationis*]” (DC 11:55).<sup>337</sup>

Similar to the lover’s and the beloved’s different visions of the thing seen, the discreet moments (*Augenblicke*) in the plant’s process of transformation are oriented towards and fulfilled in another, higher stage of development. The formation of the cotyledon (the embryonic leaves of the seed) is immediately followed by another force (*Trieb*) that (re)produces the symbolic leaf: “Gleich darauf ein folgender Trieb, sich erhebend, erneuet,/ Knoten auf Knoten getürmt, immer das erste Gebild./ Zwar nicht immer das gleiche; denn mannigfaltig erzeugt sich,/ Ausgebildet, du siehst’s, immer das folgende Blatt [...]”.<sup>338</sup> The adverb “gleich” [“immediately/similarly”] again does double duty for Goethe by indicating both the successive character of the symbolic plant’s formation and the baseline identity governing this process within which “all is leaf.”<sup>339</sup> According to the beholder, the plant’s dynamic of self-differentiation is essentially analogic: each *gestalt* remains an iteration of the same original form (“immer das erste Gebild”). Although one only ever sees the idea sequentially unfold through the symbolic plant’s next leaf (“immer das folgende Blatt”), sight transforms into insight via the phenomenon’s teleological development. The first pro-visional telos of self-differentiation achieved in plant formation is the leaf: “Und so erreicht es zuerst die höchst bestimmte Vollendung,/ Die bei manchem Geschlecht dich zum Erstaunen bewegt.” Upon attaining this relative perfection, the plant discloses the interior drive at its most diverse (“mannigfaltig”), abundant, and expansive. It is through sheer plenitude of appearance that, at this stage, the leaves reveal the idea’s irreducible, transcendent unity and so fulfill the interior law of

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<sup>337</sup> Pfau, *Incomprehensible Certainty*, 407.

<sup>338</sup> Goethe, “Maifest,” GHA 1: 199.

<sup>339</sup> Goethe, GHA 13: 582. “Alles ist Blatt.” My translation.

plant development.<sup>340</sup> As an *Urphänomen*, the symbolic leaf discloses its invisible source indirectly through plant-life's endless flux of formation and transformation. In the leaf, therefore, "scheinet die Fülle des Triebes frei und unendlich zu sein." By concretely presenting the source and telos of its striving (the leaf), the plant appears, for the first time, fully in light of the sun, the clearest symbol of nature's godlike, quasi-eternal motion. For it is through the leaf that the plant becomes translucent to the One—the hidden source, the logos governing its growth.

True to Goethe's classically restrained understanding of the symbol, the next passage stresses that the leaf's presentation of its transcendent source is only partial. It again foregrounds the symbolic plant's successive character by describing how the leaves give way to a higher stage of development. As Goethe had observed in his letter to Schiller, the symbolic image implies "a certain succession" and remains thoroughly provisional since it only ever presents the whole in part.<sup>341</sup> The next description of plant formation development emphasizes this transitional quality, even as it depicts (*darstellen*) a more perfect gestalt: "Doch hier hält die Natur, mit mächtigen Händen, die Bildung./ An und lenket sie sanft in das Vollkommnere hin." Although the symbolic plant is never fully transparent to the eidos, its development approximates the timeless idea with increasing perfection. Hence, the leaf transforms through the constriction of its expansive energy into a more refined and inward gestalt: the flower.

Doch hier hält die Natur, mit mächtigen Händen, die Bildung  
 An und lenket sie sanft in das Vollkommnere hin.  
 Mäßiger leitet sie nun den Saft, verengt die Gefäße,

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<sup>340</sup> This metaphysical principle of unity-in-difference (*analogia*) recalls Thomas Aquinas' response in *Summa theologiae*, 47: 1, addressing "whether the multitude and distinction of things come from God." After hearing objections arguing that the effect of divine action should be "one as he is one," he replies that God intended diversity amongst creation: because "His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another." Aquinas thus concludes that "the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever."

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 2: 198: The *Urphänomen* can never "be the matter of a momentary, unadulterated vision; rather it is what the educated and active mind learns to see in a long series, perhaps a lifetime, of manifestations through and behind the chance distortions of the empirical, which in practice will never be absent."

Und gleich zeigt die Gestalt zärtere Wirkungen an.  
 Stille zieht sich der Trieb der strebenden Ränder zurück,  
 Und die Rippe des Stiels bildet sich völliger aus.  
 Blattlos aber und schnell erhebt sich der zärtere Stengel,  
 Und ein Wundergebild zieht den Betrachtenden an. 40  
 Rings im Kreise stellet sich nun, gezählet und ohne  
 Zahl, das kleinere Blatt neben dem ähnlichen hin.  
 Um die Achse gedrängt, entscheidet der bergende Kelch sich,  
 Der zur höchsten Gestalt farbige Kronen entläßt.  
 Also prangt die Natur in hoher, voller Erscheinung,  
 Und sie zeigt, gereiht, Glieder an Glieder gestuft.  
 Immer staunst du aufs neue, sobald sich am Stengel die Blume  
 Über dem schlanken Gerüst wechselnder Blätter bewegt.

This stage of formation begins with a circumscription of the plant's interior powers of expansion, which were so evident in its abundance of leaves. In doing so, however, the plant remains open to self-transcendence perforce of an external impetus: conditioning nature ("Natur, mit mächtigen Händen.../ ...sie linket/ [und] leitet..."). The organism's development is never wholly self-immanent. For as Goethe observes in "Die Metamorphose der Tiere" (1798), "Also bestimmt die Gestalt die Lebensweise des Tieres,/ Und die Weise zu leben, sie wirkt auf alle Gestalten/ Mächtig zurück. So zeigt sich fest die geordnete Bildung,/ Welche zum Wechsel sich neigt durch äußerlich wirkende Wesen."<sup>342</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, a plant's various *gestalts*, which are shaped for their myriad purposes, first form in reciprocal relationship with "externally active beings" ("äußerlich wirkende Wesen"). Goethe's account of the symbolic plant's next morphological forms (the calyx and the corona) describes and itself unfolds through the reciprocal interaction with the whole of conditioning nature—that is, the antecedent order of the cosmos within which organic formation occurs. It consequently precludes the reduction of nature's "guiding hand" to a totally external, material cause. For, as we have seen regarding the seed's development, material and formal causation

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<sup>342</sup> Goethe, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," GHA 1: 202.

are, by way of the analogia entis, the same. A question from Goethe's notebooks on morphology indicates his sense of how extrinsic causes condition nature's immanent forms:

Doesn't the primal power [*Urkraft*] of nature—the wisdom of the thinking Being, to whom we tend to subordinate it—become more respectable if we assume that nature's force is limited (*bedingt*) and learn to see (*einsehen*) that it forms from the outside even as it forms outwards and forms from the inside even as it forms inwards.<sup>343</sup>

This “first and most general observation” of morphology, which applies to all organisms—and, by analogy, to the symbolic imagery of a poem—explicitly refers to the law of the transcendent deity limiting nature's immanent power of development.<sup>344</sup> It thus supports the thesis that the source and telos of plant development are ends that, while immanent to the organism, at once utterly transcend it in a specifically metaphysical sense—hence even more so than does the godlike light of sun. As we have argued, it is only on the basis of the principle of analogia that Goethean science can resolve the seeming contradiction of transcendence and immanence and thus overcome the alternatively equivocal and univocal ontologies of modern science. For analogia allows infinitely many degrees of differentiation and perfection within the encompassing unity of nature, even as it indirectly points to the surpassing difference of nature's provenance in divine “wisdom.” This analogic dynamic of interiorization and transcendence (*Steigerung*) is symbolically manifest in the appearance of the flower's sepals, which unfold in a circular motion that never seems to end: “Rings

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<sup>343</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Versuch einer allgemeinen Vergleichungslehre” in *Goethes Biologie: die wissenschaftlichen und die autobiographischen Texte*, ed. Hans Joachim Becker, (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1999), 154: “Wird uns [...] nicht schon die Urkraft der Natur, die Weisheit eines denkenden Wesens, welches wir derselben unterzulegen pflegen, respektabler, wenn wir selbst ihr Kraft bedingt annehmen und einsehen lernen, daß sie eben so gut von außen als nach außen, von innen als nach innen bildet?” My translation. Goethe explains this insight with an example: “Der Fisch ist für das Wasser da, scheint mir viel weniger zu sagen als: der Fisch ist in dem Wasser und durch das Wasser da; denn dieses letzte drückt viel deutlicher aus, was in dem erstern nur dunkel verborgen liegt, nämlich die Existenz eines Geschöpfes, das wir Fisch nennen, sei nur unter der Bedingung eines Elementes, das wir Wasser nennen, möglich nicht allein um darin zu sein, sondern auch um darin zu werden. Ebendieses gilt von allen übrigen Geschöpfen. Dieses wäre also die erste und allgemeinste Betrachtung von innen nach außen und von außen nach innen. Die entschiedene Gestalt ist gleichsam der innere Kern, welcher durch die Determination des äußern Elementes sich verschieden bildet. Eben dadurch erhält ein Tier seine Zweckmäßigkeit nach außen, weil es von außen so gut als von innen gebildet worden; und was noch mehr, aber natürlich ist, weil das äußere Element die äußere Gestalt eher *nach* sich, als die innere *um* bilden kann.“

<sup>344</sup> Ibid. My translation.



im Kreise stellet sich nun, gezählet und ohne/ Zahl, das kleinere Blatt neben dem ähnlichen hin./  
 Um die Achse gedrängt, entscheidet der bergende Kelch sich,/ Der zur höchsten Gestalt farbige  
 Kronen entläßt.“ This cluster of finer leaves appears to be “without number.” Moreover, it spirals  
 inwards and upwards so as to form the calyx (the ring of sepals) and, eventually, the corolla’s (the  
 ring of petals) deeper inwardness. In unfolding through the analogic intervals (“stellt sich [...] neben dem ähnlichen hin”) of nature, this gestalt intimates an infinite horizon: throngs of sepals  
 encircle the plant’s axis, thus distinguishing their provisional formation from the leaf while pointing  
 beyond themselves towards the symbolic flower: “zur höchsten Gestalt [der] farbige[n] Kronen.”

Although this passage of the elegy does not mention the intricate interaction of the plant  
 with its ecosphere—e.g. the interplay of animal- and plant-life in the course of the plant’s  
 reproduction (this comes slightly later)—it does refer to the beholder’s, and particularly the  
 beloved’s, attraction to these more delicate phenomena (the calyx and the corolla): “Und ein  
 Wundergebild zieht den Betrachtenden an.“ It becomes increasingly evident at this stage of the  
 plant’s development that its interior law of formation implies an extrinsic telos beyond the leaf’s  
 relation to the sun’s “holy, eternal” light: namely, human spirit. This is because Goethe draws with  
 increasing frequency on language that pertains to the realms of culture: love and religion. When the  
 calyx develops into a flower “in hoher, voller Erscheinung,” the poet again refers to the beloved’s  
 and, implicitly, his own relationship to the beauty before them: “Immer staunst du aufs neue, sobald  
 sich am Stengel die Blume/ Über dem schlanken Gerüst wechselnder Blätter bewegt.“ The beloved  
 thus finds herself moved by the flower’s form as it lifts itself over the leaves. Just as the leaf had  
 become sunlight in the preceding passage, so too nature becomes spirit in this one. For the  
 beholders are absorbed like the sun, so to speak, into the plant’s drive to formation (*Bildungstrieb*);  
 they have become in an analogous sense the telos towards which the plant strives. Its beauty is there  
 for the lover and the beloved to recognize, express, and realize. Thus, the poet indirectly suggests

the beloved's potential for participation in the symbolic flower's creative activity: "Aber die Herrlichkeit wird des neuen Schaffens Verkündung[.]" Although it is only in the poem's conclusion (lines 63-80) that the beloved's capacity for co-creation becomes explicit and more fully active, it already constitutes a conditioning element of the symbolic plant's formation within this poetic exchange.

The lyric persona's theo- and anthropomorphic language in the next verses make plant development's openness to transcendence still more evident by describing the divinity's role in reproduction. As Boyle suggests, this passage of the poem establishes a pivotal distinction between Goethean morphology and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, since "Goethe refuses to see the sexual differentiation of individuals and their recombination in the reproduction of the species as the terminus of natural development."<sup>345</sup> Rather, as the remainder of the poem stresses, reproduction is characterized by polarity and transcendence, such that eros opens from within to divine agape. We shall see that both the symbolic plant's regeneration and the beloved's education unfold through the divine force of love (*caritas*). Each of these drives—the vegetal and the spiritual—represents a distinct moment within same dynamic of intensification (*Steigerung*), as intimated by the erotic gestalts (pistil, stamen, and fruit) subsequently described by the lover:

Ja, das farbige Blatt fühlet die göttliche Hand,	48
Und zusammen zieht es sich schnell; die zärtlichsten Formen,	
Zwiefach streben sie vor, sich zu vereinen bestimmt.	
Traulich stehen sie nun, die holden Paare, beisammen,	
Zahlreich ordnen sie sich um den geweihten Altar.	
Hymen schwebet herbei, und herrliche Düfte, gewaltig,	
Strömen süßen Geruch, alles belebend, umher.	
Nun vereinzelt schwellen sogleich unzählige Keime,	
Hold in den Mutterschoß schwellender Früchte gehüllt. <sup>346</sup>	

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<sup>345</sup> Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, 2: 676.

<sup>346</sup> Goethe, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," GHA 1: 200.

Instead of referring to the external impetus conditioning the plant's formation of reproductive organs as the "hand" of nature as before (ln. 33-34), the poet now suggests to the presence of the deity: "Hymen schwebet herbei." This shift suggests that the mystery of procreation is symbolic in the Christian-Neoplatonic sense. For these pro-visional gestalts, the mediate purpose of which are sexual division, unification, and reproduction—depict the organism's transition beyond the realm of nature. Through reproduction, the plant comes into contact not only with another member of its species but with the divine origins of creation: "Ja, das farbige Blatt fühlet die göttliche Hand." Procreation thus unfolds through polar unification ("Zwiefach streben sie vor, sich zu vereinen bestimmt"), even as these more interior reproductive gestalts—stamen and pistil—are conditioned by a transcendent presence whose infinite activity tacitly shapes them from within. Faintly echoing the rapturous conclusion of "Ganymed," the lover imaginatively describes pollen suspended between heaven and earth, at once ascending into the air and receiving the blessing of the conjugal deity, Hymen. The gametes marry visible and invisible realities like incense on the altar by actively receiving and propagating the divine gift of life: "Hymen schwebet herbei, und herrliche Düfte, gewaltig,/ Strömen süßen Geruch, alles belebend, umher." Through the synesthetic perception of pollen—it is barely discernable to the eye, yet powerfully and interiorly present through the flower's aroma—the lover envisions the divine presence guiding plant formation's teleological striving towards regeneration.

Finally, with the arrival of fruit, the plant's drive to differentiation, variation, and transformation reaches its most intensive phase of development. The offspring is a new entity with a unique form and fate of its own. It nevertheless demonstrates the symbolic character of plant growth as a transcendent unity of opposites, which the lyric persona now expresses in metaphysical language intimating the analogy between creation and its eternal source ("den Ring der ewigen Kräfte"):

Und hier schließt die Natur den Ring der ewigen Kräfte;  
Doch ein neuer sogleich fasset den vorigen an,  
Daß die Kette sich fort durch alle Zeiten verlänge  
Und das Ganze belebt, so wie das Einzelne, sei.<sup>347</sup>

The infinite horizon previously suggested by the flower becomes more explicit here. For now it appears, via analogia (“sogleich”/ “so wie”), in the fruit’s oblique presentation of eternal succession (“die Kette”) and its origins in the transcendent whole (“das Ganze”). By referring to “nature”—not the divinity, as had the preceding passage—this symbol indicates that the divine force of creation is immanent to individual being, yet not at the expense of this interior power’s transcendent trajectory. While the lines appear to naturalize the deity by enclosing “the ring of eternal powers” within the fruit, its gestalt retains an interior, as it were, “greater” difference from the whole as intimated in the image of life as a “chain” comprised of analogic links. No one organism fully encompasses the infinite but only ever pro-visionally refers to the absolute through its similarity-in-difference to another finite form. Goethe recognizes, as we have seen, that the natural symbol is finite: its form comes into being and it passes away.<sup>348</sup> From this follows the paradox that the symbolic image can disclose the immortal best in being given to end—to perish. To speak with Hegel, the image “must go to ground” in order to disclose its eternal essence. As an individual ontologically distinct from the whole, the fruit thus contains a principle of radical difference-in-identity that conditions its relationship to the transcendent. The fruit is not wholly tautegorical—for its meaning (eternal life) transcends its being by way of analogia. Through the plant’s union with another being, it gives new life in perpetuity; yet to do so, the fruit must fall. The procession of interlocking generations that pro-visionally “closes” (“schließt”) within the fruit consequently implies both causal (material,

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Hence Trunz’ observation in his commentary on Goethean morphology: “Das Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis, den das Wesen, das in ihm gegenwärtig ist, ist unvergänglich. Aber nur in der Unzulänglichkeit des Vergänglichen ist uns das Wesen gegenwärtig; die Erfüllung unseres Seins ist, daß dieses Unzulängliche Ereignis wird” (Goethe, GHA 13: 548).

This transcendent dynamic of reproduction becomes fully explicit in the poem's conclusion. Here the poet addresses the beloved in summary explication and intensification of the law of love just disclosed. Hence, he explains that the mysterious logic of plant formation (*analogia*) applies to all realms of nature and culture:

No longer confused by Enlightenment science's severance of meaning and being, the beloved now grasps the hermeneutic key to nature. She has attained symbolic insight into the mystery of its formation through analogia. In principle, every organism—not just the chorus of flowers and plants—can “speak louder and louder with” her (“spricht lauter und lauter mit [ihr]”). For, now she knows how to read the Book of Nature (“der Göttin heilige Lettern”) in order to behold its morphological law (logos) of development in higher lifeforms. Furthermore, she is primed to understand that this new, interlocking vision of reality applies to human endeavors such as courtship

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and worship. Just as the seed develops into the flower and the caterpillar transforms into the butterfly, so does the law of human development entail the possibility of transcendence through divinization (Bildung as *dei*-formation).<sup>350</sup> It is this fully human, thus, “sentimental” (in the precise Goethean sense) iteration of the formative drive of nature that the poet addresses in the elegy’s last ten lines. Having returned to more conversational locutions in dialogue with the beloved, Goethe turns his attention to the most mysterious yet palpable formation of all: namely, the love blossoming between them. Thus, the lover implores her to see that the transcendent dynamic of plant development through divine love has also characterized their friendship from the beginning and now conditions their shared understanding of life’s source and telos:

O gedenke denn auch, wie aus dem Keim der Bekanntschaft                   70  
 Nach und nach in uns holde Gewohnheit entsproß,  
 Freundschaft sich mit Macht aus unserm Innern enthüllte,  
 Und wie Amor zuletzt Blüten und Früchte gezeugt.  
 Denke, wie mannigfach bald die, bald jene Gestalten,  
 Still entfaltend, Natur unsern Gefühlen geliehn!

By drawing on the forms of plant development to present their cultural analogues, this image of human love establishes a chiasm with the lyric persona’s previous descriptions of fruit formation through anthropo- and theomorphic language. Such inversions and crossings are key to Goethe’s Christina-Neoplatonic understanding of symbolism. For they suggest the analogic and participatory manner in which the invisible source of creation becomes visible and, in turn, the visible reveals its numinous provenance. This passage consequently presents the latent power of spiritual realities at work in the lower forms of nature. As the privileged expression of divine love operative in nature, human interiority exalts the plant’s internal form and lifts it by means of images into a transcendent light—for the poet receives and realizes the divine force of love through his poësis.

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<sup>350</sup> As Goethe observes in his *Maximen und Reflexionen*, “Das Wahre ist gottähnlich: es erscheint nicht unmittelbar, wir müssen es aus seinen Manifestationen erraten” (GHA 12: 460).

It is somewhat ironic, at least at first glance, that Goethe's poem about the symbolic plant closes with what appears to be an allegory. Within the register of courtship, the seed signifies budding acquaintance, the sprout indicates the comfort of long-standing relationships, blossom and fruit suggest friendship and human love. However, as verses 74 and 75 suggest, these images are also symbols of a more complex reality presently unfolding—namely, mutual understanding in love. The allegory indicates that the lovers have attained the same view of the moment's transcendent significance. It thus functions like an image within an image: although the imagery ostensibly etiolates into allegory, it nevertheless retains the organic density of the context from which it arises. Rather than presenting an abstraction, then, this allegory distills and concentrates the idea's dynamic crossing of the visible, thus rendering the image's gestalt and meaning still more translucent to its divine origins in love (*caritas*). The lover's concluding exultations depict this concrete moment of intellectual communion:

Freue dich auch des heutigen Tags! Die heilige Liebe  
Strebt zu der höchsten Frucht gleicher Gesinnungen auf,  
Gleicher Ansicht der Dinge, damit in harmonischem Anschauen  
Sich verbinde das Paar, finde die höhere Welt.

The ecstatic shout for joy again recalls the rapture of “Maifest” and “Ganymed.” However, as we have seen, the lyric persona's affectivity is at once restrained by the object-oriented vision of plant morphology. In Goethe's didactic elegy, the erotic force of natural symbols is thus more ascetic and even more explicitly oriented towards the transcendent source (the *logos*) within which all things participate and through which all things appear. This view of “Amor”—*caritas* as shaping nature and culture from within suggests that it unfolds with necessity and yet, paradoxically, that its fruition requires the addition of human freedom. If it is transcendent, it must be gratuitously given and graciously received. The poem's concluding verses thus faintly resemble a doxology: a prayer of thanks to the Creator who creates through the love he has bestowed upon poet and his beloved. Like Goethe's early hymns, then, the poet's attitude before the other—the beloved, nature, and the

deity—remains one of active receptivity. It is a shout for joy, which is full of recognition that divine love analogically underpins the lovers' shared vision of the living symbols before them; for the One who is love is concretely alive between them. Thus, through the mysterious logic of love, they discover a "higher world."

## Conclusion

This chapter and previous chapter have endeavored to show how Goethe's oeuvre draws on Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics to recover the transcendent interiority of things from the naturalizing tendencies of modernity. Following his first encounter with Herder in 1771, Goethe regards the cosmos through the lens of analogia, thus allowing him to recover the inner form of the cosmos and, in so doing, to envision its transcendent source. As we have seen, the natural symbol plays a crucial role in this rehabilitation of language and life. By reunifying meaning and being and the myriad polarities—mind and world, appearance and idea, nature and God—that were severed by the Enlightenment's reductive sciences, Goethe's lyric poetry, poetics, and morphological writings make significant inroads towards overcoming the nominalism plaguing eighteenth-century philosophy. Thus, we have argued, he decisively repudiates the prevailing ontology of modernity: equivocality. Yet unlike the Spinozists of his era, Goethe never does so on the basis of a univocal ontology but eschews both ontological monism and dualism in favor of analogia. We have seen that by developing Herder's theory of natural symbolism, Goethe retrieves, if only unwittingly, the Scholastic doctrine of the analogia entis. For he recovers a notion of finite form (*Gestalt*) that participates in the divine while also preserving its ontological difference from the infinite. Thus, we have argued, he embraces panentheism—not pantheism. Like his mentor Herder, Goethe's pre-convictions are consistently *Christian*-Neoplatonic and thus testify to the influence the imago Dei tradition on his poetry and prose.



According to Herder and Goethe's expressivist view of symbolic imagery, all things (*logoi*) are living images of the One, the numinous logos shaping nature and culture and from within. Goethean poetics and science entail a moment of encounter with this immanent yet nonetheless transcendent source that renders poësis essentially receptive through participatory co-action. For Goethe, it is the poet-scientist's task to recognize and realize this cosmic law of formation as a "formed former" of creation (Herdt). Through the beholder's essential, participatory likeness with the eidetic thing seen—which grounds in the principle of analogia underpinning all appearances—poetic sentiment becomes real sympathy with the whole of creation; and scientific sight becomes insight as the rapt beholder pro-visionally glimpses the cosmos' transcendent source. Through the natural symbols (*logoi*) of the arts and sciences, human speech becomes an indirect expression of divine reality (*logos*)—a form of natural theology. For as have seen, the finite act of poësis discloses the timeless *eidos*' infinite activity already at work within his symbolic imagery. The Goethean use of symbols thus becomes translucent like the leaf to the sun, revealing the innermost life source and significance of things.

Although Goethe's recovery of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol was widely imitated in nineteenth-century German lyric poetry, his example was typically observed in the breach. Late romantic poets as diverse as Heinrich Heine and Eduard Mörike recognized his poetry as the paragon of excellence in substance and style. Yet as we shall see in the next chapter on Mörike's Biedermeier appropriation of the classical symbol, the immense momentum of Enlightenment seems to have been irresistible for even this most "naïve" of poets. Hence, the following chapter shows how, for Mörike, Schiller's "sentimental" disposition—the modern poet's estrangement from nature and belatedness vis-a-vis the divine origins—comes to displace the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of things as expressions (*logoi*) of the transcendent.

For Mörike, the Lutheran minister with sympathies for both Goethe and Catholicism, this transition towards a secular worldview only unfolds gradually and with evident resistance. His lyric abounds with such Goethean qualities as inwardness (*Innigkeit*), depth of insight (*die Tiefe des Augenblicks*), and concreteness. Thus, Mörike's lyric poetry excels in many respects and instances at symbolic disclosure; and, we shall see, it invariably does so on the basis of analogia. Yet it is also unambiguously the case that his poetics employs a "sentimental" use of the symbol in the Schillerian sense, which seeks to undermine the symbolic unity between appearances and their eternal *eidos*. A significant tension thus emerges in Mörike's poetics between the Christian-Neoplatonic view of the symbol's enduring grounds in analogia and the modern, equivocal understanding of the symbol's essential impoverishment and transience as mere (allegorical) sign. Mörike's oeuvre thus offers an extraordinary illustration of nineteenth-century art's shift away from classical and romantic "epiphanies of being" grounding in ontological univocity towards a view of time and interiority characterized by their essential pro-visionality: that is, towards the "epiphanies of interspaces" and "times" characterizing literary modernism (Taylor). Yet as we shall see in the next two chapters, Mörike's lyric poetry in no way confirms the commonplace story of secularization, according to which the sacramental universe saturated with divine presence becomes strictly immanent and anthropocentric. Rather, the transition towards interspatial and -temporal epiphanies manifest in Mörike's best poetry evinces a subtle recovery (perhaps despite the poet's intentions) of the lyric image's ineluctable basis in the metaphysics of analogia.

## THE SECULARIZATION OF CHRISTIAN-NEOPLATONIC SYMBOLISM IN MÖRIKE'S *BILDER AUS BEBENHAUSEN*

Gram aller Art und Farbe, das Gefühl der Reue nicht ausgenommen,  
war er als eine herbe Würze jeder Lust auf seinen Teil gewöhnt.  
Doch wissen wir, auch diese Schmerzen rannen abgeklärt und rein in  
jenem tiefen Quell zusammen, der, aus hundert goldenen Röhren  
springend, im Wechsel seiner Melodien unerschöpflich, alle Qual und  
alle Seligkeit der Menschenbrust ausströmte.

— Eduard Mörike, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*

### Introduction

In a recent essay on secularization in German culture between 1830 and 1900, John Walker remarks that for an influential line of romantic thought—one preeminently represented by Goethe—“the key medium of religious truth was not the word” conceived as an arbitrary, material signifier (this they termed “allegory”).<sup>351</sup> Rather, those rejecting the mono-causal and anti-metaphysical worldview of modern science were embracing the Christian-Neoplatonic “symbol, the power of which consists in its ability to sum up an entire theology in one potent image.”<sup>352</sup> Such a “symbol cannot be invented,” Walker observes, but is inherent in the archetypal structure of the cosmos.<sup>353</sup> For philosophers like Joseph Görres, philologists like Friedrich Creuzer, and poets like Clemens Brentano and Joseph von Eichendorff, “art is potentially connected to religion not” only “because [the symbol] reflects the truth of human subjectivity;” more importantly, it “subordinates reflection to disclosure” understood as the self-gift—the sheer, irrefutable *givenness*—of the

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<sup>351</sup> Ian Cooper and John Walker, eds., *Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World*, 167.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

transcendent.<sup>354</sup> According to Walker, the late-romantic poetry of Lutheran minister and amateur classicist Mörike only tenuously belongs to this romantic tradition. For his oeuvre “often suggests less an external natural order than a symbolic world undermined from within by a distinctly modern doubt, in which subjective consciousness and the objective criteria of truth are only precariously related.”<sup>355</sup>

Indeed, the slow creep of secularization evident in Mörike’s poetry often suggests that the image has lost any basis in a symbolic order prior to the poet’s own fabrication. On this view, lyric poetry has instead become irrevocably “sentimental” in the precise Schillerian sense of term. The poem’s mediation of insight into the numinous source of things and images through symbols thus appears to be equivocal and, as a result, utterly transient. As we shall see in this chapter on Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* (1863), the ontological equivocation pervading the symbolic imagery in this poem would drive a wedge between (aesthetic) creation and its creator, while nonetheless referencing the transcendent divine. And yet, perhaps despite appearances (not to mention Mörike’s own intentions) his best lyric poetry resists such prevalent yet inevitably vain attempts at secularizing the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol. For to the extent that his use of symbolic imagery unveils a reality transcending the realm of subjective impression and preference, a foundational analogy between words, things, and their numinous source cannot be abandoned but, in fact, inexorably reimposes itself on the poem—even if the poet might wish, at times, to dispense with it. In the

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. Hence Walker discerns in Mörike’s lyrics a “constant tension [...] between the apprehension of a desacralized world” and a faltering recollection of the Christian notion of desire—“hope” in the *eschaton*—through sentimental relics of the past. Furthermore, he regards Mörike’s understated Schellingianism as the cause of his divergence from the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of symbol, which Walker argues through his reading of “Die Elemente” (1838). This view of Schelling as Mörike’s “Leitstern am Himmel der philosophischen Denker” is corroborated by Ulrich Kittstein in his biography *Eduard Mörike: Jenseits der Idylle*, (Darmstadt: Lambert Schneider Verlag, 2015), 43. Henceforth: *Jenseits der Idylle*. Storz also considers Enlightenment and late-romantic philosophies of immanence—namely, Spinozism and Schellingianism—responsible for Mörike’s equivocal poetics of the symbol. See *Eduard Mörike*, (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1967), 76.

fourth chapter, which addresses “An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang” (1825), “Auf eine Lampe” (1846), and “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1846), we shall see that the poet’s desire to unveil a significant reality beyond mere sentiment reveals how symbolic vision necessarily unfolds within the difference between the visible world and the transcendent divine. Because signification entails likeness, yet lyric poetry always signifies in and through difference, a constitutive analogy—that is, the simultaneity of likeness and even greater difference—emerges from within the dynamism of Mörike’s imagery itself.

A contemporary of Heinrich Heine, Edgar Allan Poe, and Charles Baudelaire writing two generations after the era of Weimar classicism, Mörike occupies a pivotal position in the history of German letters. The consummate lyric poet, Mörike differs from more modern figures of post-revolutionary Europe in that he was still immensely attracted by the charism of the classical symbol—the idea of a presence that transcends history and, hence, his own finite capacities.<sup>356</sup> However, Mörike’s images perhaps most characteristically evoke oscillating tones that mourn the loss of the Christian-Neoplatonic worldview. At once idyllic and elegiac, naïve and sentimental, the Mörikan image is typically estranged from the ancient cosmos that it conjures. Simply put, the poet no longer quite believes in the lyric image’s power to present its divine origins. Neither Mörike nor his fellow seminarians at the Tübinger Stift—such as confidants F.T. Vischer and D.F. Strauß—regarded the cosmos as teleologically ordered to and, thus, inwardly filled by the transcendent. The *intimum* and *summum* of Augustinian theology had seemingly ceased to cohere in both Biblical images and the Book of Nature—much less in the aesthetic productions of nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>357</sup> As Hans Frei observes, metaphysical realism was increasingly jettisoned in German philology and

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<sup>356</sup> This is evident in Mörike’s many poems on Christian themes, several of which derive from paintings, as in “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1845) and “Schlafendes Jesuskind” (1862).

<sup>357</sup> See Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 187.

theology of the nineteenth-century due to the rise of historicizing methods of inquiry that had begun, ironically, with Herder's genealogical inquiries into the origins of poetry.<sup>358</sup> However, a deeper issue still was the legacy of Protestant iconoclasm. Although Herder and Goethe had challenged the attenuated notion of symbol articulated in Kant's third *Critique*, the Pietist philosopher's worldview was already widespread in Enlightenment culture—indeed Kant had simply expressed the long-standing Protestant critique of images in a philosophical idiom. If no longer predicated on the *analogia entis*, as per Lutheran theology, an image cannot *present* (*Darsellen*) the divine without becoming a simulacrum (an idol).<sup>359</sup> Hence the image can never function as a symbol, which, as DC Schindler observes, must be understood—and indeed is what it is—in light of an antecedent covenant.<sup>360</sup>

Reflection on the Greek use of “symbolon” sheds light on its relation to the image. In its original meaning, “symbol” referred to a *tessera hospitalis*, “the half of an object (usually a bone or die) that a host had broken in two and delivered into the safekeeping of his guest while holding onto the other himself.”<sup>361</sup> As a “token of the friendship that was formed through the act of hospitality,” the

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<sup>358</sup> Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 183-233. The historical irony of this fact owes to Herder's commitment to the Christian-Neoplatonic conception of the symbol discussed in chapter one. The argument holds that he and Goethe had attempted the recovery of analogy-based metaphysics and Aristotelian teleology and had thus articulated a version of metaphysical realism. While critiquing their poetics, Frei acknowledges that they come far closer to recovering a realist worldview than most their contemporaries and heirs.

<sup>359</sup> This critique began with Lutheranism's dismissal of the Roman Catholic notion of sacramentality, according to which the Eucharist is the type of all things such that the cosmos really participates (*methexis*) in and presents (*mimesis*) the logos of creation. It then culminates in the writings of twentieth-century Lutheran theologians such as Karl Barthes, for whom “the *analogia entis* represented everything that was wrong with natural theology and, by extension, the Catholic Church,” even denouncing in his *Church Dogmatics* as “the invention of the Antichrist” (T.J. White, ed., *The Analogy of Being*, 36). Cf. Brad Gregory's historical account of this development in *The Unintended Reformation*, whereby the Reformation excluded the transcendent God of Christianity from the philosophical and political arenas, thus paving the way for the hegemony of a disenchanted, univocal worldview after the age of Enlightenment (25-74).

<sup>360</sup> D.C., Schindler, *Freedom from Reality*, 151.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 31. Schindler further explains that “the Greek verb *sym-ballō* means ‘to join together’” (7).

symbol “represented the abiding character of the bond.”<sup>362</sup> Its purpose was to reinforce and preserve community. But such a bond between persons, things, and the divine—a bond based in the common good—had by the time of the German Revolutions of 1848 and 1849 become unbelievable to many Europeans. Because of the ongoing secularization of society, largely due to the sciences and industrialization, art was also in the agonizing process of severing itself from religion.<sup>363</sup> Whereas, according to Goethe’s analogy-based metaphysics, the poem had depended for its significance on the ontologically prior order of nature and divine reality (his notion of symbolic experience [*Erlebnis*] was, as Gadamer notes, never *merely* aesthetic), Mörike’s images tend to exhibit a strained, even delusory autonomy vis-à-vis the cosmos.<sup>364</sup> This and the following chapter thus describe his poetry’s equivocal appropriation of the classical symbol, whereby the lyric image appears to have become uncoupled from its origins in a reality transcending the poet’s finite powers of recollection and imagination. As remains to be seen, this occurs as the result of historical processes that are reflected in Mörike’s poetry: namely, the secularization resulting from the univocal metaphysics of the modern philosophy of science, the privatization of religion at the hand of liberal-secular state, and what Brad Gregory has recently termed “the subjectivization of morality” due to the loss of Aristotelian virtue ethics in Protestant theology.<sup>365</sup> As Gregory observes of post-Reformation Europeans in general, without symbols of the common good, one’s endeavors were “bound to be dissipated in desires, passions, and impulses that tended away from flourishing and toward individual self-absorption (if not self-destruction) and the erosion of community.”<sup>366</sup> This

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> See Ian Cooper and John Walker, eds., *Literature and Religion in the German-Speaking World*, 161-162.

<sup>364</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 68.

<sup>365</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 180-235.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 191.

fragmentation of the world and, furthermore, the etiolation of the category of personhood (the *imago Dei*) that it yields appear in Mörike's lyrics like the shadow cast by a "historical-philosophical sundial" portending the crises of the twentieth-century.<sup>367</sup>

If, however, the image is to be more than a contrivance, a picture, or an idol, it must be grounded in a reality that is not contingent on our representations of it. Whereas this chapter contends that, by contrast, Mörike's poetics of the image in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* would undermine any relation between poetry and the symbolic order, chapter 3 recovers the metaphysical principle of analogia underlying his use of symbolic imagery in the early poetry on time-consciousness (*Erinnerungshyrik*) and a late thing-poem (*Ding-gedicht*). The argument begins in chapter 2 by recounting Mörike's equivocal reception of Goethe's and Schiller's reflections on symbol in their letters. We shall see that, despite Mörike's profound indebtedness to Goethe's notion of symbolic vision—the moment (*Augenblick*) of insight into the eternal—epiphany appears to become a strictly punctual phenomenon in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*. For it is ostensibly confined to the poet's own historical horizon, the finite scope of his gaze ("ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes"), and, hence, to his interior powers of poësis. Regarding Mörike's cycle of ekphrastic poems on the Cistercian abbey at Bebenhausen, this chapter thus describes the symbolic image's de-potentialization to a sign—its reduction to allegorical discourse—which appears to rest fully in the poet's powers of memory (*Erinnerung*), sympathy (*Einfühlung*), and imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). The argument then addresses Mörike's tortured relationship to Christianity in an effort to discern the influence of Protestant theology on his dialectic of the image. Drawing on Paul Ricœur's phenomenology, we compare the peculiar oscillation of idyllic and elegiac tones demonstrated in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* with the twentieth-century Protestant theologian's attempt to retrieve symbolic speech through a

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<sup>367</sup> This image of lyric poetry's universal import is drawn from Adorno's *Noten zur Literatur*, 92, whose notion of allegory figures prominently in this and the following chapter. "[Eine] geschichtsphilosophische Sonnenuhr." My translation.



“second naïveté.” We contend that an elective affinity emerges between Mörike and Ricœur since they similarly repudiate divine presence in the image while affirming (and consequently etiolating) Christian symbolism as an allegorical (strictly *ex negativo*) reference to the transcendent. This reconceptualization of symbol presupposes an equivocal metaphysics that, we shall see, hollows out the symbolic image by “transgressing” the principles of analogia, methexis, and mimesis underpinning Christian-Neoplatonism.<sup>368</sup> The keynote (*Grundton*) of Mörike’s lyrics—naïveté—consequently bears a striking resemblance to Ricœur’s phenomenological account of symbol and the twentieth-century phenomenologist’s (unwitting) conflation of symbolism with allegory.<sup>369</sup> In sum, this chapter contends that although the Mörikean image appears to be severed from nature and divine reality and is, therefore, in a certain sense autonomous, it remains equivocally confined to the scope of the poet’s own gaze. It evinces what Taylor identifies as the characteristic trait of literary modernism: namely, “a slide to subjectivism and an anti-subjectivist thrust at the same time.”<sup>370</sup>

Chapter three deepens this observation by drawing out the proto-modernist notions of interiority and image exhibited in Mörike’s early poems on time-consciousness (*Erinnerungslyrik*). While subjectivization of the image remains the dominant tendency of Mörike’s poetry, it paradoxically opens a second view of the image’s autonomy: for, having ostensibly lost its relation to the divine, the poem also becomes increasingly severed from its origins in the finite person. In so doing, the moment (*Augenblick*) of symbolic insight into the ontologically indeterminate phenomena—the sunrise, the lamp, and the fossil—is suspended *within* and *between* the images of it. This adumbrates, we shall see, what Taylor has described as the modernist “epiphany of interspaces”

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<sup>368</sup> Cooper, *The Near and Distant God: Poetry, Idealism and Religious Thought from Hölderlin to Eliot* (London: Maney Publishing, 2008), 99.

<sup>369</sup> This chapter primarily draws on Paul Ricoeur’s discussions of symbol from “The Language of Faith,” *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Works* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) and his discussion of a “second naïveté” in *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 349-351.

<sup>370</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 456.

and -times, according to which the presence of the thing seen is only obliquely disclosed.<sup>371</sup> Whereas classical “epiphanies of being” had expressed the interior depths of the poet and the cosmos in the mode of immediate symbolic presence and were therefore prone to depict the origins in the manner of a copy (Gadamer), the “intertemporal” and “interspatial” epiphany of modernism “can’t be seen *in* an object” or, for that matter, in a subject “but has to be framed *between* an event and its recurrence, through memory” (479). Hence, instead of strictly repudiating the metaphysical dimension of mimesis and methexis underpinning the classical symbol, the modernist epiphany of interspaces and -times underscores that the thing seen only obliquely appears in and through the image—namely, under the aspect of “a greater difference.” Somewhat paradoxically, it is through a process de-subjectization that the poet recovers a vision of the numinous source of appearances. As remains to be seen, this indirect insight into the transcendent necessarily unfolds through the metaphysical principle of analogia.

The argument proceeds in chapter 3 with an interpretation of “An einem Wintermorgen” (1825), recounting how Mörikan images conjure the belated echoes of expressivist poetics of Weimar classicism, while washing away the classical symbol’s totalizing metaphysics of presence (ontological univocity without distinction) away in the maelstrom of time. Hence it describes the displacement of univocal metaphysics with what at first appears to be an equivocal worldview devoid of any real relation to the transcendent, yet increasingly depicts analogic presence of the deity while underscoring its difference—even its apparent absence—from the thing seen. As the bourgeois notion of lyric interiority (Mörike’s self-enclosed and hermetic sense of selfhood) becomes increasingly unstable, his poetic vision’s dependence on an antecedent order prior to the propositions and epistemological doubts of the “punctual self” (Taylor) becomes ever more pronounced. Chapter three concludes with a reading of “Auf eine Lampe” (1846) that intervenes in

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 479.

Emil Staiger's, Martin Heidegger's, and Romano Guardini's famous discussions of the poem. In light of Mörike's poetics of memory (*Erinnerung*), the argument discerns an analogous shift unfolding in this thing-poem (*Dinggedicht*) from a subject-centered to a fully de-subjectivized view of the aesthetic object. Hence it marks a shift from classical poetics, as articulated in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, to a proto-modernist notion of the image's aesthetic autonomy. Instead, however, of precluding the principles of mimesis and methexis structuring the classical symbol, the image's de-subjectivization reveals that in and through the irreducible act of poësis a covenant obtains between the symbolic image and its provenance in the transcendent. As in Mörike's early memory-poetry, the epiphanic insight into the numinous in his late thing-poetry unfolds through the metaphysical principle of analogia, such that it obliquely discloses the divine presence. If only in such moments of de-subjectization, as paradigmatically displayed in "Göttliche Reminiszenz," Mörike's best poetry belies the equivocal ontology of the symbol that he elsewhere espouses.<sup>372</sup> This is because his best poems attain a view of the symbol in and through the internal dynamism of image itself: namely, as a constitutive analogy developing within the scope of the greater difference between the image and its transcendent provenance, the poetic vision and the timeless eidos of the thing seen. Although Mörike embraces critical philosophy's deconstruction of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, his imagery sometimes anticipates modernist poetics as evinced by Anglo-American imagism (Eliot and

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<sup>372</sup> As Gregory explains in *The Unintended Reformation*, the notion of metaphysical univocity, equivocity, and analogy (*analogia entis*) are Scholastic in origin. Fourteenth-century Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus first articulated the idea of metaphysical univocity in a theological context, arguing that divine being belonged to the same order as common being. Thus he contended that "one predicate was and had to be common to and shared in the same sense by God and creatures" (36). This univocal view of reality—which problematized the sheer transcendence of the Judeo-Christian God—was also adopted by nominalists such as William of Ockham and early modern scientists such as Thomas Hobbes and Francis Bacon; in combination with Ockham's "principle of parsimony" (Ockham's razor), metaphysical univocity became the basis for conducting scientific inquiry into nature—thus excluding divine action from nature (40). In brief, "the transcendent God had been assimilated to the natural world and then marginalized through natural causality" (52). Metaphysical equivocity arises simultaneously with the notion of univocity but becomes especially pronounced following the disenchantment (Max Weber) experienced by Western culture after the Enlightenment. It indicates any attempt to recover the deity's transcendent presence on the basis of a univocal worldview.

Pound) and, we shall see, the thing-poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*. In so doing, his poetry invariably achieves symbolic insight into the analogia entis undergirding the lyric image.

### Mörike's Enigmatic Response to Weimar Classicism

Sprung from cosmic desire like the natural symbol, Mörike's lyric imagery is nevertheless burdened by a sense of belatedness vis-à-vis the transcendent source of creation. As such, his poetry is often tinged with a profound despair resulting from modernity's elegiac disposition towards nature, classical culture, and the divine. In the following, we shall see that this mood runs far deeper than the strain of joy—Mörike's peculiar "naïveté"—only barely sustaining his lyrics. For, in the main, his poetry lacks the eschatological hope that characterizes the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of time and the contingent image, according to which the divine is pro-visionally present in history.<sup>373</sup> Similar to his contemporary Heinrich Heine's lyric poems, Mörike's oeuvre instead evince the "torturous melancholy" that Friedrich Sengle has identified as "the spiritual undercurrent of the post-revolutionary period in all of Europe."<sup>374</sup> Mörike's poetry from the early

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<sup>373</sup> See Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology*, 231.

<sup>374</sup> Friedrich Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit: Deutsche Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Restauration u. Revolution, 1815-1848*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1971-80), 698: "Quälende Melancholie." "Die seelische Grundströmung der nachrevolutionären Epoche in ganz Europa." My translation. Cf. Emil Staiger's *Die Kunst der Interpretation*, 34-35, 205-214. In all other respects, the contrast between these poets could not be more pronounced. Heine's poetry is far more urbane and ironic than the Schwabian minister's. Nevertheless, there is a spiritual kinship evident in their melancholy and their apostasy from Protestant Christianity. From Mörike's morose romantic novel *Maler Nolten* (1832), in which every one of his young characters dies, to his late novella in a sunnier, classical style of *Mozart auf der Reisen nach Prag* (1852), the poet's creative source was nourished by a persistent melancholy. The world-weary pastor's disposition—he often complained of the tiresome duties of his vocation—is much like the one that he ascribes to Mozart: "Und wenn er nun, durch diese und andere Berufsarbeiten, Akademien, Proben und dergleichen abgemüdet, nach frischem Atem schmachete, war den erschlafften Nerven häufig nur in neuer Aufregung eine scheinbare Stärkung vergönnt. Seine Gesundheit wurde heimlich angegriffen, ein je und je wiederkehrender Zustand von Schwermut wurde, wo nicht erzeugt, doch sicherlich genährt an eben diesem Punkt und so die Ahnung eines frühzeitigen Todes, die ihn zuletzt auf Schritt und Tritt begleitete, unvermeidlich erfüllt. Gram aller Art und Farbe, das Gefühl der Reue nicht ausgenommen, war er als eine herbe Würze jeder Lust auf seinen Teil gewöhnt. Doch wissen wir, auch diese Schmerzen rannen abgeklärt und rein in jenem tiefen Quell zusammen, der, aus hundert goldenen Röhren springend, im Wechsel seiner Melodien unerschöpflich, alle Qual und alle Seligkeit der Menschenbrust ausströmte" (Mörike, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, MKG 6: 231). The purity of this source of inspiration in Mörike's lyrics remains to be seen.

1820s to the final 1864 edition of his *Gedichte*, which belongs to the Biedermeier era of German literature, has often been described as epigonal in subject, form, and tone.<sup>375</sup> By the time of Goethe's death in 1832, Weimar classicism had already become world literature and the cornerstone of German culture; its legacy established a standard of beauty for succeeding generations (one often denounced as insufficiently political), even as its aspirations for the universal education of humanity (*Bildung*) were dissipating under the iron rule of the Metternich system.<sup>376</sup> According to Staiger's assessment of the historical situation, late-romantic and Biedermeier poets shared "the fate that they could only live through memory. The golden age of the 'blessed' (*Seligen*) as Mörike had referred to Goethe, Schiller, Mozart, and Haydn, lay decades in the past."<sup>377</sup> For the "latecomer" Mörike, Staiger contends, it was impossible to experience life "other than as belated."<sup>378</sup> This elegiac disposition is spectacularly illustrated by an image from the poet's 1852 novella *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*—namely, of the bitter orange tree, which awakens in Mozart "a charming memory [*eine liebliche Erinnerung*] of his boyhood's days" and "a long-effaced musical reminiscence, the faint traces of which he dreamily pursued awhile."<sup>379</sup> While lost in reflection, Mozart half-consciously plucks the

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<sup>375</sup> Staiger, *Die Kunst der Interpretation* (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1955), is perhaps the main proponent of this view. By contrast to Sengle's appropriation of the term "Biedermeier," Storz holds that it serves little use inasmuch as it entails "ein apriorisches Abwerten jener Dichter – der Drost, Stifters, Mörikes – [...] im Sinne von 'Kleinmeistern'" (*Eduard Mörike*, 38). This is, however, not necessarily case, as the following assessment of Mörike's place in German letters seeks to show.

<sup>376</sup> It was a period of political repression—through censorship and networks of spies—and, especially in the German principalities, of insular cultures starkly contrasting the political vision of the foregoing era, as was paradigmatically expressed in Schiller's letters *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1793). Cf. James Sheehan's discussion of the Karlsbad decrees, which had restricted freedoms of the press and scholarship, from his chapter on Restoration politics in *German History: 1770-1866*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 408.

<sup>377</sup> *Die Kunst der Interpretation*, 209. "Das Schicksal, einzig in der Erinnerung leben zu können. Die hohe Zeit der 'Seligen', wie [Mörike] Goethe, Schiller, Mozart und Haydn genannt hat, liegt um Jahrzehnte zurück." My translation.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 207. "Spätling." "Anders denn als vergangenes." My translation.

<sup>379</sup> Eduard Mörike, "Mozart on the Way to Prag" in *German Novellas of Realism*, vol.1, ed. Jeffrey L. Sammons, trans. Walter and Catherine Alison Philips (New York: Continuum, 1989), 267; henceforth: *German Novellas*. Cf. Mörike, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, MKG, 6: 1: 239: "Eine liebliche Erinnerung aus seiner Knabenzeit." "Eine längst vermischte musikalische Reminiszenz, auf deren unbestimmter Spur er sich ein Weilchen träumerisch erging."

forbidden fruit, thus echoing humanity's fall from paradise into time. Later in the novella, the narrator tellingly describes the tree as "a living symbol of the subtle intellectual charm [*feingeistigen Reize*]" of the Baroque, "which was considered almost divine, though nowadays, of course, we find little in it that is truly praiseworthy, for it already bore within it the germ of a sinister future, the world-shaking onset of which was [...] not so very remote from the time of our innocent narrative."<sup>380</sup> Analogous to the narrator's suggestion that the beauty and horror of Baroque neoclassicism—of the Sun King and the Thirty Years War—already portended the demise of the *ancien regime*, Mörike suggests that the fragmentation of the Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysical framework was already underway in Viennese and Weimar classicism. Indeed, the bitter orange tree intimates a rupture between time and eternity, image and source, that was, Mörike hints, already present *in the beginning*. As we shall see, his lyric depictions of nature, history, and the divine in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* similarly stress that the image unfolds through the sentimental power of memory (*Erinnerung*)—that is, through the recollection of the moment's essential transience.

Influenced by Staiger's provocative view of Biedermeier art, contemporary scholarship continues to underscore Mörike's self-conscious belatedness (*Spätzeitbewußtsein*).<sup>381</sup> However, its

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<sup>380</sup> *German Novellas*, 284. Cf. MKG, 6:1:257: "[Ein] lebendes Symbol der feingeistigen Reize eines beinahe vergötterten Zeitalters [...], [...] das schon eine unheilvolle Zukunft in sich trug, deren welterschütternder Eintritt dem Zeitpunkt unserer harmlosen Erzählung bereits nicht ferne mehr lag." The protagonist's account of what took place in the garden faintly recalls the analogic structure of the Goethean symbol; for Mozart describes how the fruit tree inspired an interior vision with a formal gestalt of identity-in-difference that intimates the divine: "So lebhaft aber wie heut in Ihrem Garten war mir der letzte schöne Abend am Golf kaum jemals wieder aufgegangen. Wenn ich die Augen schloß - ganz deutlich, klar und hell, den letzten Schleier von sich hauchend, lag die himmlische Gegend vor mir verbreitet! [...] Ich glaubte wieder dieselbe Musik in den Ohren zu haben, ein ganzer Rosenkranz von fröhlichen Melodien zog innerlich an mir vorbei, Fremdes und Eigenes, Krethi und Plethi, eines immer das andere ablösend" (Mörike, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag*, MKG, 6). This echoes Goethe's description of the symbol from his letters with Schiller as "requir[ing] a certain succession; excit[ing] similar and diverse ideas in my spirit; and thus, from within and without, mak[ing] a certain claim to unity and universality" (Goethe, FA 4.2: 389).

<sup>381</sup> For a thorough (if one-sided) account of this reception history, see Rolf Eichhorn, *Mörikes Dinggedichte: Das schöne Sein der Dinge* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2007), 146-169, 404-424. Although Eichhorn's shrill repudiation of Staiger's hermeneutic method unjustly excludes the relevance of biography and history to the interpretation of a poem—and consequently denies any relationship at all between Mörike and Goethe—Eichhorn provides a survey of Staiger's profound influence on subsequent scholarship.

significance has fundamentally altered, thanks in large part to Sengle's reevaluation of late romanticism in *Biedermeierzeit* (1980), which jettisoned once and for all the view of Mörike's poetry as derivative and second rate.<sup>382</sup> In fact, its "epigonal" relation to classicism has been reinterpreted as the very source of his lyrics' novelty inasmuch as Mörike's appropriation of Goethean poetics subtly undermines the classical symbol's presentation (*Darstellung*) of the transcendent.<sup>383</sup> A consensus now acknowledges Mörike's originality vis-à-vis the preceding epochs, often foregrounding his poetry's adumbrations of the "ontological indeterminacy" (Taylor) of modernist lyric poetry.<sup>384</sup> For instance, Ulrich Hötzer affirms that his writings innovatively draw on ancient and modern poets, ranging from Theocritus and Horace to Schiller and Hölderlin.<sup>385</sup> Thus, Hötzer contends, Mörike "paraphrases" classical verse forms to achieve rhythms and tones entirely organic to the German language of his times.<sup>386</sup> As Sengle remarks, Mörike had "passed through and overcome epigonism, and this means that he could employ all the conventional forms of literature in new ways."<sup>387</sup>

Although his literary production certainly lacks the breadth of Goethe's genius, scholarship has

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<sup>382</sup> Sengle cannot, however, be given credit for single-handedly reassessing the value of Biedermeier literature. Other mid-twentieth century scholars such as S.S. Prager recognized the originality of Mörike's poetics vis-à-vis classicism. As he contends in his reception history of the poet's oeuvre *Mörike und seine Leser: Versuch einer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag 1960), the transition towards an understanding of the poet transcending his nineteenth-century fame for idylls and fairytales began with Hugo Wolf's modernist settings of the poet's lyrics just after the fin-de-siècle (ibid., 35-41).

<sup>383</sup> This perspective pervades the *Mörike Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, ed. Inge and Reiner Wild, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler 2004), in which its currency was institutionalized. Henceforth: *Mörike Handbuch*. Ulrich Hötzer was an early advocate of this more nuanced view of Mörike's relationship to Weimar classicism, as evinced by his posthumously published lectures and writings on the poet in *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, ed. Eva Bannmüller (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1998).

<sup>384</sup> Cf. Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 24, where he characterizes Mörike as "ein Januskopf, der in frühe griechische Zeit zurückweist [perhaps with Heraclitus in mind] und zugleich auf den Einbruch der Moderne schaut."

<sup>385</sup> Cf. ibid., 279-291. Regarding the difference between Goethe's and Mörike's notions of symbolic disclosure, Hötzer writes: "Kaum je ruht der Augenblick des Mörikeschen Gedichts bedeutungsvoll in sich wie der Augenblick des Goetheschen Gedichts. Fast immer ist er offen nach Vergangenheit und Zukunft" (285).

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 706: "Er ist durch das Epigonentum hindurchgegangen, und dies bedeutet, daß er alle überlieferten Formen in neuer Weise verwenden kann."

found that Mörike's lyric poetry attains a similar depth of insight, which is typically discussed in terms of epiphanic vision and time as "the depths of the moment of insight" (*die Tiefe des Augenblicks*).<sup>388</sup> This observation pertains, in particular, to Mörike's *Erinnerungshyrik*—his many poems depicting a present event intensified through recollection—which foregrounds the temporal structure of symbolic disclosure as mediated by memory. According to this influential line of argumentation, Mörike's emphasis on time-consciousness, the moment's distension and contraction, and the inexorable flux of history, distinguishes his poetics from classicism and makes it a precursor of the secularized understanding of epiphany often ascribed to literary modernism (Hofmannsthal, Joyce, Woolfe).<sup>389</sup> Despite its resonances with classical (e.g. Augustinian) anthropology, wherein memory serves in tandem with the imagination as a means of recollecting the divine, Mörike's poetry—particularly as evinced in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*—often depicts memory as a sentimental power forever estranged from its source.<sup>390</sup> As a result, it displaces the image's numinous origins with a sign of the moment's passing—time's sheer distension (*distensio*)—thus distracting from the deity's presence.<sup>391</sup> Even as it recalls Goethe's poetics of experience (*Erlebnisdichtung*) and the

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<sup>388</sup> See, for instance, Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 147: "'Tiefe des Augenblicks', das meint, daß Gegenwart nicht in sich, sondern auf Vergangenen ruht, auf Vergangenes weist. Es meint, daß das Wahrnehmen der Gegenwart auf die Erinnerung als ein ganz wichtiges Organ zum Hervorbringen der Wirklichkeit angewiesen ist. Und es meint auch, daß Gegenwärtiges das Zukünftige in sich birgt, daß auch Gegenwart Bewegung der Zeit ist, Umschlagen der Blickrichtung, weg von der Tiefe des Vergangenen, hin zur Tiefe des Künftigen." Cf. Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, 27, on the special "Intensität" characterizing Mörike's lyric.

<sup>389</sup> Christian L. Hart Nibbrig's *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit: Zeiterfahrung und Zeitgestaltung bei Eduard Mörike*, (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1973) gives a seminal and still in many respects the most insightful account of temporality in Mörike's lyrics.

<sup>390</sup> See Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology*.

<sup>391</sup> The notion of time's distension (*distensio*) employed in the following is essentially Augustinian: for the image's temporal distension is at once our means of recollecting the eternal and a constant temptation. As Hochschild observes, the corresponding problems of cosmic time's distension and the human being's ineluctable "lateness to God" because of distraction (*distensio* as concupiscence) is always contrasted" for Augustine "to the intimate presence of God to the soul" (ibid., 231). See Augustine's intriguing reflections on the temporal element of poetry in *De vera religione*, where he "meditates on the impermanence of creation," observing that it must be regarded as "a whole 'in temporal sequence' in order that its beauty be displayed" (cited in Hochschild, 186). According to this early treatise, time "possesses all the 'beauty of its changefulness'" because it traces and, in a sense, contains the eternal without ever encompassing it. Hence, "[creation] is not evil because it is transient. A line of poetry is beautiful in its own way, though no two syllables can be



recovery of the classical symbol by Hamann, Herder, and Goethe, *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* stresses the image's temporal structure as a finite product of memory and lyric phantasy. This sentimental attitude consequently yields a historicized view of things that ostensibly strips the image of its covenant with the antecedent order (*kosmos*) of things—the logoi of God—by depicting moments of epiphanic insight (*Augenblicke*) as strictly punctual occurrences. Thus, it happens that the symbol becomes a sign of divine absence.

For Charles Taylor, the novelty of modern philosophy and literature stems from an understanding of interiority as dis-embedded from the ontological order of the cosmos. Modernism celebrates the “decentered subject,” whose interior life is often likened to a stream in its sheer transience.<sup>392</sup> This epoch “rebels,” Taylor contends, “against the spatialization of time” into a moment of transcendent insight, as did Heidegger’s attempt in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), to destruct the “view of time in which the present is the dominant dimension.”<sup>393</sup> In response to the increasingly mechanistic and technological worldview of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society, philosophers and artists turned inwards to “the lived world, the world as experienced, known, and transmuted in sensibility and consciousness,” since it could not “be assimilated to the supposedly all-

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spoken at the same time [since it] consists of successive syllables of which the later ones follow those which had come earlier. In spite of this, the verse is beautiful as exhibiting the faint traces of the beauty which the art of poetry keeps steadfastly and unchangeably” (ibid.). By keeping the whole in mind, if only ever provisionally, Augustine recollects the presence of transcendent beauty within and through the perception of each fleeting part. Yet this awareness of the divine presence remains fraught with the burden of subjectivity—the demands to avoid distraction and purge the interior image of self-deceit. As Hanby observes in *Augustine and Modernity*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2, the Augustinian subject is only “free [...] as graced”; because memory inevitably fails as the will falls and gives in to distraction, its recollection of the transcendent source presupposes God’s prior remembrance of the human being. Augustin’s notion of freedom overcomes Pelagian/Stoic subjectivity “precisely insofar as it attains to the good which is the aim and motive of our every act, a good explicated as the love between the Father and the Son”—that is, the *donum* who is the Holy Spirit (ibid.). Mörike’s turn towards modernism was only faltering. Poems such as “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1845) still reflect an understanding of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol that is, as Romano Guardini contends, undeniably orthodox.

<sup>392</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 456.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 463.

encompassing machine.”<sup>394</sup> Instead of returning to a classical notion of insight, however, according to which self-expression could “be in harmony with” and even “further the revelation of the spirit in things,” modernism rejected many of its presuppositions: namely, classicism’s implicit belief in “the inherent goodness of man and nature” and its conviction that the realignment of “inner nature and reason” is “proper to a restored humanity.”<sup>395</sup> The modernist turn inwards entails “a fragmentation of experience,” which undermines traditional understandings of self-identity and other-relatedness as metaphysically grounded in the structure of the cosmos.<sup>396</sup> According to Taylor, the crucial moment in this transition from classicism’s recovery of Christian-Neoplatonic interiority, conceived as symbolic expression of the divine, lay in modernism’s rejection of “epiphanies of being.”<sup>397</sup> “Gone was the alignment between [...] inner nature[,] reason,” and being, such that moments of seemingly transcendent insight in modernist art—one might think of Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Lord Chandos Brief* (1902), James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), or Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg* (1924)—become utterly punctual and prove ambiguous as to the ontological value of the thing seen.<sup>398</sup> Gone, too, was the possibility (at least ostensibly) of epiphanic encounter with the eternal source of nature through symbols instituted by the rational and benevolent logos.

Werner Kohlschmidt’s discussion in *Form und Innerlichkeit* (1955) of melancholy, memory, and desire in Mörike’s lyrics describes a similar process whereby art’s symbolic foundations are washed away by the muddy stream of history. He contends that the classical “moment of insight” (“der Augenblick”), once conceived as a concrete instance of transcendent encounter, “is displaced

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 460.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, 461, 462.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

[...] from the category of being to time.”<sup>399</sup> Contrary, for instance, to Goethe’s “Ganymed,” which Kohlschmidt describes in spatial terms as presenting a dynamic of “intensification and concretion” (“Steigerung und Verdichtung”) many of Mörike’s lyrics—especially those in his early romantic style—are “pure time-poems” (“reinsten Zeitgedichten”).<sup>400</sup> Yet Kohlschmidt also acknowledges that, similar to Goethe’s lyrics, such poems as “An einem Wintermorgen” paradoxically retain “a strong impression” of poetic inwardness, concreteness, and mood; thus, they tenuously remain within the purview of classicism by “mirror[ing] an interior motion.”<sup>401</sup> What Mörike’s poems on temporal flux effect, therefore, is a second, imagistic presence—a simulacrum—on the shifting sands of sentiment and time. Instead of simply reproducing images of transcendent experience in the Goethean tradition of *Erlebnislyrik*, Mörike’s poems on time-consciousness constitute an entirely new genre—namely, memory-poems (*Erinnerungslyrik*) that stress the poet’s distance and temporal difference from the presence (*Gegenwart*) as disclosed in the past encounter.<sup>402</sup> Kohlschmidt thus discerns “in Mörike’s lyrics a certain consciousness of time that ruptures the pure moment of insight (*Augenblicke*) and renders it remote from itself or else distances the ego from the moment.”<sup>403</sup> Such sentimental self-awareness entails, Kohlschmidt contends, a notion of time “that immediately

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<sup>399</sup> Werner Kohlschmidt, *Form und Innerlichkeit: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Wirkung der deutschen Klassik und Romantik*, (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1955) 238: “Wird [...] aus der Kategorie des Seins in die Zeit verstetzt.” My translation.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 236. As Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, observes, “die Erfahrung der Welt lost sich von der Kategorie des Raumes. Die Raum-Zeit ist aufgehoben ins Fließen der reinen Zeit, die kontinuierliche, strömende Gegenwart ist” (25).

<sup>401</sup> Kohlschmidt, *Form und Innerlichkeit*, 236: “Stehen unter einem starken Eindruck.” “Spiegeln eine innere Bewegung.” My translation.

<sup>402</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, also contends “daß die erinnernde Vergegenwärtigung eines Vergangenen und Verlorenen für Mörike einen Urmodus dichterischen Imaginierens darstellt [...]” (6). He holds, furthermore, that memory’s medial character in Mörike’s lyrics distances it from the moment of insight: hence, “daß Mörike sich der Erinnerung nur hinzugeben vermag, wenn sie als Erinnerung reflektiert ist, als fürchte er, in ihr zu ertrinken. Solche Erinnerung muß stets sich selber setzten, sagen, daß sie es sei. Das schafft zugleich Distanz gegenüber der herandrängenden Fülle der in die Gegenwart gerufenen Vergangenheit” (8).

<sup>403</sup> Kohlschmidt, *Form und Innerlichkeit*, 237: “Bei Mörike eine bestimmte Zeitbewußtheit, die den reinen Augenblick abbricht, ihn von sich abrückt, bzw. das Ich vom Augenblick entfernt. Eine Zeitbewußtheit, die aus dem Augenblick sofort eine Erinnerung oder Erwartung macht.” My translation.

transforms the moment of insight into a memory (*Erinnerung*) or an anticipation (*Erwartung*)” of the future and, therefore, may seem to lack any basis in eternal being.<sup>404</sup> While this secularizing understanding of symbolic insight is often evident in Mörike’s poetry, especially in the *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, we shall see that his lyric imagery tends to belie the critical Zeitgeist (Hegelianism) and his own poetic intention. This is because, at its best, his poetry transitions away from “epiphanies of being” to those disclosing the “interspaces” and “-times” within the image’s own dynamic form in a manner consonant with Anglo-American imagism. In so doing, some of Mörike’s poems eschew the pantheistic view of symbol (ontological monism) prevalent in the classical and romantic periods while also overcoming the chasm opened between the image and its eternal source of significance by the equivocal metaphysics of (proto)modernism. Because of its enduring reliance on the principle of analogia and apophasis, his poetry’s symbolic imagery often succeeds in rising beyond the scope of the poet’s own sentimental gaze to present the transcendent deity’s presence in nature and art.

At its worst, however, Mörike’s efforts at undermining the classical symbol’s basis in the abiding order of things result in a form of idolatry: namely, the temporally distended (second) presence of the poet’s enchanted, inevitably disenchanting image. According to the prevailing consensus of Mörike scholarship, what renders his lyric poems a pivotal point of transition on the way from classicist to modernist poetics is their equivocal depiction of lyric inwardness. For even as the poet’s inner capacities remain confined to the fleeting moment, they simulate transcendent encounter. As Kohlschmidt observes, Mörike’s poetry thus yields (*zeitigt*) “new forms of interiority: namely, melancholy and desire,” which “lend the epiphanic moment confined to time’s immanent horizon the thrill (*Schauer*) of a second being—that of a self-enclosed inwardness.”<sup>405</sup> After

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 238-239: “Neue Formen der Innigkeit: eben Wehmut und Sehnsucht.” “Verleih[en] dem in die Zeit eingeschränkten Augenblick die Schauer eines zweiten Seins, einer ichbezogenen Innerlichkeit.” My translations.

dissolving symbolic presence in the temporal flux of the lyric medium, Mörike's time-poems attain, on Kohlschmidt's account, a second interiority and immediacy by concretizing (*verdichten*) time into an image, which is reflected through memory and filled with impeded longing. This essentially elegiac form of inwardness is radically punctual and, therefore, historically and ontologically isolated.<sup>406</sup> In the following, we shall see how this poetic attitude is manifest in the late cycle *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*. For here the "punctual self" (Taylor) of Mörike's poetry equivocally strives to attain a second transcendence through the magic of disenchantment.<sup>407</sup> It emerges that his images' peculiar naïveté springs from his longing for an ostensibly unattainable encounter. Instead of presenting the absolute, they become "allegories of desire" (de Man) for the lost presence of nature and God.<sup>408</sup>

This prevailing reading of Mörike as a forerunner of modernism is, however, not altogether obvious from his life and letters. Beginning, at the latest, with his translations and redactions of Greek and Roman poetry in *Klassische Blumenlese* (1840) and, subsequently, the poems written for the 1848 edition of his *Gedichte*, Mörike drew almost exclusively on traditional subjects and forms of lyric speech.<sup>409</sup> His affinity for Anacreontic, in particular, gives much of Mörike's poetry a levity that made the provincial Lutheran minister a master of idylls and traditional "German inwardness"

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<sup>406</sup> Although proto-modernist, Mörikan inwardness has roots in early modernity; for it emerges from the welter of Protestant theology (e.g. Pietism), modern philosophies of immanence (e.g. Spinozism and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, which Mörike intermittently studied), and liberalism (Mörike was, privately, a supporter of the *Märzrevolution* of 1848). Cf. Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 165, on the necessity of taking a genealogical view of contemporary subjectivity. Regarding Mörike's dilettantish interest in philosophy, Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, concedes "so hat er sich den auch niemals stetig und längere Zeit mit philosophischem Schrifttum beschäftigt — am ehesten noch mit Schelling und Spinoza. Auf diesen hat er sich freilich erst in der Vikariatszeit, nach der Arbeit am 'Maler Nolten' eingelassen" (76).

<sup>407</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 49.

<sup>408</sup> Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, 132. Although Adorno's uses the phrase "nur Allegorie der Sehnsucht, voll des Ausdrucks der Vergängnis, ..., kaum Gegenwart" in his account of Eichendorff's poetics, it more nearly describes Mörike's, as we shall see in this and the following chapter.

<sup>409</sup> With Mörike, we might say in somewhat Hegelian terms, the classic worldview has not only become "classicism", but (weimar) classicism has itself become highly self-conscious. Its lyric genres (anacreontik, elegie) seem heavily curated, less forms of self-expression than aimed at exhibition. The book becomes the "museum" of forms.

(“deutsche Innigkeit”) in the eyes of his contemporaries.<sup>410</sup> According to Sengle, Mörike’s poetry represents “the unbroken relationship to God and world—one untainted by ‘reflection’—that even before Schiller was admiringly termed ‘naïve’.”<sup>411</sup> This attitude is intimated in an 1831 comment on Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1795) that seems oblivious to the undercurrent of irony shaping the educational path (*Bildungsweg*) of the novel’s truly naïve protagonist: “It places me,” Mörike writes, “in a wonderful state of harmony with the world, with myself, with the universe. This, I would think, is after all the truest criterion of an artwork. This is the effect of Homer and of every antique statue.”<sup>412</sup> Sengle’s influential account of Mörike’s appropriation of classicism contends that it became the basis of a “programmatic naïveté” whereby the “eternal presence of great or congenial paragons” increasingly govern his writings.<sup>413</sup> As a result this attitude, Sengle claims, “history

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<sup>410</sup> See, for example, Mörike’s poem “Der alte Turmhahn.” Praver, *Mörike und seine Leser*, 20, cites Theodor Storm’s account of Mörike’s lyric style from Storm’s *Erinnerungen an Eduard Mörike*: “Da war Tiefe und Grazie, deutsche Innigkeit verschmolzen oft mit antiker Plastik, der rhythmisch bewegte Zug des Liedes und doch ein klar umrissenes Bild darin; die idyllischen, vom anmutigsten Humor getragenen Stücke der [1838er] Sammlung von farbigsten Gegenständlichkeit und doch vom Erdboden losgelöst und in die reine Luft der Poesie hinaufgehoben.” Mörike’s love letters and poems to his fiancée Luise Rau have been described as “eine Höhepunkt der Innigkeit und Unmittelbar” reminiscent of Goethe’s “Maifest” (*Mörike Handbuch*, 21-22).

<sup>411</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 694: “Das ungebrochene, durch ‘Reflexion’ nicht zerstörte Welt- und Gottesverhältnis das man schon vor Schiller mit Bewunderung als ‘naïv’ zu nennen pflegte.” My translation.

<sup>412</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 11: 239: “Es setzt mich wunderbar in Harmonie mit der Welt, mit mir selbst, mit Allem. Das dünkt mich, ist das wahrste Kriterium eines Kunstwerks überhaupt. Das thut Homer auch und jede Antike Statue.” Such harmony was mostly absent from Mörike’s life and works at the time, as his own anti-Bildungsroman attests. Having lost his father and siblings at an early age, the poetically gifted youth was assigned a bourgeois profession in the Lutheran clergy, which he bitterly resisted; he had chronic health issues (it has been speculated that he suffered from multiple sclerosis); and his love-life was marred by the trauma of a reckless romance from his years as a student in Tübingen. Despite the poet’s native good humor, he was prone to despair of his fortunes.

<sup>413</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 707. “Ewige Gegenwart großer oder seelenverwandter Vorbilder.” “Die Geschichte verräumlicht sich [...] zur Allgegenwart des Wahren und Schönen.” My translations. After the publication in 1832 of his own anti-Bildungsroman, *Maler Nolten*—a morbid story of erotic education inspired by Novalis, in which Mörike exercises the demons of his youth (particularly his romance with Maria Meyer)—the maturing poet’s taste for the classics became far more pronounced (Sengle, 70). His readings consisted of a steady diet of ancient Greek and Roman poetry, which gave his late style a patina of classical form and substance. By his own admission, Mörike henceforth eschewed “that which [...]” was “formerly life and breath” in abstaining from the excesses of romanticism (Mörike, MKG, 12: 91). “With great self-certainty,” Sengle contends, “and unperturbed by the authority of Goethe, he pursues a more wholesome path” that recovers the classical virtues of moderation, composure, and circumscription (Sengle, 704: “Mit großer Sicherheit, auch unbeirrt durch die Autorität Goethes, geht er den für richt erkanntten Weg in die Stille, in die ‘Gesundheit’.” My translation). An 1837 letter to Vischer from 1837 suggests this shift in Mörike’s approach to his lyric: “Regarding my relationship to poetry, it is at present merely the desire of paramour, who must restrain himself for the sake of his diet.” Cited in Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 704. “Was mein Verhältnis zu der Poesie betrifft, so ist’s für jetzt

becomes spatial” for Mörike in a manner typical of Biedermeier art through “the universal presence of truth and beauty.”<sup>414</sup> If, as remains to be seen, the classical view of the cosmos was not an entirely stable standard for the young poet, it retained an enduring charm (*Reiz*).<sup>415</sup> Consider, for instance, Mörike’s use of the classical idiom in the account of his spiritual awakening from his 1834 *curriculum vitae* (*Investiturlbenslauf*). Written for church authorities upon receiving his post as parson of Cleversulzbach, this document describes how Mörike’s eldest sibling had taught him to see nature’s transcendent source, thus shaping his sense of “inwardness” (“Innern”):

What only a youthful mind may sense behind the surfaces of the external world, of nature, and human relations, all this was stirred inside me (*in meine Innern*) in conversations on lonely walks with this brother; he knew how to give the most commonplace phenomena a higher and often mysterious charm (*Reiz*); and it was also he, who first understood how to direct my childish feelings more sustainably towards supersensible and divine things.<sup>416</sup>

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eigentlich nur die Sehnsucht eines Liebhabers, der sich diäthalber enthalten muß” (Mörike, MKG, 12: 147). Thus, he turned his attention to translating Horace and Theocritus, to classicism, and, we shall see, intermittently to Christ to sustain his tenuous existence.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Regarding Mörike’s enigmatic religious convictions, commentators have often emphasized the poet’s confession to his friend D. F. Strauß of his “enduring affinity for Christianity.” Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 14: 91: “Fortdauernde Neigung zum Christentum.” My translation. Cf. Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 700. One of the more strident advocates of Mörike’s religiosity is Ian Cooper. As we shall see, his monograph *The Near and Distant God* goes so far as to deny Mörike’s sympathy with Strauß’ historical criticism. J.P. Stern distinguishes the Mörikean symbol from that of “aestheticism,” presumably on this basis, asserting that it “is an expression of the world (or at least an intimate part of the world) as a creation of God, ‘pulcher horologium Dei.’” J.P. Stern, *Idylls and Realities: Studies in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*, (New York: Friedrich Ungar Publishing, 1971), 79. Stern considers his symbols constitutive on the classical model of the cosmos. Similarly bracketing the evidence from Mörike’s correspondences—to which we will presently turn our attention—that the poet had in fact lost his faith, Romano Guardini has good reason to affirm that the subject of “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1845) “is the interiority of Christ, behind which lies the mystery of the Incarnation” (Romano Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis*, 52). “Ist die Innerlichkeit Christi, hinter welcher das Mysterium der Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes liegt.” My translation. Guardini even goes so far as to contend that this poem “speaks about it in a manner against which no person of faith need object,” though he is quick to note that Hegel had also viewed the Gospel of John as “the proper expression of that which he held to be Christian.” Ibid., 53. “Spricht darüber in einer Weise, gegen die wohl kein gläubiger Leser etwas einzuwenden hätte.” “Den eigentlichen Ausdruck dessen, was [er] für christlich hielt.” My translations.

<sup>416</sup> MKG, 9: 329. Cited in *Jenseits der Idylle*, 258: “Was nur ein jugendlicher Sinn irgend Bedeutungsvolles hinter der Oberfläche der äußern Welt, der Natur u[nd] menschlicher Verhältnisse zu ahnen vermag, das Alles wurde durch die Gespräch dieses Bruders auf einsamen Spaziergängen, wenn ich ihn manchmal auch nur halb verstand, in meine Innern angeregt, er wußte den gewöhnlichsten Erscheinungen einen höheren u[nd] oft geheimnisvollen Reiz zu geben; er war es auch, der meine kindischen Gefühle zuerst mit mehr Nachhaltigkeit auf übersinnliche u[nd] Göttliche Dinge zu lenken verstand.” My translation.

The poet recalls learning with wonder of creation's symbolic depths, through which mundane appearances become the vessels of the transcendent and display a "charm" ("Reiz") intimating the presence of the "divine." Consequently, these early glimpses of numinous beauty stimulated ("anregen") the poet's sense of the inner life of the spirit. In light of Mörike's recollection of his childhood here, Sengle's contention that "linking the terrestrial with the supernatural must have been the poet's deepest need" seems fitting.<sup>417</sup> And yet, the poet's use of the term "charm" (*Reiz*) in this passage already suggests the fundamental enigma of his poetics.<sup>418</sup> A word appearing in many of his best works—for instance, "Göttliche Reminiszenz" (1846), "Auf eine Lampe" (1846) and, as we have seen, *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag* (1852)—"charm" intimates a plethora of ostensibly opposing ideas. According to Ian Cooper, the sense of "charm" in the late thing-poems suggests the transcendent presence of the Holy Spirit—even as it "transgresses representation;"<sup>419</sup> taken more literally, "charm" indicates a physiological "stimulus" that moves an organic body and gives it a unity, harmony, and a grace transcending the mechanical arrangement of parts; finally, it also recalls the neoclassical levity of Mörike's mature worldview, according to which, as he puts it in an 1840 letter, "the miraculous is only illusory and mere play."<sup>420</sup> For Mörike and the contemporary scholarship, the term implies many contradictory meanings. Even as it echoes the classical view of the cosmos, his usage of "Reiz" is often taken to indicate the Christian-Neoplatonic images de-potentialization through the vicissitudes of time. If on the surface the words *Reiz* and *reizvoll*

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<sup>417</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 700. "Die Verknüpfung des Irdischen und des Überirdischen muß sein tiefstes Bedürfnis gewesen sein." My translation.

<sup>418</sup> See Kittstein's chapter "Vergnügen und Spiel" in *Jenseits der Idylle* on the anachreontic (ultimately unbearable) levity characterizing Mörike's poetics.

<sup>419</sup> Cooper, *The Near and Distant God*, 93.

<sup>420</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 13: 100: "Das Wunderbare nur scheinbar ist und bloßes Spiel." My translation. Cf. Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 723: He characterizes Mörike's "Rococo" style as "ein anmutig-übermütiges Spiel [...], ein Sieg des 'gesunden' Menschen, der sich nicht ängstigen läßt, ein Sieg des Künstlers, der heitere Gestalten an die Stelle dumpfer 'Mächte' setzt."



(enchanting) connote the grace of neoclassical courtly culture—for instance, the *grazioso* of Mozart's K 331 (A Major)—it also implies a Baroque insight that characterizes Mörike's poetics from the early memory-poems to his late style: namely, the recognition that symbolic disclosure through the image is fleeting. Thus, the relation between the word's two dimensions is that of surface serenity and melancholic depth. As expressed in an alexandrine (*the* Baroque verse form) from "An einem Wintermorgen," "Es ist ein Augenblick, und alles wird verwehn."<sup>421</sup>

Mörike's relationship to Weimar classicism is similarly enigmatic. His reception of Goethe and Schiller began during his studies in Urach and Tübingen in the early 1820s, which was—because of a scandalous affair and the rigors of the Tübinger Stift—a tumultuous period in the poet's life. Hence, Mörike's first encounters with the classical tradition were often deeply unsettling.<sup>422</sup> Upon reading the *Goethe-Schiller-Briefwechsel* in 1829, he recounts his experience in a letter to another former student at the Stift, Johannes Mährlen:

The terrific (*tolle*) little book stuck in my hands—its pages flew rapidly from right to left as though possessed; I soon stood in the middle of a holy, classical milieu, eventually read gingerly and more gingerly still, yes, I held my breath so as not to disturb the still, deep surfaces in whose abyss I dropped my gaze straight down, as if I might see the soul of art.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Mörike, "An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang," MKG, 1: 12: My translation. Cf. Hötzer's discussion of Mörike's paraphrase of the Baroque alexandrine in *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 272-277.

<sup>422</sup> Tellingly, his encounter with Goethe's oeuvre was first encouraged by his friend and early Hölderlin enthusiast Wilhelm Waiblinger, whose bohemian lifestyle left a profound impression on the young man. See Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 36, 47-51. Waiblinger's influence surely echoes in *Mozart auf der Reise nach Prag* in the concern that Eugenia expresses for the beloved composer: namely, "daß dieser Mann sich schnell und unaufhaltsam in seiner eigenen Glut verzehre, daß er nur eine flüchtige Erscheinung auf der Erde sein könne, weil sie den Überfluß, den er verströmen würde, in Wahrheit nicht ertrüge" (Mörike, MKG, 6:1: 283-84). Kittstein contends that "Waiblingers Schicksal muss [Mörike] demonstriert haben, wohin der Bruch mit den gesellschaftlichen Konventionen und eine genialische Ungebundenheit führen konnten. Die vorsichtige Diätetik, die er später entwickelte und die sein beschränktes, zurückgezogenes Dasein leitete, ist wohl nicht zuletzt als Gegenentwurf zu der rauschhaften, zügellosen Existenz und dem 'schauderhaften Sturz' dieses einstigen Weggefährten zu begreifen" (*Jenseits der Idylle*, 50).

<sup>423</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 11: 30: "Das tolle Büchlein klebte aber in meinen Händen fest – seine Blätter flogen eilig wie besessen von der Rechten zur Linken, ich stand bald mitten in heiliger klassischer Atmosphäre, las endlich sachte und sachter, ja ich hielt den Athem an, die ruhige tiefe Fläche nicht zu zerstören, in deren Abgrund ich nun senkrecht meinen Blick hinunterließ, als dürfte ich die Seele der Kunst anschauen." My translation. Cf. Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 37.

This revealing statement suggests that for Mörike, to partake of the fullness of the aesthetic framework developed in those letters, he must take himself entirely out of the equation. Reading as though possessed (“besessen”), he has no being except as pure spectator (“reines Auge”). The passage trembles with the fear that he may disrupt the “placid surface” in peering down into the “abyss” (“Abgrund”)—an expression intimating the treacherous, potentially fatal interiority of the symbol. However, what Mörike purports to see in its depths is altogether familiar. Staring into the abyss of the artwork, he purportedly glimpses his own reflection: “I must confess that I recognized in right many an idea my own possession, one already acquired by my own efforts, and I quivered with delight at its salutation.”<sup>424</sup> Mörike imagines that the truths surfacing in the still waters of classicism originally belonged to him—although, as soon as he says so, they begin to slip through his grasp like the hours passing by as he loses himself in the letters. Towards the end of his study, well after midnight, the poet surrenders any semblance of classical self-composure:

Finally, my phantasy became disoriented on deviant paths; I ran through the adjacent cells of the insane asylum and rummaged in the benighted world of monstrosities in their dreams; a thousand faces of fools grinned upon the beautiful, daylight clarity of [this] little book, and they almost convinced me that the philosophers lie in horrible error and that only they, the fools, had gotten behind the curtain of divine understanding, where one sees and almost bursts with laughter at how Mr. Schiller and Mr. Goethe, with self-important miens and bows, discuss the embellishment of nuts and the *mundus in nuce*.<sup>425</sup>

Following the impulses of his fancy and, evidently, struggling against the so-called “anxiety of influence” (Harold Bloom), Mörike balks at the philosophical clarity of classical poetics. He imagines

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<sup>424</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 11: 30. “Gar manche Idee, das darf ich Dir wohl gestehen, erkannte ich als mein selbst erworbenes Eigenthum wieder, und ich schauderte oft vor Freuden über seiner Begrüßung.” My translation.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid. “Zulezt gerieth meine Phantasie auf ganz fremde Abwege; ich durchlief die benachbarten Zellen des Irrenhauses und wühlte in der nächtlichen Fratzenwelt ihrer Träume; auf die schöne Tagesklarheit Deines Büchleins grinsten tausend Narrengeichter die mit ihren tief pfliffigen Augen mich fast überredeten, die Philosophen liegen in einem entsetzlichen Irrthum und nur sie, die Narren, wären hinter die Gardine des göttlichen Verstandes gekommen, wo man sehe und fast platze vor Lachen, wie HE. Schiller u. HE. Göthe\*) sich mit wichtigen Mienen und Bücklingen über die Vergoldung von Nüssen und des MUNDUS IN NUCE unterhalten.“ The dream vision continues: “Ich hatte viel zu thun um den Demonstrationen des herrlichen Zirkel zu entrinnen, sie riefen und pfliffen mir noch lange aus Sprachröhren nach, als ich schon wieder in dem Büchlein weitermachte. Aber endlich wars doch wieder Frieden und ich pries mich glücklich im Blauen Tage der Poesie, deren Herz man in diesem Buche in abgemessenen, langsam vorgezählten Pulsen schlagen hören kann.” My translation.

taking a peek behind the curtain of the divine intellect to find that Goethe's and Schiller's reflections on symbolism—sarcastically alluded to here as a discussion on the “embellishment of nuts” and the “world in a nutshell”—are horribly in error (“in einem entsetzlichen Irrthum”). Notwithstanding Mörike's assurances that he eventually recovered his peace of mind “in the clear blue day of lyric” (“im blauen Tage der Poesie”), his reception of Weimar classicism in 1829 was disturbed by romantic brooding and doubts that remain unresolved in his writings. As remains to be seen in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, it is precisely the symbol's metaphysical coherence that concerns him.<sup>426</sup>

In the main, contemporary scholarship has rejected the view of Mörike as a naïve artist whose poetics neatly corresponds with Weimar classicism.<sup>427</sup> In characterizing his literary-historical situation as “late and belated,” the consensus tends to view his use of classical and Christian forms as highly self-conscious and, furthermore, as reflecting the pervasive secularization of nineteenth-century German culture.<sup>428</sup> On this account, the naïveté characterizing Mörike's images is deemed an affectation or contrivance, even if his genius for understatement and classical form keeps them from becoming overly mannered. Less an “absolute aesthetic value” (“absoluter Kunstwert”) than a “stylistic ideal” (“Stilideal”), his images' naïveté categorically differs from Goethean symbolism,

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<sup>426</sup> But how can this be, given Mörike's profound anxieties about its philosophical coherence? His reception of the Goethe-Schiller exchange certainly did evolve after the 1820s; indeed, these letters containing perhaps Goethe's fullest account of symbolic disclosure so greatly impressed the young poet that he routinely studied them until the end of his life (cf. *Mörike Handbuch*, 34). And yet, as Mörike intimates ten years later, he remains ambivalent about them: “Göthe ist mir immer auf den Fersen. Die schönsten Stellen aus seinen herrlichen Briefen summen mir immer in den Ohren (Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 13: 69). Goethe's poetics positively hounds him; for, as we shall see, the classical symbol opens Mörike's lyrics to the abyss of time—namely, the absence of the deity—and the inner wellspring of melancholy and unfulfilled desire.

<sup>427</sup> According to Praver, *Mörike und seine Leser*, the shift in Mörike's reception history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) began with modernist settings of his lyric poetry to music—particularly by Hugo Wolf (33–35). Cf. Susan Youens, “Doubters and Believers: Case Studies in the Geistliche Lieder of Eduard Mörike and Hugo Wolf,” *The American Journal of Semiotics*, vol. 13: 1–4, (Fall 1996 [1998]), 103–146.

<sup>428</sup> Reiner Wild, “*Sohn des Horaz und einer feinen Schwäbin*”: *Beiträge zur Lyrik Eduard Mörikes*, ed. Inge und Reiner Wild (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2014), 117. Henceforth: *Beiträge*.

which, we have seen, is “*not so much an aesthetic experience as an experience of reality*” (Gadamer).<sup>429</sup> For instance, Mörike’s affinity for fairytales and Anacreontic indicates a return to Rococo aesthetics, not a genuinely naïve appropriation of ancient symbolic forms. Rather, as Sengle asserts, it is “the result of a highly self-conscious effort to attain healing and rejuvenation,” which ultimately smacks of a neo-Pelagian attempt to distract himself from the contingency of existence.<sup>430</sup> Similar, we shall see, to Ricoeur’s attempt to recover the symbolic language of Christianity by means of critical philosophy, Mörike’s imagery frequently—and, it must be stressed, contradictorily—employs classical symbols to diminish the deity’s real presence. In divergence from Goethe’s poetics, it displaces the analogic metaphysics underpinning his expressivist poetics with an equivocal understanding of the image—even as his lyric poems superficially draw on the Christian-Neoplatonic symbols. Like Ricoeur, he reduces the event of symbolic disclosure (*Augenblick*) to allegory, thus de-potentiating the image to a discursive sign that transgresses representation (mimesis) and would thus, paradoxically, bar participation (methexis) in divine reality.<sup>431</sup>

In the following, we shall see how *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* seeks to de-potentiate and master the image by historicizing the secularized monastery’s symbols in a manner echoing contemporary critical philosophy (Hegel, Strauss, and Vischer). This self-conscious, subtly elegiac cycle represents Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism as a finite product of the lyric imagination, specifically, as conceived through the sentimental power of memory. As a result, its imagery oscillates between sentimental and naïve intonations, whereby the image undergoes a process of subjectivization

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<sup>429</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 709. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 68.

<sup>430</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 706. “Das Ergebnis eines höchst bewußten Bemühens um Heilung und Verjüngung.” My translation. According to Sengle, Mörike’s oeuvre constitutes a concerted effort to overcome “the torturous melancholy” plaguing post-revolutionary Europe in an age of political repression and rapid industrial and scientific advancement (ibid., 698).

<sup>431</sup> This process of reducing symbolism to discourse precisely mirrors Paul de Man’s account of symbol in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” from *Blindness and Insight*. Given their qualifications on the symbol’s manner of disclosure (*Seinsweise*), de Man and Ricoeur no longer properly speak of symbolism at all, but only of allegory.

insofar as it severs from the antecedent order (*kosmos*) of things. Mörike thus transgresses symbolic representation by reducing the image to a sheerly temporal trace of the absolute, which can only disclose God's absence from the world. This renders the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol nothing more than an allegory of cosmic desire: a discursive sign that vanishes without ever touching its transcendent referent. Instead of merely disenchanting the image, however, the *Bilder* evoke a "second naïveté" (Ricouer), a second, magically fleeting presence (Kohlschmidt), and an equivocal sense of transcendence. Paradoxically, the subjectivized image "dissolves into the shapeless 'music' of an infinitely distended point in time," which at once intimates the dissolution of subjectivity: that is, the sheer de-personalization of poet and poem.<sup>432</sup> In so doing, the image becomes what Augustine had unambiguously identified as an idol (from *eidolon* a simulacrum). For this cycle distracts (*distensio*) from the analogic presence of the divine person underpinning the poetic imagination and memory, supplanting it instead with an equivocal, strictly punctual feeling of transcendence vaguely reminiscent of Schleiermachian religiosity. The cycle's imagery thus yields an ontologically impoverished notion of symbolic insight that isolates the experience of transcendence within what purports to be an essentially transient vision (*Augenblick*). In a manner suggesting the paradoxical slide towards subjectivism and anti-subjectivism characteristic of modern poetry (Taylor), Mörike's *Bilder* indicate that epiphany has become ontologically equivocal as a strictly private possession confined to the scope of the poet's own gaze, which is itself in the process of vanishing.

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<sup>432</sup> James Rolleston, "Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung" in *Mörike's Muses: Critical Essays on Eduard Mörike* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1990), 161.

## Divine Absence in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* (1863)

### 1. Kunst und Natur

Heute dein einsames Tal durchstreifend o trautes Kloster,  
Fand ich im Walde zunächst jenen verödeten Grund,  
Dem du die mächtigen Quader verdankst und was dir zum Schmucke  
Deines gegliederten Turms alles der Meister verliehn.  
Ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes verleugnest du dennoch  
Nimmer den Mutterschoß drüben am felsigen Hang.  
Spielend ahmst du den schlanken Kristall und die rankende Pflanze  
Nach und so manches Getier, das in den Klüften sich birgt.<sup>433</sup>

### 2. Brunnen-Kapelle am Kreuzgang

Hier einst sah man die Scheiben gemalt, und Fenster an Fenster  
Strahlte der dämmernde Raum, welcher ein Brunnlein umschloß,  
Daß auf der tauenden Fläche die farbigen Lichter sich wiegten,  
Zauberisch, wenn du wie heut, herbstliche Sonne, gegläntzt.  
Jetzo schattest du nur gleichgültig das steinerne Schmuckwerk  
Ab am Boden, und längst füllt sich die Schale nicht mehr.  
Aber du zeigst mir tröstlich im Garten ein blühendes Leben,  
Das dein wonniger Strahl locket aus Moder und Schutt.<sup>434</sup>

### 5. Sommer-Refektorium

Sommerlich hell empfängt dich ein Saal; man glaubt sich in einem  
Dom; doch ein heiterer Geist spricht im Erhabnen dich an.  
Ha, wie entzückt aufsteiget das Aug im Flug mit den schlanken  
Pfeilern! Der Palme vergleicht fast sich ihr luftiger Bau.  
Denn vielstrahlig umher aus dem Büschel verlaufen die Rippen  
Oben und knüpfen, geschweift, jenes unendliche Netz,  
Dessen Felder phantastisch mit grünenden Ranken der Maler  
Leicht ausfüllte; da lebt was nur im Walde sich nährt:  
Frei in der Luft ein springender Eber, der Hirsch und das Eichhorn;  
Habicht und Kauz und Fasan schaukeln sich auf dem Gezweig.  
– Wenn von der Jagd herkommend als Gast hier speiste der Pfalzgraf,  
Sah er beim Becher mit Lust über sich sein Paradies.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Mörike, *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, MKG, 1: 293.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 297.

## 6. Gang zwischen den Schlafzellen

Hundertfach wechseln die Formen des zierlich gemodelten Estrichs  
Auf dem Flur des Dorments, rötlich in Würfeln gebrannt:  
Rebengewinde mit grüner Glasur und bläulichen Trauben,  
Täubchen dabei, paarweis, rings in die Ecken verteilt;  
Auch dein gotisches Blatt, Chelidonium, dessen lebendig  
Wucherndes Muster noch heut draußen die Pfeiler begrünt;  
Auch, in heraldischer Zeichnung, erscheint vielfältig die Lilie,  
Blume der Jungfrau, weiß schimmernd auf rötlichem Grund.  
Alles mit Sinn und Geschmack, zur Bewunderung! aber auch alles  
Fast in Trümmern, und nur seufzend verließ ich den Ort.<sup>436</sup>

## 7. Stimme aus dem Glockenturm

Ich von den Schwestern allein bin gut katholisch geblieben;  
Dies bezeugt euch mein Ton, hoff ich, mein goldener, noch.  
Zwar ich klinge so mit, weil ich muß, sooft man uns läutet,  
Aber ich denke mein Teil, wißt es, im stillen dabei.<sup>437</sup>

## 10. Nachmittags

Drei Uhr schlägt es im Kloster. Wie klar durch die schwülige Stille  
Gleitet herüber zum Waldrande mit Beben der Schall,  
Wo er lieblich zerfließt, in der Biene Gesumm sich mischend,  
Das mich Ruhenden hier unter den Tannen umgibt.<sup>438</sup>

## 11. Verzicht

Bleistift nahmen wir mit und Zeichenpapier und das Reißbrett;  
Aber wie schön ist der Tag! und wir verdürben ihn so?  
Beinah dächt ich, wir ließen es gar, wir schauen und genießen!  
Wenig verliert ihr, und nichts wahrlich verlieret die Kunst.  
Hätt ich auch endlich mein Blatt vom Gasthaus an und der Kirche  
Bis zur Mühle herab fertiggekritzelt – was ist's?  
Hinter den licht durchbrochenen Turm, wer malt mir dies süße,  
Schimmernde Blau, und wer rundum das warme Gebirg?  
– Nein! Wo ich künftig auch sei, fürwahr mit geschlossenen Augen  
Seh ich dies Ganze vor mir, wie es kein Bildchen uns gibt.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 303.

Mörike's cycle of eleven lyric images belongs to the last decade of his oeuvre, when he had resigned from his Lutheran ministry (in 1843) and was nearing the end of his tenure at the Stuttgarter Katharinenstift. By 1863, the poet had begun gradually withdrawing from public life. Mörike's poor health had been the official reason for his departure from the clergy (he also ceased to attend church services), and it was ostensibly convalescence that he sought during his six-week stay in the guesthouse of the former Cistercian monastery in Bebenhausen.<sup>440</sup> Secularized in 1806, whereupon it became the royal hunting palace of the Württemberg dynasty, this idyllic cloister resting in a valley outside Tübingen contains a complex of buildings spanning the late romanesque and neo-gothic styles. As Wolfgang Braungart observes, the monastery's many ornate features—above all its stone tower in the high Gothic fashion—violated the statutes of the Cistercian order, which had been established as a reform movement advocating that monks return to a strict observance of the Benedictine rule.<sup>441</sup> Its beauty thus became a marker of the order's decline through the early modern period (due in part to competition with the mendicant movement) and, furthermore, of the monastery's eventual secularization. This appealed to Mörike, the sentimental poet charmed by the allure (*Reiz*) of the Christian-Neoplatonic worldview that he had relinquished.<sup>442</sup> Moreover, he had once visited the cloister as a student at the Tübinger Stift, and now the aging artist returned on the eve of his fifty-ninth birthday a changed man, having renounced his vocation in the priesthood and, as Volker Dürr contends, lost the “romantic faith” of his youth “in

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<sup>440</sup> Cf. Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 544. As Volker Dürr observes in his essay “‘Altersstil’: Time and Space in Mörike's *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*” in *Mörike's Muses: Critical Essays on Eduard Mörike*, ed., Jeffrey Adams (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1990), it was also the poet's fifty-ninth birthday (181).

<sup>441</sup> See Wolfgang Braungart, “Spätzeitbewußtsein: Mörikes Gedichtzyklus *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*” in the *Zeitschrift für Württembergische Landesgeschichte*, vol. 51, (Stuttgart: MKG. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1992), 303-305.

<sup>442</sup> Mörike identified as a disenchanted modern, as indicated by his support for D.F. Strauß' view that science and technology should continue their inexorable march, regardless of the consequences for humanity. See Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 12: 147.



the sovereignty of the poetic self.”<sup>443</sup> The extent to which Dürr’s assertion holds true (does Mörike repudiate subjectivity in this cycle?) remains to be seen. At any rate, the poet would certainly have relished the peculiar nostalgia of a return characterized by disenchantment.<sup>444</sup> Although the idyllic cloister is filled with Christian symbols recalling the eternal present—“the pure presence of the enchanted-enchanted moment,” as Storz emphatically puts it—Bebenhausen’s depiction in this cycle ultimately reveals “a deep historical-philosophical skepticism.”<sup>445</sup> Its epiphanies are punctual memories of a vanished reality, which Mörike’s images (*eidola*) “master and hold fast” by distending time through the fleeting medium of the lyric.<sup>446</sup> Instead of disclosing the transcendent, then, these poems would preclude its enduring presence. They become signs that trace the deity’s absence, thus confining the moment of insight (*Augenblick*) to a strictly immanent horizon—even as they attain an illusory transcendence. In doing this, the *Bilder* de-potentiate the image and diminish the memory of its eternal source.

From the opening poem to its ironic conclusion, this cycle is self-consciously situated with respect to classical poetics’ notion of mimesis whereby, as Storz contends, “the human being resists time and impermanence.”<sup>447</sup> Whether conceived in terms of ontological univocity or analogia, the

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<sup>443</sup> Dürr, “‘Altersstil’: Time and Space in Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*,” 181.

<sup>444</sup> Especially evident in “Besuch in Urach” and the poet’s early *Erinnerungslyrik*, which we will discuss in the following section, the subtler magic of disenchantment is a trope already familiar to Mörike from his youth.

<sup>445</sup> Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, 359: Mörike “ging es in den Gedichten von Bebenhausen [...] um die reine Gegenwärtigkeit des entzückt-entzückenden Augenblicks.” My translation. Braungart, “Spätzeitbewußtsein,” 297: “In diesem Zyklus wird das alte Kloster zum Emblem des heiteren Glücks, der Harmonie einerseits und einer tiefen geschichtsphilosophischen Skepsis andererseits.” My translation. Cf. Dürr, “‘Altersstil’: Time and Space in Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*,” 181: “Mörike no longer believed in the power of poetry to transform the world since social reality and the laws of nature, indifferent, autonomous, had asserted themselves in ever more hostile and inexorable terms.”

<sup>446</sup> Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, 372. My translation.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid. “Wehrt sich der Mensch gegen Zeit und Vergänglichkeit.” My translation. Storz further contends that “Mörikes Gedichte über Bebenhausen wollen bewältigen und festhalten, was im wörtlichsten Sinn ‘Gegenstand,’ nämlich Ort und Mitte glücklicher Wochen geworden war” (ibid).

classical notion of poësis had regarded the artist's depiction of the timeless eidos as participatory (methectic). Mörike's poems on the symbolic images at Bebenhausen subtly undermine this ancient understanding of poësis. His concern with representation is evident in the title of the first lyric image, "Kunst und Natur," which echoes the initial verses of Goethe's 1800 sonnet "Natur und Kunst" ("Natur und Kunst, sie scheinen sich zu fliehen/ Und haben sich, eh man es denkt, gefunden")—yet, in doing so, it also problematizes the pre-reflective ("eh man es denkt"), so to speak, "naïve" unity that Goethe finds in this polarity.<sup>448</sup> Already intimated in Mörike's reversal of the sonnet's title, this and the ensuing lyrics subvert the classical prioritization of nature and divine reality over art. As a result, the artfully constructed monastery becomes a sentimental image—"a total construct of the sensitive spirit" ("Ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes")—estranged from its transcendent origins.<sup>449</sup> Mörike fully recognizes the metaphysical consequences of this perspective. For his description of the quarry that once yielded the monastery's stones as ("jenen verödeten Grund") suggests an analogy between the lifeless artwork and its source, since nature is also "desolated" by the rupture between them. Thus, as Braungart observes, the price of overturning the norms of classicism is "the death of nature."<sup>450</sup> This effacement of the image's natural origins already signals the death of God, which tolls ever louder in the ensuing lyric images. It seems that art no longer participates in and (re)presents nature—much less the divine—as a life-giving source but instead playfully, even ironically, mimics it ("Spielend ahmst du [sie]/ Nach") with dead

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<sup>448</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Selected Poems*, ed. Christopher Middleton, (Boston: Suhrkamp, 1983), 165. Goethe, "Natur und Kunst," GHA, 1: 245: ("Nature, it seems, must always clash with Art,/ And yet, before we know it, both are one." My translation.

<sup>449</sup> Mörike, *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, MKG, 1: 293. My translation.

<sup>450</sup> Braungart, "Spätzeitbewußtsein," 303. He proceeds to observe that "der 'Grund,' aus dem das Kunstwerk hervorgegangen ist, ist nun, 'verödet'. Nicht mehr wird die Aneignung und Überwindung der Natur in der Kunst vorbehaltlos bejaht. Darin äußert sich auch die sentimentalische Skepsis der Moderne, die, wenigstens seit Schiller und der spätern Aufklärung, des mit menschlicher Geschichte und Kultur verbundenen Verlustes eingedenk ist, auch wenn sie diesem Prozeß grundsätzliche zustimmt" (ibid).

metaphors.<sup>451</sup> The slow creep of secularization resulting from the modern sciences, political liberalism, and, foremost, Protestant theology's attenuated understanding of the image had deprived Mörike of a sacramental worldview.<sup>452</sup>

Taken together, these verses suggest that the cycle's primary motif—its various ekphrastic descriptions of architectural features representing creation and the logos through whom all things were made—fails to present any source outside the self. The almost (“fast”) palm-like forest of pillars in the summer refectory (V), the fantastic creatures adorning the ribs and vaults (V), and the dormitory floor's mosaic of vines, doves, and lilies (VI)—these natural symbols of the eternal have become arcadian ruins (“alles/ Fast in Trümmern”) retained only in the poet's sentimental and fanciful recollection of the site (“nur seufzend verließ ich den Ort”). His assertion that the cloister's imagery is “wholly an image of the sensitive spirit” thus chimes with Hegel's historicist understanding of “poetic phantasy” as the representation of an “*inner* vision and feeling” instead of “the thing itself.”<sup>453</sup> According to Hegel, it is the “*subjective* side of the poet's spiritual work of creating and forming his material” that produces lyric images and, through them, discloses the immanent truth of art: the “spiritual light that shines in itself.”<sup>454</sup> According to the logic of this cycle, neither the monastery nor the lyric representations of it present their origins in a reality that transcends them.<sup>455</sup> Notwithstanding the elegiac mood of his imagery, however, the poet cannot fully disavow the artwork's origins in nature, “thanks to whom” the cloister has received its “massive

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<sup>451</sup> Just ten years later, the young Friedrich Nietzsche came to a similar conclusion about the effacement of the image in his essay “Über Wahrheit und Lüge in einem außermoralischen Sinne” (1873). Thus, only two generations after Weimar classicism and Goethe's recovery of the symbolic cosmos, Mörike comes to view language as mere convention—as enchanting but empty illusion.

<sup>452</sup> See Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 25-74.

<sup>453</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, trans. T.M. Knox, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1111.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 521.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. Dupré, *The Quest of the Absolute*, 126-27.

stone blocks” (“die mächtigen Quader”) and the material for its tower’s ornamentation (“Schmucke”). Although it is essentially a product of poetic sentiment, the image purportedly never denies (“nimmer verleugnest”) its maternal source (“den Mutterschoß drüben am felsigen Hang”). Neither do the *Bilder* disclaim their epigonal relation to classicism—rather, they cunningly subvert its hierarchy of values through equivocation. By reconstructing the monastery in the poet’s own image (specifically, as a *distensio animi*), we shall see, his sentimental sense lyric interiority displaces the transcendent as the source of the symbol’s provisional meaning.

Having replaced the artwork’s natural origins with a construct, the poet similarly depotentiates the images of light and water—both Christian symbols of the divine—in the cycle’s second poem. This lyric historicizes the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol by depicting the cloister’s fountain chapel (“Brunnen-Kapelle”) as yet another enchanting ruin that has lost its former glory. Hence, the image has become estranged from its source in the numinous and thus—through the poet’s inner powers of fancy and memory—attained a peculiar magic. Mörike first depicts this objectively sacred space (*topos*) as having once been inundated with a fading (“dammernde”) light refracted through stained-glass windows:

Hier einst sah man die Scheiben gemalt, und Fenster an Fenster  
Strahlte der dämmernde Raum, welcher ein Brunnlein umschloß,  
Daß auf der tauenden Fläche die farbigen Lichter sich wiegten  
Zauberisch, wenn du wie heut, herbstliche Sonne, gegläntzt.

The poet imagines an interior realm filled with things—the windows and the well—recalling the classical cosmos made in the image of God. Thus, this erstwhile chapel contained a transcendent depth that irradiated (“strahlen”) light received from the source of life, as intimated by the silent fountain at its center.<sup>456</sup> The theological and metaphysical significance of these symbols is, however,

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<sup>456</sup> Cf. John 7:38, NRSV: “And let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

only implicit. Mörike does not even imagine an altar among them. Instead, the interiorized sacred space (*chorós*) traditionally invoked through dynamic participation in the divine liturgy occurs in an altered form—namely, through the poet’s sentimental imagination (what S.T. Coleridge terms “fancy”).<sup>457</sup> An interior vision thus unfolds that depicts the synesthetic interplay of wavering light and water yet also intimates that its magical effect (“zauberisch”—a word drawn from the romantic discourse) is essentially transient: for the light in the room is dying (“dämmernde”), and the sun itself is autumnal (“herbstlich”). Thus romanticized, the chapel becomes a sentimental phenomenon relegated to an imaginary past within the poet’s memory. Again, this image is “ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geists,” since the space is actually devoid of water and the sunlight’s colorful refractions: “Jetzo schattest du nur gleichgültig das steinerne Schmuckwerk/ Ab am Boden, und längst füllt sich die Schale nicht mehr.” The daylight shines down indifferently (“gleichgültig”) through the empty windows, casting shadows of the past and of a divinity that is conspicuously absent. Hence, the light source no longer participates (*methexis*) in the lifeless images that it yields—long, too, has the well of life been dry.<sup>458</sup> Inasmuch as the poet fabricates key historical details in the poem’s first verses for effect, the image is self-consciously constructed.<sup>459</sup> As Braungart observes, this part of the cloister never had stained-glass windows, which Mörike would have known from his study of the history of

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<sup>457</sup> On the distinction in Orthodox theology between *topos* and *chorós*, see Shevelkina, “The Chôra of Dionisy’s Wall-Painting,” 18: “*Chôra* is often translated as “space,” differentiated from “place.” This notion of space inherently involves movement by way of expansion and contraction. Spatial movement is often enacted collectively, as in a choir or a choreographed dance. While sacred place (*topos*) is objective, already existing, and already sanctified, sacred space (*chorós*) is enacted liturgically, and must be experienced rather than existing as a static entity.”

<sup>458</sup> It is interesting to juxtapose Mörike’s poetics of metaphysical disillusionment with Eichendorff’s contemporaneous lyrics, which eschew sentimental and nostalgic tropes in favor of phantasmagoric images. Whereas Mörike’s poetics divests the lyric image of transcendent significance, Eichendorff’s centers around the “irruption of past memories into the patterns of quotidian conscious existence—a strategy not only calculated to intensify our perception of psychological depth *qua* ‘recollection’ (*Erinnerung*) but also our sense of an untranscendable covenant between subject and history.” Pfau, *Romantic Moods*, 225-309.

<sup>459</sup> See Braungart, “Spätzeitbewußtsein,” 306.

the monastery's architectural features during his first weeks in the guesthouse.<sup>460</sup> The image initially developed is, it seems, *wholly* a product ("ganz ein Gebild") of lyric phantasy. It thus brings the subversion of classical values in the cycle's opening image to an early conclusion: whereas for Christian-Neoplatonic culture stained-glass had represented the coactive unity of divine and human creation, these windows painted in the poet's fancy indicate that art has displaced nature and divine reality. On this view, the image has become a construct signaling the absence of God.

The mediation of elementary oppositions such as time and eternity, interiority and transcendence, through natural symbols is therefore radically problematized in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*. Regarding the synthesis of "nature and art" in the cycle's fifth poem, "Sommer-Refektorium," Braungart contends that such "mediation can at most punctually and under extraordinary circumstances succeed, but never abidingly."<sup>461</sup> Although the harmony of the refectory's gothic pillars and ceiling evoke a "paradise" removed from time and decay, this lyric image abruptly shifts from description of the ascending artwork in the present—"Ha, wie entzückt aufsteiget das Aug im Flug mit den schlanken/ Pfeilern!"—to its imagined reception *as* paradisaical *in the past* by a visiting count after the monastery had been secularized and turned into a hunting palace.<sup>462</sup> And it is specifically "*bis* paradise, individual and singular—a paradise of sport for the count palatine, hence, of his deadly mastery of nature, not harmonious living in and with nature."<sup>463</sup> From this perspective, then, the images of animals adorning the ceiling ("Dessen Felder phantastisch mit grünenden Ranken der Maler/ Leicht ausfüllte: da lebt was nur im Walde sich nährt:/ Frei in der Luft ein

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Braungart, "Spätzeitbewußtsein," 308: "Die Vermittlung höchsten punktuell und unter außergewöhnlichen Bedingungen gelingen kann, nie aber dauerhaft." My translation.

<sup>462</sup> Mörike, *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, MKG, 1: 297.

<sup>463</sup> Braungart, "Spätzeitbewußtsein," 308: "Das 'Paradies' des Refektoriums ist eben nur 'sein Paradies,' ein individuelles, singulares, ein Paradies der Jagd für den Pfalzgrafen, also auch der tödlichen Naturbeherrschung, nicht des harmonischen Lebens mit und in der Natur." My translation and emphasis.

springender Eber, der Hirsch und das Eichhorn”) have become trophies indicating the prowess of human art instead of creation’s origins in the ever-present, ever inwardly active logos. This subjectivization of art holds, furthermore, for the powers of memory and lyric imagination that have interiorly re-constructed the ceiling in the form of a lyric image. The refectory is, it seems, the poet’s exclusive “paradise” since, according to the cycle’s sentimental logic, the *Bilder* (*eidola*) are “a total construct of the sensitive spirit.” Despite, however, Mörike’s estranged view of Christian-Neoplatonic symbol’s eternal provenance, its ineluctable basis in analogia is evident from his first ecstatic (hence, pre-reflective) vision of the phenomenon: “Ha, *wie* entzückt aufsteiget das Aug im Flug mit den schlanken/ Pfeilern.” This verse thus unwittingly echoes Goethe’s use of simile in “Maifest” while also recalling, if only from the disenchanted perspective of old age, the concluding lines of Mörike’s early poem “An einem Wintermorgen” (“Auf einmal blitzt das Aug, und, wie ein Gott, der Tag/ Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!”). However sentimental it may be, Mörike’s imagery cannot but testify to its analogic participation in the moment (*Augenblick*) of divine poësis.

“Verzicht,” the cycle’s final poem, nevertheless continues the elegiac motif of a punctual experience of transcendence ensuing the image’s seemingly ineffectual mediation of the absolute. Evoking yet undermining Goethe’s deliberately restrained symbolic affirmation of the absolute, the cycle’s conclusion acknowledges this moral imperative—with the caveat, however, that art cannot express the surpassing beauty of nature at all:<sup>464</sup> “Bleistift nahmen wir mit und Zeichenpapier und das Reißbrett;/ Aber wie schön ist der Tag! und wir verdürben ihn so?/ [...] Hinter den licht durchbrochenen Turm, wer malt mir dies süße/ Schimmernde Blau, und wer rundum das warme

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<sup>464</sup> Cf. Dürr, “‘Altersstil’: Time and Space in Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*,” 190: “That the cycle of poems ends in renunciation is another aspect of Mörike’s mature style. Goethe, too, in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden* raised renunciation to the spiritual ‘requirement of the epoch.’ Goethe’s classical poetics circumscribes the lyric image to finite bounds; instead of recklessly striving for transcendence, it allows the whole to appear in part.”

Gebirg?” Mörike’s cycle of ekphrastic (thus mimetic) poems ends with an ironic twist, given this tongue-in-cheek rejection of its own efforts at presenting the thing seen. This irony is further amplified by the contradictory assertion in the poem’s fourth verse that “nichts wahrlich verliert die Kunst;” for the classical view of art as a concrete expression of the eternal present, through which nature attains an enduring value, is at once affirmed and denied. If nothing represented by art is lost, the artwork nevertheless remains a strictly finite form of mimesis that, the poet contends, cannot present the whole (“das Ganze”) that still beckons an intuitive vision: “– Nein! Wo ich künftig auch sei, fürwahr mit geschlossenen Augen/ Seh ich dies Ganze vor mir, wie es kein Bildchen uns gibt.” The only means of attaining insight into the eternal is, these verses shrewdly suggest, by turning inwards away from both art and nature to a source that seems to transcend them both. As Braungart observes, “only the remembering subject is capable of preserving the whole ‘image’ for himself and only when it is confined within him.”<sup>465</sup> The moment of transcendent insight has become a singular perspective restricted to the scope of poet’s own historicizing, ironically shifting gaze. As a result, the artwork that expresses this isolated notion of interiority is itself essentially transitory. “It can only remind us of its deficiency and thus,” Braungart contends, “through its essential poverty refer us to the bliss imparted in the momentary event of disclosure [*Augenblickserfahrung*].”<sup>466</sup> Hence, this lyric reveals “modern self-consciousness’ foundational disposition of elegiac memory [*Erinnerung...*], for which memory is essentially the mode in which the experience of bliss becomes possible.”<sup>467</sup> The cycle’s conclusion thus reinforces the sentimental character of its other images as memories

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<sup>465</sup> Braungart, “Spätzeitbewußtsein,” 309: “Nur das erinnernde Subjekt vermag für sich selbst und nur auf sich selbst beschränkt dieses ganze ‘Bild’ zu bewahren.” My translation.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid: “Das Kunstwerk kann nur – sozusagen – an seine eigene Unzulänglichkeit erinnern und so im Mangel auf das Glück der harmonischen *Augenblickserfahrung* verweisen.” My translation.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, 311: “Das von der für das moderne Bewußtsein grundlegende Haltung der elegischen Erinnerung [...], für das Erinnerung wesentlich der Modus ist, in dem Erfahrung von Glück möglich ist.” My translation.



estranged from their source—even as it tacitly employs the principle of analogia underpinning the apophasis of Christian-Neoplatonism’s symbolic theology (“Seh ich dies Ganze vor mir, *wie* es kein Bildchen uns gibt”).

Similar to Braungart, Dürr discerns a proto-modernist notion of interiority emerging in “Verzicht.” Using language reminiscent of Augustine’s discussion of memory in the *Confessions* (Book 10) and twentieth-century phenomenology’s appropriation of this tradition, Dürr glosses a passage from Mörike’s letters employing apophatic imagery to describe what he considers the poem’s de-subjectivization of the image:

In looking and enjoying, in immersing oneself in the object, its essence is experienced and internalized; the Cistercian abbey and its natural surroundings are secured as an inner image which will stand forever before the eye of contemplative memory in those hours of “dark and blessed self-forgetfulness,” as Mörike wrote to Luise Rau, “when the outer senses seem to close, everything that surrounds us sinks down and disappears, and the innermost soul raises its eyelashes.”<sup>468</sup>

The question as to this transcendent yet “inner image’s” manner of appearance, which concerns the ontological status (*Seinsweise*) of its presence, is never raised by Dürr and thus goes unresolved. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the cycle’s conclusion renounces lyric subjectivity and its images through “self-forgetfulness” or, alternatively, preserves them through memory’s capacity to distend time. Is this image of interiority univocally self-contained, is it somehow equivocally open to self-transcendence, or even is still possibly open to divine through analogia? In the following, we shall see that the poet’s decision to turn his gaze inwards to his “own paradise” in finite memory and lyric phantasy—thus closing his eyes to the image’s participation (methexis) in a reality that transcends him—is a recurring trope in Mörike’s oeuvre. Mirroring the negation of selfhood in dialectical theology, he equivocates in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* about his own agency in the act of poësis

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<sup>468</sup> Dürr, “Altersstil: Time and Space in Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*,” 191, quoting Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 11: 272. The letter continues: “[...] und wir, wenn ich so sagen darf, nicht mehr uns selbst sondern den allgemeinsten Geist der Liebe, mit dem wir schwimmen wie im Element empfinden.”

and, thus, equivocates about the actual presence of the divine. As a result, the destabilization of lyric interiority yields either the apotheosis of bourgeois subjectivity or its inverse: utter de-personalization—not, as Dürr contends, a thoroughly de-subjectized vision of the essence of things such as one later finds in Rilke’s thing-poetry or Anglo-American imagism. The result is the cycle’s seemingly secularized imagery, which would preclude divine presence. By contrast, a genuinely symbolic vision requires the poet to turn his gaze outwards (not inwards) so as to describe the analogic gestalt of the phenomenon as it emerges within the realm of appearances. Yet, as we have seen, Mörike does precisely the opposite: he only grasps at the image of the whole for himself, in a punctual moment of insight (*Augenblick*), whereby the interior form of the thing seen finally goes unnoticed and undescribed. In so doing, the poet cannot see how the phenomenon is antecedently and super-abundantly given from its eternal source in the transcendent divine.

If, as Dürr insists, “time is the most dangerous enemy of art” for Mörike, the *Bilder* only avoid time’s abyss by sentimental distension (*distensio animi*)—that is, by protracting time into a simulacrum of the eternal ostensibly precluding Christian-Neoplatonism’s participatory sense of poësis.<sup>469</sup> Because it is through the temporal medium of poetry that Mörike attempts to overcome time’s relentless passage, he is bound to lose the illusion of paradise. Hence, the only possibility of success lies, it seems, in forgetting time altogether. According to Dürr, this cycle of images composed in classical distichs “strive[s] for the suspension of time” through its combination of the idyllic and elegiac moods.<sup>470</sup> While this melancholic distension of time predominates in the poem’s elegiac images, such that the pleasure of epiphanic vision is nourished by the painful recollection of loss, this cycle repeatedly strikes an idyllic tone (Mörike’s peculiar naïveté) that mixes with the prevailing mood and enhances its intensity. This mixture is evident in the seventh poem, “Stimme

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<sup>469</sup> Dürr, “‘Altersstil’: Time and Space in Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*,” 184.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 188.

aus dem Glockenturm,” which describes the old-world charm (*Reiz*) of the gothic belfry by means of personification: “Ich von den Schwestern allein bin gut katholisch geblieben;/ Dies bezeugt euch mein Ton, hoff ich, mein goldener, noch./ Zwar ich klinge so mit, weil ich muß, sooft man uns läutet,/ Aber ich denke mein Teil, wißt es, im stillen dabei.” Mörike’s humorously anthropomorphic identification with this Catholic image occurs through an act of imaginative projection that, like the cycle’s second poem, calls an image of the thing’s former glory into the present. However, its tone is also highly self-conscious since the bell’s apparent good humor is offset by her isolation (“allein...geblieben”) and alienation (“klinge so mit, weil ich muß”) in the modern era—hence, by the insinuation of self-doubt (“hoff ich”) and resentment (“ich denke mein Teil, wißt es”). Instead of “eliminat[ing] time as an element of estrangement,” as Dürr argues, in accord with the classical idyll, her nostalgia is laced with ironic undertones tolling the ravages of history and amplifying the cycle’s sense of loss.<sup>471</sup> Compelled to tell the hour against her will, the bell’s mysterious suspension of time as an enduring symbol of Christian-Neoplatonic culture is, Mörike suggests, purely specious. Her “golden tone” no longer announces the sacrament nor the enchanting music of the spheres, but instead recalls the image’s estrangement from the divine.

Mörike’s distention of time through the combination of idyllic and elegiac tones becomes even more explicit in the cycle’s penultimate poem, “Nachmittags.” Here the bell tolls three o’clock in commemoration of the hour of Christ’s death: “Drei Uhr schlägt es im Kloster. Wie klar durch die schwülige Stille/ Gleitet herüber zum Waldrande mit Beben der Schall,/ Wo er lieblich zerfließt, in der Biene Gesumm sich mischend,/ Das mich Ruhenden hier unter den Tannen umgibt.”<sup>472</sup> The terse, objective statement of fact that opens this poem (“Drei Uhr schlägt es im Kloster”) is offset by the long, second sentence, which quasi-phenomenologically describes the bell’s manner of

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<sup>471</sup> Cf. Dürr, “Altersstil”: Time and Space in Mörike’s *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*,” 188.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

appearance for the poet. Hence it depicts the “tremulous” (“mit Beben”) arc of the sound as it travels to edge of the wood, where he rests, as well as the tolls’ “pleasant” dissolution (“lieblich zerfließt”) in the hum of the bees that surround him. In so doing, this image transforms the act of remembrance from recollection of the divine presence—specifically, the mystery of the Cross faintly echoed in the bell’s dying fall—to an intensification (*Er-innerung* in the emphatic sense) and protraction of an aural perception in the present. The buzz distends the moment (*Augenblick*) by simultaneously revealing and obscuring its source. It seems that the divine is only present as a trace (*ex negativo*) in these lines, namely, through the transient sound of a bell striking three—an oblique reference to the Trinity, yes, but above all, for Mörike, a sign of time’s inexorable passage. The image of the tolling bell is ostensibly emptied, almost kenotically, of symbolic significance as it drowns in the noise of the insects; for it has become an allegory of an eternal moment (the Passion) that it never even attempts to (re)present (*darstellen*). Once reduced to a sound that just happens to carry semantic significance, the toll’s meaning is bound to disperse in time, thus gradually negating the image. However, even as it goes under and verges on senselessness (“das Gesumm”), the image qua sign equivocally recalls the transcendent. Whereas for the faithful Lutheran, recognizing the utter vanity of the image—hence, of lyric interiority and the finite act of poësis—first clears the way for divine action in the world, Mörike had ceased to believe. As remains to be seen, his poetics of the image recalls Protestant dialectics; but instead of invoking salvation through Christ’s Passion and Cross—much less (re)presenting the divine act of remembrance as per Catholic liturgy and art—the *Bilder* suggest the poet’s attempt to forget time’s descent into the oblivion of non-being and, in so doing, to forget its origins.

Here the classical understanding of memory as the co-active recollection of eternal forms morphs into what James Rolleston describes with regard to an analogous passage from the 1828 poem “Im Frühling” as “a moment of stasis” wherein “the sound of the world, both within and

without the observing mind, dissolves into the shapeless ‘music’ of an infinitely distended point of time.”<sup>473</sup> Having become a punctual, “purely observing consciousness,” the poet lies listening with closed eyes to the vernal hum of bees and is wracked by desire and lament:<sup>474</sup> “Ich sehne mich, und weiß nicht recht, nach was:/ Halb ist es Lust, halb ist es Klage;/ Mein Herz, o sage,/ Was webst du für Erinnerung/ In golden grüner Zweige Dämmerung?/ – Alte unnennbare Tage!”<sup>475</sup> According to Rolleston, this early poem on time and recollection articulates a romantic conception of “Bildung” (formation), whereby “memory submerges all interpretation in [the] ‘interior’ fullness”—“halb ist es Lust, halb ist es Klage”—of the “symbolic event.”<sup>476</sup> This subtly differs, however, from the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of memory as *anamnesis/reminiscentia*, which is a co-active, hence, participatory, and ineluctably personal remembrance granted by the grace and enduring presence of God.<sup>477</sup> By contrast, the process of interior formation through recollection only unfolds in “Im Frühling,” as in “Nachmittags,” insofar as the poem “risks falling silent,” thus “open[ing] its language to oblivion” as it submerges in nonverbal sound.<sup>478</sup> In this apophatic act of “forgetting” the image’s eternal source of significance “lies,” Rolleston insists, in “the possibility of metamorphosis:

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<sup>473</sup> Rolleston, “Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung,” 161. This lyric describes an experience of communion with nature, which Rolleston likens to Goethe’s “Ganymed,” as the young poet lies on his back in spring: “Die Wolke seh ich wandeln und den Fluß,/ Es dringt der Sonne goldner Kuß/ Mir tief bis ins Geblüt hinein;/ Die Augen, wunderbar berauschet,/ Tun, als schiefen sie ein,/ Nur noch das Ohr dem Ton der Biene lauschet./ Ich denke dies und denke das,/ Ich sehne mich, und weiß nicht recht, nach was:/ Halb ist es Lust, halb ist es Klage;/ Mein Herz, o sage,/ Was webst du für Erinnerung/ In golden grüner Zweige Dämmerung?/ – Alte unnennbare Tage!” (Mörike, “Im Frühling,” MKA, 1: 42)

<sup>474</sup> Rolleston, “Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung,” 160.

<sup>475</sup> Mörike, “Im Frühling,” MKA, 1: 42.

<sup>476</sup> Rolleston, “Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung,” 158, 159.

<sup>477</sup> According to Augustine, for instance, the natural power of “memory contains God inchoately, but this in itself depends on divine presence,” since it is ultimately God “who contains human memory, and in doing so fills it, illumines it, and speaks to it in a language it comprehends” (Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology*, 150). Similar to the force of love (eros) discussed in chapter one, Christian-Neoplatonism conceives memory as a co-active power of expression spoken to the creature through the creature.

<sup>478</sup> Rolleston, “Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung,” 161.

as the detached consciousness has become the pure hum of language without a goal, so now the blankness of passive sensation becomes a space to be filled by memory.”<sup>479</sup> On this account, memory lies fully in the power of the poet, even as its temporal structure effaces his presence: for as Storz observes of “Nachmittags,” this dialectic of presence and absence “virtually omits the poet from the moment of experience.”<sup>480</sup> Thus, rather than de-subjectizing the image, this act of forgetting the self and its source renders the symbolic moment wholly impersonal. It is the peculiar irony of *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* that the process of interior formation (Bildung) that it presents through lyric phantasy and memory also intimates the sheer effacement of subjectivity—even as it distends the poet’s inwardness into a simulacrum of the eternal. Rolleston also discerns this tendency in Mörike’s poetics of memory. For his time-poetry suggests the subjective “affirmation of loss, [of time, interiority, and selfhood], an ecstatic disruption of the present moment, which [the poet] articulates as the only possible fulfillment of that moment.”<sup>481</sup> Instead of co-actively recalling the eternal origins through the actual grace of God, the moment of symbolic of insight (*Augenblick*) becomes a sentimental act at once contingent on human interiority (memory, phantasy, etc.) and its disappearance.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, 373: “Aus dem erlebten Augenblick spart das Gedicht jetzt den Dichter selbst geradezu aus.” My translation.

<sup>481</sup> Rolleston, “Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung,” 162.

<sup>482</sup> See New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia on actual grace: Joseph Pohle, “Actual Grace,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), accessed February 24, 2022, <<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06689x.htm>>.

## A Protestant Dialectic of the Image

A glimpse at Mörike's biography regarding his troubled relationship to Christianity sheds light on the characteristic "naïveté" of his poetry and his poetics of the image. The young man's estrangement from his confession began, at the very latest, during the years of his vicariate for the Lutheran Church of Württemberg. Remarking on the trials of his "slavery" to the profession ("Vikariatknechtschaft"), after a failed attempt in 1828 to establish himself financially as an independent writer, Mörike confesses his inner turmoil in a letter to Mährlen: "You have no idea how I suffer. Gnashing my teeth through tears I chew on the old fare, which needs must wear me down. I tell you, he alone sins against the Holy Spirit, who serves the church with a heart like mine."<sup>483</sup> Mörike's letters reveal a thoroughgoing ambivalence about matters of the spirit. By all accounts, the poet's relationship to his "bread-winning profession" ("Brotberuf") as a Lutheran clergyman was tortured and wholly differed from his idyllic presentation of the life of the country pastor in "Der alte Thurmhahn" (1840). Perhaps the best evidence of Mörike's irresolution about his vocation and faith comes through letters exchanged with two friends, Friedrich Theodor Vischer and David Friedrich Strauß—both Young Hegelians (*Junghegelianer*) who had once attended the Tübinger Stift, only to become prominent apostates. Commenting in a letter to Vischer on the publication of Strauß' notorious *Das Leben Jesu* (1835)—which had scandalized their contemporaries

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<sup>483</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 11: 21: "Du hast keinen Begriff von meinem Zustand. Mit Knirschen und Weinen kau ich an der alten Speise, die mich aufreiben muß. Ich sage Dir, der allein begeht die Sünde wider den heiligen Geist, der mit einem Herzen wie ich in der Kirche dient." My translation. Cf. Kittstein, 211-220. Having completed his course of studies in theology at the Tübinger Stift—with only middling results, particularly in homiletics—and entered upon an exhausting vicariate of almost seven years, Mörike confides in Mährlen: "Alles, nur kein Geistlicher!" It was only after a failed attempt in 1828 to establish himself financially as an independent writer that he resolved to endure the struggle to attain a pastorate, which he referred to contemptuously as his "Brotberuf" (Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 10: 199). Remarking on the trials of his vocation, Mörike complains in 1827: "es ist, so wahr ich lebe, kein überqueerer Einfall, wenn ich mich aus diesen hunderttausend Haken und Häkchen losreißen will, die mich, oft unsichtbar, zerren und zerstreuen u[nd] meine bessere Kraft niederhalten, daß ich mich am Ende selbst nicht mehr kenne" (Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 10: 163). Aside from his litany of bureaucratic responsibilities, Mörike also abhorred the weekly sermon and to such an extent that, as Kittstein observes, it developed into a genuine phobia: "Ich *kann* und *kann*," the poet sighs, "eben nicht predigen und wenn Du mich auf die Folter spannst" (Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 10: 219). Mörike took leave from the vicariate for a year in 1827, at least ostensibly to recover his health, then to return with renewed enthusiasm in early 1828. Only a month into his new post, however, the poet confesses his sins to Mährlen.

by reducing Biblical narrative to myth through historical criticism—Mörike expresses sympathy with Strauß' positions:

You write too of the movements surrounding Strauß. I view them with the greatest interest. What he takes away from common Christian belief through his criticism of the Gospels was of course already taken away from him and from you and from me and from thousands in a different, more primitive way, and we can only ask what this theological bankruptcy, spreading further and further afield, will finally mean for the uneducated masses, and what means of reassurance they will have in the face of it. In my public office as pastor, I have always felt permitted, indeed obliged, to assume certain things as agreed and given, in accordance with tradition: partly because of people's lack of intellectual independence, partly because even the educated and knowledgeable person likes to have his devotion tied to the ideas and forms of thought that he has been used to since childhood; though I grant you that I have never felt entirely comfortable doing so.<sup>484</sup>

In addition to recognizing a prevailing “theological bankruptcy” in Württemberg, perhaps in reference to the supernaturalist theology taught at the Tübinger Stift during the previous decade, Mörike confesses his skepticism about the historical truth-value of the Gospels.<sup>485</sup> Furthermore, the still practicing minister asserts that he and the masses had anticipated Strauß' critique, if only by means more rudimentary than the theologian's historicist dialectic. Mörike agrees in principle with Strauß' critique of Christianity. Although his preaching takes the facticity of revelation for granted, it hardly does so in good faith; for Mörike acknowledges that his motives for presuming the Gospels' veracity lie partly in the intellectual immaturity of the folk, partly also in his sentimental “devotion” to the customary beliefs and forms of his childhood. Notwithstanding the needs of the heart, Mörike intimates his rejection of Christian dogma and finds himself endorsing his friend's dialectic

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<sup>484</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 12: 146–147, translated in Cooper, *The Near and Distant God*, 85. “Du schreibst auch von den Straußischen Bewegungen. Ich sehe ihnen mit dem größten Antheil zu. Dasjenige, was er gemeiner Christenheit durch die Kritik der Evangelien nimmt, war freilich ihm und Dir und mir u[nd] Tausenden auf einem andern primitivern Weg im Voraus weggenommen und es könnte sich nur fragen, wie denn bei einem so landkundig werdenden theol[ogischen] Bankerot zuletzt der unvernünftige Haufe sich befinden u[nd] beruhigen werde? In meiner öffent[lichen] Stellung als Geistlicher habe ich jederzeit geglaubt, gewisse Dinge hergebrachter Maßen als ausgemacht und faktisch voraussetzen zu dürfen, ja zu müssen, und zwar theils nach dem Grundsatz von der Unmündigkeit des Volks, theils weil doch selbst auch der Gebildete und Wissende gern seine Andacht an die von Kindheit auf gewohnten Vorstellungen u[nd] Formen knüpfen mag; obwohl ich Dir gestehe, daß mir bei dieser Auskunft niemals ganz wohl u[nd] frei zu Muthe war.“

<sup>485</sup> The Tübinger Stift was dominated a decade earlier by “supernaturalism,” which had rejected the validity of human reason in light of revelation. Cf. Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 229.



of history: “In the meantime Strauß’ maxim that science must blithely follow its inexorable path irrespective of the consequences cannot be disputed. His spirit is brave and fine, and it is a joy to hear his arguments in the polemics.”<sup>486</sup>

When Mörike nevertheless affirms his “persistent fondness for Christianity” in an 1843 conversation with Strauß (during the year of his retirement from the Lutheran clergy) his attitude towards the faith is best understood as a “second naïveté” analogous to Ricœur’s postcritical hermeneutic.<sup>487</sup> This mirrors the dialectics of Lutheran theology, according to which the Christian-Neoplatonic God, who was inmost and active in all things, has become a *dens absconditus*—never within (save the believer), only beyond this world. The subject’s punctual inwardness is, therefore, the only possible locus of transcendent encounter. Despite, however, these Lutheran and Enlightenment pre-convictions (*Vorurteile*), Mörike’s paradoxical appreciation for Catholic art, dogma, and even his taste in women belies an ambivalent disposition towards the orthodox notion of sacramentality.<sup>488</sup> As Sengle observes, the poet’s “secret or experimental *Catholicism* is of course related to his idealization of naïveté and especially with his antiquating style.”<sup>489</sup> While at the Tübinger Stift, Mörike had requested to take courses in Christian ethics with theologians from the

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<sup>486</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 12: 146–147: “Inzwischen ist Straußens Maxime daß alle Forschung völlig unbekümmert um die Folgen ihre gerade Bahn fortschreiten müsse, auf keine Weise anzufechten. Er ist ein tapferer und feiner Geist and es ist eine Freude, ihn in den Streitschriften zu hören.” Based upon this affirmation of Strauß’ writting, Ritchie Robertson suggests in his essay “Mörike and the Higher Criticism,” *Oxford German Studies*, 36:1, 2013, that Mörike implicitly affirms the Hegelian view that “that modern humanity was moving on from images to abstract ideas” and should therefore “grasp religion as a set of philosophical truths which [do] not need a narrative embodiment” (51).

<sup>487</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 14: 91: “Daß ich bei meiner fortdauernden Neigung zum Christentum, die in den 3 letzten Jahren sich eher gestärkt u[nd] näher bestimmt, als vermindert habe...” See Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 694, 706, where he also uses this phrase to describe Mörike’s enigmatic interiority: “Man wird sich zunächst doch einfach fragen müssen, wie irgendeine Naivetät in der damaligen württembergischen Intelligenz und gar bei einem Stifter möglich gewesen sein soll” (694). See also Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

<sup>488</sup> See Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 41, on the Catholic understanding of the sacramentality “as a comprehensive, biblical view of reality in which the transcendent God manifest himself in and through the natural, material world” and the rejection of this view during the Reformation.

<sup>489</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 732: “Heimliche oder experimentelle *Katholizität* steht selbstverständlich im Zusammenhang mit dem Naivitätsideal und speziell sogar mit dem Antikisieren.” My translation.

Catholic faculty, which his Protestant advisors viewed with great suspicion.<sup>490</sup> After attaining his parsonage in Cleversulzbach, Mörike had a shrine to the Virgin Mother added to it (his own mother, a devout Lutheran, disliked it). The poet twice fell in love with Catholic women: first during his year of leave from the vicariate in 1828 for convalescence in Catholic Oberschwaben and then with Margarethe von Speeth, whom he eventually married (much to the dismay of his “bosom friend” and fellow Lutheran pastor Wilhelm Hartlaub).<sup>491</sup> Moreover, Mörike kept the habit of saying prayers before meals with his wife and young girls, even after he left the church, as Theodor Storm had discovered during a visit in 1855 to his great surprise.<sup>492</sup> In brief, the enigma of Mörike’s faith accords with a prevailing tendency in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe towards the privatization of religion, which Mörike acknowledges is the case in the course of his conversation with Strauß. After confessing his “persistent fondness” for Christianity, the poet distinguishes “between the use that I can find in it for my own person and between my task as a preacher.”<sup>493</sup> By contrast, however, to the Pietist glorification of subjectivity—as culminates in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s romantic theology—Mörike also regarded the strictly private appropriation of Christianity with suspicion. Citing his excoriating satiric lyric “Sarkasme wider den Pietismus,” Susan

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<sup>490</sup> Ernst Müller, *Stiftsköpfe*, eds., Volker Henning Drecoll, Juliane Bauer, and Wolfgang Schöllkopf (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012), 210–211.

<sup>491</sup> Cf. Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 162. Although the young lady remains anonymous the poet’s letters, she is likely the subject of lyrics such as “Josephine,” which foreground the erotic dimension of the Catholic Mass. Cf. Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 732.

<sup>492</sup> Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 231.

<sup>493</sup> Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 14: 91: “Den großen Unterschied zwischen dem Gebrauch, den ich davon für meine Person machen könne, und zwischen meiner Aufgabe als Prediger.” This attitude characterized Mörike’s practice of Christianity for the duration of his adulthood. Cf. Mörike’s letter from 1830 to his fiancée, Luise Rau: “Nie fühlte ich ein lebhafteres Bedürfnis ein durstigeres Verlangen nach derjenigen Beruhigung welche mein Beruf unmittelbar mit sich bringt, und doch – nie fühlte ich mich unfähiger, Hand an die Arbeit zu legen und meiner Empfindung irgend eine Form zu geben. Das Evangelium hielt mir seinen ganzen Frieden entgegen und locket mich tief und tiefer in jene stille Abgeschiedenheit des Geistes, wo der Engel unserer Kinderjahre uns wieder begegnet und mit uns weint. *Aber was ich hier empfand das gehörte nur mir, gehörte nur Dir – ich konnte die Brücke zur Predigt nicht finden, und was dort lauterer Gold gewesen war das wurde stumpfes Blei wenn ich die Feder ansetzte* (Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 11: 100).

Youen writes that he wholly mistrusted its “emphases on the *Busskampff*, or the sinner’s war with the self for repentance, and [even] on a personal relationship with God [!]” inasmuch as it leads “to rampant subjectivity.”<sup>494</sup> Youen asserts that Mörike’s “very belief in God wavered,” as

when Mörike wrote to his sister Luise’s good friend Charlotte Späth on 3 April 1827, telling her of Luise’s death and burial, [and] confided that the pious Luise [a confessing Pietist] had reproached him on her deathbed, asking him, “Do you believe in the Savior, Eduard? at which, unhappily, I could not answer her.”<sup>495</sup>

Since Mörike mistrusted the notion of a personal relationship with Christ, it seems that he could not affirm God’s presence in the world at all.

Another branch of scholarship alternatively regards the poet and his lyric poetry as Christian in spirit—yet also as distinctly Hegelian. This approach takes us deeper into the enigma of Möriekan interiority by shedding light on the logic of his second naïveté vis-à-vis the classical symbol. Through a dialectic derived from Protestant theology, Ian Cooper’s argumentation in *The Near and Distant God* (2008) shows how Mörike’s poetry “transgress[es] representation” in order to disclose the transcendent God of Christianity.<sup>496</sup> This ontologically equivocal view of Mörike’s oeuvre holds that his images no longer correspond to the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of symbol, contending instead that they have a dialectical gestalt on the Hegelian model. Identity-in-difference (Cooper calls it “analogy”) still characterizes their structure; but this relation is, he insists, merely formal as Kant had asserted.<sup>497</sup> According to Cooper, Mörike’s poems function as signs indirectly referring to the

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<sup>494</sup> Susan Youens, “Doubters and Believers,” 115. She cites the poem in full: “Sarkasme / wider / den Pietism” – “Wer wissen will, wie baigen, wie pikant/ Der Christianism öfters Hand in Hand/ Mit feinem Sünden-Reize webt,/ Dem biet' ich folgendes Rezept:/ Mir wismet' es ein Pietist,/ Der doch zugleich Lyäens nicht vergißt./ / Man nimmt ein altes Evangelien-Buch,/ Um es in lauem Brantwein einzuwaichnen,/ Bringt's unter die Kompreß', um es dann durch ein Tuch/ Bis auf den letzten Tropfen auszulaichnen:/ So hast du einen Extrait d'Evangile,/ Der mit Bedacht goutiert sein will,/ Du hast—ein Tröpfchen unter deinen Wein—/ Ein wonne-schmerzlich Reu- und Buß-Tränklein!”

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>496</sup> Cooper, *The Near and Distant God*, 99.

<sup>497</sup> See Cooper’s account of how “Auf eine Christblume” “creates an analogue to point beyond the flower, and beyond the words of the poem (ibid., 89). He concludes on the basis of this attenuated notion of analogy that “the meeting [between time and eternity] can only take place in a transcendent realm beyond the present” (91).

transcendent by negating the image's materiality—thus “transgress[ing] representation” (mimesis) and participation (methexis) in the divine via the *analogia entis*. On Cooper's reading, the God of Mörike's poetry is strictly noumenal such that His self-disclosure in history can only occur in the negative. Because the transcendent is never truly present, it can only be grasped conceptually through an equivocal ontology conflating presence and absence—identity and difference. And this in turn confines Christ's presence in the world to a hypothetical past, a utopian future, and thus to the scope of the believer's sentimental perspective. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Cooper's interpretation of Mörike's lyric poetry bears a strong resemblance to Ritchie Robertson's reading of his poetics in light of the Straußian maxim “that modern humanity was moving on from images to abstract ideas.”<sup>498</sup> This Hegelian (in origins Lutheran) critique of images helps to explain Mörike's equivocal appropriation of classicism in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*.<sup>499</sup> As we have seen, this cycle similarly underscores the Christian-Neoplatonic image's historicity as a mere trace of the absolute, which only ever punctually appears within the confines of lyric phantasy and memory.<sup>500</sup> The historicizing perspective of the *Bilder* establishes a distance between the poet, the symbol, and its subject (the lyric vision disclosed) that repudiates the poem's image-quality as a constitutive

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<sup>498</sup> Ritchie, “Mörike and the Higher Criticism,” 51. By Cooper's own lights, the relation between Mörike's images and the divine exhibits “the highest conceptual necessity identified by Hegel in the *Phänomenologie* [...]: Spirit is made manifest to consciousness” through “the self-consciousness itself that is achieved in its passage through human history” (Cooper, *The Near and Distant God*, 89). Spirit—just whose remains altogether ambiguous—is said to recollect itself in Mörike's lyric poetry through the “transgression of representation” (ibid., 199). Its dialectical procession negates material presence, mediation, and the historical moment so as to refer, Cooper argues, to the trans-historical reality of Christ (89). He continues to assert that “Spirit recollects itself” in poems such as “Auf eine Christblume” through “the self-consciousness that is achieved in its passage through human history” (89). Richly textured images such as “Auf eine Christblume” and “Göttliche Reminiszenz,” which employ analogies suggesting a poetics of the symbol on the Christian-Neoplatonic model, are thus reduced to the impoverished manner of disclosure characteristic of signs; they become traces intimating but only ever deferring the presence of God. By contrast to Ritchie, Cooper believes that Mörike's poetry achieves “a post-Kantian hermeneutic of Spirit,” which purportedly opposes Strauß' critique of mediation through and communion in Christ.

<sup>499</sup> Cite Pfau's *Romantic Moods*, 260–261.

<sup>500</sup> See Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*.

presentation of the eternal. This space of sentimental reflection (Mörikean interiority), through which the moment of insight (*Augenblicke*) unfolds, is the subjectively perceived, (re)constructed, and negated distance of time's extension (*distensio*) and formation (*Bildung*) into a lyric image. Thus transgressed, the image becomes a sign intimating the immediate presence (and absence) of the eternal. Through this dialectic of construction and negation, it becomes "the pure hum of language without a goal"—an abstract sign conceived as the empty, fleeting, yet seemingly infinite "space to be filled"—if not by the Holy Spirit, then by the poet's finite powers.<sup>501</sup> By confining the image (*eidolon*) to a punctual, strictly immanent horizon, it becomes a product of lyric fancy ("ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes") restricted to the scope of the poet's own, contingent memory and mood.

If the *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* "resign" the sacramental view of the cosmos as saturated with the divine light, they also seek to reclaim the transcendent through "resignation" (*Verzicht*). Thus, the *Bilder* paradoxically attempt to preserve the moment of symbolic insight into the numinous by effacing God's presence in the created image.<sup>502</sup> Even as Mörike's gaze turns inwards towards an image wholly circumscribed within himself, he ironically proclaims the inner presence of a whole ("das Ganze") that transcends him. This mystical, dialectical reversal is faintly reminiscent of the active/passive chiasm characterizing the classical symbol—the coincidence of the *intimum* and *summum* through the deity's self-gift. However, the dialectic of the Mörikean image precludes the co-action of divine and human poësis, since it negates the medium through which participation unfolds—namely, the image ("wie es kein Bildchen uns gibt") and the poet qua imago Dei.<sup>503</sup> The

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<sup>501</sup> Rolleston, "Biedermeier and the Romantic Poetics of Bildung," 161.

<sup>502</sup> Mörike's concept of *Verzicht* chimes with Kierkegaard's notion of "infinite resignation," described as "the last stage" before faith in *Fear and Trembling* (1843), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), there being—as Kierkegaard well understands—no guarantee that one will ever advance to faith.

<sup>503</sup> Mörike's "Göttliche Reminiszenz" is, we shall see, a notable exception to this tendency.

lyric image cannot convey the sky's transcendent blue ("Hinter den lichtdurchbrochenen Turm, wer malt mir dies süße,/ Schimmernde Blau, und wer das warme Gebirg?"); it neither presents (*darstellen*) nature nor its eternal source. Instead, the image becomes a sign of an incommunicable, interior vision of "the whole" which is, in the end, never represented at all. Since it is never actually depicted, lyric encounter with the transcendent remains equivocally confined to the self—yet, paradoxically, only to the extent that the poet disappears. As we have seen, he only remembers the absolute by forgetting himself in time (through its distension within the lyric medium!), thus disregarding the need for the moment's (*Augenblick*) redemption by God. As echoed in its oscillation between the elegiac and idyllic tones, this cycle abruptly yet nonetheless subtly switches between openness and closure, between action and passion vis-à-vis divine. Hence the either/or logic of the Mörikean image recalls, as Cooper has shown, dialectical theology. It appears to preclude the real presence of God, only ever obliquely referring to the Trinity through the "transgression of representation"—that is, through images reduced to signs of "Spirit's self-mediation" (its self-construction and -negation) within the finite scope of poetic memory and fancy.

The dialectical notion of transcendence evident in this cycle further recalls Ricœur's postcritical hermeneutic. Lamenting "the *forgetting* of the question of the origin and the meaning of our life" as well as the lost significance of "words like 'inwardness,'" Ricœur attempts to rehabilitate the classical symbol.<sup>504</sup> Although he supports dialectical philosophy's "demythologization" of culture and language, as a Calvinist he also opposes totally reducing symbol to the univocal metaphysics of the secular.<sup>505</sup> Ricœur instead posits that symbolic speech has its own equivocal logic and legitimacy.

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<sup>504</sup> Ricœur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 226.

<sup>505</sup> Ricœur "believe[s] that the philosopher can contribute to the debate over demythologization, eventually preventing some confusions or some false alternatives, by elaborating something like a critique, in the Kantian sense of the word, of symbolic language, that is, a study of its structures, of its function, and a justification of its validity in relation to a certain sphere of objects" (*ibid.*, 232).

Hence he observes that symbols “function [by] their [formal] analogy with the dimension of existence and being which one wants to signify,” such that the symbol attains “a double meaning” referring to itself and something wholly other that transcends it.<sup>506</sup> This relation of identity-in-difference (analogy) is, he insists, strictly formal since the symbol’s “double meaning” only “points indirectly” to “existential and ontological possibilities” instead of the actual presence of God.<sup>507</sup> In thus precluding the metaphysical principle of analogia, his understanding of the symbol’s manner of disclosure become “equivocal:” for in referring to a meaning (something “more” and “other”) that wholly differs from historical conventions, causal necessities, and what is otherwise “factually available,” the symbol can only open the “inexhaustible possibility” of reality’s transcendent dimension.<sup>508</sup> Although Ricœur’s recovery of symbolic language holds that humanity is “founded,” that is, “created and recreated by a generative word,” this double-edged hermeneutic “de-constructs” the literal, historical, and contemplative values of the symbol in order to “liberate” its allegorical significance. According to Ricœur, destruction of the symbol’s ontological foundations and the subsequent, constructivist interpretation of its allegorical meaning belong to the same hermeneutic process.<sup>509</sup> Its goal is “the generation of possibility in the heart of our imagination[, our memory,] and our language.”<sup>510</sup>

Although Mörike’s intentions in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* are less transparent, the end is the same: the etiolation of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol and its displacement with a simulacrum. Similar to Ricœur’s, Mörike’s grasp of Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism only allows for “possibility”

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 232-233.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 237.

of something “more” and “other.” This follows from its equivocal oscillation of tones (alternatively sentimental and naïve, ironic and meek), which yields “multivocal significations in which one meaning leads to another meaning” and another—until the meaning of the image’s being dissolves in the maelstrom of time (the word “allegory,” Ricœur contends, “did not, in its origins, mean anything different”).<sup>511</sup> In *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, Mörike only references the divine on the basis of an equivocal ontology. For, like Ricœur’s philosophy of language, this cycle develops a critical hermeneutic of signification—not of depiction—to which Mörike attaches a “comprehension of time, no longer,” as both Protestants believe, “as the objective time of the world, but as that time about which St. Augustine [purportedly] spoke in the eleventh book of the *Confessions*, that [strictly interior] time which is,” according to Ricœur, “the distension and intension of our existence, which deploys itself on from a lived present by retention of a past and anticipation of a future.”<sup>512</sup> Mörike’s *Bilder* also express this subjective view of time—not as symbolic image presenting and participating in the eternal via analogia, but as the punctual ego’s sentimental projection of his own existence and his (conceptual) grasp of its fleeting significance. Mörike thus seeks to recover a trace, however transient, of symbolic insight into the eternal origins of language by transcending representation altogether. The result is, however, the effacement of the image and imago Dei tradition. Like Ricœur and the Young Hegelians before him, Mörike holds that symbolism does not require the “immediacy of belief,” since “we are faced,” as Ricœur puts it, “with [...] significations which do not speak of facts but which point indirectly, by means of the meaning of the meaning, to existential and ontological possibilities.”<sup>513</sup> The symbols of the faith are essentially discursive signs void of intrinsic

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>513</sup> Ricœur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 234. Ricoeur rejects the “immediacy of belief” that he associates with the classical symbol in *The Symbolism of Evil*: “Does [modern hermeneutics’] revivification of philosophy through contact with the fundamental symbols of consciousness mean that we could go back to a primitive naïveté? Not at all. In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolism of the



form and value, which can never admit the real presence of the divine.<sup>514</sup> It is in this manner precisely that Mörike's *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* employs de-potentialized images that, it seems, only negatively disclose the possibility of transcendence. Like Ricœur's philosophy of the symbol, then, this cycle regards the symbolic image from a critical perspective that purports to bracket its metaphysical implications. It is only *as though* the faded symbols of Christendom concretely depict the source of life. Yet, we have seen, in thus striving and purportedly failing to represent the transcendent, the *Bilder* appear to attain a second, "naïve" presence (the infinitely distended moment) and an allegorical significance that is supposed to inwardly transcend time. Again, this only occurs insofar as the symbol becomes ontologically equivocal by driving a wedge between appearances and their invisible source. As Ricœur contends, "in symbolism we are faced with languages which are [ontologically] equivocal."<sup>515</sup> However, in thus reducing the symbolic image's depiction of the transcendent to a strictly negative "possibility," the image ironically becomes an idol confined to the scope of the punctual ego's own gaze. In so doing, this dialectical view of the self, the image, and their vanished relation to source hastens the secularization of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol.

To conclude, Mörike's *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* exhibit a prevailing tendency in German culture—from Luther to Strauß—to de-potentialize the image. This unfolds in the cycle through the conflation of symbol with allegory (discourse), which confines the symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) of the absolute to an equivocal notion of lyric interiority characterized by the poet's "second

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sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second naïveté in and through criticism" (351).

<sup>514</sup> See Ricœur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 232, on the superficially analogic gestalt of the symbol: In the production of symbols, "a certain number of physiognomic values are chosen as functions of their analogy with the dimension of existence and being which one wants to signify. There is, therefore, a sort of double essence, a double meaning of the cosmic representation, which is the movement itself of the symbol."

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

naïveté.” We have seen how, through the cycle’s logic of negation, the classical image becomes a sign of divine absence—just as transcendence becomes a strictly punctual occurrence paradoxically restricted to the scope of the poet’s phantasy and memory. Thus, the cycle’s sentimental images of Christian symbols evince an elegiac distance—barely concealed under the poem’s idyllic tones—vis-à-vis creation’s eternal source. As a result, symbolic insight only self-consciously occurs by “transgressing representation” through abrupt shifts beyond the analogic medium of the image (“wie es kein Bildchen uns gibt”). Furthermore, we saw how the *Bilder* (*eidola*) seek to convert time into a simulacrum of the eternal. For they seek to generate a second immediacy through mood (“Halb ist es Lust, halb ist es Klage”) that fills the poet and spurs a second transcendent insight into the source of creation. Thus they evoke a second, disenchanting presence (Kohlschmidt) born of oblivion by submerging the eternal logos in the hum of language, without a telos, (Rollestone) and seemingly drowning the meaning of being in the senseless rush of time. Instead of de-subjectivizing the image in order to describe its emergent gestalt and thus to attain insight into its source in the invisible, Mörike’s enchanting imagery results in its de-personalization: the effacement of the symbolic image and the poet as imago Dei. However briefly, the Mörikean symbol appears to open the *possibility* of insight into the “whole” (*das Ganze*)—understood as time’s sheer distension, its inexorable descent into non-being. Thus, the poet elegiacally affirms the loss of divine reality. The logic is neo-Pelagian: having forgotten the intimate presence of God to his own lyric powers, Mörike embraces the peculiar intermixture of melancholy, desire, and humor that characterizes this cycle of elegiac idylls. Thus, he achieves a second “naïveté.”

As suggested by the parallels established between *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* and “Im Frühling,” the poet’s anguished appropriation of classicism had already begun in the 1820s. In the following chapter, we shall see that Mörike’s de-stabilization of lyric interiority need not result in de-personalization: that is, in the effacement of the image, lyric agency (poësis), and divine personhood.

Despite the young poet's self-conscious concern with the image's source vis-à-vis nature and the transcendent, he sometimes succeeds in overcoming his prejudices (*Vorurteile*) against classical metaphysics by de-subjectivizing the image of the thing seen. This unfolds paradigmatically in “An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang” (1825) and in the thing-poems “Auf eine Lampe” (1846) and “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1846) through the quasi-phenomenological suspension of his vision of the thing seen *within the image*. Thus, these poems evince the transition away from the “epiphanies of being” characterizing Weimar classicism towards what Taylor terms “epiphanies of interspaces” and “-times” of modernist imagism. In so doing, they disclose—in and through the difference of signification—a constitutive analogy always already at work within the structure of the image itself.

## ADUMBRATIONS OF MODERNISM: ANALOGIA AS THE BASIS OF THE MÖRIKEAN IMAGE'S AUTONOMY

“Die Kraft des Geistes ist nur so groß als ihre Äußerung, seine Tiefe nur so tief,  
als er in seiner Auslegung sich auszubreiten und sich zu verlieren vermag.”

— G.W. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*

### Introduction

We argued in the previous chapter that Mörike's appropriation of the classical symbol diverges from Goethe's Neoplatonism and, likewise, from the mainstream (Catholic) tradition of German romantic lyric (Brentano, F. Schlegel, Eichendorff) that had regarded images as expressing the symbolic order (logos) of nature and the divine.<sup>516</sup> If, as Sengle observes, “one ought to consider, more than we are accustomed to, that in the first half of the nineteenth-century, Catholicism returned to German literature and that, through the Catholic poets of Silesia, Westphalia, Austria, and the Rhineland the church's ancient trove of symbols was newly opened,” this only partially holds for Mörike.<sup>517</sup> The confidant of the F.T. Vischer and D.F. Strauss could never fully embrace “pansymbolism.”<sup>518</sup> “For simple reflection” and what Sengle elsewhere describes as Protestant *Weltschmerz* resulting from secularization coincides in Mörike's writings and, indeed, “in the whole

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<sup>516</sup> See Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 1: 293-294.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 314. “Man muß mehr als bisher daran denken, daß in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts der Katholizismus in die deutsche Literatur zurückkehrte und daß sich über die katholischen Dichter Schlesiens, Westfalens, Österreichs und der Rheinlande die uralten Symbolschätze der Kirche für die Literatur neu öffneten.” My translation.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 296.

conservative Biedermeier epoch, with the cult of the image.”<sup>519</sup> According to Sengle, the pervasive melancholy of this era of literature “has roots that reach far beyond the Restauration, since religious skepticism is, even within Christian culture, much older than this period. One could go back to the Renaissance, whose skepticism became the basis for the wistful mood of impermanence (*Vergänglichkeitsstimmung*) of the Baroque.”<sup>520</sup> As with *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, this disenchanted attitude is evident in Mörike’s early poems on time-consciousness and the thing-poetry from his middle period. Inasmuch as “the certainty” born of logos-theology was rapidly “disappearing or sublimating in idealistic speculation, [...] the abyss of *Weltschmerz* became ineluctable” for the apostate Lutheran minister.<sup>521</sup> And yet, to the extent that Mörike’s lyric imagery expresses his desire to behold and describe (*darstellen*) the transcendent divine, it remains bound to the notion of analogic predication subtending the classical symbol. Even when fraught by subjectivity—the poet’s anxieties, desires, and fetishes—the image retains an irrepressible power to open the beholder’s intellectual horizon to that which transcends him. However, we shall see that symbolic insight into the eternal through

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid. “...denn die einfache Reflexion, der gesunde Menschenverstand behält im ganzen konservativen Biedermeier neben dem Bilderprinzip sein Recht.” My translation. In addition to the historical factors contributing to the pessimism and, even, nihilism of many Restauration poets—Schopenhauer and Platen are indicative, if not totally characteristic—Sengle contends that “wir den tiefsten Grund des Weltschmerzes in der Unsicherheit bezüglich letzter Wert- und Sinnfragen zu suchen haben” (26). Sengle observes that “das Wesen und der Sinn der Welt sind [...], wenigstens in den Augen vieler, durch die idealistische Philosophie und den Historismus nicht deutlicher, sondern undeutlicher geworden. Der Weltschmerz wäre demnach die seelische Reaktion auf eine Skepsis, die sich nicht nur, wie es Immermann schien, auf das empirische Beobachten und Wissen bezieht, sondern auf die verschiedensten Formen der Wahrheit, die damit allumfassend, metaphysischer und religiöser Art sind” (ibid., 26). My translation.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid, 26. “Wenn diese Deutung richtig ist, dann muß der Weltschmerz Wurzeln haben, die weit hinter die Restaurationsepoche zurückreichen; denn die religiöse Skepsis ist, auch innerhalb der christlichen Kultur, viel älter als die Restaurationsperiode. Man könnte bis in die Renaissance zurückgehen, auf deren Skeptizismus die schwermutige Vergänglichkeitsstimmung der barocken Kultur zu beziehen ist.” My translation.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 28. “Indem die Sicherungen, die der Logos-Begriff der christlich-humanistischen Kultur verliehen hatte, verschwanden oder sich in idealistische Spekulationen verflüchtigten, war, so scheint es, in seelischer Beziehung der Abgrund des Weltschmerzes nicht mehr zu vermeiden.” My translation.

analogia only unfolds insofar as the poet's "sentimental" disposition (Schiller) undergoes a radical de-subjectivization—yet without effacing the image or denying the poet's agency as *imago Dei*.

In addition to recalling the origins of secularization, the "sense of crisis" characterizing Mörike's writings—and, Sengle notes, "the majority of Biedermeier literature"—also chimes with modernist notions of interiority.<sup>522</sup> Whereas the previous chapter described the subjectivization of the image in Mörike's poetry as a consequence of Protestant iconoclasm, this one draws out a new dimension of his poetry's proto-modernism. Focusing on the crisis of lyric subjectivity, it describes a second view of the image's autonomy: having lost, for the poet, any certain relation to the cosmos and its divine origins (logos), the poem also becomes increasingly remote from its origins in finite poësis. As Taylor observes, inner nature, reason, and being were no longer obviously—that is to say, univocally—embedded in the order of the cosmos.<sup>523</sup> By contrast to Weimar classicism, the infinite distance characterizing the ontological difference between things and their transcendent provenance haunts Mörike's best poems. Because the interior relation of words and things to their metaphysical source had, during secularization, become an epistemological problem, expressivist interiority was rendered radically uncertain. Yet we shall see that this situation does not always dead end, for Mörike, in the cynicism of the "sentimental" worldview. Rather, for the young poet enthused by the morning light, hope transforms the pervasive strain of doubt into insight—just as wonder allows the middle-aged man to overcome a profound sense of loss. In so doing, we shall see, the poet's attention subtly shifts to the internal dynamics of the image itself. For, insofar as Mörike allows himself to become absorbed in the thing seen, his vision is progressively suspended *in and between the images*, thus resulting in a novel kind of interspatial and -temporal epiphany (Taylor) that overcomes

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 30. "Das Gefühl der Krise ist für die meisten Angehörigen der Biedermeiergeneration unausweichlich." My translation.

<sup>523</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 462.

both the univocal and equivocal symbolism prevalent in nineteenth-century German literature.<sup>524</sup> It discloses the metaphysical principle of analogia subtending the gestalt of the thing seen as it emerges through the image.

Foreshadowing the imagist poetry of the early twentieth century, Mörike's poems become increasingly compressed and hermetic, yet remain nonetheless epiphanic. In the following, we shall see with regard to "An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang" (1825) how Mörike responds to the modern crisis of interiority by de-subjectivizing lyric speech. In progressively suspending the moment of symbolic insight *in* and *between* isolated images, he recovers the personal core of the poem: namely, its origins in the transcendent divine. The chapter then concludes by addressing the persistence of metaphysics in "Auf eine Lampe" (1846). Specifically, it describes the consequences of the transition in Mörike's thing-poetry from a subject-centered to an increasingly, *though never fully*, impersonal view of the image and its object. In so doing, this section underscores Mörike's shift from a classicist poetics, for which Hegel's *Aesthetics* is my touchstone, to a proto-modernist notion of the image's aesthetic autonomy.<sup>525</sup> However, unlike speculative idealism, the poet retains a rich view of the autonomous image's gestalt as basing in the principle of analogia.

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 479. As we shall see, this shift from epiphanies of being to interspaces and times is evident in Mörike's early memory-poems as well as, perhaps surprisingly, his thing-poems, which many scholars have viewed as initiating this modernist genre. On the genealogy of thing-poetry, see Kurt Oppert, "Das Dinggedicht: Eine Kunstform bei Mörike, Meyer, und Rilke," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, (Spring, 1926), 747-783.

<sup>525</sup> The influence of Idealist aesthetics on "Auf eine Lampe" is evident in its depiction of beauty as an appearance of the absolute. In taking Hegel's *Aesthetics* as my touchstone, however, I do not mean to suggest that Mörike was ever a Hegelian or that Hegelianism was normative for poets of the *Biedermeierzeit*. Sengle rightly asserts that "das Hegelianische System ist für die Restaurationsepoche nicht repräsentativ" (*Biedermeierzeit*, 1: 84). Nevertheless, Sengle also notes with regard to *Biedermeier* literature, "daß der Kunst überhaupt etwas vorgegeben ist, daß sie mehr als Spiel und formales Virtuositentum sein muß, darin ist man sich einig" (ibid., 85). Put otherwise, *Biedermeier* poetry was in the main a late romantic movement with roots in Weimar classicism that still embraced a view of the image as expressing the truth of the world. My chapter shows how this aesthetic paradigm, which I term expressivism (Taylor), begins to break down in poems from Mörike's early and middle periods.

## Imagism in Mörike's "An einem Wintermorgen, bevor Sonnenaufgang"

An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang (1825)

O fläumenleichte Zeit der dunkeln Frühe!  
Welch neue Welt bewegest du in mir?  
Was ist's, daß ich auf einmal nun in dir  
Von sanfter Wollust meines Daseins glühe?

Einem Krystall gleicht meine Seele nun,  
Den noch kein falscher Strahl des Lichts getroffen;  
Zu fluthen scheint mein Geist, er scheint zu ruhn,  
Dem Eindruck naher Wunderkräfte offen,  
Die aus dem klaren Gürtel blauer Luft  
Zuletzt ein Zauberwort vor meine Sinne ruft.

10

Bei hellen Augen glaub' ich doch zu schwanken;  
Ich schließe sie, daß nicht der Traum entweiche.  
Seh' ich hinab in lichte Feenreiche?  
Wer hat den bunten Schwarm von Bildern und Gedanken  
Zur Pforte meines Herzens hergeladen,  
Die glänzend sich in diesem Busen baden,  
Goldfarb'gen Fischlein gleich im Gartenteiche?

Ich höre bald der Hirtenflöten Klänge,  
Wie um die Krippe jener Wundernacht,  
Bald weinbekränzter Jugend Lustgesänge;  
Wer hat das friedenselige Gedränge  
In meine traurigen Wände hergebracht?  
Und welch Gefühl entzückter Stärke,  
Indem mein Sinn sich frisch zur Ferne lenkt!  
Vom ersten Mark des heut'gen Tags getränkt,  
Fühl ich mir Muth zu jedem frommen Werke.  
Die Seele fliegt, so weit der Himmel reicht,  
Der Genius jauchzt in mir! Doch sage,  
Warum wird jetzt der Blick von Wehmuth feucht?  
Ist's ein verloren Glück, was mich erweicht?  
Ist es ein werdendes, was ich im Herzen trage?  
— Hinweg, mein Geist! hier gilt kein Stillestehn:  
Es ist ein Augenblick, und Alles wird verwehn!

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Dort, sieh, am Horizont lüpf sich der Vorhang schon!  
 Es träumt der Tag, nun sei die Nacht entflohn;  
 Die Purpurlippe, die geschlossen lag,  
 Haucht, halbgeöffnet, süße Athemzüge:  
 Auf einmal blitzt das Aug', und, wie ein Gott, der Tag  
 Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!<sup>526</sup>

“An eine Wintermorgen” opens with an exquisite image of time’s crystallization through desire and the formative power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). In the poem’s first verse, the enchanted hour becomes visible, at least interiorly, through an organic metaphor: “feather-light” (*flaumenleicht*). At once evoking the levity of snowfall, the almost invisible growth of fluff on fruit, down on a bird or the young poet’s face, and, furthermore, the warm fragility of embryonic development, the poem’s opening lines establish the prevailing dynamic of the poem. It suggests the concentration (*Verdichtung*) and distension of the fleeting moment into an image through interiorization: “O flaumenleichte Zeit der dunkeln Frühe! / Welch neue Welt bewegest du in mir? / Was ist’s, daß ich auf einmal nun in dir / Von sanfter Wollust meines Daseins glühe?” This image depicts a process of interior formation (*Bildung*) recalling both Goethean poetics and what Sengle terms the Biedermeier “tendency towards spatialization” (*Verräumlichungstendenz*), according to which time is internalized and subdued through lyric speech.<sup>527</sup> However, as the subsequent lines intimate, the image also has an extrinsic aspect; for inasmuch as “time is addressed as an active being (*Wesen*),” this initial verse intimates a mysterious, even personal, presence.<sup>528</sup> It suggests, as Nibbrig observes, “more than a time-space continuum filled with an atmosphere of mood.”<sup>529</sup> According to Storz, it

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<sup>526</sup> Mörike, “An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang,” MKG, 1: 11-12.

<sup>527</sup> See Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 727. See also *ibid.*, 1, 51: “*Angesichts der andrängenden Macht der Zeit*, so ist wohl zu interpretieren, *findet man im liebevoll ergriffenen und innerlich angeeigneten Raum ein heilsames Gegengewicht.*”

<sup>528</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 30.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.* “Die Zeit wird angesprochen als ein wirkendes Wesen.” “Mehr als ein von Atmosphäre erfüllter Zeit-Raum.” My translations.

has the gestalt of a natural symbol, for this predawn moment of inspiration follows the Goethean paradigm of intensification “between two natural poles, veritably, between day and night.”<sup>530</sup> Through a litany of natural polarities—self and world, past and future, inwardness and transcendence—this image appears to open lyric speech to a source outside the self: namely, one in which the poet finds himself comprehended (“Was ist’s, daß ich auf einmal nun in dir/ Von sanfter Wollust meines Daseins glühe?”). The image thus depicts a moment of self-transcendence (*Steigerung*) charged with desire for a “new world” beyond the known and the visible. Moreover, the initial exclamation is followed by two interrogatives forming a chiasm (“du in mir”/“ich [...] in dir”), such that their structure and diction recalls the opening lines of Goethe’s “Ganymed” (“Wie im Morgenrot/ Du rings mich anglühst”). Both invocations of dawn suggest the mystery of communion with and growth through a transcendent Other. This astounding presentation of time at the outset of Mörike’s lyric thus conveys the untarnished hope of incipency, which corresponds to the day’s earliest and purest hour—before the cares of the world can burden the poet’s spirit. It expresses the hope that the present moment of darkness so full of dawning inspiration might be imbued with love’s transcendent light. At first glance, then, this image seems replete with divine presence.

Further developing the image, the second stanza employs a classical symbol of interiority in likening the poet’s inspired “soul” to the receptivity of a crystal. An image of time-consciousness refracting the morning light, this image is, it would seem, perfectly translucent to its source: “Einem Krystall gleicht meine Seele nun,/ Den noch kein falscher Strahl des Lichts getroffen.” Although it unfolds through analogia, it at once suggests an unadulterated identity between the soul and its transcendent source. The two lights are, it would seem, univocal. And yet, upon closer inspection,

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<sup>530</sup> Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, 85. “Zwischen zwei naturhaften Polen, wahrhaftig zwischen Tag und Nacht.” My translation.

the locus of the crystal's light proves ontologically indeterminate. Does its radiance spring from within or without? Has the sun already begun to rise, or is this image of communion perhaps a product of lyric fancy? Although deeply reminiscent of the Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics of light, according to which the logos is self-revealing illumination from above, this symbol is a prime example of the "subtler language" (Taylor) of post-romantic poetry. Hence it more immediately echoes the *Sturm und Drang* and romantic aesthetics of genius.<sup>531</sup> On the one hand, it recalls the image of interior form in "Aus Goethes Brieftasche" as a "glass through which we gather within the heart of humanity the holy rays of nature's irradiant expanse and attain a brilliant insight [Feuerblick]." <sup>532</sup> It already faintly suggests, therefore, the naturalization of the transcendent. And yet, the incipient interiority expressed in the opening stanza has crystallized into a symbol that remains obdurately open to receiving and refracting light from the heavens ("blauer Luft"). For the ensuing verses (ln. 7-10) intimate a basic feature of formation (*Bildung*) through symbolic disclosure evident in Goethe's and Herder's expressivist poetics. Namely, they suggest the simultaneous activity and passivity (co-creation through nature and the divine act) of the inspired beholder: "Zu fluthen scheint mein Geist, er scheint zu ruhn,/ Dem Eindruck naher Wunderkräfte offen,/ Die aus dem klaren Gürtel blauer Luft/ Zuletzt ein Zauberwort vor meine Sinne ruft." Lyric interiority is represented in these lines as both fluid and self-contained. As a vessel with its own dynamic form, the soul's motion cannot be reduced to sheer passivity; yet neither is it purely active insofar as it remains "open to the impression of wondrous powers near." The soul as crystal thus becomes a

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<sup>531</sup> See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 404 on "the ontological indeterminacy of the 'subtler languages' of post-Romantic literature." This image's difference from classical poetics and the corresponding understanding of interiority is already suggested in its purported transparency. There is barely any trace of materiality in the crystal and none of darkness. As we saw in chapter one, however, the classical symbol is only ever translucent as a provisional disclosure of the transcendent. It participates in the absolute without fully presenting it because it is rooted in the realm of bodily contingencies.

<sup>532</sup> Goethe, "Aus Goethes Brieftasche," GHA, 12: 23. "Sie [Form] ist ein- und für allemal das Glas, wodurch wir die heiligen Strahlen der verbreiteten Natur an das Herz der Menschen zum Feuerblick sammeln." My translation.

symbol that, similar to the expressivist model, “rests” in itself—even as it “flows” into and from its origins in an oscillating relation of identity-in-difference. Open to the source’s irradient influence, the spirit finds itself empowered to express (*ausdrücken*) its force (“Wunderkräfte”). Moreover, since this power of expression appears to have been received from the heavens (“aus dem klaren Gürtel blauer Luft”) in the form of a “Zauberwort,” it seems both to transcend poetic interiority and to fulfill it. Having perceived the word through the senses (“vor meine Sinne”), the poet’s exchange with this transcendent source of significance is evidently characterized by co-action through divine poësis. The “Zauberwort” is, it seems, a gift from above.<sup>533</sup>

However, the poem’s subsequent images depart from this vaguely classical, even romantically clichéd conception of interiority as symbolic expression. Already intimated in the romantic language of “verbal magic” (“Sprachmagie”) is the poet’s awakening to his own creativity—at first equivocally conceived, we shall see, as an immanent capacity for self-expression.<sup>534</sup> While the ensuing verses defer the presence of nature and the divine and sustain this distance through the poem’s last stanza, this anguished, self-conscious deferral finally transforms into deference to the thing seen. What unfolds may be likened to the so-called “Cartesian reduction” of phenomenological inquiry (Sokolowski), whereby the timeless *eidos* of the thing seen emerges in

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<sup>533</sup> Cf. Kittler’s comparison of this passage with Eichendorff’s “Wünschelrute” in *Jenseits der Idylle*, 117: “Jenes ‘Zauberwort,’ mit dem der Sprecher [die Wunderkräfte] herbeizitieren will, deutet erstmals einen Zug von Aktivität an und stellt überdies die Beziehung zur Dichtung her, denn es lässt sich als Inbegriff der sprachmagischen Befähigung des Poeten verstehen. Zehn Jahre später feierte auch Joseph von Eichendorff in dem berühmten ‘Wünschelrute’ die romantische Dichterrede als das ‘Zauberwort,’ das die Welt zu ihrem wahren Leben erwecken könne [...]” Eichendorff’s iconic poem reads: “Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen,/ Die da träumen fort und fort,/ Und die Welt hebt an zu singen,/ Triffst du nur das Zauberwort.” Joseph von Eichendorff, *Sämtliche Werke des Freiherrn Joseph von Eichendorff: Historische Kritische Ausgabe*, (Stuttgart: Verlag MKG. Kohlhammer, 1993), 121.

<sup>534</sup> Kittler, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 117. Cf. Inge and Reiner Wild, eds., *Mörke Handbuch*, 109: “Geboten wird ein ‘Reflexionsprotokol’ (Heydebrand); das Gedicht zeigt einen Prozess der Bewusstwerdung.” In describing this process as “das Wiedererwachen der gestaltenden Kräfte des Ichs,” Renate von Heydebrand in *Edvard Mörikes Gedichtwerk; Beschreibung und Bedeutung der Formenvielfalt und ihrer Entwicklung*, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1972), recognizes that “es bleibt bei einer wenn auch dramatischen Schilderung der Vorgänge im Innenwelt” (234).

probing the being of the phenomenon through methodical doubt.<sup>535</sup> Thus, we shall see that the poet's view—of the light source and its lyric expression—is progressively suspended *within the image* until, in the final couplet, the sun appears, indirectly yet in its full glory, through an analogy. To be sure, this concluding lyric vision *qua image* transcends the equivocal self-immanence characterizing (Husserlian) phenomenology's prosaic, self-contained method of inquiry. As Mörikes imagery becomes increasingly autonomous in remotion from its source in the finite poet, it surprisingly yields an epiphany: namely, an oblique vision of the transcendent unfolding, via simile, from the dynamic gestalt of the thing seen.<sup>536</sup> In and through the “difference” of signification, a constitutive analogy unfolds. The poem becomes and, indeed, always already was a symbolic image of the phenomenon. By the poem's conclusion, which anticipates the imagism of Pound, Eliot, and Rilke, the expressivist model of poësis based in the stable ego collapses, thus hearkening the dawn of literary modernism.<sup>537</sup> As we shall see, emerging from the process of de-subjectivization depicted in this poem, which anticipates Rilke's poetics of vision, is the metaphysical principle of analogia underpinning of the symbol.

The collapse of the bourgeois ego begins in the third stanza, at the latest, by allowing the echoes of Goethean metaphysics in the opening images to become an epistemological problem. In so doing, the moment (*Augenblick*) of inspiration and symbolic insight is tinged with doubt through an act of self-reflection that raises the question, once and again, as to the image's provenance—yet now in an increasingly melancholy key. Stanzas three and four concentrate on the poet's interiority such that the poet's tone shifts from a belated, increasingly self-conscious wonder (whence the

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<sup>535</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 54.

<sup>536</sup> Mörike's aesthetization of the image is an abnormality in late romantic literature. As Sengle observes, “das ästhetische Symbol [war] noch ein rares, wenig bekanntes Plänzchen” (*Biedermeierzeit*, 1: 293).

<sup>537</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 462.

source of my inspiration?!!) to anxious introspection. Reflection on the image's origins thus results in a crisis of subjectivity. While continuing the poem's overarching dynamic of concentrating and distending time, these images of time-consciousness now appear in an estranging light:<sup>538</sup>

Bei hellen Augen glaub' ich doch zu schwanken;  
 Ich schließe sie, daß nicht der Traum entweiche.  
 Seh' ich hinab in lichte Feenreiche?  
 Wer hat den bunten Schwarm von Bildern und Gedanken  
 Zur Pforte meines Herzens hergeladen, 15  
 Die glänzend sich in diesem Busen baden,  
 Goldfarb'gen Fischlein gleich im Gartenteiche?

Suddenly reeling (“schwanken”) from the ambiguous light and depths (“hinab”) of symbolic perception—yet also oddly circumspect (“bei hellen Augen”)—the poet decides to close his eyes to the dawning day, “daß nicht der Traum entweiche.” In regarding the foregoing images as dreams and confining them within, he finds himself suspended over an interior realm filled with the light of poetic phantasy. Hence the fanciful question: “Seh' ich hinab in lichte Feenreiche?” His inward gaze has disregarded the presence of the light source (dawn) transcending his own interior powers and instead displaced it with a dream-image. As Wild observes, the poet alludes with words such as “‘fairyland’ to central locutions of romanticism and evokes their poetological connotations”—foremost, lyric fancy and the ontological suspense of dream imagery.<sup>539</sup> The mood of these lines has thus become “romantic” in the sense of the term implying magic, potential artifice, and belatedness vis-à-vis the past;<sup>540</sup> though terms such as “Wunderkräfte” and “Zauberwort” from the preceding stanza—both bywords of Jena Romantik—had already suggested this slippage.

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<sup>538</sup> The ensuing images are estranging because their tenor is “sentimental” in the Schillerian sense. See the foregoing chapter’s discussion of the Mörikean image vis-à-vis *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* as a sentimental construct (“ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes”).

<sup>539</sup> Wild, *Beiträge*, 116. “[Mit Wörter wie] ‘Feenreiche’ werden zentrale Wendungen der Romantik zitiert und die ihnen zugehörigen poetologischen Vorstellungen evoziert.” My translanton.

<sup>540</sup> Braungart’s entry on “Naturlyrik” in the *Mörike Hanbuch* further suggests a correspondence between Mörike’s poetics and Rilke’s early “Vorwandsästhetik:” “Characteristisch ist für M.: Die semiotische Aufladung der Natur

In this third stanza, however, the act of receiving the image is more problematic. Now the poet views the previous images of time and interiority as waking dreams on the verge of dispersing at sunrise, even as he claims the power to retain them by closing his eyes.<sup>541</sup> Thus, instead of drawing his capacity to create images from the formative power of a light that eternally transcends him (e.g. through the symbolic imagination conceived as divine *Ein-bildungskraft*), the poet momentarily produces them through the derivative power of fancy. No longer, then, are these images *received* as symbols of an extrinsic source; rather, they have been conjured before the poet's appropriative gaze in the manner of a daydream. The "Schwarm von Bildern und Gedanken" in this passage consequently appears to originate in the self-contained ego, bottoming out in its finite depths, "Goldfarb'gen Fischlein gleich im Gartenteich." This subtly ironic, Rococo image intimates that the images have become mere diversion—a distraction, even—such that the question as to their source ("Wer hat den bunten Schwarm [...] / Zur Pforte meines Herzens hergeladen") is momentarily drained of the erotic charge that had shaped the opening stanza. The query has become sentimental, hence, merely rhetorical, since the source that the poet seeks is, it would seem, wholly enclosed within him. Although his question recalls a personal and cultural past into the present in the following stanza, we shall see that the ensuing moments of insight remain confined to an intensified (*verinnerlicht*) but strictly punctual present. As a result, the first stanzas' joyful echoes of classical interiority begin to fade as they submerge in the worries of an inward-looking ego, for whom the

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durch individuell-subjektive Geschichte und die Überlagerung mit Subjektivität können derart dominant werden (bereits im Sinne der späteren "Vorwands-Ästhetik Rilkes)" (75).

<sup>541</sup> According to Heydebrand, *Eduard Mörikes Gedichtwerk*, "die bewunderd wahrgenommene äussere Wirklichkeit, 'die flamenleichte Zeit der dunkeln Frühe,' [ist] nur gleichsam Katalysator für den Klärungsprozess im innern des Ichs, der 'auf einmal' beginnt" (234). Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, concurs: "Nicht die Natur, sondern der Raum des Innern wird hier verzaubert" (31). In addition to recalling similar instances of the lyric persona closing his eyes in Mörike's poetry (as in "Verzicht" and "Im Frühling"), this trope also has resonances in modernist lyric: as in Sylvia Plath's "Mad Girl's Love Song," which begins "I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead; / I lift my lids and all is born again. / (I think I made you up inside my head.)" Sylvia Plath, *Crystal Gazer and Other Poems*, (London: Rainbow Press, 1971).

image's provenance has become a moment of crisis. We shall see that this romantic turn in "An einem Wintermorgen"—the subjectivization of the lyric image—remains in productive tension with Mörike's clichéd echoes of expressivist poetics of Weimar classicism until, in the concluding stanza, the poem breaks through to a proto-modernist imagism fully dependent on the metaphysical principle of analogia, which overturns both paradigms.

In the following verses (18-22), the poet's sentimental disposition towards the images before his mind's eye subtly historicizes their manner of appearance. The image thus becomes the expression of a "punctual" ego ostensibly isolated from its origins in the divine. This fourth stanza first suggests that memory is the medium through which symbolic disclosure (epiphany) unfolds, such that the temporal structure of these images deepens against the backdrop of cultural and personal history. Hence, as Wild observes, this stanza implies an act of self-positioning with respect to the past that heightens the poet's sense of belatedness vis-à-vis the numinous source of the image.<sup>542</sup>

Ich höre bald der Hirtenflöten Klänge,  
Wie um die Krippe jener Wundernacht,  
Bald weinbekränzter Jugend Lustgesänge; 20  
Wer hat das friedenselige Gedränge  
In meine traurigen Wände hergebracht?

This idyllic moment of inspiration (*Augenblick*) discloses three images in quick succession—the shepherds’ music, the nativity of Christ, and the bacchanal—which ought to (re)call the origins of poësis into the present. By placing two classical, religious symbols (the crib and the wreath) in linear, if anachronistic, progression, this image’s invocation of the Greek and Christian traditions intimates a syncretizing view of their origins. And yet, although it is purportedly “peaceful” (“friedenselig”) as the nativity of Christ, this throng’s (“Gedränge,” cf. “Schwarm von Bildern” in ln. 14) elegiac tones also unsettle the poet. Thus, the unity of the Western tradition and the poet’s place therein is offset

<sup>542</sup> Wild, *Beiträge*, 117.



by the sentimental refrain of verses 21-22 (“In meine traurigen Wände”) inquiring again as to the images’ provenance. This question intimates an underlying difference between Christ, Dionysius, and the lyric persona that goes unresolved until the poem’s conclusion. For it seems that these symbols of the divine fail to reconcile history with the poet’s experience of the present—that is, the origins of poësis with the event of creation occurring in the poem. As a result, the poet’s perception of these penetrating (*durchdringend*) images occurs through an act of recollection that historicizes the moment, deepening yet subtly destabilizing his sense of interiority.<sup>543</sup> For the tense harmony between antique and Christian culture intimated in these verses echoes a central *topos* of late romanticism, especially the writings of the Heidelberg school, which tell time and again of a “‘traumatic departure’ from some phantasmagoric order of time and place” that “furnishes a self-consciously fantasized vantage point from which ‘history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its recurrence’.”<sup>544</sup> By thus establishing the “literary-historical situation” from which the poet speaks, this stanza serves as an “assurance of his own subjectivity.”<sup>545</sup> As Wild observes, Mörike’s subjective expression of the divine and, indeed, the era of Biedermeier literature as a whole, is “characteristically belated:” for “the dreamer [...], who comes to experience himself as genius and, in so doing, places himself in the tradition of an aesthetics of genius, also regards himself as occupying an epigonal position.”<sup>546</sup> Once regarded as punctual expressions of a subject confined to

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<sup>543</sup> As Kittstein observes, “die unvermittelte Erwähnung der ‘traurigen Wände’ deutet auf Krankheit und Melancholie, vor allem aber auf Isolation und Enge hin” (*Jenseits der Idylle*, 118).

<sup>544</sup> Pfau, *Romantic Moods*, 235. Pfau proceeds to remark that “insofar as romantic lyric articulates the modernity of its subject as a recurrent tension between consciousness and memory, it is bound to stage an intrusion of the latter as an unexpected, haunting intervention.” Cf. Wild, *Beiträge*, 117.

<sup>545</sup> Wild, *Beiträge*, 117: “Literarhistorische Lage.” “Vergewisserung der eigenen Subjektivität.” My translation.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.: “Wird als eine späte und nachzeitliche gekennzeichnet.” “Der Träumer [...], der sich als Genie erfährt und dadurch in die Tradition der Genie-Ästhetik stellt, sieht sich zugleich in der Position der Spätzeitlichkeit.” My translation.

the moment of lyric speech, the poet's dream-images are bound to vanish in the vicissitudes of time. Lyric subjectivity is, we shall see, progressively undermined in the poem by a notion of history as heterogenous temporal succession.<sup>547</sup>

As in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, Mörike's melancholic sense of belatedness hints at an unsound, iconoclastic theology: namely, the presumption that in representing history and its transcendent provenance, epiphanies unfolding by means of the image remain diametrically opposed to the eternal. In the fourth stanza of "An einem Wintermorgen," Mörike similarly strikes a sentimental key in the midst of a charming (*reizend*) vision by suggesting its estrangement from the divine. Because, from the poet's perspective, the past is never present in the moment of lyric speech, the eternal cannot *actually* enter into his presence.<sup>548</sup> Thus, his idyll is laced with the bitter self-awareness that its images of the deity preclude real encounter. Although "An einem Wintermorgen" evokes harmony with the origins, it does so "sentimentally" in the precise sense of the term developed in Schiller's poetological writings. The epiphanies disclosed by Mörikean imagery can therefore "only be retained as something that is already in the process of vanishing."<sup>549</sup> By subjectivizing the image, Mörike's poetry contracts it to a hermetic moment of insight (*Augenblicke*) ostensibly uncoupled from

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<sup>547</sup> Mörike's depiction of the tension between consciousness and memory characterizing the modern subject qualitatively differs from the Catholic expression of this *topos* in the lyric poetry of his contemporary, Joseph von Eichendorff. According to Pfau, Eichendorff similarly "centers his lyrics around [the] irruption of past memories into the patterns of quotidian conscious existence," yet it serves as "a strategy" that is "not only calculated to intensify our perception of psychological depth *qua* 'recollection' (*Erinnerung*) but also our sense of an untranscendable covenant between subject and history" (*Romantic Moods*, 236). Thus, Eichendorff's images of disruptive recollection serve to present the symbolic order—namely, the untranscendable because wholly transcendent logos—of history. Put otherwise, the moment of inspiration and insight into the image's numinous origins reveals a "homogenous structure of experience" insofar nature and culture (e.g. lyric speech) participate in one, divine reality through the analogy of being.

<sup>548</sup> Dupré describes the alienation potential of memory as a typically romantic trope in *Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976): "Remembering the past may fascinate one into forgetfulness of the present. The remembering attitude reduces the real to reflection in which 'enterprises...lose the name of action' (*Hamlet* III, 1). [...] The hard edge of actuality which solely conveys the full sense of the real is softened into the remembrance of a dream" (71).

<sup>549</sup> Inge and Reiner Wild, eds., *Mörike Handbuch*, 68: "Nur als schon Entschwindendes festgehalten werden."

the cosmos revealed by the classical symbol.<sup>550</sup> According to Wild, this positions Mörike “in between” eras and establishes his “autonomy as a lyric poet” vis-à-vis tradition.<sup>551</sup> In the following, however, we shall see how the poet’s autonomy from the symbolic order is subtly transposed to the image, which not only suspends its origins in the divine, but also increasingly distances the image from its source in the poetic act of creation. This process ultimately undermines the poet’s sense of self; for his own autonomy—the originality of *self*-expression—is finally absorbed by the images’ charismatic presence: namely, their presentation of historical and emotional depth in an instant of time (*die Tiefe des Augenblicks*).<sup>552</sup> As we shall see, this de-subjectivization of the image reimagines the expressivist poetics of Weimar classicism and adumbrates a turn towards modernist imagism indirectly disclosing the metaphysical gestalt of the image.

The subjectivization of the image evident in verses three and four of “An einem Wintermorgen” indicates the extent to which a subjective sense of inwardness (*Innigkeit*)—one reflecting the legacy of Protestant iconoclasm, the Enlightenment, and secularization—seems to have displaced Christian-Neoplatonic interiority.<sup>553</sup> However, this reading turns on the common misprision of its symbols as (bad) ontological copies of the transcendent, whereby “epiphanies of

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<sup>550</sup> See *ibid.*: “Allein noch momenthaft, im Augenblick des Sprechens.”

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*: ““In literaturhistorischer Perspektive in eine Zwischenstellung.“ “Eigenständigkeit des Lyrikers Mörike.” My translations. As we have seen vis-à-vis *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, his lyrics suggest a transition from literary classicism to modernism. They are thus characterized, as Wild observes, by a unique “duality” inasmuch as Mörike draws on classical forms while intimating the radical temporalization of symbolic insight, interiority, and being.

<sup>552</sup> See Taylor’s discussion of Pound’s modernist poetics of the image (*Sources of the Self*, 475), which the poet describes as “a radiant node or cluster [...] a *vortex*, from which and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.” Taylor explains that Pound’s notion of image as vortex discloses “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (*ibid.*).

<sup>553</sup> See chapter one for my account of how Hamann, Herder, and Goethe recover this Augustinian tradition, according to which the *intimum* and the *summum* coincide. For these thinkers, the interiority of the cosmos bases in the sympathetic analogy between all things and is buttressed by their teleological form as images of the transcendent One.

being” imply pantheistic—not a panentheistic—view of things.<sup>554</sup> Similar to *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, then, this poem’s frequent use of classical symbols should not be mistaken for univocal metaphysical realism; yet neither does nor, indeed, could it ever preclude a realism grounded in the analogia entis.<sup>555</sup> The poet’s perspective on transcendent divine is, at this point in the poem, altogether equivocal. Sengle’s contention that for Mörike “all forms of a time-bound thought [...] recede in view of the *eternal presence of paragons or figures with whom he felt a spiritual kinship*” thus overlooks the sentimental character of his poetry.<sup>556</sup> Transcendent presence is always troubled in Mörike’s lyrics by the infinite distance characterizing the ontological difference between the thing and its numinous source. Mörike certainly felt a spiritual kinship with the likes of Goethe, Mozart, and Horace; however, the view that “history is spatialized in Mörike’s writings [...] to an all-presence of truth and beauty” fails to convey the historicizing sense of time-consciousness that, as we have seen, underlies Mörikan naïveté.<sup>557</sup> In so doing, this interpretation misses the poem’s transition away from epiphanies of *univocal* being. As Hans Frei argues in his critique of Herderian notions of “spirit” (“Geist”) and sympathetic identification (“Einfühlung”), the shift away from Christian-Neoplatonic interiority towards isolated selfhood already haunted the advent of expressivist poetics in the late

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<sup>554</sup> See my distinction in the introduction between symbol in the pejorative sense used by Gadamer and the symbolic image as understood in this dissertation.

<sup>555</sup> See Eichhorn’s *Das schöne Sein der Dinge*, which regards Mörike as a probing metaphysical thinker, “[der] seine Dichtkunst bzw. Aussprache als eine Ausführung des Lebens anlegt bzw. in ihr sein Leben auch ausführt und dem Rezipienten eine zu lebende Kunst anbietet. Jedoch flieht Mörike damit nicht vor der Wirklichkeit; den Begriff ‘lebensfremd’ in bezug auf seine Person anzuwenden, wäre verfehlt. Es ist lediglich eine Ausweitung des Begriffs von Wirklichkeit” (71).

<sup>556</sup> Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit*, 3: 707: “Alle Formen eines zeitbezogenen Denkens, der klassisch-romantische Vergangenheitsenthusiasmus so gut wie der jungdeutsche ‘Zeitgeist’ und die junghegelianische Zukunftskonstruktion, treten zurück gegenüber der *ewigen Gegenwart großer oder seelenverwandter Vorbilder*.” My translation.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.: “Die Geschichte verräumlicht sich bei Mörike [...] zur Allgegenwart des Wahren und Schönen.” My translation. See chapter two for an account of the peculiar naïveté that characterizes Mörike’s poetics.

eighteenth-century.<sup>558</sup> While acknowledging that Herder's understanding of natural symbols came closer to a realist ontology than any of his contemporaries in German letters (excluding Goethe), Frei argues that his hermeneutic is undermined by an ambiguity as to whether the meaning of the image "is the depiction it renders, or whether the meaning is the spirit or outlook that generated" it.<sup>559</sup> If the latter is the case, as Frei contends, then the image becomes a "distinctly human phenomenon—that of cultural spirit, differentiated into a variety of irreducibly unique historical expressions of itself."<sup>560</sup> In the fourth stanza of "An einem Wintermorgen," this ontological indeterminacy characterizing post-romantic literature (Taylor) has reached a climax. And yet, we shall see how the poem achieves a resolution in and through the image's increasing state of suspense that wholly diverges from *Bilder aus Bebenhausen's* "sentimental" conclusion. For the equivocation ultimately ceases as the poet's vision is fully absorbed in the "the depiction that it renders"—namely, the analogic gestalt of the image of sunrise.

Similar to Frei's account of Herderian poetics, Taylor's description of the "expressivist turn" in Herder, Hamann, and Rousseau stresses the ambiguous subjectivity characterizing their new mandate to fulfill one's nature by articulating and shaping "the inner élan, the voice, or impulse" particular to it through symbolic utterances.<sup>561</sup> Yet, in contrast to Frei, Taylor discerns within this

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<sup>558</sup> See Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 183-202. According to Frei, even Goethe's worldview and works (which, we have seen, purported to be ontologically grounded) were "inimical to a realistic perspective" of history (ibid., 202). For inasmuch the Goethean symbol presupposes the absolute priority of apprehension in the present, it renders "past and present [...] one in a single moment of insight" (*Augenblicke*); thus, "...past occurrences and forms of life, cut off from their specific and unsubstitutable temporal moorings, are transported with spectral or wraith-like vividness into present experience, brought into it in their very difference from our own forms of life by our inner or outer sensibility. The transport heightens not only the awareness of the past but also of the present, and one's awareness of oneself as present and aware of both present and past" (ibid., 204).

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>561</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 374.

turn inwards to the poet's source in nature a second, proto-modernist tendency that finally overcomes the Cartesian subject. According to this version of expressivism, Taylor explains, "if nature is an intrinsic source, then each of us has to follow what is within; and this may be without precedent. We should not hope to find models without."<sup>562</sup> This is, he observes, a "cornerstone of modern culture:" for the subjective turn inwards has paradoxically become the basis of the notions of interiority, selfhood, and time-consciousness evident in *both* romantic lyric *and* literary modernism.<sup>563</sup> To the extent that the "punctual" self of modernity is estranged from its source in nature, reason, and the divine, it becomes progressively difficult—indeed, seemingly impossible—for it to show "what is expressed or embodied in reality."<sup>564</sup> This great dis-embedding from the order of things, which ramps up through the course of secularization, implies that the teleological form of the self and cosmos grounding in the metaphysical realism that Goethe had only recently recovered has collapsed again into the space of the sentimental image, which, only briefly appearing, elegiacally recalls its absent origins. Yet this jaundiced view of the image of as product of the expressive ego also was also bound to collapse since it would seem to lack any basis in the reality of things. In the following, we shall see in Mörike's and, later, to Rilke's poetry how this crisis of interiority allows for a fresh, because de-subjectivized, view of the image. If epiphanies into the univocal essence of things were eventually displaced in modernism by what Taylor terms

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid. Regarding expressivism's link to literary modernism, Taylor has described a tension between, on the one hand, a turn inwards to subjectivity as a response to scientific positivism and the hegemony of univocal metaphysics and, on the other, the concomitant tendency to "decenter the subject," which begets "an art displacing the center of interest onto language, or onto poetic transmutation: "Twentieth-century art has gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity; it has explored new recesses of feeling, entered the strain of consciousness, spawned schools of art rightly called 'expressionist.' But at the same time, at its greatest it has often involved a decentering of the subject: an art emphatically not conceived as self-expression, an art displacing the center of interest onto language, or onto poetic transmutation itself, or even dissolving the self as usually conceived in favour of some new constellation" (456).

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 476.

“epiphanies of interspaces” suspended in-between places and times, this new form of insight still obliquely discloses—that is, via the “greater difference” of analogia—the image’s transcendent source.<sup>565</sup> With this kind of epiphany, symbolic disclosure cannot “be seen *in* an object [i.e. mere presence] but has to be framed *between* an event and its recurrence, through memory;” for, Taylor observes, “only when we recall it in memory can we see behind to what was revealed through it.”<sup>566</sup> As remains to be seen, this kind of epiphany already occurs in the conclusion of “An einem Wintermorgen.”

Taylor’s and Frei’s accounts of how expressivism gradually displaced univocal metaphysical realism—*yet such that the expressivist worldview itself became fundamentally unstable*—thus shed light on Mörike’s poetics of the image.<sup>567</sup> Although the poet’s turn inwards appears to ensure his originality (“der Genius jauchzt in mir!”), this has the surprising consequence, we shall see, of undermining his agency—thus desubjectifying lyric interiority. This pivot corresponds with a characteristic paradox of

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<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 479.

<sup>567</sup> Frei’s critique of Herderian hermeneutics corroborates Taylor’s account of secularization. As Frei observes, the antirealist version of expressivism unleashed by Herder renders the image a historical construct by reducing any disclosure of the source to an immanent horizon of meaning within the subject. In particular, Frei holds that his understanding of spirit (“Geist”) dissolves the realist metaphysical framework by historicizing it, since “the interpreter knows himself to be partaking of a specific historical location, that of the present,” which is absolutely incommensurable with the past (Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 192). As a capacity for sympathetic identification (“Einfühlung”) with images from remote historical moments, Herderian interiority implies a “unity-in-differentiation between past outlooks and present self-positioning;” this transports “the past into the present” through “the self-distancing of the interpreter from his nonetheless ineluctably present location in time” and, conversely, “through empathetic, imaginative entry into the past” (ibid). However, according to Frei’s understanding of the historicist hermeneutics conditioning Herder’s recovery of the classical worldview, his notion of the image is ontologically impoverished. Although it evokes the symbolic order by means of analogic relations, the Herderian image nevertheless equivocates, Frei contends, about its source: whether it lie in the thing seen or finite spirit remains unsure. Herder’s sentimental notion of interiority had subtly undermined the Christian-Neoplatonic worldview by making the present apprehension of the inner image the measure of its origins—even as it superficially drew on classical conceptions of the symbol.

modernist literature and philosophy: namely, the fact that “there seems to be a slide to subjectivism and an anti-subjectivist thrust at the same time.”<sup>568</sup> As Taylor explains,

inwardness is as much a part of the modernist sensibility as of the romantic. And what is within is deep: the timeless, the mythic, and the archetypal that are brought forth by Mann or Joyce [...] may be transpersonal. But our access to it can only be within the personal. In this sense, the depths remain inner for us as much as for our romantic forbears. They may take us beyond the subjective, but the road to them passes inescapably through a heightened awareness of personal experience.<sup>569</sup>

In “An einem Wintermorgen,” we see this shift away from a metaphysically univocal understanding of expressivism to a de-subjected sense of self-expression that, Taylor observes, nevertheless retains a sense of personal depth.<sup>570</sup> This poem thus traces a course from its echoes of Goethean symbolism in the opening, to subjective expressivism in stanzas three and four, and, finally, to the dissolution of subjectivity in the poem’s extraordinary conclusion. The result is a transcendent view of the thing seen (sunrise) and its reflection in the image—one indirectly disclosing the poet’s and the thing’s participation in the divine through the metaphysical principle of analogia. As we shall see,

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<sup>568</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 456.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 481.

<sup>570</sup> Indeed, we shall see that the rhetorical structure of the poem’s conclusion confirms this thesis by employing personification, but in a manner that decisively breaks from traditional uses of allegory to express the divine. As Sengle contends, the personification of landscapes and seasons was a characteristic means in the Biedermeierzeit of giving them a “symbolische Bedeutung; das ergibt sich aus dem Personalismus dieser Zeit” (Sengle, *Biedermeierzeit* 1: 318). Thus he observes with regard to Gotthelf’s writings that “die Dinge leben nur aus dem symbolischen Bezug, den sie zu Gott und den Menschen haben” (319). However, as a form of allegory presenting the transcendent, personification also becomes “äußerst problematisch [...], jedenfalls für Dichter, welche sie religiös nicht mehr stützen können” (335). This is precisely the case for Mörike (see my chapter two); and yet, his poetry repeatedly employs “eine *konsequente Durchführung* der Personifikation, ohne welche die Art von Mörikes besten Gedichten [e.g. “Um Mitternacht,” “Er ists,” and “Auf eine Lampe”] nicht denkbar ist” (344). The solution to this enigma, which Sengle never addresses as such, lies in what he describes as the Biedermeier understanding of “objectivity.” He explains that “die Personifikation ist im Gegensatz zur realistischen Sachlichkeit zu sehen, aber keineswegs im Gegensatz zu der ‘Objektivität’, die im Biedermeier gilt und die z.B. von dem Literaturhistoriker Eichendorff geradezu zu einem Gegen-Begriff gegen den an der Wissenschaft bzw. am guten Menschenverstand orientierten Objektivitätsbegriff der realistischen Programmatiker gemacht wird. *Objektivität im Sinne der Biedermeierkultur heißt überzeugende Manifestation der übermenschlichen Mächte*, wo immer sie erscheinen mögen: in der Religion, im monarchischen Staat, oder in der Natur als Gottes Schöpfung” (Ibid., 344). Because such a presence had become unbelievable to the apostate Lutheran minister, the “objectivity” characterizing his use of personification (allegory) can only attain an equivocal transcendence—one that, as I argue in the following, is increasingly associated with the aesthetic autonomy of the image.





poet's inner sense ("Sinn") and the ascending light on the horizon—hence, between the "soul" that flies afield and the "genius" within. However, the image also suggests that the moment of twilight is suspended between intensification and transcendence inasmuch as the light source remains ontologically indeterminate. Again recalling the language and tone of *Sturm und Drang*, this animated passage is peppered with exclamations indicating the poet's ecstatic ("entzückt") return to the present.<sup>571</sup> Perforce of his unbridled ("so weit der Himmel reicht") sympathy with the sun, he has apparently overcome the burdens of introspection and, hence, forgotten his estrangement from the source: the memories of stanzas three and four thus momentarily disperse through his absorption in the ascending light. His soul flies beyond the bounds of the body, and the universal genius rejoices ("jauchzt") in him, such that he seems to recover the moment of transcendence (*Augenblicke*) just lost in sentimental reflection on the image's provenance. Insofar as the poet bursts forth from his broody dreams to daylight, this presentation (*Darstellung*) of interiority seems to locate its source in a reality that transcends the ego's fancy—even as it fully engages his imagination. Verses 24-26 suggest, as such, that the poet has undergone an active-passive reversal similar to the moment of encounter depicted in the opening stanzas. They first describe how the poet reorients his inner gaze towards the horizon, which causes (if only in a secondary sense) an ecstatic feeling of reinvigoration ("entzückter Stärke"); this in turn generates the power ("Muth") to do good works. Yet the poet also indicates that these actions follow from a prior, essentially passive event (*Ereignis*)—namely, his interior vision's immersion ("getränkt"-*sein*) in the encompassing twilight. The gestalt of this passage thus recalls the chiasma characterizing the classical symbol in that it appears to depict a moment of insight within an interior realm structured by its emergence *in* and *through* the transcendent light of an Other. This is underscored by the poet's description of the good deeds that he plans to perform as "pious" ("fromm") insofar as piety implies an attitude of reverence before the divine.

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<sup>571</sup> See Storz, *Eduard Mörike*, 85.

However, in a pattern echoing the transition between stanzas one and three from a classical to a romantic sensibility, this passage abruptly shifts back to an introspective, angst-ridden attitude with regard to the present. Although the poet initially experiences this twilight moment as an encounter with the divine, his expression of enthusiasm in the language of *Sturm und Drang* remains self-consciously epigonal and is, therefore, progressively troubled by the doubts raised in the foregoing stanzas as to the images' origins. Thus, the soul's flight to the horizon halts and plummets back into introspection with the sentimental question: "Doch sage/ Warum wird jetzt der Blick von Wehmuth feucht?" This abrupt reversal of the spirit's ascent with the sun—stressed by the poem's only use of enjambment ("Doch sage")—recasts the preceding images of expectancy in a melancholy light. Inasmuch as verses 23-28 echo Goethe's early poetics, they already suggest the lyric persona's belatedness vis-à-vis the source of inspiration. But now, in this protracted moment of reflection (ln. 29-33), he recalls his epigonal situation. Hence, the poet expresses estrangement in view of the event (twilight) unfolding before him, suddenly recollecting time's historicity as a manifestation of mood—melancholy—which has opened his eyes to the temporal abyss (*die Tiefe des Augenblicks*) within him.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> This crisis is acknowledged and deepened in another of Mörike's early poems on time-consciousness, "Besuch in Urach" (1827). Depicting an interior return to a beloved valley of his youth, a return mediated yet ultimately undermined by recollection, this poem de-potentiates the image to an allegory of desire. Because the natural symbols recalled purportedly cannot participate in the subjective experience of time, the poet finds himself estranged from nature and the past. In rejecting any semblance of sympathy between them, his sentimental disposition towards the symbol repudiates its metaphysical gestalt—and, thus, the presence of the eternal origins—in favor of an equivocal sense of transcendence. In the opening stanzas of "Besuch," symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) is suspended between the past and present in a manner that directly parallels "An einem Wintermorgen." Although it is similarly sentimental, "Besuch in Urach" is also far more intensely morose. For here the poet experiences the suspended moment of recollection as an interior contradiction that throws him into profound despair. It is as though he literally *hangs* between times in estrangement from the original event of encounter: "Hier wird ein Strauch, ein jeder Halm zur Schlinge,/ Die mich in liebliche Betrachtung fängt;/ Kein Mäuerchen, kein Holz ist so geringe,/ Daß nicht mein Blick voll Wehmuth an ihm hängt:/ Ein jedes spricht mir halbvergeßne Dinge;/ Ich fühle, wie von Schmerz und Lust gedrängt/ Die Träne stockt, indes ich ohne Weile,/ Unschlüssig, satt und durstig, weitereile" (Mörike, *MKG*, 1: 45-47). The language and tone of this passage ("von Schmerz und Lust gedrängt") echo the crisis of introspection depicted in verses 28-33 of "An einem Wintermorgen" and, more generally, the riven interiority of late-romantic Bildung (formation) as evinced by *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*. See also Rolleston's analysis of "Im Frühling" (Jeffrey Todd Adams, ed., *Mörike's Muses*, 158, 159. "Besuch in Urach" depicts symbolic insight into nature as a snare ("Schlinge") that distracts the poet's attention

[...] Doch sage,  
 Warum wird jetzt der Blick von Wehmuth feucht?  
 Ist's ein verloren Glück, was mich erweicht? 30  
 Ist es ein werdendes, was ich im Herzen trage?  
 — Hinweg, mein Geist! hier gilt kein Stillestehn:  
 Es ist ein Augenblick, und Alles wird verwehn!

The moment hangs in the balance, as it were, between an elegiac sensibility (“Ist’s ein verloren Glück”) and the hopefulness articulated at the outset of the poem (“Ist es ein werdendes, was ich im Herzen trage?”). It is a tenuous suspense—we have seen it in many of Mörike’s poems (“Halb ist es Lust/ halb ist es Klage”)—which intimates his wavering faith in the image’s capacity to present an eternally enduring source that transcends and sustains him. This poignant moment reflects the teetering position of lyric imagery in nineteenth-century Germany ostensibly on the verge of uncoupling from the classical symbol. Hence it reflects the secularization of German literature due to the image’s reduction to a strictly punctual phenomenon. Lyric speech has become a “sentimental” (in Schiller’s sense) tribute to a divinity whose ineffable constitution is now mirrored by the sheer evanescent, proto-modernist inwardness of Mörike’s poetic self.

With this turn in verses 28-33 of the poet’s gaze from the inbreaking light to his own reflections on the moment’s transience, the poem’s dynamic of transcendence has once again fallen into an egocentrism isolated in space and time. However, the moment and the poetic consciousness that it discloses have also been deepened by moods that it would not otherwise have known. This intensifies the crisis of introspection expressed in the foregoing stanzas; for instead of expressing

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from what is only just intimated in these lines: namely, the half-remembered source of a bliss that currently escapes him. The poet’s recollection of Urach—specifically, the natural symbols (“Dinge”) of divine presence previously encountered—thus threatens to seduce his interior gaze, entrapping it in the sentimental distension (“liebliche Betrachtung”) of lost time. Instead of beholding the memories before him as symbols of the eternal, then, he tends to linger on them idly with a “Blick voll Wehmut.” As a result, it is not so much the natural symbol, much less its source, that has excited his lyric speech; rather, the image issues from his nostalgic mood, a subtle mixture of concupiscence and despair, and an awareness of mortal danger evoked in him upon his interior return to the valley. Tinged with angst from the outset, every memory of his childhood becomes an isolating image (*eidola*) that fascinates and stunts his hope in the prospects of returning to the source so as to recover the significance of the past and present. Here Mörike’s skepticism—his “guten Menschenverstand,” as Sengle puts it—becomes the full-blown pessimism so characteristic of Restoration literature.

eternal, univocal being, the epiphany stresses the image's utter historicity and, thus, its infinite distance/difference from the transcendent source. What Mörike stages is, as it were, the specter that Hegelian dialectics sought to fend off: namely, a form of "Reflektion" that does not issue in a qualitative advance, and that does not sublimate the numinous into the immanent order. Instead, introspection suggests a kind of lucid stalling, an intuitive awareness of the nullity of a strictly immanent vision. Expressed as an alexandrine—the principal verse form of poetry from the Thirty Years War—the insight ("Es ist ein Augenblick, und alles wird verwehn!") depicted in this instant echoes the quintessential *topos* of Baroque poetry: all-encompassing transience (*Vergänglichkeit*).<sup>573</sup> In so doing, it also pivots towards a secular version of modernism, according to which "epiphanies of being" are undermined in the maelstrom of time and thus become profoundly enigmatic.<sup>574</sup> Hence the foregoing images of ecstatic interiority are cast, once more, in an indeterminate light that obscures the ontological status of their source. In these melancholy verses (29-33), the hope that had sprung from participation in the presence of the transcendent and had thus given this and the opening stanzas' structuring polarities an intensifying dynamic is emphatically displaced by Mörike's acute awareness of the image's isolation. The poet's attention has been diverted from joyful absorption in the event (dawn) to a distracting mood ("Wehmuth") conjured through reflection upon the image's vanity. His flight of fancy consequently falls into a present devoid of immediacy yet strangely filled with the sentimental awareness of "ein verloren Glück" and "ein werdendes, was ich im Herzen trage[.]"<sup>575</sup> If, as Nibbrig's observes, "Mörike expresses at this point in the poem the

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<sup>573</sup> Gryphius's sonnets (e.g. "Menschliches Elende" and "Es ist alles eitel" [1643]) are characteristic of this period.

<sup>574</sup> Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 144.

<sup>575</sup> According to Kohlschmidt's account of melancholy and desire in Mörike's poems on time and memory, the confinement of the symbolic "moment of insight (*Augenblick*) [...] to a temporal horizon" induces "the thrill of a second being, i.e. of an egocentric interiority" that attains its own equivocal transcendence" (Kohlschmidt, *Form und Innerlichkeit*, 238). My translations here and following. Isolation from the symbol's eternal source begets, he explains, a "need for totality, which can only spring from the loss of the whole, yet generates ("zeitigt") new forms of inwardness" that trace the divine without constitutively disclosing its presence (ibid., 239). Whereas, for instance,

loss of experiential immediacy [*Erlebnisunmittelbarkeit*]" associated with the classical symbol, it paradoxically generates a "second," de-subjectivized view of transcendence through the increasingly autonomous image.<sup>576</sup> As we shall see in the final stanza, the poet's sentimental self-absorption ultimately gives way to epiphany by suspending the image's presentation of the thing seen (the sunrise) in the mode of "possible" experience.<sup>577</sup> In so doing, we shall see, the vision discloses metaphysical principle of analogia underpinning the symbolic moment of insight.

In light of the prevailing trajectory of subjectivization thus far described—the poet's turn towards an interior realm marked by isolation in the present, estrangement from the divine, and the resulting ontological indeterminacy—the breakthrough in the concluding stanza of this lyric comes as a surprise. For it depicts a natural process, sunrise, as an event that finally rids the poet of self-reflection and thus overcomes his crisis of introspection. As a result, it superficially suggests a return to the pantheistic, as it were, "naïve" notion of epiphany often associated with Weimar classicism, romanticism, and (mistakenly) Roman Catholicism, according to which symbols present (*darstellen*)

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Goethe's classical metaphysics had regarded the symbol as an image of the divine, thus giving epiphanies an eternal significance, the symbolic moment in Mörike's poetry is typically reduced to an immanent horizon within the scope of the poet's own gaze. As Kohlschmidt observes, his lyrics' "displacement of the fulfilled moment (*Augenblick*) from the order of being to time" occurs by confining the kairotic present ("der Kairos"/"der erfüllte Augenblick") to a formal "relation of temporal succession" characterized by an underlying difference (ibid.). Although, as we shall see, its structure superficially retains the analogic gestalt of identity-in-difference, the Mörikan symbol equivocates: while referencing transcendent unity, it remains circumscribed within history's descent into non-existence. Kohlschmidt thus observes that the symbolic insight conferred in Mörike's memory-poems is nothing more than a punctual "link in the flux of time" (ibid., 238). The sentimental poet experiences this de-potentialization of the image as an unendurable loss of the divine. Hence it inspires a second, paradoxical attempt to "fulfill the moment," Kohlschmidt observes, "by means of the very time dissolving" in his grasp as he shapes the fluid medium of the lyric into images (ibid.). In turn, this yields what seems an increase in interior depth (*die Tiefe des Augenblicke*); for it appears that "the transcendent experience [*Erlebnis*], which has been relegated to temporal contingency and thus dissipated, has gotten richer: namely, in its recollection and repetition [*Wiederholung*] through melancholy" that oscillates with an elegiac sense of desire (ibid.). The symbolic moment is thus made present as a mood that tends towards the blithe detachment that we have described as Mörikan naïveté.

<sup>576</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 34: "An dieser Stelle des Gedichts spricht Mörike den Verlust der Erlebnisunmittelbarkeit [...] aus." My translation.

<sup>577</sup> See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351 and *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 233.

the transcendent by means of a univocal relation to nature and the divine. However, such a “return” or *zweite Naivität* being an impossibility, we see Mörike’s lyric decisively shifting towards a modernist epiphany whose source, to speak with Taylor, is no longer revealed *through* the mere presence of an “object” or, alternatively, through the absolute presence of a “copy” (Gadamer), but, rather, suspended *between* partially discontinuous images. Hence the phantasmagoric conclusion of “An einem Wintermorgen” adumbrates the imagist movement of fin-de-siècle Europe by “framing” the experience of sunrise through a “concatenation of half-coherent images” that “sets up an epiphanic field.”<sup>578</sup> This passage’s turn towards the concrete is immediately evident in the deictic gestures with which the poet directs our attention to the proceedings already underway: “Dort, sieh, am Horizont lüpf sich der Vorhang schon!” In this final stanza, it seems that the poet’s gaze turns outwards, away from dream-images, so as to behold the sun ascending “like a god” on the horizon:

Dort, sieh, am Horizont lüpf sich der Vorhang schon!	
Es träumt der Tag, nun sei die Nacht entflohn;	35
Die Purpurlippe, die geschlossen lag,	
Haucht, halbgeöffnet, süße Atemzüge:	
Auf einmal blitzt das Aug, und, wie ein Gott, der Tag	
Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!	

As Wild observes, this series of images is the poet’s “answer to the insight into his essential belatedness, as was disclosed through the process [in stanzas three and four] of attaining self-certitude through lyric.”<sup>579</sup> For, Wild contends, it indicates a rejection of romantic inwardness, whereby the poet overcomes his estrangement vis-à-vis the source and recovers the lyric moment (*Augenblick*): “In the experience of the sunrise, the self-referentiality of the dreamer and his absorption in his own inwardness, is contrasted with a view of nature, that is, of ‘reality.’”<sup>580</sup> Thus,

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<sup>578</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 477.

<sup>579</sup> Wild, *Beiträge*, 120.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.: “In der Erfahrung des Sonnenaufgangs wird der Selbstbezogenheit des Träumers und der Versenkung in die eigene Innerlichkeit der Blick auf der Natur, auf die ‘Wirklichkeit’ entgegengesetzt.” My translation.

the poet no longer constructs an image born of his strictly immanent powers of fancy and memory but, rather, quasi-phenomenologically describes a natural process within which he finds himself absorbed. Now his task is, Wild contends, the “presentation [*Darstellung*] of possible experiences of reality. Thus, the creative process becomes co-action in divine poësis [*Schöpfungsakt*], just as the poet becomes a creator and, hence, a true genius, ‘wie ein Gott’.”<sup>581</sup> “Only now,” Wild asserts, “has the dreamer become a poet.”<sup>582</sup> On this account, then, Mörike has recovered the “possibility” of beholding the transcendent and thus overcome his crisis of introspection by renouncing the notion of inwardness restricted to subjective expression. In so doing, the Mörikan image attains the capacity to present a reality transcending the confines of the ego, thus reoccupying the (potentially pantheist) view of the symbol associated with Weimar classicism.

A closer look at this stanza reveals, however, that the poet’s understanding of encounter with the real has changed through the course of the poem, as has the quality of his naïveté. Rather than reverting to the clichéd notion of the image’s disclosure of the deity intimated in the opening stanza, Mörike stresses the images’ transcendent difference from its origins in either the poet or nature. It is a trajectory, we shall see, that culminates in the radical de-subjectivization of lyric interiority in Mörike’s thing-poems. Granted that the final image of daybreak is a moment rife with echoes of the origins of creation (“Auf einmal blitzt das Aug, und, wie ein Gott, der Tag/ Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!”), its manner of presentation (*Darstellung*) initially remains suspended, as Wild duly observes, in the mode of “possibility.” This epiphanic moment does not purport to render its transcendent origins univocally present in the manner of an “object” capable of

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 121: “Darstellung möglicher Wahrnehmung von Wirklichkeit. Darin wird der kreative Vorgang zum Schöpfungsakt, wird der Dichter zum Schöpfer und damit wahrhaft zum Genie, ‘wie ein Gott’.” My translation.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 119: “Erst jetzt ist der Träumer zum Dichter geworden.” My translation.



being mastered by science or, alternatively, by magic, as is (ostensibly) the case in the absolute presence of a “copy” (Gadamer). Hence the poet does not seek to unilaterally *actualize* the symbolic event unfolding before his gaze.<sup>583</sup> Yet neither does this passage simply repeat the sentimental expression of subjectivity evidenced in stanzas three through five, whereby the transcendent is only equivocally referenced while remaining altogether absent. Rather, his disposition is that of the contemplative beholder primed to receive a vision. The final succession of images thus presents (*darstellen*) “a constellation of words or images which set up a space that draws ideas and energy into it” by depicting “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”<sup>584</sup> In this deepened, if virtual state of suspense, the image’s presence—its manner of presenting the light source—becomes more profoundly dynamic. As we shall see, it is no longer evident that it expresses the sunrise, lyric interiority, or anything simply present at all—despite remaining emphatically epiphanic. For now the image unfolds within the difference between the visible world and the transcendent divine: yet such that a constitutive analogy—that is, the simultaneity of likeness and even greater difference—emerges from within the dynamism of the lyric image itself.

The doubts as to the image’s provenance that had plagued stanzas three through five have not fully dispersed with the rising sun, but instead provoke a new grasp of the moment of symbolic insight. No longer disclosing an “epiphany of being,” the transcendent source of light is now suspended *in* and *between* memories, spaces, and times. By employing the metaphor of the world as stage (“am Horizont lüpft sich der Vorhang schon“), the final stanza’s first verse foregrounds the

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<sup>583</sup> Whereas the poets of Weimar classicism had sought to actuate a potential for growth in nature, as “formed formers” (Herdt) articulating and realizing more intensely the gestalt of a form that precedes them, Mörike’s poetics neither bears a dialectical nor an organic relation to the thing seen. Rather, it has broken from the classical notion of *Bildung* as teleological formation, thus suspending the event of disclosure (*Ereignis*) between images. See my discussion in chapter one of Goethe’s “new song,” which describes its recovery of Aristotelian and Christian notion of actualizing the origins.

<sup>584</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 475.

fleeting temporal and mnemonic structure of this image of sunrise; for it describes the natural process as a play already underway (“schon”)—perhaps even from the outset of the poem. This verse thus suggests a similarity between the image of divine day (“wie ein Gott, der Tag”) concluding “An einem Wintermorgen” and the ambivalent moments of doubt and insight that had yielded the poet’s crisis of interiority. Hence it faintly recalls the moment of symbolic insight’s temporal suspense between the image and its source, even as the poet finds himself increasingly absorbed in its spectacular display. Although this image of sunrise as an ongoing play suggests the ontological priority of nature and the divine as sources of the self and, therefore, echoes the classical view of the symbol, its ontological status remains, if only for the time being, suspended. For the fact that the play is already in progress also amplifies the poet’s experience of the moment’s belatedness. As Hötzer observes, this “apperception of the first flash of sunrise” is still “born by the knowledge that everything will vanish (‘verwehn’),” as becomes clear in the ensuing lines.<sup>585</sup>

In turning towards a proto-modernist notion of epiphany, the next line recalls the language of stanza three wherein the poet attenuates the passing images’ reality by likening them to a dream on the verge of dispersing (“der Traum entweiche”). However, the metaphysical indeterminacy indicated in the poem’s conclusion is more complex inasmuch as the dream-image is no longer conceived as a subjective projection. Instead of suggesting that the poet’s interior realm is, as a dream world (“Feenreich”), the impoverished source of the image, Mörike now projects the dream state onto the daylight itself: “Es träumt der Tag, nun sei die Nacht entflohn[.]” According to this remarkable inversion, it is not the poet who dreams per se but personified day that dreams through him. The image depicts an ecstatic moment of calm that suspends reflection.<sup>586</sup> It seems, therefore,

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<sup>585</sup> Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 144: “Das Gewahrwerden der aufblitzenden Sonne [...] ist getragen vom Wissen, daß alles ‘verwehn’ wird.” My translation.

<sup>586</sup> As Hötzer observes, however, the “moment that rests in itself, so characteristic of Mörikan lyric,” is paradoxically “born by the experience of finitude [*Zeitlichkeit*] (ibid., 255). “Der in sich ruhende Augenblick der

that the poet serendipitously receives his vision from a source that transcends him: namely, the dawning day that dreams. Although it echoes the active-passive reversal of the poem's opening stanza and that of verse 25, the immanentization of light expressed in this line unfolds in an even deeper state of suspense, as suggested by the use of the present subjunctive ("nun sei"), which indicates that the poet has become nothing more than an instrument of the dream's expression. As a result, this image of sunrise appears to have become tautegorical in the sense that its source of significance rests wholly within itself.<sup>587</sup> Hence it seems to preclude the poet's active role in its disclosure, even as the image unfolds through him. Thus de-subjectivized, lyric speech becomes the

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Möríkischen Dichtung ist getragen von dem Erfahren der Zeitlichkeit.“ „[Es ist] gebrochen.“ My translation. Unlike the Goethean symbol that discloses an eternal moment of insight (*Augenblick*), this and the ensuing images of sunrise increasingly efface the human and divine poet's presence.

<sup>587</sup> That Mörike embraces a tautegorical view of the symbol, rather than an allegorical or analogical understanding, is especially evident in "Besuch in Urach" depiction of the waterfall: "O hier ist's, wo Natur den Schleier reißt! / Sie bricht einmal ihr übermenschlich Schweigen; / Laut mit sich selber redend will ihr Geist, / Sich selbst vernehmend, sich ihm selber zeigen. / – Doch ach, sie bleibt, mehr als der Mensch, verwaist, / Darf nicht aus ihrem eignen Rätsel steigen" (Mörike, MKG, 1: 45-47). Similar to the buzzing insects in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen* and "Im Frühling," the waterfall seems to submerge language in "the shapeless 'music' of an infinitely distended point of time" (Rolleston); and yet, the "music" of the epiphanic moment has become sheer noise inasmuch as the roaring cascade drowns the transcendent source of significance in its depths. As Wild and Kittstein suggest, this passage recalls Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, not Goethean symbolism. According to Wild, "nature is supposed to become to itself" in this passage "through an act of self-reflection in the medium of poetic language" (see Wild, *Beiträge*, 148, and Kittstein, *Jenseits der Idylle*, 124). My translation. Hence, nature and spirit initially appear to be reconciled ("O hier ist's, wo Natur den Schleier reißt! / [...] Laut mit sich selber redend will ihr Geist") through the natural symbol's manner of disclosure: self-presentation ("mit sich selber redend" / "Sich selbst vernehmend, sich ihm selber zeigen"). The cataract's significance is immanent to its sheer presence, which would seem to presuppose spirit. However, inasmuch as the reflexivity of the symbol described in this passage is totally self-enclosed ("heautonomous")—such that it never discloses its numinous origins for the beholder—the waterfall becomes absolutely "tautegorical" on the Schellingian model: the symbol's meaning remains wholly immanent to its finite being (cf. Whistler, 15). By contrast to Goethean symbolism, then, nature cannot refer beyond itself via analogy to a meaning characterized by transcendent difference: "Sie bleibt, mehr als der Mensch, verwaist, / Darf nicht aus ihrem eignen Rätsel steigen!" From the poet's sentimental perspective, nature is even more estranged from its source than humanity. It vainly presents itself—that is, the brute noise of its distension through time—and nothing more. On this account, then, the waterfall's self-disclosure has lost any relation to the divine as well as the poet's own existence. It fails, he suggests, to present (*darstellen*) anything beyond the sound ("laut mit sich selber redend") of nature's descent into non-being. Herder's expressivist understanding of "the great *analogy of creation*," whereby "everything has feeling and feels its likeness to all things," and "life surges to life," has thus been displaced with a disenchanting view of space and time (cited in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 369). My translation. As the following stanza indicates, the waterfall no longer has the participatory gestalt (methexis) that had characterized the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol; instead, it superficially evinces the univocal structure characteristic of post-Reformation hermeneutics in general, according to which symbols belong to immanent sign systems no longer open to participation in the transcendent.

mouthpiece of divine day's arrival. The increasing autonomy of this series of images—their state of ontological suspense—consequently suggests the daylight's infinite difference from its divine and human origins. And yet, as Pfau observes of the Husserlian epoché, the poet's "receptivity is not to be confused with passivity but, on the contrary, responds to the phenomenon's sheer givenness" by participating in the synthesis of "its temporally discrete aspects."<sup>588</sup> Intuiting the sheer, super-abundant givenness of the image involves "a complex temporal sequence of aspects awaiting their synthesis into a coherent whole;" thus, "it presupposes a teleological ordering of consciousness and phenomenon toward one another. For sheer visibility will engage consciousness only insofar as a phenomenon is imbued with an as yet invisible significance."<sup>589</sup> We shall see that within the parameters of the quasi-phenomenological suspense established by the concluding series of images, the vision's entanglement in both the beholder's active-noetic operations (namely, memory and imagination) and in the metaphysical principle of analogia underpinning the image's symbolic gestalt becomes increasingly clear.

If this moment of indeterminacy overcomes the doubts raised by the poet's historicizing reflections in stanzas three and four, it does so by suspending his subjective perspective, effectively absorbing it *in* and dislocating it *between* the flux of images. Thus, it amplifies their historicity by washing away the image's ontological foundation in a univocal (pantheist) symbolism. As Hötzer observes, the "moment that rests in itself, so characteristic of Mörikean lyric," is paradoxically "born by the experience of finitude [*Zeitlichkeit*]." By contrast to the mistaken understanding of the Goethean symbol as disclosing an eternal moment of insight (*Augenblick*) on a univocal basis, the concluding images of sunrise distend time, while subtly recalling its inexorable descent.

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<sup>588</sup> Pfau, "Absolute Gegebenheit," in *Phenomenology to the Letter: Husserl and Literature*, Philippe P. Haensler, Kristina Mendicino, and Rochelle Tobias, eds. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 234.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

Nevertheless, the images of temporal succession in this stanza fulfill the dynamic of crystallization begun in the opening stanza, which also exhibit the distinctive “tendency to spatialize time” (“Verräumlichungstendenz”) characteristic of Biedermeier art. Although these verses show the “historical-philosophical sundial” (Adorno) turning towards modernism, they at once recall Mörike’s heritage as a late romantic poet. Hence, despite giving time’s passage a symbolic gestalt, these images radically temporalize being by undermining the epiphany’s sheer presence. According to Hötzer, by contrast to the Goethean event of disclosure (*Ereignis*), “the present has, in Mörike’s poetry, been dipped in the stream of continual transformation. Every moment is a transition, suspended [*eingespannt*] between the past and future; and it attains its symbolic meaning precisely as a transient phenomenon.”<sup>590</sup> This complex evanescence and prolongation of the Mörikean symbol is evident in the stanza’s next image; for its beautiful but hallucinatory depiction of the horizon softly breathing—as though continuing the waking dream of day—positions the moment between in- and exhalations: “Die Purpurlippe, die geschlossen lag,/ Haucht, halbgeöffnet, süße Atemzüge.” Verses 36 and 37 thus depict a moment of inspired expression (“haucht”) by personifying the world as a dreamer on the brink of encounter with the sun’s transcendent light—the same position as the poet in the opening stanza and the preceding lines.<sup>591</sup> Now, however, the image’s expression of the source has become more profoundly enigmatic through the ontological indeterminacy characterizing its increasing distance from lyric inwardness. As already suggested by the depictions of sunrise as an ongoing play and as the twilight suspense of a dream, this litany leaves the light’s ontological status

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<sup>590</sup> Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 47: “In Mörikes Dichtung ist die Gegenwart [...] eingetaucht in den Strom ständiger Verwandlung. Jeder Augenblick ist ein Übergang, eingespannt zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft, und er erhält seine symbolische Bedeutung gerade als Vergehendes.” My translation.

<sup>591</sup> Although, as Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, observes, “the image, only just presented, has already passed,” it nevertheless achieves an immediacy that appears to overcome the instant’s ontological impoverishment (38): “Das Bild ist, kaum ist es vergegenwärtigt, auch schon vergangen.” My translation.

suspended *in between* the images conceived as crystallizations of distinct instants of temporal passage.<sup>592</sup> The instance of symbolic insight thus becomes a pro-visional image—a fleeting, hermetic vision of the transcendent—that, while undermining the phenomenon’s univocal presence, subtly evokes its identity with (in greater difference from) the classical cosmos.<sup>593</sup> For this image of time-consciousness unfolds across an analogic interval emerging in and through temporal difference, thus recalling the metaphysics of analogia, which, as we have seen, had also buttressed Weimar classicism’s notions of symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*).<sup>594</sup>

The simile structuring the concluding image of divine day’s ascent (ln. 38) should not be mistaken for a return to pan-symbolism on the basis of a univocal metaphysics. Mörike’s view of the symbol is, even more decidedly than Goethe’s, not pantheistic. Although the language of “An einem Wintermorgen,” its melody, and the natural phenomena depicted briefly become simultaneous (“Auf einmal”), they entail what Adorno regards as the primary characteristic of modernist lyric: namely, an underlying “moment of *rupture*.”<sup>595</sup> They consequently evoke the ontological difference between creation and its transcendent origins. In so doing, these final images obtain, on the one hand, a

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<sup>592</sup> Cf. Nibbrig’s discussion of “ein zentrales Problem von Mörikes Dichtung überhaupt:” namely, “das Problem des bloßen Bildseins erdichteter Bilder, die Frage nach der Wirklichkeit des dichterischen Traums.” (ibid., 6). Nibbrig proceeds to relate this problem of the image’s sentimental gestalt to Mörike’s poetics of memory; for poetry’s purportedly illusory quality as mere image is a consequence of lyric phantasy’s interplay with the power of recollection, whereby “die erinnernde Vergewärtigung eines Vergangenen und Verlorenen für Mörike einen Urmodus dichterischen Imaginierens darstellt” (ibid.). Cf. also 38: “Der ausgezeichnete Augenblick muß von jenem Sog nach vorwärts und rückwärts befreit werden, wenn er verwirklicht werden soll. Deshalb wird er punktualisiert.”

<sup>593</sup> See Wild, “Beiträge,” 120.

<sup>594</sup> Consider, as a point of comparison, Goethe’s poem “Im Atemholen sind zweierlei Gnaden” from the *West-östlicher Divan*, which presents the receptive act of breathing—its life-giving *exitus* and *reditus*—as a constitutive symbol of the divinity’s interpenetration of natural and aesthetic processes (lyric speech): “Im Atemholen sind zweierlei Gnaden:/ Die Luft einziehen, sich ihrer entladen;/ Jenes bedrängt, dieses erfrischt;/ So wunderbar ist das Leben gemischt./ Du danke Gott, wenn er dich preßt,/ Und dank ihm, wenn er dich wieder entläßt” (Goethe, GHA, 2: 10).

<sup>595</sup> Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, 80: “Das Moment *des Bruches*.” My translation. Cf. Nibbrig, 38.

“second,” naïve “immediacy,” since “the human, language itself, seems as though it were once again divine creation [*Schöpfung*].”<sup>596</sup> In the final couplet of “An einem Wintermorgen,” the poet recollects and reimagines the possibility of transcendence—if only, as we have seen, on the condition that the origins of the symbolic act are suspended.<sup>597</sup> The moment crystallizes into an image—“Auf einmal blitzt das Aug”—that mirrors the poet’s own awakening, as Wild observes, from dreamer to lyric genius whose vision reflects the divine: “[...] und, wie ein Gott, der Tag/ Beginnt im Sprung die königlichen Flügel!” Mörike has awakened to the fullness of time and his poetic vocation: thus, he beholds, as though in a trance, the advent of light from its eternal origins.<sup>598</sup> Yet it is not so much the poet that attains autonomy in this verse as the image itself. Expressed as a simile (“wie ein Gott”), the image unfolds in synchrony with the poet’s speech and the phenomenon described but remains incommensurable with either; for Mörike’s imagery—his use of personification (allegory)—no longer presents the divine or human person as its univocal source.<sup>599</sup> Rather, in recovering the *possibility* of a transcendent presence emulating the symbol of Weimar classicism, the image’s

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 81: “Zweite Unmittelbarkeit [wobei] das Menschliche, die Sprache selber scheint, als wäre sie noch einmal die Schöpfung.” My translation. These remarks are made with regard to Eichendorff’s lyric, but in my estimation they equally obtain for Mörike’s.

<sup>597</sup> Mörike describes the magical effect of the image—its simulation of simultaneity with the transcendent origins—in an 1844 letter to Christian Wilhelm Heydenreich regarding the latter’s settings of lyric poetry to music. He writes that they achieve such a unique “immediacy that, one might say, melody and poetry are sprung from a *single* point and thus completely combine. By things of this nature, where the most sublime is achieved by simplest means, one would like to believe that it were united, just as it is now, for all eternity” (Mörike, *Briefe*, MKG, 14: 169). My translation. “Dieselbige Unmittelbarkeit, daß man sagen kann, es gehe Melodie und Dichtung, in *einem* Punkt entsprungen, vollkommen ineinander auf. Bei Sachen dieser Art, wo mit dem Allereinfachsten das Herrlichste erreicht ist, möchte man glauben, es sei das, so wie es ist, seit ewig beisammen gewesen.” My translation. As Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, observes, “die Verdichtung des dichterischen Gegenstandes auf engem Raum ermöglicht Überschaubarkeit und simultane Gegenwärtigkeit aller seiner Teile. Es ist dies für Mörike ein Kriterium des Vollkommenen und Vollendeten” (335).

<sup>598</sup> Wild describes the symbolic insight into the origins of *poësis* that unfolds in this image: “Antike Vorstellungen von der rosenfingrigen Eos, die sich am Morgen von ihrem Lager erhebt, von Helios, der mit dem von geflügelten Pferden gezogenen Sonnenwagen seine morgendliche Fahrt beginnt, sind mit den christlichen Bildern des Ostermorgens und der Auferstehung verknüpft (womit der Schluss des Gedichts auch deutlich an die vierte Strophe anschließt); zitiert wird nicht zuletzt die Zentralmetapher der Aufklärung” (*Beiträge*, 120).

<sup>599</sup> See fn. 560 on Mörike’s use of personification and its relation to Biedermeier “personalism” (Sengle).

expansion and distension of time by way of a simile discloses its constitutive analogy with the eternal source of creation.

The “depth of temporal insight” (*Tiefe des Augenblicks*) that this finale discloses consequently attains the characteristic naïveté of Mörike’s poetics. Despite the poet’s efforts to overcome the impasses of a sentimental worldview, the conclusion of “An einem Wintermorgen” is—much like the images of *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*—tinged with elegiac tones. However, it also wholly different insofar as this poem’s conclusion presents (*darstellen*) the transcendent by means of symbolic image while underscoring its pro-visionality: namely, the infinite difference between time and eternity through which the analogy first emerges. If only implicitly, it retains “the moment of rupture” (Adorno) burdening the images of the foregoing stanzas—yet in a transfigured manner.<sup>600</sup> This is confirmed by Hötzer’s observation that the penultimate verse of the poem is—like line 33—another alexandrine, “the appropriate verse form for expressing the knowledge that everything will ‘pass’.”<sup>601</sup> This line thus subtly refers us back, by way of melody, to the Baroque insight (“Es ist ein Augenblick, und Alles wird verwehn!”) into the all-encompassing vanity of history (cf. *Ecclesiastes*). In so doing, it draws attention to the moment’s reflection through memory (*Erinnerung*) and, hence, to the poet’s epigonal position vis-à-vis the past. Yet unlike the elegiac tones of the foregoing stanzas and those of *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, they issue in “An einem Wintermorgen” from a de-subjected vision. Thus, in this proto-modernist poem, images are not simply the projections of a self-

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<sup>600</sup> Similar to Ricœur’s understanding of “a second naïveté” vis-à-vis the symbol that retains the beholder’s critical distance from the thing seen, Adorno contends that the “second immediacy” generated by a lyric image does not necessarily imply naïve symbolism—i.e. myth-making and ontologizing (whether univocal or analogic) on the part of the poet. The symbol might also have a more modern form. Although it possesses a “totality or universality” and thus represents the whole “within its limits [...], in its [essential] finitude,” it may also bear the marks of an historicizing self-consciousness: namely, “the historical relationship of the subject to objectivity.” (Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, 82). My translations.

<sup>601</sup> Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 144: “Die angemessene Versform für das Wissen, daß alles ‘verwehn’ wird.” My translation.



contained ego (“ganz ein Gebild des fühlenden Geistes”). If it deepens the image’s and the poet’s sense of inwardness, this poem’s phantasmagoric finale does so, to speak with Pound, by rendering both “a radiant node or cluster [...] a *vortex*, from which and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.”<sup>602</sup> Such ideas (logoi) are the essence of the real and the analogic expression of the divine Word (logos).

Although the symbolic moment has “ruptured” from its origins, its reference towards the transcendent divine does not simply equivocate. The interspatial and -temporal epiphany that ensues reveals an analogic relation subtending the natural phenomenon and indirectly intimating, via simile, its identity with the divine. In so doing, this moment of insight into the image’s eternal origins overturns both the univocal and the equivocal conceptions of the symbol. While jettisoning the univocal “epiphany of being,” this event of disclosure (*Ereignis*) evokes the classical while ultimately recalling its own historicity. Hence the lyric persona’s estrangement from the source in the foregoing stanzas becomes a crucial component of this new sort of insight. As remains to be seen vis-à-vis Rilke’s thing-poetry, recognizing the symbolic moment’s pro-visionality—its revelation of the transcendent being of things through transience and, hence, its qualitative difference vis-à-vis the eternal—is foundational for the recovery of the metaphysical principle of analogia in literary modernism. As we have seen, such insight presupposes a de-subjectivization of the image that clears the beholder’s horizon of prejudices against the transcendent, thereby allowing for contemplative vision to first unfold. This pro-visionally suspended view of the symbol, which recurs in Mörike’s thing-poetry (*Ding-gedichte*), confirms that his imagery’s proto-modernist autonomy only discloses the transcendent in indirect flashes—namely, by way of analogia.

If “An einem Wintermorgen” echoes ancient and modern sources, its symbolism repudiates both the univocal metaphysics (pantheism) so often associated with the poetics of Weimar classicism

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<sup>602</sup> Cited in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 475.

(Herder and Goethe) and the equivocal metaphysics characterizing the “sentimental” strain of romantic poetry (Schiller). In rejecting univocal epiphanies of being, his poems thus evince two countervailing tendencies explored in this and the previous chapter: either they seek to de-potentiate the image to a product of lyric fancy, memory, and desire on the basis of an equivocal ontology of the image that finally results, as we saw in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, in the depersonalization of the poet and the poem as *imago Dei*; or, alternatively, his poetry overcomes this sentimental perspective (perhaps even despite the poet’s intentions) by de-subjectizing the image. This unfolds in “An einem Wintermorgen” insofar as Mörike pro-visionally suspends the image’s ontological origins in both the poet and nature, whereby the increasingly autonomous image first reveals its emergent gestalt through the principle of analogia. In so doing, Mörike’s early poem on time-consciousness recovers the symbolic image’s irrepressible power to disclose a vision of the transcendent while adumbrating the interspatial and -temporal epiphanies of modernist imagism

This transcendent view of the image, which especially anticipates Rilke’s poetics of vision (*Schau*) from the middle period in Paris, is also salient in Mörike’s thing-poem “Auf eine Lampe.” As Nibbrig observes, an overriding continuity obtains between Mörike’s early time-poems and the thing-poetry from his later periods. When viewed with respect to the “formation and experience of time,” the symbolic expression of interiority is structurally the same in them: insight into the essence of the things invariably unfolds through the law of analogia underpinning the image.<sup>603</sup> Although they exhibit a difference of emphasis—since the thing-poems do not “thematize the relation

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<sup>603</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 265: “Betrachtet man die Entwicklung von Mörikes Lyrik unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Zeiterfahrung und Zeitgestaltung, so zeigt sich, daß sie von einer durchgehenden künstlerischen Absicht gelenkt ist.” My translation. Nibbrig proceeds to observe that, in the late thing-poetry, “das unmittelbare Verhältnis zwischen Ich und Welt [wird] nicht unmittelbar thematisiert, sondern es realisiert sich im Gedicht gerade in der Abstraktion von aller subjektiven Problematik, im vorzeigen schlichter Gegenständlichkeit, hinter der sich das dichterische Subjekt versteckt, das sie vermittelt” (ibid.). Whereas Nibbrig believes that the lyric subject is essentially same punctual, Cartesian ego, I describe a further shift towards a de-centered understanding of selfhood in the late *Dinggedichte*.

between self and world” as a “subjective problematic”—both oppose univocal epiphanies of being by suspending the moment of symbolic insight (*Augenblick*) within the pro-visional image. However, this does not reduce the thing seen to a strictly naturalistic horizon precluding symbolic insight into the eternal. If the crisis of subjectivity in the time-poems (*Zeitgedichte*) and the epigonal mood of the thing-poetry reflect the legacy of Protestant iconoclasm and the slow creep of secularization, they at once resist these historicizing trends by virtue of their de-subjectivized view of the image, which reveals the persistence of metaphysics in the modern German lyric.

In adumbrating the modernist “epiphany of interspaces,” -times, and -memories, Mörike’s epigonal poetry renders the image’s disclosure of depth (*die Tiefe des Augenblicks*) a pro-visional event (*Er-eignis*) of encounter with the eternal origins of the thing—no matter how historically belated it may be. Even as his thing-poetry crystallizes time’s passage into an image intimating an eternal presence, they foreground the image’s sheer transience, thus undermining its univocal presentation of the origins. Yet, in so doing, the epiphanic power of poetry cannot be neatly confined to the ego’s recollection and re-imagination of the fleeting moment.<sup>604</sup> Rather, as the thing-poems demonstrate, it is increasingly represented as an autonomous property of the thing seen: namely, as beauty beyond means/ends relations. According to Nibbrig, the fact that “beauty reveals itself” in Mörike’s thing-poetry “through particular things removed from their relations to purposive ends [*Zweckbezügeln*]

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<sup>604</sup> Regarding “Die schöne Buche” (1842), a thing-poem depicting “the origins of a moment [*Augenblick*] of fulfilled solitude [*Einsamkeit*], of a *reditus* to the lyric persona [*Ganz-zu-sich-selber-Kommen*],” Hötzer thus observes that this return to the self “is not antique but modern—indeed modernist—particularly with regard to its punctuality [*die Erfahrung des Plötzlich*]” (Hötzer, *Mörikes heimliche Modernität*, 175). “Mörikes Gedicht von der *Schönen Buche* erzählt den Ursprung eines Augenblicks erfüllter Einsamkeit, des Ganz-zu-sich-selber-Kommens. Die Gattung der Ursprungsgeschichte hat, wie gesagt, eine weit zurückreichende Tradition. Das Zu-sich-selber-Kommen aber ist nicht antik, sondern neuzeitlich, ja modern. Vor allem die Erfahrung des ‚Plötzlich‘, ist modern.” My translation. Similar to Heidegger’s hermeneutics of *Dasein*, which faintly echoes Hegelian and Neoplatonist *exitus* and *reditus* of Spirit while confining the appearances of Being to the realm of historical contingency, Mörike’s poetry isolates lyric interiority in time.

defies a historical tendency: the reification of the beautiful.”<sup>605</sup> We shall see that by suspending the lyric vision of the thing’s beautiful appearance *in* and *between* the images of it, thus rendering its imagery increasingly autonomous, “Auf eine Lampe” yields symbolic insight—however epigonal and provisional—into the transcendent source of creation. As a result, the image attains an uncanny autonomy, which many (Staiger, Heidegger, and Guardini) have viewed as a sentimental depiction of the thing’s beauty on the basis of an equivocal ontology. At once echoing Hegel’s classicist aesthetics and foreshadowing modernist poetics, this poem evinces Mörike’s aestheticizing view of images and things as radically detached from subjective purposes. However, we shall see that this in no way precludes the image’s—and, thus, poetic imagination’s—co-active participation in and presentation of the phenomenon through the *analogia entis*. The metaphysical sense of autonomy that emerges in “Auf eine Lampe” is therefore not equivocal, but analogic.

### The Image’s Autonomy in “Auf eine Lampe” and “Göttliche Reminiszenz”

Auf eine Lampe (1846)<sup>606</sup>

Noch unverrückt, o schöne Lampe, schmückest du,	
An leichten Ketten zierlich aufgehangen hier,	
Die Decke des nun fast vergeßnen Lustgemachs.	
Auf deiner weißen Marmorschale, deren Rand	
Der Efeukranz von goldengrünem Erz umflieht,	5
Schlingt fröhlich eine Kinderschar den Ringelreihn.	
Wie reizend alles! lachend, und ein sanfter Geist	
Des Ernstes doch ergossen um die ganze Form –	
Ein Kunstgebild der echten Art. Wer achtet sein?	
Was aber schön ist, selig scheint es in ihm selbst.	10

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<sup>605</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 335: “Die Schönheit, die sich in Mörikes Dichtung an den aus allen Zweckbezügen herausgelösten Einzeldingen offenbart, trotz einer geschichtlichen Tendenz: der Verdinglichung des Schönen.” My translation.

<sup>606</sup> Mörike, „Auf eine Lampe,“ MKG, 1: 132.

Like “An einem Wintermorgen,” “Auf eine Lampe” demonstrates the opposing aspects characterizing the Mörikean image—its sentimental reduction to the ego and de-subjectivization—but even more decisively evinces the latter tendency. If, as Kurt Oppert asserts, “Auf eine Lampe” presents a moment of “ecstatic intuition” (*entzückter Anschauung*) in the Goethean sense, it may also be regarded as an early example of the *Dinggedicht* (particularly as C.F. Meyer and Rilke develop the genre), which “lets [...] the ‘thing’ effect the eye and soul until, freed from all contingency, the law of its form discloses itself without contribution from the outside.”<sup>607</sup> Hence it implies a notion of epiphanic insight that is increasingly distanced from the subject—yet even as, paradoxically, the thing seen attains a profound, personal depth of meaning.<sup>608</sup> According to Oppert, in striving for “the essential, the symbolic,” thing-poetry combines “description” with a manner of “interpretation” that exclusively serves to present the idea of the thing.<sup>609</sup> This hermeneutic thus guards against the arbitrary imposition of concepts and morals (as in Enlightenment allegory) onto the object by allowing the idea to emerge from its concrete appearance in space and time. In so doing, Mörike’s thing-poem opens the beholder to a “disinterested intuition” that emancipates the “thing from the slavery of means/ends relations.”<sup>610</sup> Thus, the beholder achieves a relationship to the thing characterized by a notion of autonomy—one with classical and modernist resonances—that suspends the aesthetic object’s purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) while obliquely disclosing, by way of

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<sup>607</sup> Oppert, “Das Dinggedicht,” observes that “die Anrede an den Gegenstand leise vorhanden ist, so daß sich, mit Goethes Wort, wohl von ‘entzückter Anschauung’ reden läßt” (752). With “Auf eine Lampe” and Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte* in mine, Oppert proceeds to describe the thing-poem “läßt [...] das ‘Ding’ in Aug und Seele wirken, bis es, von allem Zufälligen gereinigt, das Gesetz seiner Form ohne fremdes Zutun und wie von selber enthüllt” (754). My translation.

<sup>608</sup> Nibbrig also notes this tension in his assertion, “daß sich Mörike durch die Gegenständlichkeit und scheinbare Unpersönlichkeit dieser Lyrik hindurch ganz persönlich ist” (ibid., 331).

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 755: “Auch die Dingdichtung strebte zum Wesentlichen, zum Symbolischen vor, gleich stark der Tendenz zur Beschreibung, war die zur Deutung[.]” My translation.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 759.

simile, its grounds in the metaphysical principle of analogia. This is, we shall see, the source of the thing's mysterious charm (*Reiz*). In the following, we shall see how the autonomous law of analogia emerges in "Auf eine Lampe" through the lyric image's detachment from its finite origins. Because this poem purports to disclose the essence of art ("ein Kunstgebild der echten Art") by means of the lamp's self-immanent mode of appearance ("selig scheint es in ihm selbst"), it provisionally suspends the image's relation to any extrinsic origins and telos in a manner similar to the imagism concluding "An einem Wintermorgen."<sup>611</sup> Yet in so doing, the de-subjected image indirectly discloses the personal core of the poem insofar as the poet still participates in the symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) of the lamplight's transcendent beauty.

Recognizing the shift in Mörike's poetry from the sentimental to the de-subjectivized view of the image requires a discerning sense of its form and metaphysical significance; for the image's depotentiation to an allegorical sign on the basis of a equivocal metaphysics and its re-potentiation to a symbolic image basing in the analogia entis unfold in constant tension. As manifest in the *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, "An einem Wintermorgen," and, we shall see, "Auf eine Lampe," the tendency to de-potentiate the image chimes with the prevailing philosophy of the post-revolutionary era: Hegelianism. This is especially the case where Mörikean image most reflects the legacy of Protestant iconoclasm and Kantianism, which results in his poetry's seeming incapacity to express the transcendent and, hence, the symbols naturalization to an utterly immanent horizon.<sup>612</sup> According to Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, first held in Heidelberg in 1818, the "romantic" art of modernity no longer expresses a religious truth. "Art with respect to its high vocation" had, as Louis Dupré

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<sup>611</sup> To be sure, as Dupré observes, "the aesthetic consciousness possesses a transcendence of its own. It sets up ideals that allow man to surpass the givenness of the present. It opens up a realm of possibility in which freedom finds its vital place. Yet this transcendence remains purely ideal" (*Transcendent Selfhood*, 52).

<sup>612</sup> This is most emphatically the case in one of Mörike's darkest poems, such as "Besuch in Urach" (1827), which many view in light of Schellingian philosophy.

observes, purportedly “become ‘a thing of the past.’ Henceforth the artist finds his content in himself.”<sup>613</sup> Because, for Hegel, the artwork’s beauty depends on its autonomy from the purposive order of things (*die gedungene Welt*), the truth that it discloses is “subjectivity” conceived as a “spiritual light that shines in itself.”<sup>614</sup> Hegel’s discussion of lyric poetry from the lectures on art demonstrates this at root Kantian conviction:

But if a lyric work of art is not to fall into dependence on the external stimulus and the purposes implicit in it, but is to stand out by itself as an independent whole, then the essential thing is that the poet shall use the stimulus purely as an opportunity for giving expression to himself, to his mood of joy or sorrow, or to his way of thinking and his general view of life.<sup>615</sup>

According to Hegel, “the *poetic* imagination” does not present “the thing itself” but “gives us on the contrary an *inner* vision and feeling of it.”<sup>616</sup> It is, therefore, the “*subjective* side of the poet’s spiritual work of creating and forming his material” that produces images and, through them, discloses the truth of art. On this account, then, the image does not originate as a gift of the deity—namely, through the gratuitous act of creation—but instead has its source in the “subject,” whose emotion has been freed (“befreit”) from contingency. The goal of lyric poetry is, Hegel contends, “to liberate the spirit not *from* but *in* feeling.”<sup>617</sup> This occurs through the “concrete” (“*gegenständlich*”), hence, symbolic presentation of poetic interiority (“*das Herz*”)—yet not “merely [by] extricating this felt passion from its immediate unity with the heart.”<sup>618</sup> Rather, the poet “makes of it an object purified from all accidental moods, an object in which the inner life, liberated and with its self-consciousness

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<sup>613</sup> Dupré, *The Quest of the Absolute*, 126-27.

<sup>614</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1: 521.

<sup>615</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 2: 1118.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, 1111.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, 1112.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*

satisfied, reverts freely at the same time into itself and is at home with itself.”<sup>619</sup> This process of purification, whereby interiority attains a second immediacy in and autonomy over the image, requires it to attain the dialectical clarity of a concept. Much like Mörike’s “Naivitätsprogram” (Sengle), Hegel’s cleansing of the image smacks of neo-Pelagianism. For it must become fully transparent to its source in the subject. Thus immanentized and reduced to a dialectical phenomenon, the image’s manner of disclosure (*Seinsweise*) is de-potentiated to that of a sign—a mere trace of the noetic thing seen. As Pfau observes, Hegel’s theory of semiotics “centers on the appropriation of the image and its sublation (*Aufhebung*) into thought, a crucial step designed to strip the image of its vestigial materiality, its contingent, potentially disruptive impact on the subject.”<sup>620</sup> For Hegel, the image must be distilled into an allegory—a discursive sign—over which the subject exercises full control.<sup>621</sup> Pfau thus observes how *Encyclopedia* §§ 446-462 describes a “gradual increase of autonomy enjoyed by a subjectivity” elsewhere defined by Hegel as “the power over the fund of images and presentations belonging to it.”<sup>622</sup> According to Hegel’s aesthetics, then, the image-quality of lyric poetry is nothing more than a mirror of subjective spirit’s freedom—achieved in the act of self-appropriation—from contingency. Despite its objective appearance and the potentially universal scope of its meaning, the symbolic presentation of truth through lyric images is, Hegel contends, univocally sourced in the subject.

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid.: The passage continues: “For the primary realization of the inner life is itself still inwardness, so that this emergence from self means only liberation from that immediate, dumb, void of ideas, concentration of the heart which now opens out to self-expression and therefore grasps and expresses in the form of self-conscious insights and ideas what formerly was only felt.”

<sup>620</sup> Pfau, *Romantic Moods*, 260.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 261. Cf. Gadamer’s account of “Sprachvergessenheit” in *Wahrheit und Methode* (422).

<sup>622</sup> Pfau, *Romantic Moods*, 256-257.



Ostensibly classical in form, content, and tone, “Auf eine Lampe” echoes Hegel’s notion of aesthetic autonomy. It depicts a lamp with antique features characterized, as Spitzer observes, by “moderation,” “self-contained circularity,” and “charm” (*Reiz*)—even as the poem subtly historicizes these qualities.<sup>623</sup> The first three verses of “Auf eine Lampe” establish an historicizing frame of reference that begins and ends the image, thus echoing the lamp’s circularity while wrapping the image in longing for the thing’s past (and present) source of significance. As is often the case in Mörike’s poetry, the attitude is intensely epigonal:

Noch unverrückt, o schöne Lampe, schmückest du,	1
An leichten Ketten zierlich aufgehangen hier,	
Die Decke des nun fast vergeßnen Lustgemachs.	
[...]	
[...] Wer achtet sein?	
Was aber schön ist, selig scheint es in ihm selbst.	10

According to Spitzer, the poem “is itself constructed in a circular fashion (like the central symbol, the marble bowl)—a condensation of the circle returning to itself.”<sup>624</sup> It thus evokes the classical style, which appears to present (*darstellen*) the eternal. Whereas the room that it once illuminated has almost been forgotten (“nun fast vergeßnen”), the lamp hangs undisturbed (“unverrückt”), as though removed from the flux of time (“selig scheint es in ihm selbst”). It thus recalls the idea of eternal self-enclosure reminiscent of Schiller’s description of the Juno Ludoviso statue in the fifteenth letter of *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1793): “the whole form reposes and dwells within itself, a completely closed creation, and—as though it were beyond space; [...] there is [...] no unprotected part where temporality might break in.”<sup>625</sup> Classical form is, Schiller had

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<sup>623</sup> Leo Spitzer, “Once Again on Mörike’s Poem ‘Auf eine Lampe’.” A 1951 Dialogue on Interpretation: Emil Staiger, Martin Heidegger, Leo Spitzer,” in *Modern Language Association*, vol. 105: 3 (May 1990), 428.

<sup>624</sup> Spitzer, “Once Again on Mörike’s Poem,” 428.

<sup>625</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (London: Routledge and Paul, 1954), 81. See Angelov, “‘Auf eine Lampe’ von Eduard Mörike. Autonomität und Heterogenität der ‘klassischen’ Form” in *Aradia*, 46:1 (September 2011), 87, which brought this similarity with Schiller’s poetics to my attention.

claimed, impervious to temporal passage; hence his conclusion in the twenty-second letter that “the aesthetic alone is a whole in itself, as it combines in itself all the conditions of its origins and of its continued existence. Here alone do we find ourselves snatched outside of time [*wie aus der Zeit gerissen*].”<sup>626</sup> On Schiller’s telling, the classical artwork’s transcendence results from its autonomy vis-à-vis its origins and end. It has purportedly been freed from contingent, purposive relations, such that the beholder in turn experiences a *sentimental* sense of transcendence: ecstasy. For it is only *as though* (“wie”) he were torn from time, while in reality, Schiller believes, the beholder remains confined to the realm of immanence. The classical thing seen is only the flight of finite spirit as it traces (*per negationem*) the transcendent divine, which remains an eternally self-enclosed *deus absconditus*. Similar to Schiller’s account of the Juno Ludovisi, Mörike’s description of the antique lamp’s symbolic manner of disclosure seems to imply an equivocal understanding of the transcendence characterizing the “Kunstgebild der echten Art.” The lyric image appears to be strictly self-immanent; for the last line suggests, quite paradoxically, that the idea of beauty presented through the poem is absolutely autonomous (“Wer achtet sein?”) in that its appearance transcends any dependence on expression through human constructs. This sentimental attitude would render the image hermetic, insofar as the logic of participation (*methexis*) and the law of *analogia* that had characterized its relation to the symbolic realm for Goethe and, indeed, the entire Christian-Neoplatonic tradition has broken down.<sup>627</sup> And yet, we shall see, despite the conclusion’s enigmatic

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<sup>626</sup> Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 103. The passage continues: “[...] and our humanity expresses itself with a purity and integrity as though it had not yet experienced any detriment from the influence of external forces.” The Pelagian overtones of Schiller’s thought are clear.

<sup>627</sup> Recalling the waterfall of Mörike’s 1827 poem “Besuch in Urach,” which purportedly lacks any interior relation to time, thus enclosing the significance of descent in upon itself, this notion of symbolic insight appears to repudiate the Christian-Neoplatonic doctrine of participation (*methexis*). Schelling’s theory of the symbol is probably behind the repudiation of transcendence in “Besuch in Urach,” and it still resonates in “Auf eine Lampe.”

interpretation of the thing seen, this poem remains epiphanic—and not merely formally, but constitutively so. For, the foregoing depiction (*Darstellung*) of the lamp provisionally discloses—through the beholder’s de-subjectivized vision and the principle of analogia—the divine (“selig”) light of beauty “in itself.”<sup>628</sup>

In addition to echoing Hegelian and Schillerian notions of classical form, this increasingly hermetic view of the artwork’s transcendence seems to chime with Heidegger’s de-personalizing account of “Auf eine Lampe.” Reflecting the modernist philosopher’s own equivocal ontology, Heidegger’s reading of the poem holds that “the beauty of the beautiful [lamp] does not depend on the grace of human beings—on whether or not they notice the artwork, on whether or not they take pleasure in what is beautiful. Beauty remains what it is, independent of the answer to the question ‘Who notices it?’” Since the poet’s presence is, Heidegger insists, utterly insignificant, the lamp attains the features of an autonomous artwork absolutely independent of external purposes—including, by contrast to Hegel, those *internal* to the finite beholder. On this fully decentered account, the poem shifts from a univocal (classicist) to an equivocal (modernist) notion aesthetic autonomy that depicts the artwork’s transcendence (“selig scheint es”) by negating the poet’s role in the event of disclosure.<sup>629</sup> At once recalling dialectical theology’s conception of God as *deus absconditus*, the Mörikean image seems to exist exclusively for its own sake, radically remote (*abgeschieden*) from the rest of creation.<sup>630</sup> In resisting the beautiful object’s reduction to self-

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<sup>628</sup> Recent scholarship has rightly emphasized that the poet is necessarily involved in the moment of insight. However, the manner of his involvement remains a point of contention. Cooper contends, for instance, that the poet remains present like the thing seen as a “surface on which Spirit glints,” thus implying a Hegelian dialectic (*The Near and Distant God*, 94). Inasmuch as this view renders the poem an allegory—a discursive sign of the absolute—it voids the poem of divine presence in the manner criticized in the previous chapter. See the Inge and Rainer Wild, eds., *Mörike Handbuch*, 149, for an overview of this line of interpretation.

<sup>629</sup> Yet, as we shall see, the poet foregrounds his presence on several occasions in the poem, particularly in the sentimental exclamation “Wie reizend alles!” and the rhetorical question “Wer achtet sein?”

<sup>630</sup> Beginning with medieval mystics such as Meister Eckhart, a dialectical understanding of the Christian God as *deus absconditus* emerged from Germanic culture. It is a view that rejects natural theology and, thus, the deity’s

interest—and, hence, to the efficient causation characterizing the sciences’ univocal, materialist worldview—the poem also appears to lose any sense of the lamp’s purposiveness as a thing of use intrinsically related to “the person, whom it should give light.”<sup>631</sup> According to this reading, Mörike’s aesthetic view of the lamp suggests his symbolism’s lack of an ontologically robust understanding of how formal/final causation (*Bildung*) shapes the image through the human and divine acts of creation. This purported oversight reflects modernity’s forgetfulness of the *analogia entis*, which had established the requisite distance between both orders for human (*dei*)formation to coincide with divine *poësis*, while preserving the relationship between them. As was argued in chapter one, in recovering this teleological sense of *Bildung*, Hamann’s, Herder’s, and Goethe’s expressivist poetics had discovered that lyric inwardness opens to the transcendent: hence that the *intimum* and the *summum* coincide by way of *analogia*. By contrast, what distinguishes the modern and modernist understandings of symbolic presentation through images from their Christian-Neoplatonic prototype is their repudiation of the constitutive analogy between creation and the divine. Whereas the symbols of the Christian faith, as images of the transcendent deity, disclose their origins through a *panentheistic* relationship of identity in greater difference, those of post-romantic literature and philosophy teeter on a dialectical precipice between the pantheistic tendencies evinced in Herder’s and Hegel’s hermeneutics of Spirit and, alternatively, the deity’s sheer absence from the realm of appearances as posited by Kant’s and (differently) Heidegger’s philosophical aesthetics.<sup>632</sup> In both

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immanence to creation. This is evident in the writings of Eckhart, Luther, Barthes, and many others in this German-Protestant tradition.

<sup>631</sup> Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis*, 140.

<sup>632</sup> See Philippians 2: 5-11: “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” By contrast, the modern crisis results from an overemphasis on either the identity between creation and the divine (*hen kai pan*) or their sheer difference as posited by Kant’s transcendental critique, according to which the intuition of the Idea through image occurs “bloß analogisch [...] mithin bloß der Form der Reflexion, nicht dem Inhalte nach” (Kant, *Die Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 253).

cases, the image is severed from its transcendent source—either because of a univocal or an equivocal ontology of appearances. As remains to be seen vis-à-vis “Auf eine Lampe,” this secularizing tendency increasingly—though never fully—suspends the image’s source in the divine and human person. Yet the result yields, as in “An einem Wintermorgen,” a surprise: for instead of reducing the appearance of beauty either to an immanent or transcendent perspective, the poem’s de-subjection indirectly grants insight into the transcendent reality of the thing (*res*) seen. Similar to Mörike’s early poems on time-consciousness, then, “Auf eine Lampe” marks a point of transition—much like Hegelianism in the history of ideas—from a classical to a modernist view of the image. However, the Mörikean thing-poem’s pivot away from the univocal (subjective) worldview does come to rest an equivocal (decentered) view of transcendence. Rather, we shall see that the poet’s quasi-phenomenological depiction of the lamp is, in fact, robustly participatory (methectic), mimetic, and analogic, thus revealing the persistence of metaphysics in the modern German lyric.

At first glance, it appears that “Auf eine Lampe” is a subjective expression of the poet’s historical situation.<sup>633</sup> By initially situating the lamp within a fleeting temporal horizon (“noch”/ “nun fast vergeßnen”) and then closing with a sentimental question (“Wer achtet sein?”), the poet stresses the moment’s historicity, even intimating the beautiful object’s impending oblivion. To be sure, the thing perdures for a spell within the poet’s memory; for it is delicately suspended here (“zierliche aufgehangen hier”) in a twofold sense: 1) spatially, between the observer, the ceiling, and the floor, thus suggesting the emphatic sense of *Er-innerung* (memory) as an “interiorization” of

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<sup>633</sup> As Cooper has argued, the transient moment of epiphanic insight (*Augenblick*) seems to occur according to a historicist hermeneutic of Spirit (*The Near and Distant God*, 93). However, he contends that the disclosure of “Geist” through the antique lamp achieves transcendence, as we have seen, by transgressing representation (the lamp’s material presence); moreover, such disclosure is purportedly “communal” and even “Incarnational as defined [Hegel’s] *Phänomenologie*: the becoming present of ‘Geist’ to human historical consciousness as human historical consciousness, making itself apparent in the body of the community” (ibid., 94).

perception, and 2) temporally, between the present's orientation towards the future ("noch") and its provenance in the past ("nun fast vergeßnen"). Within this framework, the image initially appears to depend fully on the poet's power to recollect it, since its presentation unfolds through spatio-temporal oppositions united in the poet's intellect. This understanding of the image's gestalt is, however, precisely the point of contention raised by the poem insofar as it historicizes the thing's image through sentimental reflection ("Wer achtet sein?"). Albeit more subtly than in "An einem Wintermorgen," the image's provenance and presence through memory have at least implicitly become a problem suggesting an epistemological crisis that threatens to undermine the beautiful lamp's past and present significance for the beholder. That the poem stresses the passage of time is, as Guardini observes, manifest in the opening verses. For they suggest that "the time in which the pleasure chamber [*Lustgemach*] belonged is past; the relation of human beings to one another and to the things in their lives has changed."<sup>634</sup> Through the advance of industrialization, technology, and scientific positivism in the nineteenth century, the modern view of the thing's place in the cosmos had become increasingly isolating. "Insofar as [the old things] are still there," Guardini remarks, "they have become solitary and forsaken [*einsam*]. [...] As a result, the lamp is alone with itself, and to feel this is saddening. Its impermanence penetrates the heart."<sup>635</sup> The antique lamp appears to the poet through the lens of melancholy—a mood (*Befindlichkeit*) suggesting the image's severance from any enduring source of significance yet, we shall see, tenuously preserving its personal core.

In the ensuing description of the lamp's surface, Mörike balances the opening verses' melancholy key with images of joy, laughter, and everlasting life. Thus, the elegiac tone transitions

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<sup>634</sup> Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis*, 29: "Die Zeit, in die [das Lustgemach] gehörte, ist vergangen; das Verhältnis der Menschen zu einander und zu den Dingen, die in ihrem Leben gestanden, hat sich verändert." My translation.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. "Sofern diese noch da sind," Guardini remarks, "sind sie einsam geworden. [...] So ist die Lampe mit sich allein, und das zu fühlen, macht Traurig. Die Vergänglichkeit dringt ans Herz." My translation.

into the idyllic, evoking the peculiar naïveté of his imagery. It is here that he first references the lamp's classical form, which consists, we have seen, in symmetry, equipoise, and moderation:

Auf deiner weißen Marmorschale, deren Rand  
Der Efeukranz von goldengrünem Erz umflieht, 5  
Schlingt fröhlich eine Kinderschar den Ringelreihn.  
Wie reizend alles! lachend, und ein sanfter Geist  
Des Ernstes doch ergossen um die ganze Form –

As intimated in Mörike's use of alexandrines—a verse form recalling the Baroque—the lamp's beauty results in part from its classical balance. Its white marble bowl further suggests immutability and purity, values that, as Angel Angelov observes, had become associated with bourgeois “classicism, which had its origins in the mid-eighteenth century and made [marmoreal whiteness] the defining characteristic of the antique style.”<sup>636</sup> Since bronze was not applied in antiquity as decoration on marble, the artwork depicted here is evidently a belated phenomenon (much like the poem itself) belonging to one of the classicizing periods of late modernity.<sup>637</sup> This subtle historicization of the lamp indicates its mutability—even as the natural symbols adorning its surface, both of which intimate immortality, (re)present the eternal origins of life. The bronze inlay of ivy wreaths and the relief of children dancing a roundelay intimate a divine presence in their midst and, hence, the enthusiasm accompanying the moment of poetic insight (*Augenblick*). Just as ivy evokes both Christian burial rites and the crown of Dionysius, the children's joyful dance could either be bacchanalian or tempered like the trinitarian *perichoresis*.<sup>638</sup> Thus, the lamp's self-contained equipoise

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<sup>636</sup> Angelov, “‘Auf eine Lampe’ von Eduard Mörike,” 84: “Klassizismus, der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts seinen Anfang nahm, und seinen späteren Weiterentwicklungen zum Hauptkennungsmerkmal der Antike gemacht.” My translation.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid. Angelov explains: “Bezeichnend für die Umgestaltung, die der Klassizismus des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts mit dem Erbe der Antike vornimmt, ist die in der Antike unmögliche, im Biedermeier jedoch durchaus mögliche Kombination von Bronze und Marmor in ‘Auf eine Lampe.’ Zwar wurde Bronze auch in der Antike verwendet, doch der Einsatz von Metall (und zwar vorwiegend Eisen) ist speziell für die Moderne kennzeichnend, sowohl bei Hausrat, als auch bei Industriewaren und Großprojekten wie Brücken und Eisenbahnen. Das Klassische ist nicht antik, es ist ein umformendes Erschließen und Aneignen.”

<sup>638</sup> Whereas Heidegger finds the Dionysian in the ivy, Angelov sees it in the children dancing.

also implies its opposite: ecstasy. For it entails the asymmetry of a reference transcending the univocal levelling of meaning and being (absolute tautology, as posited by Schelling's theory of the symbol).<sup>639</sup>

Consider the poet's description of the lamp as "reizend" and "lachend" yet as also possessing "ein sanfter Geist/ Des Ernstes doch ergossen um die ganze Form[.]" As was initially observed in Mörike's prose writings, he partially draws the language of "charm" (*Reiz*) from a theological discourse on the divine learned during his youth, yet partially also from rococo aesthetics. Although "reizend" perhaps intimates the trace of the Holy Spirit's transcendent presence ("ein sanfter Geist") in the beholder, as Cooper observes, it at once suggests the levity characterizing the poet's sentimental worldview, according to which "the miraculous is only illusory."<sup>640</sup> However, the anthropomorphic description of the lamp as "laughing" ("lachend") also echoes the classical discourse on the natural symbol, which presents its source in culture and divine reality through analogy. Hence it recalls Herder's observation from *Kalligone* (1800) that "the 'laughing meadows' would not laugh, if they neither greened nor blossomed."<sup>641</sup> Mutatis mutandis: neither would the lamp "laugh," were it not suffused with the light of "Spirit" illuminating its relationship to disparate spaces and times—to a recollected past and the fleeting present; to lyric interiority, the "Lustgemach," and to the transcendent source of life.<sup>642</sup> Similar to Mörike's use of personification in

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<sup>639</sup> See Angelov, "'Auf eine Lampe' von Eduard Mörike," 88.

<sup>640</sup> Cf. Cooper, *The Near and Distant God*, 92-94.

<sup>641</sup> Herder, "Kalligone," DKV 8: 956: "Die 'lachenden Fluren' lachten nicht, wenn sie nicht grüntem, nicht blühtem. [...] *Jedes Ding bedeutet*, d. i. es trägt die Gestalt dessen was es ist." My translation.

<sup>642</sup> Cf. Cooper's contention vis-a-vis "Auf eine Lampe" that "art projects us into a realm of relation or communality [...]. Our world and the world of the lamp derive their meaning from their relation to each other, from the fact that each extends beyond its particular horizons and meets the other in the created object. And in that movement between times, time itself is pointed to a universal horizon that encompasses and exceeds all time" (*The Near and Distant God*, 93).



“An einem Wintermorgen” (“und, wie ein Gott, der Tag), this image’s presentation of the human and divine unfolds through analogia: “*Wie* reizend alles! lachend[.]” Regarded as an adverbial intensifier, verse 7 at once expresses the poet’s enthusiastic participation in the thing seen and indicates his ontological manner (*Seinsweise*) of doing so. For, in the event (*Ereignis*), it establishes the moment of symbolic insight into the numinous presence of the materially invisible, yet nonetheless given lamplight by way of a constitutive analogy.<sup>643</sup>

If the poem’s sententious conclusion nevertheless suggests the image’s sheer autonomy from either source of significance, such that it would finally seem to preclude their disclosure, the emergent gestalt of the symbolic image/thing itself suggests otherwise. For this moment of indirect insight issues in what twentieth-century phenomenology and icon-theology terms a “counter” or “reverse perspective” into the invisible source of the real (Marion and Florensky). Traditionally, this sense of epiphany unfolds indirectly through a precise, if ostensibly distorted depiction of image’s emergent form: specifically, of the principles of formal and final causation shaping its appearance. What emerges is a chiastic view of the phenomenon, whereby the beholder’s de-subjectivized view is circumscribed within the transcendent vision of the deity (“ein sanfter Geist/ Des Ernstes doch ergossen um die ganze Form“). Thus, the beholder finds himself beheld. While this constitutive view of the deity’s presence is already suggested in the simile underpinning “Auf eine Lampe,” we shall see that it becomes far more explicit in an incontrovertibly Christian poem from the previous year: “Göttliche Reminiszenz” (1846).

Whereas verses 4-8 of “Auf eine Lampe” hint at the presence of a beauty surpassing the lamp’s and the image’s contingent appearance; yet the epigonal tones of the poem’s conclusion, which directly address the “blessed” (*selig*) lamplight’s manner of transcendence, then suggest that the light is in fact fully independent of the beholder, such that it only *seems* to appear to him. The

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<sup>643</sup> See Sengle, 318-19, 335, 344 on personification in Biedermeier poetry and Mörike in particular. See also fn. 560.

famous dispute between Heidegger and Staiger regarding “Auf eine Lampe” turns precisely on the ontologically indeterminate manner of disclosure implied by the poem’s last line. Does “appears/shines” (“scheint”) indicate mere appearance, a classical metaphysics of light, or perhaps the impenetrable darkness of oblivion? Is the lamp’s beauty sentimental in the Schillerian sense—such that its autonomy is only an abstract concept—or is it, alternatively, an appearance of the transcendent idea? Although the philologist and the philosopher have different understandings of the lamp’s presence, they agree that it is not an example of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol. Staiger’s more refined ear first discerns in this poem the tones of melancholy longing characterizing so much of Mörike’s oeuvre. Despite noting its resonance with classical poetics, he argues that the poet “does not see the lamp as a work of art as Goethe would see it—that is, in brotherly admiration, as an organic object whose structural principles are related to those of the human body and mind.”<sup>644</sup> Rather, the poet beholds it “more—not totality, but more—from the outside,” since “he does not feel at one with it, any more than he does with his own childhood, concerning which the [lamp’s] band of children may waken in him a melancholy memory.”<sup>645</sup> To put the point differently, Mörike feels estranged from the thing seen even as he identifies with it. Instead of precluding the principle of analogia underpinning the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol, however, this in fact makes it more plausible: for what Staiger describes is the poem’s transition away from the univocal sense of epiphany erroneously associated with Goethe to a proto-modernist epiphany of interspaces and -times opening the poet’s horizon to the metaphysics of analogia subtending the image. If Staiger recognizes that the lamp’s gestalt entails a relation of identity-in-difference—between past and present, subject and object—he indicates that this image only discloses the trace of

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<sup>644</sup> Leo Spitzer, “Once Again on Mörike’s Poem ‘Auf eine Lampe,’” 418.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

symbolic unity with the other inasmuch as the poet's perspective equivocates: it remains "outside" and therefore, Staiger suggests, lacks the constitutive identity with the thing that had characterized Herder's and Goethe's analogy-based metaphysics. Having described Mörike's gaze as epigonal and, hence, as isolated in its perception of the lamp's beauty, Staiger also observes that his nostalgia bears on the lamplight's manner of appearance. For the poet's melancholy disposition indicates that his presentation (*Darstellung*) of the idea is ontologically indeterminate: "What is beautiful *seems* blissful...' is all that he dares to say. [...] It is as though the viewer of the pleasure chamber has already left and is now only reflecting on the world of art. Recollection befits him, as one who feels himself to be belated."<sup>646</sup> The symbolic lamp is, Staiger contends, a sentimental phenomenon in the precise Schillerian sense. As the mere projection of the punctual ego's epigonal disposition towards and impeded desire for the classical cosmos, the lamplight's absent beauty is essentially equivocal and, therefore, elegiac. Hence, Staiger asserts, the verb "to appear/shine" ("scheinen") in the poem's last verse primarily means mere appearance (*videtur*). The lamp's manner of disclosure is only transcendental—not transcendent on the classical model. According to Staiger, then, the poet strives to achieve a constitutive presentation of the idea but finds himself barred. As a result, the thing-poem's epigonal tones result from its failure to meet this ideal.

Responding to Staiger's interpretation, Heidegger recognizes an internal contradiction in its account of the lamp's appearance; for, the philosopher observes, "there is no legitimate conception of 'scheinen' in the sense of 'merely to seem as though' without the more fundamental purport of 'scheinen' in the sense of a self-revealing disclosure."<sup>647</sup> It is a core tenet of phenomenology—as argued in the introduction to *Sein und Zeit* (1927)—that phenomena are never merely illusory but

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<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 423.

instead unveil *something* for a dative of disclosure (*Dasein*).<sup>648</sup> Every appearance discloses the Being of beings—if only *per negationem*, as Heidegger elsewhere contends, through “nothingness” [temporal] negation of existence” (“das Nichten des Nichts”).<sup>649</sup> With an appeal to Hegel’s aesthetics, Heidegger argues that

the lamp, ‘the glowing,’ is as ‘a work of art of the true kind,’ the σύμβολον of the artwork as such—of the ‘ideal,’ in Hegel’s language. The lamp, the *objet d’art* (“O beautiful lamp”), combines in one its appearance to the senses and the luminosity of the idea as the essence of the work of art. The poem itself is a symbol in language of the work of art as such.<sup>650</sup>

Although Heidegger regards the symbolic lamp’s appearance as disclosing the meaning of Being, his understanding of “scheinen” as “lucet” (disclosure) radically historicizes the artwork’s essence.

“‘Scheint’ points in the direction not of a phantom but of an epiphany;” however, what the lamp discloses as the essence of art is the idea’s (the Being of beings) sheer historicity.<sup>651</sup> On this account, Mörike’s thing-poem reveals that the Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics of light intimated by the symbol has been extinguished in the flux of time—in particular, by the poet’s melancholy depiction of its descent into oblivion.<sup>652</sup> Heidegger agrees with Staiger’s characterization of the mood (*Befindlichkeit*) of this image and his conclusion regarding the poet’s incapacity to participate in the

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<sup>648</sup> The locus classicus for this understanding of the phenomenon is Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 2006) 27-39. He describes it as “[das], was sich zunächst und zumeist gerade *nicht* zeigt, was gegenüber dem, was sich zunächst und zumeist zeigt, *verborgen* ist, aber zugleich etwas ist, was wesentlich zu dem, was sich zunächst und zumeist zeigt, gehört, so zwar, daß es seinen Sinn und Grund ausmacht” (35). On the key phenomenological notion of the “dative of disclosure,” see Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 65.

<sup>649</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1955), 35: “Im Sein des Seienden geschieht das Nichten des Nichts.”

<sup>650</sup> Leo Spitzer, “Once Again on Mörike’s Poem ‘Auf eine Lampe,’” 421.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>652</sup> This interpretation resonates with Mörike’s most pessimistic images: for instance, the cascade of “Besuch in Urach,” which drowns out the river’s numinous source of significance.

artwork's disclosure of the idea. Yet he contends that "melancholy speaks in the poem because the work of art in its essence escapes" all humanity, not just the epigonal poet.<sup>653</sup>

The poet can be affected by this melancholy mood, however, since he is one of those who remain sensitive to the essence of the artwork. It is for this reason, too, that the melancholy mood cannot depress him. He holds his place against it, because he knows that the true kind of an art object, the beauty of the beautiful, does not depend on the grace of human beings—on whether or not they notice the artwork, on whether or not they take pleasure in what is beautiful. Beauty remains what it is, independent of the answer to the question "Who notices it?"<sup>654</sup>

Unlike Staiger, then, Heidegger believes that Mörike has paradoxically attained a deeper insight into the essence of art through his epigonal worldview than Goethe and Herder, who had still thought in terms of classical metaphysics. If "Auf eine Lampe" brings "the essential nature" of the lamp and "its world (the pleasure chamber) to illumination," it discloses that they are essentially transitory. Heidegger conjectures in conclusion that "perhaps the poet had caught a glimpse of this limitation (in this 'woe'), which is intrinsic to the work of art—with the woe then turning his feeling to melancholy. As an epigone, he has evidently seen more and borne more than his predecessors have."<sup>655</sup> Mörike had begun to grasp the radical autonomy of the image—namely, its absolute estrangement from divine and human origins. Thus, Heidegger believes, the poem fully de-personalizes the image, thus disclosing its utter vanity.

Whereas Staiger regards Mörike's poem as a sentimental imitation of classicism, Heidegger's interpretation reads it as a forerunner of literary and philosophical modernism. Thus, when Staiger notices that the poet no longer participates in the image's disclosure of the transcendent, Heidegger affirms this position. He asserts that the symbolic artwork is more profoundly autonomous than

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<sup>653</sup> Leo Spitzer, "Once Again on Mörike's Poem 'Auf eine Lampe,'" 425.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid, 426.

Neoplatonic, Kantian, or Hegelian aesthetics had imagined; for the essence that its beauty discloses utterly transcends the poet, just as Being/Nothing is said to so transcend the existence of Dasein that it only appears in the mode of *possibility*.<sup>656</sup> By disputing Staiger's interpretation of "scheinen" as mere appearance (*videre*), which had measured the lamplight's manner of disclosure (*Seinsweise*) against the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol, Heidegger attempts to move beyond classical metaphysics. Appearance (*lucere*) is, he contends, essentially *equivocal* as a temporal manifestation of Being/Nothing through finite things.<sup>657</sup> Thus, he rejects that the hermeneutic of participation (methexis) and the univocal (!) understanding of being serving as Staiger's implicit standards of judgment are adequate frames for interpreting the image's appearance. Heidegger only considers the poem epiphanic to the extent that it negatively discloses the essential historicity of existence. Thus, the beautiful never *actually* appears but remains suspended, so to speak, within or behind the lyric images. Heidegger's account of "Auf eine Lampe" purports to deepen Staiger's reading while rendering it phenomenologically consistent. In so doing, he regards this poem as a proto-modernist image; for it purportedly displaces the univocal gestalt of the classical symbol with a more thoroughgoing equivocity, which requires the dissolution of the finite subject for the absolute to truly appear. On this account, then, "Auf eine Lampe" severs the image (and the thing seen) from its divine and human sources. Yet, as Heidegger's emphasis on affectivity belies, it continues to deepen the personal center of the poem, even as it effaces the subject's role in the event of disclosure (*Ereignis*).<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>656</sup> This especially holds for Heidegger's late work (e.g. *Holzwege*) which gradually reverses the priority established in *Sein und Zeit* of existence over essence and, hence, of appearances *for* Dasein over an increasingly abstract conception of Being/Nothing. This reversal (*Kebr*) indicates the shifting sands of Heidegger's equivocal ontology.

<sup>657</sup> See, Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 29–30.

<sup>658</sup> In addition to its conflating being and non-being, Heidegger's interpretation of the lamp's appearance paradoxically reduces the disclosure of the artwork's essence to the scope of the beholder's finite gaze. If Heidegger denies—in a move consistent with his late writings—the significance of the dative of disclosure (*Dasein*), he nevertheless affirms that the poet is the one "who remain[s] sensitive" to the melancholy atmosphere of the

Romano Guardini's phenomenological interpretation of "Auf eine Lampe" provides a third way of reading the poem: namely, in light of the Christian-Neoplatonic theory of the symbol. He begins by contesting the position established in the poem—one unquestioningly conceded by Staiger and Heidegger—that the lamp's beauty issues from its sheer autonomy. Before the beautiful thing became isolated within a forgotten pleasure chamber, it was "a thing of use" presupposing the presence of the people who made and used it; hence, its manner of appearance implies a history of social praxis.<sup>659</sup> According to Guardini, the symbolic lamp "does not rest [...] so purely in itself as it appears at first glance; rather it is bound up with the person, whom it should give light."<sup>660</sup> To speak with Sokolowski, if the thing is to be beautiful in the first place, it requires "a dative of disclosure"

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artwork and "holds his place against" the despair-inducing insight into the historicity of existence that it yields. Mörike adopts the quasi-classical stance of restraint (*Verhaltenheit*), which, as Ryan Coyne observes regarding the Heidegger's 1930 Beuron lecture on Book XI of the *Confessions*, is the philosopher's "term for the self-gathering of the soul or the *intentio animi*, its stretching-forth toward eternity" (Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of St. Augustine in Being and Time and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 167, 169). "In the dynamic of pressing on (*ad-tendere*)" that Heidegger discerns in Augustine's inquiry into time, he "espies the reversal of the mind's dispersion (*dis-tentio*) into multiplicity. That is, [he] interprets the intention of the soul, the ultimate expression of which is extension toward eternity, as a mode of this *at-tention*" (ibid., 167). Self-restraint is Heidegger's answer to the dispersion (*distensio*) of the self in time, and he seems to discern this disposition in Mörike's appropriation of the classical style. See ibid., 167: "[Heidegger's] interpretation effectively equates the act of interrogating time with the enactment of true temporality: 'Time [is] the distention of life [*distentio vitae*]. ... And this means: gathering oneself together, stretching out toward eternity [*Gesammelt sich herausstrecken zur aeternitas*].'" Although the poet of "Auf eine Lampe" is fully aware of the historicity of beauty, he similarly "presses on" and attends exactly to its finite appearance in the antique form of the lamp, which he regards as eternally self-contained (heautonomous). According to Heidegger, it is through the poet's grasp ("holding on") of the symbol's equivocal presence that he gathers himself (*intentio*) and bears his essential finitude. On this account, then, poetic interiority emerges from the doomed attempt to recollect itself from disintegration in time *by distending time* through the temporal medium of the lyric image. Heidegger's account of the soul's temporal distension altogether opposes Augustine's recognition of the transcendent source of the self in "addressing his own mind as follows: 'Courage, my mind, and press on [*adtende*] strongly. God is our helper: he made us, and not we ourselves. Press on [*adtende*], where truth begins to dawn'" (ibid., 169). By contrast to the Augustinian conception of *distensio animi*, Heidegger's neo-Pelagian recovery of inwardness occurs through the poet's own powers of recollection and attention. Although Heidegger provides minimal textual evidence for his reading, his observations nevertheless accord with the peculiar naïveté that, as we have seen, characterizes the poem's transitions between the elegiac and the idyllic tone; furthermore, it corresponds with Mörike's biography—namely, his "Naïvetätsprogram"—and the poet's late turn to the classical style as manifest, for instance, in *Mozart auf der Reise*.

<sup>659</sup> Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis*, 30: "Ein Ding des Gebrauchs." My translation.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.: "Ruht [...] gar nicht so rein in sich selbst, wie es auf den ersten Blick scheint, sondern sie ist auf den Menschen hin bezogen, den sie leuchten soll." My translation.

who made it and for whom it appears.<sup>661</sup> The lamp's beauty thus depends on its purposive relationship to human beings: "that it is beautiful cannot be separated from [this twofold relation]" of formal and final causation.<sup>662</sup> If the lamp were to fall entirely out of use, it would no longer be "selig in ihm selbst," for it would cease to cast its light and thus remain shrouded in abandon. Similar to the puppets in Rilke's 1914 essay or, as we shall see, "the petrified city" of autonomous images in his *Neue Gedichte* (1904/06), "the abandoned [*herrenlos*] creature" could only display an essential lack.<sup>663</sup> Although its autonomy (in disuse) might suggest a "relation of transcendence," it does so "without ever arriving [at its end]," such that the thing becomes "uncanny."<sup>664</sup> From this vantage point, the autonomy of art heralded by Heidegger and the Kantian tradition of philosophical aesthetics attains a demonic facet. Supposing that one disregards the artwork's use-value for people, "one can, admittedly, regard it as an image that no longer serves any purpose but nevertheless exhibits beautiful forms; however, should one feel this state of things more deeply, then the character of mere disuse does not last but gradually becomes sinister."<sup>665</sup> Thus isolated from its socio-historical context, the aesthetic object devolves into an idol: "it becomes a magical danger" for the beholder that abstracts the image and its object from their numinous source of significance.<sup>666</sup> It effaces the poet's agency—his role in symbolic disclosure—and undermines his interiority, even as it betrays a personal presence.

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<sup>661</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 65.

<sup>662</sup> Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis*, 30: "Daß sie schön ist, kann davon nicht abgelöst werden. Sie ist schön, indem sie Lampe, Lampe aber ist sie nur, wenn Menschen da sind, denen sie leuchtet." My translation.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 31: "Das herrenlose Geschöpf." My translation.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid. "Das Hinüberbezogen-Sein und nicht Ankommen-Können." "Das Unheimliche." My translations.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid. "Man [kann] es zwar bewußt als ein Gebilde nehmen, das keinen Zweck mehr erfüllt, doch schöne Formen aufweist; empfindet man aber den Zustand tiefer, dann dauert der Charakter des bloß Unbenutzten nicht fort, sondern er geht in den der Bedrohlichkeit über." My translation.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid. "Es wird zur magischen Gefahr." My translation.



Guardini's observations point us to the fact that "Auf eine Lampe" is, contrary to Heidegger's assertions, never fully de-personalized. To be sure, its manner of presenting the thing seen is pro-visionally suspended, such that the poem is historicized and de-subjectivized—thus, distanced from its source in the ego—; yet we have seen that this occurs in a way that increases the co-active role of the poet's imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) in the presentation of the image. Hence, Heidegger's and Staiger's misprisions of the symbolic image do not—indeed, they cannot—preclude a view of the lamplight on the basis of the metaphysical principle of analogia. Although the law of analogy subtending the emergence of the image attains a degree of autonomy, it is never wholly independent of its divine and finite beholders. Rather, it obliquely unfolds in and through their interlocking visions, whereby the infinite asymmetry of analogia (a "greater difference") structures its ontological manner of appearance. The counter perspective on the transcendent emerging from this poem's quasi-phenomenologically suspended view of the thing (*res*) is echoed in "Göttliche Reminszenz."

Göttliche Reminiszenz (1845)<sup>667</sup>

Πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο.  
Ev. Joh. 1, 3

Vorlängst sah ich ein wundersames Bild gemalt,  
Im Kloster der Kartäuser, das ich oft besucht.  
Heut, da ich im Gebirge droben einsam ging,  
Umstarrt von wild zerstreuter Felsentrümmersaat,  
Trat es mit frischen Farben vor die Seele mir.

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An jäher Steinkluft, deren dünn begraster Saum,  
Von zweien Palmen überschattet, magre Kost  
Den Ziegen beut, den steilauf weidenden am Hang,  
Sieht man den Knaben Jesus sitzend auf Gestein;  
Ein weißes Vlies als Polster ist ihm unterlegt.  
Nicht allzu kindlich deuchte mir das schöne Kind;  
Der heiße Sommer, sicherlich sein fünfter schon,  
Hat seine Glieder, welche bis zum Knie herab

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<sup>667</sup> Mörike, "Göttliche Reminiszenz," MKG, 1: 258.

Das gelbe Röckchen decket mit dem Purpursaum,  
 Hat die gesunden, zarten Wangen sanft gebräunt; 15  
 Aus schwarzen Augen leuchtet stille Feuerkraft,  
 Den Mund jedoch umfremdet unnennbarer Reiz.  
 Ein alter Hirte, freundlich zu dem Kind gebeugt,  
 Gab ihm soeben ein versteinert Meergewächs,  
 Seltsam gestaltet, in die Hand zum Zeitvertreib. 20  
 Der Knabe hat das Wunderding beschaut, und jetzt,  
 Gleichsam betroffen, spannet sich der weite Blick,  
 Entgegen dir, doch wirklich ohne Gegenstand,  
 Durchdringend ewge Zeitenfernen, grenzenlos:  
 Als wittre durch die übervolkte Stirn ein Blitz 25  
 Der Gottheit, ein Erinnern, das im gleichen Nu  
 Erloschen sein wird; und das welterschaffende,  
 Das Wort von Anfang, als ein spielend Erdenkind  
 Mit Lächeln zeigt's unwissend dir sein eigen Werk.

A remarkable example of both memory- and thing-poetry, this lyric image unfolds through multiple layers of interiorization, representation, and recollection. It describes a painting of the Christ-child playing in a mountain setting, which suddenly appears before the poet's inner gaze ("Trat es mit frischen Farben vor die Seele mir") as he walks through an Alpine pass. As Nibbrig observes, "poetic imagination paints it again. The landscape, in view of which the poet recalls the [original] painting, appears once again in the [poet's description of the recollected] image."<sup>668</sup> The space of the interior image thus melds with the beholder's inwardness, just as the image's temporal structure progressively "melds with the past [evoked through his memory of the image]."<sup>669</sup> Even more emphatically than in "An einem Wintermorgen" and "Auf eine Lampe," this melding of horizons is constitutive. For it discloses the divine origins of the symbol ("das Wunderding") as present in the interior vision—namely, the act of imaginative remembrance (*Er-innerung*)—through analogia: that is, the likeness in greater difference between creation and its Creator. After depicting the Christ-child's idyllic resting place amidst goats and highland palms, the poem describes the

<sup>668</sup> Nibbrig, *Verloren Unmittelbarkeit*, 336: "Dichterische Imagination malt es noch einmal. Die Landschaft, deren Anblick die Erinnerung an das Bild auslöst, erscheint im Bild wieder." My translation.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., 337: "Verschmilzt mit der Vergangenheit [der Erinnerung an das Bild]." My translation.

awesome power of his gaze: “Aus schwarzen Augen leuchtet stille Feuerkraft,/ Den Mund jedoch umfremdet unnennbarer Reiz.”<sup>670</sup> A “quiet” light emanates from the boy’s deep black eyes that recalls the luminous power (“leuchtet”) of the symbol in Mörike’s poems on time-consciousness and things; however, this metaphysical light illuminates the image more clearly still than in them, yet nonetheless indirectly.<sup>671</sup> Although the child’s mouth concretely discloses his divinity, it is encircled by an “ineffable charm” (“unnennbarer Reiz”) that sets it apart from the beholder’s lyric phantasy and speech. Its beauty and sublimity exceed his capacity to fully express it, even as, we shall see, the image retains a participatory gestalt predicated on the *analogia entis*.<sup>672</sup> For the painting’s charismatic presence does not originate in lyric subjectivity, as in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, but in the image itself—namely, in its numinous source. The distance that this symbolic discloses between the finite and divine poles of vision (“Durchdringend ewge Zeitenfernen, grenzenlos“) is truly infinite in the sense of the “greater” ontological difference creation and the transcendent deity. And yet, we shall see, similar to the lamp’s symbolic presentation of the beautiful, the luminosity of the recollected image actually increases the poet’s participation in the divine light’s emanation. Instead of de-personalizing the poem, then, it de-subjectivizes the poet’s gaze (“spannet sich der weite Blick,/ Entgegen dir, doch wirklich ohne Gegenstand“), thus opening an oblique but participatory vision into the image’s transcendent source. For, in its likeness to humanity in Christ, the deity’s eternal memory “pierces through” the vast distance between creation and its origins in the divine One who made it. The Godhead thus involves the finite poet’s interior act of creation—the acts of perception, recollection,

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<sup>670</sup> Mörike, “Göttliche Reminiszenz,” MKG, 1: 258.

<sup>671</sup> “Stille” also echoes Winckelmann’s famous description of the classical style as a “quiet grandeur” (“stille Größe”) in *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauer-Kunst*. Consider the inspiration that Mörike draws from lightening at the conclusion of “Besuch in Urach:” “Du meiner tiefsten Kräfte stiller Herde,” which suggests that this sublime fire from the heavens is somehow the deepest source of his imagination (*Einbildungskraft*).

<sup>672</sup> Hence, the poet refrains from saying whether the child smiles or frowns but instead leaves the divine gesture shrouded in darkness (“umfremdet”). Nibbrig also observes that “das Unnennbare, das im Antlitz des Kindes anschaulich wird, wirkt reizvoll fremd, wie das Schöne sonst bei Mörike” (*Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 336).

and imagination—in His presentation of the symbol’s constitutive gestalt. And the transcendent deity does so, we shall see, by way of analogia.

Similar to early memory-poem’s historicization of the image, “Göttliche Reminiszenz” distinguishes between the poet’s original encounter with the image (“deuchte mir”) and the present moment of interior of perception as mediated by recollection (“leuchtet”). Yet it also makes a third distinction that was underdeveloped in “An einem Wintermorgen” and “Auf eine Lampe”—namely, the time *of* the image itself (“Der heiße Sommer, sicherlich sein fünfter schon”), which differs from lyric subjectivity and its object (the material painting).<sup>673</sup> In this poem, time issues from a noetic source that transcends the concrete image and the poet’s recollection of it, even as it constitutively unfolds through both at once in the narrative present. This becomes evident the description in verses 18-20 of an encounter between the Christ-child and an elderly shepherd who “Gab ihm soeben ein versteinert Meergewächs,/ Seltsam gestaltet, in die Hand zum Zeitvertreib.”<sup>674</sup> The time of the poem assumes a participatory gestalt here as indicated by the preposition “soeben,” which, as Nibbrig observes, “ties the present of the event in the image with the present of the vision. The preterit [narrative past tense] indicates the beholder’s participation in an event that has already begun, not one that begins with his participation.”<sup>675</sup> This suggests a narrative realism only intimated in the imagism of early memory poems. Through the ontological priority of the time presented in the painting, the recollection of the original encounter with the image merges with the present moment (*Augenblick*) of narrative time. The temporal structure of the epiphanic event that, already unfolding, ensues (namely, the divine vision through which all things are made) then attains an

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<sup>673</sup> Recall the poet’s assertion in “Besuch in Urach” that the natural symbol lacks any interior relationship to time.

<sup>674</sup> Mörike, “Göttliche Reminiszenz,” MKG, 1: 258.

<sup>675</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 337: “Verknüpft die Gegenwart des Geschehens im Bild mit der des Betrachtens. Das Präteritum deutet auf die Teilnahme an einem Geschehen, das schon begonnen hat, nicht erst beginnt mit der Teilnahme an ihm.” My translation.

analogue in the natural symbol (the fossil) received by the boy, which unites myriad polarities—past and present, mountains and sea, art and nature—through its constitutive presentation of time.<sup>676</sup> As a gift given by the shepherd, this fossilized memory mediating divine and finite remembrance suggests creation's and, in particular, humanity's participation in the Christ-child's recollection that nature was and is gratuitously given (*ex nihilo*) by the creator. Furthermore, the immanent gestalt of this stone paradoxically intimates its origins in the fount of eternal of life: for this dead thing is also an organic image of the divine logos (“Πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο”) disclosing, by way of analogy, the living source from which it sprang and will forever spring.<sup>677</sup>

The fleeting focal point of the recollected image, this “miraculous thing” (“Wunderding”) recalls the nature's and the artwork's (*Kunstgebilde*) genesis in the divine act of creation. It thus becomes the vessel of a vision in the ensuing verses through which eternity enters time. Playing with this symbol of divine power as though “whiling away the time” (“zum Zeitvertreib”)—thus intimating the utter gratuity of the event—the Christ-child turns his gaze towards the beholder, sparking a moment of insight (*Augenblick*) into the depths of the Father's memory (“Erinnerung”). The poem presents (*darstellen*) an epiphany on the Christian-Neoplatonic model as an active/passive reversal of vision—that is, a counter perspective (Florensky) whereby the beholder suddenly (“jetzt,/ Gleichsam”) experiences his gaze as given from the source of creation:

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<sup>676</sup> Nibbrig describes the fossil as “sichtbare, versteinerte Erinnerung, dinghaftes Sinnbild für das Perennieren der Vergangenheit in der Zeit” (ibid., 337).

<sup>677</sup> Created through the Christ-child's play (“ein spielend Erdenkind”), the fossil is “ein Kunstgebild der echten Art.” As Angelov observes of the lamp, Mörike's use of the word “Kunstgebild” (artwork) echoes Herder's and Goethe's expressivist notions of the symbol since it implies a relation of identity-in-difference between organic, cultural, and divine creation (Angelov, “‘Auf eine Lampe’ von Eduard Mörike,” 83, 91). Whereas, per *Grimms Wörterbuch*, Herder describes “musculature as an interwoven *Kunstgebild*” Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (1817) recounts how the antique lamps excavated at Portici 20 years prior were adorned with “Masks and tendrils, such that every flame illuminated an actual *Kunstgebilde*” (ibid.) My translation. As an artwork (*Kunstgebilde*), the fossil's beauty—its charm (*Reiz*)—is similar to the antique lamp in Mörike's lyric; however, it also differs inasmuch as it recalls the analogy of being underpinning classical metaphysics. For it is represented (*darstellen*), we shall see, as a natural symbol constitutively disclosing the transcendent whole in part.

Der Knabe hat das Wunderding beschaut, und jetzt,  
Gleichsam betroffen, spannet sich der weite Blick,  
Entgegen dir, doch wirklich ohne Gegenstand,  
Durchdringend ewge Zeitenfernen, grenzenlos[.]

As Nibbrig suggests, time issues from the past of the image (“hat das Wunderding beschaut”) and leads to the present perception of it (“jetzt”), thus implying an “ultimate communion of the time of the thing seen with time of [the poet’s] vision” (*Augenblick*).<sup>678</sup> The temporal gestalt of this event is participatory as a constitutive presentation of the deity’s transcendent act: the poet “participates [*hat erlebend teil*] in the immediate event of encounter [*Erlebnisgeschehen*]” as disclosed through the recollected image.<sup>679</sup> By contrast to *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, this poem neither de-potentiates symbolic disclosure nor denies the presence of the divine; for the power of the Godchild’s vision cannot be confined to the scope of the poet’s own gaze. Even as the deity’s eyes turn towards the beholder in a personal gesture (“entgegen dir”), they reflect his insight into the farthest reaches of the cosmos: Christ’s vision altogether transcends the one whom he beholds (“doch wirklich ohne Gegenstand,/ Durchdringend ewge Zeitenfernen, grenzenlos“). Whereas the images of the secularized monastery locate the symbolic image’s source in the poet’s own powers, the presentation (*Darstellung*) of divine vision in “Göttliche Reminiszenz” differs in that it penetrates (“durchdringend”) his ego; it suffuses his memory, imagination, and perception and thus transforms his finite capacity for poësis. More like the imagery of “An einem Wintermorgen” and “Auf eine Lampe,” then, this moment of insight (*Augenblick*) unfolds through a simile (“gleichsam betroffen”)—one characterized by identity that retains the greater difference between divine and finite creation. This poem consequently avoids reducing the image to an immanent historical horizon by foregrounding its participation (methexis) in the eternal act of divine recollection and poësis. For just as the poet remembers through the

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<sup>678</sup> Nibbrig, *Verlorene Unmittelbarkeit*, 337: “Die endgültige Verschmelzung der Zeit des Betrachteten mit der des Betrachtens.” My translation.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.: “Erlebend hat [der Dichter] teil an dem [...] unmittelbaren Erlebnisgeschehen.” My translation.

divine power of memory, he creates through God's infinite act of creation: that is, to speak with Aquinas, the "act of being."<sup>680</sup> Thus pierced to the core by the Christ-child's gaze, he envisions a thunderbolt issuing from the boy's stormy brow: "Als wittre durch die überwölkte Stirn ein Blitz/ Der Gottheit, ein Erinnern, das im gleichen Nu/ Erloschen sein wird[.]“ In a split second, the logos of God ("Das Wort von Anfang") fully remembers and re-presents the Father's eternal presence. It is "a recollection" ("ein *Erinnern*") in the emphatic sense of interiorization and, hence, of deepening perception; for the poet's briefly experiences the origins as given *within* himself *in* and *through* the Godchild's vision. Again, this symbolic depiction (*Darstellung*) of simultaneity through analogy is not merely formal (as per Kantian symbolism) but concrete. It is therefore through ontological difference between divine and created orders and, hence, the vast gulf of time between Genesis and the present moment of poësi that the poet's vision becomes one with deity's imaginative power.

As in "An einem Wintormorgen" and "Auf eine Lampe," the interspatial and temporal epiphany of "Göttliche Reminiszenz" is mediated by a series of symbolic images—the painting, the fossil, and, as we shall see by way of conclusion, the lightning flash of creation. This final, most transient symbol discloses the Godhead's infinite presence in the act of poësis, yet it does so obliquely by way of a simile: "Als wittre durch die überwölkte Stirn ein Blitz/ Der Gottheit, ein Erinnern, das im gleichen Nu/ Erloschen sein wird.“ What the strike reveals is, we shall see, the metaphysical principle of analogia structuring humanity's relationship with the transcendent divine. By likening this sublime event of disclosure to lightening, Mörike stresses the symbolic image's sheer pro-visionality; for the light disappears in the very instant that it illuminates the cloudy heavens of God's brow.<sup>681</sup> Similar to time- and thing-poetry, this epiphany unfolds in a state of suspense in and

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<sup>680</sup> See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1: 4: 1: 3.

<sup>681</sup> As intimated by the enjambment in this line, the act of creation through natural symbol implies an ontological difference between creation and the creator.

between a series of images that serve to de-subjective the poet's vision—yet without effacing his personhood. In so doing, the lightning flash illustrates how precisely the deity's self-disclosure harrows the punctual ego. Recalling Hölderlin's "Wie wenn am Feiertage" (1799)—yet through an explicitly Christian vision, whereby grace perfects nature without destroying it (St. Thomas)—the thunderbolt penetrates and transforms the subject as *imago Dei*.

The event of encounter (*Ereignis*) between heaven and earth occurs in the conditional tense, such that the adverbial phrase at the beginning of verse 22 ("gleichsam betroffen") at once echoes the suddenness of the event (*gleich*: "now") and pro-visionally suspends its reality (*gleichsam*, *als ob*: "just as if").<sup>682</sup> This renders the vision irreducible either to the mere, univocal presence of an object or to the equivocal, yet finally illusory projection of the ego. In doing this, it consequently opens the beholder's horizon to the transcendent yet nonetheless interior source of creation. Verse 25 similarly begins with the conditional conjunction "as" ("Als wittre"), which can either combine contemporaneous processes or introduce a hypothetical comparison (*als ob*).<sup>683</sup> Each phrase thus establishes an analogy between opposing phenomena: 1) the Christ child's and the poet's visions, and 2) the present moment of creative recollection and the original moment of creation ("das welterschaffende/ Das Wort vom Anfang"). Rather than suggesting a merely formal relationship, however, these fleeting similes are constitutive because of the participatory (methectic) structure of the vision (reverse perspective) that they disclose. To be sure, the contorted syntax of verses 21–26—which strains human language to its limits—suggests an infinite difference between the created and divine orders, as does the emphatic use of enjambment in verse 25 ("ein Blitz/ Der Gottheit"). As we shall see vis-à-vis Rilke's thing-poetry, this foreshadows modernism's emphasis on the image's

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<sup>682</sup> DWDS – *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache. Das Wortauskunftssystem zur deutschen Sprache in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed., <<https://www.dwds.de>>." "Gleichsam," DWDS, <<https://www.dwds.de/wb/gleichsam>>, accessed on 2/31/2022.

<sup>683</sup> "Als," DWDS, <<https://www.dwds.de/wb/als>>, accessed on 2/31/2022.



pro-visionality. And yet, inasmuch as the moment of symbolic insight (*Augenblick*) depicted in these verses emerges through analogia and retains a participatory structure, it is never isolated from its source in divine poësis. Thus, it never becomes a strictly punctual epiphany (*Augenblick*) confined to lyric interiority and undermined the finite powers of poësis. Similar to the time- and thing-poetry, this image recollects this belated moment's redemption from sheer vanity. What the poem instead expresses, and more eloquently than anywhere in Mörike's oeuvre, is the symbolic image's sheer gratuity and plenitude as given by God.

Memory does not serve elegiacally in these lines to wash the ontological foundation of the symbol away in the river of time; neither does this litany of images brook any equivocation about their origins in the eternal. "Göttliche Reminiszenz" thus stresses the transience of insight in a manner that forestalls both the univocal and equivocal understanding of epiphany. For as we have seen, it is *in* and *between* the poem's imagistic litany of symbol that its vision of the transcendent origins emerges. The transition away from pantheistic epiphanies of being towards the interspatial and -temporal insights of modernism described in both "An einem Wintermorgen" and "Auf eine Lampe" is, therefore, also evident here—in a poem whose subject is, as Guardini observes, is "the interiority of Christ, behind which lies the mystery of the Incarnation."<sup>684</sup> What is more, Mörike "speaks about it in a manner against which no person of faith need object."<sup>685</sup> The radical pro-visionality of this forever-novel kind of symbolic insight accords with Christian orthodoxy. For insofar as it discloses the Father's transcendent act of creation through the Son, the perfect, uncreated Image, it obliquely unfolds within the beholder's memory and phantasy via the analogia entis.

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<sup>684</sup> Guardini, *Gegenwart und Geheimnis*, 52. "Ist die Innerlichkeit Christi, hinter welcher das Mysterium der Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes liegt." My translation.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid. My translation.

## Conclusion

In chapter 3, we stressed the poet's tendency to reduce the image to the scope of his own sentimental gaze, thus subjectivizing it to the point that it could only allegorically refer to the transcendent (*ex negativo*). In this chapter, we described how Mörike succeeds at times in overcoming the crisis of interiority that results from this de-potentialization of the image to a sign. We have argued that this requires the poet to quasi-phenomenologically suspend his perspective within the image, thus de-subjectivizing his vision without destroying its personal character. In so doing, we have demonstrated how the resulting attitude sheers the poet of metaphysical biases against the transcendent, thus allowing for the principle of analogia to emerge from in and through the thing seen. Instead of embracing naturalism or idealism, then, Mörike's poetry charts a new course by seeking transcendence—not in the hidden recesses of the self—but in the image itself. In so doing, the sheer pro-visionality of his time-poems and the autonomy achieved in his thing-poetry reveal “the greater difference”—that is, the ontological difference—through which the analogy structuring the relationship between the cosmos and its transcendent provenance unfolds.

Following the recovery of Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics during Weimar classicism and, in particular, Goethe's rehabilitation of the interiority of things—through their embeddedness in a transcendent source of significance and on the basis of the analogia entis—the Mörikan image's provenance in the symbolic order becomes increasingly problematic. This results in a transition away from univocal (pantheist) epiphanies of being on the classical and romantic model and yields two, proto-modernist views of the image in Mörike's works: one reflecting the legacy of Protestant iconoclasm and secularization, the other describing the principle of analogia underpinning the symbolic image of the transcendent. As we have seen, the first view evinces the contradictory slide towards subjectivization and de-personalization characterizing modernist expressivism (Taylor). On the other hand, the second view succeeds in de-subjectifying the image, thus obliquely opening the

poet's horizon to the presence of the transcendent divine. This occurs in Mörike's poetry insofar as his symbol imagery becomes radically pro-visional. Whereas this stress on epigonal time-consciousness yields the punctual ego evident in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, which ultimately effaces the poem's personal core, it can also disclose a novel view of things basing in the analogy of being. As we have seen in "An einem Wintermorgen," "Auf eine Lampe," and "Göttliche Reminiszenz," this is reflected in the shift of characterizing Mörike's best poetry past both the univocal and equivocal views of epiphany characterizing much modern poetry and philosophy. What it reveals is, as we have seen, a truly original vision of the symbolic image's metaphysical basis in the principle of analogia.

This chapter has shown how Mörike responds to the modern crisis of interiority by developing a proto-modernist imagism, according to which epiphany occurs through interspatial and -temporal images irreducible to an immanent horizon of meaning. Hence we have seen that, as the poet's vision becomes increasingly absorbed in the immanent gestalt of the phenomenon, it yields a symbolic image of the transcendent grounded in the analogy of being. We will now further explore this paradox in the thing-poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, which manifests the anti-subjectivist thrust of modernist poetry in exemplary fashion, even as it evokes a Christian-Neoplatonic view of things.

## SIMILE AND SYMBOL IN RILKE'S *NEUE GEDICHTE*: A MODERNIST RECOVERY OF THE ANALOGIA ENTIS

“Within ourselves, life in the visible world alternates with life in the invisible, and thus we experience moments—sometimes brief, sometimes extraordinarily fleeting, sometimes even the tiniest atom of time—when the two worlds grow so very near in us that we can see their intimate touching. At such fleeting moments in us, the veil of visibility is torn apart, and through that tear—that break we are still conscious of in that moment—we can sense that the invisible world (still unearthly, still invisible) *is breathing*; and that this and another world are dissolving into each other. Our life in such moments becomes an unceasing stream in the same way that air when warmed streams upward from the heat.”

— Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*

### Introduction

In a 1951 lecture on modern lyric poetry, physician and expressionist poet Gottfried Benn suggests that Rainer Maria Rilke was perhaps the last great poet of similes (“WIE-Dichter”).<sup>686</sup> Sometime between Weimar classicism and the present age, the poetic use of analogy had become, Benn insists, incorrigibly sentimental: “simile [“wie, oder wie wenn, oder es ist als ob”] is an artificial construct, mostly idle. [...] It is always a break in the vision; it adds something extraneous; it compares; it is not a primary proposition.”<sup>687</sup> If, according to Benn, the “major poet is a great realist, extremely close to all actualities [“Wirklichkeiten”],” Rilke’s achievement was twofold: He employs analogies without projecting his ego (*andichten*) onto “lifeless nature” or “fleeing from the terrestrial”

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<sup>686</sup> Gottfried Benn, *Probleme der Lyrik*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1954), 16.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid. “Der große Dichter aber ist ein großer Realist, sehr nahe allen Wirklichkeiten — er beläßt sich mit Wirklichkeiten, er ist sehr irdisch, eine Zikade, nach der Sage aus der Erde geboren, das athenische Insekt.” My translation.

into the “esoteric or seraphic.”<sup>688</sup> This assessment of the Austrian poet’s style fits, albeit uneasily, into the prevailing narrative of lyric poetry’s secularization in the modern period. According to Benn and legions of contemporary critics, the word is essentially a metaphor born of sensory stimuli—“a nerve” response “translated into an image” (Nietzsche)—thus confining its “reality” to the strictly immanent horizon of consciousness.<sup>689</sup> It has consequently become imperative, according to modern sensibilities, that any poetic reference to the transcendent equivocate: For the only possible alternative to science’s ontological monism is, it seems, a dualism of body and spirit inherited from Protestant Christianity, which by the fin-de-siècle had become increasingly outlandish. Hence Benn’s advice to young poets “to disperse the esoteric and seraphic” in their imagery “tremendously carefully on a hard realistic substratum.”<sup>690</sup> This view reflects the prevailing use of metaphor over simile from French symbolism (Mallarmé and Valéry) to German-language modernism (Trakl and Benn), which—by following the visual arts (Kandinsky and Klee) into abstract expressionism—had shifted lyric speech towards an aesthetics characterized by the image’s equivocal relation to its source in the order (*kosmos*) of things.<sup>691</sup> By contrast, Rilkean modernism, like Anglo-American Imagism (Eliot and Pound), resists the abstracting forces of modernization. And it is, as remains to be seen, precisely Rilke’s concerted use of simile in the thing-poems of *Neue Gedichte* (1907/08) that allowed him to reimagine the image’s symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) of a transcendent, deeply personal meaning not basing in metaphysical monism or dualism but in the analogy of being (*analogia entis*).

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 16, 17. “Erstens die unbelebte Natur, die angedichtet wird [...]” “Dieser seraphische Ton ist keine Überwindung des Irdischen, sondern eine Flucht vor dem Irdischen. Der große Dichter aber ist ein großer Realist, sehr nahe allen Wirklichkeiten — er beläßt sich mit Wirklichkeiten, er ist sehr irdisch, eine Zikade, nach der Sage aus der Erde geboren, das athenische Insekt.” My translation.

<sup>689</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in an Amoral Sense,” in *Truth: Engagements across Philosophical Traditions*, 16.

<sup>690</sup> Benn, 17. “Er wird das Esoterische und Seraphische ungeheuer vorsichtig auf harte realistische Unterlagen verteilen.” My translation.

<sup>691</sup> See Wolfgang Müller, “Rainer Maria Rilkes ‘Neue Gedichte’: Vielfältigkeit eines Gedichtstypus,” in *Deutsche Studien*, vol. 13, ed., Willi Flemming & Kurt Wagner (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1971), 97.

Of German-language modernist poets, perhaps none has a body of work more entangled in secularization and its factious interpretations than does Rilke. *The Book of Hours* (1905)—a cycle of lyric poems awash in Christian-Neoplatonic imagery yet depicting a monk’s apostacy—made him famous as a late symbolist (in the tradition of Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Maeterlinck) with a spiritual kinship to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. While his early poetry thus makes frequent reference to the transcendent divine, it tends to do so equivocally by alternatively conflating and opposing divine and finite poësis.<sup>692</sup> Following Rilke’s youthful enthusiasm for Russian Orthodoxy, however, his use of symbolic imagery became increasingly circumspect regarding its depictions of God. For this reason, his biography is often compared with Heidegger’s development in the first decades of the twentieth-century from budding seminarian to existentialist philosopher.<sup>693</sup> According to Anne Carpenter, for instance, Rilke’s poetics ever more demonstratively evinces an immanent ontology recalling Heideggerian *Dasein*, which lacks any comprehension of the analogy of being (*analogia entis*).<sup>694</sup> While this may hold for Rilke’s masterpieces of the post-war period, it overlooks his development during the years centering in Paris (1902–1910) of a symbolism grounding in the metaphysics of *analogia*. In the following, we shall see that his *Neue Gedichte* (1907/08) develop a poetics of the simile stressing that any likeness between the transcendent and the things in which it slumbers is always characterized by a “greater dissimilarity” between them.<sup>695</sup> Thus affirming both likeness and difference simultaneously, it regards all visible being as participating in the divine without displacing it. If, as remains to be seen, secular Rilke-scholarship has taken note of this

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<sup>692</sup> See Balthasar, *Apokalypse*, 276–299.

<sup>693</sup> See *ibid.*, 193–316.

<sup>694</sup> See Anne Carpenter’s *Theo-Poetics*, 161, regarding the *New Poems*: “The metaphysical problem with Rilke, identified as early as [Balthasar’s] *Apokalypse*, is a failure to comprehend the analogy of being and thus a failure to understand the asymmetrical relationship between God and the world.”

<sup>695</sup> See T.J. White, O.P., *The Analogy of Being*, 5.

metaphysical turn in the poet's view of words and things, it remains a point of confusion for theologians and literary critics interested in assessing his poetry's standing vis-à-vis the Catholic tradition. This essay therefore establishes a paradigm for reading Rilke's thing-poetry from Paris as evoking a Christian-Neoplatonic vision of the cosmos. We contend that it depicts (*darstellen*) the metaphysical concept of appearance that, since the time of Dionysius the Areopagite, had informed the classical, and specifically incarnational, understanding of symbol. That is, Rilke's approach to the lyric image, exemplifying a modernist conception of simile (*Vergleich*), means to trace the emergence of things from their invisible source. The essay analyzes "The Rose-Window," a sonnet depicting the medieval cathedral's foremost symbol of divine reality—its iconic stained-glass rosetta windows. It is here that Rilke's modernist reimagination of analogia is perhaps most explicit. Thus, we shall see how the sonnet neutralizes modernity's opposition to the transcendent by depicting a contemplative vision of the divine through apophysis and analogy.

The understanding of analogia at stake is specifically that of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which had underscored the "greater dissimilarity" tempering the likeness between finite and transcendent being. In recovering the central role of this principle within Rilke's thing-poetry, we find Rilke-scholarship habitually seeking to circumnavigate, if not reject outright, the metaphysical entanglements of Rilke's symbolic manner of presentation in the *Neue Gedichte*. The very possibility that literary modernism might rest on deeply considered and enduring, Christian-Neoplatonic foundations seems all but inconceivable for most contemporary critics.<sup>696</sup> For instance, in discussing Rilke's letter to Clara from July 6, 1906, which describes analogy as the narrow "entryway" into the essence of things, Wolfgang Müller employs the Scholastic term "analogia entis" to suggest "how

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<sup>696</sup> A notable exception is Joanna Rzepa, *Modernism and Theology: Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Czesław Miłosz* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 197–260.

Rilkean things are connected in a hidden manner according to a symbolist worldview.”<sup>697</sup> Instead, however, of recognizing the thing-poetry’s affinity with premodern aesthetics, Müller takes French symbolism’s increasingly immanentized, secular notion of poetic speech as its prototype. Thus, he contends that “epiphany” in Rilke’s thing-poetry “should, as is principally the case in modernism (Joyce, Woolf, Hofmannsthal, and Broch), not be understood in a religious sense.”<sup>698</sup> Judith Ryan similarly recognizes that a principle of analogic relation underlies the imagery of the *Neue Gedichte*. Unlike Müller, however, she discerns its true origins: “Transformation” is, Ryan observes, “a process with roots in the idea of analogy” and, particularly, the “medieval understanding of analogia, [...] with which Rilke would have especially been familiar through the writings of Augustine, but also through medieval lyric poetry.”<sup>699</sup> Thus, she contends that Rilke understood analogy as “the form of divine revelation” and draws this astute conclusion: as “subjective as the analogies [of the thing-poems] may appear, they disclose something eternally valid. This is the manner in which Rilke seeks to overcome the subjectivity of lyric poetry.”<sup>700</sup> Although Ryan recognizes the crucial, indeed, deeply personal role that the metaphysical principle of analogia plays in Rilke’s thing-poetry, she repudiates

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<sup>697</sup> Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Neue Gedichte*, 94, 106. Müller cites the letter’s key passage: “Und die Freude an solchen großen Dingen [paintings in an art gallery] geht so ganz in Nuancen vor sich, daß man später nicht sagen kann, sie war so oder so gefärbt. Und man weiß nichts von ihr, wenn man nicht ein paar Anmerkungen hat, aus dem Momentanen heraus, die helfen könnten. So geht es mir auch mit dem Bildnis aus dem letzten Jahre in Berlin [“La Cucana” von Goya] Es müßte einem vor solchen Dingen ein Vergleich kommen, der wie ein kleiner Eingang ist, durch den man immer wieder hineinkam” (94). Rilke, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1904 bis 1907*, eds., Ruth Sieber-Rilke und Carl Sieber (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1939) 163.

<sup>698</sup> Manfred Engel and Dorothea Lauterbach, eds., *Rilke-Handbuch: Leben — Werk — Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), 304. “Die Epiphanie — eigentlich die Erscheinung des Göttlichen unter den Menschen — ist hier, wie grundsätzlich in der Moderne, etwa bei Joyce, Woolf, Hofmannsthal (*Chandos-Brief*), und Broch, nicht in einem religiösen Sinne zu verstehen.” Translations of this text are my own.

<sup>699</sup> Judith Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung: Poetische Struktur und Dichtungstheorie in R.M. Rilkes Lyrik der Mittleren Periode, (1907-1914)*, (München: Winkler Verlag, 1972), 41-43. “Der Vergleich ist [...] als wesentliche Voraussetzung der ‘Verwandlung’ zu verstehen” (ibid., 43). “Nach der mittelalterlichen Philosophie, mit der Rilke insbesondere durch die Schriften Augustinus’ [...] vertraut war, ist die Analogie die Offenbarungsform des Ewigen” (ibid., 41). Translations of this text are own.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 41. “So subjektiv die Analogien auch scheinen mögen, sie deuten auf ewig Gültiges hin; auf diese Weise versucht denn auch Rilke, die subjective Tendenz der Lyrik zu überwinden.”



its ontological status as symbol.<sup>701</sup> Following Käte Hamburger's reorientation of Rilke-studies in terms of Husserlian phenomenology, she, like the main current of Rilke-scholarship, consequently equivocates about his imagery's presentation (*Darstellung*) of the transcendent.<sup>702</sup> Similar to Ryan, Jürgen Söring has hazarded the idea that, when regarded as a response to the disaggregation meaning and being ramping up at the fin-de-siècle, Rilke's adherence to mimetic poetry in the *New Poems* suggests an attempt to recover the *analogia entis*.<sup>703</sup> Unlike Ryan, however, he suggests that Rilke's turn to the metaphysical principle of *analogia* redresses fin-de-siècle language skepticism by recovering classical symbolism. The symbol is his thing-poetry's answer to the contemporary crisis of interiority—the apparent meaninglessness of things once denuded of intrinsic form—that had resulted from the loss of Christian-Neoplatonism's view of words and things as participating in the divine order of the cosmos.

Since Maximus the Confessor (c. 580 — 662 AD) at the latest, Christian orthodoxy has held that recognizing and expressing God's presence in the world requires analogic predication. Whereas later Franciscan theology (Duns Scotus) would fatefully espouse the “univocity of being” and whereas, by contrast, the symbolic theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (5<sup>th</sup> — 6<sup>th</sup> c. AD) had underscored the radical alterity of the divine logos—its supra-essentiality and, hence, sheer non-being as transcendent good (*thearchia*)—Maximus affirms “that logos and logoi are analogically related.”<sup>704</sup> For the God, who “wisely inscribed [the marvelous things that we see] and is ineffably inscribed within them, is rendered legible when He is read by us, communicating to us solely the concept that he exists, and not what He is ... allowing Himself to be seen *by analogy* through visible

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<sup>701</sup> See Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 142.

<sup>702</sup> Cf. J. Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung*, 49.

<sup>703</sup> Jürgen Söring, “Zu Rilkes poetischem Konzept im Abstraktionsprozess der Moderne,” in *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, eds., Manfred Engel and Dieter Lamping (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1999) 207.

<sup>704</sup> Pfau, “Seeing and Being Seen Coincide,” 35.

things as their Creator (*analogos heauton dia ton horaton*).<sup>705</sup> At once affirming and surpassing the apophaticism that underlay Dionysius' fusion of Christianity with Neoplatonic philosophy, Maximus prepared the way for the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and, thereafter, 'Thomas Aquinas' (c. 1225–1274) defense of the use of divine names on the metaphysical basis of the *analogia entis* in his *Summa theologiae*.<sup>706</sup> The thing-poems of the *Neue Gedichte* are best understood as symbolic images in this tradition—hence, not as bad copies of the absolute or arbitrary signs, but as presentations (*symbolische Darstellungen*) of their source in the finite poet, the world, and the transcendent through analogic predication.<sup>707</sup> By recognizing the metaphysical entanglements of modernist poetics, this chapter probes what Thomas Pfau identifies as “an integral, properly form-giving feature of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*, namely, the way that the exceptional already slumbers within and erupts from within the ordinary.”<sup>708</sup> In the following, we shall see *how* precisely the irruption of the epiphanic from the realm of ordinary appearances in Rilke's thing-poetry suggests the co-inherence of sight and insight, meaning and being: namely, through the fraught syntax of similes stressing the difference between

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<sup>705</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: the Ambigua*, 1128D. Cited in “Seeing and Being Seen Coincide,” 35. Maximus thus outlines what the Fourth Lateran Council comes to term the analogy of being: “All things are related to Him without being confused with Him, who is the essential and personally distinct logos of God the Father” (A, 7: 1077C).

<sup>706</sup> Maximus affirms that “it is not possible for the infinite and the finite to exist simultaneously on the same level of being” (A, 7: 1081B). Cited in “Seeing and Being Seen Coincide,” 35. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1: 13: 5, 6, and 10. Apophasis (from Greek: “ἀποφάσις to ‘speak off,’ deny”) indicates the *via negativa* whereby the transcendent One is disclosed through pro-visional—that is, transient yet nonetheless revelatory—symbols. See “apophasis,” *OED Online*, (Oxford University Press, March 2021), accessed on 5/31/2021. On the groundbreaking use of apophasis in Dionysius' symbolic theology, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1992), 79.

<sup>707</sup> Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 158-159. Gadamer holds that the image's ontological manner (*Seinsweise*) of presenting the *Urbild* stands between that of the sign and symbol and that it differs from the latter in that it implies an increase in the being of the *Urbild*: For the image present it while remaining ontologically distinct from it. Hence the difference between a painting or a poem representing a nation and the nation's flag. In my view, Gadamer's distinction does not adequately acknowledge the possibility of a *symbolic image*—that is, an image ontologically identical to its source yet at once radically different from it. The symbolic image presupposes the *analogia entis*, which preserves the ontological distinction between the symbolic image and its source. To put the matter in Scholastic terms: the existence of the symbolic image does not fully correspond to the essence that it discloses, whereas existence and essence are absolutely one in transcendent divine.

<sup>708</sup> Thomas Pfau, “Absolute Gegebenheit,” 251.

the image and its source in the transcendent divine.<sup>709</sup> Thus, we shall see that Rilke's lyric speech recovers Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism by staging an undesigning contemplation (*Anschauen*) of things through apophasis—understood on the basis of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite's symbolic theology as the practice of negating the image in order to disclose its participation, by way of analogia, in the transcendent divine. And small wonder that Rilke's thing-poetry is symbolic in this sense, given that it takes the gothic cathedral as one of its central motifs and, as remains to be seen, given the poet's youthful enthusiasm for Russian Orthodox iconography and liturgy.

Focusing on this complex of motifs, the chapter first analyzes “Die Fensterrose,” a sonnet depicting the cathedral's foremost symbol of divine reality—its iconic stained-glass windows—wherein Rilke's reimagination of the analogia entis is perhaps most explicit. In so doing, this section establishes a paradigm for reading the *Neue Gedichte* as recovering Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism. Specifically, it describes how “Die Fensterrose” neutralizes modernity's bias against the metaphysical origins of appearances by depicting a contemplative vision of the transcendent divine through apophasis and analogia. The final section of this chapter investigates the origins of Rilke's symbolist poetics of the image in his equivocal appropriation of Russian Orthodox iconography. We shall see that his letters, essays, and poetry from Russia evince a rudimentary understanding of Christian-Neoplatonic apophasis and, thus, of the contemplative vision of the transcendent divine preceding its presentation (*Darstellung*) through symbolic imagery. However, it emerges that Rilke's youthful enthusiasm for Russian iconography remains superficial insofar as his writings equivocate about the symbolic image's origins in the antecedent order of the cosmos. As remains to be seen, Rilke clings to a modern view of the self as the symbol's expressive source—despite his affirmation of the transcendent. Nevertheless, we contend that Rilke's development of a symbolist poetics during the

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid., 252.

middle period in Paris follows from this crucial yet oft-neglected engagement with Russian Orthodox iconography.

In chapter five, we show how Rilke's early, "sentimental" understanding (in the precise Schillerian sense) of symbolic images dovetails upon his return to the West with French symbolism and avantgarde visual art. First, we contend that Rilke's concern with the visual arts was motivated, following his engagement with Nietzschean iconoclasm, by fin-de-siècle crisis of language skepticism—which, tellingly, had coincided with his trips to Russia and his encounter with Russian Orthodox iconography in the company of Lou Andreas-Salomé. Regarding his 1902 monograph on the Worpsweder artist colony, we then describe Rilke's search for equivalence relations ("Äquivalenzen") between mind and world through natural symbols, as manifest in modernist landscape paintings. In so doing, it becomes evident that early Rilke had adopted a Nietzschean view of art's essentially metaphorical relation to nature and, thus, of the symbol's equivocal transcendence. Next, the argument describes a key transition in Rilke's conception of the symbol: namely, a metaphysical turn in his grasp of the thing's place in the cosmos pitting the equivocal sense of the natural symbol expressed in *Worpswede* against the analogy-based symbolism that Rilke learns under the influence of Rodin. Specifically, Rilke comes to embrace the master's view of poësis as an analog to natural and divine "création," thus reshaping his sense of the symbolic image's participation in the cosmic order of things through the *analogia entis*. While, as Pfau observes, Rilke had sought in the avant-garde visual arts freedom "from the shackles of aesthetic convention and its pre-established codes of beauty and mundane reference," he increasingly recognizes that this does not necessitate the disavowal of traditional symbolic forms.<sup>710</sup> What he says of his mentor applies to him no less:

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<sup>710</sup> Ibid., 247. See Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4: 418: "Neue Beziehungen verbanden [Rodin] fester mit der Vergangenheit seiner Kunst. Diese Vergangenheit und ihre Größe, an der so viele wie an einer Last getragen hatten, ihm wurde sie der Flügel,

New associations linked him more closely with the tradition of his art. This past and its greatness, which so many before him had felt to be a burden, lent wings to Rodin, carrying him aloft. For when he sensed confirmation in those years, affirmation of what he wanted and was searching for, it came from the art of antiquity and from the furrowed darkness of cathedrals.<sup>711</sup>

The letters and monographs from this period evince a counter perspective on things (*res*) as belonging to the organic order of divine reality and, therefore, as deriving from the cosmos' invisible origins. This corresponds, we shall see, with his development of the symbolist poetics of the *Neue Gedichte*. After addressing Rilke's monograph on Rodin (1903), the chapter concludes by describing how Rilke advances upon Rodin's understanding of the symbolic image in the *Briefe über Cézanne* (1907). In these letters, we see Rilke resolutely returning to challenges raised by fin-de-siècle nominalism in order to overcome the lingering equivocation vis-à-vis the transcendent that he discerned in Rodin's aesthetics. As remains to be seen, Rilke does so by articulating a hermeneutic of the verbal image basing in its likeness to the paintings and to the painter's vision of the things. Hence, he does so, we shall see, on the basis of the principle of analogia underpinning the thing's "final and definitive image-existence."<sup>712</sup>

### **Apophysis and the analogia entis in "Die Fensterrose"**

"Die Fensterrose" (1906)

Da drin: das träge Treten ihrer Tatzen  
macht eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt;  
und wie dann plötzlich eine von den Katzen  
den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt,

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der ihn trug. Denn wenn er in jener Zeit je eine Zustimmung empfangen hat, eine Bestärkung dessen, was er wollte und suchte, so kam sie von den Dingen der Antike und aus dem faltigen Dunkel der Kathedralen."

<sup>711</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, trans. Victoria Charles, (New York: Parkstone International, 2011), 9, accessed 6/28/2021, ProQuest Ebook Central. Henceforth: *Rodin*.

<sup>712</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, trans. Joel Agee (New York: New Point Press, 1985) 72; Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA, 4: 631.

gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt, -  
den Blick, der, wie von eines Wirbels Kreis  
ergriffen, eine kleine Weile schwimmt  
und dann versinkt und nichts mehr von sich weiß,

wenn dieses Auge, welches scheinbar ruht,  
sich auftut und zusammenschlägt mit Tosen  
und ihn hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut -:

So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein  
der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen  
ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.<sup>713</sup>

Written in January 1906, several months after Rilke had first visited the cathedral at Chartres with Rodin, “Die Fensterrose” belongs to a cycle of six poems in *Neue Gedichte* addressing gothic architecture.<sup>714</sup> The title of the poem refers to a stained-glass rose window, perhaps the most magnificent feature of the twelfth-century architectural style envisioned by Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis.<sup>715</sup> Rilke would have known from weeks of studying the gothic style at the Bibliothèque nationale, begun upon his arrival in Paris in the fall of 1902, that Suger’s use of light symbolism through stained-glass was the principal innovation of the new basilica.<sup>716</sup> Inspired by scholasticism’s surge of interest in Dionysius’ symbolic theology, as evidenced in his friend Hugh of St.-Victor’s commentaries on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Suger had envisioned “translucent panels, ‘vested’, as he put it, with sacred symbols, [...] like veils at once shrouding and revealing the ineffable.”<sup>717</sup> Rilke clearly

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<sup>713</sup> Rilke, “Die Fensterrose,” WKA, 3: 29.

<sup>714</sup> See Briggite L. Bradley, “The Internal Unity of Rilke’s Cathedral Poems,” in *The German Quarterly*, March 1968, 41: 2, 207-209.

<sup>715</sup> See Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of the Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

<sup>716</sup> See Bradley, 207, on Rilke’s study of gothic cathedrals. She quotes his letter from September 26, 1902, in which Rilke writes that “diese letzte Woche bin ich jeden Tag von 10 Uhr an bis 5 Uhr nachmittags in der Nationalbibliothek gewesen und habe viele Bücher gelesen und viele Reproduktionen von Kathedralen aus dem XII. und XIII. Jahrhundert gesehen. Das war eine große, große Kunst.” Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1902 bis 1906*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke und Carl Sieber (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1930), 43.

<sup>717</sup> Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 120-121.

understood the stained-glass windows' apophatic symbolism; for instead of focusing on the rose window's sheer luminosity, "Die Fensterrose" plunges the beholder's vision into an abyss akin to what Dionysius sublimely terms "the ray of divine darkness, which transcends all existence."<sup>718</sup> The poem's emphasis of the window's "darkness"—an intonation already evident in its title, "*Fensterrose*," which suggests the German word for "dark" (*finster*)—is not poetic caprice but instead serves to present the thing as it is actually given from the source of appearances.<sup>719</sup> As Otto von Simson remarks in his classic study of the cathedrals at Saint-Denis and Chartres, "gothic interiors are [not] particularly bright (although they are generally much more luminous than their Romanesque predecessors)."<sup>720</sup> Hence he observes that stained-glass windows "are structurally and aesthetically not openings to admit light, but transparent walls" evoking the positive valuation in Dionysian theology of the image's materiality, contingency, and darkness as a *veiled* disclosure of the light of being.<sup>721</sup> It is by depicting the rose window in its *reality*—namely as a visibly darkened counterpart of its light source—that Rilke's thing-poem obliquely realizes (*verwirklichen*) the transcendent. As we shall see, the symbolic imagery of "Die Fensterrose" presents the thing seen in an indirect manner that, similar to the *Corpus areopagiticum*, foregrounds the radical difference characterizing the relation between creation and the divine.

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<sup>718</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology* 1, 1, 998B—1000A, quoted in Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 19.

<sup>719</sup> Hence his assertion in the monograph on Rodin that the gothic style arose from the "necessity" of obtaining an objective correlative for the angst inspired by death and the day of reckoning: "Und wer diese Gebilde sah, der empfand, daß sie nicht aus einer Laune geboren waren, nicht aus einem spielerischen Versuch, neue, unerhörte Formen zu finden. Die Not hatte sie geschaffen" (Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4, 408).

<sup>720</sup> Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 3.

<sup>721</sup> Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 4. Simson observes that "the stained-glass window [...] denies the impenetrable nature of matter, receiving its visual existence from an energy that transcends it. Light, which is ordinarily concealed by matter, appears as the active principle; and matter is aesthetically real only insofar as it partakes of, and is defined by, the luminous quality of light" (ibid.).

While the sonnet's title points the reader to its subject, the presentation of the rose window does not overtly commence until the final tercet, when it becomes clear that an analogy ("so...wie") subtends the poem's tortured syntax. Even then, Rilke never describes the thing's particular features, but instead remains at a distance, thus upsetting the beholder's expectation as to the reality unfolding before his gaze.<sup>722</sup> Rather, the sonnet opens by disorienting the beholder, only allowing him to refocus on the rose window after de-subjectivizing his perspective—namely, by leading away from the ego's preconceived notion of the thing seen. In so doing, this poem progresses through apophasis (not-saying/-seeing) to insight into the thing's transcendent origins. This process begins in the opening verse with an ungrammatical deictic gesture that, in directing the beholder to look inwards, casts his gaze into an abyss whence the thing seen arises: "Da drin: das träge Treten ihrer Taten/ macht eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt." Instead of referring to the light of the rose window or, indeed, to anything visible at all, these lines throw the reader into an ominous realm of acoustic phenomena distinguished by sharply alliterated 't'-s and guttural vowels that intimate the torpid pacing ("träge Treten") of cats. Rilke heightens the sense of disorientation here by deferring the pronoun's ("ihrer") referent ("Katzen") to the fourth verse, hence, by depicting the cats' paws as yet in isolation from their bodies, and by nominalizing "treten," which parallels his broader use of "abstract neuter adjectives as nouns" in the *Neue Gedichte* to name what is "foreign and incomprehensible."<sup>723</sup> However, it remains to be seen that the thing-poetry's apparent distortion of the phenomenon is anything but "abstract;"<sup>724</sup> for it never undermines the metaphysical principles of

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<sup>722</sup> Rilke's thing-poems often only indirectly describe their object. Consider the first of Rilke's trio of poems on the main portal at Chartres, which initially depicts its statues "by a simile having an effect so graphic that we lose sight of them as sculptures," before returning the reader's attention to various details above the door (Bradley, "The Internal Unity of Rilke's Cathedral Poems," 212).

<sup>723</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 311.

<sup>724</sup> Regarding Rilke's use of "abstrakte Neutra" in "Blaue Hortensie," Müller argues that "es läßt sich hier eine Technik der Abstraktion erkennen, die der Hinwendung zur Abstraktion in der modernen Malerei entspricht" (ibid.).



mimesis and analogia but instead allows for a more objective (*sachlich*), concrete presentation of the thing seen. While the disembodied sound of paw-steps is salient in these first verses, it only serves to amplify the profounder silence of their surroundings (“eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt”), thus suggesting a vast expanse—like a cavern or the nave and crypt of a gothic cathedral. Hence, the poem’s disorienting beginning depicts a polar intensification (*Steigerung*) of sound opening onto an interiority shrouded in darkness and silence—one inwardly uniting the seer, the thing seen, and the transcendent source of the cosmos.

Rather than entirely expunging the realm of appearances, and the beholder with them, the opening depicts the thing’s genesis from the womb of phenomenality. Hence the opening intimates a veiled Marian symbolism:<sup>725</sup> namely, the womb-like realm of pure dynamism—the *Chôra*—in between the *eidos* and the *eikon*, “within which creation forms” as the invisible emerges into appearance.<sup>726</sup> According to Jennifer Cushman, Rilke knew this tradition from his encounter with Russian iconography; for his favorite icon was, she explains, “the *znamenie* [...] in which the Virgin Mother is portrayed with all of creation within her.”<sup>727</sup> By depicting the window through an apophatic symbolism faintly recalling the icon, “Die Fensterrose” elicits undesigning contemplation (*Anschauen*) of the thing’s mimetic gestalt. If, from the perspective of modernity, the rose window is

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<sup>725</sup> The symbolism of rose windows is often associated with the Virgin Mary, the “Mystical Rose” (St. Bernard of Clairvaux). See Laura Lieber, “A Stroll in the Garden: A Brief History of the Rose without Thorns,” accessed online on 2/16/2020, <<https://dukeperformances.duke.edu/stroll-in-the-garden/>>.

<sup>726</sup> See Maria M. Shevelkina, “The Chôra of Dionisy’s Wall-Painting,” Shevelkina explains that *Chôra*, as described in Plato’s *Timaeus*, plays a key role in the process of creation for the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition. “In order to enact the transition from the *eidos*—the essence, the invisible world of Being—to *eikon*—the visible image of this Being, the known and ordered cosmos—Plato requires a third entity for facilitating this transition: *Chôra*. Receiving *eidos* and *eikon*, *Chôra* is understood as the womb or matrix (*ekmageion*), within which creation forms. [...] Its constantly morphing edges are the periphery of the churning *eidos* and *eikon*, contained within *Chôra*’s ever-mutating womb” (17–18).

<sup>727</sup> Cushman, “Beyond Ekphrasis: *Logos* and *Eikon* in Rilke’s Poetry,” in *College Literature*, 29:3 (Summer 2002) finds echoes of the “*znamenie* icon” in the third of his *Duineser Elegien*, but it stands to reason that his eccentric Marian devotion reaches much further back in Rilke’s biography and art (ibid., 103). His use of Marian motifs is most explicit in *Das Marianleben*, which he wrote after finding a book in the library at Duino Castle on Orthodox iconography from Mount Athos and the Kiev Monastery of the Caves (ibid., 93).

not an image in any obvious sense but an abstract prism of light and color, Rilke's view of the phenomenon clears our horizon of this preconception, thus allowing its elementary form to appear. For it emerges that the phantasmagorical interplay of light and darkness through the rose window discloses an image of divine reality—both literally and metaphysically speaking. Whereas one of the rose windows in the cathedral's transepts is usually dedicated to Mary, the rose window over the main western portal traditionally depicts the Last Judgement. Rilke deftly combines the two figures, thus emphasizing the themes of death and rebirth through contemplation born of fear and trembling. Hence his assertion in the monograph on Rodin that the gothic style arose from the “necessity” of finding an objective correlative for the “angst” inspired by death and the day of reckoning:

And whosoever saw these images felt that they were not born of caprice, not of some playful attempt to find new, unheard of forms. They were made of necessity. [The medieval Christian] escaped to these visible things from his angst before the invisible courts of a heavy faith; [he] fled from uncertainty to this realization [*Verwirklichung*]. One still sought this reality in God, yet it was no longer by inventing images of him and trying [fancifully] to imagine the Far-too-distant [*Vielzufernen*]: rather, one was pious inasmuch as he took all of his angst and poverty—all fearfulness and the gestures of the little ones—into His house and placed them upon His heart.<sup>728</sup>

Unlike Heideggerian “Angst”—which cannot take anything as its adequate object and thus reveals the no-thingness of *Dasein* precluding personal relationship to the cosmos—this account of the “angst” informing the gothic style recalls a chaste fear of the Lord.<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>728</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4, 408. “Und wer diese Gebilde sah, der empfand, daß sie nicht aus einer Laune geboren waren, nicht aus einem spielerischen Versuch, neue, unerhörte Formen zu finden. Die Not hatte sie geschaffen. Aus der Angst vor den unsichtbaren Gerichten eines schweren Glaubens hatte man sich zu diesem Sichtbaren gerettet, vor dem Ungewissen flüchtete man zu dieser Verwirklichung. *Noch suchte man sie in Gott, nicht mehr indem man ihm Bilder erfand und versuchte, sich den Vielzufernen vorzustellen*: indem man alle Angst und Armut, alles Bangsein und die Gebärden der Geringen in sein Haus trug, in seine Hand legte, auf sein Herz stellte, war man fromm.“ My translation and emphasis.

<sup>729</sup> See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 184-191.

While Rilke perhaps overemphasizes the anxieties motivating the expression of the Christian faith in gothic art (at the expense of hope and joy, considering how Psalm 84 describes the heavenly “courts” and Suger describes his art), this passage indicates key aspects of his own poetics and its continuity with classical symbolism.<sup>730</sup> First, the image is a “realization” in and through the transcendent divine expressing the finite artist’s interiority while remaining irreducible to it. As a disclosure of the invisible Godhead in the realm of material substances—in the flesh, as it were—the rose window’s presentation of its source in the divine and human poet suggests a realist metaphysics, according to which artworks manifest a cosmic order (*logos*) inwardly uniting the beholder with the thing seen on the model of the Incarnation. Rilke’s account of the gothic style thus suggests what he later terms “*Dingwerdung*” (literally: “becoming a real thing”), following Cézanne’s notion of modern painting as *réalisation*, meaning “the self-constitution of things in the apprehending consciousness prior to any positing or reification of the appearance in question.”<sup>731</sup> Hence this passage’s crucial recognition that God (“den Vielzufernen”) remains at an infinite distance from creation, even as he is inmost to it, which underscores the symbolic image’s apophatic manner of presentation. Envisioning the transcendent divine through undesigning contemplation requires, Rilke suggests, a harrowing of the modern subject, conceived as the source of sentimental images “invented” through caprice and fancy. Hence, it is by looking way from oneself in fear and trembling—precipitating what Christian-Neoplatonism terms “*metanoia*”—and by adopting “the gestures of the little ones” that one becomes an image in the flesh and one’s art manifests its divine

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<sup>730</sup> See NRSV, Psalm 84, 1:2: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.”

<sup>731</sup> Pfau, “Absolute Gegebenheit,” 245. Pfau contends that “the metaphysics of *Dingwerdung* rests above all with understanding that visual experience is fundamentally an act of witnessing, not appropriation. Defining of its phenomenology is the capacity of the beholder to let the thing in question simply unveil itself by discarding all spatiotemporal trappings (“wie ein Mantel, eine Last [. . .] und eine Maske” [KA 1: 510]) or vestigia, as Bonaventure calls them.”

origins.<sup>732</sup> The archetype of this transformation through apophysis is, of course, Mary's *fiat*: her supplication, in chaste fear, at the Annunciation to the will of the Father.

Returning to the depiction of inwardness in the opening verses of "Die Fensterrose," we can see how theosis occurs through polar reversals within the womb-like cradle of appearances. J. Ryan has described the myriad polarities structuring Rilke's thing-poetry—such as darkness and light, sound and silence—in terms of a "reversal" (*Umschlag*) and "transformation" recalling the operational logic of the classical symbol. Specifically, she argues that transformative insight occurs in the *Neue Gedichte* through a "singular process" of reversal, "which begins with an apparently absolute separation between opposites before finally opening onto a higher plane where the two are unified."<sup>733</sup> Thus, it is through polarities generating what icon theology terms a "reverse" or "counter perspective" on the thing seen that Rilke's images disclose the transcendent. By de-subjectivizing the beholder's gaze on things, reverse perspective first allows one to hear the ineffable ("andre Seite/ der Gesang") and to see the invisible ("andre Seite der Natur").<sup>734</sup> Recalling Husserl's *epoche*, in which the "natural attitude" of consciousness is temporarily suspended, contemplative vision unfolds as an objectively real "event" (*Ereignis*) rather than a subjective "experience" in that it clears the beholder's horizon of all (pre)conceptions or "positings" (*Setzungen*) regarding the material constitution of the visible. As a result, the thing's "bourgeois reality" is supplanted by its timeless *eidos*.<sup>735</sup> This makes it

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<sup>732</sup> What Rilke describes is the kenotic dynamic, whereby the divine logos is concretely realized in the accidents of existence. It thus recalls modern accounts of kenosis from St. Therese of Lisieux's "little way" (*petite voie*) to Catholic philosopher Ferdinand Ulrich's phenomenological description of finitization ("Verendlichungsbewegung des Seins"). See Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo abyssus: Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998).

<sup>733</sup> J. Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung*, 23. Regarding the retelling of Odysseus' exploits in "Insel der Sirenen," she notes how the danger of the siren song undergoes a reversal into silence: "[...] denn nun ist sie nicht im Tosen/ und im Wüten, wo sie immer war" (37).

<sup>734</sup> Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung*, 38.

<sup>735</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 72. Translation altered. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 631. See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, on the "phenomenological attitude," 47–51.

possible for the beholder's attention to refocus on the thing's emergence from its transcendent source—what Ryan equivocally terms “its empty middle”—where the “realisation of the thing's form [*Gestaltwerdung*] in [its] structural composition” first unfolds.<sup>736</sup> Although, according to Ryan, this process of reversal often seems to entail “the elimination of any personal relationship to the object,” it nonetheless issues “in its opposite” by presenting “an excess of meaning” (“eine größere Bedeutung”).<sup>737</sup> For, as she proceeds to explain, the “poet also participates in the transformation and is taken up into the thing transformed,” such that the thing “no longer” appears “as an isolated phenomenon, but rather as a part of a relational system.”<sup>738</sup> It thus becomes an image presenting the (metaphysical) schema of appearances—namely, what philosophers and poets prior to the twentieth and twenty-first century unabashedly termed a “symbol.” What Ryan and myriad scholars equivocally defining the thing-poem as a “phenomenon” overlook is that its de-subjectivized manner of presentation (*Seinsweise*) in the *Neue Gedichte* accords with the apophysis characterizing symbolic theology (Dionysius).<sup>739</sup> For these images of the thing seen veil the numinous presence in darkness, thus preserving the ontological distinction between divine and created being. Rightly understood, the Rilkean thing-poem is not a copy but a *symbolic image* of its source.

By staging the event of reverse perspective inwardly transforming the beholder, the thing-poems of *Neue Gedicht* suggest the transfigured realm of “world-interior-space” (*Weltinnenraum*)—a neologism coined by Rilke indicating the unification of the beholder's interiority with that of the

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<sup>736</sup> J. Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung*, 49. “Die Gestaltwerdung der Dinge in einem strukturellen Gefüge.”

<sup>737</sup> J. Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung*, 36. “Das Auslöschen jedes persönlichen Bezugs zum Gegenstand, das aber schließlich in sein Gegenteil umschlagen muß.”

<sup>738</sup> J. Ryan, 49, 43; my translation: “Nicht mehr als isoliertes Phänomen, sondern als Teil eines Bezugssystems. In dieser Herstellung des ‘Bezugs’ besteht die ‘Verwandlung’ des Dinges, das auf diese Weise eine größere Bedeutung erlangt.”

<sup>739</sup> See Fischer, 248: “I am largely in agreement with Hamburger when she writes that “the [thing] is not a symbol, but a ‘phenomenon.’” Ryan also equivocates on this point: The thing-poems “‘symbolisieren’ nicht [die Gestaltwerdung der Dinge], sondern sie stellen ihn unmittelbar dar” (ibid., 49). If, following Käte Hamburger, Ryan denies that the thing-poetry presents its meaning in the manner of a symbol, she nonetheless describes its analogic gestalt, its participatory structure, and its presentation of the transcendent through polar reversal—thus recalling the classical symbol.

cosmos. Rilke's first use of this term comes in the fourth stanza of "Es winkt zu Föhlung fast aus allen Dingen" (1914):

Durch alle Wesen reicht der *eine* Raum:  
Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still  
durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,  
ich seh hinaus, und *in* mir wächst der Baum (KA 2: 113).

As Fischer observes, Rilke had already articulated the idea of world-interior-space in a journal entry from 1913 entitled *Erlebnis (I)* and *(II)*.<sup>740</sup> This text recalls related moments of insight (*Einsicht*) into the "other side of nature" through natural symbols—the tree and the bird—which had occurred between 1906 and 1908, during Rilke's most intense period of work on the *Neue Gedichte*.

Remembering these events, he writes of a "southern garden (Capri), when a birdcall in the open and his inner consciousness were one. [...] On that occasion he had closed his eyes, so that he might not be confused by the contour of his body in such a generously granted experience, and infinity passed into him from all sides in so familiar a manner that he could believe he felt within himself the gentle presence of the stars which had now appeared."<sup>741</sup> This passage attests, as Pfau remarks, to Rilke's recognition that "three-dimensional, Newtonian space and the spatiotemporal nature of eidetic intuition are not fungible, but ontologically distinct. Whereas the former is grasped by quantification and division, the latter exhibits absolute continuity: 'ohne Raum / von jenem Raum zu nehmen, den die Dinge rings verringern.'"<sup>742</sup> What distinguishes and elevates Rilke's thing-poetry, however, from his prose accounts of world-interior-space is the poem's apophatic manner of presentation (*Seinsweise*) and, thus, the radical difference between infinite and finite being that it discloses.

Although the experience of interiorization narrated in *Erlebnis (I)* and *(II)* parallels "Die Fensterrose"

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<sup>740</sup> Rilke, *Erlebnis (I)* and *(II)*, WKA 4, 666—70. See Luke Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist: Rilke and the New Poems* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 197-200.

<sup>741</sup> Cited in Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 198.

<sup>742</sup> Pfau, "Absolute Gegebenheit," 255.

in its recovery of the cosmological order of symbols, it lacks the quasi-phenomenological rigor of the thing-poems from *Neue Gedichte*. For the prose account of his participation in the cosmos (“Weltinnenraum”) neither depicts the harrowing de-subjectization of the beholder’s gaze as it transforms into an image nor foregrounds its analogic gestalt. The symbols of *Erlebnis* (I) and (II) are therefore prone to univocal predication vis-à-vis the symbol’s transcendent source: the beholder, the birdcall, and the stars “were one” without distinction.<sup>743</sup> On the other hand, insofar as “Die Fensterrose” stages insight into the thing’s essence through apophysis, the poem de-subjectivizes its symbolic image-existence, thus allowing the metaphysical principle of analogia underpinning its gestalt to fully emerge.

This process of transformation and insight into the rose window’s essence begins almost imperceptibly in verse three of the first quatrain, when Rilke introduces the simile shaping the sonnet’s presentation (*Darstellung*) of the rose window. In keeping with the opening images, he only does so obliquely in order to stress the radical difference between the various poles of the comparison: the cat and the window, the human and the divine. Thus, it happens that the meaning disclosed in the final tercet of this poem—the rose window’s analogic presentation of the deity (“So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein/ [...] / ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein”)—only gradually appears, as though materializing from the dark cradle of existence, where the Godhead first distinguishes order from chaos. For, the poet’s use of “wie” in verse three initially seems to function as an adverbial intensifier (“how”): “und wie dann plötzlich eine von den Katzen/ den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt, // gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt[.]“ Bordering on a non sequitur, this verse depicts an abrupt insight initiating a process of transformation. If, from a certain

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<sup>743</sup> H. R. Klieneberger’s reading of Rilkean poetics in light of the British romantic tradition recognizes this potential in Rilke’s poetics, which he suggests has returned to a pantheistic notion of “immanent transcendence” (50). H. R. Klieneberger, *George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal and the Romantic Tradition*, (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1991).

perspective, this force resembles violence (*Gewalt*) and thus attains a demonic facet recalling the Biblical “angel of the abyss” (*Abaddon*), Rilke sees through the negative—through death, sin, and destruction—to its source in the transcendent divine, who created both the world and the abyss whence the cosmos first arose.<sup>744</sup> Beyond intensifying the opening verses’ disorienting gesture (“Da drin”) to the point of sheer chaos, then, the latent analogy (“wie dann plötzlich”) also opens the dynamic of interiorization (*Verinnerung*) and insight (*Einsicht*), whereby the rose window becomes one with the beholder as both transform into a symbolic image of the thing’s source (*verwandeln ins Gebilde*) in the transcendent divine.<sup>745</sup> As the ensuing verses suggest, this transformational event (*Ereignis*) occurs through a reversal of the anticipated direction of vision towards the window such that *the beholder first becomes the thing seen*—by the cats and, ultimately, by the in-dwelling God of creation.

Rilke was aware that by immersing oneself in the phenomenon to the point of utter absorption, the act of contemplation (*Anschauung*) becomes becomes co-active and, thus, maximally receptive to the sheer givenness and abundance of the phenomenon. Hence his observation in the letter to Clara from March 8, 1907 describing how the seer’s perspective shifts so far away from itself in beholding the thing seen that the thing becomes “strangely anonymous” and, in so doing, “fulfills” itself “within us, without us.”<sup>746</sup> In the event (*Ereignis*), “under the influence of the contrast,” one glimpses the thing’s “essence with such clarity (clarity of nuances), that the

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<sup>744</sup> Rev. 9:11. Gn. 1:2.

<sup>745</sup> Müller finds the paradigm for Rilke’s notion of transformation into an image in the medieval sculptor, as depicted in the poem “Requiem für Wolf Graf von Kalckreuth” (Engel, ed., *Rilke Handbuch*, 302). For the poet is tasked “hart sich in die Worte zu verwandeln,” “wie der Steinmetz einer Kathedrale/ verbissen umsetzt in des Steines Gleichmut” (Rilke, “equiem für Wolf Graf von Kalckreuth,” WKA 1: 425). Müller thus observes how, similar to T.S. Eliot’s notion of the poem’s personal core, Rilke regards the “Kunstwerk” as “das Ergebnis eines Transformationsprozesses, [...] bei dem sich das Ich durch künstlerische Arbeit in das Kunstwerk umwandelt” (Engel, ed., *Rilke Handbuch*, 302). The locus classicus in twentieth-century phenomenology describing this (in origins Christian-Neoplatonic) process of transforming into an image is, of course, Hans Georg Gadamer’s *Wahrheit und Methode*.

<sup>746</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe in zwei Bänden*, ed., Horst Nalewski (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1991), 246-247. Henceforth, BR 1. My translation.



momentary impression involuntarily intensifies itself [sich steigert] into the symbolic.” According to Rilke, the phenomenon

becomes meaningful through a *provisional* intensity of our vision or because it occurs in a place where it becomes *perfect in its peripherality* and perpetually valid and deeply significant for some personal insight, which, in the same moment that it arises in us, meaningfully corresponds with the image. Contemplative vision [*Anschauen*] is such a wonderful thing, *about which we know so little*; through it we are completely turned outwards, yet even as our ecstasis peaks, things appear to occur in us that had been ardently waiting for *the moment when they would not be observed*; and while they—intact and *strangely anonymous*—fulfill themselves *within us, without us*, — then, within the things outside us, their meaning grows: a convincing, strong, — their only possible name, through which we blissfully and reverentially recognize the event occurring inside us, *yet without our touching it, only very faintly, very distantly grasping it under the sign of an already strange thing that has, even in the next moment* [Augenblick], *become estranged* —.<sup>747</sup>

What Rilke stresses in this letter is that penetrating contemplation of the thing seen occurs indirectly. Insight into its essence as a symbolic image of the numinous occurs through apophasis. Arising through an estranging process of de-subjectivization transforming the seer and the thing seen into an image, contemplative vision discloses the presence of a symbolic meaning transcending the realm of mundane appearances.<sup>748</sup> It thus suggests, as Hermann Meyer observes, a “selfless, surrendered vision” shorn of the biases against theology and metaphysics closing the modern mind to the transcendent.<sup>749</sup> As the symbolic images of Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte* still more perfectly attest, rigorously

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid. “Alles das Unwichtige, das oft bedeutsam wird durch eine vorübergehende Intensität unseres Sehens oder weil es an einer Stelle vor sich geht, wo es vollkommen wird in all seiner Nebensächlichkeit und unaufhörlich gültig und von tiefer Deutsamkeit für irgendeine persönliche Einsicht, die, im selben Augenblick in uns auftretend, mit jenem Bild sinnvoll zusammenfällt. Das Anschauen ist eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir so wenig wissen; wir sind mit ihm ganz nach außen gekehrt, aber gerade wenn wir’s am meisten sind, scheinen in uns Dinge vor sich zu gehen, die auf das Unbeobachtetsein sehnsüchtig gewartet haben, und während sie sich, intakt und seltsam anonym, in uns vollziehen, ohne uns, — wächst in dem Gegenstand draußen ihre Bedeutung heran, ein überzeugender, stärker, — ihr einzig möglicher Name, in dem wir das Geschehnis in unserem Innern selig und ehrerbietig erkennen, ohne selbst daran heranzureichen, es nur ganz leise, ganz von fern, unter den Zeichen eines eben noch fremden und schon im nächsten Augenblick aufs neue entfremdeten Dinges begreifend —.” My translation and emphasis.

<sup>748</sup> Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckharts Mystische Schriften*, trans. Gustav Landauer, ed. Wolf Siegbert, (Bodenburg: Verlag Edition AV, 2019), 118. “Dies Ende [Gott] hat keine Weise, es erwächst der Weise und geht in die Weite. Sankt Bernard sagt: Gott lieben, das ist weise ohne Weise.”

<sup>749</sup> Hermann Meyer, *Zarte Empirie*, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), 260.

contemplating things through an apophatic praxis of vision allows one to discern their basis in the analogy of being.

The depiction of this harrowing process of de-subjectivization in “Die Fensterrose” intensifies in verses four and five (“den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt, // gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt, -”) through a chiasm disclosing a reverse perspective reality.<sup>750</sup> Whereas the beholder’s vision (“den Blick”) is active in the first two verses, the cat’s eye becomes the agent after the stanzaic divide, thus inverting the relation between seer and thing seen in a manner that threatens to extinguish his vision. At first glance, the horizon of meaning seems to be confined to the depths of the raging beast. Instead of being abolished, however, the beholder’s interiority only pro-visionally merges with the cat’s, whose roiling blood engulfs him in a dark image of baptismal death and rebirth. The image consequently opens a view of world-interior-space: for, both poles of the vision (the human and the animal) attain a significance transcending the natural bourns of finitude by indirectly disclosing their source in the transcendent divine—namely, through a tortured simile (“wie...so”) that breaches the being’s immanent gestalt, yet without destroying it. It thus faintly recalls Thomas Aquinas’ teaching that “grace does not destroy nature but fulfills it.”<sup>751</sup> It also suggests Meister Eckhart’s understanding of vision as a state of active-passivity (*Gelassenheit*), whereby the beholder is emptied of falsifying images before being filled by the “ray of divine darkness” (Dionysius).<sup>752</sup> As Fischer observes, Rilke’s epiphanic poetry thus echoes the thirteenth-century theologian’s teaching that “my vision of God is at the same time God’s vision of me”—a

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<sup>750</sup> In so doing, it faintly recalls Goethe’s classical symbolism.

<sup>751</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1: 1: 8.

<sup>752</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology* 1, 1, 998B—1000A. See Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 104–105. See also Meister Eckhart’s sermon “Von der Dunkelheit” in *Meister Eckharts Mystische Schriften*.

teaching grounded in Eckhart's understanding of the *analogia entis*.<sup>753</sup> "Die Fensterrose," in particular, confirms Fischer's contention that it is "at the juncture of seer and seen that the genesis of [a] meaning" born, we have seen, by the analogy of being arises in Rilke's thing-poems.<sup>754</sup>

By depicting a reverse perspective on the real, "Die Fensterrose" redresses modernity's impoverished view of things as denuded of inner form and, hence, of any significance transcending finite being.<sup>755</sup> Instead, Rilke's contemplative presentation of the rose window recovers the classical understanding of things as symbolic images of the divine characterized by their analogic relation to the source of the cosmos. This implies, as Fischer observes, that the thing-poems of the *Neue Gedichte* are 1) "chiasmic"—what Christian Neoplatonism terms "methectic" (participatory)—in that it involves both the subject- and the object-pole of vision, and 2) "epiphanic," inasmuch as it presents an excess of meaning intimating a numinous presence.<sup>756</sup> Thus, the symbolic imagery of Rilkean thing-poetry presents the thing *concretely* by requiring the beholder to participate in the event of disclosure through co-action: namely, by engaging what S.T. Coleridge had once termed the "secondary imagination."<sup>757</sup> It implies, therefore, "a superior kind of knowing" through images—not concepts—initiating the transformation of the beholder into the image and resulting in imaginative

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<sup>753</sup> See Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 104. According to Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, the basis for Eckhart's teachings and, indeed, a major current of literary modernism lay in their provocative reception of the *analogia entis*. See Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Die Mystik der Moderne: Die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), 16.

<sup>754</sup> Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 219.

<sup>755</sup> See T.J. White, O.P., ed., *The Analogy of Being*, 353, 356. Hanby observes that "from a modern point of view, the world's inner nature and meaning are no longer deeply informed by its relation to God for the simple reason that, from within the scientific outlook governing modern thought and life, the world *has no* inner meaning and nature, no inherent unity, no being in itself that might make visible the invisible or provide (in principle) a limit to our ability to command it" (362).

<sup>756</sup> See Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 215-231.

<sup>757</sup> From Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* reprinted in Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen's *Theological Aesthetics Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2005), 198.

insight (*Einsicht*) into the essence of the thing seen.<sup>758</sup> Drawing on Husserl's early lectures on image-consciousness, Pfau advances upon Fischer's account by precisely describing how phantasy's dynamic-creative role in the Rilkean thing-poem necessitates continual, teleological transformation of the beholder's vision as it seeks to generate a more perfect presentation (*Darstellung*) of the thing seen.<sup>759</sup> On this basis, Pfau redefines the sense of "epiphany" at stake in Rilke's poems from Paris as "a thing's unfathomable capacity for initiating a vision (*Schau*) that unveils the very being of which the thing itself is a manifestation; and it is in the modality of an image that this unveiling takes place."<sup>760</sup> Insofar as the creative mediations of phantasy and image reveal themselves, Pfau observes, as integral in the *Neue Gedichte*, Rilke's thing-poetry challenges us "to acknowledge this essential conjunction of quotidian perception [*Wahrnehmung*] and creative vision [*Phantasie*], of the visible and the invisible," and, thus, "to confront the metaphysical entanglements of both phenomenology and modernist poetics."<sup>761</sup>

When in the second quatrain of "Die Fensterrose" the beholder's vision submerges in the vortex of the cat's eye ("wie eines Wirbels Kreis"), thus annulling the Cartesian sense of selfhood ("und dann versinkt und nichts nichts mehr von sich weiß"), the personal core of the poem—its "final and definitive image-existence" (*endgültiges Bild-dasein*), understood as the analogic relation between mind and cosmos—remains.<sup>762</sup> This is above all evident from Rilke's use of simile here and

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<sup>758</sup> Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 213, 219. Drawing on Jean Luc Marion's descriptions of "saturated phenomena," Fischer observes that the *Neue Gedichte* are "irreducible to concepts and always present a specific kind of excess, precisely because they bear the form of a superior kind of knowing. The light of the intellect confronts the appearance of a greater light in the form of the work of art. [...] The intellect is to the poem as the mole's eyes are to sunlight. [...] When a poem is really understood or actualized, it is grasped with the *imagination* and not conceptual reasoning" (ibid., 213).

<sup>759</sup> Pfau, "Absolute Gegebenheit," 18-19.

<sup>760</sup> Pfau, "Absolute Gegebenheit," 252. Hence Rilke's belief, as confessed in a letter from 1897, that "alle Dinge sind ja dazu da, damit sie uns Bilder werden in irgendeinem Sinn" (BR 1: 41).

<sup>761</sup> Pfau, "Absolute Gegebenheit," 252.

<sup>762</sup> The watery imagery in this stanza and the blood symbolism in the next recalls a process akin to the Christian's rebirth in baptism. For it is by baptismal water and Spirit that, as Peter Leithart observes, "we undergo a sea-change transfigure[ing us] to something rich and strange." See Peter J. Leithart, *Baptism: A Guide to Life from Death*, (Bellingham,

elsewhere in the *Neue Gedichte*. The novelty of Rilkean similes becomes clear, as Müller observes, when comparing his thing-poems to the prevailing predilection for metaphorical speech from French symbolism to German language modernism.<sup>763</sup> Whereas Rilke had similarly preferred the use of metaphor in *Das Stunden-Buch* (1905)—which evinces a Jugendstil proliferation of imagery depicting equivocal “experiences of identification (between God and things, the poet and things, and between the poet and God)” —his thing-poems from Paris stress the aspect of *difference* in identity between the image and its transcendent source. Hence Müller’s observation that, although “Rilke’s thing-poetry consistently seeks to find formal equivalents for things,” it resists becoming a symbolic copy (“eine unmittelbare Präsenz”) of the thing seen.<sup>764</sup> The images of *Neue Gedichte* consequently remain irreducible to symbolism in the pejorative sense of the term (Gadamer). This is because, as J. Ryan astutely observes, his use of “comparison” in *Neue Gedichte* “often precedes any mention of the thing and therefore shifts the accent from the thing” (e.g. the rose window) “to the simile” itself—thus refocusing the beholder’s perspective on the image’s analogic gestalt.<sup>765</sup> Müller also notes this technique, observing that it yields a “tension” between the two terms of the analogy, which is “already given through the syntax of the comparison.”<sup>766</sup> By thus placing disparate things and images in polar relation, Rilke strains yet ultimately reinforces the symbolic form of the whole as a presentation (*Darstellung*) of the thing seen through analogy. Yet as we have seen, the hallmark of his thing-poetry is its use of simile to de-subjectivize the beholder’s perspective while paradoxically

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WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 21–31. Leithart cites Tertullian, who says that by baptism man is “being restored to God, to the likeness of him who had been aforetime in God’s image” (ibid.).

<sup>763</sup> Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte”*, 97.

<sup>764</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 303.

<sup>765</sup> J. Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung*, 40.

<sup>766</sup> Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte”*, 110. Poems employing this rhetorical strategy—e.g. “Treppe der Orangerie,” “Das Portal (II),” and “Die Fensterrose”—exemplify Rilke’s temerity in drawing analogies through images with diverging forms and syntactical structures. See ibid., 102.

deepening its personal core.<sup>767</sup> Like Pound's notion of the image as vortex "from which and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing," the Rilke thing-poem presents "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."<sup>768</sup> As Charles Taylor observes of the epiphanies of modernist literature in general, "our access" to the thing "can only be within the personal. [...] They may take us beyond the subjective, but the road to them passes inescapably through a heightened awareness of personal experience."<sup>769</sup> In "Die Fensterrose," Rilke employs simile to stage contemplation of the symbolic image through apophysis, thus stressing the metaphysical principle of analogia undergirding the thing seen by granting the vehicle of the comparison (the cats), which comprises the majority of the poem, relative independence from its tenor (the rose window) and ground (the image as a whole).<sup>770</sup> The symbolic image of the thing seen consequently appears in distortion, so to speak, just as do Rodin's, Cézanne's and the icons of the Orthodox and medieval Catholic church.<sup>771</sup> Yet such symbolism is anything but abstract. Because the use of analogy in "Die Fensterrose" first leads the beholder's gaze away from the light of the window, instead plummeting it into the dark heart of the cat ("und ihn hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut"), the initial appearance of the

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<sup>767</sup> Like Pound's notion of the image as vortex "from which and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing," the Rilke thing-poem presents "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (cited in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 475). As Charles Taylor observes of the epiphanies of modernist literature in general, "our access" to the thing "can only be within the personal. [...] They may take us beyond the subjective, but the road to them passes inescapably through a heightened awareness of personal experience" (*ibid.*, 481). See my discussion of imagism in chapter 3.

<sup>768</sup> Cited in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1989), 475.

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>770</sup> Cf. Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes "Neue Gedichte"*, 108.

<sup>771</sup> Thomas Pfau has described the analogy between icon theology, phenomenology, and modernist art of the West in various contexts. See "Rethinking the Image: With some Reflections on Gerard Manley Hopkins," *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature*, vol. 57, 135-137. On the misleading idea of "intentional distortion," see Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art. Translated by Wendy Salmond* (Chicago: Reaktion Books, 2009), 209. A 2016-2017 exhibition of Indian, Japanese, and Navajo art at the University of Michigan entitled *Less than Perfect* took up this topic. While the rugs, pottery, robes displayed are non-mimetic, as opposed to art in the Western tradition, they nonetheless depict patterns perceived in nature by means of "deliberate distortion." Hence the exhibition's motto: "Nothing we see or hear is perfect. But right there in the imperfection is perfect reality." Carla M. Sinopoli, "Less than Perfect | Intentional Distortion," University of Michigan Museums, Ann Arbor, Michigan, (August 26, 2016 — January 6, 2018),

ground in verse three (“wie”) is hidden. Rilke’s concerted apophysis at once veils and augments the simile, thus purging it of caprice and allowing the thing’s image-structure to gradually emerge from the darkness.

The volta in the sonnet’s final tercet leaves no doubt as to the metaphysical gestalt subtending the thing seen. It does not equivocate about the image’s analogic relation to the transcendent. Rather, the final tercet establishes the primary term of the comparison (tenor) through the correlative conjunction “so” and thus presents its ground in the invisible divine: “So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein/ der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen/ ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.” Rilke’s depiction of the rose window’s “darkness” is not an abstraction given its actual appearance in the western facade.<sup>772</sup> Because of its location with fewer adjacent clerestory windows, the relative prominence of its tracery, and its smaller size, as at Sainte-Denis, the western rose window is often much darker than those of the transepts. In keeping with the symbolism of death evident in this edifice, then, where the sun casts its fading light, the western window traditionally depicts the Last Judgment—the tenet of Christian dogma that Rilke regards as the principal motive for medieval artistry’s turn from painting to more concrete forms of visual presentation such as sculpture and stained-glass. In beholding the rose window, then, Rilke must have wondered at the scant light that it permits and at the meaning of this unexpected aspect of the phenomenon. That Rilke grasped the gothic style’s apophatic symbolism and the symbol’s basis in the *analogia entis* is certain. Consider, as a point of comparison, his paradoxical description of “the dark[ness]” of the western facade in another sonnet from the cathedral cycle, “Das Portal (II).” Instead of describing it

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<sup>772</sup> No matter how far-flung, Rilke’s similes usually present something precisely observed in nature or culture. See Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes “Neue Gedichte”*, 99-100, which relates how Rilke’s first “Spitzen-Gedicht” (WKA 1: 475) draws from nature an extraordinarily precise analogy (“wie zwischen Stamm und Rinde”) to describe the transformation of a seamstress sacrificing her eyesight to the lace that she has crafted. Müller notes that this image functions on many levels, the most astounding of which is perhaps the most concrete; for Rilke likely observed that, if one peels bark from a tree and lets its underside dry out, a lacelike pattern emerges. Rilke was “ein Dichter und haßte das Ungefähre” (Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, WKA 3: 572).

as an absence of light, this poem presents a counter perspective on the real by depicting “the dark” as an active entity, which Rilke identifies—by way of simile—with both Christ and God the Father:

und so wie durch jene [Welt]/  
der Held im Mantel seiner Handlung tritt: —

so tritt das Dunkel dieses Tores handelnd  
auf seiner Tiefe tragisches Theater,  
so grenzenlos und wallend wie Gott-Vater  
und so wie Er sich wunderlich verwandelnd

in einen Sohn [...].<sup>773</sup>

Just as the heavenly Father is present in Christ, the uncreated Image, through the Son’s polar nature, so the divine ray of darkness appears through the portal’s images (“aufgeteilt [...] / auf viele kleine beinah stumme Rollen”). To speak with Maximus the Confessor, divine logos and logoi are analogically related. Commenting on this simile yet without naming the metaphysical and theological tenet supporting it—analogia—Bradley precisely describes its form: “The simile is specific in stating that the ‘Dunkel’ is like God the Father, not that it is He. This applies equally to God the Son, who is immediately identified with the small statues. The ground of being manifests itself in the world by undergoing a strange transformation into many insignificant parts (‘Rollen’).”<sup>774</sup> Similar to “Die Fensterrose,” Rilke stresses the radical difference between the images depicted in the portal and their dark source in the cradle of being.

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<sup>773</sup> Rilke, “Das Portal (II),” WKA 1: 464-465. Similar to “Die Fensterrose,” the sonnet begins with a jarring statement—this time about the “expansiveness of what is meant (‘Sehr viele Weite ist gemeint damit’)—initially leading the beholder’s gaze away from the thing seen. One must ask both “what” and “where” the poet means before the image of the portal sharpens. This verse falls outside of the “so...wie” syntax, as do the first two verses of “Die Fensterrose.” Furthermore, this poem similarly begins by developing the second term (vehicle) of the comparison, which also indicates Rilke’s concerted use of apophasis to disclose a counter perspective on the thing.

<sup>774</sup> Bradley, “The Internal Unity of Rilke’s Cathedral Poems,” 214.



## Symbol in *Das Stunden-Buch* and Rilke's Reception of Russian Orthodox Iconography

Rilke's grasp of Christian-Neoplatonic symbolism, as manifest in the *Neue Gedichte*, was long in coming. Scarred from youth by his mother's "superficial religiosity" and "her 'distracted piety,'" Rilke's early view of Catholicism was blighted.<sup>775</sup> Hence, as Siegfried Mandel observes, it was "with an intensity ... rooted in emotional and intellectual antagonism" that Rilke's youthful writings on Christianity, such as the unpublished *Christus-Visionen* (1896/97), represent Jesus of Nazareth—"the childhood symbol of unanswered prayers, the interloper and intruder who denied life and mortal love and stood between himself and his mother."<sup>776</sup> Beyond this adolescent animosity to Christianity, it was eventually Rilke's budding friendship with Lou Andreas-Salomé in Munich and her expertise in Nietzschean philosophy that shaped his view of the faith at the fin-de-siècle. Upon meeting Rilke in 1897, Andreas-Salomé—who had known Nietzsche personally and published on his writings—encouraged the young poet to adopt a more nuanced reception of Christ's transcendent significance. According to Ronald Perlwitz, she spurred him to move beyond the ontological "monism" of his early "criticism of Christianity's hostility to life and its hope in transcendent."<sup>777</sup> As such, Rilke increasingly embraces the thorough-going equivocation vis-à-vis the transcendent divine evident in Nietzsche's thought, as in such cunningly metaphysical doctrines as "the law of eternal recurrence," "the will to power," and "God's dependence on the poetic subject."<sup>778</sup> At the same time, Rilke's friendship with Andreas-Salomé, a native of St. Petersburg, had also introduced him to Russian things—language, landscapes, art, and religion—through two

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<sup>775</sup> Ralph Freedman, *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Helen Sword in collaboration with the author (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), 211 quoting Rilke's letters to Lou Andreas-Salomé.

<sup>776</sup> Siegfried Mandel, *Visions of Christ*, (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1967), 16. Cited in *Rilke-Handbuch*, 198.

<sup>777</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 161.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

journeys in her company, in the spring and summer of 1899 and 1900, which stirred his keen interest in Christian-Neoplatonism and nourished his understanding of its symbols. As remains to be seen, the result of this youthful enthusiasm was Rilke's first attempt at developing a symbolist poetics of the image. In his poetry and prose from this earliest period of intellectual maturation, Rilke probes the metaphysical implications of the symbol—yet, we shall see, without overcoming a “sentimental” (in the precise Schillerian sense) view of the cosmos. For, in stark contrast to the *Neue Gedichte*, modernity's expressivist sense of selfhood, conceived as the equivocal source of the symbol, is entrenched at its center.<sup>779</sup>

As *Das Stunden-Buch* (1905)—a lyric cycle written between 1899 and 1903 and dedicated to Andreas-Salomé—attests, Rilke eventually came to affirm the equivocal desire for transcendence expressed in Nietzsche's transvaluation of Christianity. In this three-part narrative of apostasy, the *Stunden-Buch* monk programmatically weaves Nietzschean inversions of Christian contemplative practices—the hermitic reclusion, askesis, and apophasis preached by Zarathustra—into his own iconographic poems. For instance, apophatic negation plays an equivocal role in the following verses:

Du [Gott] bist so groß, daß ich schon nicht mehr bin,  
wenn ich mich nur in deine Nähe stelle.  
Du bist so dunkel; meine kleine Helle  
an deinem Saum hat keinen Sinn.  
Dein Wille geht wie eine Welle  
und jeder Tag ertrinkt darin.

Nur meine Sehnsucht ragt dir bis ans Kinn  
und steht vor dir wie aller Engel größter:  
ein fremder, bleicher und noch unerlöster,  
und hält dir seine Flügel hin.<sup>780</sup>

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<sup>779</sup> As Wolfgang Braungart observes, “the key to form, rhetoric, and theme in the *Stunden-Buch*” is the Schleiermachiian “feeling” of the religious subject: “a subject,” that is, who “speaks out of the freedom of his subjectivity,” has no need for Church institution and dogma “and, therefore, has no need of a mediator (Christ)” between him- or herself and God (Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 219).

<sup>780</sup> Rilke, *Das Stunden-Buch*, WKA 1: 171.

Apophasis serves here, as in orthodox Christianity, as a means of self-transcendence. However, the second strophe suggests its new significance in this context: “pride” (“Hoffahrt”).<sup>781</sup> Whereas the first six verses depict the negation of finite being in the dark waves of the divine, the dynamic then tilts into a reversal satanically threatening its negation. For, the monk increasingly views his poësis as the source of his own *and* the deity’s transcendence. Hence his confession in Book I: “Ich weiß: Du bist der Rätselhafte,/ um den die Zeit in Zögern stand./ O wie so schön ich dich erschaffte/ in einer Stunde, die mich straffte,/ in einer Hoffahrt meiner Hand.” In building the dome and painting the icon, the monk may sing, “Ich will dich immer spiegeln in ganzer Gestalt,” yet this invariably means defiance of the divine will: “Ich will *mich* entfalten./ Nirgends will ich gebogen bleiben,/ denn dort bin ich gelogen, wo ich gebogen bin.”<sup>782</sup> The equivocal dynamic of self-transcendence depicted in *Das Stunden-Buch* is truly punishing; for as Rilke, following Nietzsche, fully comprehends, it ineluctably results in the bacchant’s fall back into the realm of immanence (ontological monism): “Du siehst, ich will viel./ Vielleicht will ich Alles:/ das Dunkel jedes unendlichen Falles/ und jedes Steigens lichtzitterndes Spiel.”<sup>783</sup> Insofar as the monk takes himself to be the exclusive source of the symbols of divine reality that he constructs (*facere*)—which cannot, therefore, participate in a cosmological order transcending the subject—he knows a boundless angst and isolation that only ramps up after his departure from the cloister:

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?  
 Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)  
 Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)  
 Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,  
 mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.

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<sup>781</sup> Rifting on the Christian-Neoplatonic view of the cosmos as an ebb and flow from the transcendent One, the monk effectively flattens it into Nietzsche’s law of eternal recurrence: “Mit diesem Hinfluten, mit diesem Münden/ in breiten Armen ins offene Meer,/ mit dieser wachsenden Wiederkehr/ will ich dich bekennen, will ich dich verkünden/ wie keiner vorher.// Und ist das Hoffahrt, so laß mich hoffärtig sein/ für mein Gebet[.]” Ibid., 162.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., 183. My emphasis.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid., 163.

...

Was wirst du tun, Gott? Ich bin bange.

However, as Braungart observes, despite the monk's inclination to "use" its opposition to "God" to "circle around himself" and, thus, to plumb the abyss of the modern subject, an ineffaceable I/Thou relationship obtains in *Das Stunden-Buch* faintly echoing Nicolaus of Cusa's mystical "coincidentia oppositorum."<sup>784</sup> If only equivocally, then, Rilke's mesmerizing accumulation of metaphors for the divine suggests that the monk's "inexhaustible subjectivity correlates with the construction of the transcendent God."<sup>785</sup> He simply cannot say "I am" without uttering "Thou art." Adequately expressing this insight into the intentional structure of subjectivity—consciousness' grounding correlation to the transcendent phenomenon—became, according to Käte Hamburger, the defining challenge of Rilke's oeuvre. It motivates his lifelong pursuit of "sensory equivalents (*sinnliche Äquivalente*) in nature [...] for what is quietest and most intangible and unfathomable in us."<sup>786</sup> And, as remains to be seen, it sparked his fraught attempts in the years between 1899 and 1907 to develop a symbolist poetics.

Rilke's engagement with Christianity irrevocably opened his intellectual horizon to the transcendent. According to Jenifer Cushman's provocative thesis, the young poet had experienced a "Gestalt shift" during two his extended trips to Russia (1899 and 1900), where, in addition to cultivating his burgeoning love for the countryside and peasantry of his self-proclaimed "spiritual homeland," he had learned to cherish the symbolic forms of Russian Orthodox iconography and the

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<sup>784</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 221. "Das Künstler-Subjekt braucht dieses Gegenüber 'Gott', um sich selbst in einer unabschließbaren Auseinandersetzung mit ihm zu 'umkreisen'." "Wie sie [eine grundlegende Strukturbestimmung Gottes] etwa ein Nikolaus von Kues mit seiner Formel von der 'coincidentia oppositorum' gefaßt hat."

<sup>785</sup> Ibid., 221. "Die unausschöpfbare Subjektivität korreliert mit der Konstruktion des übergroßen Gottes." My translation.

<sup>786</sup> Rilke, "Die Bücher zum wirklichen Leben," WKA 4, 652. "Die innere Gewißheit, daß es auch noch für das Leiseste und Unfaßbarste in uns in der Natur sinnliche Äquivalente giebt, die sich müssen finden lassen." My translation.

divine liturgy.<sup>787</sup> Cushman argues with considerable merit that it was Rilke's experience (*Erlebnis*) of rapture during the Easter liturgy at the Kremlin's Dormition Cathedral in the spring of 1899—enveloped in the synesthetic imagery of glittering icons, swinging censers, and chanting priests—that the poet “encountered logos, the creative word, in his ears, eyes, and all his senses.”<sup>788</sup> On Cushman's telling, “the physical removal of the icons, those windows that simultaneously convey and block the divine light, provoked a corresponding removal of mental barriers for Rilke;” for she argues that it shifted his aesthetic vision away from the sentimentalizing poetry of his youth towards imagery depicting the numinous presence of the thing seen. As Rilke confesses in an 1899 letter to Helena Woronin, the ancient symbols had blinded and deafened him, thus opening his mind to the transcendent: “my voice has been lost in the Kremlin bells, and my eye sees nothing after the golden dazzle of the domes.”<sup>789</sup> Rilke's painstaking study of the Russian literature, history, and Orthodoxy instilled in him an abiding appreciation of the images of divine reality attained through apophysis. For example, several poems from *Das Stunden Buch* attest to Rilke's understanding of the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol's pro-visional—hence *transient yet nonetheless revelatory*—manner of presenting the divine, as evinced in the following verses:

Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen,  
 du Dämmernde, aus der der Morgen stieg.  
 Wir holen aus den alten Farbenschalen  
 die gleichen Striche und die gleichen Strahlen,  
 mit denen dich der Heilige verschwieg.

Wir bauen Bilder vor dir auf wie Wände;  
 so daß schon tausend Mauern um dich stehn.  
 Denn dich verhüllen unsre frommen Hände,  
 sooft dich unsre Herzen offen sehn.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>787</sup> Brodsky observes, “Russia seemed to him a key that had opened a locked door” to the transcendent source of his art. Hence the young poet's piety. Patricia Pollock Brodsky, “Rilke and Russian Art,” *Germano-Slavica*, 2:6, 1978, 411.

<sup>788</sup> Cushman, “Beyond Ekphrasis,” 83.

<sup>789</sup> Cited and translated in Cushman, 85. This letter was written to Helene Woronin on Mai 2, 1899.

<sup>790</sup> Rilke, *Das Stunden-Buch*, WKA 1: 158.

Rilke clearly grasps the idea of apophasis as derived from Dionysius's symbolic theology, according to which images at once conceal and disclose their transcendent source: "Denn dich verhüllen unsre frommen Hände,/ sooft dich unsre Herzen offen sehn." And yet, we shall see that it was only after returning to Western Europe and encountering Rodin's and Cézanne's modernist aesthetics that the expressive potential and stringency of apophasis fully dawned on him. Although *Das Stunden-Buch* occasionally employs Christian-Neoplatonic symbols in an orthodox manner, this collection of poems typically employs traditional imagery as a pretense ("Vorwand") for the expression of strictly subjective ideas.<sup>791</sup> It is telling that, much like the French symbolists, Rilke prefers the use of metaphor over simile at this stage of his career: for this cycle's Jugendstil proliferation of images tends to express the divine presence in an equivocal manner conflating God and self, God and nature, God and non-being.<sup>792</sup> Hence its narrative arc depicting the monk's departure from the convent, his secularization and isolation in the modern metropolis, and the apotheosis of death in the final book, which Braungart rightly describes as "a monism of life and death."<sup>793</sup> In the following chapter, we shall see that by moving away from this transient, youthful fascination with Russian Orthodoxy to the concept of apophasis informing his Rodin and Cezanne monographs—which is no longer expressly bound up with Christian iconographic thought—Rilke found avant-garde models of contemplation in the West remarkably consistent with the orthodox

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<sup>791</sup> Rilke's early journals develop his sentimental worldview in terms that scholarship has come to term the "Vorwands-ästhetik," according to which "die Dinge nur Vorwand zur Aussprache subjektiver Geständnisse sind" (Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes 'Neue Gedichte'*, 20). As Müller observes, "die Realität der im Medium der Stimmung erfahrenen Dinge der Außenwelt" is, for the young poet, totally "ungewiß" (ibid., 14). Hence Rilke's confession on November 3, 1899: "ich weiß nicht bestimmt, ob der Wald, durch den wir gehen, nicht nur meine Stimmung ist, — eine dunkle, schattige. Wer weiß: vielleicht ist auch Venedig nur ein Gefühl" (ibid.). The depths of this fin-de-siècle epistemological skepticism make Rilke's recovery of a realist view of things in the following months and years all the more remarkable.

<sup>792</sup> See ibid., 96.

<sup>793</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 220. "In den pantheistischen Wendungen des zweiten Buches klingt der Leben-Tod-Monismus des dritten Buches bereits an." My translation.

understanding of Christian iconography and liturgical practices. For now, however, we must observe how Rilke's appropriation of the symbolic visual images of Russian Orthodox iconography continually equivocates vis-à-vis the transcendent. For, as remains to be seen, he programmatically infuses its traditional forms with modernity's expressivist understanding of selfhood as the symbol's "sentimental" source.

Several months after his Easter experience at the Dormition Cathedral, Rilke writes the first of two essays on contemporary Russian art taking the Orthodox icon as its type. Here he observes that "the blackened, Byzantine images" suggest a notion of "beauty" that applies to art in general.<sup>794</sup> Icons open "a possibility," he insists, "a space, in which the beholder must recreate ("wiederschaffen") what the artist first created, which is consummated in the scope of these images through the piety of those who pray before them."<sup>795</sup> Similarly, the artist employing the symbolic images of Russian Orthodoxy "must bring them to bear," Rilke contends, "by fulfilling within the golden crusts [of the paintings] the visions of the folk [the Body of Christ], without touching the customary forms."<sup>796</sup> Such "participation" in the prototype through the image—what Christian-Neoplatonism terms "methexis"—"obtains for every artwork in the highest sense."<sup>797</sup> According to Rilke, participation in traditional symbolic forms "provides" the artist "with the opportunity to dream of something beyond the new image-content" that the beholder brings forth: and in so doing,

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<sup>794</sup> Rilke, "Russische Kunst," WKA 4, 154. "Wir haben es hier mit einem vorgiottesken Volke zu tun, dessen alle Erlebnisse religiöser Art sind und so stark, daß sie uns in verdunkelten byzantinischen Bildern eine Schönheit erkennen lassen[.]" All translations of this text are my own.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid. "Was im höchsten Sinne von jedem Kunstwerke gilt, dem Fühlenden gegenüber: daß es nur eine Möglichkeit ist, der Raum, in welchem der Schauende wiederschaffen muß, was der Künstler zuerst geschaffen hat, das erfüllt sich im Rahmen dieser Bilder durch die Frömmigkeit derjenigen, die davor beten."

<sup>796</sup> Ibid. "Hier muß der Künstler einsetzen, indem er, ohne an der gewohnten Form zu rühren, innerhalb der goldenen Krusten die Visionen des Volkes erfüllt; und indem er ihm Gelegenheit giebt, auch über diesen neuen Bildinhalt hinaus zu träumen, hat er Aussicht von Schönheit zu Schönheit aufzusteigen und dabei das ganze Volk mitzuerheben in die reifen Wirklichkeiten seiner Seele."

<sup>797</sup> Ibid.

he contends—in an unmistakable echo of Plato’s *Symposium*—one “attains a view so as to ascend from beauty to beauty, thus to lift the whole of the folk into the ripe realities of his soul.”<sup>798</sup> To be sure, the understanding of participation (*Teilhabe*) expressed in this essay is not nearly as robust as it becomes after his encounter with Rodin and Cézanne, particularly as expressed in his notion of “world-interior-space.” Yet it is nonetheless indicative of the paradigm shift that Rilke’s poetics will undergo in the middle period towards imagery rooted in the symbolic order of the cosmos: namely, in what Platonists had termed the thing’s “inner form” (logos).

Despite the far-reaching currents of thought evident in Rilke’s early engagement with Russian Orthodox iconography, his account of participation in its symbolic images is finally predicated on a modernist sense of the self. For, insofar as the essay suggests that an icon’s form “can be filled with a variety of contents whose source is the individual viewer or artist,” Rilke’s “emphasis on the role of the individual in religious art is,” as Patricia Brodsky remarks, indeed “startlingly unorthodox.”<sup>799</sup> His celebration of subjectivity in this context thus evokes the metaphysical ambiguities characterizing what Charles Taylor has termed the “expressivist turn” in nineteenth century literature (Rousseau and Herder), according to which the self takes its origins in nature and the divine as a mandate to express its *own* nature and transcendence, hence, to shape its *own* form.<sup>800</sup> As remains to be seen in the following chapter, the modernist variant of expressive selfhood—which, according to Taylor, paradoxically evinces “a slide to subjectivism and an anti-subjectivist thrust at the same time”—is the prevailing paradigm in Rilke’s first attempt, in *Worpswede* (1902), at developing a symbolist poetics vis-à-vis avantgarde visual art in the West. And it is already equivocally in play, here, in his reception of the symbolic images of Orthodox iconography.

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<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> Brodsky, “Rilke and Russian Art,” 413.

<sup>800</sup> See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 368–393.



However, although Brodsky's assessment holds in the main, it risks overlooking the anti-subjectivist thrust of Rilke's essay and, hence, of missing the significance of his incipient grasp of apophysis, broadly conceived as the suspension of egocentric selfhood occasioning insight into the icon's source in the transcendent divine. For, Rilke's appreciation of iconography's "enduring form" at once suggests his recognition, albeit it partial, of the necessity of de-subjectivizing poësis for the sake of attaining an undesigning vision of the thing seen.<sup>801</sup> This is intimated in an observation in the same essay contrasting the art of the Slavic Revival with that of the western tradition:

while elsewhere a certain aesthetic idea seeks to embody itself through ever riper forms of intensification [*Steigerung*], [in Russia, "the wide land in the East, the only one in which God remains connected with the earth, ... the land of realities" still "open to the advent of some sudden blessing,"] here a dance of thoughts processes through an enduring form. This is, for the people, the gesture of prayer that fills it with the contents of its entire experience [*Erlebens*] — for the artist, it is the ancient image of the saint, the icon, whose style goes back in the end to Andrei Rublev in the sixteenth century.<sup>802</sup>

If we acknowledge that Rilke learned the forms and praxis (if not the full meaning) of Orthodox apophysis while studying Russian iconography, and if we further grant that this essay rejects western aesthetics since the Renaissance precisely because humanism had displaced the transcendent with egocentric "aesthetic ideas," then Rilke's description of the beholder's re-creation (*Wiederschaffung*) of the icon's enduring form *through prayer*—a pouring out of the soul in submission to the divine will—suggests his latent sense of the imperative governing the *Neue Gedichte*: the decentering of the subject.<sup>803</sup> Hence his confession in an 1899 letter from St. Petersburg that "Russian things would give [him] names for the most awful pieties (*fürchtigste Frömmigkeiten*) of his

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<sup>801</sup> Rilke, "Russische Kunst," WKA 4: 155. "Eine dauernde Form." My translation.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid. "Während anderswo eine bestimmte künstlerische Idee sich, in immer reifere Formen steigend, zu verkörpern sucht, geht hier [in Russia, "das Land der Wirklichkeiten," which remains open to "dem Einzug irgend eines plötzlichen Segens"] ein Tanz von Gedanken durch eine dauernde Form. Diese ist für das Volk die Gebärde des Gebetes, die es mit dem Inhalt seines ganzen Erlebens füllt — für den Künstler das alte Heiligenbild, das Ikon, dessen Stil im Grunde auf die Schule des Andreas Rubleff, die im sechzehnten Jahrhundert blühte, zurückgeht." My translation.

<sup>803</sup> See Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 106.

soul that had been striving, already since childhood, to enter into [his] artwork.”<sup>804</sup> As Rilke writes the next day, he was in the process of overcoming “an almost scientific tendency” in his own western worldview by means of the “local materials” (e.g. icons), thus allowing him to view things great and small as belonging to the symbolic order.<sup>805</sup> As Jürgen Lehmann observes, the crucial prerequisite for attaining this insight had been “the demand to approach things devoutly, piously, and humbly,” as evinced, however provisionally, in the “distinctive artistry” of the first two books of the *Stunden-Buch* before “dominating, above all, in the works of the middle period.”<sup>806</sup> According to Lehmann, Rilke’s newfound piety suggests his “conception of a non-subjective, non-referential, religious artform attending to the singularity of things” as images of their source in the cosmos—in nature, culture, and the transcendent deity mysteriously abiding in his creation.<sup>807</sup> Hence the young poet’s budding understanding of art in terms of the icon regards poësis “as a metaphysical activity with roots in the [Russian Orthodox] folk” (the Body of Christ) and the symbolic forms of expression “legitimated by their piety.”<sup>808</sup> While Rilke’s own poetry and prose from this pivotal period between 1899 and 1902 tends only to observe the stringencies of Orthodox iconography in the breach, his grasp of the apophysis underlying this contemplative tradition prepared the way for

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<sup>804</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe und Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit, 1899 bis 1902*, ed. Ruth Sieber-R. and Carl Sieber, (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1931), 17. Henceforth, B99–02. “Ich fühle in diesen Tagen, dass mir russische Dinge die Namen schenken werden für jene fürchtigsten Frömmigkeiten meines Wesens, die sich, seit der Kindheit schon, danach sehnen, in meine Kunst einzutreten.” My translation.

<sup>805</sup> Cited in Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 106. “Eine geradezu wissenschaftliche Neige, die mir überall durch des vorhandenen Materials erstickt und entfremdet wurde.” My translation.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid. “Dieser Anspruch, den Dingen fromm, pietätvoll, demütig zu begegnen, impliziert ein besonderes Künstlertum, das vornehmlich in den ersten zwei Büchern des *Stunden-Buch* vorgestellt wird und dann vor allem im mittleren Werk dominieren wird.” My translation.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid. “Seine Konzeption von einer nicht subjektiven, nicht referentiellen, aber die Eigenheit der Dinge achtenden und zugleich religiösen Kunst.” My translation.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid. “Kunst als metaphysische Tätigkeit, die ihre Wurzeln im Volk bzw. in der durch die Volksfrömmigkeit legitimierten künstlerischen Tätigkeit hat.” My translation.

the more thorough-going gestalt shift that came once Rilke encountered Rodin's and Cézanne's modernist aesthetics.<sup>809</sup> This corresponds, we shall see, to a shift in his view of the symbol's metaphysical structure—away from an equivocal and towards an analogic understanding of the thing's manner of presenting (“aufzeigen”) the invisible. Thus, we shall see that although the poetics of things developed in Paris is no longer expressly bound to Russian Orthodox piety, Rilke's understanding of contemplation (*Anschauung*) as articulated in his monographs and letters from the period addressing the visual arts finally rests on the metaphysical principle of analogia. In so doing, it overcomes the shortcomings of his first attempt at developing a symbolist poetics while observing the colony of avant-garde artists at Worpswede. The next chapter begins by recalling this early period of transition between 1900 and 1902, which Rilke later views as beholden to an egocentric view of language, images, and their source in nature.<sup>810</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> According to the sculptor Clara Westhoff, who was soon to be Rilke's wife, the modernist aesthetics that she had learned at the Académie Julian in the ambiance of Rodin chimed with Rilke's reports about his experiences in Russia: “Als Rainer Maria Rilke nach seiner zweiten großen Rußlandreise in Worpswede eintraf, waren Paula Becker und ich gerade aus Paris zurückgekehrt und die Berichte seines Erlebens begegneten sich mit den Berichten unserer Erfahrungen. Rainer Maria Rilke begann sich damals der bildenden Kunst auf eine aufmerksame Weise zuzuwenden.” Cited in Cushman, “Beyond Ekphrasis,” 86.

<sup>810</sup> See Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 615. “Damals [as Rilke worked in Worpswede on *Das Stunden-Buch*] war mir die Natur noch ein allgemeiner Anlaß, eine Evokation, ein Instrument, in dessen Saiten sich meine Hände wiederfanden; ich saß noch nicht vor ihr; ich ließ mich hinreißen von der Seele, welche von ihr ausging; [...] Ich schritt einher und sah, sah nicht die Natur, sondern die Gesichte die sie mir eingab. Wie wenig hätte ich damals vor Cézanne, vor Van Gogh zu lernen gewußt.”

## EQUIVOCITY VERSUS ANALOGIA: CONTRASTING VIEWS OF THE SYMBOLIC IMAGE IN RILKE'S LETTERS AND MONOGRAPHS ON THE VISUAL ARTS

Are not feelings, half-feelings, all the most secret and deepest states of our interiority in a way interwoven with a landscape, a season, with a composition of the air, with a breath?... If we want to find ourselves, then we must not descend into our inwardness; outside is where we are found, outside.

— Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Conversation on Poetry* (1904)

### Introduction

In Rilke's crucial period of transition between 1899 and 1903, during which he had recovered a symbolic view of the transcendent, Russian Orthodoxy played a pivotal, if altogether equivocal role. Since the role of religion had become increasingly marginal to life and literature in the West, Rilke looked to the East. Hence, what motivated Rilke's turn to Russia was, as Cushman suggests, his generation's need at the turn of the nineteenth century for "an invigorating spiritual alternative" to what they viewed as "the waning [...] cultures of western Christianity."<sup>811</sup> It was a spiritual and social crisis at home—the nihilism of the European bourgeoisie, the "last men," (Nietzsche)—that had spurred *both* Rilke's interest in Russian things *and*, we shall see, his development of a modernist poetics of the image within the western tradition. As the conquests of scientific positivism, technological innovation, and liberalism mounted in the West, increasingly portending the "death of God" (Nietzsche), various symbolist and imagist movements in the arts sought to recover a concrete view of things rooted in the theocentric cosmos. Like many European "modernists" (such as Eliot in England, Claudel in France, and late Hofmannsthal in Austria), Rilke

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<sup>811</sup> Cushman, "Beyond Ekphrasis," 85.

defied the abstracting forces of modernization—including abstract art, which he considered a “bypass behind the back of nature and even of the imagination” and, therefore, as a “disaster.”<sup>812</sup> Yet Rilke also understood that society’s and the art’s accelerating abstraction was equally urgent for realist or naturalist movements in literary modernism—just as it was, we shall see, for his own symbolist poetics. This crisis is poignantly reflected in a passage from Rilke’s 1910 novel, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, assessing Henrik Ibsen’s plays as having failed vis-à-vis “the breakdown of traditional European culture to create a valid public vehicle for the expression of his insight.”<sup>813</sup> For here, Rilke (Malte) describes Ibsen’s “impatient, evermore desperate search amongst the visible for equivalents for what was inwardly seen”—till the aging playwright “could no longer” and “the two poles that [he] had bent together snapped apart” and his “insane power dissipated from the elastic staff,” thus leaving “[his] work [...] as nothing.”<sup>814</sup> The images of Ibsen’s realist theater have, Rilke suggests, ceased to support the symbolic covenant between the realm of appearances and their source in the transcendent. According to H.R. Klieneberger, Rilke “contrasts Ibsen with the Greek dramatists, the creators of the medieval miracle plays, and the anonymous authors of the Russian Orthodox liturgy, all of whom drew on a common symbolic language, rooted in a religious interpretation of the world which they shared with their audiences.”<sup>815</sup> For Ibsen, as for most of western civilization, the correspondence between exterior and interior, thing and meaning,

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<sup>812</sup> From a 1921 letter written on February 28 to B. Klossowska; my translation. Cited in *Rilke-Handbuch*, 147: “Eine völlige Autonomie, also eigentlich Autarkie der künstlerischen Mittel [...] wird [...] als ‚Verhängnis‘ begriffen.” “[Es] galt Rilke als ein ‚Kurzschluß der Künste hinter dem Rücken der Natur und selbst der Imagination‘.”

<sup>813</sup> Klieneberger, *George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal and the Romantic Tradition*, 74.

<sup>814</sup> Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, WKA 3: 512–13. “Da gingst du an die beispiellose Gewalttat deines Werkes, das immer ungeduldiger, immer verzweifelter unter dem Sichtbaren nach den Äquivalenten suchte für das innen Geschehene. [...] Da konntst du nicht mehr. Die beiden Enden, die du zusammengebogen hattest, schnellten auseinander; deine wahnsinnige Kraft entsprang aus dem elastischen Stab, und dein Werk war wie nicht.” My translation.

<sup>815</sup> Klieneberger, *George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal and the Romantic Tradition*, 74.

immanence and transcendence had become equivocal. As Söring suggests, the metaphysics of analogia that had given the Christian-Neoplatonic symbol its unique “concreteness” (beginning with Plato’s *Philebus*) was ostensibly “suspended since Nietzsche, at the latest,” by “the linguistic sign and its metaphoricity.”<sup>816</sup> The cosmic web of correspondences that the classical symbol had disclosed amongst persons, words, and things was apparently been undone by the skeptical epistemology that had given rise to Nietzsche’s view of language as a strictly metaphorical image.

In the following, we shall see that as Rilke develops a symbolist poetics, his early writings from the period on the visual arts struggle to overcome language skepticism and the prevailing abstraction of art in the West. Whereas the 1903 monograph on the Worpswede school of painters and sculptors perpetuates a modern theory of the symbolism as arbitrary, metaphorical signification, which had purportedly left Ibsen’s plays “as nothing,” Rilke’s later writings on Rodin and Cézanne evince a metaphysical turn in his thinking about the image’s place in the cosmos and its symbolic covenant with the invisible origins. We contend that Rilke’s development of a symbolist poetics vis-à-vis the visual arts represents his response to fin-de-siècle language skepticism. The 1902 monograph on Rodin and the *Briefe über Cézanne* (1907) seek to recover what Nietzschean iconoclasm and Hofmannsthal’s critique of language in his 1902 *Lord Chandos Brief* had lost: namely the view of linguistic and visual images as symbols of the divine. As remains to be seen, Rilke increasingly reconceives of the symbolic images of language and the visual arts on the basis of the sculptor’s and the painter’s antecedent visions of reality. This requires him to develop a new hermeneutic of the image as participatory (methectic) and as basing in the thorough-going similitude between language and the thing seen. Hence, his writings on the visual arts manifest his reimagination of the symbol in terms of the analogia entis.

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<sup>816</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, 205. By contrast to the classical symbol “ist die Übereinstimmung von Gegenstand und Bedeutung, Außen und Innen (oder auch *signifiant* und *signifié*) spätestens seit Nietzsche zumal für die sprachlichen Zeichen und deren Metaphorizität unwiderruflich suspendiert.“ My translation.

## The Equivocal Symbolism of *Worpswede* (1902) and “Der Panther”

Upon returning to Germany from Russia in fall 1900 and taking up residence in Worpswede, Rilke increasingly regards language and things as symbolic—yet at first only equivocally as the fusion of mind and world through images into an illusory identity.<sup>817</sup> While observing the avant-garde artist colony for his 1902 monograph, Rilke begins to conceive of “nature” as the source of aesthetic expression. “Art,” he writes, “always comes down to this relation, and not least in poetry, which knows to say most of the soul when it depicts a landscape:” a natural symbol. Rilke does not, however, conceive of the symbol as certain schools of romanticism had in lauding the “*hen kai pan*”—that is, on the basis of ontological univocity. Instead, he argues in an overtly Nietzschean vein that nature is “the other, the foreign, which is not even antagonistic, the indifferent [*Teilnahmslose*].”<sup>818</sup> Although he regards nature as “family tree” from which humanity descends “as the last fruits,” Rilke also holds that “if, beginning with ourselves, we follow it back twig for twig, limb for limb, we very soon find ourselves lost in the dark”—that is, in a darkness full of subhuman horrors (“bad blood and hatred”)—“and that, the further we descend, we come to evermore foreign and horrible beings, such that we must assume that we would find that nature, in the background, is

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<sup>817</sup> Many scholars have noted the similarity between Rilke’s thing-poetry and Anglo-American imagism and precisely on this basis. See, for instance, Müller’s discussion of the parallel in Engel, ed., *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, 214-235, and Fischer, 225. According to Müller, the “Äquivalenzgedanke” underlying the Rilkean image parallels Eliot’s notion that poetry requires an “objective correlative” in the world in order to unsentimentally express “emotion” and “states of mind” (ibid., 230-231). This suggests Rilke’s and Eliot’s shared affirmation of the principle of . Furthermore, Müller regards the Rilkean thing-poem as implying the participation of the beholder in the event of disclosure, which becomes, as Rilke puts it, “durch eine vorübergehende Intensität unseres Sehens [...] unaufhörlich gültig und von tiefer Deutsamkeit für irgendeine persönliche Einsicht” (ibid., 231). Eliot’s poetics and Rilke’s thing-poetry from Paris oppose the effacement of the person implicit in the notion of image and, therefore, repudiate the “death of the author” thesis (Roland Barthes). This affirmation of the image’s personal core indicates that it remains participatory (methetic) on the Platonic model as an essentially relational phenomenon. To put the issue in terms of phenomenology: the image is always given for a “dative of disclosure.”

<sup>818</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, WKA 4: 349. “Die Natur [ist], dem Menschen gegenüber, das Andere, das Fremde, das nichteinmal Feindliche, das Teilnahmslose.” All translations from this text are my own.

the most horrific and strangest of all.”<sup>819</sup> Whatever unity exists between nature and spirit is, according to this equivocal ontology, overshadowed by an abyssal darkness. Evincing what Taylor describes as “the ontological indeterminacy of the ‘subtler languages’ of post-romantic literature,” Rilke’s poetics rapidly develops between 1900 and 1902 through his encounter with French symbolism, Danish modernism, and avant-garde visual art.<sup>820</sup> Later reflecting on this period, Rilke describes the influence of “great literature” on his capacity to see “reality” (“wirkliche[s] Leben”):

Insofar as [great books] influenced me, they already referred me beyond themselves to nature, since the writings of the great Danish author [Jacobsen] had opened the way for me [...]. Since I have come to love them, they bolster in me the interior certainty that there are, even still, sensory equivalents (*sinnliche Äquivalente*) in nature [...] for what is quietest and most intangible and unfathomable in us.<sup>821</sup>

Alongside Baudelaire and Ibsen, he credits to Jacobsen “his willingness to undesigning contemplation [*unwählerischem Schauen*] and his resolve to behold things with wonder [*bewundern*]”—namely, as symbols of the invisible soul.<sup>822</sup> Hence it was progressively in terms of the imperative of de-subjectivization faintly chiming with his grasp of Christian-Neoplatonist apophysis that Rilke theorized his new poetics. However, we shall see that his early understanding of nature in *Worpswede*

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<sup>819</sup> Ibid., 308–309. “Freilich, da könnte mancher sich auf unsere Verwandtschaft mit der Natur berufen, von der wir doch abstammen als die letzten Früchte eines großen aufsteigenden Stammbaumes. Wer das tut, kann aber auch nicht leugnen, daß dieser Stammbaum, wenn wir ihn, von uns aus, Zweig für Zweig, Ast für Ast, zurückverfolgen, sehr bald sich im Dunkel verliert; in einem Dunkel, welches von ausgestorbenen Riesentieren bewohnt wird, von Ungeheuern voll Feindseligkeit und Haß, und daß wir, je weiter wir nach rückwärts gehen, zu immer fremderen und grausameren Wesen kommen, so daß wir annehmen müssen, die Natur als das grausamste und fremdeste von allen im Hintergrunde zu finden.”

<sup>820</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 404.

<sup>821</sup> Rilke, “Die Bücher zum wirklichen Leben,” WKA 4: 652. “[...] in demselben Maße, in dem sie auf mich wirkten, wiesen sie mich auch schon, über sich fort, an die Natur, seit die Dichtungen des großen Dänen mir diesen Weg eröffnet hatten. Um so mehr Grund habe ich, sie allein hier anzuführen. Denn ihnen zuerst verdanke ich die Bereitschaft zu unwählerischem Schauen und die Entschlossenheit, zu bewundern; und sie stützen in mir, seit ich sie liebe, die innere Gewißheit, daß es auch noch für das Leiseste und Unfaßbarste in uns in der Natur sinnliche Äquivalente giebt, die sich müssen finden lassen. Die Bibel hat erst später auf mich gewirkt und eines Tages, plötzlich: Ibsen.” My translation.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid.



as the dark source of the self at once implies a backslide into the subjective, “sentimental” worldview of his youth (Schiller)—despite Rilke’s heroic efforts to “pursue lost nature and thus to try, perforce of a concentrated will, to come as close to her as [he] was—without having really known it—in childhood.”<sup>823</sup>

This equivocation vis-à-vis the self’s source in nature results from the quintessentially modern celebration of expressive selfhood still coloring Rilke’s sense of the symbol. Paralleling his conflicted engagement with Russian Orthodox iconography, however, we also see him struggling in *Worpswede* against this egocentric worldview.<sup>824</sup> For even as he holds that aesthetic expression is fundamentally individualistic (“Sei du!”), Rilke suggests the need for a kind of de-centering vis-à-vis the subject. For if art “begins,” he says, “in the moment when one enters into a part of the world so as to gather words for something uncommon [*Ungemeinsames*], uncommonly profound [*Ungemeines*], and personal,” self-expression also requires the artist to return to his transcendent—at once in-and-outmost—source in nature: Thus,

having barely secured a commonwealth and shelter for the individual, in the first free moment, as it were, he inquires as to his own existence. And already what is closest to him is too close for him to make an image of it for his first solitary experience. It is through the farthest thing that he can still oversee [namely, landscape] that he attempts to express himself.<sup>825</sup>

Rilke’s emerging sense of self-expression through natural symbols requires what is outmost to the modern sensibility—the “farthest thing” he sees, the “nature” whence we arose, which thus

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<sup>823</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, WKA 4: 311.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., 349–50. Thus he writes, “Sei du! Einer sein, als Künstler, heißt: sich sagen können. Das wäre nicht so schwer, wenn die Sprache von dem Einzelnen ausginge, in ihm entstünde und sich, von da aus, allmählich Ohr und Verständnis der anderen erzwänge“ (349).

<sup>825</sup> Ibid. Die Kunst beginnt in dem Augenblick, da ein Mensch an ein Stück Welt herantrat, um aus ihm Worte für etwas Ungemeinsames, Ungemeines, Persönliches zu holen. Da, kaum daß das Gemeinwesen gesichert und der Einzelne geschützt ist, in der ersten freien Minute gleichsam, fragt er nach sich. Und schon ist ihm der Nächste zu nah, um aus ihm das Bild für sich, für sein erstes einsames Erlebnis zu nehmen. Im Fernsten, das er noch überschauen kann, sucht er es auszusprechen.”

transcends us—in order to express what is inmost to us. Although nature represents for Rilke “the other, the foreign” source of the self, this equivocal appeal also implies a mandate to fulfill oneself (one’s *own* nature) by expressing “the inner élan, the voice, or impulse” particular to it through symbolic utterances—just as it had during the “expressivist turn” of eighteenth-century literature (Rousseau and Herder).<sup>826</sup> As a “cornerstone of modern culture,” the turn outwards to the source of the self in nature had paradoxically become, as Taylor contends, the basis of the tortured notions of interiority and selfhood evident in both romanticism and literary modernism.<sup>827</sup> Hence Hofmannsthal’s appeal, echoing Rilke’s own, to the natural symbol in his *Conversation on Poetry* (1904), which holds that since “all the most secret and deepest states of our interiority” are “interwoven with a landscape, a season, with a composition of the air,” we “must not descend into our inwardness” in order “to find ourselves;” rather, “outside is where we are found, outside.”<sup>828</sup> As Taylor suggests, this worldview equivocates vis-à-vis its ontological origins in nature inasmuch as it implies “a slide to subjectivism and an anti-subjectivist thrust at the same time.”<sup>829</sup> Because unknowable nature is the source of the self, natural symbols (landscapes) are the only adequate means of expressing the self’s origins in the invisible: its abyssal depths, *or*, transcendence beyond the scope and prior to the designs of the ego. Hence Rilke’s key contention in the introduction to

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<sup>826</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 374.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid. Regarding expressivism’s link to literary modernism, Taylor has described a tension between, on the one hand, a turn inwards to subjectivity as a response to scientific positivism and the hegemony of univocal metaphysics and, on the other, the concomitant tendency to “decenter the subject,” which begets “an art displacing the center of interest onto language, or onto poetic transmutation: ‘Twentieth-century art has gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity; it has explored new recesses of feeling, entered the strain of consciousness, spawned schools of art rightly called ‘expressionist.’ But at the same time, at its greatest it has often involved a decentering of the subject: an art emphatically not conceived as self-expression, an art displacing the center of interest onto language, or onto poetic transmutation itself, or even dissolving the self as usually conceived in favour of some new constellation” (456).

<sup>828</sup> From “Das Gespräch über Dichtung” as translated in Staiger, *Basic Concept of Poetics*, trans. Marianna Burkhard, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 82.

<sup>829</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 456.

*Worpswede* that art always discloses “most of the soul when it depicts a landscape.”<sup>830</sup> As a symbol of the soul’s dark origins, the depiction (*Darstellung*) of a landscape *qua* unknowable nature expresses the transcendent in a profoundly equivocal manner. For while Rilke considers it “the final and perhaps the most peculiar value of art that it is the medium in which humanity and landscape, form and world meet up,” he nevertheless insists that “in reality,” they only “live side by side, hardly knowing of one another.”<sup>831</sup> Reflecting modernity’s prevailing irrationalism, the natural symbol’s “value” remains an arbitrary imposition of the subject onto formless matter. And yet, Rilke sentimentally insists, “in the image [... form and world] appear, as if in a higher prophetic truth, to combine, to invoke another, and it is as though they completed each so as to attain that perfect unity, which makes up the essence of art.”<sup>832</sup> Even as the sentimental artist searches nature, like Rilke’s Ibsen, for visible correspondences to the transcendent, it becomes progressively difficult—indeed, seemingly impossible—for him to show “what is expressed or embodied *in reality*.”<sup>833</sup>

This difficulty is evident in the hermeneutics of the symbol as advanced in a later chapter of *Worpswede* returning to the themes of the introduction. It becomes increasingly evident that, despite Rilke’s grasp of the natural symbol as the “sensory equivalent” of the soul, its manner of expression (*Seinsweise*) equivocates, for Rilke, as a sign intimating the transcendent while never disclosing its real presence. Once again, nature is figured as “the other, the foreign, which is not even antagonistic, the

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<sup>830</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, WKA 4: 312. “Immer aber kommt es auf dieses Verhältnis an, nicht zuletzt in der Dichtung, die gerade dann am meisten von der Seele zu sagen weiß, wenn sie Landschaft giebt[.]”

<sup>831</sup> Ibid., 311. “In Wirklichkeit leben sie nebeneinander, kaum von einander wissend[.]”

<sup>832</sup> Ibid. “Im Bilde [...] scheinen sie sich, wie in einer höheren prophetischen Wahrheit, zusammenzuschließen, aufeinander zu berufen, und es ist, als ergänzten sie einander zu jener vollkommenen Einheit, die das Wesen des Kunstwerks ausmacht.”

<sup>833</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 476.

indifferent [*Teilnahmlose*]”—thus, as the transcendent yet finally *absent* source of the self.<sup>834</sup> This metaphysical pre-conviction (*Vorurteil*) results in *Worpswede*’s inconsistent hermeneutic, which vacillates between the language of classical symbolism and modernity’s prevailing theory of signification as arbitrary metaphor. Consider Rilke’s reference here to the “dictum by Delacroix (passed on through Baudelaire)” that “nature is for us a dictionary; we search it for words.”<sup>835</sup> Neither Rilke nor his romantic predecessors purport to mean “words” in the conventional sense. As Baudelaire remarks, we search dictionaries “for the meaning of words, the creation of words, the etymology of words, [...] but nobody has ever considered the dictionary as a composition in the poetic sense of the word”: namely, as a symbolic correspondence unifying mind and world.<sup>836</sup> Similarly lamenting the modern view of language as an arbitrary system of signification—that “grand, humming, vacillating convention, into which everyone projects his own desires,” only “to lose himself the minute he speaks”—Rilke advocates what he considers a classical hermeneutic of the symbol. And he does so with an appeal to “Dante and Shakespeare,” thus suggesting a way of meaning things based in nature yet also characterized by nature’s radical alterity.<sup>837</sup> If only obliquely, perhaps even unconsciously, Rilke suggests the *analogia entis*, which had provided the metaphysical

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<sup>834</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, WKA 4: 349.

<sup>835</sup> Cited in “Der Weg vom Symbolismus,” 160-161; my translation. Müller quotes Baudelaire’s discussion of this phrase in “Salon de 1859.” “La nature n’est qu’un dictionnaire’, répétait-il fréquemment. Pour bien comprendre l’étendue du sens implique dans cette phrase, il faut se figurer les usages nombreux et ordinaires du dictionnaire. On MKG cherche le sens des mots, la génération des mots, l’étymologie des mots ... mais personne n’a jamais considéré le dictionnaire comme une composition dans le sens poétique du mot[.]”

<sup>836</sup> Ibid.; my translation.

<sup>837</sup> Rilke, *Worpswede*, WKA 4: 349. Language “ist das Gemeinsame, das keiner gemacht hat, weil alle es fortwährend machen, die große, summende und schwingende Konvention, in die jeder hineinspricht was er auf dem Herzen hat. Und da kommt es vor, daß Einer, der innerlich anders ist, als seine Nachbarn, sich verliert indem er sich ausspricht, wie der Regen im Meer verloren geht.”

framework for the *Divine Comedy*—without, however, fully recovering the symbolic covenant between the image and its source basing in the metaphysics of analogy.

Upon quoting Delacroix, Rilke suggests his understanding of language as a symbolic relation at this time only metaphorically—thus, *equivocally*—depicting the unity between self and world, image and source. For in stressing the sheer difference between these polarities, he elides the principle of analogy subtending them and first enabling their correspondence:

Precisely this circumstance makes it possible to employ nature as a dictionary. It is only because [nature] is so different from us that we are capable of expressing ourselves through it. To say the same by means of the same is not an advance. Iron striking iron only makes a noise; it does not spark.<sup>838</sup>

Iron's impact with something essentially different than itself—stone—produces a spark transcending its source in either. Analogously, the spark is a natural symbol sprung from the person's encounter with heterogeneous nature. Yet this image of the invisible slumbering within the material does not foreground the (implicit) analogic basis of nature's alterity vis-à-vis spirit—the *identity* in still greater difference—but instead evokes spirit's sheer transcendence through metaphor. As Antje Büssgen observes of this key image, it is only “*metaphorically* that nature can serve as the dictionary of the finest stirrings of the soul, thus to appear with its vocabulary of the visible beside the conventions of ordinary language.”<sup>839</sup> If nature contains spirit and can express spirit as the source of the self, it purportedly shares nothing in common with spirit as the latter's non-participatory “other.” Any reference to “nature” and its symbolic presence remains just that: arbitrary signification referring to without truly presenting (*darstellen*) the thing seen. Despite Rilke's

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<sup>838</sup> Ibid., 349. “Die Natur sei, dem Menschen gegenüber, das Andere, das Fremde, das nicht einmal Feindliche, das Teilnahmslose. Gerade dieser Umstand macht es möglich, sich der Natur als eines Wörterbuches zu bedienen. Nur weil sie uns so sehr verschieden, so ganz entgegengesetzt ist, sind wir imstande, uns durch sie auszudrücken. Gleiches mit Gleichem zu sagen ist kein Fortschritt. Eisen an Eisen geschlagen giebt nur ein Geräusch, keinen Funken.”

<sup>839</sup> Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 138. “*Metaphorisch* also kann die Natur als Wörterbuch feinsten Seelenregungen dienen und mit ihrem Wortschatz des Sichtbaren neben die Konventionen alltagssprachlicher Kommunikation treten.”

insistence otherwise, then, it is ultimately the expressivist self's own sense of transcendence vis-à-vis nature that secures the alterity—the invisible meaning—of the symbol. Recalling the equivocal image of the soul as a spark (*scintilla animae*) so often employed by romantics like Hölderlin and Schiller (alternatively pantheist and idealist) and mystics like Meister Eckhart (alternatively orthodox and heretical), who had similarly etiolated the symbolic image by stressing its sheer difference from the transcendent, Rilke insists here on the ontological gulf between nature and spirit—even as his metaphor fuses these polarities in a way that cannot wholly sustain their opposition. The metaphysical basis of Rilke's symbolism, as articulated in *Worpswede*, consequently wavers between metaphysical monism and dualism. For inasmuch as the natural symbol expresses the transcendent metaphorically—in the manner of a sign precluding participation in both nature and its transcendent source—it precludes the real presence of either, as both recede from view like some *deus absconditus*. Thus, the transcendent becomes increasingly extrinsic to the self and nature since, on this model, they lack an ontologically robust relation to one another (identity) within the cosmic order (logos) of things.

If, as remains to be seen, Rilke gradually overcomes modernity's equivocal view of the natural symbol, it remains a problem for his poetics into the *Neue Gedichte*—a problem, however, that the thing-poetry's use of symbolic imagery basing in the metaphysics of analogia finally resolves. To put the problem in terms of classical poetics, abstraction in the arts arises from the symbol's reduction to an allegorical mode of reference etiolating the symbolic image to a sign. As Gadamer explains, the image's concrete manner of depicting (*darstellen*) the thing is therefore reduced to mere reference, such that its referent remains an abstract idea—some isolated thing hinted at but never constitutively present—thus attenuating the image's relation to the thing seen (*eidos*) to sheer difference devoid of ontological identity. When regarded as a sign-system, the image no longer presents the symbolic covenant between appearances and their invisible origins but instead devolves

to an arbitrary play of signs: a metaphor for something else entirely. It is for this reason that the epiphanies of modernist symbolism tend to equivocally refer to the transcendent while denying the possibilities of real presence and participation (*methexis*) in the phenomenon.<sup>840</sup> This crisis is evident in the earliest of the *Neue Gedichte*, the sonnet “Der Panther” (c. 1902), which was occasioned both by Rilke’s observation of a panther at the Jardin des Plantes and by an antique statue of a tiger in one of Rodin’s workshops.<sup>841</sup> For it depicts a vision (of language) so enervated that it seems to have lost any real content in the realm of appearances. In staging the problem of the natural symbol’s equivocation, however, this thing poem also provides the solution to the symbolic image’s increasing abstraction in modernity: the *analogia entis*. Hence it indicates that the hermeneutic key to understanding Rilke’s new poetics of the symbol as developed in Paris is his gradual recovery, under the influence of Rodin, of a metaphysical sense of the beholder’s participation in the thing seen by means of the symbolic imagination: namely, through oblique analogies between nature, culture, and the divine beheld in contemplation of the thing’s invisible origins.

#### Der Panther

##### *Im Jardin des Plantes, Paris*

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe  
so müd geworden, daß er nichts mehr hält.  
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe  
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

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<sup>840</sup> Wagner-Egelhaaft, *Mystik der Moderne*, provides a similar genealogy of the modernist image. For her description of the image’s gestalt of identity-in-difference in literary modernism is, in keeping with Eckhart, equivocal—not analogical as per the scholastic doctrine of the *analogia entis*. On this basis, she distinguishes between two “grundsätzlich verschiedener” traditions of the symbol, one Christian and one Christian-Neoplatonic: namely, the “ontologischen Symbol denken” of the former and the “rhetorisch-hermeneutischen Tradition der Allegorie” of the latter (ibid. 26). Wagner-Egelhaaft contends that modernist literature develops from the allegorical tradition’s conception of the image/word as a sign opposed to its numinous referent without mediation (3).

<sup>841</sup> See Fischer, *Poet as Phenomenologist*, 237.

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,  
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,  
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,  
in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht.

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille  
sich lautlos auf –. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,  
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille –  
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.<sup>842</sup>

Similar to the Enlightenment (in origins Lockean) theory of language as conventional signs composed of arbitrary letters (*Buchstaben*) bearing no real correspondence with things, the bars (“Stäbe”) of the cage have apparently severed the panther from any meaningful relation to the world and its source in nature and the divine. Indeed, the bars have taken on an uncanny—because wholly abstract—life of their own in passing back and forth before the panther’s gaze, which Rilke precisely conveys through the abstract neuter noun (“das Vorübergehen”). The agency thus seems to lie in the bars/letters draining the natural symbol’s vitality—not in the organism that sees through them. Its vision has been reduced to an empty gaze that “takes in nothing more” as the panther restlessly circles its cage. And yet, the “torpid” beast retains a vital “middle” hinting at the thing’s symbolic depth: the vortiginous center of a will so powerful that it appears to rotate, Lawrence Ryan asserts, around itself alone—as though in radical remotion (*Abgeschiedenheit*), “deprived of any focus or objective” beyond its cage.<sup>843</sup> On this reading, the poem’s phenomenally impoverished center precludes the image, conceived as a rich medium of appearances between the contingent and the eternal.<sup>844</sup> When the beast languidly opens its eyes, “Dann geht ein Bild hinein,/ geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille –// und hört im Herzen auf zu sein,” thus suggesting the image’s

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<sup>842</sup> Rilke, “Der Panther,” WKA 1: 469.

<sup>843</sup> Lawrence Ryan, “Neue Gedichte—New Poems,” in *A Companion to the Works of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed., Erika A. Metzger and Michael M. Metzger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), 141.

<sup>844</sup> See Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1971), 146.



vitiation to a mere sign of the divine life force that has forever departed the animal. For L. Ryan, then, the symbol's "empty center" is ontologically equivocal in that it intimates the invisible source of life yet only by negating the symbolic image in the manner of allegory: that is, by negating the presence of the transcendent in and through the phenomenon. Following this logic to its conclusion, "one could say that the center that is nothing and that the center that is God are essentially the same."<sup>845</sup> As a result, the panther qua natural symbol vacillates between a monist and dualist ontology since, per this interpretation, the panther's "middle" is at once divine being and nothing. On this view, the natural symbol is confined by a hermeneutic intimating at yet finally barring the real presence of the divine. Hence, any reference to the transcendent remains essentially metaphorical.

While "Der Panther" certainly stages the prevailing notion of symbol in fin-de-siècle France and Germany—namely, as having become wholly autonomous from its origins—it does so in defiance of this abstract worldview. Indeed, it is precisely modernity's impoverished notion of the symbol as void of numinous content that this sonnet and the *Neue Gedichte*—viewed as a whole and as a response to fin-de-siècle language skepticism—redress. Because, as Fischer observes, Rilke's thing-poems are invariably "given in person" for the beholder, they become "rich phenomena" characterized by "an excess of meaning" intimating the divinity as given *in* and *through* the image of the thing seen. This is evident, above all, in the very syntax of "Der Panther," which again utilizes analogy to depict its subject:

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<sup>845</sup> In keeping with his equivocal view of the symbol, L. Ryan's reading of the *Neue Gedichte* stresses 1) the thing-poem's presentation of "isolated moments of lyric inwardness"/"transcendence" and 2) Rilke's use of the lyric metaphor (not simile) as the means for conveying such insight. Although he discusses Rilke's use of metaphorical imagery—conceived as a "correspondence of the disparate"—it is hard to see how, on L. Ryan's account, it draws mind and world, beholder and thing seen, "into greater proximity to the 'ultimate still sources of all life,'" if the Rilkean symbol is, as Ryan suggests, wholly self-contained (L. Ryan, "Neue Gedichte—New Poems," 133, 150). If the symbolic image never presents the thing seen, but instead remains an autonomous entity, then it can neither participate in nor even draw near the "source of life." This is precisely why the panther appears so torpid: it represents a deficient mode of life (in a cage) and a deficient mode of symbolic presentation ("heautonomous" self-absorption).

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,  
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,  
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,  
in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht.

Despite the panther's confinement, its vital depths emerge from Rilke's wonderful description of its supple yet powerful gait: "like a dance of power around a middle// in which, benumbed, a great will stands." The symbolic center no longer fully appears as an expression of the animal's vital force as it would have if beheld in its natural context. Hence the sheer enormity of its presence is no longer unbound and able to destroy the beholder but only appears provisionally and obliquely, as though veiled by the bars of the cage and images of the poem. As Fischer contends, however, "this privation is at the same time revelatory of its relation to its natural" and, furthermore, its *supernatural* "*Umwelt*."<sup>846</sup> For what this poem depicts is the panther's denaturalization at the hands of human beings who have enervated the organism by severing it from the order of the cosmos. Rilke's insight thus lies in the observation that the panther's form as a symbolic image of this invisible provenance remains—despite the image's effacement by people who have literally abstracted it from it from its habitat. Thus, the image does not become wholly autonomous as per French symbolism, just as it remains irreducible to a mere sign of what was lost. For "its meaning and existence are" irrevocably "bound" to the "larger contextual whole" in which it still lives—including, in this moment, the vision and imagination of the beholder.<sup>847</sup> To say that the panther is "like a dance of power" thus implicates, by way of analogy, the visions of the poet and the reader within what Rilke later describes in terms of the cosmology of "world-interior-space"—that is, the cosmic inwardness of the image. Inasmuch as the animal still peers out of this symbolic center—however impoverished its and the beholder's view of things may have become—its vision necessarily "articulates itself within" ours,

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<sup>846</sup> Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 240.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

thus reversing the direction of intentionality in a way that overcomes the reduction of appearances to the ego's sentimental perspective. The power of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) thus participates in and unfolds through the life force of the natural symbol. When the final, provisional image disappears in the dark heart of the beast and, as it were, goes under in the manner of a sign, it nonetheless remains before the beholder as manifest in the vision of the poem and therefore retains the gestalt of the whole. In so doing, this lyric image depicts a "reverse perspective" on the thing seen—the panther qua natural symbol—opening the beholder's vision to the metaphysical schema of the appearances. For it emerges that an interior correspondence between the panther, the beholder, and their world obtains insofar as the symbolic image presents its transcendent source in the cosmos by way of analogy: as a relation of identity in difference subtly evoking the *analogia entis*.

### **The Analogy of "Création" in *Auguste Rodin* and *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter***

Scholarship has recognized the spiritual crisis of nineteenth-century Europe as the impetus behind Rilke's development of a symbolist poetics, and, in so doing, it has rightly described his engagement with the visual arts in Worpswede and Paris as a response to fin-de-siècle language skepticism.<sup>848</sup> What the scholarship has insufficiently grasped, however, is the extent to which Rilke overcomes the sentimental poetics of youth by embracing the classical metaphysics underpinning Auguste Rodin's aesthetics. We shall that the 1903 monograph on Rodin, the letters, and the thing-poetry from this period progressively sought to recover a grasp of poësis ("creation") that Nietzschean iconoclasm and Hofmannsthal's critique of language in his 1902 *Lord Chandos Brief* had lost: namely the view of linguistic and visual images as symbols of the divine. After meeting Rodin in the fall of 1902, a new hermeneutic—that is, a novel manner of interpreting appearances—began to reshape Rilke's view of things and their place in the cosmos. A 1903 letter to Lou Andreas-Solomé

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<sup>848</sup> See Engel, ed., *Rilke-Handbuch*, 136.

suggests the gestalt shift that his first, momentous weeks in Paris and Meudon had wrought. In it he confesses to Andreas-Solomé, who had known Nietzsche personally and introduced Rilke to his writings, that things now “speak” differently to him:

Rodin’s things, the things on the gothic cathedrals, the things of antiquity, all things that are perfect things [...] point me to their prototypes [*Vorbilder*]: to the moving living world, seen simply and without interpretation as the occasion for things. I am beginning to see newly: already flowers are often so infinitely much to me, and from animals have come stirrings of a strange kind.<sup>849</sup>

Nature and art speak more “strangely” as living images of their source in the infinite. This language of “type and prototype” recalls the classical symbol; yet it does so in an emphatically de-subjectivized manner. Now things are “seen simply and without interpretation.” The originality of Rilke’s “new” worldview lay in its return—by way, we shall see, of analogic intervals—to the thing’s eternal origins: to “the prototype” as obliquely presented in and through its types (images). Hence, what the young poet had learned to see under the influence of Rodin was, as he explains in his breathtaking letters to Xaver Kappus, a “more coherent” view of things locally inspired, to be sure, by Charles Baudelaire, yet more deeply still by an international movement with roots in the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition.<sup>850</sup> Unlike the equivocal epiphanies characterizing much modernist literature—from Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) to Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg* (1924)—Rilke’s thing-poetry from Paris indicates that the symbol is the analogic correlate of a vision into the eternal origins of “life,” where “everything is contemporaneous and alert and nothing is lost.”<sup>851</sup> The thing’s “beautiful appearance” is thus, as the letter on Rodin puts it, “a moment of insight [*Augenblick*], a

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<sup>849</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, vol. 1, ed., Ruth Sieber-R. & Karl Altheim (Wiesbaden: Insel Verlag, 1950), 59.

<sup>850</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1983), 33.

<sup>851</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4: 406; my translation. “Ein solches Leben, in dem alles gleichzeitig ist und wach und nichts vergangen.”

youth that comes and goes in all ages.”<sup>852</sup> More than a metaphor sparked by some essentially transient perception, this vision of things as living symbols of the transcendent presents a counter perspective on reality recovering its metaphysical schema: the organic law of appearances basing in the *analogia entis*.

Precipitating this shift was Rodin’s vision of the cosmos as a unified whole on the model of the organism.<sup>853</sup> Yet beyond changing Rilke’s sense of the symbolic covenant between parts and wholes and, hence, between things and their place within nature and culture, the encounter with Rodin had opened Rilke’s eyes, once again, to the cosmos’ eternal origins. This is hinted at in the awestruck tone of a letter to Heinrich Vogeler from Rilke’s first weeks in Paris: “Rodin is extraordinary,” he proclaims, “and very much like his work, which exceeds [*übertreffen*] all expectations. It is a world around which sun, earth, and all the stars are circling: a new solar system.”<sup>854</sup> After visiting Rodin’s outdoor workshop in Meudon, Rilke describes the “immensely great and strange impression” that “the huge bright hall with all its white, blinding figures” made on him: “Great is the effect: surpassingly great [*übergroß*]. One sees even before stepping inside that all these hundred lives are *one* life — vibrations of *one* power and *one* will.”<sup>855</sup> Primed by his burgeoning poetics of landscape as first developed in *Worpswede*, Rilke saw in the figure of Rodin and his statues a unified cosmos wherein things and appearances bear a symbolic relation to their transcendent source: “Every one of these fragments”—the seemingly isolated hands, busts, and torsos “looking out through” the pavilion’s “glass doors like the populace of an aquarium”—each piece “is only conceivable,” Rilke observes, “on the basis of such a transcendent [*eminent*], seizing unity [*Einheit*],

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<sup>852</sup> Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, 1: 59. My translation and emphasis.

<sup>853</sup> See Ralph Freedman, *Life of a Poet: Rainer Maria Rilke*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 166.

<sup>854</sup> Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, 1: 40. My translation.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*, 34. My translation.

and it is so utterly not in need of completion [*Ergänzung*], that one forgets that they are only parts and often parts of different bodies.”<sup>856</sup> Rilke’s insight into the transcendent unity of the fragment allowed him to attain a view of nature as a whole as knowable and, even, as essentially participatory (methectic). In his contemporaneous letters to the young poet Xaver Kappus, Rilke advises him on this basis to “trust in nature, in what is simple in nature, in the small things that hardly anyone sees that can suddenly become huge, unmeasurable.”<sup>857</sup> For he suggests that doing so “as someone who serves,” so as “to win the confidence of what seems poor,” makes “everything more coherent [*einheitlicher*] and somehow more reconciling, not in your conscious mind perhaps, but in your innermost awareness, awakens, and knowledge.”<sup>858</sup>

Underlying this “more coherent” view of things was a new understanding of the natural symbol. Rilke’s letters from the period testify to his trust in the “beautiful appearance” of things as manifesting the cosmic order (logos). Now, he believes, surface phenomena contain “depths in which everything becomes law [*Gesetz*].”<sup>859</sup> Rilke had thus learned a new way of beholding “the nature of things”—not solely the nature of *the self*—from Rodin’s contemplative practice of discerning their “modelé,” which Rilke understands as “science of planes, as distinct from contours,” presenting the vital depth that “fills out all contours” and, in so doing, expresses “the law governing the relationship between these planes.”<sup>860</sup> When, in conversation with Rilke, Rodin finds that his young daughter has placed the shell of a snail in his hands, he exclaims after a few moments’ silent

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<sup>856</sup> Ibid., 35. My translation.

<sup>857</sup> Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 33.

<sup>858</sup> Ibid.

<sup>859</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>860</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters*, trans. Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton, (New York: MKG.MKG. Norton, 1945-48), 83.

admiration: “Voilà, le modelé grec!”<sup>861</sup> Echoing Goethe’s teaching from his studies in plant morphology that “all is leaf,” Rilke explains the meaning of this event in observing that “the little snail recalls the greatest works of Greek art:”

it has the same simplicity, the same smoothness, the same inner radiance, the same cheerful and festive sort of surface ... And herein things are infallible! They contain laws in their purest form. Even the *fragments* in such a shell will again be of the same order, will be once more modelé grec. This snail will always remain a whole, as regards its modelé, and the smallest piece of [this] snail shell is always modelé grec.<sup>862</sup>

No matter how partial their form, Rodin suggests, natural symbols disclose their origins in an eternal law (logos). Writing to Xaver Kuppus from Rome one year later, Rilke provides a similar example of how things express their source in nature and the divine: namely, the “unforgettable ... staircases designed by Michelangelo, staircases constructed on the pattern [*Vorbild*] of downward-gliding waters, and, as they descend, widely giving birth to step out of step, as if it were wave out of wave.”<sup>863</sup> By contemplating [*Anschauen*] “such impressions,” Rilke proceeds to observe, “one gathers oneself back from the exacting multiplicity, which speaks and chatters there ..., and slowly learns to recognize the very few things in which something eternal endures that one can love ... and gently partake in.”<sup>864</sup>

Rilke had come to view the image as participating in divine reality through the transition of analogic intervals: like a wave out of wave, or, as he inversely depicts the lawful rhythm of rise and fall, *exitus* and *reditus*, underlying natural and cultural forms in “Die Treppe der Orangerie” (1906),

Wie Könige die schließlich nur noch schreiten  
fast ohne Ziel,...

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<sup>861</sup> Ibid.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid., 83-84. Translation altered.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid., 49.

so steigt, allein zwischen den Balustraden,  
die sich verneigen schon seit Anbeginn,  
die Treppe: langsam und von Gottes Gnaden  
und auf den Himmel zu und nirgends hin[.]<sup>865</sup>

Like a king representing divine will and reason in the temporal order, the staircase's genuflection from the beginning of time and its subsequent ascent manifests (*darstellen*) the eternal dynamic of "God's grace:" kenosis in the ongoing act of creation—generative self-sacrifice and self-transcendence. Rilke's sense of participation and the metaphysics of analogia underlying the symbolic image is thus much broader than he first lets on to Xaver Kappus. As he had suggested in a letter to Clara from the previous fall, following just one week of visits to Meudon, the whole of nature had become more coherent and beautiful for him. Upon his return to Rodin's home one evening, after walking in the wooded valley near his workshop, he saw with fresh eyes how "the green of the vineyards were undulating in the dark, and the skies were wide and filled with stillness.

The bells were ringing and spreading out high up and nestling into the narrow Val Fleury and were everywhere in every stone and in the hand of every child. For a long time I haven't felt land, sky, and distance thus. As if I had sat for a year in a city or in a prison—that is how thankful I was to these things for their loneliness [*Einsamkeit*] and moved by every little leaf that took part, subservient and still, as the smallest member in the greatness of this evening.<sup>866</sup>

Like Rodin's fragmentary statues, every leaf had become symbolic of the transcendent unity of nature. And although it is only implied, each leaf participates thusly because its loneliness, singularity, and unity reflect the finite poet's and deity's presence through the analogy of being.

Rilke's view of natural symbols had changed after his visits to Meudon insofar as he now viewed them, as Ralph Freedman suggests, in terms of a transcendent, "ordering spirit."<sup>867</sup> While

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<sup>865</sup> Rilke, "Die Treppe der Orangerie," WKA 1: 487.

<sup>866</sup> Rilke, *Letters*, 86.

<sup>867</sup> Freedman, *Life of a Poet*, 166.



Rilke saw “in each thing a reflection of the whole and ... the whole as a function of the organism,” its organic form itself eminently transcends the whole as a presentation through analogy of the organism’s invisible source: spirit. This view is intimated in Rilke’s understanding of the “law” of nature manifest in Rodin’s art in terms of a word taken from the mouth of the master: “création,” a word that had, according to Rilke, “lost the frivolity of its French usage and the cumbersome heaviness of the German word: *Schöpfung*,” and thus, like Augustine’s *verbum interius*, had “eclipsed every human language...and was alone in the world.”<sup>868</sup> This transcendent word had, Rilke contends, excelled the ideology-laden conventions of human language by becoming an image of the spirit of the Creator and, hence, by bearing the divine likeness through the analogy of being. Rilke’s more coherent view of nature and art as “création” shines through in his letters to the young poet, where he states that “all beauty in animals and plants is a silent, enduring form of love and yearning.”<sup>869</sup> Now Rilke suggests that he “can see the animal, as he sees plants, patiently and willingly uniting and multiplying and growing, not out of physical pleasure, not out of physical pain, but bowing to necessities that are greater than pleasure or pain, and more powerful than will and withstanding”—that is, he intimates, bowing to final causes transcending the order material and efficient causation. As “création,” his vision of nature has fundamentally altered. It is now something the poet “humbly receives” as a “mystery:” namely, as a contemplative vision of the end “that the world is filled with, even in its smallest things.”<sup>870</sup> The metaphysical basis of this counter perspective on reality, understood as “création,” is the *analogia entis*: the identity in greater difference between nature, culture, and their invisible source in the divine. “If only,” Rilke continues, people “could be more reverent toward their own fruitfulness, which is essentially *one*, whether it is manifested as mental or

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<sup>868</sup> Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, 33. My translation.

<sup>869</sup> Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 38.

<sup>870</sup> Ibid.

physical; for mental creation too arises from the physical, is of one nature with it and only like a softer, more enraptured and more eternal repetition of bodily delight.”<sup>871</sup> After encountering Rodin, Rilke could no longer espouse a dualistic view of the cosmos. What he had beheld was undeniable: he had seen the numinous presence of things as richly given through the sheer vitality of their surface appearances. In Rodin’s art and through the superabundance of life that infused them, Rilke had become the recipient of a vision of the thing’s inner form (*modèle*): its participation, by way of analogy, in the divine act of creation.

The principle of analogia underpinning Rilke’s new grasp of things as symbols of creative spirit is also evident in his account from the 1903 monograph of Rodin’s aesthetic vision. Regarding the portraits of Victor Hugo, Balzac, and the *Man with the Broken Nose*, which Rilke considered together as “the last stage, the outer circle of [Rodin’s] vast development,” he suggests that the analogia entis is their hermeneutic key. For here he compares the contemplative manner of “interpretation” (*Auslegung*) developed by Rodin to a Christian “parable” (*Gleichnis*): this vision,

which began with the portraits, extended deeper and deeper into his work... It began slowly. Rodin walked this new path with infinite caution. Again, he proceeded from plane to plane, following and listening to nature. It was nature itself that showed him the places he knew more about than met the eye. When he went to work and created a great simplification from many small details in disarray, the result resembled what Christ had done when people approached him with unclear questions, and he cleansed them of their sins with a sublime parable. He fulfilled nature’s own intentions. He completed things that were helpless in their becoming, and he revealed hidden relationships just as the evening of a hazy day reveals mountains extending into the distance like rolling waves.<sup>872</sup>

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid.

<sup>872</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4: 434. “Diese Auslegung, die bei den Porträts begann, wuchs von da immer weiter in sein Werk hinein. Sie ist die letzte Stufe, der äußerste Kreis seiner weiten Entwicklung. Sie fing langsam an. Mit unendlicher Vorsicht betrat Rodin diesen neuen Weg. Wieder drang er von Fläche zu Fläche vor, ging der Natur nach und hörte auf sie. Sie selbst bezeichnete ihm gleichsam die Stellen, von denen er mehr wußte, als zu sehen war. Wenn er dort einsetzte und aus kleinen Verworrenheiten eine große Vereinfachung schuf, so tat er, was Christus den Leuten tat, wenn er die unklar Fragenden mit einem erhabenen Gleichnis reinigte von ihrer Schuld. Er erfüllte eine Intention der Natur. Er vollendete etwas, was im Werden hüllos war, er deckte die Zusammenhänge auf, wie der Abend eines Nebeltages die Berge aufdeckt, die in großen Wellen sich fortpflanzen in die Ferne.” My translation.

It was by way of parabolic similitude (*Gleichnis*) that Rodin's artwork manifests the logos underlying all appearances and rippling through them in waves. Hence he made these things, Rilke believes, "as God had made them" with respect to their formal and final cause: namely, their "participation," by way of analogy, in the deity's own "nameless life."<sup>873</sup> For Rodin, "creating a portrait meant searching for eternity in any given face, that piece of eternity with which it took part in the great life of eternal things."<sup>874</sup> "Just as we hold a thing up to the sky," Rilke observes, "in order to understand its form more purely and simply, these images are all moved, if ever so slightly, from their moorings into the future."<sup>875</sup> As opposed to mere "beautification" and "characteristic expression," then, this symbolic vision of the thing's participation in the cosmic order was "a matter of separating the enduring from the transitory, passing judgment, being just."<sup>876</sup> Specifically, it was predicated on the analogy between the transcendent good (*thearchia*) in and through which all things were made and the artist's own act of creation: thus, as Rilke puts it, on Rodin's "unbounded devotion to what was before him, his reverence for every line drawn by fate, his trust in life, which creates even where it disfigures."<sup>877</sup> The artist's "trust" in nature's likeness to the divine life had consequently made him "stronger and less confused by the multiplicity" of appearances, so that now "he felt himself capable of recognizing the eternal in all this, that which made suffering also good, that which made expectation of hard times,

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<sup>873</sup> Ibid., 433. My translation.

<sup>874</sup> Ibid., 434. My translation. "Ein Bildnis schaffen hieß für ihn, in einem gegebenen Gesichte Ewigkeit suchen, jenes Stück Ewigkeit, mit dem es teilnahm an dem großen Gange ewiger Dinge."

<sup>875</sup> Ibid. My translation. "Er hat keinen gebildet, den er nicht ein wenig aus den Angeln gehoben hätte in die Zukunft hinein; wie man ein Ding vor den Himmel hält, um seine Formen reiner und einfacher zu verstehen."

<sup>876</sup> Ibid. My translation. "Das ist nicht, was man verschönern heißt, und auch charakteristisch machen ist kein passender Ausdruck dafür. Es ist mehr; es ist: das Dauernde vom Vergänglichen scheiden, Gericht halten, gerecht sein."

<sup>877</sup> Ibid., 433. My translation. "Seine unbegrenzte Hingabe an das Vorhandene, seine Ehrfurcht vor jeder Linie, die das Schicksal gezogen hat, sein Vertrauen zu dem Leben, das schafft, auch wo es entstellt."

and beauty of pain.”<sup>878</sup> Rodin and his protégé had come to see the transcendent good shaping positively everything in creation.

After Rilke’s momentous first encounters with Rodin in September 1902, then, his view of reality became emphatically metaphysical. Hence his contention in the 1903 letter on Rodin to Andreas-Solomé that the sculptor’s art “advances beyond” (“hinüber hinaus”) the model as “the silent, ascending realization of the desire *to be*, which proceeds from all nature.”<sup>879</sup> “In so doing,” Rilke explains, “the error that would make art the most arbitrary and vain trade”—that is, the sentimental view of the arts as mere metaphor, mere convention, the view that he had only recently endorsed—“is annulled.” Rilke no longer clings, therefore, to the estranging sense of nature and art informing *Worpswede*. Instead, he conceives of “création” (poësis) as “the most humble service” to nature and as “wholly governed by [nature’s] law.”<sup>880</sup> Rodin’s task was, according to Rilke, to depict the transcendent law of being through which “the appearance of beauty” emerges. And yet, “one could almost say that the appearance of his things was unimportant to him, so intensely was it that he experience [*erleben*] their being, their reality.”<sup>881</sup> As we have seen, this vision of the thing’s reality as a unification of bodily and spiritual form was predicated on the metaphysical principles of participation (methexis) and analogia. Tellingly, it was first in the human face that Rodin had found the likeness of the deity; for “life [...] appeared on faces with the clarity of a dial,” such that he

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<sup>878</sup> Ibid. My translation. “Er glaubte in alledem jetzt, besser und weniger verwirrt von dem Vielen, das Ewige zu erkennen, das, um dessen willen auch das Leid gut und die Schwere Mutterschaft war und der Schmerz schön.“

<sup>879</sup> Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, 55. “Das namenlose Fortschritt über das andere [das Modell] hinaus, die stille und steigende Verwirklichung des Wunsches, zu sein, der von allem in der Natur ausgeht.” My translation.

<sup>880</sup> Rilke, *Briefe 1897 bis 1914*, 55. “Sie [die Kunst] ist der demütigste Dienst und ganz getragen von Gesetz.” My translation.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid., 56. “Daß man fast sagen könnte, das Aussehen seiner Dinge sei ihm gleichgültig: so sehr erlebt er ihr Sein, ihre Wirklichkeit[.]” My translation.

discerned in them “the spirit of his age, just as he had discovered the spirit of the Middle Ages in its cathedrals:”

gathered around a mysterious darkness, held together by an organism, adapting to it and in its service. Human beings had become temples, and there were tens of thousands of these temples, none of them identical and all very much alive. And the most important thing was to demonstrate that they were all of one God.<sup>882</sup>

Rilke notes that it was Dante’s *Divine Comedy* that confirmed the law of analogia that Rodin had already beheld in nature. When Rodin “read of the weeping feet of Nicholas the Third, he already knew that feet could weep; indeed, he knew that there is a kind of weeping that encompasses the whole body, and that tears can come from all the pores.”<sup>883</sup> The “suffering bodies of another generation” depicted by Dante were, Rilke suggests, symbolic “images” of divine kenosis—Christ’s self-gift on the cross and in act of creation—and so was the suffering of Rodin’s contemporaries.<sup>884</sup>

Hence Rilke’s observation regarding the early portrait *Man with the Broken Nose* that, despite its disfigurement, this bust is “beautiful on account of its perfection.” Such perfection does not result from “the incomparable meticulousness with which it was crafted” but, he explains, “from the sense of proportion, the balance of the living planes, and from an understanding of the fact that all these moments of ferment come to rest within the thing itself.”<sup>885</sup> When “moved by protean pain of this face, one also has the unmistakable sense that it utters no accusation. It makes no appeal to the

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<sup>882</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4, 412. “Versammelt um ein geheimnisvolles Dunkel, zusammengehalten von einem Organismus, an ihn angepaßt und ihm dienstbar gemacht. Der Mensch war zur Kirche geworden und es gab tausend und tausend Kirchen, keine der anderen gleich und jede lebendig. Aber es galt zu zeigen, daß sie alle eines Gottes waren.” My translation.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid., 413. “Und wenn er von den weinenden Füßen Nikolaus des Dritten las, so wußte er schon, daß es weinende Füße gab, daß es ein Weinen gab, das überall war, über einem ganzen Menschen, und Tränen, die aus allen Poren traten.” My translation.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid. “Es war eine Offenbarung. Er sah die leidenden Leiber.” My translation.

<sup>885</sup> Ibid., 416. “Nicht aus der unvergleichlichen Durchbildung allein ergibt sich diese Schönheit. Sie entsteht aus der Empfindung des Gleichgewichts, des Ausgleichs aller dieser bewegten Flächen untereinander, aus der Erkenntnis dessen, daß alle diese Erregungsmomente in dem Dinge selbst ausschwingen und zu Ende gehen.” My translation.

world. It seems to carry its own justice within, the reconciliation of all its contradictions, and a patience sufficient for the weight of its burden.”<sup>886</sup> As we shall see in the following, it is increasingly on account of the symbolic image’s *imperfection*—its greater dissimilitude from the divine in similarity—that Rilke considers it a more perfect reflection than nature of the transcendent. With this insight gleaned from Cézanne’s paintings, Rilke comes to surpass Rodin’s aesthetics by recalling the symbolic image’s sheer provisionality: that is, the infinite difference between the artwork and its numinous source. In so doing, we shall see, he comes to a deeper understanding of the metaphysical schema of analogia underlying all appearances.

### Analogy, Methexis, and “Image-existence” in *Briefe über Cézanne*

In the fall of 1907, Rilke attended a memorial exhibition of Paul Cézanne’s paintings at the Salon d’Automne in Paris. The encounter inspired a series of letters to Clara describing the visual artist’s style in terms advancing upon the 1903 monograph on Rodin; yet they did so with an unprecedented, quasi-phenomenological precision refining Rilke’s sense of the metaphysics of analogy underlying the symbolic image. As remains to be seen, these painstaking descriptions of Cézanne’s paintings employ simile in a manner cognate with the *Neue Gedichte*, thus tempering the symbolic unity between the thing and its transcendent source that Rilke had witnessed in Rodin’s art. Upon further consideration, Rilke recognizes a temptation in the sculptor’s symbolism: namely, his artworks’ tendency, as Rilke puts it, to “glitter in the reflections of their interpretation.”<sup>887</sup> For Rilke, this implies an illicit resurgence of modernity’s sentimental worldview, according to which the meaning of things is arbitrarily projected onto them through metaphor—not according to the nature

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<sup>886</sup> Ibid., 416–417. “War man eben noch ergriffen von der vielstimmigen Qual dieses Angesichtes, so fühlt man gleich darauf, daß keine Anklage davon ausgeht. Es wendet sich nicht an die Welt; es scheint seine Gerechtigkeit in sich zu tragen, die Aussöhnung aller seiner Widersprüche und eine Geduld, groß genug für alle seine Schwere.” My translation.

<sup>887</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 49. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 617.

of things themselves. In *Briefe über Cézanne*, we thus see Rilke resolutely returning to problems raised by fin-de-siècle language skepticism so as to overcome the symbolic image's lingering equivocation vis-à-vis the transcendent. As such, his accounts of the "image-existence" of things as depicted in Cézanne's paintings stress both the visual image's and, in equal measure, his own verbal imagery's mysterious pro-visionality: that is, its transience and qualitative difference vis-à-vis the eternal—its contingency—which is itself revelatory of the thing's essence. In the following, we shall see how Rilke's struggle to comprehend Cézanne's paintings helps him attain an understanding of symbolic images as yielding glancing yet, for this very reason, more objective ("sachlich") insights into the metaphysical structure of appearances. What Rilke learns is, specifically, that to depict the painting's gestalt as it emerges from the womb of visibility, his own imagery must describe its emergence (*Gestaltwerdung*) in a manner structurally cognate with (yet, as a verbal image, altogether different from) Cézanne's antecedent vision of the fruits, landscapes, and faces themselves. Hence, it is a shared view of creation as analogia that allows Rilke's letters to depict—*by way of simile*, thus, in and through the principle of analogia—the image's participation in the transcendent order (*kosmos*) of things.

Like so many of his correspondences, this collection combines exact descriptions of the master's art with biographical insight while situating the significance of both with respect to Rilke's own development as a poet: namely, vis-à-vis the poetics of "objective reality" (*Sachlichkeit*) developed in the *Neue Gedichte*. In striving to describe what Rilke terms the artwork's "final image-existence" ("Bild-dasein"), the *Briefe über Cézanne* provide perhaps the definitive account of the poetry from Paris; for, as is well known, these letters stress the "objectivity" of Cézanne's and Rilke's own art. According to Rilke, this virtue lies in the paintings' depiction of "the substantiality of things," that is, of "a reality intensified and potentiated to the point of indestructibility by

[Cézanne's] experience of the object."<sup>888</sup> This manner of representing things unfolds in a manner structurally similar to the "realization" ("Verwirklichung") of the transcendent that Rilke had discerned in Rodin's artworks. Through a process that Cézanne had termed "réalisation" and that Rilke translates literally as "the becoming of a thing" (*Dingwerdung*), his paintings show how the phenomenon's invisible essence takes on color and shape in the realm of appearances and, in so doing, becomes a concrete thing (*res*). In these letters, however, Rilke becomes increasingly aware of the hermeneutic challenge that this implies: first, of attaining Cézanne's insight into structure of phenomenality and, second, of conveying this antecedent vision by means of language. His solution is, we shall see, to warp and shape discursive speech according to the gestalt of the thing seen, thus rendering language an image like unto the painting. In so doing, it becomes increasingly evident that visibility presuppose a metaphysical schema—the principle of analogia underpinning the thing's "final and definitive image-existence"—and, furthermore, that beholding the thing in truth requires the practice of contemplation. Hence it presupposes "a mode of seeing wherein we respond to the phenomenon as the call of a distinctly structured appearance eliciting our attentive yet undesigning response."<sup>889</sup> As Pfau observes of the final poem in the *Neue Gedichte*, "Die Rosenschale," "the metaphysics of Dingwerdung rests above all with understanding that visual experience is fundamentally an act of witnessing, not appropriation. Defining of its phenomenology is the capacity of the beholder to let the thing in question simply unveil itself by discarding all spatiotemporal trappings."<sup>890</sup> *Briefe on Cézanne* consequently reduce (in the phenomenological sense of "leading back") appearances to their transcendent source. In the following, we shall see how this endeavor presents a counter perspective on reality obliquely disclosing the analogia entis

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<sup>888</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 32. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 608.

<sup>889</sup> Pfau, "Seeing and Being Seen Coincide," 24.

<sup>890</sup> Pfau, "Absolute Gegebenheit," 257.



underpinning the symbolic image's participation ("Teilnahme") in the cosmos. Thus, they present a numinous presence superabundantly filling the thing's colorful gestalt with life from within.

Rilke's letters on Cézanne build directly on the insights attained through his study of Rodin. Although he suggests to Clara that "certain shifts in perspective" had led him to consider the "simple order" of things gleaned through Rodin's aesthetics the product of strictly "provisional, personal insights," the metaphysical framework of Rilke's descriptions and commentaries on Cézanne remains essentially the same.<sup>891</sup> According to Freedman, the basis of his admiration for the painter's works lay in the "uncanny resemblance" between Cézanne's use of color (*plans*) and "Rodin's *modelé*," according to which surfaces (*plans*) present the symbolic depth of things—their vital source and essence. Discussing a letter on Cézanne's *Self-Portrait*, Freedman observes how the poet describes the interfusion of vibrating colors with shape and living motion.<sup>892</sup> Rilke envisions, he says, "a harmony of colors telescoped with surfaces" leading him "to view in their composition artfully contrived analogies to the drama of life."<sup>893</sup> Rilke may thus describe a shade of blue as "listening, as if into an ear," such that Cézanne's loud colors receive "a silent response from within"—the implication being that what lies "within" these vivid pigments is alive.<sup>894</sup> This mixture of color and contour has, Rilke observes, "made each feature" of the self-portrait "hang from" the "strong structure of the skull, pushed out from within" in what he considers

an incredible escalation and yet reduced to its most primitive, yielding that expression of uncontrolled amazement in which children and countryfolk can lose themselves — except that the gazeless stupor of their absorption has been replaced by an animal alertness which entertains an untiring, objective [*sachliche*] wakefulness in the unblinking eyes.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>891</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 7, 49. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 596, 617.

<sup>892</sup> Freedman, 276-277.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>894</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 77. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 634.

<sup>895</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 74. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 632.

The analogic intervals uniting surface, form, and meaning in the visage of the self-portrait extend far deeper than Freedman imagines. For these correspondences rest on a vision—one shared by all three artists—of natural and aesthetic creation as analogs of divine poësis. It is, as Hermann Meyer observes, a “selfless, surrendered [*hingeebene*] vision” shorn of the epistemological presumption that defines the attitude of modern thought vis-à-vis the transcendent.<sup>896</sup> According to Rilke, then, the self-portrait shows how Cézanne looks upon things “without even remotely interpreting” them “or presuming himself superior to” them.<sup>897</sup> Totally dependent on the antecedent order of appearances—like “a dog who sees himself in the mirror and thinks: there’s another dog”—this humble approach to the phenomenon yields, Rilke believes, the “great, incorruptible objectivity” of the painter’s “contemplative vision” (“diese Sachlichkeit seines Anschauen”).<sup>898</sup> Cézanne’s sheer humility before appearances affirms the mystery of creation by recognizing that “reality” is “always ... indescribable, down to its smallest details.”<sup>899</sup> This humble attitude impressed Rilke as the proper way of viewing Cézanne’s paintings, even as it challenged the poet to describe them with an exactitude surpassing his accounts of Rodin’s works and, furthermore, surpassing the very limits of discursive language. What the *Briefe über Cézanne* seek to convey is, therefore, a lyric vision analogous to that of the paintings themselves. After struggling for months to express how, precisely, Cézanne’s art presents the numinous source of landscapes, still lifes, and portraits, Rilke comes to grasp that to understand his art—to see *into* its color and form and, thus, to discern its transcendent

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<sup>896</sup> Herman Meyer, *Zarte Empirie* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), 260.

<sup>897</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 74. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 633.

<sup>898</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 73. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 632.

<sup>899</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 10. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 597–598.

significance—one must behold them just as the painter beheld the thing seen: namely, “with the unquestioning, matter-of-fact interest of a dog.”<sup>900</sup>

By employing this estranging analogy, Rilke does not mean to confine the artist’s creative vision to a naturalist, immanent horizon. Quite the opposite, in fact, for he increasingly viewed Cézanne’s canine qualities—above all, the faithful Catholic’s obedient humility to the order of things—as the secret to his success. The letters’ emphasis on this quality recalls a crucial trope from the 1903 monograph on Rodin as well as the early writings on Russian Orthodox iconography: namely, contemplative vision (*Anschauung*) through apophysis. In the monograph, Rilke frequently insinuated that the principle of not-saying/-seeing was a key aspect of the sculptor’s transcendent vision. He had written, for instance, that Rodin’s “work (the work on the *modelé*) was the same in everything” he “made, and it had to be done so humbly, so obediently, so devotedly, so impartially on the face and the hand and the body, that *names no longer mattered*,” he “simply gave form to matter *without knowing* what would result, *like a worm making its way from place to place in the dark*.”<sup>901</sup> Although Rilke had elsewhere extolled the alertness and exactitude of Rodin’s vision, which beholds “the man’s face like a scene he takes part in himself” so that “nothing that happens escapes him,” here he compares it to the blindness of the worm humbly working in the depths of the earth.<sup>902</sup> The same de-subjectivized manner of looking upon the world holds for Cézanne. For according to Rilke, his labor “no longer knew any preferences or biases or fastidious predilections, whose minutest component had been tested on the scales of infinitely responsive conscience, and which so

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<sup>900</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 75. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 633.

<sup>901</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4, 461. “Diese Arbeit (die Arbeit am Modelé) war die gleiche bei allem was man machte, und sie mußte so demütig, so dienend, so hingegen getan sein, so ohne Wahl an Gesicht und Hand und Leib, daß nichts Benanntes mehr da war, daß man nur formte, ohne zu wissen, was gerade entstand, wie der Wurm, der seinen Gang macht im Dunkel von Stelle zu Stelle.” My translation and emphasis.

<sup>902</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, WKA 4, 436. “Er erlebt das Gesicht des Menschen wie eine Szene, an der er selbst teilnimmt, er steht mitten drin und nichts was passiert ist ihm gleichgültig oder entgeht ihm.”

incorruptibly reduced a reality to its color content that it resumed a new existence in a beyond of color, without any previous memories.”<sup>903</sup> Thus, Rilke asserts,

no one before [Cézanne] ever demonstrated so clearly the extent to which painting is something that takes place among the colors; and how one has to leave them completely alone, so that they can come to terms among themselves. Their mutual intercourse [*Teilnahme*]: this is the whole of painting.<sup>904</sup>

By leaving the colors alone amongst themselves, Cézanne allows their vibrations to intimate the metaphysical law of participation (*methexis*) and, deeper still, the principle of *analogia* governing the thing’s appearance.

As with the account of Rodin’s worm-like disposition, this simile in *Briefe über Cézanne* comparing the look of the self-portrait to a dog’s serves to de-subjectivize the sculptor’s vision and, thus, to stress its dependence on the antecedent order of things. Moreover, it establishes an analogic correspondence between nature and art that bears within the likeness between them a profound asymmetry separating the artist’s intentions from the perfection of the artwork. While suggesting the greater dissimilitude between creation and the Creator (the worm, the dog, and the divine), the notion of analogy underlying this vision nevertheless allows the inner law of nature to emerge, however slowly and obliquely, through the thing’s surfaces (*plans*). Rilke’s thus recognizes and describes the law of participation (*methexis*) at work in Cézanne’s use of color by way of simile conceived in terms of the *analogia entis*. Hence his observation in the letter describing the portrait of Madam Cézanne in a red armchair that “*it’s as if every part were aware of all the others—it participates that much; that much adjustment and rejection is happening in it; that’s how each daub plays its part in maintaining equilibrium and in producing it: just as the whole picture finally keeps reality in*

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<sup>903</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 58. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 623.

<sup>904</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 66-67; translation altered. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 627.

equilibrium.”<sup>905</sup> What holds reality in place is, specifically, the equivalence relation evinced in Cézanne’s paintings, whereby things are “so perfectly translated” into their “painterly equivalents that, while it is fully achieved and given as an object” (and thus remains mimetic), “its bourgeois reality at the same time relinquishes all its heaviness to a final and definitive image-existence” (*endgültiges Bild-dasein*).<sup>906</sup> Although Rilke never explicitly says so, the equivalence relation underpinning the thing’s participatory image-existence is analogic. For, instead of employing discursive speech to make a formal proposition about the thing’s analogic structure, he obliquely shows us this fact by depicting the dynamic of the colors’ emergence into visibility by way of another simile likening them to the inner workings of a dog:

Just as in the mouth of a dog various secretions will gather in anticipation at the approach of various things—consenting ones for drawing out nutrients, and correcting ones to neutralize poisons: in the same way, intensifications and dilutions take place in the core of every color, helping it to survive contact with others. ... In this hither and back of mutual and manifold influence, the interior of the picture vibrates, rises and falls back into itself, and does not have a single unmoving part.<sup>907</sup>

Echoing Rilke’s use of analogy in the *Neue Gedichte*, this image estranges by placing terms that are immensely different—the haut-couture painting’s color combinations and the saliva of a dog—in comparison. In so doing, it stresses the principle of analogia underlying the symbolic imagination and, in so doing, it affirms that envisioning the metaphysical schema of appearances presupposes an apophatic vision only ever granting indirect insight into the essence of things.

Despite the humility and obedience that it presupposes, such a vision fully involves the beholder powers of poësis—memory, attention, and imagination—within the thing’s self-disclosure. One day after composing the letter on the portrait of Madam Cézanne, Rilke confesses the

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<sup>905</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 71. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 630.

<sup>906</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 71–72. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 630–31.

<sup>907</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 72. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 631.

inadequacy of his attempt to depict its manner of “so perfectly” translating the thing seen “into painterly equivalents. Although Rilke considers his own account of the portrait’s “tonal values” as “more inadequate than ever,” he also holds that “it should be possible to make compelling use of [language], if one could only look at a picture as though it were part of nature [*ein solches Bild wie Natur anzuschauen*]—in which case it ought to be possible to express its existence somehow.”<sup>908</sup>

Viewing the symbolic image “as though it were a part of nature”—through a participatory hermeneutic—implies a thorough-going similitude between nature and the visual and verbal images of it. As we have seen, for such a vision to present the artwork’s numinous source, it must first become wholly dependent on the antecedent order (*kosmos*) of appearances, thus opening the beholder’s eyes to their metaphysical schema. Otherwise, the vision could only ever impose form upon them in the sentimental manner of Rilke’s early poetics: it would remain utterly self-absorbed. In *Briefe über Cézanne*, by contrast, he had come to understand more fully that the vision preceding poësis must become worm- or dog-like to see the natural and divine law at work in mundane appearances. This is, Rilke suggests, precisely the attitude before the “indescribable” mystery of reality yielding the “expression of uncontrolled amazement in which children and country people can lose themselves,” as manifest in the alert, animal look of Cézanne’s self-portrait. As Pfau observes of the *Neue Gedichte*, recognizing this co-inherence of sight and insight, meaning and being, requires us to confront “the metaphysical entanglements” of Rilke’s “modernist poetics.”<sup>909</sup>

Similarly, Rilke’s *Briefe über Cézanne* present “an integral, properly form-giving feature” of his view of nature, language, and art according to the metaphysical principle of analogia: “namely, the way that the exceptional already slumbers within and erupts from within the ordinary.”<sup>910</sup> And this irruption

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<sup>908</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 73. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4, 631.

<sup>909</sup> Pfau, “Absolute Gegebenheit,” 251.

<sup>910</sup> Ibid.

of the epiphanic into the realm of ordinary appearances suggests, as Pfau observes, “that the creative mediations of fantasy and image reveal themselves as integral.”<sup>911</sup> As such, the de-subjectivized vision of Rilke’s thing-poetry and Cézanne’s paintings never precludes the beholder’s participation in depicting its essence but, instead, renders the artist’s rapt attention and recapitulation of nature’s law through the symbolic imagination essential to its disclosure. Rather than annihilating the beholder, then, apophasis makes the vision more personal, more interior, and more objective by obliquely depicting the divinity in-dwelling and shaping all appearances.

Although unbeknownst to Rilke, Cézanne had described his understanding of color in similar terms. In conversation with Jacques Gasquet, the painter described them as expressing “the radiance of the heart” and as giving “an outward form to the mystery of vision, that links earth and sun, the ideal and the real! An airy, colored logic suddenly ousting somber, stubborn geometry.”<sup>912</sup> Echoing Rodin’s transcendent view of things, Cézanne had recognized a law at work in surface phenomena expressing the living form of the cosmos and the vital role of the artist’s imagination in its expression. This law of participation was, for Cézanne, most evident in the counter perspective on reality gleaned in beholding the interplay of colors themselves, where “only colors exist..., and in them brightness, the being whose thoughts they are, this aspiration of the earth towards the sun.”<sup>913</sup> Thus, he had sought to paint the appearance of things as they emerge from the cradle of visibility—prior, that is, to reducing them to formal, mathematical relations abstracted from their organic context in reality viewed as a transcendent whole. This required him to learn the contemplative

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<sup>911</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>912</sup> See Joachim Gasquet’s *Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations*, trans. Christopher Pemberton, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 71; my emphasis. Cited in Fischer, 156. Although Rilke could not have read Gasquet’s 1921 memoir before making his own observations about Cézanne’s aesthetic praxis, the memoir does confirm Rilke conjectures.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid.

practice of apophasis. Hence he would “begin by distanc[ing]” himself “from the landscape to see it,”<sup>914</sup>

With this first sketch, these geometrical lines, *I detach myself from it*. Geometry — the measurement of the earth. A tender feeling comes over me and from the roots of this feeling rises the sap — color. A sort of deliverance. ... An airy, colored logic suddenly ousting somber, stubborn geometry. Everything becomes organized: trees, fields, houses. I am seeing. In patches of color. *The geological foundation, the preparatory work, the world of drawing gives way; it has collapsed as if struck by a natural disaster. A cataclysm has carried it off and breathed new life into it*. A new stage begins. The real one! The one where nothing escapes me, where everything is dense and at the same time fluid, natural. Only colors exist now, and in them brightness, the being whose thoughts they are, this aspiration of the earth towards the sun ... A minute in the life of the world passes. *To paint that minute in its precise reality! Forgetting everything else for its sake. To become that minute*. To be, in other words, the sensitised plate. *To convey the image of what we see, forgetting everything that appeared before*.<sup>915</sup>

It is, for Cézanne, only after “ousting” the abstract forms of geometry and modern science that oblique (“in patches of color”), strictly provisional (but “a minute in the life of the world”) insight into the transcendent unfolds. Whereas the Euclidean worldview underwriting modernity’s abstract notions of space, time, and selfhood—as evinced by the writings of Newton and Descartes—had flattened appearances within the totalizing horizon of the rationalist ego, Cézanne’s art seeks to recover a counter perspective on reality disclosing its invisible source in the transcendent deity.<sup>916</sup> Presenting the thing seen through symbols of reality, not mathematical or fantastical simulacra, had required him to learn both the contemplative practice of looking away from the ego (apophasis) to the source of appearances in the antecedent order of things and an indirect manner of depicting them through color alone that would bear the fullness of sound, smell, texture, temperature, emotion, and meaning that the vision disclosed.

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<sup>914</sup> Ibid.

<sup>915</sup> Ibid.

<sup>916</sup> Cf. Florensky, *Beyond Vision*, 215.



More than a decade before Gasquet's recollections were published, Rilke had noticed the apophatic quality of Cézanne's vision. Thus, he explains to Clara in a letter from October 9, 1907 that, "while painting a landscape and a still life, [Cézanne] would conscientiously persevere in front of the object, [...] *approaching it only by very complicated detours*. Beginning with *the darkest tones*, he would cover their depth with a layer that led a little beyond them, and keep going, expanding outward from color to color"—from darkness to the irreducible radiance infusing the thing seen.<sup>917</sup> Rilke discerns, furthermore, that the images arise from a dialectic of seeing and not-seeing: "I think there was a conflict, a mutual struggle between the two procedures of, first, looking and confidently perceiving, and then of appropriating and making personal use of what has been perceived;" thus, "that the two, perhaps as a result of becoming conscious, would immediately start opposing each other, talking out loud, as it were, and go on perpetually contradicting each other."<sup>918</sup> If only in bursts of color emerging from the cataclysm of geometry, the painter strives to disclose the sheer plenitude of the landscape. And, Rilke suggests, he sees that doing so requires a radical de-subjectivization dispensing with the bourgeois conventions of painting and the realist symbolism of the late-nineteenth century. Rather, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty remarks, Cézanne had sought to disclose "the vibration of appearances, which is the cradle of things," by returning "to the source of silent and solitary experience on which culture and the exchange of ideas have been built"—thus launching "his work just as a man once launched the first word."<sup>919</sup> Such a radical attempt at leading appearances back

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<sup>917</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 33-34. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4, 609. My emphasis.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid. Recalling key tropes and symbols from the monograph on Rodin, Rilke proceeds to observe how "the old man endured their discord, ran back and forth in his studio, which was *badly lit* [...]. He ran back and forth with green apples scattered about, or went out into his garden in despair and sat. And before him lay the small town, unsuspecting, with its *cathedral*; a town for decent and modest burghers, while he [...] had become *different* [...]" My emphasis.

<sup>919</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, trans. Michael B. Smith, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 69. By stressing Cézanne's "uncertainty," "solitude," and "confusion," Merleau-Ponty puts his finger on the painter's apophatic method of contemplation. He observes that the painter's difficulties were "those of the first word. He thought himself powerless because he was not omnipotent, because he was not God

(*reduction*) to the origins of expression reveals, Rilke contends, not the conventionality of language, art, and nature, but their eternal “image-existence,” understood as an analogic equivalence relation preserving the immeasurable difference between the thing seen and its transcendent source. For, while Cézanne sought to disclose the thing’s source in nature and the divine—his work remains, he confesses, “oriented toward the intelligence of the *Pater Omnipotens*”—he also recognized that his images only ever succeed at presenting their source indirectly as the result of an apophatic praxis of vision.<sup>920</sup> According to Rilke, Cézanne fully grasped the difference between his vision of things and the whole of reality. The painter was, he observes, never content with his works but instead “remained in conflict with every single one of [them], none of which seemed to achieve what he considered to be the most indispensable thing. *La réalisation* ... achiev[ing] the substantiality of things, a reality intensified and potentiated to the point of indestructibility by his experience of the object.”<sup>921</sup>

Cézanne’s and Rilke’s appreciation for apophasis finally suggests a Platonic paradox underlying their understanding of the symbolic image. For the painter’s reduction of appearances to color correspondences and the poet’s analogous use of simile both indicate that perfect depiction requires the artist’s recognition of the image’s imperfection. Just as Rilke had found a hermeneutic challenge in depicting the fullness of Cézanne’s vision by the limited means of language, the entire challenge of *réalisation* (“Dingwerdung”) lay, as Fischer observes, in Cézanne’s attempt to depict “the fullness of the landscape or reality with the limited means of colors and their interrelations.”<sup>922</sup>

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and wanted nevertheless to portray the world, to change it completely into a spectacle, to make *visible* how the world *touches us*” (ibid.).

<sup>920</sup> Cited in Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 186.

<sup>921</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 32. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 608.

<sup>922</sup> Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist*, 158. He cites a conversation between Cézanne and Gasquet in which the painter explains how “the pure blue smell of pine, which is sharp in the sun, ought to blend with the fresh green smell of

By warping the image's gestalt and, hence, only imperfectly disclosing the thing seen, that the painter and the poet effectively recovered what Lambert Wiesing describes as the productive "paradox internal to Plato's concept of mimesis," namely, that

the maker of likenesses must picture perfectly in order to achieve a non-perfect mimesis that identifies itself as such, while the appearance-making illusionist without exception engages in bad, imprecise mimesis in order to bring about a perfect pictoriality, a pictoriality, that is, that is not recognizable as pictoriality.<sup>923</sup>

It is precisely this paradox that had led Cézanne and Rilke to reject the totalizing perspectives of geometry and Enlightenment semiotics in favor of "counter perspective." Instead, they endeavored to depict the thing seen through a practice evident in Christian iconography of both the East and West and in many other premodern, religious aesthetic traditions besides: what art critics have termed (somewhat misleadingly) "deliberate imperfection."<sup>924</sup> For, depicting (*darstellen*) the invisible

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meadows in the morning and with the smell of stones and the distant marble smell of Sainte-Victoire. I have not achieved that effect. It must be achieved by colors themselves."

<sup>923</sup> Lambert Wiesing's discussion of "Plato's Concept of and its Hidden Canon" in *Artificial Presence: Philosophical Studies in Image Theory*, trans. Nils F. Scott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 120. On the other hand, Plato's occasional endorsements of the copy (*eikastike*) over the image, as in *The Sophist* (235d–236b) and in *The Republic* (Book X), takes for granted that the copy achieves perfect imitation by referring to something "without interpreting this something in a contingent manner" (ibid). Thus "there is no mediating grammar of picturing between copy and what is copied, no perspective of transformation, no distorting style, no language, no medium"—hence neither image nor imagination. According to Plato, the perfect likeness would merely be a copy, though no human art or craft can fully achieve this ideal. It is, rather, the signs of mathematics and the rational prose of dialectical philosophy that most closely approximate truth in terms of such a strict correspondence theory. It is for this reason that Gadamer places Plato at the beginning of the "Sprachvergessenheit" characterizing the rationalist tendency of Western philosophy; however, Catherine Pickstock's "The Late Arrival of Language: Word, Nature and the Divine," *Modern Theology*, vol. 27(2), 238-262 does much to rehabilitate the Platonic conception of language as an image as opposed to the abstract sign of "la langue des calculs." By contrast to the copy (*mimesis eikastike*), the poetic image (*mimesis phantastike*) only fails to adequately present the true inasmuch as it does so without foregrounding its artificiality; *for the imperfect presentation of truth is an essential structural feature of the image*, rendering it pro-visional in a twofold sense of 1) transience and 2) revelatory of truth. As Hegel eventually puts it, the image must go to ground (*zu-Grunde-gehen*) in order to reveal its source.

<sup>924</sup> See Florensky, *Beyond Vision*, 209 on "intentional distortion." A 2016-2017 exhibition of Indian, Japanese, and Navajo art at the University of Michigan entitled *Less than Perfect* took this topic as its theme. While the rugs, pottery, robes displayed are not mimetic in the Western tradition, insofar as these artforms abstain from figural representation, they nonetheless depict patterns perceived in nature through "deliberate distortion." Hence the curators took the following observation by twentieth century Zen master Shunryu Suzuki as a motto: "Nothing we see or hear is perfect. But right there in the imperfection is perfect reality." Carla M. Sinopoli, "Less than Perfect | Intentional Distortion," University

qualities of the thing seen (its sounds, smells, emotions, and, ultimately, its divine source) had required an indirect manner of depiction stressing the incommensurable difference between the image and its origins—yet, crucially, without rupturing the gestalt of the whole in the manner of abstract art. Put otherwise: without annulling the metaphysical principles of mimesis, methexis, and analogia. In so doing, they recovered a grasp of mimesis as the imperfect presentation of the transcendent through provisional images basing in principle of analogia and disclosing the symbolic order of things. Their contemplative practice of apophasis had allowed them to recover a transcendent view of the cosmos by recovering its inner form and the divine, intensely personal significance of appearances.

Although *Briefe über Cézanne* build on the symbolist aesthetics that Rilke had developed with Rodin, Rilke believes that their objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) surpasses his observations on Rodin's style—just as Cézanne's manner of depicting things through color alone is purportedly more objective (*sachlich*) than Rodin's use of surfaces. The shortcoming of Rodin's symbolism was, we have seen, its tendency to “glitter in the reflections of their interpretation.”<sup>925</sup> Rilke “would have preferred” that his art was more akin to Cézanne's symbolic images: “without any statement, more discreet, more factual, left alone with themselves.”<sup>926</sup> In contrasting the two visual artists, Rilke increasingly recognizes this hermeneutic perplexity: that the vision of the thing is prior and infinitely preferable to its representation through an image, yet that vision is ineluctably bound up in the thing's analogic image-existence. Whereas Rodin's artworks (*Kunst-Dinge*) had, according to Rilke, sought to depict the eternal by overcoming contingency and thus perfecting nature, Cézanne's art more perfectly

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of Michigan Museums, Ann Arbor, Michigan, (August 26, 2016 — January 6, 2018),  
 <<https://exhibitions.kelsey.lsa.umich.edu/less-than-perfect/deliberate.php>>, accessed on 6/4/2021.

<sup>925</sup> Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, 49. Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne*, WKA 4: 617.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid.

presents the transcendent by embracing the contingency of the image. This implies a more profound sense of the metaphysical principle of analogia underlying the symbolic image; for stressing the immense dissimilitude between the surface image and its source in the cosmos suggests that the image's contingency is itself revelatory of being. As we have seen, Rilke's affirmation of temporality as an expression of the essence of things is evident in his letter to Clara from March 8, 1907 in Capri, just months before encountering Cézanne's paintings. For here, he recommends a contemplative practice of apophasis allowing phenomena to coalesce, almost entirely of themselves, into symbols of a transcendent meaning. Hence, he extols

the rashly transient, insights, briefly flashing illuminations that last for a second within you under the influence of any given event [Begebenheit]; everything trivial, which often becomes meaningful through a provisional intensity of our vision or because it occurs in a place where it becomes significant through a provisional intensity of our vision or because it happens at a place where it becomes perfect in its peripherality and perpetually valid and of deep import for some personal insight, which, appearing in us at the same moment that it arises in us, corresponds meaningfully with the image. Contemplative vision [*Anschauen*] is such a wonderful thing, of which we still know so little; with it we are turned completely outwards, but just when we are most so, things appear to be going on in us that had longingly waited for the moment when they would not be observed, and while they—untouched and strangely anonymous—fulfill themselves in us, without us,—then, within the things outside us, their meaning grows: a name convincing, strong, the only one possible for them, in which we blissfully and reverently recognize the event occurring inside us, though we ourselves do not quite reach to it, only quite faintly, quite from afar, comprehending it under the sign of some thing, strange a moment ago and already in the next moment [*Augenblick*] estranged —. It often happens to me just so, such that some face will profoundly move me; in the morning, for example, as they often commence here; one has already had a lot of sun, and then, when suddenly in the shade of an alley a face appears to the beholder, then one sees, under the influence of the contrast, its essence with such clarity (clarity of nuances), that the momentary impression involuntarily intensifies itself into the symbolic.<sup>927</sup>

What Rilke had recognized was that perfectly depicting the thing's emergence into the realm of visibility requires a use of imagery stressing the image's pro-visionality: its manner of disclosing the eternal through indirect, transient insights. Furthermore, he had learned to see an analogy between vision and verbal imagery, through which the meaning of appearances "grows: a convincing, strong,

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<sup>927</sup> Rilke, *Letters*, 266. Translation altered.

their only possible name” as bestowed upon poet and born within him by the transcendent, antecedent order of thing’s essence as it emerges from the dark. For perfectly depicting such a vision of things as they attain color and form presupposes a notion of the symbolic image as at once contingent and revelatory of being (thus, *pro*-visional). As we have seen, this apophatic manner insight corresponds with the increasing objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) of his own thing-poetry—the cosmic law of participation basing in the *analogia entis* manifest in them—and it is precisely what he affirms in Cézanne’s paintings.

## Conclusion

In certain respects similar to Mörike’s poetry and its historical situation, Rilke’s own responds to the crisis of the poet’s relation to the image and its source in nature and divine reality by turning outwards to behold the things themselves. By focusing his discerning attention on the medium—the image—through which phenomena first appear, Rilke recovered a symbolic sense of lyric presentation and *poësis* echoing Christian-Neoplatonism. Rilke’s poetics of the symbol thus chimes with Goethean expressivism in its concerted effort to depict the thing’s numinous source of significance. In so doing, it similarly overcomes the sentimentalism plaguing the modern worldview. In turning his gaze away from “the punctual ego” (Taylor) to landscape and the things that fill it, Rilke transcends the metaphysical the impasses of Nietzschean philosophy. For instead of viewing the natural symbol as mere metaphor, forever opposed to nature and its divine provenance, he progressively learns to grasp—through his encounters with Russian iconography, Rodin, and Cézanne—the constitutive analogies underpinning the appearance of things (*logoi*). As we have seen, this manner of obliquely beholding reality through contemplation (*Anschauung*) and the understanding of the symbolic image that it implies yields the myriad epiphanies depicted in the *Neue Gedichte*: namely, their insights via *analogia* into the timeless *eidos* present in and through the

phenomenon. Rilke's poetics from the middle period thus reimagines the Christian-Neoplatonic understanding of the symbol.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation has sought to describe the legacy of Christian-Neoplatonic metaphysics in the modern German lyric poetry of Goethe, Mörike, and Rilke. Specifically, it was shown that the notions of symbol and image employed by each poet draws on the Christian tradition through a use of similes intimating the *analogia entis*. We saw how in Goethe's prose and poetry this recovery of classical philosophy unfolds through both his robust appropriation of the Aristotelian understanding of formal and final causes and the *imago Dei* tradition of his Pietist heritage. From the early *Sesenheimer Lieder* to his studies in morphology and the didactic love poem on this subject, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," Goethe employs symbols in a manner overcoming the fragmentation of the cosmos (the abstraction of things and facts about them from eternal values) at the hands of Enlightenment science's nominalist pre-convictions. For, it was argued, his lyric poetry's symbolic presentation (*Darstellung*) of inner forms recovers the interior being of things by uncovering the constitutive analogic relation underpinning their manner of appearance. By contrast to Goethe, Mörike's understanding of the image was unphilosophical and often marred by the legacy of Lutheran iconoclasm and—however passively Mörike may have absorbed this influence—its inflection through German Idealism's critique of the image's ontological entanglements. And yet, despite the modern doubts plaguing Mörike's appropriation of symbolism and his frequently jaundiced view of the image, as manifest in *Bilder aus Bebenhausen*, the poet's desire for transcendence sometimes spurs him to present things as they really appear to him prior to subjective sentiment and epistemic concerns. And, we have seen, this ineluctably unfolds through *analogia*. As manifest, for instance, in "Am Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang" and his thing-poem on the Christ child,



“Göttliche Reminiszenz,” Mörike proves capable of looking beyond the scope of his own gaze and, hence, of overcoming his “sentimental” worldview in order to recover a sense of the symbolic image commensurate with its most penetrating instantiations in the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition. Finally, we have seen that Rilke’s poetry from Paris similarly struggles against the prevailing winds of modernity: specifically, against the increasing abstraction of things from organic contexts and values, the reduction of appearances to a naturalistic horizon of significance, and the isolation of the human person. Still more so than Mörike’s, his thing-poetry succeeds in overcoming the equivocal understandings of symbol and transcendence characterizing the modern period. For, we have argued, Rilke’s poetics from the middle period emphatically embraces the principle of analogia subtending language, images, and things as a means of obtaining oblique yet nonetheless participatory insight into the divine. From the cathedral cycle of the *Neue Gedichte* to his engagements with the visual arts, Rilke proves to be a “great poet of similes” (Benn) on the expressivist model.

In conclusion, the findings of this dissertation refute the secularization thesis concerning modern culture and literature, according to which our productions are anthropomorphic projections of desire for what is an essentially illusory experience of transcendence. Rather, we have seen that the human person along with its natural and cultural context is instead an expression of divine reality: specifically, the logos of God, who has lovingly crafted all things in his image. Hence, we have argued that nature and culture are, in the poetry of Goethe, Mörike, and Rilke, depicted as symbolic images of their source in the transcendent. This is confirmed by the covenant of analogia that, as witnessed through their lyric poetry, obtains between the cosmos of things and their inmost source of significance. Instead, therefore, of reducing language and image to an arbitrary system of signification projected onto appearances by an alienated ego, hence instead of affirming the sentimental attitude underlying the critical approach to philosophy and literature dominating contemporary scholarship, this dissertation shows how such critique always already views the

phenomenon as an abstraction—that is, in isolation from its organic context in the cosmic order of things (*re*). Moreover, it has endeavored to show how any critique of the image must inevitably draw on the principle of analogia buttressing Christian-Neoplatonic transcendent frame in advancing its claims against the enduring presence of God.

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