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**POETICS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF REFLECTION:
With Particular Attention to
W.H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*
as It Reflects Back to Its Predecessors
and Forward to Postmodernism**

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D

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Abstract

This thesis examines how a poetics may emerge from both the possibilities and the limits peculiar to the metaphor of the mirror and the concept of reflection. Working from a particular history of Western ideas that moves from Plato through to postmodernism, the examination focuses on W.H. Auden, whose treatment and utilization of reflection within *The Sea and the Mirror*, a long and variegated poem and commentary upon Shakespeare's late play *The Tempest*, act as a template for an expanded notion of poetics. It is argued that this poetics affirms the creative process by a breaking down of the borders between reflection and what is being reflected, thereby necessitating a reinscribing of those borders self-reflexively and ironically, and in turn necessitating a reevaluation of the respective tasks and boundaries of philosopher, artist and theologian.

As suggested by Auden and *The Sea and the Mirror*, this poetics draws upon texts from a variety of historical periods and a variety of theoretical disciplines. The texts investigated in this thesis include: the "text" of a certain history of ideas defined as the philosophy of reflection; Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; Robert Browning's *Caliban Upon Setebos*; Auden's later poem *Friday's Child* as well as many of his critical writings; and the theoretical notions and theologies of such contemporary thinkers as Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida as they themselves interact with the texts of the Bible, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and many other thinkers who have been critical of the West's metaphysical and onto-theological traditions. The bringing together of such texts is meant to show that, upon a continual reinvention of previous texts, the distinctions between an original and a copy, a poem and a commentary, or imaginative and theoretical discourse, begin to blur, and that the resulting negations and recreations, as variously represented by the figure of the "O", mark out a new inclusive arena for philosophy, art and theology. It is argued that this circular arena or stage does not, however, preclude the possibility of a "Wholly Other", but that, in line with the tradition of negative theology, any theology seeking an non-idolatrous notion of God will depend upon a doctrine of creation as suggested by Auden, where reverential silence is reached through the ironies

and inversions of conscious artifice as a "rite". In this sense, it is thus suggested that any philosophy or art probing the paradoxes and fissures of its own mirror-like creations necessarily opens up new theological possibilities.

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Preface

A thesis such as this, which purposely sets out to cross boundaries and disciplines, requires not only a certain approach to its composition, but also a certain approach to its reading. A thesis, as its etymology suggests, ought *to propose* and *to place* a particular argument. But when the particular argument itself questions the very notion of proposition and placement, at least in the accustomed understanding of these terms within academia, the resulting *displacements* can make reading a difficult, if not a disorienting, task. Of course, in a curious self-referentiality, this thesis will somehow have to account for its strangeness and departure from the norm, will have to justify its border-crossing, and it is the intention and the attempt of the following argument, by the time it has run its modest course, to have offered just such a justification for its unconventional *modus operandi*. But the reading of it will nevertheless demand a certain willingness to allow various critical approaches not simply to overlap their fields but in doing so to redefine or reconstitute those fields, so that, for example, the field of philosophy and the logic of discursive reasoning would become redefined or reconstituted by the field of poetry and the methods of poetic analysis, and vice versa. This is to say, that by crossing such disciplines as philosophy, poetry and theology, one necessarily requires a new strategy to follow, as it were, the *line* of argument, a line reconstituted enough that, indeed, *linearity* may no longer be the best term for its description. And an alternative model is offered in the course of this argument, a circular model, whose procedure, if followed, would alter the entire concept of circumlocution or the "circular argument". But whatever the model, the reader will see, it is hoped, that the required or resulting new strategy is, in the end, precisely what is being argued for in the term *poetics*.

As the unwieldy title of the thesis tries to show, the argument brings together the notions of poetics and postmodernism within the contexts of a particular philosophical discourse and history, reflection, and a particular poet and his poetry, W.H. Auden and chiefly, but not restricted to, *The Sea and the*

Mirror. The two outside terms, "poetics" and "postmodernism", the two which have most compelled the writing of this thesis, are the more amorphous of the terms, for there is little consensus as to exactly where their boundaries should lie: is "poetics" a category, a method, or a theory?; is "postmodernism" an academic theory, a cultural condition, or a historical label? There is of course no shortage of published material claiming to offer definitions for these terms, particularly in recent times. One salient and important example is Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, which deals extensively with contemporary texts of fiction and their common strategy of problematizing "historical knowledge, subjectivity, narrativity, reference, textuality, [and] discursive content".¹ Although this present thesis owes much to works like Hutcheon's, as they have laid significant groundwork for approaching the broad and sometimes intimidating topics both of "poetics" and of "postmodernism", it shares very different aims. Hutcheon for example, working largely within literary criticism, seeks to offer a description of both postmodern theory and postmodern practice, a description which very much conflates "theory" and "practice".² While this thesis too admits a conflation of "theory" and "practice", it also attempts a conflation of "description" and "prescription", so that though it argues within a certain time line and for a certain history of ideas both of which have contributed to "the way things are now", it also attempts to enact, or at very least to suggest possibilities for, a new mode of operating. In this sense, the thesis is as much philosophy and as much theology, the two disciplines or discourses within the humanities which have most legitimized a posture towards the future, as it is literary or any other kind of descriptive "criticism". The thesis thus purposely stays away from compiling and citing all the latest definitions, theories and summations of the terms "poetics" and "postmodernism", and instead seeks to *work out* a definition, literally and figuratively, from what might emerge out of not simply one discipline or one historical epoch, but a necessary convergence of many.

¹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), 231.

² *Ibid.*, 14ff.

The terms of the title which come between "poetics" and "postmodernism" are more confined in nature, and thus lend themselves to a more specific treatment. The philosophy of reflection, which takes up the lengthy Chapter 1, is a particular, admittedly selective reading of how a certain metaphor has functioned within the history of Western, largely philosophical thought. The reading does not pretend to cover all angles of reflection within the large scope of time covered, nor all angles within each thinker presented, but it does intend to shed light on the immense importance, influence, or one might even say *sovereignty* that one metaphor has held over a vast period and in a variety of conceptual frameworks. Like all history of ideas, its narrative will be misleading, for there is always a myriad of complications and intricacies left unsaid that can radically alter the picture one way or the other. But it is hoped that the narrative will be seen for what it is, a necessary construction contributing to an overall sense of *poetics*.

The figure of W.H. Auden is an important and integral part of the thesis' strategy. Yet it is critical to stress that the thesis is not about Auden *per se*. To be sure, both his life and his work have an enormous bearing on the aims of the argument. But this bearing is not in the sense of a historically critical or biographical analysis. Auden's *making* of poetry is what is emphasized throughout, often at the cost of the personal details that may stand behind such making. Biographical conjectures then are either eschewed or put into footnotes, not as an attempt to detour the rigours of historical scholarship, but as an attempt to keep the argument's focus continually on the reinventions of the tradition from which Auden himself worked. And this, as far as the biographies inform us, is just as Auden would have wanted it.³

For all the respect and praise Auden has received as a major literary figure this century, and for all his recent popularity within the general public, who have, for one reason or another, made him into something of a fashion, Auden scholarship is still relatively thin. Perhaps this neglect is due to the personal and literary traits which make it so difficult to label Auden and his

³ See, for example, Humphrey Carpenter, *W.H. Auden: A Biography* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), xv-xvi.

work. Perhaps it is because of the major shifts he underwent from the early part of his career to the later part of his career, shifts which, whether poetic, political or religious, many critics still seem to hold against him. Perhaps the presiding enigmas of his character and beliefs have yet to find the appropriate context that offers either solution or relevance -- though it is this thesis' argument that, in postmodernism, they have. Whatever the reasons, the relative paucity of detailed and noteworthy works on Auden is conspicuous. And this is especially the case with *The Sea and the Mirror*, arguably his most significant and impressive achievement. There has been no critical text published on this poem, at least one not known at the time of this thesis' writing, and of the few notable scholars to analyze the poem at length (Lucy McDiarmid, Thomas R. Thornburg, and Gerald Nelson, e.g.⁴), none have examined it exhaustively nor, more importantly, considered its implications for postmodernism. It was therefore felt justified to devote a full and lengthy chapter (Chapter 3) to this intricate work, in hopes not only to fill what seems like a glaring gap, but to draw out its manifold relevancies within a postmodern context.

Because of its impractical size, the text of *The Sea and the Mirror* has not been included anywhere in the body of this work. But the chapter explicating the long poem/commentary was written with the assumption that the reader would have the text open before her/him. It is therefore recommended that, to facilitate the greatest ease in following the explication, not only should the reader familiarize, or refamiliarize, her/himself with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (which figures largely in the preceding chapter, Chapter 2), but that a complete copy of *The Sea and the Mirror* should accompany the reading of Chapter 3. This is also to suggest that primary texts are here indispensable: this

⁴ There have been several Ph.D.s written on *The Sea and the Mirror* worth noting: Thomas R. Thornburg's "Prospero, the magician-artist: a commentary on *The Sea and the Mirror*" (Ball State University, 1963 -- later revised and published as a monograph by Ball State in 1969 under the title *Prospero, the Magician-Artist: Auden's The Sea and the Mirror*); Joan Rumsey Evans' "The quest for the self: a Jungian interpretation of *The Sea and the Mirror* by W.H. Auden (California State University, 1976); and Erica Helen Riggs' "Ariel and Prospero in the poetry and criticism of W.H. Auden to *The Sea and the Mirror*" (University of Toronto, 1976). All these, it should be noted, are at least twenty years old.

thesis is itself an intertext necessitating close and *direct* interaction with all the texts in which it is enmeshed, Auden's text especially.

In this weave of texts, the surrounding chapters dealing with Shakespeare, Browning, Auden's later work, and such contemporary thinkers as Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida serve on one level to confirm Auden's importance now more than ever. But in intertextual dependence, they also serve to widen the argument's jurisdiction, and thus are meant to claim their own centrality, so that Auden just as much confirms the prevailing currency of his predecessors and successors as they him. Such mutual dependence is what the figure of the "O" and the notion of a poetics of reflection will come to denote.

That the thesis culminates in a theological discussion is not meant to privilege one discipline over another, for it is hoped that what can be seen in the end is that, first, a rigid notion of the "discipline" of theology is itself reworked, and that, second, this reworking necessarily involves other disciplines -- philosophy, history and literary criticism, for instance -- woven together in an inextricable manner. What becomes theology in the final chapter cannot be divorced from the preceding incursions and excursions through a particular history of ideas, through selected poetical texts, and through the metaphors which, limited and limiting in their way, slippery and yet forceful in their way, inevitably accompany them.

Finally, as is always the case, this thesis could not have been written without the significant input and tremendous help of certain individuals. Thoughts about Auden contained within are greatly indebted to The Right Reverend Bishop Peter Walker, who took time out to discuss some of the personal aspects of Auden in his later years and some of the deeply religious influences that continue to hold sway through Auden's life and work. The general course of the argument has been tried and tested at various times and in various contexts within The Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology at the University of Glasgow, and the fellow-students who endured these presentations and contributed to the sharpening of their reasonings and intentions are owed deep gratitude. The possibility of working all these ideas into a doctoral thesis could not even have been considered were it not for the

unconditional support of loving and gracious parents who have given of themselves in untold ways, despite their considerable distance from the thesis' undertaking. Gratitude here cannot be contained in words. Lastly, immeasurable thanks and appreciation is owed to Dr. David Jasper, whose model supervision, ever-insightful suggestions, indefatigable energy, and valued friendship have exceeded all expectations. One could not possibly acknowledge all the indispensable fibres within this thesis attributable to him, so deeply sealed as they are within the various laminations of the argument. One can only acknowledge that the self-expression of the argument as a whole has been the result of a growing kindred spirit, one which has, as it should, blurred the border between where the student ends and where the teacher begins.

Introduction

He who will one day teach men to fly will have moved all boundary stones; the boundary stones themselves will fly up into the air before him, and he will rebaptize the earth. . .

-- Friedrich Nietzsche¹

The metaphors we seek to expound are those of the mirror and reflection. The question we seek to resolve by this exposition is this: in the traditional separation of the reflected and the reflection within art and philosophy, where precisely do the separating borders lie? Where does reflection end, and where does what is being reflected begin? Where, for that matter, does art end, and philosophy begin, or vice versa. And on what grounds would these borders lie, if these borders could indeed be marked out? Are there such grounds, and if so, are they solid and immovable? Are they, ultimately, theological grounds? Artists, philosophers, and theologians have been grappling with these questions, in one way or another, throughout the entirety of our Western thought, for these questions, as we hope to show, form the very heart of Western thinking.

The last few decades have brought an increased awareness of borders, and more specifically, of the erasing of borders. They have also brought an increased awareness of the mirror and mirroring. What is being labelled the postmodern condition has much to do with both borders and mirrors: with where the borders of mirrors actually lie, with what constitutes or grounds those borders, with what constitutes the mirrors, and with the exposure and dismantling of both. Philosophy and art, the principle locations now of the postmodern discourse, have long depended upon the image of the mirror: for philosophy, the mirror metaphor has provided workable language for how humans see and understand the world and themselves, and since Descartes has been the chief image for epistemology; for art, the mirror metaphor has been the basis for the aesthetic understanding of mimesis, art as imitation, and of poetics, art as

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1954, 1968, 1982), 304.

making. Today, the problems of the mirror metaphor, which were first scrutinized in detail by Hegel and Romantic theorists in response to the Enlightenment, have come to a head in postmodern discussion.² Here, philosophical borders have become aesthetic, while aesthetic borders have become philosophical. Postmodern theorists have questioned the traditional distinctions between "art" and "reality", between "the made" and "the given", have questioned where the one begins and the other ends, and how the confusion or manipulation of the one for the other has led to suppression, oppression, and self-delusion. As Linda Hutcheon writes, they maintain "that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world -- *and* that we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist 'out there', fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history."³ Or as a leading postmodern theorist, Jean-François Lyotard, states, "it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented."⁴ The *invention* of the unrepresentable is the paradox of postmodernity, an allusion to illusion, to mirrors and to self-reflexive closure and disclosure, to the breakdown of such dichotomies as truth/fiction, inside/outside, unity/division, mediate/immediate. It is a paradox that puts the philosopher in the position of the artist, and the artist in the position of the philosopher. The postmodern dilemma, or the postwar dilemma, is a question of how to, and whether to, draw up, maintain, or reify borders which are in themselves really not given entities at all.

² We shall look at Hegelian and Romantic considerations in some, though admittedly limited, detail below (e.g. Introduction, 14-16, Chapter 1, 64-71). Eric B. Williams, who treats the Romantic critique at some length in *The Mirror and the Word* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), writes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: "This period's rethinking of man's relation to the world, its reevaluation of mimesis and the function of language, are all part of a general epistemological event that signals the beginning of a new era. In a way, our century is still coming to terms with this event; we are still in the process of exploring the possibilities that arise when the *mirror* is removed from the center of our conceptualization of knowledge, art, and language" (33). The second half of Williams' book brings this shift to bear on the poetry of Austrian writer Georg Trakl (1887-1914).

³ Hutcheon, 43.

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 -- orig. published in French 1979), 81.

W.H.Auden

But we might well ask what marks out the borders of postmodernity itself. Where is the dividing line between "post" and "modern" which its very label assumes? Is it in some way marked, paradoxically, by this obfuscation or removal of borders? If so, how do we go about bringing to view borders constituted by the breakdown of borders? It is in such a bind or at such an aporia that we draw (on, up, or upon) the figure of W.H. Auden (1907-1973).

For Auden, the question of borders was paramount. Auden crossed geographical borders momentarily and regularly throughout his life. He crossed literary borders habitually. (It is not without significance that his early published career included travel journals -- *Letters from Iceland* and *Journey to a War*.⁵) His entire career included poems of every kind, plays for both radio and stage, essays, libretti, film and documentary text, tracts, and virtually every other literary genre publishable. Within each genre Auden crossed boundaries of form at almost every turn, and was proud to claim in his later years that he had written a poem in every poetic form known to the English language. He would even cross the boundaries of poetry and prose, so that his poetry could sound very prosaic, and his prose take on a very poetic role. We see this crossing preeminently in his long and varied work of the early 1940s, *The Sea and the Mirror*, which was the height of a continual probing of the borders between the work as artifice (the mirror) and the world that lay outside of the artifice (the sea), between "art" and "reality". It is not then surprising that as a poet, a poet having come to prominence while the world was going to war over boundaries and borders, Auden should himself cross or straddle borders -- categorical borders, labelled borders, borders of "isms" and periods. With Auden, the lines had started to blur. In many ways *The Sea and the Mirror*, as can be seen from its very title, and as will be explored fully in Chapter 3, inaugurates this new blending and breakdown of the boundaries.

⁵ *Letters from Iceland* (with Louis MacNeice -- Faber and Faber, 1937; Random House, 1937); *Journey to a War* (with Christopher Isherwood -- Faber and Faber, 1939; Random House, 1939).

Thus we could define both postmodernity and the work of Auden in a traditionally circumscribed manner: we could draw a circular line around the middle decades of this century -- the thirties to the sixties -- and place the most important accomplishments of Auden centrally and significantly within it. We could say that what precedes this demarcation has assumed the label "modern", and what succeeds it the label "postmodern", and we could contest (and our argument will continually suggest this) that Auden acts as a frontier or border between the one and the other, that informed by the one, he now informs the other, insofar as this other, our present "postmodern" situation, still lacks precise definition. To define Auden's contribution to this century, we could say then that during an extremely turbulent time, when the world was embroiled in its second of great wars, and borders were moving with great rapidity and at great expense, when redefinition of the western geographical and political maps was also forcing a redefinition of our psychological, moral, aesthetic, philosophical and spiritual maps, Auden was a tracing line (perhaps not the only one, but a major one) which ran across all these borders, becoming with time the bold frontier onto a very different cultural and intellectual condition, a new and tumultuous *fin de siècle*.

But should we attempt such definitions, we first must take into account the words of Auden himself: "Not only does Man create the world in his own image, but the different types of man create different kinds of worlds."⁶ If we are to define Auden's world in light of our postmodern world, or, in the end, our postmodern world in light of Auden's world, and do so by setting up Auden "on the frontier", to borrow the title from one of his own collaborative plays (which has much to do with borders, political and other)⁷, we must at the very outset be aware of our own contrivance in such a move. By placing Auden very deliberately within a certain history both of culture and, more towards this arguments' purpose, of ideas, we create, or better recreate, both his world and our own. And this is the very thesis: Auden's drafted his world within a *poetics*,

⁶ W.H. Auden, *The Prolific and the Devourer* (Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco, 1976, 1981), 3.

⁷ W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *On the Frontier* (Faber and Faber, 1938; Random House, 1939).

artificially and necessarily; we likewise must draft our world, artificially and necessarily, within a *poetics*, and one which is informed most significantly by Auden. This thesis seeks to deal with such a poetics and its necessity. This thesis seeks to *be* such a poetics, as it tries to deal with our postmodern situation and Auden's relevance to it, as it drafts our world and as it redrafts Auden's world self-reflectively.

Historical borders

The borders and boundaries we then will both employ and reevaluate in our scrutiny of borders in general are, specifically, twofold: the borders that mark out any history of ideas, and the borders that delineate description from creation. The first borders are those we must set up in order to place Auden and the reflective tradition in some kind of meaningful context and to grant them critical significance. These are the reified borders of our historical divisions and formulations, without which we could not begin. They are descriptive borders, forming a logic and a sequence in the pattern of changing aesthetic, philosophical and theological abstractions over a given period. But they are borders not described simply. Michel Foucault has noted their complication: "It is not easy to characterize a discipline like the history of ideas: it is an uncertain object, with badly drawn frontiers, methods borrowed from here and there, and an approach lacking in rigour and stability."⁸ For all its "fluctuating languages", "shapeless works", and "unrelated themes", the history of ideas nevertheless "sets out to cross the boundaries of existing disciplines, to deal with them from the outside, and to reinterpret them."⁹ This will be, to some extent, our goal and task in placing Auden. But to engage in such a task of reinterpretation is to suggest a move from the realm of strict propositional description to the realm of creative analysis. The second borders are those which have segregated these two realms, the objectivity of propositional truth and the subjectivity of creative

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, rpt. 1989 from Tavistock Publications, 1972), 136.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

interpretation. By quoting Foucault, we have already begun a conscious move from the one realm to the other, for Foucault (a postmodern figure as he is) challenges the very notion of "from the outside", of objective, sovereign truth in historical analysis: his particular interest is in "trying to deploy a dispersion that can never be reduced to a single system of differences, a scattering that is not related to absolute axes of references; it is trying to operate a decentering that leaves no privilege to any centre. . . it does not set out to be a recollection of the original or a memory of the truth. On the contrary, its task is to *make* differences. . .".¹⁰ We take our cue from Foucault's emphasis here on making, for this is precisely Auden's emphasis, though in a very different context and through very different modes of discourse. By constructing a particular history of ideas, and situating Auden formatively within that history, we are making as much a story as we are a claim. In all our discussions, philosophical and critical, we are fabricating a world, a world view, an episteme,¹¹ and thus continually traversing the boundaries between philosophy, history, literary analysis and poetics, just as *The Sea and the Mirror*, as we will see, traverses the boundaries between commentary and poetry.¹²

A history of ideas pertaining both to reflection and to Auden is one then which becomes on the one hand a history of poetics, and on the other hand a poetics of history. Let us begin by situating the notion of poetics itself. From

¹⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹¹ An *episteme* for Foucault is the collation or collocation of the various historical borders that shape a society, highlighting not the collocation's rational (epistemological) but its discursive (relational) nature: "The episteme is not a form of knowledge (*connaissance*) or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities" (ibid., 191).

¹² We use the terms "philosophy", "history", etc., as particularly defined concepts within our Western intellectual tradition, but what this thesis actually intends may go beyond such classical designations, and may not be philosophy, history, etc. in their old sense at all. We might very well say with Foucault: "If philosophy is memory or a return to the origin, what I am doing cannot, in any way, be regarded as philosophy; and if the history of thought consists in giving life to half-effaced figures, what I am not doing is not history either" (Foucault, 206). If this thesis simply gives life to the half-effaced figure of Auden, then it will have failed in its task. It does not aspire in any way to being a biography of either Auden's life or his work. The traditional understanding of *biography* is, as it was with Auden (see, e.g., his Forward in *A Certain World* [London: Faber and Faber, 1971], vii), counter to the poetics being put forward here.

the Greek *poiêsis* -- a doing, a working, a making -- a poetics has traditionally been an affirmation of the poetic arts. Broadly, it calls for a certain understanding of the creative process. This understanding may be prescriptive or descriptive, or it may be both, as with the most seminal and famous, Aristotle's *Poetics*. The focus, however, remains upon the human ability, and the human *necessity*, to make, to build, to construct, or to fabricate, and upon the imaginary and observational stances needed for this creative activity. For Aristotle, this focus is distinguished by three features: the means, the objects, and the manner of the poetic arts, all of which are active features, even the objects themselves, for the "objects which the imitator represents are actions" (1448^a, 1)¹³. Acting, doing, making -- these are the defining participles of any poetics, and like their grammatical functions as participles, combining verbal, nominal and adjectival properties of a word, they give a poetics rein to activate, to state, and to modify the process of creating. As a provisional definition, then, we might say that *a poetics affirms the nature of human creativity by activating, stating, and modifying the creative process with view to a greater understanding of that creative nature in light of the rest of human activity and concern.*

How is this creative process to be considered precisely? We could describe it, in light of our discussion so far, as the process of bordering, of constructing outlines with borders, so that art is always an exercise of delimiting. As Heidegger has said in his late essay "The Origin of the Work of Art": "Createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure. . . . What is here called figure, *Gestalt*, is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (*Stellen*) and framing or framework (*Ge-stell*) as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth."¹⁴ And Jacques Derrida has taken Heidegger further when, in *Memoirs of the Blind*, he draws very

¹³ Aristotle, *De Poetica*, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *The Works of Aristotle, Vol. XI*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 64. In another essay, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", Heidegger says: "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, 154). See also Kevin Hart, "The Poetics of the Negative", in *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory*, ed. Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 294-295.

particular attention to the paradoxical nature and function of the artist's border or outline (*trait*), which, when functioning, effaces itself to allow the space it marks out to come forth: "The outline or tracing separates and separates itself; it retraces only borderlines, intervals, a spacing grid with no possible appropriation. The *experience* or *experimenting* of drawing (and experimenting, as its name indicates, always consists in journeying beyond limits) at once crosses and institutes these borders. . .".¹⁵ But this gets us ahead of ourselves, and into the self-overcoming of borders. If we look historically, rather, we find the creative process described more in terms of imitation or mimesis. And the chief metaphor used to describe the imitative occurrence, the metaphor that has largely dominated poetics since Plato, is that of the mirror, or reflection. Chapter 1 will explore more fully (and philosophically) the theory of mimesis and reflection from its roots in Platonic thinking, but for now let us see that the image of the mirror brings both reflection and bordering into view -- the mirror, as a reflecting surface, is a surface clearly framed, whether by its own edge, by an added adornment, or, in the case of the reflecting pool, by a circumferencing shore. If the artist "holds up a mirror to nature",¹⁶ then the artist also sets the boundary of his or her reflection. Both the reflecting surface and its *limits* are thus put on display.¹⁷ For this reason the mirror image continues to function as a

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 54.

¹⁶ Cf. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III,i, 20-21; see below, Chapter 2, 91ff.

¹⁷ The notion of the *limit*, derived from the Latin *limes*, a path, road, way, boundary, limit, land-mark, fortified boundary-wall, but also further related to *limus*, sidelong, askew or oblique, and hence to both *limb* and *limbo* (*Webster's Dictionary*), carries many suggestions for the nature of the border, suggestions which remain at odds with one another: stopping, restricting, confining, defining, opening up, allowing passage, releasing, neutralizing, placing in limbo. All these possibilities and semantic overtones bring a paradoxical nature to the very heart of artistic creation, if we hold to the idea that art is an exercise in delimitation. Jacques Derrida has explored this paradoxical nature at length throughout his work, and particularly in relation to Kant's notion of the *parergon* (literally, that which is "outside the work", such as, in Kant's mind, an ornamental addition or the frame of the picture) in his essay on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* entitled "Parergon" in *Truth in Painting* (trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987], 15-147). There, Derrida calls attention to the way the frame is neither part of the picture it is a frame for nor part of the surrounding environment which it makes the picture distinct from, and yet also, that the frame participates in *both*, in both that which is considered "inside" and "outside" the work, "a hybrid of outside and inside" (63). Thus, the "frame fits badly" (69). As Derrida writes, in a manner which reveals the strange mix of decidability and undecidability characteristic of the *parergon* (Derrida poses questions but leaves out the question marks -- he *states* questions): "Where does the frame take place. Does it take

defining metaphor within contemporary discussions of the creative process, finding as much currency with the likes of Derrida as it did for those before him. Of course, how Derrida and other postmodern thinkers operate within this metaphor, or the use to which they put it, now differs remarkably. We endeavour to trace this history and difference of use, especially as this history and difference pass through Auden and *The Sea and the Mirror*, always bearing in mind that, following Derrida, and Auden before him, our trace will -- and, in a sense to be born out in due course, *must* -- at once cross and institute its own borders, whether historically, philosophically, aesthetically, or, ultimately, theologically.

The historical nodes upon which our line of inquiry shall touch begin with the Greek thinking of Plato, for the metaphor of reflection is there first internalized, leaving us with a dual legacy of the meaning of "reflection".¹⁸ Reflection can be either the bending back of something upon a surface (a sound, a glare, a likeness, etc.) or a contemplative state of the mind. The two semantic ranges are not unrelated, as the former, grounded in the actual physics of *recursus*, has been idealized in the latter. The idealization of any metaphor is a metaphysical move, as indeed the *idea* of metaphor itself can be seen as metaphysical at heart (Derrida, echoing Heidegger, states: "metaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosopheme, a metaphysical concept"¹⁹). Our entire Western philosophical tradition begins, then, with the

place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between the two limits" (63). We ourselves shall explore the limits of this strange situation -- neither inside nor outside -- in our ensuing analysis of the mirror's frame, which limits a purely reflecting surface whose "work" inside the frame can be a pure and exact replica of what is outside the frame, complicating matters (and matter) even further. But we shall go yet further in exploring the limits of the surface itself, not only its two-dimensional "inside" and "outside", but its three-dimensional "before" and "behind". What is the boundary or limit of the mirror as one gazes *into* it? Does the mirror have any grounds of its own on which a limit of depth can be marked out? As we shall see with the metaphor of reflection (and indeed *any* metaphor), the depths are both limited and limitless.

¹⁸ See below, Chapter 1, 37-43.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 219. Cf. Heidegger's "the metaphorical exists only inside the metaphysical", as quoted by Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 259. Ricoeur, in "Study 8 -- Metaphor and philosophical discourse", takes both Heidegger and Derrida to task on this issue. He argues for a "discontinuity between speculative discourse and poetic discourse" (258).

metaphorization of not simply our world, but of our access to our world. Reflection being at the very core of this tradition, it has provided the touchstone for all subsequent philosophical reactions within it. Is reflection the only metaphor, or is it the best metaphor, from which to found our relation to the world, by which to fund our philosophical categories? These questions have been a tremendous impetus behind our Western history of ideas, since they touch the artist as forcefully as the philosopher and the theologian.²⁰ If reflection and metaphor are essentially part of human creation, where does philosophy end and creativity begin? What constitutes "reality" and what constitutes "art"? If both philosopher and artist aspire to "truth" in some manner, what is the nature of this "truth" and how does it correspond to reflection or to metaphor or to the metaphor of reflection? Such questions continue to be aimed at Plato himself, the archetypal artist/philosopher.²¹

There is no seamless unity between Plato's employment of reflection and the succeeding ages that follow him, but of all the threads that make up the vast fabric covering the period between ancient Greece and the present, those of Plato continue to stand out. As we reserve a more detailed tracing of these strands for Chapter 1, let us briefly and selectively here at the outset isolate several historical moments and figures that play significantly and exemplarily into the warp and woof of our own discussion.

The Greek instauration of the 14th century to the early 17th century, what we call the Renaissance, was consumed intellectually with all that the Greek reflective tradition had passed on. As the growing possession of mirrors in

²⁰ Richard Rorty, an academic philosopher who has crossed over into literary theory, explores these questions of reflection and the mirror metaphor in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). In a more rigorous treatment, Rodolphe Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror* (London: Harvard University Press, 1986) discusses in detail Derrida's challenge to the whole of the reflective tradition, especially from Kant and Hegel onwards.

²¹ Rorty: "The permanent fascination of the man who dreamed up the whole idea of Western philosophy -- Plato -- is that we still do not know which sort of philosopher he was. Even if the *Seventh Letter* is set aside as spurious, the fact that after millenniums of commentary nobody knows which passages in the dialogues are jokes keeps the puzzle fresh" (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 369, n15). In the category of great artist/philosophers who keep us guessing, we might also put Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Derrida, all of whom of course are, in their own way, responding to Plato.

Western Europe became a symbol of a developing civilization and all its adornment, of a human society fascinated with itself, the artist and intellect alike magnified their examination of reflexivity and self-reflexivity.²² Having grappled theologically with the resemblance between God and humanity, they now shifted the preponderance of their scrutiny to resemblances between humanity and the created world it makes and inhabits. Fernand Halryn writes:

In art, the extensive speculations on the divine *disegno* and its human analogue can be explained in terms of the questions raised by Renaissance art. If a work is the result of a kind of synthesis, of an *electio* from what visible reality presents to us, what is the principle that guides the selection? What is the basis for discrimination between different works? What is the structure of the relation between reality, the artist, the work, and the spectator? What makes it possible to ascribe truth-value to a work, if it is true that it does not only reproduce nature? Together, these questions give priority to a *theoretical* approach to art, which is manifested in a systematic reelaboration of the theory of ideas, concerned with meaning as much as communication.²³

The "relation between reality, the artist, the work, and the spectator" is no better examined pictorially than in the famous portrait of Jan Van Eyck (d.1441), *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride* (1434). Arnolfini, a wealthy Italian merchant, stands hand in hand with his wife in their bedroom, posing as if in a wedding ceremony. The wife's other hand holds the folds of her long green dress up to her waste, giving a very conspicuous impression of pregnancy. Behind them, and directly centred in the picture, is a circular wall mirror, large enough for one to make out a reflection, but small enough to be unsure precisely what the reflection pictures. One's first sense is that it is of the artist, Van Eyck. Technically, this ought to be so, if the artist was really copying all that he saw. But upon closer scrutiny, one cannot make out any easel, or any figure standing with a brush in hand. Rather, there appears, beyond the backs of the painted

²² See, for example, M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 32.

²³ Fernand Halryn, *The Poetic Structure of the World*, trans. Donald M. Leslie (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 174. Halryn's concern is principally with Copernicus and Kepler. But in Kepler he sees a vigorous attempt to describe and even reconstruct the world as a representation or a reflection of its Creator, drawing from Platonic thought: "Kepler himself referred to Plato on this subject: as Creator, the Christian God permits himself to be conceptualized according to a modified Platonic scheme. . . But it is worth recalling that in the second half of the sixteenth century art theoreticians insistently transposed this conception of the divine Creator to their realm" (171). See also below, Chapter 4, 180-181 and footnote 6.

couple in the mirror, two people leaving through a doorway, as if another marriage couple (the woman wearing a headdress similar to Arnolfini's wife). Who this second couple could be is unclear. But as viewers we are now conscious of a play going on between images in and in front of the mirror, and of the artist who by painting the mirror has drawn attention to himself, if only indirectly. If we continue our scrutiny, we find that above the mirror there is written on the wall a Latin inscription: "*Johannes de Eyck fuit hic, 1434*" ("Jan Van Eyck was here, 1434"). The artist *has* been direct, though in a playful way, giving deference to his subject by not putting himself in the mirror *per se*, but linking himself with the mirror in the inscription above it. On the one hand the artist lessens himself radically and ironically by not including himself in the reflection (for Aristotle, the *eirōn*, from which we get the word "irony", was a man who deprecates himself²⁴); on the other hand he doubles himself in his inscription. The precise intention of Van Eyck is unclear, just as is the mirror's reflection,²⁵ but the effect is unmistakable: what we began by looking at as a portrait has become something quite other, not imitation of the couple so much, as imitation of imitation, the process of art being captured by the artist, the "mirror" of art reflecting back upon itself.

²⁴ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 40.

²⁵ The most influential interpretation is of Erwin Panofsky (in *Early Netherlandish Painting, Vol. 1* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953], 201-203), who reads the double portrait as depicting a clandestine marriage, with hidden symbolic meanings found in the various objects about the room. Others have followed his symbolist approach. Albert E. Elson, for example, conjectures this explanation: "The mirror directly above the joined hands of the newlyweds was a symbol of the all-seeing eye of God, its presence like a celestial notary seal, reflecting in miniature more of the contents of the room than are evident in the rest of the painting. Its spotless image of reality made the mirror a symbol of truth. This use of the reflected objects permitted a second wedding, that of the visible to the invisible" (*Purposes of Art* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962, 1972], 328). The most thorough examination of the painting, from a historical perspective, is Edwin Hall's recent *The Arnolfini Betrothal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), which argues that the portrait portrays "the conclusion and ratification of the arrangements for a future marriage by a formal *sponsalia*, or betrothal ceremony" (49). But both the symbolic readings and Hall's historical critical conclusions ignore the self-conscious irony introduced by the addition of the mirror, and the questions it raises about art's relationship to truth or reality. Linda Seidel's postmodern readings (see "'Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait': Business as Usual?", *Critical Enquiry* 16 [1989], 55-86; and "The Value of Verisimilitude in the Art of Jan van Eyck", *Yale French Studies*, Special Edition, *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. Daniel Poirion and Nancy Freeman Regalado [1991], 25-43) allow for much more irony and paradox. See also Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 349-350.

The Renaissance drew from the Greeks the perplexing problem of human creativity in light of the divine; and it drew from Plato in particular the lingering questions of how this human creativity relates to a notion of reality and truth. In Van Eyck we see the problems and questions framed laconically: the portrait as a genre, a Renaissance invention, seeks to mirror the human face; but the created nature of the reflection brings enigmas and ironies, and we find that human imitation courts the divine realm of creation all too closely. So in Van Eyck the apparent sacredness of the event being portrayed (whatever the event happens to be) is confused by the secularity of the depiction, by the intrusion of the artist where traditionally God should be (Van Eyck himself as the graphic "brow" over the central all-seeing eye, the mirror, in whose own retina we seek out, consciously or unconsciously, the pictorial image of the artist). If the artist is doing more than strict copying or replication, if something new is actually being brought into the world in a way that was previously reserved for God or the gods alone, how does the artist account for this power, and whose outlook will now define what is "real"? Whose eye are we really looking into? seems to be the question Van Eyck is asking in his double (perhaps triple, perhaps quadruple. . .) portrait.

The implied problem of human creativity in the Renaissance -- its usurpation of the divine -- required justification or defense, and we begin to see such defense emerge in formal treatise. Philip Sidney's "The Defense of Poesy" in the late 1500s is one such example. It turns frequently to Plato: "And truly, even Plato, whosoever well considereth shall find that in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin as it were and beauty depended most on poetry. . .".²⁶ And its main thesis is drawn from Aristotle: "Poesy, therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word

²⁶ Sir Philip Sidney, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 104. Further: "Plato therefore (whose authority I had much rather justly construe than unjustly resist) meant not in general of poets. . . but only meant to drive out those wrong opinions of the Deity (whereof now, without further law, Christianity hath taken away all the hurtful belief), perchance (as he thought) nourished by then esteemed poets. And a man need go no further than to Plato himself to know his meaning: who, in his dialogue called *Ion*, giveth high and rightly divine commendation unto poetry. So as Plato, banishing the abuse, not the thing, not banishing it, but giving due honor to it, shall be our patron and not our adversary" (143).

mimêsis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth -- to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture -- with this end, to teach and delight."²⁷ But it also draws the cusps on which all later discussion of poetics will pivot: "Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up the with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another Nature, *in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth*, or, quite *anew*, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit" (italics added).²⁸ It was Sidney's immediate successor, William Shakespeare, who would receive the greatest accolades in regards to the creation of the *new*: "the highest praise of Shakespeare was that some of his dramas exhibit beings that could not possibly have been mirrored from this life. A powerful influence in the genesis of Shakespeare idolatry, in the most literal sense of 'idolatry', was the awe experienced before the man who emulated God in 'creating' Caliban, Oberon, the witches, in *Macbeth*, and -- not Hamlet, who after all was such a man as can be found in nature, but the ghost of Hamlet's father."²⁹ As the reading of Shakespeare, and his influence on poetics, are of such crucial importance, particularly for Auden and *The Sea and the Mirror*, we will devote most all of Chapter 2 to a possible reading of Shakespeare's own understanding of poetics as it comes out of *The Tempest*, that great drama which has everything to do with art looking at itself, and is thus arguably the summit of Renaissance thinking about art as imitation and (self-) reflection. For whatever else the play's controlling character, Prospero, may represent, he certainly embodies that turn of theological and aesthetic thinking Auden phrased so well when he said Man creates the world in his own image.³⁰

A further historical boundary which cannot be ignored, for it plays significantly into Auden's own development, and the postmodernism which was

²⁷ Ibid., 109-110.

²⁸ Ibid., 108.

²⁹ Abrams, 276. For a brief discussion of Sidney's treatise, and its effect on later literary critics, especially in view of Shakespeare, see 273-276.

³⁰ See above, 4.

to follow him, is the Romantic turn of the late 18th century. M.H. Abrams' still pertinent work on Romantic thought, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, unravels the major shift from the metaphor of reflection to other metaphorical alternatives.

He writes:

In any period, the theory of mind and the theory of art tend to be integrally related and to turn upon similar analogues, explicit or submerged. To put the matter schematically: for the representative eighteenth-century critic, the perceiving mind was a reflector of the external world; the inventive process consisted in a reassembly of 'ideas' which were literally images, or replicas of sensations; and the resulting art work was itself comparable to a mirror presenting a selected and ordered image of life. By substituting a projective and creative mind and, consonantly, an expressive and creative theory of art, various romantic critics reversed the basic orientation of all aesthetic philosophy.³¹

This orientation moved from imitation to expression, from the metaphor of the mirror to the metaphors of the fountain, the stream, the lamp, the radiating sun, the wind-harp, or the living plant.³² In this shift towards the perceiving mind as projection or expression, "the boundary between what is given and what bestowed is a sliding one, to be established as best one can from the individual context."³³ This shift was impelled both by the Enlightenment and by its radicalization in German Idealism, under which the individual and subjectivity had been subsumed. But its consequence was in turn to radicalize the creative jurisdiction of the artist, to assume for art the role that not only the Divine Creator had held, but that religion as a whole had held, so that in Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry", imagination has become completely autonomous, and "Poetry is indeed something divine."³⁴ Shelley's case is an extreme one, but it shows, however radically, the central concerns that Romantic thinkers inherited from their Renaissance predecessors: the relation between the singularity of the

³¹ Abrams, 69.

³² See *ibid.*, 57-69.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62. These shifts were thus indications of a more general epistemological shift, whereby knowledge of the world was gained no longer through a passive receptivity but through an active creativity, a shift very much Kantian in its roots. See below, Chapter 1, 62-66. On both the influence and the limits of Abrams' thesis in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, particularly as it pertains to literary criticism, see Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 155-168.

³⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", *Shelley's Prose Works, Vol III*, ed. Harry Buxton Forman (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880), 136.

human and the comprehensiveness of the divine, and its corollary, the relation between the singularity of a human work of art and the supposed reality of the created world out of which it has come. These concerns became Romantic obsessions, what John Bayley in *The Romantic Survival* has generalized as "an acute consciousness of the isolated creating self on the one hand, and of a world unrelated, and possibly uninterested and hostile, on the other; and the wish somehow to achieve a harmonious synthesis of the two."³⁵

As to this acute consciousness, Bayley puts Auden well within the Romantic tradition. And he is certainly accurate, inasmuch as Auden's chief concern, as the mere title of *The Sea and the Mirror* indicates, is the relation between the mirrors of art and the seas of worldly experience. But as to achieving a harmonious synthesis of the two, Bayley sees Auden in thorough opposition: "For the whole tenor of Auden's critical pronouncement on poetry has been to imply a separation between the poet as Poet, and as a responsible social being commanded to love his neighbour and behave properly. . . Why should he stress so continually that Art is one thing and Life another, and that nothing but bad art and wrong living will come if we try to mix the two?" Bayley answers that Auden "sees art as a mirror world, complete in every detail, the only difference between it and the real world being that it [the mirror world] does not in fact exist." Auden then, according to Bayley, is highly Romantic in

³⁵ John Bayley, *The Romantic Survival* (London: Constable, 1957), 9-10. This Romantic drive towards synthesis is of course different to the synthesis at work in Hegel's dialectical program. With Hegel, the creating self is subsumed into a larger world-historical movement or Spirit, leaving individual imagination thoroughly abstracted or idealized. (Says Hegel: "Yet just in this its highest phase art ends by transcending itself, inasmuch as it abandons the medium of a harmonious embodiment of mind in sensuous form, and passes from the poetry of imagination into the prose of thought" -- *Introductory Lectures of Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. Michael Inwood [Penguin: London, orig. trans. 1886, republished 1993], 96.) That Romanticism should thus find more affinity with Kant than its contemporary Hegel, and yet that Hegel and Hegelianism should come to dominate the nineteenth century so extensively (at least within Europe, and especially within theology) -- these factors are crucial in understanding both the succeeding "modernity" and "postmodernity" of the twentieth century. See below, Chapter 1, 66-71, for more on the differences between Romanticism and Hegel; see Hegel's *Introductory Lectures of Aesthetics*, 85-88, for Hegel's own understanding of the Romantic art and its unity of the human and divine nature. For Hegel's domination of the nineteenth century and his role in modernity, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 23-74.

his concerns, but "more deeply considered and less confident" in his conclusions.³⁶

Bayley, writing in the late 1950s, could not anticipate the postmodern critique which Auden in his peculiar way had anticipated. Postmodernism, the historical boundary to which we shall subject, ultimately and ironically, all other boundaries, is characterized by its deep considerations of the distinctions between what is a "construct" and what is "given"; and it is necessarily less confident about where the borders between the two should lie -- necessarily, for its chief mode of operation in negotiating from one side to the other is that of irony. Bayley acknowledges Auden's own deep sense of irony³⁷; but he does not see that this irony is more than mere word playing or "poetic self-consciousness". Irony is less a matter of a situating within a certain lack of seriousness or within an ethos of humour, and more a matter of de-situating, of moving across borders, to show that truth is not a fixed commodity. "Irony is an existence-qualification", as Kierkegaard says, and therefore "only a possibility".³⁸ This possibility is what postmodernity highlights. It erects borders, but only to cross them, or erase them, so as to maintain a continual sense of possibility in light of that which can never be reduced to anything essential, foundational, or metaphysical. Postmodernity is a critique of a stable metaphysics, which cuts off possibility with finality and closure. Irony destabilizes, opens one up to difference and multiplicity (which is why Kierkegaard always speaks of irony in terms of infinity). Irony is the ruling gesture of the postmodern critique, because irony calls into question all determinations and appearances (and by extension, imperialisms and dominations).

It is thus no surprise that the image of the mirror and its reflection continue to hold a central place in postmodern thinking, for the mirror is in its very nature ironic. One could say, along with Northrop Frye, who bases his definition on Aristotle, that irony is "appearing to be less than one is"³⁹. The

³⁶ Bayley, 135. For Auden's views of Romanticism and its attempts at unity, see *The Prolific and the Devourer*, 72-74.

³⁷ Ibid., 147, 159-160, e.g.

³⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Vol. I*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 503, 505.

³⁹ Frye, 40.

mirror, of course, always shows an image less than what it actually is simply by reducing the dimensions from three to two. The image is therefore not "real" in the same sense as that which stands before the mirror is "real", that is, in the case of a person, flesh and blood. The image is merely light reflecting off the quicksilver behind the glass. But "less than" also implies its converse, "more than", and irony's technique of saying one thing and meaning another also becomes, like the mirror, a method of creating an "other" -- an other image, an other level of discourse, an other meaning. When this multiplying is such that the added elements are not simply "other", but opposite, as it is so often in our postmodern contexts, irony gives way to paradox and contradiction.⁴⁰ Lines are delineated in such a way as to invite deletion. The border that is drawn to separate or delimit a work calls attention to itself not as a stable marker but as a fashioned and arbitrary marker, which just as easily could have been placed elsewhere or nowhere, or with different dimensions. As the work of Derrida has shown, this graphic image does not merely apply to graphic drawing, but equally to writing as well, for writing is *inscription*, a physical engraving into a surface, a bordering: "*The engraving*: art being born of imitation, only belongs to the work proper as far as it can be retained in an engraving, in the reproductive impression of its *outline* . . . The engraving, which copies the models of art, is nonetheless the model for art. If the origin of art is the possibility of the engraving, the death of art and art as death are prescribed from the very birth of the work. The principle of life, once again, is confounded with the principle of death."⁴¹ If language, and indeed all the arts are implicated in a self-destruction, in which the possibility of their existence necessitates the possibility of their demise, in which building and demolition are two sides of the same creative coin, then *doing* art will always bring inherent contradictions. In stressing these contradictions, in creating art for the expressed purpose of showing that, by creating it, the work is therefore destabilized, postmodernity has promoted a

⁴⁰ Auden says in *The Prolific and the Devourer*: "To be useful to an artist a general idea must be capable of including the most contradictory experiences, and of the subtle variations and ironic interpretations" (22).

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 208.

playful and yet undermining view of what constitutes our human (creative) experience.⁴²

Auden and art

In the history of aesthetic ideas from the Renaissance to postmodernity, which we have only faintly traced out and not filled in, Auden stands in a pivotal position. This century, in between the height of modernism and the present postmodernism, comes two world wars, both of which have been, and continue to be, greatly significant in shaping the century's intellectual climate and activity. Born in 1907, Auden was too young to participate in the First World War, and too old to join the ranks of soldiery in the Second. He felt compelled to address politics, however, and as a rising and leading star of a young Oxford circle of poets and writers (first hailed "The Auden Group", which included principally Stephen Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, Edward Upward, and Rex Warner⁴³), he sought to change his society by combining his poetry with a vague brand of Marxist socialism⁴⁴. But as his fame grew throughout the 1930s, and his political and social influence did not -- a war was raging in China and Spain, and a severe one brewing in and about Germany, and

⁴² The effects of this destabiling playfulness have been far from congratulatory. Postmodern culture has been characterized by a deep malaise, the symptom of which has been, more than anything, a cynicism. The unresolvable paradoxes of irony pushed to this extreme, leaving one at an intellectual, ethical, and spiritual impasse, have created less citizens of the *jouissance* so often promoted within the aporetic moment, as citizens of discontent. Today's cynic is like one wandering in a labyrinth that has no solution, no possible way out, but wandering with a map of that labyrinth in hand. To be caught in a solutionless situation, and to be fully aware of that situation, to the point of highlighting it, advances only a cynical pose. As Peter Sloterdijk describes it in his *Critique of Cynical Reason* (trans. Michael Eldred [London: Verso, 1983]) it is a comic, satirical, mocking pose of "not-knowing" as opposed to "knowing better" (293). It is also an *unsatisfactory* pose, in the sense of a necessary lack of *fullness*. The cynicism of today is bred upon the *de-centred*, *de-situated*, disseminated core of anything that might hold. This cultural vacancy has had difficulty retaining any sense of affirmation, despite the efforts of many who claim that affirmation is about all the void can, or should, hold. Affirming the *unaffirmable* (< Latin *affirmare*, to present as fixed) is what Auden was himself intensely concerned with (see below, Chapter 5, 228-230); cynicism, however, was something he never cultivated, for reasons that will come to light in due course below.

⁴³ Carpenter, 155.

⁴⁴ Charles Osborne writes: "For all his talk about Marxism, Auden's attitudes were really never any further left than an uncommitted, radical liberalism" -- *W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet* (London: Rainbird, 1979), 136.

Auden felt frightfully helpless in the face of them all⁴⁵ -- he saw his aim as a poet had been errant. He effected a major shift in his thinking when, in 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, and to the outcry of his fellow countrymen, he crossed borders as a resident from England to America, and, a year or so later, shifted concerns from politics to Christianity. With these moves, his poetry took a decided turn. No longer intent on social, political or moral change, Auden came to stress the limits of poetry and art, that is, their inability to manifest any moral value outside of themselves. In a often-used quote, tinged with hyperbole, Auden summed up his later attitude: "If not a poem had been written, not a picture painted, not a bar of music composed, the history of man would remain materially unchanged."⁴⁶

In her book *Auden's Apologies for Poetry*, Lucy McDiarmid argues that from the forties onwards Auden's work loses its self-importance and gains a playful regard, which celebrates its own insignificance: "Every major poem and every major essay becomes a *retractio*, a statement of art's frivolity, vanity and guilt."⁴⁷ Even though in the mid-fifties Auden would state that "the occupational disease of poets is frivolity"⁴⁸, McDiarmid contends that frivolity and triviality actually become for Auden the occupational mandate of poets, which need apology or justification.

Deference, apology, self-deprecation -- these become ritual gestures in Auden's later poetry. The lyrics written after 1948 are definitely "post-Caliban": each assumes that all poems, itself not excluded, are silly and trivial, examples of "incorrigible staginess" that need to be apologized for and forgiven. This notion is not "discovered" within the poem, as it was in *The Sea and the Mirror*: the poem takes it for granted. The poem is the stage on which the poet shows off: at the end

⁴⁵ This despite having gone to Spain, in the wake of other European intellectuals, to lend support to the resistance against Franco. It was this futile experience in Spain which helped catapult Auden back to the Christian beliefs of his upbringing -- see Carpenter, 209-210, and Auden's own version of his conversion in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, ed. James A. Pike (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1956), 41.

⁴⁶ Carpenter, 256. A later and more personal version of the same idea: "I know that all the verse I wrote, all the positions I took in the thirties, didn't save a single Jew" (Carpenter, 413). This idea is worked out most expressly in *The Prolific and the Devourer*: "The Prolific and the Devourer: the Artist and the Politician. Let them realise that they are enemies, i.e., that each has a vision of the world which must remain incomprehensible to the other" (23).

⁴⁷ Lucy McDiarmid, *Auden's Apology for Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), x.

⁴⁸ *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, 41; cited by Osborne, 203.

of the "play" he speaks a kind of anti-*plaudite*, in which he does not ask for applause but asserts that the poem has been silly and insignificant, acknowledges his own weakness, and defers to some greater power. Auden humbles himself. . . The sounded note is the tone of perpetual apology.⁴⁹

Absolutes, certainties, truth, religious or spiritual values -- none are within the domain of poetry. For Auden they lie irretrievably outside the poetic bounds, to be hinted at perhaps, to be suggested at maybe, but not articulated. At best, poetry becomes a celebration of the inarticulable or unrepresentable. "Ultimately", says McDiarmid, "all Auden can do to indicate spiritual value is to talk about his own and poetry's inabilities." Thus *The Sea and the Mirror* becomes "a discussion of the spiritual fraudulence of aesthetic effects."⁵⁰

McDiarmid's reading of Auden's post-English work stresses an apologetic stance grounded upon poetry's inability. But why do art, if art is unable to access the "greater" concerns of humankind, and can only deprecate itself before them? The answer, the *apology* of Auden, claims McDiarmid, is that in humbly and playfully acknowledging its own limitations, poetry bows to something which it itself cannot obtain, and so gives reverence with a muted intercession. "To describe the origin of poetry is both to advertise its triviality and to pay homage to the untrivial substance from which it derives. The tone of apology modulates into a tone of worship."⁵¹ But the worship never advances beyond a *tone*, the intercession never becomes anything other than an inarticulate sound. If poetry is a ritual act, it is foremost one which undermines itself, and shows itself as no more than an *act*. This reading of Auden helps to define and account for the self-referentiality in a work like *The Sea and the Mirror*, and in a possible poetics for Auden in general. But what it does not account for is the *act* itself, the business of doing and creating, which is yet to be fully justified. Why do *art*, and not go directly to that which art cannot speak of -- that is, become a minister, a monk, a guru, a soldier, a politician, a revolutionary, a relief worker, a medical researcher, etc.? What has the business of creating got

⁴⁹ McDiarmid, 120.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

to do with *being* in this world? Here, Auden has more to say than simply trivialities and frivolities. There is theological importance to creating itself. So he himself says of *The Sea and the Mirror* that it is "really about a Christian conception of Art."⁵²

The question that we have suggested as central to any poetics at least since Sidney's *Defense*, the question of how human creativity relates to the divine, is a question ultimately leading to some doctrine of creation, whether theological, aesthetic, or both. We will look at Auden's rendering of a possible poetics in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we will look closely at Auden's theology, as far as it can be delineated. But the parameters of a doctrine of creation are essential even at this point, for they inform our various readings, from Shakespeare through to postmodernity. How did Auden see his own task as a poet in relation to the divine realm for which he held belief?

A doctrine of creation

The notion of an aesthetic doctrine of creation might begin with this question: does our will to create arise out of our experiences in life, or does our experiences in life arise from our will to create? If experience precedes the will to compose, if *being* precedes or underpins *creating*, then one's notion of poetics will tend to be mimetic in the classical sense: art will imitate reality. If the other way around, if the will to compose precedes experience, if *creating* precedes or underpins *being*, then one's notion of poetics will tend to be more Romantic and modern: art will somehow participate in reality. For Auden, neither are quite true, or both are. In *New Year Letter*, written in 1940, he says:

For Art and Life agree in this
That each intends a synthesis,
That order which must be the end
That all self-loving things intend
Who struggle for their liberty,
Who use, that is, their will to be.

⁵² Carpenter, 325.

The *will* is critical in Auden's understanding of the relationship between art and life, for both are necessarily *intentional*, and come together so: "Yet in intention all are one". That is, those who are existentially living out their lives in decision find that the volitional drive behind *creating* is the same as that behind *being*.⁵³ Both activities are prompted by the same necessary source. Thus the poem goes on to say that

Art in intention is mimesis
But, realised, the resemblance ceases;

In the will, art and life unite: the intentional impulse to produce a work shares the very intentional impulse which allows one's existence continually to manifest itself, self-assertively, within the world.⁵⁴ But when art is manifested concretely, its resemblance to life no longer exists:

Art is not life and cannot be
A midwife to society
For art is a *fait accompli*.⁵⁵

⁵³ The emphasis on decision is drawn from Kierkegaard's emphasis throughout his writings on subjective decision as a necessity for eternal happiness and infinite truth. As but one example: "Perhaps the reader will recall that when the issue becomes objective, there is no question of an eternal happiness, because that lies precisely in subjectivity and decision" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Vol. I*, 116, note).

⁵⁴ In an essay entitled "Augustus to Augustine" (originally published in 1944; reprinted in a later collection of Auden's essays *Forewords and Afterwords*, ed. Edward Mendelson [New York: Vintage International, 1989]), Auden writes: "The Christian doctrine of creation asserts, among other things, that there is nothing intrinsically evil in matter, the order of nature is inherent in its substance, individuality and motion have meaning, and history is not an unfortunate failure of necessity to master chance, but a dialectic of *human choice*" (36, italics added). In an essay written not many years after Auden's here, Martin Heidegger adds some significant comments upon the human capacity to will, the human capacity to create, and the necessary relation between the two: "The willing of which we speak here is the putting-through, the self-assertion, whose purpose *has already* posited the world as the whole of producible objects. This willing determines the nature of modern man, though at first he is not aware of its far-reaching implication, though he could not already know today by what will, as the Being of beings, this willing is willed. By such willing, modern man turns out to be the being who, in all relations to all that is, and thus in relation to himself as well, rises up as the producer who puts through, carries out, his own self and establishes this uprising as the absolute rule. The whole objective inventory in terms of which the world appears is given over to, commended to, and thus subjected to the command of self-assertive production. Willing has in it the character of command; for purposeful self-assertion is a mode in which the attitude of the producing, and the objective character of the world concentrate into an unconditional and therefore complete unity. In the self-concentration, the command character of the will announces itself. And through it, in the course of modern metaphysics, the long concealed nature of the long-since existing will as the Being of beings comes to make its appearance." -- "What Are Poets For?", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 111.

⁵⁵ W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 200-201. All references to *Collected Poems* hereafter will be abbreviated *CP*.

As a finished product, art is a fulfilled product, and therefore can no longer be willed. In the *doing* of art, life is drawn within its bounds; in the *realization* of art, life withdraws. Life, then, is both present and absent in a work: present as *possibility*, absent as *materialized*. But we cannot live without possibility, nor without materiality, and so we are caught amid open and closed poles of existence, and we struggle to negotiate between them. Doing art typifies this struggle. In another poem of the same year, *In Sickness and In Health*, Auden wrote:

Rejoice, dear love, in Love's peremptory word;
All chance, all love, all logic, you and I,
 Exist by grace of the Absurd,
And without conscious artifice we die:
So, lest we manufacture in our flesh
The lie of our divinity afresh,
Describe round our chaotic malice now
The arbitrary circle of a vow.

That reason may not force us to commit
That sin of the high-minded, sublimation,
 Which damns the soul by praising it,
Force our desire, O Essence of creation,
To seek Thee always in Thy substances,
Till the performance of those offices
Our bodies, Thine opaque enigmas, do,
Configure Thy transparent justice too.⁵⁶

Auden here suggests, in difficult syntax, that we seek a creative Essence, which is clearly deified, in created substance or artifice, not to forward our own divinity, which is a lie, nor the divinity of the created thing, but, by performing our rightful offices (our creative acts), to rejoice in the divine justice (Love) which gives us purpose through what we in turn create. Thus several years later, in one of the few poems with an explicitly Christian theme, *For The Time Being*, Auden could write: "Because in Him all passions find a logical In-Order-That, by Him is the perpetual recurrence of Art assured."⁵⁷ This "logical In-Order-That" is the purpose clause of the will and intention, so that the will to compose,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 319.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 389.

to "seek Thee always in Thy substances", is theologically grounded.⁵⁸ Art is theological inasmuch as its *doing* arises theologically: in even more pronounced religious language, "Because in Him the Flesh is united to the Word without magical transformation, Imagination is redeemed from promiscuous fornication with her own images."⁵⁹ All this suggests that for Auden, the creative act is bound up with *being* by virtue of an incarnational and sacramental possibility, which has already been prefigured in the Christian story. This possibility manifests itself in the will.⁶⁰ And it manifests itself this way necessarily. Human beings *must* act. By the mid-forties, Auden would describe this necessity non-religiously in his long poem *The Age of Anxiety*: "Human beings are, necessarily, actors who cannot become something before they have pretended to be it; and they can be divided, not into the hypocritical and the sincere, but into the sane who know they are acting and the mad who do not."⁶¹

If the poetic drive and the existential drive merge together within the will, and within its corollary, possibility, creation will come only by means of contingency. This is another important aspect to Auden's aesthetic understanding.⁶² In a later essay "Making, Knowing, and Judging", Auden

⁵⁸ The phrase "In-Order-That" is taken from a quote of Kierkegaard's ("On the difference between a Genius and an Apostle", trans. Alexander Dru, in *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises* [London: Oxford University Press, 163]), and used at the beginning of Auden's essay "Genius & Apostle" (in *The Dyer's Hand and other essays* [London: Faber and Faber, 1963]): "No genius has an *in order that*: the Apostle has absolutely and paradoxically an *in order that*."

⁵⁹ *CP*, 388. Cf. Abrams, 272ff., on the growing theological connection of the imagination in Renaissance and Romantic thinking; also Culler, 160-168.

⁶⁰ In a later essay, "The Virgin & the Dynamo", Auden states that "the poet's activity in creating a poem is analogous to God's activity in creating man after his own image. It is not imitation, for were it so, the poet would be able to create like God *ex nihilo*. . . It is analogous in that the poet creates not necessarily according to a law of nature but voluntarily according to provocation"; in *The Dyer's Hand and other essays*, 70. All references to *The Dyer's Hand* will hereafter be abbreviated *DH*.

⁶¹ *CP*, 518. Cf. Oscar Wilde: "Man is least himself when he talks his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" -- "The Critic as an Artist", in *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1975), 45.

⁶² Again, as informed by Kierkegaard, as is so much of Auden's theology during this period. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Vol. I, 98: "Everything that becomes historical is contingent, inasmuch as precisely by coming into existence, by becoming historical, it has its element of contingency, inasmuch as contingency is precisely the one factor in all coming into existence. -- And therein lies again the incommensurability between a historical truth and an eternal decision."

remarked that "a poet will always have a sneaking regard for luck because he knows the role which it plays in poetic composition."⁶³ That role is kept alive by the fact that the poet, however intentional he or she may be in creating something, does not deal with certainties. The makings and creations are neither themselves eternal verities nor of eternal verities -- of fixed and univocal absolutes which are axiomatic and irrefutable -- but only of approximations, of analogies, for however incarnational or sacramental art may be, it is so as *possibility*, and not as a fixed or predetermined necessity. About poets, Auden wrote: "What makes it difficult for a poet not to tell lies is that, in poetry, all facts and all beliefs cease to be true or false and become interesting possibilities."⁶⁴ Those interesting possibilities art can render only in, as it were, the subjunctive mood, and not the indicative.⁶⁵ A poem can be "true" only by way of analogy to a "Something" it can never fully nor immediately gain or manifest -- call it "Truth" or "reality" or whatever, it matters little, since the "Something" must remain encased in qualifying inverted commas, bound to the contingencies of this world and of art's medium. A poem strives towards this greater "Something", however perceived, but its strivings remain only provisional and contingent.

Every poem, therefore, is an *attempt* to present an analogy of that paradisaical state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united in harmony. Every good poem is very nearly a Utopia. Again, an *analogy*, not an imitation; the harmony is *possible and verbal only*.⁶⁶

Since creativity is a contingent exercise, contingent upon our wills as vehicles for possibilities of being, and upon the materialized structures which in their artificiality cannot house universal absolutes, if there indeed are any to be housed, art has its limitations which it must realize. In response to Yeats' famous lines "The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or

⁶³ *DH*, 47.

⁶⁴ "Writing", *DH*, 19.

⁶⁵ Auden in "Dichtung und Wahrheit", VIII, *CP*, 650: "As an artistic language, Speech has many advantages -- three persons, three tenses (Music and Painting have only the Present Tense), both the active and the passive voice -- but it has one serious defect: it lacks the Indicative Mood. All its statements are in the subjunctive and only possibly true until verified (which is not always possible) by non-verbal evidence."

⁶⁶ "The Virgin & The Dynamo", *DH*, 71, italics added.

of the work", Auden responded "This is not true; perfection is possible in neither."⁶⁷ Auden wished to move away from a kind of Romanticism which preached that artists and their art participated in a divine Truth by nature of their unity with the greater whole. Art may strive for this unity but it can never reach it.⁶⁸ For Auden, imagination can never achieve perfection; it is, at best, neutral.⁶⁹ And art can never achieve divinity; it can *respond* to it, but never attain it -- a notion Auden took straight from Kierkegaard, who asserts that the category of the aesthetic can in no way directly convey that of the religious.⁷⁰ Art is limited by its being a *fait accompli*. "Analogy is not identity", Auden said; "Art is not enough."⁷¹

If art is not capable of any fully religious disclosure, if, that is, it is in no way epiphanic,⁷² it needs to disclaim any pretensions to such effect. "Poetry is not magic," claims Auden. "In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and

⁶⁷ "Writing", DH, 19. Yeats' quote is from his short poem "The Choice" (W.B. Yeats, *Selected Poetry*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares [London: Macmillan, 1962; Pan Books, 1974], 153):

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all that story's finished, what's the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

⁶⁸ Edward Callan, *A Carnival of Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 198: "In Auden's view, the Romantics failed to understand the neutrality of the imaginative faculty in relation to the true and the good, and their acceptance of the imagination as the divine element in man led them to confound 'the identity of the romantic hero with the consciousness of the poet.' "

⁶⁹ DH, 133-134: "Imagination is beyond good *and* evil. Without imagination I remain an innocent animal, unable to become anything but what I already am. In order to become what I should become, therefore, I have to put my imagination to work. . . But once imagination has done its work for me, to the degree that, with its help, I have become what I should become, imagination has the right to demand its freedom to play without any limitations, for there is no longer any danger that I shall take its play seriously."

⁷⁰ E.g. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Vol. I, 439-444. See also Callan, 180-181.

⁷¹ As quoted by Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 292.

⁷² For the notion of art as "epiphany", see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 456-493.

disintoxicate."⁷³ Thus the above "In-Order-That" which is behind the artistic passions in *For The Time Being* becomes an ironic reach, perhaps stemming from a divine realm, but never actually arriving at anything which could appropriate that divinity. Auden's poetic task, then, becomes one of disenchantment. And here we return to McDiarmid's reading of Auden's work as apology for the frivolous. Without epiphany and without strict imitation, art's existence is nothing more than game playing; analogous of something more, perhaps, but analogous through play, and restricted to play. " 'The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning' ", Auden entitled one his poems, borrowing the line from Shakespeare. The poem concludes:

What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,
Can trick his [Man's] lying nature into saying
That love, or truth in any serious sense,
Like orthodoxy, is a reticence?⁷⁴

Love, or "truth", is only a silence within the poetic bounds, which "the luck of verbal playing" admits. Ironically, the poem, through the trickery of "truth", disenchanting itself, that is, shows its own impossibility for "truth". The playful nature of poetry then takes over, leaving frivolity in an elevated stance. As Auden concludes his essay "The Poet and the City": ". . . among the half dozen things for which a man of honor should be prepared, if necessary, to die, the right to play, the right to frivolity, is not the least."⁷⁵

Does Auden subscribe, then, simply to a poetics of *l'art pour l'art*? If poetic frivolity is so paramount, does this not draw a closed boundary around art, and make it thoroughly and radically self-contained, a sheer exercise in formalism? How does Auden's apology for poetry differ from a promotion of art simply and exclusively for the sake of art itself? But Auden's view of frivolity and play is not so bound. In a postscript to an essay that began with Nietzsche's remark "To become mature is to recover that sense of seriousness which one had as a child at play", Auden writes his own version: "A frivolity which is innocent,

⁷³ "Writing", *DH*, 27. Or in an article "The Poet of Encirclement" (*Forewords and Afterwords*, 351): "Art. . . is not Magic, i.e. a means by which the artist communicates or arouses his feelings in others, but a mirror in which they may become conscious of what their own feelings really are: its proper effect, in fact, is disenchanting."

⁷⁴ *CP*, 621.

⁷⁵ *DH*, 89.

because unaware that anything serious exists, can be charming, and a frivolity which, precisely because it is aware of what is serious, refuses to take seriously that which is not serious, can be profound."⁷⁶ Art's disenchantment, art's frivolity, amounts to a refusal to take seriously what is not serious. But art also acknowledges, by indirection, its awareness of what *is* serious, and here Auden's understanding goes beyond a *l'art pour l'art*. As we have seen, the theological ground underpinning the creative process, the incarnational possibility as manifested in the will, though it does not allow art to house any absolutes, *does* allow art to point tacitly to "Something" beyond itself. Art, while disenchanting its magical or divine status, at the same time pays muted homage to that magic or divinity which inspired it:

The impulse to create a work of art is felt when, in certain persons, the passive awe provoked by sacred beings or events is transformed into a desire to express that awe in a rite of worship or homage, and to be fit homage, this rite must be beautiful. This rite has no magical or idolatrous intention; nothing is expected in return. Nor in a Christian sense, is it an act of devotion. If it praises the Creator, it does so indirectly by praising His creatures -- among which may be human notions of the Divine Nature. With God a Redeemer, it has, so far as I can see, little if anything to do.⁷⁷

Auden's sense of frivolity can be found in the line "nothing is expected in return". One does not go to poetry or art for redemption, redemption of whatever kind. One goes, at best, to pay homage, a homage rendered in play. That homage may be of a Divinity, or more likely it may be of something made possible by that Divinity within its created realm; ultimately, it is a homage of the life which is, in the end, inaccessible to the artifice of art. "Poetry can do a hundred and one things, delight, sadden, disturb, amuse, instruct. . ." concludes

⁷⁶ "Postscript: The Frivolous & the Earnest", *DH*, 429. Cf. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Vol. I, 550-555: "The humorist possesses the childlike but is not possessed by it, continually keeps it from expressing itself directly but allows it only to shine through a consummate culture. If, therefore, a fully cultured person is placed together with the child, they always jointly discover the humorous: the child says it and does not know it; the humorous knows that it is said. However, a relative culture placed together with a child discovers nothing, because it pays no attention to the child and its foolishness" (551). Cf. also Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 269-270, on the relation between irony and earnestness.

⁷⁷ "Making, Knowing and Judging", *DH*, 57. Auden's language here is Calvinist -- see George Pattison, *Art, Modernity, and Faith* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 134.

Auden, "but there is only one thing that all poetry must do; it must praise what it can for being and for happening."⁷⁸

Such a doctrine of creation, or a doctrine of creating, where will, contingency, disenchantment, frivolity and homage all come together, stands behind Auden's "Christian conception of Art" which he claimed for *The Sea and the Mirror*, and which indeed informs all his work since the forties. The reason why Auden continues to do art and to write poetry, and not abandon his craft altogether on account of its limitations, lies in art's ability and necessity to affirm or bless "*what there is for being*"⁷⁹, after it has shown clearly and self-reflectively the demarcation against what it, as art, cannot be. But the "Christian" part of art's role, though affirmative, must remain indirect and, ultimately, relegated to silence. On the specific topic of Christianity and art, Auden later wrote:

There can no more be a "Christian" art than there can be a Christian science or a Christian diet. There can only be a Christian spirit in which an artist, a scientist, works or does not work. A painting of a Crucifixion is not necessarily more Christian in spirit than a still life, and may very well be less.⁸⁰

The "spirit" here can be seen as the will or intention prompted by the divine In-Order-That; it does not necessarily find direct translation, and, as Auden suspects, probably should not. The work itself should affirm what there is for being, and that includes, or begins with most assuredly and directly, its very self as work, though its affirmation can only be ironic, as it affirms what, or that, it cannot affirm -- as it affirms by denial.

We may ask why Auden's emphasis on art's limitations is so forceful, why such a doctrine of creation needs explication. We may say, as Bayley has, so what?: "The great classical writers would not have even considered it worth saying: Dante, Goethe and Tolstoy are not disturbed by the awareness that what they write is not Life: they are preoccupied rather with the points at which Art and Life touch and interact, with the interplay of influence and resemblance, not

⁷⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁹ The poetic version in "Precious Five", *CP*, 591.

⁸⁰ "Postscript: Christianity & Art", *DH*, 458.

with the initial, if basic, dissimilarity."⁸¹ Why does Auden feel so compelled to expose the "contrived fissures of mirror", as Caliban puts it?⁸²

Auden stands in a long line of those who have addressed the theological problems inherent in the act of creating. As a poet, he is caught in the double bind of knowing the human and spiritual limitations of artifice, but being compelled nevertheless to draw the artist's circle and to place his entire understanding of the world and himself within that circle (we will explore this circle fully in Chapter 4). This is the double bind of reflection: reflecting what is always less than what is reflected by adding more than what is reflected, its artificial reflection. Where does one situate the "real" in all this play of mirrors? Is not "reality" simply another's, if not one's own, fabricated circle, another reflecting mirror? Where is the essence that lies at the heart of it all? Auden's thought suggests that any essence is an essence of *creation* ("Force our desire, O Essence of creation / To seek Thee always in thy substances") -- not an essentialist's fixed and metaphysical bedrock we call ultimate or absolute reality, but an active, ever-shifting, ever-renewing creative manifestation which knows its unessential nature and its capacity for contradiction and deconstruction, which knows, ultimately, that any "truth" we can speak of is, paradoxically, a silence. Auden's aesthetic is not a mere stating of the obvious through gratuitous and indifferent means. It is a reflection of an entire history of critique which realizes that what we wish to state is beyond our means, but that we must go on stating within our means anyway, for this is the inexorable condition of humankind as it faces the divine, and the inexorable condition of the "Essence" of creation as it faces humankind. From such conditions "There is no way out", as Caliban says, and "There never was".⁸³

Thus Auden's recurring themes -- will, contingency, disenchantment, play, self-reflexivity, irony -- are terms enjoying full currency within today's postmodern discourse. And his image of the mirror is as current now as it has

⁸¹ Bayley, 136.

⁸² *CP*, 444.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

ever been.⁸⁴ We will look at this currency more closely in Chapter 5. As the metaphor of reflection continues to be probed with the joint instruments of both art and philosophy, we find Auden's language en route to this present situation via his attempt to redefine the borders of metaphor itself, and in doing so to show the "febleness" of the mirror metaphor which has held such a prominent and lengthy position in Western thinking, from the Renaissance to Romanticism and beyond. This task becomes for Auden, as we have said, a redefining of the function of art. That redefining has been carried on, with much and largely unacknowledged debt to Auden's mid-century efforts, by postmodern thinkers since the sixties. That Auden has largely gone unacknowledged is due to the perceptions of his Christianity and theology, perceptions which have never seen that the doctrine of creation underpinning his belief is less a quirky and personalized orthodoxy than it is a profound reevaluation of reflective theology, a reevaluation fully in line with the present postmodern critique.⁸⁵ As postmodernity wrestles with its own problems of unity and fracture -- of not just a mirror's doubling but of multiplicity, the mirroring of mirrors -- as it moves away from a thoroughgoing nihilism, an entrapment within endless reflection, and towards breaking free from that entrapment through, once again, theological possibilities, a move suggested even by its most rigorous exponent, Jacques Derrida ("...one has to believe" are the last words of the recent *Memoirs of the Blind*⁸⁶), Auden's poetics, as his poetry, becomes particularly significant. Auden has yet to be called "postmodern", and perhaps, given the lingering haziness of the concept of postmodernism as a whole, such a label would yet be a misnomer. But his concerns in a period when borders were being crossed at great expense provide a critical bearing for us in a period when border-crossing is common place, but no less problematic. As we shall now see.

⁸⁴ See for example David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 327-359.

⁸⁵ See for example Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 13-41; Rodolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 150-170.

⁸⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 129.

Chapter One

For there could be no history without the gravity and labor of literality. The painful folding of itself which permits history to reflect itself as it ciphers itself. This reflection is its beginning. The only thing that begins by reflecting itself is history.

-- Jacques Derrida¹

As the notion of reflection sits at the hub of our Western tradition of philosophy *and* of our Western tradition of poetics, we will examine the history of this notion as it comes to us at various intellectual angles. But of course a full account of reflection historically is not only too vast a project to undertake here, but too much within the very tradition which figures like Auden question or rework. To suggest there is a "full account" is to play fully into the reflective philosophy which poetics, at least since the Renaissance, and certainly since the Romantics, continually threatens to undermine or rewrite. Even to suggest there is a "hub" to our traditions of philosophy and poetics, whether that hub is a metaphor of reflection or something else, is still to move within a metaphysical paradigm, one that purports to offer grounds and essential reductions to such things as historical movements, teleology and a history of ideas. Metaphysics, as Derrida, the eminent critic of reflective philosophy, has called it, is a "white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West"² -- which is to say, that philosophy is a fabulous construction, a *mythos*, which, if it has a center, reflects only itself, and not something extrinsically prior to or beyond itself. Philosophy is unavoidably a rhetorical exercise, Derrida continues to stress. In our own accounting of reflective history, we acknowledge what Auden calls "our incorrigible staginess", our use of "feebly figurative signs",³ which force us, necessarily, to be selective, as rhetoric is selective (a careful choosing and excluding of words). But we also claim that such selectivity does not

¹ "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book", *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 64-65.

² Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology", *Margins of Philosophy*, 213.

³ *The Sea and the Mirror*, CP, 444.

diminish the representation of our history, as it is, we have already said with full concession to self-reflection, a poetics of history as much as a history of poetics.⁴

Of all the determinations that can mark out this history of ideas, the notions of the One and the Many are chief among them. For since the Pre-Socratics⁵, these opposing poles return again and again throughout the discourses of our philosophical heritage in one guise or another. The first pole marks our singularity and all its concomitant ideas and expressions: unity, wholeness, uniformity, totality, purity, identity, stability, solidarity, constancy, eternity, completeness, essence, being, truth, God, etc. The second pole marks division and all its related terms: diversity, plurality, multiplicity, multiformity, alterity, separateness, equality, complexity, imitation, impurity, inconstancy, time, incompleteness, sin, etc. These poles are situated within all the categories we have set up for philosophical inquiry, whether they be existential, relational, spatial, temporal, material, abstract, logical, ethical, theological, etc. As bipolar opposites, they function as competing matrices of reality within our Western tradition; *qua* bipolar opposites, they are inveterately part of that tradition, inasmuch as that tradition has made bipolar opposites its defining feature, as many postmodern theorists have tried to show.⁶ As one of the oppositions tends to be privileged over the other, these poles have become battle lines around

⁴ Above, 6. We might think, correlatively, of Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*, which is also, under the Hegelian system, a history of philosophy -- an apt correlation since, as we shall see below, it is with Hegel that the reflective tradition comes to its greatest culmination and/or sublation, from which philosophy and aesthetics has been trying to recover ever since. See Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 35-78, and Mark C. Taylor, "Foiling Reflection", *Diacritics*, 8: 1 (1988), 54-61.

⁵ From the shifting, opposing forces in Heraclitus' thought to the monism of Parmenides -- see Rex Warner, *The Greek Philosophers* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 9-48.

⁶ E.g. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament*, 25-26: "As Derrida sees it, Western thought has almost always based itself on binary oppositions. Occasionally, he hazards a brief list of some of the more important of these oppositions [e.g. *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), 29, 43; "Differance", *Margins of Philosophy*, 17]. A more ample list might read as follows: transcendent/immanent, intelligible/sensible, spirit (mind, soul)/body, presence/absence, necessary/contingent, essence/accident, primary/secondary, nature/culture, masculine/feminine, white/black (brown, red, yellow), heterosexual/homosexual, normal/abnormal, sane/insane, conscious/unconscious, identity/difference, positive/negative, inside/outside, central/marginal, object/representation, objective/subjective, history/fiction, serious/trivial, literal/metaphorical, content/form, signified/signifier, original/copy, speech/writing, text/interpretation, text/context, primary text, secondary text, and so on." For a further and somewhat different list, see Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8-9.

which our philosophical contentions have been most rigorously fought. The privileging of oneness, longstanding throughout our intellectual history, has now found persistent criticism from the postmodern critique, which has countered with a privileging of plurality. By "privileging " we mean not that one denies the other, but that one is more often considered the highest reach to which we can strive, to which we ought to strive, or to which we are compelled whether we strive for it, against it, or not at all. The postmodern shift simply announces a redirection of effort from one reach to the other.

The metaphor of reflection has played an important role in bringing us to our present philosophical juncture because it has managed, among other things, to bring these two poles of the One and the Many within the same region, and to render their polar distinction more than a little blurred. Since the metaphor has been used to champion either side, supporting at once the notions of division and unity, the metaphor itself has become internally unstable, and the center of continual critical interest. What is it about reflection as a concept that allows it to be viewed as both divisive and unifying, and thus to be ultimately divisive within itself? And why is it not simply the philosophers who have become aware of its problems, but also the artists, in some cases to even a greater degree? Such questions require an close examination of the nature of reflection.

The metaphor of reflection

Metaphorically, the concept of reflection is drawn from the realm of the visual. It is not primarily an abstraction, but a physical motion. When something is reflected, it is literally bent back (>Latin *re-*, back, and *flectere*, to bend, curve or turn). It is rerouted 180°. We have only a visual recourse to describe this with any accuracy. Even if we think in terms of a spatial or mathematical vectors, we are still dependent on diagrammatic descriptions. Reflection penetrates space, pivots, and retraces itself. It is visually represented by some such figure: \supset . In the physical world we speak of a reflecting surface, the two dimensional plane on which the reflection pivots and returns in the direction from which it came. The mirror is the most popular and reliable of

such surfaces. Light rays go in and are returned, bent back, bearing an exact copy of that which stands before the mirror. We have in turn abstracted his physical phenomenon. We have taken the visual image and used it metaphorically to denote a mode of meditative or discursive thought. In this abstraction we have shifted from a transitive to an intransitive stance: mental reflection no longer demands an object for completion. This is a subtle but significant shift. When we reflect, the mind is internally dependent; it no longer needs the outside world. What is being bent back is now something that resides within the mind, is brought from the mind back to the mind. There is already a notion of unity in our abstracted sense of the verb.

Going forth and returning, the idea of the round-trip, carries a sense of wholeness, completion, or totality. The circularity of the image enfolds the ancient geometrical symbol of perfection, of coming round to the origin, of singularity, of oneness. The linearity of the image traces out the pilgrimage, the journey, on which something ventures forth towards a destination, and returns back in time to the starting point. These aspects -- circularity and linearity combined -- promote the notion of unity and wholeness within the visual picture of reflection. But if we return to the transitive sense of the verb, an object becomes a necessary part of the bending back -- *something* is reflected. That *something* introduces alterity, or otherness, as an object does to any transitive (non-substantive, non-copulative) verb. Something *else* is bent back, returned. The destination presents to the pilgrim something *other* to carry back. There is addition, doubling, secondarity, created by the reflecting moment. The surface of reflection which manifests this alterity becomes not just the pivot point, but the disrupting aspect of the visual image, the breaking point of the continuity within the circular route. What goes out comes back, yes, but comes back as *something other* than that at the point of origin. Division has invaded the image, for now we see the image *qua* image, that is, as something imitated, reproduced, even if this reproduction is our very own self, divided upon itself. The visual image of reflection (\supset) bears with it a copy of itself, as if the image should be redrawn with a decisive break at either end (=), with lines that are parallel but separate.

The plane of the reflecting surface creates objectification, breaking what may be considered the oneness of the whole into the plurality of parts.

The mirror image is our clearest example of this phenomenon at work. As a two-dimensional surface, it bounces back to us all that the incoming light has revealed to us this side of its plane. But what is bounced back to us is an image, a doubling of the three-dimensional world in two-dimensions, a facsimile of anything that stands before the mirror. The image might be identical, might be a perfect replica, discounting its reduction in dimension, but it is nevertheless something *other*. If we catch a glimpse of ourselves in a mirror, we catch a glimpse of not strictly ourselves, but a double made from the interaction of light rays on quicksilver. This alterity is most palpable when we see our reflection in, for example, a store window, where both our image and the store's display behind the window intermingle. Seldom is the subject/object division created ever considered, for narcissistically we are too occupied with our own appearance, if we are not occupied with the store's display.⁷ But internally we are aware the division exists. The reflection, the mirror, is at once us, and at once not us. The One (\supset) and the Many ($=$) are both offered. The mirror image consigns to us the immense tension between these two poles where our grandest questions and abstractions have arisen. It is no surprise then that the reflective metaphor of the mirror has been central to our philosophical projects since Socrates' dialectical conversations on the mounds of Athens.

Plato's reflection

Throughout Plato's dialogues, a reflective feature can be found within the very manner of expressed thought, the *dialectike* method itself. In this manner of eliciting supposed truth, as Rodolphe Gasché has pointed out in *The Tain of*

⁷ Auden, "Hic et Ille", *DH*, 104: "It is impossible consciously to approach a mirror without composing or 'making' a special face, and if we catch sight of our reflection unawares we rarely recognize ourselves. I cannot read my face in the mirror because I am already obvious to myself." On the actual *disappearance* of the self or selfhood in the mirror, see Mark C. Taylor's chapter "The Empty Mirror" in *Deconstructing Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing; Chico, CA.: Scholar's Press, 1982), esp. 93-98.

the Mirror, there is a splitting and a merging, a division (*diairesis*) and a reunification (*synagogue*).⁸ The speaker presents an idea to an interlocutor, who responds to the initial proposal either by assent or refutation. Even if by assent, the response represents a division, for the final truth to which the initial proposal will contribute yet stands apart, and is only coalesced through a mutual discussion, a weaving together of questions and answers between the speakers, where assent and refutation bear each successive idea towards a culmination in an incontrovertible "truth", the point of reunification between the two interlocutors. Each speaker's consciousness of truth is reflected in the other, until both speakers come to a unity within the wholeness of the established truth, just as reflection, having split upon the reflecting surface, comes back upon the viewer as him or herself. Gasché, in his detailed discussion of the philosophy of reflection, goes even further and points out that this method of reaching knowledge and truth "must be one that describes the intrinsic and spontaneous movement of truth itself." Philosophy, by its nature of being determined by the very thing it is trying to explicate, will always need "to reflect itself into self-consciousness", that is, to show not simply the way to truth, but the way, its way, *as* truth.⁹ The dialectical method is not only reflexive¹⁰ in the way it comes to truth, but in itself as truth manifested. Reflection of truth in this case takes on a *self*-reflection, as philosophical method shows itself implied in the truth it seeks, and vice versa. The discursive notion of reflection, then, the reflexivity of the mind as it functions intransitively and self-consciously within itself, finds its

⁸ Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-122. See also David Shaw's *The Lucid Veil* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 168, for a discussion of how two Victorian thinkers, George Grote and Walter Pater, both stressed that Plato's real importance lies in his medium as his true message. An even earlier thinker, Kierkegaard, spent of good portion of his Master's thesis, *The Concept of Irony -- with continual reference to Socrates*, describing at length the particularities of the method used by Socrates and put into written form by Plato, and the possible differences between the one's version and the other's -- see esp. 31ff.

¹⁰ The distinction between "reflective" and "reflexive" is a difficult one, and finds differing explanations according to every author's own use of the two terms. To limit this confusing array, we define the two terms as they are used throughout this thesis in the following way: "reflective" refers to the actual and metaphorical act of bending back upon oneself, whereas "reflexive" refers to the state of such capability. A mirror is reflective when it produces a doubling image, reflexive as an instrument capable of such reflection. The former carries more a transitive force, the latter more an intransitive force, though both require the other for its completion (and hence reflex(ct)ivity always implies *self*-reflex(ct)ivity).

preCartesian origin within the Socratic/Platonic method. Hegel's later dialectic, as it takes shape within a post-Cartesian philosophical world, will radicalize not simply the Cartesian/Kantian legacy of self-reflection, but the Greek dialectic which first allowed, or even forced, philosophy to look at itself reflexively.¹¹

If truth is reflected in the manner by which it is sought, there is yet another level of reflection at work in Plato, and that is of course in the substance of truth when it is sought for and found. The path of enlightenment and truth in Platonic theory is one leading from the shadowy and reflected appearances we encounter with our physical senses to the metaphysical realities we encounter with our mind. Plato's doctrine of Forms¹² relies heavily on a metaphorical understanding of reflection as it pertains to the creation of a secondary or subordinate copy. Unlike the supposedly pure and singular original, the copy is but a temporal image that needs, like a mirror, to be shattered before the true precedent Form can be properly and metaphysically perceived. Once obtained with a rational compulsion that affords, within the dialectic method, a definite certainty, the metaphysical perception becomes knowledge in the proper sense: an irrefutable foundation on which all appearances and multiplicities rest and to which they all eventually give way. The foundational Form, then, stands this side of the mirror, and is only accurately faced by turning one's back, in an anti-reflexive stance, on the mirror images of this physical and bodily world. In a strange reversal, *physis* becomes ephemera, and the things of *nous* substance.

A reflective/anti-reflective tension results from this positioning, as can be seen distinctly within *The Republic's* famous Allegory of the Cave in Book VII. The shadows cast upon the wall by the various material objects and taken for

¹¹ Kierkegaard saw the self-reflexive nature in this manner of philosophical thinking when, in response to Hegel's "speculative thought", he perceived that "speculative knowledge is not as knowledge usually is, something indifferent in relation to what is known, so that this is not changed by being known but remains the same. No, speculative knowledge is itself the object of knowing, so that the latter is no longer the same as it was but has come into existence simultaneously with speculation as the truth" -- *Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Vol. I*, 223-224.

¹² Or, as it is also called, the doctrine of Ideas, such as it comes to us in Book X of *The Republic*, for example. Of all the explanations of this doctrine or theory, Bertrand Russell's in *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945, 1972), 119-132, is particularly lucid.

reality by the fettered prisoners are nothing but two-dimensional projections. Cornford notes in his celebrated translation, now over fifty years old, that had Plato been our contemporary, he would have found the analogy of cinema irresistible to his parable, as both the fire's light and the film projector reflect their images off a forward wall.¹³ One must escape the darkness of the cave in order to see the objects in their true substantial form, just as we must leave the darkness of the theatre in order to experience the outside realities of which the simulacra of the screen purport to be. But even in the light of the outside sun we may be deceived. Dazzled by the radiance, we could still follow shadows and images in water before we become accustomed to objects in their full sunlit reality. Even in the upper world, reflections are at work, keeping us at a remove from the originary Form until our eyes have properly adjusted to the overwhelming light.¹⁴ So the journey for Plato is one whereby we necessarily rely on reflection in the process. Only in the final culmination of reason's journey, the perception of the essential Form of Goodness, which is source for all light, intelligence and truth, can the imitations of reflection be put fully behind us. But pure Goodness is the most difficult to perceive, and most often we perceive only a glimpse. Few are so wise as to dwell exclusively before its brilliant light.

Nor *ought* one remain fixed before the light in the upper world, teaches Socrates. Practically, there must be a return to the world of particulars and shadows: if it is not simply because most of us are unable to sustain wisdom, then, for the rare nobles who are able, it is because those left behind need to hear of the true light.¹⁵ The return is an essential part of the Allegory, and one

¹³ *The Republic of Plato*, trans. with intro. and notes by Francis MacDonald Cornford (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 228n.

¹⁴ "He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day" -- (VII, 515-516) *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Doubleday, 1973 ed.), 206-207.

¹⁵ "Then, I said, the business of us who are the founders of the State will be to compel the best minds to attain that knowledge which we have already shown to be the greatest of all -- they must continue to ascend until they arrive at the good; but when they have ascended and seen enough, we must not allow them to do as they do now.

often forgotten in its retelling. In the context of the Republic that Socrates is expounding and advocating to his interlocutor Glaucon, the journey to Truth is reciprocal. It must lead back to the cave for the betterment of the commonwealth. The Allegory is ultimately applied to education, to the manner by which the community is bound in harmony and oneness under true thinking, and to politics, to the rulers in which that education is entrusted. The Allegory contains a coming back upon itself, a reflective motion we have ascribed to the concept of the One, a concept which is indeed governing Plato's view both of Goodness and of the Republic. Moreover, this movement out to the upper world and back again to the lower world is not just allegorical in its pointing to the practice of running a successful Republic, but in its pointing to Plato's notion of Truth as Gasché has described it self-determining terms: that the returning to the cave is a reflexion of Truth looking back upon itself and knowing itself as Truth. In the Allegory, the light requires the darkness to see itself as light. There is a mutual dependence between the two divided worlds. Though Plato does not pursue the unsettling consequences of this co-dependence, he does implicitly recognize its reciprocal elements later in his descriptions of the dialectic. Recalling the Allegory, he describes the dialectic as that procedure by which one moves upwards out of the imprisoning darkness towards the light of first principles, towards Goodness in its originary Form.¹⁶ But it is a procedure of dialogue, of moving back and forth between question and answer, of returning to the cave only to advance out of it. And this movement is modelled for us by Socrates himself, who must rely on the benighted Glaucon to reach the sunlit

What do you mean?

I mean that they remain in the upper world: but this must not be allowed; they must be made to descend again among the prisoners in the den, and partake of their labors and honors, whether they are worth having or not" -- (VII, 519), *ibid.*, 210.

¹⁶ "Here at last, then, we come to the main theme, to be developed in philosophic discussion. It falls within the domain of the intelligible world; but its progress is like that of the power of vision in the released prisoner of our parable. When he had reached the stage of trying to look at the living creatures outside the Cave, then at the stars, and lastly at the Sun himself, he arrived at the highest object in the visible world. So here, the summit of the intelligible world is reached in philosophic discussion by one who aspires, through the discourse of reason unaided by any of the senses, to make his way in every case to the essential reality and perseveres until he has grasped by pure intelligence the very nature of Goodness itself. This journey is what we call Dialectic" -- (VII, 532), *trans. Cornford*, 252.

Truth of his reasoning. In the Platonic world, reflex is an essential part of advancement.

The Republic's concern for the two poles which give the dialectic its movement -- reality and appearance, or correspondingly, the One and the Many -- is further seen in the final Book (Book X), with its attempts to distinguish between art and truth, and to understand their relation. Here, the reflective metaphor draws specifically on the picture of the mirror in an attempt to clarify the notion of imitation. The artist and craftsman do not create the Form of any one object. They do not present its Form in reality. They rather *represent* its Form in appearance. And we can all represent easily enough, says Socrates, "none quicker than that of turning a mirror round and round -- you would soon enough make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the other things of which we were just now speaking, in the mirror."¹⁷ So the craftsman who makes a bed, a painter who paints one, and a poet who describes one, all imitate through *mimesis* the one essential idea of Bed fashioned first by God. That original, foundational Bed is One; any copy of it in nature, on canvas or in print is addition, and therefore less real. Art, like a mirror, doubles and superadds, and thus leads one away from the truth of the object as it exists metaphysically unified. Art then is deceptive, and its deception banishes the bulk of artists from the commonwealth.¹⁸ The reflection

¹⁷ X, 597, trans. Jowett, 289.

¹⁸ Of course, not *all* artists are banished, nor *all* art. Socrates extols Homer with the following qualification: "but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State" (Book X, trans. Jowett, 301). In an earlier example (Book III), Socrates had excised certain musical modes, but he did allow two to remain (the Dorian and the Phrygian), one "warlike, to sound the note or accent which a brave man utters in the hour of danger and stern resolve", and one to be used "in times of peace and freedom of action" as strains of the fortunate or of temperance (trans. Jowett, 87). That is, if art can show itself profitable to the overall weal of the commonwealth, promoting "law and the reason of mankind" over "pleasure and pain", then, says Socrates, "we shall be delighted to receive her" (trans. Jowett, 301-302). But she must make a case for herself, she must *defend* herself, or "her defenders who are lovers of poetry and yet not poets" must be granted "the permission to speak in prose on her behalf" (trans. Jowett, 302). Here we have the beginnings of a call for art either to account for itself or to be accounted for, a call that will echo throughout the entirety of our Western tradition in one form or another, and be heard ringing behind the various poetics that later will emerge, from Aristotle's onwards. For more on Plato's unease with art, see Iris Murdoch, *Fire and the Sun -- Why Plato Banished the Artists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

of the mirror image, of mimesis, is discredited fully under ideal Socratic rule. Only a reflection of the mind, the dialectic, is permissible within the perfect State.

But as Plato's Socrates must dialectically engage with Glaucon to achieve his philosophical summits, so Plato himself must resort to the artist's medium of the written word to set his philosophy in motion. And thus the irony and unease within Plato's writings which threaten to do the very thing Socrates himself charges the artists of: undermine the notion of reason and reality by further removing the reader from any originary source. This unease, noticed by generations since, can be fixed upon the figure of Socrates himself, whom Plato has created, as Kierkegaard says, "by means of poetic productivity".¹⁹ We know no more of the "true" Socrates than if he was paraded before the fire in the darkened cave and his shadow cast upon the wall. In the sense which the argument in *The Republic* has been contesting all along, the figure of Socrates is a reflection and mimesis, and Plato an artist and craftsman. And of this Plato could not have been unaware. Nor could he have been unaware that by the very same token, all that he put into Socrates' mouth is, by virtue of its graphic and scriptural representation in print, a form of imitation and mimesis. His only possible justifying recourse is to emphasize the dialectical form of this representation. But that dialectical form, as we have seen, is itself reflexive, coming back upon itself not only through question and answer, but through its need to know itself as a justifiable course, or *recourse*, to truth, and thus ultimately to know itself in self-determination *as* truth. Plato is caught within his own reflex. And it is this impasse which provides the history of reflection and the metaphor of the mirror with an ongoing instability.²⁰

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 15.

²⁰ For a further discussion of Plato's notion of reflection and mimesis, particularly its ironic and paradoxical features, see Arne Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 10-43; also, Christopher Janaway, *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 106-157.

Aristotle's mimêsis

Aristotle's treatment of the dialectic and of mimesis was less rigorously dualistic than his predecessor's. Aristotle did not subscribe to a doctrine of Forms or Ideas, but rather to a notion of "universals" which cannot rightly exist except in their manifestation within particulars. He thus made much less of the split between the physical and the metaphysical, much less of truth as a sovereign, hypostatic reality, and much less of the dialectical process as a sovereign route to that truth. For him, dialectics was a theoretical manner of argumentation, linked with the more important rhetoric.²¹ It had more to do with the "probable" than it did with fixed and indubitable truth. The path to utmost knowledge was through a logical series of proofs and counterproofs, through syllogistic structures, through techniques (*technai*) that were more empirically methodical and began with definitions rather than arrived at them. One might say that for Aristotle there was much less of an obsession to separate the One out from the Many, for the world was a multiform arena of matter and substances, of actions and potentialities, on which philosophy directed its gaze. Action and actualizing were more interesting and important to him than the more static metaphysics of Plato. And this active view helped in some ways to deflect the inherent mirroring of philosophy upon itself set up by his predecessor.

The retreat from a strict dualism can be seen in Aristotle's understanding of mimesis. Unlike Platonic mimesis, which was a copy of a Form, and thus distanced by some degree from Truth, Aristotelian mimesis had a greater connection between representation and what was represented. Ricoeur, in his extensive study on metaphor, has iterated that Aristotle's mimesis is defined only in terms of the poetic realm, and is thus inseparable from making or *poiêsis*. It cannot then be "confused with imitation in the sense of copy. If *mimêsis* involves an initial reference to reality, this reference signifies nothing other than the very rule of nature over all production. But the creative dimension is

²¹ "Rhetoric is the counterpart of Dialectic", the *Rhetorica* begins (1354^a 1 -- trans. W. Rhys Roberts in *The Works of Aristotle, Vol. XI*, ed. W.D. Ross [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924]). See Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 28-29.

inseparable from this referential movement. *Mimêsis* is *poiêsis*, and *poiêsis* is *mimêsis*.²² This "creative dimension" is crucial. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that the objects of *mimêsis* are actions (1448^a, 1). To represent these actions, the artist (here the poet/dramatist) must provide a structure (Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody) in which not only will the actions be plausible, but in many ways will take on a life of their own. So Aristotle states "that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary" (1451^a, 36-37)²³. To describe what *might* happen, what is *possible as being probable or necessary*, is a huge shift from Plato. As in the dialectics, probability and potentiality now overtake actuality and direct/indirect copying. The artist fashions something *new*, we might say. Aristotle's focus is on actions, which by nature are open-ended; Plato's focus is on static *things*, beds, vessels, plants, animals, etc., which are by nature closed and self-contained. Actions are only self-contained when they function within a unified Plot. But that unified Plot, though essential for Aristotle, is not itself a direct imitation of some prior given. It is, we are reminded, a *muthos*, which can just as well be translated Fable or Myth.²⁴ Mimetic actions come within fable-making. They are unlike those the historian deals with, Aristotle differentiates, for the historian describes the thing that has been, while the artist what might be (1451^b, 3-5). This subjunctive or conditional element in Aristotle's mimetic understanding gives art its own life, so to speak, its own point of reference. As Ricoeur has stated, its reference is to a given only in the sense of a rule of nature over *production*. But

²² Ibid., 39. See also Ricoeur's treatment of Aristotle's *Poetics* and *mimêsis* in *Time and Narrative, Vol. I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 31-51; 52ff.

²³ Aristotle, *De Poetica*, trans. Ingram Bywater, *The Works of Aristotle, Vol. XI*. All following quotations from the *Poetics* are taken from this translation.

²⁴ See Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 37ff. Acknowledging Ricoeur, Melberg describes Aristotle's mimesis as "defined by *mythos* and *praxis*, which brings the concept close to areas of time and action -- in contrast to Platonic *mimesis*, which is closer to image, imagination and imitation." Melberg defines *mythos* as "a concept of order, which makes it possible to view literary works as structured wholes" and *praxis* as "already structured events or chains of events, which can be perceived as meaningful and answering a purpose" (44-45). This *mythos/praxis* distinction is what Melberg sees as Aristotle's attempt "to create temporal order out the paradoxes of Platonic poetics" (50), temporality, repetition and time being Melberg's chief concerns in his analyses of mimesis (1-9).

once produced, actions within a *muthos* refer to nothing other than themselves. Art has been given an autonomy, the likes of which will only be exploited some two thousand years later with the Romantic turn.

We might even go further and say, with Ricoeur, that Aristotelian mimesis, with its emphasis on what *might* happen, not only gives art a certain autonomy, but, with its further emphasis on the tragic, also *adds* something to art. Imitating is an inherent trait in humanity, Aristotle explains in describing the origin of poetry (1448^b, 4ff). As children, we learn by imitating what we see, and delight in realistic representations. But the pleasure in learning is in gaining something new, and strict imitations do not, by definition, offer anything new.²⁵ So then, "if one has not seen the thing before, one's pleasure will not be in the picture as an imitation of it, but will be due to the execution or colouring or some similar cause" (1448^b, 19-20). That is, will be due to the *production* or *poiêsis*. Poetry, infers Aristotle, grew out of a pleasure of creating, and admiring the creation. The original aptitude may have been imitation; the resulting desire was improvisation (1448^b, 23-24). But the improvisations soon divided into two kinds, one dealing with noble actions (Tragedy), and one dealing with meaner or ignoble actions (Comedy). For Aristotle, the former, even as it succeeded Epic poetry, was clearly the highest reach of any artist. But its glorification creates further tensions within the mimetic structure. "Thus", writes Ricoeur, "*muthos* is not just a rearrangement of human action into a more coherent form, but a structuring that elevates this action; so *mimêsis* preserves and represents that which is human, not just in its essential features [as it would with Plato], but in a way that makes it greater and nobler. There is thus a double tension proper to *mimêsis*: on the one hand, the imitation is at once a portrayal of human reality *and* an original creation; on the other, it is faithful to things as they are *and* it depicts them as higher and greater than they are."²⁶ Given the notion of possibility which sits over the *muthos* and its making, we can fairly say that the

²⁵ Unless one takes into account an ontological difference between a "copy" and an "original", so that the copy introduces something ontologically "new".

²⁶ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 40. See also Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 281-289.

creative and elevated side of this tension ultimately wins out.²⁷ Art comes away from the *Poetics* not banished into exile from an ideal world, but having itself been granted by Aristotle the status of a kind of ideal world, that is, one both autonomous from and an improvement upon the world as we actually live in it.

As much an advance as Aristotle's notion of mimesis is over Plato, with all its (re)creative features, Aristotle still did not overcome the reflective nature of metaphysics so powerful under the Platonic rubric. Art may do more than simply reflect, but thinking as a whole is for Aristotle still very much reflexive in nature. And this may account for why, in what was to follow Plato and Aristotle, reflection and mimesis were held inextricably together in a strictly imitative sense for so long.²⁸ We can see Aristotle's notion of thought as reflection emerge most forcefully in his *Metaphysics*, where the operation of the Mind and its thoughts is clearly influenced by a Platonic notion of an "original" and a "copy" operating within the Mind. Granted, the intellect participated in what it perceived in a manner quite foreign to Plato.²⁹ But within this notion of identity the act of thinking itself becomes reflective in the sense in which we have been speaking -- coming back upon itself to know itself as truth. A passage that begins Book XII, Chapter 9, reveals the extent to which Aristotle was caught up in his own reflective position. "Thought is held to be the most

²⁷ Ricoeur is a little less willing to take sides. In pointing out a later passage in the *Poetics* where Aristotle widens the possibilities, saying a poet can imitate human actions "either as they were or are, or as they are said or thought to be or to have been, or as they ought to be" (1460^b, 7-11), Ricoeur sees more of a balancing act: "Reality remains a reference, without ever becoming a restriction" (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 42). But a preceding statement of Aristotle's (1460^a, 26-27) is telling: "A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility." Here Aristotle seems to be taking the side of imagination over imitation.

²⁸ Convincingly, one might say, until Kant. But Aristotle himself did not help his own theory. The phrase *mimêsis phuseôs*, imitation of nature, arises in Aristotle often in connection with art outside of the *Poetics* (see Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 41; 333-334), often enough to confuse the issue of mimesis and representation. Though the word *phuseôs* in the phrase *mimêsis phuseôs* may not, as Ricoeur suggests, mean all that we take it to mean when we think of "nature" today, referring instead to something much more active and creative than the inert "givens" of our modern science (ibid., 42-43; 333-334), art as "imitation of nature" has enough of a reflecting aspect in its analogy that, without clarification, which Aristotle seldom granted, one can easily overlook the creative, non-imitative elements.

²⁹ Hylomorphically, in Rorty's term -- i.e., in a manner where "knowledge is not the possession of accurate *representations* of an object but rather the subject's becoming *identical* with the object" (Rorty, 45).

divine of things observed by us", he states at the outset, in treating the subject of divine thought (1074^b, 15-16).³⁰ But what makes it so divinely good, he asks -- the very act of thinking, or what is thought of? Since the act of thinking will belong to the one who thinks the worst thing in the world, the act itself cannot be the best of things, he reasons. Nor can the object of thought, for that object can be obviously both good and bad. "Therefore", he concludes, "it must be of itself that divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking" (1074^b, 33-34). With the very Platonic premise that thought is the most divine thing, Aristotle is led to the same self-reflection of thought that governed Plato's dialectic. When the object of thought is speculative, and not containing matter, the act of thought and the object of thought become one thing: "thought and object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter", and so, "the divine thought and its object will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought" (1075^a, 2-4). This is not an isolated theory, restricted to the divine gods. It appears again in *On the Soul*: "Mind is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its objects are identical" (430^a, 2-4).³¹ This identity between thought and object does not share Plato's grand sense of an eternal Idea existing separately from the activity of the Mind, but it comes all too close: "throughout eternity is the thought which has *itself* for its object" (*Metaphysics*, 1075^a, 10). That is, whatever differing notion Aristotle may have had regarding the mind/body distinction, thought is still elevated to the point where it is self-substantiating. The mind looks to itself for its verification of the highest things. And this allows Rorty to say that Aristotle lends himself just as much to the imagery of the mirror as both his predecessor and the later Descartes.³²

³⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, trans. W.D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle, Vol. VIII*, ed. J.A. Smith and W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908). All following quotations from the *Metaphysics* are taken from this translation.

³¹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. J.A. Smith, in *Works of Aristotle, Vol. III*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

³² Rorty, 45.

So whatever advances Aristotle made over Plato's dualism, and over the drive to ground all reality upon a singular notion (Form, Idea, Truth, etc.), he did not escape the tendency to regard mind as superior by virtue of its ability (and its necessity) to scrutinize its own working. He thus kept a metaphysics firmly in place. The Greek philosophical legacy after Socrates can be summed up in this manner: that it established a category beyond the sensible by which the prefix "meta-" would take on a new and theologically eminent role; but that this category necessitated the ability for self-examination, and set the analogy of reflection indispensably into its framework. This point cannot be overstressed. To place something "beyond" ("meta") creates a division; knowledge requires a bridging of the divide, a unifying. If the mind is part of that "meta" category, it must be able to look at itself to know of its separated existence. It must self-reflect, in order for it to cohere. So too with truth: if it is something beyond, it must know itself as beyond to be in any way grasped. To know truth one must first presuppose truth: this was the hidden assumption at work in the Platonic dialectic, which must ultimately regard itself *as* Truth.³³ There is then a fundamental tension residing within the unity/division or One/Many distinction at work in any "meta" category: to be placed beyond disrupts unity, and to reflect restores unity, but this reflecting also "reflects" the initial division, so that like a mirror upon a mirror, unity is never fully obtained. It is, as Derrida will later stress, always already deferred. The reflection model is inherently an unstable *metaphor*.

The Christian era -- Augustine and iconography

We have emphasized the Greek notions of reflection as they come to us in Plato and Aristotle because they show the philosophical metaphor at its incipient stage, where its inherent problems are first to be located and exposed.

³³ Heidegger also realized this when he said, "Truth is what first *makes possible* anything like presupposing" (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962], 270), and why perhaps ultimately he could not fully overcome metaphysics himself, despite this being his conscious goal. Also, "Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought" (*ibid.*, 24).

We could easily succumb to the temptation, as many have, of vaulting intellectually and historically from Aristotle to Descartes, ignoring the millennium and a half of Christianized philosophy and thinking that comes in between within our Western tradition. In a surface sense this is warranted, since Platonism and/or Aristotelianism had such a powerful sway over the Church's theological speculations, and the metaphor of reflection altered little until Descartes. But even in our brief glance of the metaphor's history, we would be guilty of assuming too much uniformity to bypass this vast period altogether. The struggle set up by Plato under philosophic reflexivity between the One and the Many took on a fierceness in the Patristic era which has yet to be matched, particularly over the relation of Christ to God. Chief among the Patristics is Augustine, whose anticipation of Descartes' *Cogito* is something often overlooked. Even a cursory look at this theologian reveals the entrenchment of philosophical reflection and its attempt to unify.

At the centre of the christological debates of the early centuries of Christianity stood various doctrines of creation which fought diligently to reconcile the One and the Many, taking their starting points within the Godhead itself. The Oneness of the Godhead and the begottenness of the Son held, one might say, a poetic dimension in which the mimetic tradition, art as "imitation of reality", would eventually work itself out.³⁴ Augustine's own contributions to christological and Trinitarian doctrine were immense, as his own starting point

³⁴ In the theological distinctions marking these early debates and controversies, the idea of creation was at the very heart of understanding Christ's relation to God. How does a begotten Son remain identical with his Father? This question forced ontological distinctions between "same" and "difference", between "generated" and "ungenerated", between even "original" and "copy" -- the same distinctions forced by the operation of a mirror. What was a question of poetics with Aristotle, how a created work is related to its original, became a question of theology with the Patristics. There is an unresolved notion of *mimêsis* within the christological and Trinitarian controversies, a notion which was never made explicit at the time, but which would later have impact upon theology's view of the arts: if God became flesh in Christ, not only was the material world shown some degree of confidence, but a created work could somehow reflect something much greater than itself. Incarnational theology affirmed art's material substance; christological and Trinitarian theology affirmed art's ability to reflect eternal truths. Thinking of Aristotle, one could conceivably say that a poetics sowed the seed for a christological view of Christ as both begotten and One with the Father.

was not with the Father, but with the very nature of divinity itself.³⁵ His Platonism comes through clearly here. To find the essence of divine nature is to find the true reality which can only be One. However distinct the Three Persons, this immutable essence always unifies. Moreover, this Trinity is reflected throughout creation, so that one may find it analogously within the human soul. The result of such reflective Platonism is enormous: to find the most veritable image of the Trinity, "a man should look primarily into himself, for Scripture represents God as saying ' Let *us* [ie. the Three] make man in *our* image and in *our* likeness.' "³⁶ Concerned not only with the essential nature of God but how we can come to know that difficult nature, Augustine takes a reflexive turn inwards. Where his predecessors considered a reflection between the Persons of the Trinity, and the problems which came with such a view, Augustine builds reflection right into our understanding of God, and ultimately ourselves. Charles Taylor, in his comprehensive book *Sources of the Self*, makes much of this early turn inwards, and quotes the famous line from Augustine's *De versa Religione*: " 'Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas' ('Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth')."³⁷ Reflecting upon God's nature, Augustine arrives at the nature of humankind. Not only is there reflection put to use analogously in the reading of the Genesis creation account, where God makes man in His (Their) own image, but more fundamentally there is reflection put to use in how we know the truth of that image. One turns in upon oneself in radical reflexivity, and in doing so, one turns towards God. We can see this move at work within the very structure of the *Confessions*, the first *autobiography* as we conceive of it today. Our whole concept of an autobiography presumes that by reflecting back upon one's life, its truth can be revealed. We owe this presumption to the *Confessions*, which, in reflecting back upon Augustine's own life, reveals in the end God's truth (and

³⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Harper and Row, 1960, 1965, 1968, 1978), 272.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁷ Charles Taylor, 129.

hence the explication of God's creation of the world in the final chapters).³⁸ Knowledge begins with self-knowledge. And self-knowledge begins with certainty of self-presence. "Augustine was the inventor of the argument we know as the 'cogito' ", says Taylor, "because Augustine was the first to make the first-person standpoint fundamental to our search for truth."³⁹ And so Taylor points out the proto-Cartesian move in which Augustine shows that his own existence cannot be doubted, as doubting requires existence (*On Free Will*, II, iii,7).⁴⁰ The "proof" of our existence is in subjective regard; the proof of God's

³⁸ A vivid example of such self-reflection opens Book II: "I must now carry my thoughts back to the abominable things I did in those days, the sins of the flesh which defiled my soul. I do this, my God, not because I love those sins, but so that I may love you. For love of your love I shall retrace my wicked ways. The memory is bitter, but it will help me to savour your sweetness, the sweetness that does not deceive but brings real joy and never fails" -- *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 43.

³⁹ Charles Taylor, 133. Cf. Auden: "When a Christian, like Augustine, talks about ethics, therefore, he begins not with the rational act or the pleasant act, but with the *acte gratuite*, which is neither reasonable nor physically pleasant, but a pure act of absolute self-autonomy" (*Forewords and Afterwords*, 36-37). Auden wrote these words as a part of a review ("Augustus to Augustine", *The New Republic*, 25 September, 1944) of Charles Norris Cochrane's *Christianity and Culture: a study of thought and action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940). Auden was very much influenced by this book, as he admits in the review's opening paragraph: "Since the appearance of the first edition in 1940, I have read this book many times, and my conviction of its importance to the understanding not only of the epoch with which it is concerned, but also our own, has increased with each reading" (*Forewords and Afterwords*, 33). Arthur Kroker, in his chapter "*Theatrum Saeculum: Augustine's Subversion*" in *The Postmodern Scene* (with David Cook [London: Macmillan Education, 1986, 1988], 35-72), goes to great lengths in hailing Cochrane as an immensely important and progressive philosophical historian, "a member of that broader tradition of thinkers, in Canada and elsewhere, who developed a self-reflexive critique of modern civilization" (39) and whose "writing responded, at its deepest threshold, to the aesthetics of poetic consciousness" (46), features no doubt appealing to Auden. Kroker sees Cochrane as presenting "us with the challenge of rereading the Augustinian discourse, not simply within the terms of Christian metaphysics, but as a great dividing-line, perhaps *the* fundamental scission, between classicism, the discourse of modernism, and its postmodern fate" (36): "It was Cochrane's singular insight to see the real implications of Augustine's *Confessions*; to sense that to the same extent that Augustine might rightly be described as the 'first citizen of the modern world,' then we, the inheritors of modern experience, cannot liberate ourselves from the 'radical anxiety' of the postmodern age until we have thought against, overturned, or at least inverted, the Augustinian discourse" (37). As to these "real implications", Kroker adds later: "Augustine's *Confessions* are an actual, written account of the exact moment at which took place a fundamental rupture in the interstices of Western consciousness. Augustine's conversion in the garden at Cassiacium marks a great threshold in the Western mind: a fundamental, seismic division between the warring antinomies of classical experience, and the 'serenity' of the undivided will (the 'will to will') of modernism" (125). We may add that Kroker's bringing of Augustine into a postmodern discussion via Cochrane's texts is suggestive for our own bringing of Auden into a postmodern discussion, though our stress is on other texts besides Cochrane's.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *On Free Will*, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex, in *The Problem of Free Choice* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), 80-81.

existence is likewise in subjective regard, for He can be the only one ultimately directing our mind's eye towards our self-knowledge. Knowing our own soul is an advance; knowing *how* we know our own soul brings us to the feet of our Maker. This reflexive theology anticipates our modern era more than it is often given credit for. As Taylor remarks, "To focus on my own thinking activity is to bring to attention not only the order of things in the cosmos which I seek to *find* but also the order which I *make* as I struggle to plumb the depths of memory and discern my true being. . . This understanding of thinking as a kind of inner assembly of an order we construct will be put to a revolutionary new use by Descartes."⁴¹

The point to see in this limited examination of Augustine's thought is how he synthesized philosophical reflexivity with Christian theology, and did so upon a doctrine of creation which stood at the heart of christological and Trinitarian concerns. His approach at overcoming the tension between the One and the Many was to center upon an essential self, first within the Godhead, and then, and more importantly, within the individual. As we saw in Plato, the idea of Truth is reached through the dialectical method, which is by nature reflexive because it must justify its own recourse and know itself *as* Truth, and not simply as a way *to* Truth. With Augustine, this method becomes internalized, so that the way to Truth, and ultimately to God who is Truth, is in a great sense an autobiographical method. The tension of God being Other in relation to humanity is softened by this interiority, just as the tension of the Christ being Other to the Father is softened, or done away with, by an interiority with the Triune. We know the divine interiority by our own interiority, for it is reflected in us. Just as, artistically, we know Augustine by his *Confessions*, for he is reflected in both its content and its form. Or so he would have us believe.

Augustine's Christianization of Platonic reflection would find later expression in the Church's development of iconography. The icon became the point of fusion between theology and poetics, for the making and veneration of the iconographic image was as much a religious exercise as it was artistic, and

⁴¹ Charles Taylor, 141. We might also say by Foucault as well (see, for example *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [New York: Pantheon, 1970]).

the two could not be separated. The tension then inherent within the christological debates reappeared in the iconoclastic debates, for the issue remained one of creation: how can a created thing participate in the eternal Divine? Augustine's internal understanding of this participation, with its Platonic sense of reflected imitation now bolstered by a Divinity found and encountered within, and with its distinct expression made evident in his own confessional writing, stands to justify the iconographic doctrine. Natural images (Plato's actual bed) and artificial images (Plato's drawing of a bed) both relied on an archetype. For the Church, this archetype was the eternal and immutable image of God. Because God is the Creator of all things, His image will participate in all His creation, humankind and the material world alike. As the natural image is a product of the Divine Mind, so the artificial image is a product of the human mind. The artificial image is unlike its Divine counterpart, being made from human fallibility and corruptible matter, but it can participate with the Divine by a "unity-in-unlikeness", where the unity comes through the existence of the archetype present as a "prototype".⁴² A picture of Christ or a saint, then, can be venerated not as a thing in itself, which is idolatrous, but as a pointing towards the Divine Image which is not identical to but participates in the material thing. There is a consubstantial relationship between image and archetype by virtue of creation, but there is not identity. The doctrine owes much to the language and categories employed in the doctrine of the Trinity, which is iconography's closest ally, though in the case of Christ's relationship to the Father, orthodoxy states that there is identity.

The iconoclastic rebuttal sensed Arianism lurking beneath the iconic understanding. To represent Christ in a corruptible material form was to depreciate him to a level below the divine status. Christ could not be created or recreated in either a material sense or any other sense, except eternally.⁴³ But

⁴² I.P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena", in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 509.

⁴³ As in the doctrine of eternal creation or eternal generation put forward, for example, by Origen (Kelly, 128), or later, in a more radical version, by Meister Eckhart, who writes: "Thus the saints say that the Son is born eternally and that he will continue to be born without ceasing. Neither would God have created the world, if having created were not the same as still creating."

the official Church view held to a wider sense of incarnation, one shored up by a Platonic and Augustinian understanding of intellect: it is not primarily the physical senses which are moved by a venerable viewing of an icon, but the mind which is moved and turned towards God. The iconoclasts were missing the point if their rejection was on the grounds of materiality alone. The icon uses the material substance of its artificial image to bring the penitent viewer to the intelligible world of the Divine Image, just as Christ became flesh to bring the world salvation. The material substance does not degrade the Divine; the Divine, rather, uplifts the material substance, at least to the point where it can participate in something much greater than itself. The Arian strands of iconography were thus countered by a view of intelligence to which the physical would ultimately give way, a view decidedly Augustinian in its direction, in that the icon forces one inward to find the truth of which it is an image. But the tension between the poetic and theological strands remained taut nevertheless, before they would eventually snap under the pressure of Luther.⁴⁴

The participatory nature of iconography played down the mimetic tradition of strict imitation, but art was developing under Church auspices widely enough outside of iconography, particularly in the West, to keep the mimetic

Therefore, God created the world in such a way that he still creates it without ceasing" -- *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Oliver Davies (London: Penguin, 1994), 80-81.

⁴⁴ George Pattison argues that, rather than supporting the notion of iconography, Augustine's "mistrust of the visual sense" was "normative for a millennium and a half of Christianity", and was endorsed in the Reformation "by a renewed emphasis on the iconoclastic elements in the Bible" (*Art, Modernity and Faith*, 16). This different reading shows the tension in both Augustine and the idea of reflection. Undeniably, Augustine considered the intelligible/spiritual realm to be the highest realm, the locus of "Truth". But this realm is *reflected* in us, both in our inward selves and in the *expression* of those inward selves, such as in the *Confessions*. This reflection, whether it be called allegorical, symbolic, analogical, etc., requires a certain juncture of divinity (God) and humanity (Augustine, e.g.), of the spiritual (inward self) and the material (the written word, e.g.), a juncture central to iconography. If one stresses that the two sides of this juncture are ultimately incommensurable, and that the intelligible/spiritual is the only place truth can reside, as Western theology came to stress, then indeed it is no surprise the Western Christian tradition was "pervaded by a consensual suspicion concerning the visual" (134). But if one stresses the juncture, as Augustine could be said to have stressed *in reflection* and *in practice* (that is, in the writing of the *Confessions*, e.g.), then "the theophanous possibilities of the icon" (134) are affirmed. For Pattison's discussion of iconography, especially within Eastern Orthodoxy, see his chapter "Icons of Glory", 118-133. Jean-Luc Marion, who in *God Without Being* (trans. Thomas A. Carson [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991]) says the "icon does not result from a vision but provokes one" (17), tries to move iconic experience outside the realm or notion of reflection altogether. See below, Chapter 5, 214ff., for a further discussion of Marion.

tradition, in whatever manifestation, alive and well. The metaphor of the mirror began to make its way visibly into the arts in a way which theology and philosophy, working at the discursive level, had not, but it owed its immediate currency to that theology and philosophy as much as it did to the growing use of mirrors in an ever civilizing society. We have seen how artists like Van Eyck in the fourteenth century were beginning to play with strengths and weaknesses of the metaphor, using mirrors explicitly within their work, and making reflection and self-reflection part of the aesthetic experience, both literally and figuratively. Art became the explicitly reflective stance, reaching a peak in the Renaissance with Shakespeare, whom we will deal with at length in Chapter 2. It was not until Luther's even more radical inward turn that philosophical reflexivity, so long buried tacitly within the Greek heritage of the Church's theology, reemerged explicitly for reappraisal. Luther cleared the way not only by his own version of Augustine's first-person standpoint, but perhaps as significantly by his implicit rejection of the artistic image. With the Reformation having deflated art's affirmation of the physical as an effective means to the Divine, theology and poetics began to go their separate ways, leaving philosophy to find its place somewhere in between. It was Descartes who most radically started from this middle point, only afterwards trying, by way of concession, to ground his philosophy of doubt upon theological certainties. This approach led, through an epistemological reflexivity more radical than that of either Augustine's or Luther's, to even further divides, bringing the inherent problems of the reflection metaphor into a vulnerable open, and widening the splits not only between theology and philosophy, but within theology and philosophy respectively. In this divisive sense of reflection, Descartes inaugurated what we now know as the modern world.

Descartes and the modern turn

It is a mistake, however, to think that Descartes and the Cartesianism he left us were simply a radicalizing of preceding philosophical or theological visions. Certainly, Descartes owes much both to Augustinian thought and to

Lutheran reform, the latter if only tacitly and by a century of cultural and theological osmosis. And his greatest debt lies in the metaphorical framework which governed his speculations, that of reflection, of bending back upon oneself, which he would push to an extreme. But Descartes' world, we must remember, had itself shifted radically from even a century earlier, especially with regard to a newly emerging scientific worldview, so that what allows Descartes to push reflexivity farther than before is as much Galileo's revolutionizing view of scientific knowledge and Bacon's view of mechanism as it is a direct metaphorical inheritance.⁴⁵ How one looked at the physical world in the seventeenth century was markedly different from the preceding century, and thus how one looked at oneself as the viewer of that world had also significantly changed. Descartes, in his famous doubting stance, doubted the world outside of him not as a cosmos founded upon Forms and Ideas to which the Mind inextricably participates, nor as a corruptible world which is nevertheless ordered by the Divine Creator and left with His *vestigia*, so that the enquiring mind can find God behind it, but as a certain detached or disengaged reality which the mind instrumentally objectifies. The world is not simply "out there"; it is "out there" as an ontological extension distinct from the immaterial thinking mind. Descartes' dualism stresses a mechanistic relation between the material and immaterial, and forces the objectifying mind to represent *within* the world it finds *without*. An "idea" ceases to be a sovereign metaphysical logos, as in Platonism, and becomes the *manner* by which reality is properly internally perceived. "A representation of reality now has to be constructed", as Taylor describes it. "As the notion of 'idea' migrates from its ontic sense to apply henceforth to intra-psychic contents, to things 'in the mind', so the order of ideas ceases to be something we *find*, and becomes something we *build*."⁴⁶ The Cartesian move places the burden of the task of knowledge primarily on the

⁴⁵ Charles Taylor, 144; Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981; Bantam Books, 1984), 14-35. Indeed, the science of the likes of Galileo and Bacon and the metaphorical inheritance from philosophy and aesthetics are directly linked, as Hallyn argues throughout *The Poetic Structure of the World*. For Hallyn's view of where Galileo departed from certain notions of, for instance, Platonism, see 222-224.

⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, 144.

individual mind. The modern "self" was thus born: that inner, psychic distension from which all ideations find their reference point. The "self" becomes a philosophical reflexivity (self-determining truth) isolated in a first-person stance.

As the new science made "proof" an integral part of its explorative venture, so Descartes made "certainty" an integral part of coming to knowledge. One does not merely represent with accuracy the external world within the internal mind; one must gain a certainty that the representation is indeed accurate. Knowledge must then include a reflection upon its very own process. Epistemology in our modern sense, a questioning of how we know what we know, becomes one of the requisites for philosophical inquiry. We find this requisite, and its need to make certain, distilled within the *Cogito*. After doubting all external reality, internal reality is afforded proof of existence by its very ability to doubt, as we saw anticipated by Augustine. But where in Plato reason carried its own certainty and in Augustine faith ultimately supported this reason, so that proof of God or the Good was part of what it meant to exercise faith or reason, Descartes' disengaged stance afforded no such connection, and forced the mind to turn upon its own operation for its substantiation and assurance. To know with certainty means to be able to think about thinking, to *self-reflect* in the utmost sense. Only by bending back upon oneself in radical self-questioning can one anchor the certainty of one's thoughts.⁴⁷

The faculty of "disengaged reasoning" we are talking about here provides the sharpest pivot point for the two sides we now consider as the premodern world and the modern world. Grounded in the seventeenth century's new

⁴⁷ The *Second Meditation* concludes: "But now I have *come back* imperceptively to the point I sought; for, since it is now known to me that, properly speaking, we perceive bodies only by the understanding which is in us, and not by imagination, or the senses, and that we do not perceive them through seeing them or touching them, but only because *we conceive them in thought*, I know clearly that *there is nothing more easy for me to know than my own mind*. But because it is almost impossible to rid oneself so quickly of a long-held opinion, I should do well to pause at this point, so that, by long meditation, I may imprint this new knowledge more deeply in my memory" (italics added -- René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and the Meditations*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe [London: Penguin, 1968], 112). To "come back imperceptively to the point I sought" is precisely the self-reflection, here narrativized beautifully, which we saw in Plato: truth and certainty reflected in the very way in which they are sought; truth substantiating itself by its own method.

scientific stance, as forwarded by Galileo, Bacon and Newton, this disengaged reasoning resituates the tension we drew at the beginning between the One and the Many. Where the split between appearance and reality which Greek thinking passed down was a split taking place within a cosmology that kept the thinking mind an integral participant, so that the movement from the physical to the metaphysical was a movement that never left an overall order, the new split which Descartes elaborated was one which breached an overall order, and made the mind a separated, non-participating observer which creates that order itself. The One, the thinking mind (*res cogitans*), and the Many, the world it observes (*res extensa*), are thus demarcated as never before. It is this demarcation, this split not simply between Mind and Body but now between self and world, subject and object, that is most revolutionizing, most distinguishing, and ultimately most open to critique.

When the mind is fundamentally segregated from the external objects of its contemplation or "vision", so that it must then "remake" that world within itself instrumentally or mechanistically through reflection, a tremendous onus is placed upon the interior individual, this necessary creation we now call "the self". Split as it is from any unifying cosmos, "the self" becomes the locus of all foundational activity, whether it is creating epistemological, ontological, theological, or existential certainties, or creating moral and ethical sources.⁴⁸ The question for Descartes became: how does one find certainty of reality if the thinking subject has no prior ontological or metaphysical connection with its object other than a dislocated, reflective gaze? His answer became: one can only find certitude and determination of the ordered world within the mind by an inflated certification and determination of its own operation as a subjective self. Epistemology and selfhood, then, necessarily become interdependent.

They also give birth to what we call "self-consciousness", awareness of oneself as self. Augustine certainly turned inward. But his entire being was still grounded in a cosmological reality ordered by God, to whom his inward turn would intrinsically lead. Descartes' move inward, upon the disenchanting of any

⁴⁸ The latter is Charles Taylor's underlying argument throughout his *Sources of the Self*.

cosmos, did not assume a prior grounding other than doubt, so that God, if He was to be discovered, was to be discovered *along the way*, based not upon *His* ordering first but upon one's *own* ordering. *Self*-consciousness preceded consciousness of God. Of course Descartes tries to reprioritize God by making His contemplation of the created order foundational to all, so that the Self's existence finds a place in reality only because the Creator has first issued forth thought that substantiates the external world (*Discourse Four, Third and Fifth Meditation*). But the decisive move had been made: one can be truly aware of God only after one is truly aware of the self. *Cogito ergo. . .*, and not *Deus cogitat ergo. . .*, nor *Cogito Deum ergo. . .*. So the ancient Greek Delphic oracle to "Know thyself" becomes with Descartes, in a radical epistemological twist, the founding pillar of modernity. And consciousness is introduced as the modality by which this modern reality is not merely discovered, but, in the reflective sense of representing and ordering something distinct and separate, *created*.

In this regard, the figure of Rousseau becomes the new and modified Augustine of the modern world. "The source of unity and wholeness which Augustine found only in God", writes Charles Taylor of Rousseau, "is now to be discovered within the self."⁴⁹ In Rousseau's attempt to reflect an accurate picture of himself in his autobiographical *The Confessions* -- he tells us at the outset: "My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself"⁵⁰ -- he, like Augustine, reflects his own self-consciousness. With Rousseau the act of writing, as Paul de Man says, "seems to be held up and justified as a way to recuperate a self dispersed in the world."⁵¹ But that world is precisely the world of *The*

⁴⁹ Charles Taylor, 362.

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1953), 17.

⁵¹ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 171. De Man quotes Rousseau's preface to his play *Narcisse*: "I confess that there exist a few sublime minds able to dispel the veils with which truth hides itself, a few privileged souls who are able to withstand the stupidity of conceit, the low jealousy and the other passions generated by literary ambitions. . . If any doubt remains as to the justification [of my literary vocation], I boldly proclaim that it is not with regard to the public or with regard to my opponents; it only toward myself, for only by observing myself can I judge whether or not I can include myself among the

Confessions, the created text in which Rousseau's self-consciousness is both dispersed and recuperated. For even Rousseau confesses, in *The Confessions*, that his self-awareness and self-knowledge originate with books: "it is from my earliest reading that I date the unbroken consciousness of my own existence".⁵² The culmination of this apparently "unbroken consciousness" comes with *The Confessions*, a book which ends with the author writing about himself reading *The Confessions*, a superb instance of the Cartesian self-reflexivity and its resulting creativity at work.⁵³

This Cartesian move will have a profound effect on the understanding of a poetics. The artist no longer discovers things in the world and then imitates them, or as in Aristotle's *mimêsis*, discovers some feature of reality and, in effecting a portrayal, offers an original and (in the case of tragedy) ennobling creation of it; the artist is, by virtue of the conscious self, a creator intrinsically, whose stance before the world presupposes a subject/object split, and whose artistic activity is thus an extension of a necessarily active and procreative relation to the world. Of course, neither Descartes nor the great scientific revolutionaries before him would ever describe their activity as one of creation. Instrumental reason was simply a way of ordering what the mind received from the outside. But the reflective model on which this disengaged reason is built -- *representing* the world in the mind's eye, as a mirror represents whatever it faces -- makes the most of the disengagement, so that having no pre-given order in which the object might relate to the subject, the subject is bound, like the mirror, to carry everything itself, "everything" being both the object and the order in which that object is situated. This is a creative venture: the subject, because it has been fully set apart, must represent the object *anew*. We can think of this venture metaphorically in this way: where the premodern artist may have simply

small number. . . I needed a test to gain complete knowledge of myself and I have taken it without hesitation' " (171). Such a desire for complete knowledge of oneself, and a test to procure it, is remarkably similar to Descartes desire in *The Meditations*.

⁵² Rousseau, 19.

⁵³ For more on Rousseau's relation to modernity, see Charles Taylor, 355-363; for close textual readings of Rousseau see de Man, 135-301 (on Rousseau and "self", 160-187; on *The Confessions*, 278-301); for the way Rousseau's "unbroken consciousness" in fact breaks down, see Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, "Part II".

held up a mirror to nature, the modern artist, like Rousseau, e.g., becomes the mirror. In the first instance, the artist imitates from a position which participates in the world being reflected: the mirror may reflect the ground on which the artist stands, but the artists nevertheless still feels his or her feet firmly planted upon that ground apart from the mirror. In the second instance, the artist has no way of feeling part of the ground except by recreating that ground exclusively for itself, as Rousseau does in *The Confessions*. The artist as a mirror continually makes something that is *other* to what it is a reflection of, for it has no way of bringing the reflection and the reflected together, as the artist who holds the mirror can by being placed outside of the mirror. With a disengaged way of thinking, viewing the artist as a maker of something thoroughly original, as the Romantics will do, is not a considerable leap.⁵⁴

Kant's transcendental reflection and Romantic reaction

In between Descartes and Romanticism stands Immanuel Kant. Kant was no less rational about aesthetics, but he did see the matters of taste and beauty as matters which "*cannot be other than subjective*".⁵⁵ For him, though, the strict division set up between the knowing subject and the extended object was problematic, as the subject was forced to assume too much responsibility as the sole foundation of certainty, especially when its mode of perception is instrumental and mechanical. Hume's scepticism had shown the limits of such a

⁵⁴ It is thus significant that the Romantics sought for different metaphors to describe the function of art other than that of the mirror, metaphors which, in Abrams words, would "reanimate the dead universe of the materialists" and "tie man back into his milieu" (65), metaphors like the lamp or Coleridge's archetypal plant. The creative element of Cartesian reasoning, conversely, depended upon a thorough break between the self and the world, and its mode was still very much instrumental, assuming some kind of rational mastery of the given, inert world. Romanticism notwithstanding, and despite Rousseau's attempt to accede to "the voice of nature" (Charles Taylor, 357), this rational dimension has never quite left us, and is perhaps why, in the modern world, we have tended not to adopt the term "poetics" in describing our artistic activity. We speak of a *theory* of art, a *defense* of art, or of *aesthetics*, but we seldom speak of a *poetics* as a realm of activity integrated with the rest of our world (along with *physics*, *metaphysics*, *politics*, etc.). Under Cartesian dualism, that comprehensive integration, despite the efforts of the Romantics, is no longer available.

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 41-42.

mode.⁵⁶ Rather than give in either to an agnostic scepticism or to a Deism, which in the name of God mechanized things even further, Kant strove to bolster the subject/ego itself. He did this by making the subject transcendent, by making it stand beyond or above the objects of its perception by its ability to *synthesize* all the data conceptually. Kant's assumption, as Rorty points out, was that "manifoldness is 'given' and that unity is made".⁵⁷ In taking what was implied within Cartesian dualism, that the mind must in some sense *build* an order of ideas through its representations, Kant made this constructive faculty the explicit feature of understanding: "we can only be conscious of objects constituted by our own synthesizing activity".⁵⁸ So the mind sets up the categories with which we come to know, and can only come to know, reality. By this creative -- we might very well say *poetic* -- move, Kant hoped to overcome the divisive stance of disengaged reasoning. For if the categories of the mind are what constitute reality, "objects" are no further apart from us than our own self; we are unified, subject and object, by *a priori*s that rule the mind. Ideal subjective reason transcends the divisions within the phenomenal world, and gives the mind an even greater autonomy over it. "Instead of seeing ourselves as quasi-Newtonian machines, hoping to be compelled by the right inner entities and thus to function according to nature's design for us, Kant let us see ourselves as deciding (noumenally, and hence unconsciously) what nature was to be allowed to be like."⁵⁹

This transcendent synthesizing -- building unity from the many -- relies on what Gasché calls *transcendental reflection*. Gasché quotes Kant himself: " *Reflection (reflexio)* does not concern itself with objects themselves with a view to deriving a concept from them directly, but is that state of mind in which we first set ourselves to discover the subjective conditions under which [alone]

⁵⁶ Indeed, so had Kant's own first two *Critiques*. Jean-François Lyotard begins his discussion of Kant's Third Critique in his book *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* with the following: "The task assigned to the *Critique of Judgement*, as its Introduction makes explicit, is to restore unity to philosophy in the wake of the severe "division" inflicted upon it by the first two *Critiques*" -- trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1.

⁵⁷ Rorty, 153.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

we are able to arrive at concepts.' ⁶⁰ We see here the basic notion of reflective philosophy at work: *how* we arrive at concepts is as much if not more important than *what* those actual concepts are. And with Kant, this reaches the height of *self-consciousness*, for it is a "state of mind" directed at "subjective conditions". It is not simply the empirical workings of the mind (Locke) nor the logical workings of the mind (Leibniz) which are inspected, but a synthesis of the two, so that the entire subjective process -- empirical, rational, psychological and aesthetic -- is unified and accounted for by the mind's own discovering of what it has made. Only under such a transcending view can the validity for our thoughts and perceptions be found. And validity, *making certain*, has been the primary philosophical quest since Descartes first split the viewing mind into subject and object. Given this split, Kant's project was to try to regain a unity within the operation of reflection itself.⁶¹ It was, so to speak, to add a mirror to a mirror, so that the first mirror could fully see itself mirroring.

But how could this supposedly transcendent reflection overcome the inherent splitting within reflection itself? How does adding a mirror to mirror unify the initial split? Does this not simply add *more* splits? The reflection paradigm did not seem capable of sustaining unity in whatever extreme form it was cast, so that Kant's subjective idealism, though a pinnacle in Enlightenment thinking, served only to deepen the problems of the One and the Many and of finding a sturdy bridge between the two. For the Romantics who had seen the divide only widening, Kantian thought provided both an impetus for change and the goods with which to implement that change. Kant's notions of cognition and of how it comes to bear on aesthetic judgement gave both German Idealists and Romantic theorists their building materials for privileging the mind's creative

⁶⁰ Gasché, 18.

⁶¹ As Lyotard marks out, "reflective judgement" in the third *Critique* is assigned the task of this reunification: "The faculty of judgement is said to be 'simply *reflective*' when 'only the particular is given and the universal has to be found' (18;15). This is what the *Anthropology* (§44) calls *Witz, ingenium*, or 'discovering the universal for the particular', finding identity in a multiplicity of dissimilar things" (*Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, 2). He summarizes: ". . . if the third *Critique* fulfils its mission of unifying philosophy, it does so, not primarily by introducing the theme of the regulative Idea of an objective finality of nature, but by making manifest, in the name of the aesthetic, the reflexive manner of thinking that is at work in the critical text as a whole" (*ibid.*, 8).

role. The most important of these materials was the *constructive* aspect of the perceptual and cognitive faculty within the Kantian mind, where objects must now conform to our cognition, rather than our cognition to the objects.⁶² The Romantics seized not only on the subjective elements of this reversal, but on the *poiesis* it implies. The subjective mind was principally a co-creator of reality. In Germany and England especially, an entirely new language was being articulated, one which made "creation" an essential activity of humankind and, in particular, the artist. Once a right reserved only for deity, creation of something "new" was now what elevated humankind above the natural order. Yet the natural order was not lost in the process. And this is where Romanticism took issue with Kant and his school. Nature was not merely a construct of the *a priori* categories of the mind, which unify its manifoldness, and are themselves unified by a transcendental reflection. Nature became intimately connected with the subjective self as a source for inspiration and imagination that is co-active with the mind. Romanticism wanted to overcome the dualities of the One and the Many, the Infinite and the Finite, the Subject and the Object, the Mind and the Body, by making Nature part of an organic and eternally creative process which is interlinked with humanity and its activity. To make this shift, it had to find a new model, a new analogue, or a new metaphor which would be more amenable than that of reflection. As "the theory of mind and the theory of art tend to be integrally related and to turn upon similar analogues, explicit or submerged"⁶³, this new analogue had to carry both philosophical and aesthetic duties. Romanticism as a movement, then, became neither a philosophy, nor an aesthetic theory, nor simply an artistic flowering. It was, at heart, a critique, which manifested itself equally in philosophy, theory and aesthetic practice. It was a critique against the splitting of the One and the Many which the Enlightenment, culminating in Kant, had exaggerated through radical reflection.⁶⁴

⁶² This is Kant's self-described "Copernican revolution" in the "Preface to the Second Edition" of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Norman Kemp Smith [London: Macmillan, 1929, rpt. 1992], 22-23). See Williams, 57-58.

⁶³ Abrams, 69.

⁶⁴ For a fuller discussion of Romanticism's attempt to come to grips with its inherited Kantian philosophy, see Williams' Chapter 3, "Romantic Optimism and the Philosophy of Language" (57-90).

The Romantics' great contribution to our philosophical and aesthetic history was to realize clearly that the metaphor of reflection on which philosophy and art theory had so long depended was indeed just a *metaphor*. This realization it owed in large part to Kant, who explicated the categorical apparatus of the thinking mind and its constructive nature, a nature we saw intrinsic to Descartes' *Cogito*. But to redraft the metaphor did not mean that the mind must stay ontologically sequestered from the world, with simply a new framework to view from. The Romantic challenge, in response to Kant, was to find a metaphor which safeguarded the self/other connection Kant himself had been unsuccessful in retaining, or regaining. The successes to this challenge had varying degrees; none of them could be called comprehensive. The Romantic joining of *Geist* and *Natur*, as many German proponents would describe it,⁶⁵ had its own problems which remained unresolved, problems arising from a strong emphasis on subjectivity that seemed to make the connection between the Spirit and Nature contingent upon individual vagaries, unarticulated imagination, or uncontrolled emotion. The exact connection was imprecise, and a bit too dependent on individual experience, so that the purported unity rested on dubious grounds. Unity in the sense of *totality* was never achieved. This, at least, was the main criticism put forward by Hegel, who felt none of the Romantic theorists and philosophers had overcome the reflective splitting any better than Kant himself. It was Hegel, in response both to Kant and to Romanticism, who pushed the desire for unity to its furthest reach, exposing the metaphor of reflection to its most rigorous critique by subsuming it under his own "dialectic".

Hegel's absolutization and Kierkegaard's reaction

Hegel saw clearly the problems inherent within the subject/object split. Under Kantian philosophy, which Hegel called a "metaphysic of reflection"⁶⁶, the necessary doubling which constitutes "understanding" and "knowledge" --

⁶⁵ Ibid., 62

⁶⁶ Gasché, 25.

reflection-into-self on the one hand, and reflection-into-other on the other hand, the thinking being and that which is thought -- remained forever unreconciled. Never could the two sides meet: one was led "either to empirical knowledge, void of any concepts, or to an understanding of the a priori conditions of knowledge, independent of what empirically exists."⁶⁷ There was no way of unifying or totalizing knowledge seen in this way. As totality and unity were the principle concerns for Hegel, as they had been for most of the philosophers we have looked at, he sought to absolutize knowledge beyond the contradictory dualisms of reflection. This meant to absolutize reflection, to make reflection reflect itself in such a way that there is no doubling, no remainder left over, no self/other distinctions or similar such antinomies -- nothing but totalized unity. To do this, reflection must in some sense destroy itself, or consume itself. Gasché has pursued at length Hegel's attempt to bring reflection to this absolutized point. He calls it an attempt to mediate oppositions, or differences, by grounding them in an Absolute which nullifies them, which brings them to a point of "indifference". "By destroying itself in making itself its own object, reflection throws itself, to use Hegel's words, into the abyss of its own perfection."⁶⁸ This perfection is a negativity, an aporia, a nullification, a sublation, where all oppositions are reunited by being related to, and thus done away with by, an *absolute* totality. This totality, this Absolute, becomes the third term in Hegel's dialectic, an overarching synthesis. For Hegel, reason found its historical culmination in this sovereign synthesis (or Absolute, or later *Geist*), a synthesis which succeeded for the first time in overcoming the differences philosophy had been attempting to overcome since its beginning.

Hegel's abstruse thought and reworking of the philosophy of reflection are not easily condensed.⁶⁹ We have so far been looking at the way the operation of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁹ Gasché's efforts are admirable, but hardly exhaustive. Nor, in light of his focus on Derrida, do they consider Derrida's own unique reading of Hegel in *Glas*. Mark C. Taylor, who himself offers a worthy summary of Hegel's views in "Foiling Reflection", rightly asks: "Why does Gasché exclude Derrida's 'more literarily playful' writings? And why, in a book on the relation between deconstruction and philosophy of 'reflection', does Gasché refuse to consider *Glas*, which is Derrida's most extensive and important engagement with Hegel?" (62).

reflection creates doubles and differences. What is reflected is always *other* to the reflection itself. This goes for reflection of the self upon an object, or for reflection of the self upon itself. *Two* sides are always created: the viewing, knowing subject, and the object which is viewed and known, even if this object is the viewing subject itself. To objectify this subject/object duality, as Locke tried,⁷⁰ does not overcome difference; it simply creates another opposition -- the viewing mind looking at the object of the subject/object duality. Unity is not restored. To subjectify the subject/object duality, as Kant tried (and then later Fichte) by making the subject transcendent, also does not overcome difference, for the subject still must determine itself within the duality, still must make differences between itself as a thinking mind and the content of its thought. Determination always requires indetermination to set its boundaries, so that to have any knowledge (that is, to set limits, to determine) will always create its opposite. Even the subject which looks at itself thinking, in order to *know* itself as that thinking subject, must at some point differentiate. Again, unity is not restored. There seems to be no way out of division within the reflective model. Every mirror that is added, whether objectively or subjectively, simply adds more oppositions. Hegel, driven by an intense desire to restore the One above the Many, realized that the only way to overcome this growing house of mirrors was to absolutize all the mirrors into one concept. Mirroring would be seen within one overriding framework, in which difference and difference-making become the common, uniting feature. Difference is perfected into indifference. Subject

⁷⁰ In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 1 (collated Alexander Campbell Fraser [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894]), Locke sets out "external sensible objects" and "the internal operations of the our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves" as the two "fountains of our knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, and can naturally have, do spring." Of the latter, he specifies "*perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*, and all the different actings of our own minds; -- which we being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct ideas as we do from bodies affecting our senses. This source of ideas every man has wholly in himself; and though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects, yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called *internal sense*. But as I call the other Sensation, so I call this REFLECTION, the ideas it affords being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself. By reflection then, in the following part of this discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof there come to be ideas of these operations in the understanding" (122-124).

becomes object, object becomes subject, and both are subsumed within an indifferent whole or Spirit, which unites or synthesizes them both.⁷¹ Hegel himself says, "Reason thus drowns itself and its knowledge and its reflection of the absolute identity, in its own abyss: and in this night of mere reflection and of the calculating intellect, in this night which is the noonday of life, common sense and speculation can meet one another."⁷² Unity is restored. But it is restored through a negative means, through self-overcoming or self-annihilation, described by Hegel in language which postmodernists now use. Hegel has built a structure with so many mirrors that mirroring becomes its *one* essential feature, and to such a degree that it can no longer be called mirroring (for mirroring necessarily *doubles*). Mirroring has been totalized out of existence. All separation has been lost in a One.

By bringing reflection to its effective demise, Hegel represents an endpoint in Enlightenment's project of reason. Built on the subject/object distinction, that project fulfils itself and is subsumed within the absolute identity of the two sides within Hegel's dialectic. Mirroring can never be viewed in the same light, either epistemologically or aesthetically, since it has been radicalized and idealized into oblivion. The question that Hegel's idealism leaves is not how to restore reflection, but what to put in its place. That is a question which will plague philosophy and aesthetics up to the present day.

The Romantic reaction to Kantian philosophy was to move away from system. Freedom, imagination, intuition, individuality -- these were all part of the new language being forged by Romantic artists and theorists. "System", the structures which reason built to gain complete mastery over the universe, was at

⁷¹ Derrida, in writing of Hegel in *Glas* (trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand [Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986]), summarizes his thought: "The spirit thinks and at the same time is conscious of itself. I know the object only insofar as I know myself; I also think it while thinking myself thinking it. . . . One should not even say that spirit does not have any content outside itself, an object of which it would only be the knowing form. One must say: what cannot have any content outside itself, what in advance interiorizes all content, even were it infinite or rather infinitizing in it, that is what calls itself spirit, conceives or grasps itself as spirit. *Geist* repeats itself. So spirit alone can conceive spirit. As such, it has no outside limit; thus it is the free and the infinite" (21-22).

⁷² Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, as quoted by Gasché, 41.

the root of the problem, they felt. Hegel's response, then, a system-making in extreme, only made matters worse. Having rescued the "self" from a transcendence in Kantian philosophy which kept it isolated and alienated from the natural world, Romantic thinkers were not about to give the self up altogether within the kind of subsuming dialectic of Hegelianism. Hegel's dialectic was for thoroughgoing idealists. Artists, being who they are as artists -- those concerned as equally with nature as with the mind, those whose creativity must *assume* the world, not *subsume* it -- were not easily attracted by Hegelianism. Moreover, they themselves had already seen the "abyssal" side of the reflective model. Art had often played the house of mirrors, whereby reflection is shown as caught within its own self-negation, opening up aporias, sublations and nullifications by the very nature of its supposedly mimetic role. And we have already seen this in some early painters (Van Eyck, e.g.). What Romanticism was not willing to do was systematize this abyss, and make it fit happily into a unified totality. That would, in effect, do away with the artist altogether. Strictly speaking, an artist could not survive within the Hegelian system, because an absolute identity between subject and object imperils the very notion of creation. If total unity were to be established, nothing new could be instigated except by the Absolute, which depersonalizes, spiritualizes and idealizes in its synthesis.⁷³ In a Hegelian Trinitarianism, the third term -- the

⁷³ This notion of Hegel's system doing away with the artist clearly requires more elaboration than is possible here. Hegel himself, it appears, came close at times to admitting art's redundancy or inadequacy. Michael Inwood summarizes Hegel's often conflicting thoughts on this matter: "Art reveals the absolute, and so, in their different ways, do religion and philosophy. Art thus expresses the same 'content' as religion and philosophy, but in a 'different' form. It expresses its content in a sensory form, while religion does so in the form of pictorial imagery (*Vorstellung*) and philosophy in the form of conceptual thought. Philosophy is higher than art, both because conceptual thought is the essence of man and because philosophy has a wider range. Philosophy can speak about art, but art cannot speak in any detail about philosophy, unless it is tending to become philosophy, and this, in Hegel's view, entails its degeneration as art. Thus, despite its high import, art is at risk of being seen as second-rate philosophy, dispensable in favour of philosophy, unless we are too primitive to produce philosophy or unable to appreciate it without adornment. On the other hand, Hegel insists that art is an end in itself, not a means to some further end (such as morality) and thus potentially replaceable by other means to the same end. . . . On this account art is both important, in that it reveals the absolute, and unique, in that it reveals it in a sensory way. But art is still in a precarious position, once philosophy (or religion independent of art) has found its strength. For art is important and unique in different respects, and we can ask: Is art important in that respect in which it differs from philosophy, or could we cease, without loss, to portray the absolute in *sensory* form? Does art disclose crucial aspects of

synthesis, the Spirit, the *Geist* -- subsumes its counterparts in infinitization or abstraction.⁷⁴ But the artist needs to retain some sense of concretion, some sense of incarnation, in order for there to be creative art. And so Romanticism naturally moved in a very different direction to Hegelianism. It kept its focus on subjectivity, and sought to reconnect with the world from an inner response.

The reaction to Hegel in many ways opened up the possibility for poetic discourse to return to philosophical thinking. The rationalism of Cartesian and Kantian philosophy, though it granted to aesthetics the whole notion of subjectivity, had dealt with art as only one more object to behold and account for, while the grand system of Hegelianism idealized art to the point of impersonality. Romanticism tried to make *poiêsis* not simply an aesthetic concern, but the very essence of life, an essence that bridges the One and the Many in a "holy wedlock of the Universe with the incarnated Reason for a creative, productive embrace", as Schleiermacher phrases it.⁷⁵ It thus provided an impetus for shifting the philosophical ground from a rational and reflective base to a more subjectively creative base. We see this shift most immediately with Kierkegaard. In an extreme counter to Hegel, Kierkegaard returns philosophy back to the individual; not simply to a rationalized view of subjectivity, but to the individual as an existent being whose ability to choose is as critical as to ratiocinate. This existential turn is, in one sense, as much a critique of reflective philosophy as is the Hegelianism it reacts to. Hegel's thinking radicalized static reflexivity to the point of self-negation; the existential move changes the static gaze to active participation. *Being* loses its status as a noun, and takes on a verbal and participial force. One does not stand in a fixed

e.g. Christianity that theology and philosophy cannot reveal? Hegel does not pose, or answer, these questions unequivocally, but he tends to suggest that as philosophy and religion advance, the sensory aspects of the world, and hence artistic expression of it, become less important." -- Michael Inwood, "Introduction", in Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, xxiv-xxv. See also xxxi-xxxii; Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 49; and Habermas, 34-35.

⁷⁴ Or in Derrida's more radical language, puts to death the father in the son -- *Glas*, 32-33. This is language Thomas J. Altizer will pick up in his "Death of God" theology. See below, Chapter 5, 217-218.

⁷⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion -- Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (London: Harper and Row, 1958, 1986), 43.

reflective position, but now rather enables existence and being by an activation of will and desire. With such a focus on the self as an existing being, who uses reflection to overcome reflection,⁷⁶ *poiêsis* was given access to philosophical territory it had never before reached (at least since Aristotle). For by emphasizing the unity of being over the dualities of metaphysics, existentialism invites creativity into both epistemology and ontology: what it means to know and have certainty falls to what it means to exist through choice and decision (which are creative acts in the barest sense, acts of determining), while what it means *to be* falls to the identical thing. There is necessarily a poetic nature to this view of being, because the exercising of life depends on acts of *creative* reflection and decision. So in Kierkegaard's own work, we find a more poetic approach to philosophical thinking. His ideas are often delivered to us through indirection, through pseudonymous voices, through story and parable, or through irony, rather than through a rational discourse that purports to uncover truth and reality directly.⁷⁷ Kierkegaard's thought always demands a response of decision

⁷⁶ For Kierkegaard, "reflection", which always effects distance, always interrupts immediacy, always threatens individuality, cannot be altogether avoided. Humankind must always reflect to some degree ("I began at once with reflection" Kierkegaard admits in *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*; "it is not as though in later years I had amassed a little reflection, but I am reflection from first to last" -- trans. Walter Lowrie, ed. Benjamin Nelson [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 81). For it is through reflection that we begin to understand ourselves existentially. But such a beginning does not become a conclusion in and of itself; if we are to become truly existing subjective individuals, we ourselves must at some point bring our reflection to an end: "If the individual does not stop reflection, he will be infinitized in reflection, that is, no decision is made. By thus going astray in reflection, the individual really becomes objective; more and more he loses the decision of subjectivity and the return into himself. Yet it is assumed that reflection can stop itself objectively, whereas it is just the other way around; reflection cannot be stopped objectively, and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, but it is the subject who stops it" (*Postscript, Vol. I*, 115-116). This idea finds a specifically theological context in *The Point of View*: "In the sphere of immediacy it is a perfectly *straightforward* thing to become a Christian; but the truth and inwardness of the reflective expression for becoming a Christian is measured by the value of the thing which reflection is bound to reject. For one does not become a Christian by means of reflection, but to become a Christian in reflection means that there is another thing to be rejected; one does not reflect oneself into being a Christian, but out of another thing in order to become a Christian; and this more especially the case in Christendom, where one must reflect oneself out of the semblance of being a Christian" (96).

⁷⁷ "I am essentially a poet", Kierkegaard admitted in his *Journals* (*The Journals of Kierkegaard*, trans. and ed. Alexander Dru [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958, 1959], 168). Or *Postscript*, 73-74: "The difference between subjective and objective thinking must also manifest itself in the form of communication. This means that the subjective thinker must promptly become aware that the form of communication must artistically possess just as much reflection as he himself, existing in his thinking, possesses. Artistically, please note, for the

from the reader. It does not reflect ideas onto a page which the reader can observe with detached reason, but calls the reader to engage with the text as participant, or as, in ways anticipating modern literary theory, co-creator. In opposition to Hegelianism's complete subsuming of the self, Kierkegaard demands a full rendering of the self in willful activity, even in the reading process. This rendering conflates self-consciousness with *poiêsis*, and will thus set the framework for a new model of self-understanding, one that no longer relies exclusively on the metaphor of reflection. We will see this rendering specifically worked out in Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*, as it owes much to Kierkegaard.

Of course, nineteenth century art and art theory did not immediately follow up Kierkegaard's reworking of the self. Kierkegaard remained, at least till Nietzsche, a wilderness voice. The advance of the natural sciences, and the theories they spawned as a result, particularly Darwinism and Positivism, held art in an odd tension between a growing disenchantment of the world on the one hand, and, as Matthew Arnold ends his essay *Literature and Science*, "the need for beauty" on the other.⁷⁸ "Realism" and "Naturalism" were just two examples of attempts at reconciliation. While the creative output was in no way hampered during this time -- in fact, it flourished -- any sense of a poetics was at most tied to criticism of Arnold's kind, who felt "culture" must be preserved through art in the face of science and technology, with art tending to become, in line with the Romantics, the natural successor to a religion and philosophy on the decline. But any existential sense of a *poiêsis* at work within our very bearing towards this culture, and more importantly towards ourselves as

secret does not consist in his enunciating the double-reflection directly, since such an enunciation is a direct contradiction." Hence Kierkegaard's preoccupation with irony, the mode of indirection. See further *The Point of View*, 43, 57ff., as well as *The Concept of Irony*, which, ironically, is Kierkegaard's work most influenced by Hegel. Kierkegaard's indirection is dealt with further below in Chapter 5.

⁷⁸ Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science", in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Vol. X, ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 73. The last several lines are: ". . . while we shall all have to acquaint ourselves with the great results reached by modern science, and to give ourselves as much training in its disciplines as we can conveniently carry, yet the majority of men will always require humane letters; and so much the more, as they have the more and the greater results of science to relate to the need in man for conduct, and to the need in him for beauty" (72-73).

individuals existing within this culture, was yet foreign. It took Nietzsche to declare not only the death of the Christian God whom the nineteenth century had felt slipping away philosophically and culturally, but also the end of philosophy (and perhaps culture) as we had known it, before any existential or poetic understanding of self and of the world, as Kierkegaard had laid down, would take root.

Nietzsche and the postmodern turn

Nietzsche becomes the grand fulcrum on which this new understanding of the self and the world will turn. The critique which begun most specifically with Hegel, taking a new direction with Kierkegaard, reaches its culmination at the end of the century with a philosophy so radical it does not claim to be philosophy, but claims to go beyond it. In Jürgen Habermas' words, Nietzsche and his "neoromantic" followers "struck the subjective genitive from the phrase 'critique of reason' by taking critique out of the hands of reason",⁷⁹ that is, out the hands of reflective philosophy. With the subject/object dichotomy of reflective thinking discarded, but with an awareness of self-consciousness now inescapable, the reworking of humanity's position over against the world inevitably focussed on the notion of selfhood. Nietzsche's profound declaration of the end of metaphysics and the God who relied on it really amounted to a declaration of the end of a view of self-consciousness which falsely promoted a unassailable security between the thinking subject and what was thought. Nietzsche challenged the very manner in which religion and philosophy had relied so heavily and so blindly on such a security. To him, subjectivity and objectivity were simply matters of construct, which could just as easily be dismantled as erected. The holes and cracks within the reflective model betrayed the negations that lay behind the mirror surface, so that what could be built through reflection could in turn be torn down. In step with Kierkegaard, Nietzsche felt the existential self had been held back by the grand systems of

⁷⁹ Habermas, 59.

society and philosophy. Unlike Kierkegaard, however, Nietzsche felt the entire Western notion of God was implicated in these systems. His response was to turn the self not towards a naked and anxious confrontation with the Divine but towards the willful power which helped to create selfhood in the first place. The *Übermensch* becomes the overcoming individual who is daring enough not only to destroy the past idols and refashion new ones, but also to acknowledge the construct of its own self-conscious self, and to thus refashion this self anew.⁸⁰ This will to power becomes a *poetic* exercise more than discursive exercise.⁸¹ The heart of *being* is a *poiêsis* in which the creative self determines anything we might call the rational or reasoning self, and not vice versa. So in the body of Nietzsche's writings we do not find expositional philosophy but, like Kierkegaard, thinking as it comes to us through textual constructs conscious of its own construction, and which demands from us not self-reflection but self-investment or self-fashioning. So Nietzsche's writing is as much a work of art as it is reasoned argument. In fact, for most classical philosophers of his day, it was not reasoned argument at all, but a wild call from a madman who had more in common with the vagaries of artists than with the truth-seeking of genuine philosophy. Nietzsche's critique of "genuine" philosophy brought an understanding of truth which did not rely on the old epistemological models of self-consciousness or on the ontological models of selfhood, but which placed truth fully into the hands of the individual as the creator of his or her own fate. Of course, such a responsibility was not for the weak of will. It is only the rare *Übermensch* who has the courage and nerve for such world-changing determination: "*Genuine philosophers, however, are commanders and*

⁸⁰ The refashioning of the self becomes one of the chief postmodern agendas, and contemporary literature on the subject is copious. For more on Nietzsche's role in this agenda, see Paul Ricoeur's representative analysis, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 11-16, where Ricoeur sees Nietzsche attacking Enlightenment notions of selfhood as a rhetorical and interpretative strategy which philosophy itself refuses to acknowledge.

⁸¹ Habermas, referring to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*: "Together with a sensibility that allows itself to be affected in as many different ways as possible, the power to create meaning constitutes the authentic core of the *will to power*. This is at the same time a *will to illusion*, a will to simplification, to masks, to the superficial; art counts as man's genuine metaphysical activity, because life itself is based on illusion, deception, optics, the necessity of the perspectival and of error" (95).

legislators: they say, '*thus it shall be!*'. . . Their 'knowing' is *creating*, their creating is legislation, their will to truth is -- *will to power*.⁸² This is truth gained not relativistically nor solipsistically, but poetically. As if with Shelley in view, Nietzsche makes philosophers the acknowledged poets of legislation.

Nietzsche takes us radically over the brink of metaphysics. His own work suggests that in going beyond metaphysical and reflective models altogether, we find ourselves realizing what artists have so often taken as their working assumption: "First, peoples were creators; and only in later times, individuals. Verily, the individual himself is still the most recent creation."⁸³ The poetizing of the world is, for Nietzsche, the most basic activity of humanity, if one can speak of a "basic activity" beyond metaphysics. This is not to say that Nietzsche, or artists themselves, are not in any way still "reflective", or that philosophers have never in any way been "poetic"; it is to say that Nietzsche, taking his cue from but going beyond the Romantics,⁸⁴ was the first modern thinker to give full credence to "making" as the power driving all human endeavour and thought not towards unity, but towards a certain anti-essentialism, a hermeneutic of plurality and impermanence.⁸⁵ In such a postmetaphysical world, creativity becomes the only "ground" -- an endlessly shifting ground -- on which to stand.

Heidegger, who took most seriously the Nietzschean call to go beyond metaphysics, began his efforts not poetically but existentially. In an attempt to go behind any reflective sense of Being, and find the very core of what it means to exist, Heidegger too reexamines the notion of self. In *Being and Time*, the "true" self hinges on a particular understanding of "truth". Drawn from the Greek word *aletheia*, truth becomes what it etymologically and privatively

⁸² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968), 326.

⁸³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 171.

⁸⁴ See Habermas, 88-97, for the way Nietzsche's understanding of, for instance, the Dionysian myth borrows from but supersedes Romantic evaluations.

⁸⁵ "Creation -- that is the great redemption from suffering, and life's growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change. Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. Thus you are advocates and justifiers of all impermanence." -- *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 199.

suggests: *a-letheia*, literally, "not-concealed", or "not-hidden".⁸⁶ Truth is an openness in which Being finds itself. It is not an objective reality which comes to us reflectively, not something beyond or behind what we can see, not an agreement between knowledge and fact, judgement and object.⁸⁷ Truth precedes these distinctions, making it possible for us to hold such distinctions and to infer anything from them, such as a notion of agreement or a metaphysic.⁸⁸ As such, it does not point to anything beyond itself, except its own non-existence. So the self emerges into this openness, this unhidden light, this clearing of its own existence. Yet in doing so it also becomes fully aware of its concomitant non-existence, of the concealment from which it has emerged, of its complete non-identity as unself which, by the opposing nature of truth,⁸⁹ it always carries alongside itself. So though Heidegger here does not set the self within a *poiêsis*, he nevertheless acknowledges the negative counterpart of Being which Nietzsche himself saw as necessary to any creation. What can be served can also be unserved. Beyond a metaphysics, the *aporia* of difference, the necessary negation of anything existing, which we found also plaguing the metaphor of reflection at its very inward structure, replaces the sovereign drive towards unity.

Such thinking characterized the earlier Heidegger. Interestingly, his later thoughts gravitated more and more towards the *poiêsis* which Nietzsche's thinking promoted. Heidegger began to see the unconcealing of truth, the bringing of truth and self into a clearing, as a creative process. What the poet and the poem does, he felt, was the same as what the thinker/philosopher is trying to do: bring truth into the open. "Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem."⁹⁰ So, "*Art then is the becoming and happening of truth.*"⁹¹ In describing Heidegger's later

⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 257-269. Also, "The Origin of the Work of Art", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 36, 50ff.

⁸⁷ "The *Being-true (truth)* of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering*. Thus truth has by no means the structure of an agreement between knowing and the object in the sense of a likening of one entity (the subject) to another (the Object)." -- *Being and Time*, 261.

⁸⁸ See above, this chapter, footnote 33.

⁸⁹ As Heidegger says later in "The Origin of the Work of Art", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 54: "Truth, in its nature, is untruth". See also 60, and *Being and Time*, 264-265.

⁹⁰ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 72.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

view, Albert Hofstadter, in the Introduction to his translation of *Poetry, Language, Thought*, asks: "Is there in the end any fundamental difference between the thinking poet and poetic thinker? The poet need not think; the thinker need not create poetry; but to be a poet of first rank there is a thinking that the poet must accomplish, and it is the same kind of thinking, in essence, that the thinker of first rank must accomplish, a thinking which has all the purity and thickness and solidity of poetry, and whose saying *is* poetry."⁹² For Heidegger, postmetaphysical thinking becomes what it had for Nietzsche, a poetizing of the world: "The poetic is basic capacity for human dwelling."⁹³ To know truth, to think truth, to experience truth, to be truth, or, to know self, to think self, to experience self, to be self -- all this, in terms of openness to the world, goes beyond philosophy and poetry in the strict sense, and resides in the common, and yet diversifying, activity of creation as set forth by both Being and the world.⁹⁴

Whether or not Heidegger was ultimately successful in overcoming metaphysics, the movement from his early thought to his later thought shows a significant shift for the twentieth century. The longstanding citadels of reflexive self-consciousness, metaphysical certainty and sovereign unity, when they are allowed to crumble under their own weight, give way not simply to a happy realignment of the artist and the philosopher -- it has not been our attempt to force this realignment, nor to suggest that at some point it had altogether disappeared, but to show that the motivating factors which have governed each side have now, perhaps more than at any time previously, become shared -- but to a way of understanding the world and our place in the world which necessitates *poiêsis* in every sphere, not just in select and specialized domains. For this reason, so much has turned upon the notion of the self, which we have highlighted since Kierkegaard, since the self, however it is conceived, participates in all spheres, being the common point of advent (as Heidegger

⁹² Albert Hofstadter, "Introduction", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, x-xi.

⁹³ Heidegger, ". . .Poetically Man Dwells. . .", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 228.

⁹⁴ For further discussion of Heidegger's merging of poetry and ontology, see Nathan A. Scott, Jr., *The Poetics of Belief* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 146-168.

might say) for anything that might fill those spheres. A common point, but not a unified one -- for the shift this century has been not towards a unified self, but a self as it exists in difference.

Postmodern reflection -- Lacan and Derrida

If we are to trace the results of this postmodern shift of the reflecting self this century, we cannot ignore the work of Jacques Lacan. Though often confined to psychology, his thinking crosses multiple disciplines, and has direct bearing on how the metaphor of reflection has been both utilized and overturned in philosophy, art, theology, and our understanding of self. Covering broad territory through the lens of psychoanalysis, Lacan's writings are not easy to decipher. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, in her *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, shows clearly that so much of Lacanian thought is in reaction to our Western philosophical tradition. "If psychoanalysis concerns the Truth of meaning and the Truth of being," she says in her Introduction, "and [if] in its search [it] subverts the 'truth' of philosophy textbooks, then Lacan's references to philosophy are a part of his effort to close the discipline down, but only to reopen it under new management."⁹⁵ This places Lacan within the Nietzschean and Heideggerean tradition. Ragland-Sullivan goes on to show that his reading of key philosophers exposes the gaps and fissures with which metaphysics has been continually stricken: "Lacan said that Plato had to invent the Ideal when "lack" forced itself on him in the form of metaphysical impasses in thinking the world and the Real. . ."; "Descartes could not find certainty in doubt, but in fact attested to the human *passion* for certainty (closure), despite the reality of doubt. . ."; "G.W.F. Hegel had to postulate successive syntheses when he could not admit that the dialectic was finally an irresolvable and contradictory motion. . ."; and "Martin Heidegger grasped the dynamic and anticipatory nature of Being, but failed to see that the limitations of Being-as-becoming stemmed from

⁹⁵ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), xx. The following discussion of Lacan is greatly indebted to Ragland-Sullivan's analysis.

retroactivity: the determinism of the unconscious. . .".⁹⁶ For Lacan, traditional philosophy (and even non-traditional philosophy) has never been capable of dealing with the ambivalences and contradictions its thought and systems generate. "Certainty" has always been the carrot on the stick, desired but never obtained. Lacan pulls the reins on the horse, and redirects it.

His redirection also begins from the self and subjectivity. For Lacan, the psyche is not a fixed and whole entity, since the unconscious always makes divisions over against the conscious. The mind is circumscribed by narcissistic drives, hidden desires, and repressed verbal myths, all of which render objectivity and certainty illusory.⁹⁷ The self is made up of a split ego which comes to know itself only through the discovery of Other, that is, through what is not itself even within itself. Lacan's famous pre-mirror and mirror stages of infancy and childhood attempt to explain this coming to self-realization. During the pre-mirror stage (the first six months of human life), an infant has no sense of worldly or bodily coherence. Everything it perceives is fragmented; it has no conception or premonition of individuality. During the mirror stage, in which the child looks in a mirror and begins to recognize itself, self-identity starts to take shape in the realization of itself as a bodily whole. The mirror objectifies the child so that it can perceive a totality in its own being, and later a totality of the larger world in which that being shares a *Gestalt*-like relation. But because the mirror objectifies, it also splits, so that "this early identification also constitutes the first alienation for an infant, a split between outer form (big and symmetrical) and an inner sense of incoherence and dissymmetry."⁹⁸ As the mirror image necessarily doubles, and creates an Other, a second self which is not-self, the child comes to self-knowledge via an internal fracture. "Lacan places this split at the heart of human knowledge. Human beings will forever after anticipate their own images in the images of others, a phenomenon Lacan refers to as a sense of 'thrownness' (akin to Heidegger's theory of the human

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., xvii.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 25.

subject).⁹⁹ It is also akin to Hegel's sense of self-consciousness, where the "knowledge of oneself is attained through the other of oneself."¹⁰⁰ But whereas for Hegel this knowledge comes through a unifying synthesis, subsuming both self and other, for Lacan this knowledge comes through an awareness of the inexorable plurality and difference, so that there is a paradox of identity based on a feeling of Oneness made up of two beings.¹⁰¹ For Lacan, the mirror metaphor (and it is just that, for a child need not necessarily look into a physical mirror to gain this awareness) serves to point out the psychic development and self-realization which forms the basis of our later perceptions, but at the heart of which lies the problems of division we have seen from the outset of our synopsis on reflection, whether in philosophy, theology, art, aesthetic theory, or now psychology. The mirror continually shows cracks, through which black spots and negations peer, disturbing the drive towards unity. In Lacan's language of narcissism, the self comes to knowledge not through reflection, but through a *recognition* of itself in something other than itself. This is a "false or aborted *Cogito*. . . There is no whole 'self' in Lacan's epistemology."¹⁰²

Although there are many more layers to Lacan's thinking about subjectivity, some seemingly impenetrable, what is useful to us here is to see that by specifically using the mirror metaphor in his analysis of selfhood, he brings the entire tradition of reflection formally to a halt. From Kant onwards,

⁹⁹ Ibid. For the relationship between self and other, cf. Heidegger, *Being in Time*, Part I, Chapter IV (149-168); for the concept of *thrownness*, cf. Heidegger, *Being in Time*, 219-224.

¹⁰⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990), 39. Cf. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 17: "Matter has its essence out of itself; Spirit is *self-contained existence* (Bei-sich-selbst-seyn). For if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not; I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free, on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself. This self-contained existence of Spirit is none other than self-consciousness -- consciousness of one's own being. Two things must be distinguished in consciousness; first, the fact *that I know*, secondly, *what I know*. In *self* consciousness these are merged in one; for Spirit *knows itself*." Cf. also above, same chapter, footnote 71.

¹⁰¹ Ragland-Sullivan, 29.

¹⁰² Ibid., 41. Moore sums up Lacan's thinking of the mirror this way: "The real import of the mirror stage, for Lacan, is that individual identity is founded upon a fiction, a misrecognition, a division, and that the introjection of the mirror image sets the stage for a life of alienation. For like the mirror stage infant, the adult subject will be able to experience itself *as* a self only through images that come to it from outside, to see its self only as others see it or not to see its self at all" (78). See also Williams, 54-55; 125-131.

philosophers have been aware of the discontinuities between the reflection and the reflected. But Lacan shows these discontinuities at work from the infant stages of human perception, so that selfhood never really has a chance to unify, because alienation from self is what it means to be a self. Anything that has come to us through reflection, then, comes to us through difference, through the opposite, or through the Many. And what we thus see are not fixed and unified truths, but constructions. Again, humanity becomes in the end (and Lacan might add from the beginning) a builder of its own realities.¹⁰³

With Lacan we have entered the postmodern world. Important though Lacan is for any discussion about reflection, he remained a rigorous theorist, who never left the shadow of Freud. His effect on the arts so far has been minimal, at least in any direct sense. Jacques Derrida, on the other hand, the postmodern theorist *par excellence*, has had a profound effect on art. How do we account for the difference? We might say that where Lacan was rewriting Freudian psychology and psychoanalysis through systematized expostulation, Derrida, whose discourse shares a similar thematic vein, is conscious of rewriting philosophy *poetically*. Like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Derrida is hard to categorize. Classical philosophers want nothing to do with him (one hears Zarathustra's song: " 'Suitor of truth?' they mocked me; 'you? No! Only poet!' "¹⁰⁴); while artists are puzzled why he is spending so much time on the likes of Rousseau, Hegel, Heidegger, Levinas, etc. And yet art, whether as a specific subject (*The Truth in Painting, Memoirs of the Blind*, e.g.), as a continual reference point, or as an adopted manner of criticizing (*Glas, Dissemination, The Post Card*, e.g.), is integral to his work. Derrida may at times appear a philosopher, and it is Gasché's intention to show him as such in *The Tain of the Mirror*, but if he is a philosopher, he is one with a very different look, one which blurs the boundaries between artist, critic and philosopher as

¹⁰³ Or as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe it in post-Freudian/Lacanian terms particularly suggestive for our discussion to follow: "The unconscious ceases to be what it is -- a factory, a workshop -- to become a theatre, a scene, and its staging" -- *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 55; as quoted by Richard Harland in *Superstructuralism* (London: Methuen, 1987), 174.

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 410.

they are traditionally cast.¹⁰⁵ For Derrida philosophizes poetically: that is, he makes *poiêsis* the working "ground" for thought.¹⁰⁶

To lay this "ground" -- a "ground" which will never itself remain solid -- Derrida shifts the philosophical focus from the One to the Many. The notions of plurality and difference, which we have seen earlier as the great philosophical bogeymen to be overcome, are now treated not as enemies but as unavoidable and necessary allies to be accepted and even celebrated. Derrida's regard of language, and in particular of writing, is that it functions only on the basis of difference, not in spite of it. Meaning is not grounded in some unified beyond, but comes out of the very play of difference we know as language. In an early essay, "Force and Signification", where he tries to move philosophical thinking from its traditional reliance on geometrical and reflective metaphors to a metaphor of force, Derrida asks, "is not the experience of *secondarity* tied to the strange redoubling by means of which constituted -- written -- meaning presents itself as prerequisite and simultaneously *read*: and does not meaning present itself as such at the point at which the other is found, the other who maintains both the vigil and the back-and-forth motion, the work, that comes between reading and writing, making this work irreducible?"¹⁰⁷ We are reminded of the Narcissus myth, where meaning, in this case self-knowledge, presents itself at the point which the other, Narcissus' own reflection in the pool, is found, is read; but it is a meaning which is neither "before nor after the act", since it relies on

¹⁰⁵ Mark C. Taylor criticizes Gasché for being too "serious" in his treatment of Derrida in *The Tain of the Mirror*, and for not being able "to see of the irony of his method" which leads to "a reading that is *neither philosophical nor literary*" ("Foiling Reflection", 62). He even goes so far as to charge Gasché with falling prey to the very philosophical tradition Gasché admits Derrida overturns: "As a result of his philosophical approach, Gasché unwittingly reinscribes many of the oppositions and hierarchies that Derrida tries to subvert. *The Tain of the Mirror* is a subtly Hegelian book about the most un-Hegelian of writers. The significance of Gasché's contribution is limited by his methodological repression of one of the most important lessons Derrida has taught us: philosophical analysis is undeniably rhetorical" (ibid., 57). See also Habermas' "Excursus on Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature", 185-210.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Wittgenstein, who, in pursuing the notion of grounds for "testing" an empirical proposition in *Über Gewissheit/On Certainty* (trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979], 17e -- 110), asks: "What *counts* as a test? -- 'But is this an adequate test? And, if so, must it not be recognizable as such in logic?' -- As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: *it is an ungrounded way of acting*" (italics added).

¹⁰⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 11.

difference for its existence. For Derrida, difference always defers a ground which could be called prior or substantiating. Derrida, as Lacan did earlier, exploits the image of the mirror to the point where the alterity of reflection confers a crisis (*krinein*, to separate). As we have seen again and again, it is in this critical separation, in this gap between the reflection and the reflected, where traditional epistemology and metaphysics break up. Derrida's deconstruction project thus goes behind the image of the mirror to focus on what allows the mirror to reflect. Gasché's thesis is precisely this: "In this first step of the deconstruction of reflection and speculation, the mirroring is made excessive in order that it may look through the looking glass toward what makes the speculum possible."¹⁰⁸ Deconstruction does not discard the notion of reflection altogether, nor seek a new metaphor entirely, but by looking through the mirror at its reverse side, at the "tain" or the tinfoil of the mirror, "one can read the 'system' of the infrastructures that commands the mirror's play and determines the angles of reflection" and thus "trace the limits of reflection without falling prey to the fictions on which it is based."¹⁰⁹ This becomes as much an artistic endeavour as it does a philosophical endeavour.

Derrida himself continually obfuscates this distinction, as if playing with a mirror, confusing boundaries, shifting frames, casting both light and shadows simultaneously. In his recent work on paintings about sight and blindness in the Louvre Museum, *Memoirs of the Blind*, he discusses the peculiar genre of the self-portrait, and notes the strange mirroring that must be assumed in order for a self-portrait to be realized.

In order to form the hypothesis of the self-portrait of the draftsman as self-portrait, *and seen full face*, we, as spectators or interpreters, must imagine that the draftsman is staring at one point, at one point only, the focal point of a mirror that is *facing* him; he is staring, therefore, from the place that *we* occupy, in a face to face with him: this can be the self-portrait of a self-portrait only *for the other*, for a spectator who occupies the place of a single focal point, but in the center of what

¹⁰⁸ Gasché, 238.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 238-239.

should be a mirror. The spectator replaces the mirror by producing, *by putting to work*, the sought after specularity.¹¹⁰

A self-portraitist must use a mirror to draw him or herself. But in a complex movement of mirror reflexivity, what is in the mirror becomes, with the completion of the picture, us, the spectator, looking in from where the mirror should be. To draw oneself, then, one necessarily assumes an *other*, but an other who takes away one's own eyes by taking one's spot in the mirror image, displacing the "self" of the self-portrait.¹¹¹ We have seen a similar mirror-play at work in the Van Eyck's double portrait, where the artist's signature above the mirror signifies his own separation, and the blindness of not seeing him(self) in the mirror.¹¹² This blinding and otherness are at the center of all making for Derrida, for they are constituted in the very origins of the work, whether in the mirror-play of the self-portrait, or, as Derrida states in an earlier essay, in the act of writing or reading:

To grasp the operation of creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom. One must be separate from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in darkness. This experience of conversion, which founds the literary act (writing or reading) is such that the very words "separation" and "exile," which always designate the interiority of a breaking-off with the world and a making one's way within it, cannot directly manifest the experience; they can only indicate it through a metaphor whose genealogy itself would deserve all our efforts. . . Only *pure absence* -- not the absence of this or that, but the

¹¹⁰ Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 61-62. Cf. Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): "The self-portrait hovers between self and other, challenging the distinction between the categories of first and third person as it challenges subjectivity and its illusion of wholeness" (271).

¹¹¹ For Derrida, the "self-portrait" is such only by virtue of it being named such, and not by virtue of a "self" to be found within the work, since such a "self" is always displaced. Hence, many works might qualify as "self-portrait": "If what is called a self-portrait depends on the fact that it is called "self-portrait", an act of naming should allow or *entitle* me to call just about anything a self-portrait, not only drawing ("portrait" or not") but anything that happens to me, anything by which I can be affected or let myself be affected" -- *Memoirs of the Blind*, 65.

¹¹² Van Eyck's "double" portrait, then, is just as much a self-portrait as it is a portrait of two Italians of the merchant class. It doubles on all accounts. The same could be said for numerous other paintings which play with the mirror image, from Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (see Bal's discussion of this painting in conjunction with Rembrandt's *The Artist in His Studio* -- Chapter 7, "Self-reflection as a Mode of Reading", *Reading Rembrandt*, 247-285); to Vermeer's *A Lady and a Gentleman at the Virginals* (see Michael Edwards discussion of this painting and several other Vermeers utilizing the mirror theme in *Towards a Christian Poetics* [London: Macmillan, 1984], 212-215); to Matisse's *La Séance de Peinture* in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. There are, of course, numerous other examples.

absence in which all presence is announced -- can *inspire*, in other words, can *work*, and then make one work.¹¹³

In Derrida's paradoxical doctrine of creation, presence and absence, blindness and sight, self and other, production and ruin, all co-habit within the very inspiration and act of creation. Creation does not invoke ruin, it *implies* it, is predicated upon it. Creation is not simply implicated in the Fall; creation, at its very origin, *is* the Fall, and the Fall creation.¹¹⁴ As Derrida says, referring again to the self-portrait: "It is like a ruin that does not come *after* the work but remains produced, *already from the origin*, by the advent and structure of the work. In the beginning, at the origin, there was ruin. At the origin, comes ruin; ruin comes to the origin, it is what first comes and happens to the origin, in the beginning. With no promise of restoration."¹¹⁵

Derrida's thought radicalizes the mirror metaphor in both philosophy and art by showing that metaphor itself "always carries its death within itself".¹¹⁶ The mirroring of mirror, the imitation of imitation, the metaphor of metaphor -- self-reflexivity pushed to extreme -- always returns upon itself negatively, like the "self"-blinding of an artist, thus disclosing the groundlessness of anything considered essential in the mind or in a work of art, and bringing to light the blind spots of our imagination.¹¹⁷ Derrida has placed equally philosophy and art

¹¹³ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 8.

¹¹⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 283: "The sign is always the sign of the Fall." See also Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), 139; and the section "Philosophy and the Fall" in Kevin Hart's *The Trespass of the Sign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3-21.

¹¹⁵ Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 65. He continues: "This dimension of the ruinous simulacrum has never threatened -- quite to the contrary -- the emergence of a work. It's just that one must know [*savoir*], and so *one just has to see* (it) [*voir ça*] -- i.e., that the performative fiction that engages the spectator in the signature of the work is given to be seen only *through* the blindness that it produces as its truth."

¹¹⁶ Derrida, "White Mythology", *Margins Of Philosophy*, 271. See also *Writing and Difference*, 227; Gasché, 293-318.

¹¹⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 184: "Imagination is at bottom the relationship with death. The image is death. A proposition that one may define or make indefinite thus: *the image is a death or (the) death is an image*. Imagination is the power that allows life to affect itself with its own re-presentation. The image cannot represent and add the representor to the represented, except in so far as the presence of the re-presented is already folded back upon itself in the world, in so far as life refers to itself as to its own lack, to its own wish for a supplement. The presence of the represented is constituted with the help of the addition to itself of that nothing which is the image, announcement of its dispossession within its own representor and within its death. The property [*le propre*] of the subject is merely the movement of the representative

on the tain of the mirror, where their structures and structural unities are shown as continually refracted and re-fractured.¹¹⁸ The mirror image has gone from imitating what is "out there", to imitating what is "inside", to not imitating at all in the strict sense, but to a continual interpretive and performative activity that distorts as much as it mimes.¹¹⁹ This move does not discard the mirror metaphor, but, on the contrary, lets it have its full play, to the point where reflection is deprived of anything "meta-", becoming fully, and paradoxically, self-contained.

Derrida, then, stands in a long line of those who have ardently critiqued reflective philosophy and its metaphysical speculations. Alongside Nietzsche, he has tried to manifest this prevailing theme: that the language of philosophy is as much one of creation as is the language of art, and both are interpretative and not legislative strategies. They are reflective, but reflective of their own interstices, in which lies the *coincidentia oppositorum* of their being. In this postmodern world of cracked mirror images, *poiêsis*, "making" (and for Derrida himself this "making" becomes "writing"¹²⁰) defines any way forward through the impasse of the mirror's paradox (and thus through the impasse of both Being's and the self's paradox). For *poiêsis* is the paradox, inasmuch as all creation inheres in its opposite. This *poiêsis* then becomes a framing of the mirror, a drawing of the border upon its edges, inside of which all things are continually remade.

expropriation. In that sense imagination, like death, is *representative and supplementary*."

¹¹⁸ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 33: "The breakthrough toward radical otherness (with respect to the philosophical concept -- of the concept) always takes, *within philosophy*, the *form* of an a posteriority or an empiricism. But this is an effect of the specular nature of philosophical reflection, philosophy being incapable of inscribing (comprehending) what is outside it otherwise than through the appropriating assimilation of a negative image of it, and dissemination is written on the back -- the *tain* -- of that mirror."

¹¹⁹ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 191: "What announces itself here is an internal division within *mimêsis*, self-duplication of repetition itself; *ad infinitum*, since this movement feeds its own proliferation. Perhaps, then, there is always more than one kind of *mimêsis*; and perhaps it is in the strange mirror that reflects as but also displaces and distorts one *mimêsis* into another, as though it were itself destined to mime or mask *itself*, that history -- the history of literature -- is lodged, along with the whole of its interpretation." See also 206.

¹²⁰ For a summary on Derrida's use of this term, and the related "arche-writing", see Gasché, 271-278.

This entire history of reflective philosophy and poetics, as it has been represented here, can be seen as a movement between the two conceptual poles of the One and the Many which, in its postmodern swing, may appear at this stage to privilege the Many. But in Derrida we see now the appearance may be false, or, at least, just that, *appearance*. For if we take away these poles altogether, or superimpose their boundaries, as mirroring ultimately does, we find ourselves in a much more poetical realm from the start, a realm Derrida continually leads us back to. As our most revered artists seem neither to begin at one of the two poles, nor to end up at one of the two poles, we shall leave the realm of the philosophers, and turn, under Derrida's gaze, back to the artists, in an attempt now to see how they who assume some kind of *poiêsis* from the outset are already putting to work a critique of reflection as both a metaphorical basis for "art" and a conceptual basis for "reality" (or vice versa). Auden stands as the figure this century for whom such a critique becomes an explicit concern of his work, thus adumbrating the postmodern turn. But Auden's critique is itself a "reflection" of artists before him, and we turn first to the most important of these, Shakespeare, and to his world of reflecting mirrors and diffusing seas within *The Tempest*.

Chapter Two

As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps. . .

-- Virginia Woolf¹

The history of philosophy as speculation -- turning an eye inward upon oneself to reflect one's own thoughts -- is not, as we have seen, distinctly separate from the realm of creativity and the activity of artists. As philosophy has continually reflected *poiêsis*, or reflected itself into *poiêsis* by the very inadequacies or lacunae of its adopted metaphorical framework, so art's speculative eye has been *more* than a mere aping of a supposed "reality" outside of itself. Both philosophy and art are caught in the double bind of delimiting *and* adding, of setting up boundaries to mark out the scope of one's reflection, as one adds a frame to a mirror, but in doing so, of also creating something *other* to what is supposedly being reflected -- the *other* of the framed mirror and its reflection. This paradox of delimiting by adding has both plagued and invigorated philosophy, has both plagued and invigorated art, just as Plato's *pharmakon* acts as both a poison and a cure.² For the placing of boundaries "constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other".³ The placing of boundaries invites a *coincidentia*

¹ From "The Mark on the Wall", *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), 79-80.

² See Derrida's quintessential essay "Plato's Pharmacy" on the grand paradox, the "self-inadequation" (139), of the term and notion of *pharmakon*, and of Plato's use of this term, especially within the *Phaedrus* -- *Dissemination*, 62-171.

³ *Ibid.*, 127. In parentheses that immediately follow, Derrida gives examples of the "sides" that may cross over: "soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc."

oppositorum -- limit and addition -- and thus a collapse of the stability or uniformity the boundaries were meant to determine, either within the self or within the work of art. Self-reflection invites its own self-destruction, as the mirroring of the mirror does away with any grounds for the distinction between the "one" and the "other".⁴

Unlike philosophy, however, art has always made its framing an integral part of its work, if for no other reason than it knows that the frame, the concretion of delimitation, cannot in any way be avoided. As Derrida points out in *The Truth in Painting*, philosophers have been uneasy with the frame (the *parergon*, as Kant calls it)⁵; artists, on the other hand, are all too aware of their ironies, and many, like Van Eyck, highlight them, and make capital of them.⁶ Such artists show that the outward frame need not confine one to a sheer formalism. As art mirrors itself, inward byways arise *within* its frame, creating regressive passages of internal reflection, in which holes and crevasses of the very act of creation itself are revealed. The apparent formalism of such self-reflection is not a structuralist's dead end, but an invitation, an invocation, into the *otherness* of the gap which the self-reflection exposes.⁷ The genius of William Shakespeare, for all his mastery of dramatic technique and poetic language, resides equally within his ability to take us further inside the

⁴ In speaking of the hymen, another term and notion which, like *pharmakon*, contravenes its own internal logic, Derrida writes: "As soon as a mirror is interposed in some way, the simple opposition between activity and passivity, between production and the product, or between all concepts in -er and all concepts in -ed (signifier/signified, imitator/imitated, structure, structured, etc.), becomes impracticable and too formally weak to encompass the graphics of the hymen, its spider web, and the play of eyelids" -- Ibid., 224.

⁵ Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 15-147. See also above, Chapter 1, 8, footnote 17.

⁶ Along with artists we may also add, as Kevin Hart does in "The Poetics of the Negative", certain literary critics: "Dialectical criticism", for example, "takes 'literature' as a frame which critics use to read certain texts and by which some texts frame themselves" (287 -- see 287-288).

⁷ Even structuralists do not think of "formalism" as a dead end. Jonathan Culler, in his *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1975), regards structuralist criticism as a movement within the problematic gaps which any text yields: "The critic comes to focus, therefore, on the play of the legible and illegible, on the role of gaps, silence, opacity. Although this approach may be thought of as a version of formalism, the attempt to turn content into form and then to read the significance of the play of forms reflects not a desire to fix the text and reduce it to a structure but an attempt to capture its *force*. The force, the power of any text, even the most unabashedly mimetic, lies in those moments which exceed our ability to categorize, which collide with our interpretive codes but nevertheless seem right." Culler then quotes Shakespeare: "Lear's 'Pray you, undo this button; thank you, sir' is a gap, a shift in mode which leaves us with two edges and an abyss between them. . ." (260-261).

boundaries of his art, further along its deep internal byways, its poetic vortices, than most. In turning to Shakespeare, then, we are not simply following Auden, and returning to his source for *The Sea and the Mirror*; we are returning to a figure whose sense of poetics has, if self-reflection is our guide, a distinctly postmodern aspect.⁸

The poetics of Hamlet

To uncover this aspect, to seek or draw out a poetics within Shakespeare, we might begin with the poetics that arises out of Hamlet's speech to the players practicing their play. "Suit the action to the word," he admonishes, "the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (*Hamlet* III, ii, 16-23).⁹ At first glance, this description appears to reflect traditional mimetic theory. "Hold the mirror up to nature" is the charge, and in so doing, the play will "catch the conscience of the king". Such an understanding of art may be the closest we have to anything Shakespeare might have put forward as an explicated theory of drama. But of

⁸ Gary Taylor, in his book *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London: Hogarth, 1989), looks at the way postmodern criticism has been, relatively speaking, slow to use the texts of Shakespeare. The French intellectuals who arose during the 1960s virtually ignored him. It was only when their theories took root in American literary criticism that Shakespeare began to emerge within postmodern critical purview, particularly in the 1980s (362-364). Taylor's book itself adopts a postmodern critique, inasmuch as it questions the "genius" or "singularity" of Shakespeare as something constructed from historical, social, and intellectual reputations, without there being sufficient questioning of those reputations. "We assume", he says, "that Shakespeare's thirty odd plays contain more of humanity than the five hundred plays of Lope de Vega that we have not read. . . [an assumption which] has led, I do not doubt, to our neglecting all those aspects of humanity which Shakespeare neglected, on the assumption that anything outside the circle of his art does not exist" (386). The suggestion of Shakespeare's genius we have put forward is based on the "black holes" (cf. Gary Taylor, 410-411) in his art which, far from containing all of humanity, lead us to blank spaces where our humanity is remade.

⁹ All quotes from Shakespeare, and hence their corresponding line references, are taken from *William Shakespeare -- The Complete Works*, gen. ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking Press, 1969, rpt. 1977). The notion of "the mirror of nature" has of course had much currency since Shakespeare, finding its way into the title of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, for one.

course, this theory is imbedded within his drama, spoken by one of his characters and directed at a play within a play. What can we glean then from this dramatized poetics? First, Hamlet tells us that there ought to be a correspondence between word and action, the one always appropriate to the other. This is nothing exceptional, for most actions can be described, and many descriptions can be acted, and it has always been the playwright's task to breed one from the other, to bring forth descriptions from actions, and in turn actions from descriptions. That plays are never acted the same way twice is proof that the correspondence between the one and the other is never a strict correspondence. So Hamlet instructs that, given all dramatic leeway, a certain modesty must be maintained, at least in correspondence with nature. Here we may see the first signs of mimesis in the imitative sense. But it is weak mimesis of this kind, for Hamlet does not say that dramatic actions must correspond exactly to nature (how could they ever be judged to fit *exactly* to nature when actions are so wide and fluid they resist the measurement and determination the word *exact* suggests? -- actions are better described within the realm of *possibility*, as Aristotle saw, we recall: "the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary"¹⁰). Hamlet says rather that dramatic actions must "o'erstep not the modesty of nature", must, in other words, not be so extravagant that nature itself could never conceive of it. The enactment of any action must remain *possible*.¹¹

Hamlet's poetics here begins to raise questions, for knowing his words are spoken within a play, what "modest nature" then do we take him to mean: our own as readers or listeners of the play called *Hamlet*, or the nature according to the action found between Act I and Act V of this play? If the latter, can Hamlet's world of actions rightfully be called "modest"? Or if these are really Shakespeare's views, can the world of actions in, say, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *King Lear*, or *A Winter's Tale*, or, ultimately, *The Tempest*, be called

¹⁰ Aristotle, *De Poetica*, 1451^a, lns. 36-38. See also above, Chapter 1, 45.

¹¹ Cf. Aristotle: "A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility" (*De Poetica*, 1460^a, lns. 26-27).

"modest"? We suspect more than a little irony here. If we take the world of drama as our guide, and specifically the world of tragedy, "modesty" would hardly be the first trait we should ascribe to nature, however we define nature. We wonder at Hamlet's sense of mimesis. He goes on to say that the whole purpose of the play is, and always has been, "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature". This often-quoted phrase seldom retains the little subjunctive qualification -- "as 'twere" -- when quoted. Why does Hamlet throw it in? To signal, we must assume, that what follows is a metaphor, a figure of speech, an unreal condition. Art is *like* a mirror held up to nature (the "as 'twere" taking the place of the "like" one finds with simile). Art in and of itself is not a mirror held up to nature (unless one's art is to make mirrors, which clearly is not what Hamlet means). Art reflects in a similar manner to a mirror. Hamlet is conscious of making a metaphor do the work of his poetics, whereby the *function* of one thing is transferred to another, the *function* of the mirror transferred to the *function* of the play. What exactly is the function of the mirror, and thus the play? To reflect "feature", "image", "form" and "pressure" (impression) back upon the viewer. Not to reflect a given "reality", but made things, as each of his words suggest. This is all a mirror can ever do. The *function* of Hamlet's poetics, then, depends upon metaphor, for his poetics *is* metaphor itself, inasmuch as the play carries over one framed thing (the action, the art) to another framed thing (the description, the mirror). And this poetics is supremely manifested shortly thereafter in the play within the play, a mirroring of the mirror, a framing of the frame, in which the king is caught.¹²

¹² "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king", says Hamlet (II,ii, 590-591). The play indeed does catch the conscience of the king. Holding up the mirror *does* something: it exposes the self by objectification, fracturing the self in discontinuity (Lacan). The king is framed, set up by his own reflection, which breaks the sense of unity with himself. To be exposed, to be put forth or placed out, is to be shown as something *other* than what appearance might suggest, to be shown as *duplicitous*. The king's conscience is quickened because he is now *known*, both to himself and to others, as the word "conscience" suggests, a knowledge and an opening of eyes which, as in the garden of Eden, brings shame, and an attempt to cover up. We might contrast Milton's Samson (*Samson Agonistes*, in John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957], 583), whose blinded eyes set his self-knowledge at ease:

Samson [To the officer sent to fetch him for the Philistine's sport]:
Return the way thou cam'st, I will not come.
Officer: Regard thyself, this will offend them highly.

The mirrors of The Tempest

Is this the poetics of Shakespeare himself? Let us turn to the next best indication, Shakespeare's dramatic swan song, *The Tempest*. For here we have the Bard's playwrighting at its most self-conscious. Is there something in this late play that takes imitation beyond an imitation of itself? If with this play, as Northrop Frye suggests, Shakespeare hits "the very bedrock of drama itself"¹³, does he manage to go beyond or behind the set frame and point to a world not bound by art, or does the bedrock lie deep within the play's frame, never to emerge outside of it, revealing only a substructure that is self-referential? Here we ask the bedrock question of any poetics (which shares a vein with hermeneutics): what is the relationship between the made thing and the viewer?, a question with which the play ultimately will end, in Prospero's famous Epilogue speech.

Before the end, let us look at the play's preceding action. The surface of this action appears broadly reflective. We can find mirroring suggested or manifested throughout. There are images that come and go, illusions conjured by Prospero and effected by Ariel, bringing a world of immaterial creatures and sounds and sights like the play of light across a polished surface. One moment they appear, the next they are gone. There are images that come and go within each character's head, dreams and visions which, in sleep or out, idealize (Gonzalo), amaze (Miranda), infatuate (Ferdinand), perturb (Alonso), take revenge (Caliban), conspire (Antonio and Sebastian), indulge (Stephano), covet (Trinculo), free (Ariel), and retire (Prospero). Like a mirror, "the quality of one's dreaming is an index of character."¹⁴ There is only one explicit reference to mirrors, when Miranda says to her suitor Ferdinand that she remembers no other woman's face "Save, from my glass, mine own" (III,i, 50), but this reference opens up upon itself a host of concomitant reflections. Miranda and her father

Samson: Myself? my conscience and internal peace.

(lms. 1332-1334)

¹³ Northrop Frye, "Introduction to *The Tempest*", in *William Shakespeare -- The Complete Works*, 1372. See also Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 117.

¹⁴ Frye, "Introduction to *The Tempest*", 1370.

Prospero have been stranded on an island since Miranda was a young child. The only faces she remembers are those of her father, of Caliban, of herself, and now of Ferdinand. The island, framed by water, has been a mirror allowing her to see only that which resides within its frame. On this particular level, we can see the unnamed island as a speculum into which characters peer. Miranda so far has only seen a handful of images, and the discovery of this new one in the form of Ferdinand is a thrill by which she is captured. Of course, there is a "brave new world" that will later enter the frame,¹⁵ but this only after she has given her affections over to the one who has reciprocated them. The rest of the shipwrecked party too will peer into this frame, but they in large part will see only themselves, as the island evinces their strengths and, more often, their deficiencies of character. In bringing this group within his frame, Prospero himself sees his past, his present and his future shaped within the island's activity. For him, the island is not only a mirror with which to play tricks, but a mirror in which the entire compass of his life unfolds. Any who peer into the frame, then, receive a vision of self-realization: whether through love, through flaw, or through manipulation.

Looking at the island in this way, we can see the metaphorical trope of Hamlet's -- the "mirror held up to nature" -- used in several ways. The island metaphorically becomes a mirror, reflecting back to the characters their various dramatic visages. And at this level, the metaphor works microcosmically, equating or relating the island with the selfhood of each character, and the shores of the island with the boundaries of that selfhood, much as if each individual held up a round mirror to their face. On another level, the metaphor works macrocosmically, reflecting back to the characters the entire dramatic world in which they are bound collectively. Everything that takes place on the island becomes the dramatic *terra firma* from which all else is defined. The island assumes the possibilities of a society, with rulers and subordinates, with economy and labour, with factions and alliances, with establishers and disestablishers, with the privileged and the impoverished, the sober and the dissipated, the greedy and

¹⁵ A "new world" hardly utopian, unless in its literal sense of utopia -- not (*ou*) a place (*topos*) -- or in the ironic and morbidly satirical Huxleyan sense of *Brave New World*.

the content, the seditious and the honourable. So Gonzalo in his utopian speech can envision a commonwealth world, free from labour and sovereignty, where people live in edenic innocence. So Caliban can envision a primitive world, peopled by the fruits of rape, and run on savagery. So Miranda can envision a "brave new world", her naivité making all things good. The island becomes a world ready to be made, or remade, by the characters who inhabit it. And we see this remaking as the play's action unfurls, both in terms of inner psychology and of outer civilizing. Indeed, the play mirrors its own internal aspect (the *dramatis personae* individually) in its external aspect (the *mise en scène* in which the *dramatis personae* play out their roles).

The island is the centrality of the play, but it is not the outer perimeter. On either side, in the first scene and in the Epilogue, there is action presented beyond the limits of the shore. We are naturally drawn first to the opening scene, since it is from here the play receives its title. Why *The Tempest* and not *The Enchanted Island*, as some later versions of the story have it?¹⁶ Why title the work on something that happens outside the frame of the main action? Is there here an indication that what happens beyond the limits of the shore is as important as what happens within its limits? Might the play's mirroring cross over the boundaries of the island's shore? As we have used the island as a mirror image of the characters' self and their world, so we could use the sea and the storm in like manner: the tempestuous waters mirror the internal states of those who have fallen their victim (that is, everyone, short of the sprites and fairies, who find themselves island-bound). Here, what lies outside of the world to be made is what is both, potentially, the greatest source of threat and the greatest source of rehabilitation. The storm brings ashore the possibility of both subversion and restoration (of society), of both iniquity and repentance (of the self). The movement from the one moral pole to the other, the action from infirmity towards wholeness, becomes the individual tempest in each character

¹⁶ Principally, John Dryden and William Davenant's adaption of 1667, fully entitled *The Tempest: Or, The Enchanted Island*. See Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 90-93.

and the collective tempest for the island as a whole. The play is so named, we might say, because the external gales that blow outside the main arena of action become the internal gales that drive the action within it. Everyone, as Ariel sings, "doth suffer a sea-change" (I,ii, 401). And this at the hand of Prospero, who works from the island.

The sea, the storm, the island: all are reflective of the inner and outer worlds of the play. But dramatic action is also interactive, and things happen among and between characters. The play shows mirror imaging here as well. With all the main characters of the play, counterparts (positive, negative and parodic) can be found. Prospero clearly finds a counterpart in Sycorax, the bedeviled mother of Caliban who was exiled to the island with her bastard son and who in turn took rule of the island with her spells and charms. She too had held Ariel captive, though out of malignancy and suppression. Her exile and Ariel's captivity lasted twelve years, the same time Prospero and Miranda have been deserted. Caliban, then, becomes a negative counterpart to Miranda. Both are exiled as only children, both are now under the watchful eye of Prospero, but one is rebellious and incorrigible, the other deferent and ingenuous. Caliban also finds a negative counterpart in Ariel, Prospero's other subordinate. As one is sent to work in drudgery, bearing the burden of material toil, the other is sent to work in magic, bearing the burden of spells and illusions. Both, however, desire their freedom, the one scheming for it through usurpation, the other working for it through contractual obedience. When Ferdinand comes ashore and into the domain of Prospero, he is forced into a similar role as Caliban, and becomes yet another counterpart to the "fishy creature", though in this case as one who is enslaved out of an honourable love for Miranda, and not salacious desire. Ferdinand's father, Alonso, and Miranda's father, Prospero, also mirror one another, both being rightful leaders of their realms, both facing the prospect of losing that child closest to their grasp, and both facing plots of insurrection. There are other parallels: among the shipwrecked, the court party is parodied in Stephano and Trinculo, the one party distraught with apparent losses, the other gloating with apparent gain; while the insidious scheme of Antonio and Sebastian is parodied in the doomed-to-failure scheme concocted by Caliban for Stephano

and Trinculo. Of the major characters, only Gonzalo remains without a mirror image, he being the one who allowed for the countering to arise in the first place, having supplied Prospero not only with means for survival but with his mirror-making books.

So then, within its own confines, the play appears to mirror itself from all sides, showing us reflected features at several different levels. On the far side of these confines lies the Epilogue. Like the storm scene at the outset, the Epilogue anticipates action beyond the ground of the island, action situated upon the insolidity of the waters ("Gentle breath of yours my sails / Must fill. . .") (Epilogue, 11). But unlike the opening action, the Epilogue does not claim to stand within the continuity of the plot. It does not claim to be action at all. Rather, it steps outside of the plot and the action to address the audience members who have just been witness to the plot and the action. Prospero is still Prospero, the administrator of the preceding events, but his plea is to be released from these events by the audience. He pleads to leave the island. Were his words part of the main action, he would have directed them to one of the characters, Alonso or the Boatswain. But he directs them to those sitting on the other side of the stage's plane of activity, to those who have viewed the island from without. This move is more complicated than it may first appear. By addressing the audience, and breaking through the "fourth wall" of the drama, Prospero has consciously demarcated yet another boundary in his artifice, this time a boundary defining his artifice as a whole. The Epilogue holds up another mirror, though one that claims to reflect not just features within the play, but the play itself as it can be viewed from outside of it. Like *Hamlet's* play within the play, a distinct mirroring of the mirror, Prospero invites the audience to view a similar picture in *The Tempest*, wherein the main character of the play, Prospero himself, shows the play as *play*, shows the mirror by turning the mirror back upon itself, and giving his own role as spell-binder over to the viewing public. "You have been watching a mirror image" he says in effect, "and now let me pass the mirror over to you, dear people, to mirror the mirror image, and show you clearly the frame of this performance. Our frame has come to its close. Set us free now by creating another frame into which we may escape." The

indulgence of the audience is to accept kindly the performance as artifice, the goal of which was "to please", and to release Prospero into the artifice of their own minds. Does Prospero thereby escape the confines of art altogether? Does Shakespeare, Prospero's creator, thereby get beyond art as imitation of imitation? On the contrary, Prospero simply moves from one frame to another, and Shakespeare simply shifts the frame. The audience becomes part of the moved frame, or, we could say, is framed, in the same way the king is framed in *Hamlet*, with our caught conscience here the acknowledgement that being part of the frame does not make the performance correspond any more to an external "reality". The performance itself is the "reality", along with our participation in it. The mirror, whether held by us or by the play itself, is only ever held up to the *play's* nature.¹⁷

The Epilogue invites us to rethink our notion of mimesis. As much as we may wish to find the concepts of "original" and "imitation" in Prospero's parting words, we search in vain. Nothing he says can point us to an "original" beyond or preceding the five Acts; any "original" must come from our inference within the five Acts, or following the five Acts, none of which can be "original" in any *prior* sense. The effect of the action, Prospero says, has been to enchant. It has not been to evoke some reality outside of itself, to show the things outside of the frame that are the sources of reflection. It is to cast a spell, which is held conjointly by the play and the audience. The play charms us while we in turn

¹⁷ Even Erich Auerbach, who in his now classic *Mimesis* (trans. Willard R. Trask [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953]) treats his subject under the traditional understanding that "reality" is somehow represented in the figurations (*figura*) of great writers -- Shakespeare "includes" or "embraces" earthly reality, even though he "goes far beyond the representation of reality in its merely earthly coherence" by including the "presence of ghosts and witches", e.g. (327) -- even Auerbach cannot avoid admitting (perhaps unwittingly) the self-reflective, self-enclosed world that operates at the heart of Shakespearean drama. In describing the difference between Shakespeare's world and that of his Middle Age predecessors, he writes: "Dante's general, clearly delimited figurality, in which everything is resolved in the beyond, in God's ultimate kingdom, and in which all characters attain their full realization only in the beyond, is no more. Tragic characters attain their final completion here below when, heavy with destiny, they become ripe like Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear. Yet they are not simply caught in the destiny allotted to each of them; they are all connected as players in a play written by the unknown and unfathomable Cosmic Poet; a play on which He is still at work, and the meaning and reality of which is as unknown to them as it is to us" (327). He follows these thoughts with a quote from Prospero's speech in *The Tempest* in which the world is compared to the play just witnessed -- to "the baseless fabric of this vision", to "this insubstantial pageant faded" (IV,i, 151,154).

charm the play, granting it the run of its own nature. Such a granting is our act of framing, while the running of its nature is the play's. The Epilogue does no more than state this mutual dependence, this mutual framing. It holds up a mirror before us only insofar as it shows us holding a mirror back. The only thing "original" is the made thing, original not in temporal priority but in unique self-subsistence. Art is always "original" in this sense, and thus, art is never an "imitation".

Is art no more than a house of mirrors, then, unable to picture anything beyond its self-enclosed world, unable to show what we have traditionally understood as "human nature", that nature with which we are all endowed, and by which we must live, outside the realm of art? Is the movement, say, from infirmity to wholeness and from iniquity to repentance simply an artifice, constructed by the artist with no correlation whatsoever to the way we conduct our lives when we are not watching a play? Perhaps the better question is this: if there seems to be a correlation, is this because there is something in the play that exceeds construct, or because there is something in our apparent lives that is bound to construct? Can the play reveal anything to us on these matters?

The mirror, we have said, confines by its frame. In its own way, it acts as a prison house. The image of the prison is one readily found in *The Tempest*. Prospero on several occasions calls his place on the island a "cell" (I,ii, 20, 39; V,i, 292, 301); and in the Epilogue, his plea to the audience is wrought with the imagery of imprisonment -- "I must be here confined by you", "But release me from my bands", "Let your indulgence set me free" (4, 9, 20). As a place of exile the island has had precedence, for Sycorax, Caliban and Ariel all experienced their own detention, whether imposed by the shores of the beach or, in Ariel's case, by the trunk of a "cloven pine" (I,ii, 277). When Prospero and Miranda begin their twelve year ordeal, they take Caliban as a creature to be civilized. But when his actions prove intractable and his motives perverse, he is confined to yet a further jail, a cave-like rock from which he must yield to hard labour. His toil is briefly inherited by Ferdinand, whose fondness for Miranda gives him the endurance to withstand his captivity: "All corners of the earth / Let liberty make use of. Space enough / Have I in such a prison" (I,ii,491-494).

As a jailer, Prospero is none too kind, either to Ferdinand or to Caliban, though his tyrannical edge is shown to have some salubrious motive by the play's end. The two shipwrecked parties, those of the court and those on the bottle, Stephano and Trinculo, are no less free than the others, and their captivity comes to a visible summation when in the final Act the court party "*all enter the circle which Prospero had made, and there stand charmed*" (sd. V,i), held in bondage until their captor releases them, while the hapless pair are held with Caliban by hounding spirits until released by Ariel. Even those characters nonessential to the plot, the Boatswain and his crew, are holed up in their ships under a spell of slumber until they are needed again at the play's conclusion. Everyone, without exception, is in some sort of imprisonment by virtue of being on or associated with the island. So it is not inappropriate when Prospero's final lines in the Epilogue stress the image of confinement. The whole of the play's actions, right from the opening scene, are wracked with captivity.

In an analogical step akin to that of the mirror, the play, and indeed art, become a prison house from which its captives cannot escape. The creation, the delimitation of anything, whether an unnamed island or a named character to dwell on it, necessarily imposes boundaries that cannot be crossed. No art is self-determining. Some kind of frame must be set up in advance.¹⁸ Art by definition imposes limits, or we simply do not call it art (a limitless or unbounded "art" would go unnoticed). *The Tempest* turns and calls attention to its own limits by making the action itself a delimiting process. Prospero is a spell-binder, closing off certain areas of existence and awareness in order to bring other areas of existence and awareness into being. Drawing the court party

¹⁸ This goes even for the "indeterminacy" movement this century, championed particularly in the field of music by John Cage, and now by much performance art, where chance and contingency are given the greatest room to maneuver. But even in such aleatory art, something must be pre-arranged -- a music score, however unorthodox, or musicians in a room, or a can of paint ready to spill on a canvas, or actors out on a street ready to perform. Chance, random happenings are not in themselves art, for they lack the assemblage of an audience. To assemble an audience for a "random" event is to impose a frame around the event, thus blocking out thorough contingency. For the precise theory of indeterminacy in music, where it first arose, see Donald Jay Grout, *History of Western Music*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960, 1973, 1980), 745-750. For the use of the term in literary criticism, see Gerald Graff, "Determinacy/Indeterminacy", *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 163-176.

in the fifth Act into a closed circle where they are bound by a spell becomes a distillation of the artistic moment. This moment is distilled from the play as whole, in which the island is the circle where all characters and spells are cast, and by which the five Acts become a spell-bound circle for the audience.¹⁹ Art is a poetic incarceration, a making of walls to confine. Prospero in the end calls for his release, but in vain, for as he has made walls for others, so too he is penned. The audience can only move him to another pen: another written or staged performance, or a performance within their mind. Either way, his sentence is fixed, his release unobtainable. And the audience has become implicated, for they too are bound as long as they remain seated before the stage. The performance is, we have said, a drawing of boundaries around the spectator, a drawing of limits to be noticed. These limits then neither can be crossed by the viewer. Is this not the lesson of Dorian Gray, whose self-portrait incarcerates the artist irrevocably, in a manner that suggests life imitates art, not art life? "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors", Wilde had said.²⁰ By

¹⁹ Cf. the Prologue to *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*:

Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did afright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies. . . etc.
(Ins. 11-20)

Cf. also Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (*Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H.J. Jackson [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], 103-104):

. . .
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honeydew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.
(Ins. 47-54)

See below, Chapter 4, for a more complete analysis of the artist's "O".

²⁰ Oscar Wilde, "The Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*, 64.

gazing into the mirror the spectator is trapped, trapped by the made thing, trapped by artifice.

The nature of this framed entrapment calls for a kind of grace or mercy. With framing comes judgement (the King in *Hamlet*, Dorian Gray, etc.), but as Prospero shows us in the Epilogue, judgement calls for *indulgence*, and not only indulgence in the sense of gratifying one's wishes, but more significantly in the theological sense of remitting punishment for a sin. Prospero's "faults" for which he asks relief lie, as he states it, in a failure "to please" (Epilogue, 13, 18); but they may also lie in his god-like assumption of the divine Creator's role, recreating both a heaven and hell within the "earth" of the island, an assumption requiring mercy and pardon from without. William Blake too saw the need for the artist to ask of his "*dear* Reader" to "forgive what you do not approve, & *love* me for this energetic exertion of my talent", by which "Heaven, Earth and Hell henceforth shall live in harmony."²¹ But as Prospero seeks mercy for the god-like exertion of his talent, so he implicates the audience in asking that they, in god-like capacity, grant such mercy. The moment of grace equals here the moment of condemnation, as both sides of the plane of the mirror, both the work of art/artist and the spectator, stand in need of a mutual release from the judgement of the frame, which can only be granted by the other -- the spectator grants pardon to the work, while the work grants pardon to the spectator for granting pardon to its work, since the spectator is implicated only in terms of the

²¹ From the opening of "Jerusalem" (*Blake -- The Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, 1966, 1969, 1971, 1972], 621). Blake writes following this initial injunction:

Reader! *lover* of books! *lover* of heaven,
 And of that God from whom *all books are given*,
 Who in mysterious Sinai's awful cave
 To Man the wondrous art of writing gave:
 Again he speaks in thunder and in fire!
 Thunder of Thought, & flames of fierce desire:
 Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear
 Within the unfathom'd caverns of my Ear.
 Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be:
 Heaven, Earth & Hell henceforth shall live in harmony.

Of the Measure in which
 the following Poem is written.

work's frame of reference. For "by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12.37) -- and as all words are imprisoned within the frame of the creative work, the work becomes both a limit and a freedom, both a judgement and an acquittal, both a binding and a release, just as the work of the cross becomes for the Word both death and salvation. In the case of Dorian Gray, his refusal to confess and seek out mercy condemns him, as both an artist and spectator forever caught within his own framing, to his own self-destruction: "Was he really to confess? Never. There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself -- that was evidence. He would destroy it."²² In the case of Prospero, the boundary between judgement and mercy is further confused by the figure of Caliban.

The negations of Caliban

Though Shakespeare's poetics as it might emerge from *The Tempest* gives us no bridge with which to cross from "drama" to "reality", from "art" to "life", it does offer some cracks and crevasses with which we might venture inwards. The most glaring of the "fault lines" is Caliban. Of all the main *personae* on the island, Caliban is the only one whose situation remains unresolved. The shipwrecked parties, having their iniquities exposed and the consciences chastened, having received both judgement and pardon, prepare themselves for

²² Wilde, *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*, 234. Wilde's prose poem "The House of Judgment", in which God has accused Man of many evils, and Man has admitted to all of them, concludes:

And God closed the Book of the Life of Man, and said, 'Surely I will send thee into Hell. Even in Hell will I send thee.'
 And the Man cried out, 'Thou canst not.'
 And God said to the Man, 'Wherefore can I not send thee to Hell, and for what reason?'
 'Because in Hell have I always lived,' answered the Man.
 And there was silence in the House of Judgement.
 And after a space God spake, and said to the Man, 'Seeing that I may not send thee into Hell, surely I will send thee unto Heaven. Even unto Heaven will I send thee.'
 And the Man cried out, 'Thou canst not.'
 And God said to the Man, 'Wherefore can I not send thee unto Heaven, and for what reason?'
 'Because never, and in no place, have I been able to imagine it,' answered the Man.
 And there was silence in the House of Judgment.

(Ibid., 406)

their journey home. Prospero and Miranda, one with a restored dukedom, the other with a pending marriage, are set to join them. Ariel, after two dozen years in fetters or service, has finally gained his liberation. But Caliban leaves the stage sulking in self-reproach and spite, and we are given no indication as to his plight. "Go to! Away!" are Prospero's last words to him (V,i, 298). Where he goes, how he gets on, who he sides with -- these are all left unanswered. His own last words suggest that he too has come to some new awareness: "I'll be wise hereafter / And seek for grace" (V,i, 295-296). But his apparent contrition is no more than show of regret for having inflicted pain and misery upon himself. "What a thrice-double ass / Was I to take this drunkard for a god / And worship this dull fool!", he concludes (V,i, 296-297). He does not say he will worship Prospero now instead; his seeking of grace is simply to lessen his being "pinched to death" (V,i, 276). His idea of freedom is not autonomy, but a new master: [*singing*] "'Ban, 'Ban, Ca -- Caliban / Has a new master: get a new man / Freedom, high-day! high-day freedom! freedom, high-day, freedom!" (II,ii, 179-181). Never does he suggest that he can be out from under someone's rule, only that he wishes to be out from under Prospero's torment, which would be freedom enough. Never demanding complete self-rule or release, never demanding complete condemnation or justification, Caliban is never granted them. We don't know what he is granted. He remains inconclusive, a black hole.

He also remains inextricable from Prospero. Adopted once, enslaved later, Caliban acts as a irreparable split on the surface of all of Prospero's dealings, and indeed on the surface of Prospero's thoughts. The attempts to civilize Caliban prove fruitless. The attempts to tame him prove impossible. The attempts to corral him prove temporary. Prospero may appear to be omniscient to everything Caliban does, but this is because he can't be rid of him. Of the parodic trio, Prospero says to Alonso: "Two of these fellows you / Must know and own; this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (V,i, 274-276). Such an admission of possession, of a kind of paternal duty, of an almost psychological union, makes Caliban an untameable dimension in Prospero's own psyche, a crack on Prospero's own mirror, a deep crevice around which Prospero must continually negotiate. At certain points his negotiation falters. Fittingly,

the most vivid of these moments comes during *The Tempest's* own play within the play. As Ferdinand and Miranda sit watching a wedding masque in the fourth Act, the entire scene is abruptly dispelled by a startled Prospero, who thinks,

I had forgot that foul conspiracy
Of the beast Caliban and his confederates
Against my life: the minute of their plot
Is almost come.

(IV,i, 139-142)

In a mirror-like manner to *Hamlet*, Prospero's conscience is awakened by or during the watched performance. Perhaps because of guilt, most certainly because of self-preservation, here too the performance has to be stopped. What has reminded Prospero of the foul deeds awaiting him? What is Caliban's link with the sprightly dances of the masque? Why does the moment of darkness coincide with the middle of the performance? As if looking in a mirror, Prospero has not been able to avoid the cracks in the images he himself has made. Caliban, his most extensive crack, always intrudes. The framed scene is wrought with its own imperfections. Framing suggests a break, a split, a fall.

This framing, as we have already suggested, begins with the language (Matthew 12.37). Upon adoption, Prospero and Miranda try to sophisticate Caliban by teaching him their own tongue. Miranda says,

I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock, who hadst
Deserved more than a prison.

(I,ii, 353-362)

When Caliban did not know his own meaning, he was given words to make his purposes known. But the very expression of his meaning and his purposes led to his imprisonment. Language, the supposed revealing of inner intent, was wisdom of another kind for Caliban. It became fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It became the wisdom, the cognizance, of a

difference from the others, and a move to be like them. Hence it became a fall; it became a malediction:

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

(I,ii, 363-365)

Language becomes a prison house which defines, because it confines, the curse.²³ The fostering of Caliban invites the dark side of creation, and the teaching of language invites fault lines to the fore of creation's surface. Prospero is plagued with these fractures, because they plague his very work; Caliban's own curse begins to take effect throughout the play, as it rids Prospero of the wedding masque in action, as it drives a plot to vanquish Prospero altogether, as it forces Prospero in the end to call for deliverance from the play's entire structure -- the structure of language as it has been formed around action. Prospero too is caught in his own prison house of words, and his Epilogue is a kind of reverse cry to Caliban's curse. May your own designs and devices plague you to death, cries Caliban to Prospero; may I be released from my own designs and devices by your good hands, pleads Prospero to the audience. But as Caliban remains Prospero's ("this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine"), Prospero is in an eternal bind. For to be released from the bounds of the play realizes fully Caliban's curse: Prospero is rid of existence. But to remain within its bounds is to remain forever on the island, forever facing Caliban, the mirror disclosing the faults of his artifice. At the end of it all, Caliban has the upper hand. Having endowed Caliban with the means to express himself in words, Prospero is bound to those words, and will live or die by them in judgement or acquittal.

²³ The idea of "the prison-house of language", which has been implicit throughout the foregoing discussion of imprisonment, has of course a deep critical history, beginning with Nietzsche, as Frederic Jameson points out in his further use of the phrase in *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), i, and continued in such works as Valentine Cunningham's more recent *In the Reading Gaol* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). The idea is also in Wittgenstein's famous line: "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt" ("*The limits of my language means the limits of my world*") -- 5.6, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922, rpt. 1981), 148.

Shakespeare shuffles Caliban into the wings at the end of *The Tempest*. But both for Prospero and for any subsequent reader or viewer, Caliban remains the central and inexorable disturbance of the action, the deformation which, far from aesthetically marring, intensifies the dramatic structure, providing space with which to maneuver inwards, a deep black cave to explore, like the cave to which Caliban himself is impounded. It is inevitable, then, that of all the play's characters, Caliban would gain the longest afterlife. Shakespeare keeps him unresolved within the play, and as a result he continues to rear his head outside the play, usurping the very plea of his master. He does not leave the bounded world of art altogether, of course, but is reframed, in a variety of settings from literature to painting.²⁴ Artists continue to remain fascinated with Caliban, even more than they do Prospero, because it is with Caliban that the very question of the bedrock of creation lies, and not with Prospero. Prospero may be the grand artificer of the play, and thus may be closer to Shakespeare than any other Shakespearean role (though at best this will remain conjecture²⁵), but his arts are delimited enough and his character prescribed enough that one can ask of him questions about *what* is created, but less questions of *why*. Caliban's character raises more profoundly the question of *why* any art. Prospero tells us that his project was to "enchant" and "please" -- and subsequent works in cinema like Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) and Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Trois Couleurs Rouge* (1994) both explore this project in light of a self-referential

²⁴ See Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's extensive study, *Shakespeare's Caliban -- A Cultural History*.

²⁵ The question of how much we can know of the man called Shakespeare by what is revealed in his extant texts is a long-debated one. One of the most affirmative in this question, as Abrams points out (248-249), was Carlyle, who applied "to Shakespeare's relation to his subject matter the old analogue of the mimetic mirror, but by an interpretative tour de force, converts the very perfection with which Shakespeare reflects the world into a revelation of the reflector." Even Carlyle admitted limits, however, and himself wrote: "Alas, Shakespeare had to write for the Globe Playhouse: his great soul had to crush itself, as it could, into that and no other mould. It was with him, then, as it is with us all. No man works save under conditions. . . . *Disjecta membra* are all that we find of any Poet, or of any man" (from *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, as quoted by Abrams, 249). We point out that the image of crushing oneself into a mould could just as aptly apply to Prospero, his mould of course being the island, in which, like all others, he is trapped.

artifice, which celebrates itself within a closed system.²⁶ But Caliban, with his "vile race", threatens artifice with a breaking down of itself, and poses questions not simply of closed systems, but of how closed systems come into existence, and how they share in, or retain, the abysses of non-existence and negation. Why create or bring into existence at all, if creation brings with it necessarily its own demise? This question is a question resting upon Caliban, and links him much more closely to the spirit and concern of tragedy than anything offered by Prospero. We are reminded here again of *Hamlet*, and the main character's monologues. The late play of *The Tempest* probes the whole question of creation by merging tragedy with the act of creating itself.²⁷ Caliban remains Prospero's because Prospero cannot really create without him -- it was, after all, Caliban who showed him "all the qualities o' th' isle" (I,ii, 337). Caliban is not only a negative counterpart to Miranda, Ariel and Ferdinand; he is the necessary inverse to Prospero's creative abilities. An "inverse" in the sense of a turning inwards, a turning creation back upon itself, or within itself, to probe the darkness that resides there, the inner vortices, the crevasses that reveal the tain of the mirror.

²⁶ Kieślowski's film, the last not only in the *Trois Couleurs* trilogy, but the last he planned to make before his retirement from cinema altogether (and with his recent death, it now certainly has become the last in his *oeuvre*), is much more subtle as a personal reading of *The Tempest*. There are no explicit references to the play at all, though the storm and shipwreck with which the film *ends* (rather than begins) are clear signs that the retired judge, who has orchestrated much of the action culminating in this shipwreck, is meant to be a Prospero figure. One may find an equivalent to Ariel in the film's focus on the medium of electronics (telephones, ham radios, television, etc.) by which much of the action's orchestration takes place, but interestingly, one can find no equivalent to Caliban in the film.

²⁷ The idea of tragedy *as* creation is something we have explored in relation to Derrida (above, Chapter 1, 85-86 -- "At the origin, comes ruin", etc.). Whether Shakespearean tragedy can be ultimately defined in these terms would require an interrogation far too extensive for our present purposes. But we can say that, inasmuch as Caliban represents an aporia within the creator's creation, an unnegotiable entrapment which Prospero can neither escape from nor ignore, Shakespeare leads us in the direction of a tragedy of poesis itself, a flaw in creation that requires a sacrifice of creation to its own abnegation. To speak of tragedy in such terms, one reconstitutes the critical discussion of the *tragic form*, for it is indeed *form* in its formation, over and above entextualized *content*, which carries the brunt of the tragic realization. "The creator of form must suffer formlessness. Even risk dying of it", Iris Murdoch says (*The Black Prince* [London: Penguin, 1973], 414). For a more critical discussion of tragedy in this postmodern sense of self-negation, see Jacques Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Representation of Closure", *Writing and Difference*, 248-250; Brayton Polka "Tragedy is -- Scription Contra-diction", in *Postmodernism, Literature, and the Future of Theology*, ed. David Jasper (New York: St. Martin's, 1993) 21-59; and David Klemm, "Back to Literature -- and Theology?", *ibid.*, 180-190.

Browning -- further reflections of Caliban

Robert Browning explores these questions of creation further through the character of Caliban in the poem *Caliban Upon Setebos*.²⁸ Subtitled "Natural Theology on the Island", the long monologue offers a doctrine of creation as seen by Caliban, who ponders God as he discovers Him in the created world, and from the standpoint of oneself as both a created being *and* a creator. Here, Caliban theologizes with an odd mixture of Arian and Darwinian assumptions, as he tries to consider not simply the God of his island, Setebos, but the creative legacy left behind by this God with which he, Caliban, too can fashion and control things. Ostensibly, the poem treats the subject of religion as it is curtailed by positivism and evolutionary contingencies. But as in *The Tempest*, there are other significant issues below the surface and between the cracks, which make this poem more than a parody of nineteenth century scientific rationalism. Caliban is used to break open the problems inherent within the act of creation itself. The poem becomes a widening of the gap first rendered by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*.

Like many of Browning's poems, *Caliban Upon Setebos* assumes the voice of one character, whose monologue carries a certain rhetorical distinctiveness. Rhetoric, we know, invokes as much a distance as it does a familiarity between speaker and hearer.²⁹ In Caliban's case, the rhetorical distance is heightened with Caliban's frequent use of the third person to describe himself. Hoping to allay the wrath of deity, or speak freely without incurring that wrath, he hides behind the third person pronoun, as if a screen to cover his own thoughts. Prospero had taught him language; he will use that language not only to curse his master, but to question, on the sly, the God of the island. He opens his thoughts, and almost every stanza to follow, by reducing himself to an apostrophe, to a pronominal ellipsis: "' Will sprawl. . .", "' Thinketh. . .", "' Saith. . .", "' Conceiveth. . .", etc. He hopes further protection or secrecy will be

²⁸ Robert Browning, *The Poems, Vol. 1*, ed. John Pettigrew (London: Penguin, 1981), 805-812.

²⁹ Wayne C. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 121-123, 155-159, e.g.; Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 33.

afforded by his cave, in whose entrance he lies as he thinks. Browning paints the opening picture with the imagery of an eye:

Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
 With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin. . .
 And while above his head a pompion plant,
 Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye. . .
 He looks out o'er yon sea. . .
 And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,
 Touching that other, whom his dam called God.

(lms. 2-3, 7-8, 12, 15-16)

The image is that of a Caliban as an eye's pupil within a dark socket, staring out to sea, but gazing inward upon its own self, and upon God.³⁰ Caliban becomes the eye that seeks, and that seeks things within his own nature, where he might observe God. He lets his "rank tongue blossom into speech":

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!
 "Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

(24-25)

"In the cold of the moon" is here another ocular image, the lunar eye of night. It is an appropriate, and ironic, image, since Caliban later claims that Prospero, in an attempt to civilize him upon capture, had blinded him. Prospero, Caliban describes, keeps not only Ariel, but

Also a sea beast, lumpish, which he snared,
 Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
 And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge
 In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban.

(163-166)

Caliban becomes a blinded eye which sees within.³¹ On the surface he is blinded

³⁰ Cf. Jean-Marie Faverjon's picture, *Self-Portrait in Trompe l'oeil*, and Derrida's treatment of it in *Memoirs of the Blind*, 92-94.

³¹ The imagery here of the blinded eye which sees from within a cave recalls Coleridge's poem "Limbo":

But that is lovely -- looks like Human Time, --
 An Old Man with a steady look sublime,
 That stops his earthly task to watch the skies;
 But he is blind -- a statue hath such eyes; --
 Yet having moonward turned his face by chance,
 Gazes the orb with moon-like countenance,
 With scant white hairs, with foretop bald and high,
 He gazes still, -- his eyeless eyes face all eye; --
 As 'twere an organ full of silent sight,
 His whole face seemeth to rejoice in light!

to anything beyond natural theology, for he is bound to the immediate and sensate world of the island and cannot see the possibility of such notions as grace or mercy, which, as we saw above, are called for by the judgement of creation and the creative act. And yet at the same time he probes far deeper than either Prospero or Miranda, who, for all their civilization, remain in a state of "sleep" throughout the poem. In considering the moon, the sun, the elements, the island, and the "snaky sea which rounds and ends" the island, Caliban

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:
He hated that He cannot change His cold,
Nor cure its ache.

(31-33)

For Caliban, creation arose out of suffering, out of an incurable sickness affecting even God. He likens the Creator to an "icy fish" in a rock-stream who desires to reach the warmer waters of the sea, but once there, is sickened and repulsed, caught between the cold finiteness of her river and the warm infiniteness of the ocean, where she

Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
And in her old bounds buried her despair,
Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

(41-43)

So Setebos, for whom creation must always be an ambivalence. As the poem progresses, Caliban works out his own theodicy -- why create if your creation is wrought in part with suffering and ugliness? -- a theodicy through which Caliban

As 'twere an organ full of silent sight,
His whole face seemeth to rejoice in light!
Lip touching lip, all moveless, bust and limb --
He seems to gaze at that which seems to gaze on him!
No such sweet sights doth Limbo den immure,
Walled round, and made a spirit-jail secure,
By the mere horror of blank Naught-at-all,
Whose circumambience doth these ghosts enthrall.

(Ins. 19-34)

Writing of this poem, David Jasper remarks: "The blind old man, recognizably Coleridge himself, embodies both spiritual deprivation and potential spiritual fulfilment. . . Accepting man's inability to know spiritual truth with certainty and acknowledging the limitations of poetic language, Poetic creativity, from the very light that comes from within man, provides intimations which reflect in themselves the divine splendour which, he surmises, shines down upon our blindness" -- "S.T. Coleridge: The Poet as Theologian -- Two Late Poems", *The Modern Churchman*, 26: 1 (1983), 41.

notion: that Setebos must have created out of spite, and now mocks us as mere, weak "playthings". Caliban thinks he too can create things with like indifference and mockery, "Making and marring clay at will". And since he can think of all that Setebos has created, and perhaps create likewise, Setebos has outdone Himself, and given his creatures greater worth than He, and surpassing ability:

Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,
And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
Than He who made them! What consoles but this?³²
(112-114)

Caliban finds comfort in his supposed superiority as a creature who can out-create his creator.³³

But Caliban's blindness does not keep him from questioning even his own suppositions. He realizes that without the Creator, he could not surpass Him.³⁴ The artist becomes both dependent on God and a usurper of God: Caliban is

³² Cf. Auden's stanza in *Friday's Child*:

What reverence is rightly paid
To a Divinity so odd
He lets the Adam whom He made
Perform the acts of God?
(CP, 675)

For a full reading of *Friday's Child*, see below, Chapter 5, 219-228.

³³ A dangerously blasphemous act, causing Marvell to demur at first upon reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

the Argument
Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song. . .

("On *Paradise Lost*", as reproduced in Milton, *Complete Poems and Prose*, 209)

That the "strong" Milton would out-do the Master Creator Himself is akin to the original sin of usurping divine jurisdiction, as in Adam and Eve's eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. See Harold Bloom's treatment of poetry's interaction with the "sacred Truths" in *Ruin The Sacred Truths* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

³⁴ David Jasper, citing Austin Farrer, offers thoughts relevant to Caliban here: "Theodical textuality, endlessly deconstructive of its own conclusions, is but a mirror or looking glass reflecting back to us with ruthless honesty. And, Farrer asserts, when we pray, 'the hand of God does somewhat put aside that accursed looking glass, which each of us holds before him, and which shows each of us our own face. Only the day of judgement will strike the glass for ever from our hands, and leave us nowhere reflected but in the pupils of the eyes of God.' " -- David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion: an Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 131. Caliban's judgement is also his saving grace: to see himself reflected in the eyes of Setebos.

The artist becomes both dependent on God and a usurper of God: Caliban is reliant on God to create, yet God is reliant on Caliban in further creation. The choice to create, or to destroy, is as much humanity's as God's.³⁵ There still remains the suffering, however.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?
 Aha, that is the question! Ask, for that,
 What knows -- the something over Setebos
 That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,
 Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.
 There may be something quiet o'er His head,
 Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,
 Since both derive from weakness in some way.

(127-134)

As with Hamlet, the real question becomes that of the suffering, the sea of troubles. In his blindness, Caliban surmises that there may be Something residing over the Creator of the material world, Setebos. But this Something he can only call the "Quiet", a wordless deity who has no regard for, and no interaction with, the created realm, a God he cannot talk about at length. Setebos, on the other hand, partakes in the less-than-happy world, even if out of spite. He shares similarities with Prospero, for both fashion things with "prodigious words". And Caliban links himself now with this fashioning, and

'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,
 Taketh his mirth with make-believes. . .

(168-169)

The highest good in Caliban's life becomes "trying what to do with wit and strength", becomes a *poiêsis*: "to make something", as he concludes. Though there is nothing utilitarian or moral in the making -- as with Setebos, it is arbitrary creation -- and though all work is eventually destroyed, as the example of the sea shows, nevertheless Caliban puts most stock in the ability to make things, in the ability to create and destroy at will. And so in a parody of eucharistic liturgy, Caliban composes a song, and offers it as an appeasement to Setebos, who, though seemingly indifferent to all, is still a God of terror:

³⁵ Cf. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*: "[The] skill in living an ironical artist life apprehends itself as a *God-like geniality*, for which every possible thing is a mere dead creature, to which the free creator, knowing himself to be wholly unattached, feels in no way bound, seeing that he can annihilate as well as create it" (72).

*"What I hate, be consecrate,
To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate
For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?"³⁶*

(276-278)

If you are self-subsisting (thy state = no mate), Caliban queries Setebos indirectly, why do you envy me? Why indeed do you torment me? Caliban thus hopes

That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

(281-283)

But that day is yet to come, for the final stanza which follows these lines depicts a fury from nature, at which Caliban cringes with feigned remorse and reverence, promising to let go the creatures he has captured, so that in turn, by some mercy, "he may 'scape" as well. The poem ends on Caliban's entire theme: trying to escape his condition.

Browning seizes on the tension first presented in *The Tempest* between the act of creation and the concomitant ills of creation. In Shakespeare, that tension is one between Prospero and Caliban. In Browning, that tension expands to one between Setebos and Caliban, indeed between God and humankind, God both as incarnated (Setebos) and unincarnated (the Quiet), and humankind as both created and creator. Though Browning's Caliban arrives at a bent theodicy -- pain and suffering exists for God's sport -- and though he appears to be rebuked by Setebos in the end for these thoughts, his blindness has nevertheless been theologically insightful. For he has clearly been aware that the Creator, by virtue of bringing the material into existence, has brought problems to Himself, and that it is through *poiêsis* that those problems are thereafter dealt with,

³⁶ The consecration and celebration normally associated with the eucharistic feast are purely negative here: that which is hated is to be consecrated; that which is celebrated is a lack. But even in its sarcasm and negativity, Caliban realizes the creative aspect of liturgical response -- a song is still composed. The necessity of such parodic "worship" is the general thrust behind M.M. Bakhtin's thesis in *Rabelais and His World*, (trans. Helene Iswolsky [London: MIT Press, 1968]), what he calls the "carnavalesque upside down" (410). Bakhtin saw that in the irreverent negations there resided the possibility for new birth and creation: "In this individualizing torrent of abusive-laudatory words the dividing lines between persons and objects are weakened; all of them become participants in the carnival drama of the simultaneous death of the old world and the birth of the new" (463).

particularly for humankind. This is why the artist goes on doing art, Caliban's blindness seems to suggest. Caliban is confined to artifice; but as Prospero "pens the drudge / In the hole o' the rock", he also provides the internal void which draws Caliban into uncharted areas. He is penned into a cave, as he is penned into language. But in either case something has been excavated to create space, space that both sets boundaries and opens deep holes. The languages of both Shakespeare and Browning provide the space for such holes, holes into new territory. As Browning shows us, this territory becomes theological. What began as a mere mirror has become something quite other, internal reflections leading to dark spots with no label, to an ineffability called the "Quiet". The frame has not been overcome, and Caliban has escaped no less than Prospero. It is that Caliban takes us to the tain of the mirror, and there to a new kind of "ground".

This "ground" of course has no being of its own. Like the tain, it is a place which allows something to take place, but which itself has no ground of reference. It is a place beyond all speech and metaphor, but which, to speak of, requires metaphor, only to deny it. It is this contradictory "ground" W.H. Auden will try to extend even further, using the metaphors of "the sea" and "the mirror", both of which collapse into one another, as they do upon themselves. For Auden, this *place* is an existential *moment* (space and time coming together), where, and when, one confronts the "Wholly Other" beyond all artifice. Yet, ironically, it is only through artifice, and within its frame, that such a place and such a moment is ever reached, as we shall now see with(in) *The Sea and the Mirror*.

Chapter Three

*The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.*

*Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
It has to face the men of the time and to meet
The women of the time. It has to think about war
And it has to find what will suffice. It has
To construct a new stage. . .*

-- Wallace Stevens¹

Having set borders to a certain descriptive history of ideas (the history of reflective philosophy), and having seen how the poet (Shakespeare and Browning) creates a disturbance to those borders (Caliban), we turn to a work whose borders between "description" and "creation" are consciously blurred. *The Sea and the Mirror* is a response to Shakespeare's play, as its subtitle tells us -- "A Commentary On Shakespeare's *The Tempest*"². But we are forced to ask: is the work rightly a commentary, or a poem? What is Auden attempting, or implying, by merging the critical approach with the creative and imaginative? Is his poetic commentary an explanation of a Shakespearean play, or the furtherance, even the sequel of it? How ought we to view *The Tempest* within a context (*The Sea and the Mirror*) that is so self-consciously an artifice itself? What exactly lies within the borders of this artifice? And does it point to anything outside of these borders? In a close, though hardly exhaustive, exegesis

¹ "Of Modern Poetry", *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 239-240.

² The work was begun in the fall of 1942, when Auden had taken a teaching post at Swathmore College in Pennsylvania, and completed in the middle of February, 1944. It began as an additional epilogue to *The Tempest*, "a play whose conclusion he thought inadequate for its themes" -- Carpenter, 325; Auden writes in "Balaam and His Ass" (*DH*, 128): "*The Tempest*, Shakespeare's last play, is a disquieting work. Like the other three comedies of his late period, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*, it is concerned with a wrong done, repentance, penance, and reconciliation; but, whereas the others all end in a blaze of forgiveness and love -- "Pardon's the word to all" -- in *The Tempest* both the repentance of the guilty and the pardon of the injured seem more formal than real."

of the work, we can see how Auden addresses these questions, how, in crossing boundaries of both analysis and creativity, his "reflection" further defines the kind of poetics we have been shaping thus far.

The title page

We begin at an obvious extremity, the cover page bearing the title, the subtitle, a dedication, and an epigraph. The main title, "The Sea and the Mirror", carries many suggestions of reflexivity, even between the "sea" and the "mirror" themselves. For though at first glance the two appear as opposites -- the one is soft, insubstantial, unpredictable, in constant flux, ever-shifting and mutable, a surface that gives in to depth and three-dimensionality, while the other is hard, substantial, and predictable, in place and fixed, ever-stable and firmly delineated, with a surface flat and two-dimensional; the one has had an enduring legacy as a symbol of chaos and mortality, the other a legacy of self-disclosure; the one a primordial history, elemental and cosmological, the other a cultural history, progressive and civilized -- the two are, at a second glance, reflections of one another. Both are bordered, the one by land, the other by an edge or fashioned frame. Both respond to light: the more light, the more that, potentially, is revealed. Both can and do reveal things, by surface or by depth. And both, as surfaces, can be instruments of reflection -- "a sea like glass", it is said of calm waters. Both the reflecting pool and the reflecting glass share a history of self-revelation.³ Both surfaces can distort, both can deceive, both can be disturbed. Whatever their profound differences, both water and glass can be image makers, and image breakers.

The title alone then prepares us for the reflections to come. The subtitle tells us more specifically that what is to follow is in some sense a reflection of, as it is a reflection on, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Intertextuality, with all the

³ The myth of Narcissus is perhaps the most famous example of the reflecting pool's ability for self-revelation. The more recent "Snow White" fable of Walt Disney has kept the reflecting glass' ability for self-revelation within modern consciousness, with its popular "Mirror, mirror on the wall. . ." episode.

implications this term carries, is plainly announced from the outset.⁴ The dedication ("To James and Tania Stern") tells us little more than who Auden was close to at the time of the writing.⁵ A quote from Emily Brontë is more significant:

And am I wrong to worship where

⁴ The term "intertextuality" has, of course, had an extensive run in modern critical theory since it was first introduced, or at least extrapolated, by Julia Kristeva in her earlier writings (e.g. *Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980]). But the notion of intertextuality is hardly new, if by the notion we mean an interconnectedness of texts, whereby one text is necessarily caught in a nexus of other texts, drawing from, alluding to, or altering, either consciously or unconsciously, those which have come before it (or even are to come after it). The whole midrashic tradition of interpretation is based on such a principle of textual connectedness (see e.g. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Struggle for the Text", in *Midrash and Literature*, eds. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986], 3-18). It is also present in T.S. Eliot's highly influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919): ". . . what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities" (*Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode [London: Faber and Faber, 1975], 38-39). Such "difficulties and responsibilities" are what Harold Bloom focuses on in his *Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), whose theory or "story of intra-poetic relationships" is based on the anxious influence of poets on succeeding generations, forcing strong poets to "misread" one another, "so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (5). Bloom exempts Shakespeare from such anxiety (11), but even an isolated example such as *The Tempest* will show how much Shakespeare relied on and reworked other texts for the construction of his pieces (see Vaughan and Vaughan, 36-49, for the possible sources of *The Tempest*). Intertextuality, then, is not restricted to postmodern criticism. Auden's use of intertextuality in *The Sea and the Mirror* certainly shares features with midrash (the poem is "a commentary"), with Eliot (the poem readjusts the "relations, proportions, and values" of the original while at the same time conforming to its concerns), and with Bloom (the poem clears an imaginative space for itself in its reconstitution of the original). But it goes beyond all of these, as it reflects not only its own, but the original's inadequacies and limits, making a new image in the blank spots of the old, and thereby, in a continuation of mirroring and creating, drawing all texts into a shared space "no metaphors can fill", but, by being drawn in, will go on trying to fill nevertheless. For a clear synopsis of the various approaches to intertextuality which Auden's approach both shares and is set off from, see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality", *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, eds. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3-36. For the way intertextuality works in postmodern fiction, see Hutcheon, 124-140.

⁵ The Sterns were a couple Auden had first met in Paris in 1937. James Stern was a short story writer whom Auden had described as "one of the most moving and original" to appear for a long time (Carpenter, 220-221). They remained life-long friends.

*Faith cannot doubt nor Hope despair
Since my own soul can grant my prayer?
Speak, God of Visions, plead for me
And tell why I have chosen thee.*⁶

This final stanza ends a poem seeking to justify the poet's exchange of reason, wealth, power, glory and pleasure ("These once indeed seemed Beings divine") for an "ever present, phantom thing", the world of imagination. Since the poet has control over her creative thought, her new "God", since she can, therefore, answer her own prayers, she wonders if her new religion -- a religion of Art -- deserves her devotion. Is it right to worship where faith is always constant and hope always secure, because the faith and hope are within a self-contained world, and never transgress the imaginative realm? The poet seems to demur, as if doubt and despair are the very things which gnaw at her conscience. She pleads with this "God of Visions" to plead in turn for her, and tell her why she has renounced the earlier pursuits for a veneration of imagination. "Bring me a vision to justify the vision", the poet in effect asks, uncertain of her chosen sympathies: "Step outside yourself, assume a life of your own, and tell why I choose you above all the rest." Can a vision do this? Can the imagination exceed its own boundaries, take on the status of the divine, and justify itself? The poet is not fully sure, and so must ask, "Am I wrong to worship. . .?" This uncertainty sets off Auden's "commentary", an attempt to answer the question and "tell why".

Already with the title page, the world of artifice is encroaching. The sea and the mirror reflect one another. They give further rise to a commentary, reflecting Shakespeare's revered late play. This, in turn, gives rise to an epigraph from a (late) Romantic writer. In between is a dedication, almost as if to say, "Anything, or anyone, you might point to outside this work is, in effect, caught up in it". Intertextuality is put into play, entwining even those who may stand outside the artifice as neutral observers. Like Prospero, Auden has already drawn a preliminary circle.

⁶ From "Plead For Me", in *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*, ed. C.W. Hatfield (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 209.

The Sea and the Mirror's *general structure*

Like Coleridge in *Kubla Khan*, Auden will weave this circle thrice,⁷ as he structures the main body of the poem neatly into three. On either side of these three main sections he places a Preface and an Postscript, as if to mirror *The Tempest*, with its first scene and Epilogue. The first main section, "Prospero to Ariel", consists of a long monologue, itself divided into three blank verse sections that are followed by shorter refrains, the first two rhymed. In the monologue, Prospero addresses both Ariel and himself, as he takes stock of the play's actions now behind him. In the second section, "The Supporting Cast, Sotto Voce", every other character inhabiting *The Tempest's* island, short of Ariel and Caliban, receive a voice in the form of a poem, each one differing in structure, style, content and length, so as to reflect the respective *personae*. Even peripheral characters like Adrian and Francisco, the Master and Boatswain, get their token say. Following each poem is a standardized refrain spoken by Antonio, whose poem leads off the section, and whom Auden in many ways presents as the most aware of the secondary characters. The section ends with a poem from Miranda, whom Auden presents as the least aware. The third section is a lengthy prose monologue, "Caliban to the Audience", in which Caliban, with the grandiloquence of the later Henry James, addresses various types of supposed theatre-goers. This final section is also divided into three parts, according to those addressed. As bookends, the Preface and the Postscript prop up the tripartite middle. The Preface is subtitled "*The Stage Manager to the Critics*", as if to mark out the two boundaries outside the actual work of art on stage: the stage manager behind the scenes, who controls the running of the play, and the critics in front of the curtain, who judge it. The Preface prepares us for the journey to be taken "on stage". The Postscript, subtitled "*Ariel to Caliban. Echo by the Prompter*", prepares us for the journey off stage. It has three stanzas, each followed by a rhymed echo, ". . . I", the voice of the prompter from the wings, cueing Ariel as he responds diminutively to Caliban's preceding oratorical

⁷ See Chapter 2, 102, footnote 19. Whereas Coleridge's circle is woven around the poet, however, Auden's is woven around the poet's work.

tour de force. The Postscript evaporates as it finishes, as if Ariel himself dematerializes, closing the entire poem with an ephemeral "I". From beginning to end, then, the artifice is elaborate and many-layered.⁸ With the Preface and Postscript, the entire poem also mirrors Shakespeare's craft, and the five Acts upon which it is a suggested "commentary".

The Preface

The Preface takes us behind the stage to the Stage Manager as he addresses the critics upon the end of the performance.⁹ He begins his description of the performance with the imagery of a circus:

The aged catch their breath,
For the nonchalant couple go
Waltzing across the tightrope
As if there were no death
Or hope of falling down;
The wounded cry as the clown
Doubles his meaning, and O
How the dear little children laugh

⁸ Auden had schematized his understanding of the poem's structure in a mirror-like diagram based on Kierkegaardian principles of existence, immediacy and possibility, with existence acting as the middle point, immediacy on its left, and possibility on its right. On the side of immediacy he grouped the sea and Caliban, nature and flesh, and Prospero; on the side of possibility, he grouped art and spirit, mirror and Ariel, and the ego. For a full reproduction of this diagram, see Richard Johnson, *Man's Place* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 47.

⁹ The "stage" is a crucial image not simply for Auden, but, as we know, for Shakespeare. "All the world's a stage", Jaques says in his famous speech (*As You Like It*, II,vii, 139 -166), as he describes the seven "scenes" of the human life. Going behind the stage at the outset suggests there is a marked boundary between performance and reality (See Gerald Nelson, *Changes in Heart: A Study of the Poetry of W.H. Auden* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969], 23-24). But of course the suggestion is a false one, for *all* of life is a stage, the manager will tell us, echoing Jaques, and anticipating Caliban. Stages, staging and staginess are what make up this globe -- a theme at the heart of *The Sea and the Mirror*, as it is at the heart of Shakespeare's craft (and as Iser has theorized in making staging an "anthropological category" in the closing pages of *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, 296-303). Hence we may leave the stage of *The Tempest*, but we enter the "managed" stage of Auden. The coupling of the stage image with that of the critic immediately brings to the foreground the performative nature of the stage's activity. For the critic judges the performance. Prospero's epilogue to *The Tempest* acknowledges that every spectator is a critic with the power to pardon or condemn the performance. The critic also must be unwilling to suspend disbelief, and by appealing to the audience in the manner that he does, Prospero wills disbelief back upon his spectators, and breaks the spell of enchantment. Auden is the critic *par excellence* in this case, since he judges in order to disenchant; but he does so by adding his own epilogue, by creating his own stage and performing his own act. The commentary of the critic becomes a poetic performance.

When the drums roll and the lovely
Lady is sawn in half.

There is no mention of the characters of *The Tempest*, nor is there any direct reference throughout the entire Preface. We begin, instead, as if *The Tempest* has already concluded. Yet we do begin *in medias res*, in the throes of a performance¹⁰ -- here a circus high-wire act. We have left one performance stage for another.¹¹ In the circus arena, it is the "aged" who are first described, as they sit on the edge of their seat in suspense or anticipation, caught in between the lead up to the daring feat and the feat's accomplishment. Children are later mentioned laughing, finding nothing but comedy in the acts of illusion, but it is the adults who understand the balancing act of the circus performance, the balance between life and death. It is they who catch the double meaning of the clown, whose role it is to make us laugh at that which would otherwise make us cry, to disguise the melancholy in the joy, just as the clown's dress and makeup cover over its own sadness. The adults see through both the visual and the verbal artifice, and, having lost the innocence and naiveté of childhood, see "the wounded cry". The loss is prefigured in the "O" of line 7 before the mention of the children, an expletive which is anything but innocent, for it anticipates Antonio's refrain at the end of section II: "*The only One, Creation's O / Dances for Death Alone.*"¹² Like the tightrope walkers dancing before death, the "O" stands on the edge; it is a sigh, a nullity, but also a complete and perfect circle, which death signifies for life, cutting us off like the end of a countdown,

¹⁰ Cf. the Prologue to Shakespeare's *The History of Troilus and Cressida*:

. . .our play
Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,
Beginning in the middle, starting thence away
To what may be digested in a play.

(Ins. 26-29)

¹¹ Cunningham, referring in *In the Reading Gaol* to Dickens' *Hard Times* and its character Sissy Jupe, writes that the circus "stands for art and fiction and the whole tradition of story and metaphor. The Circus people are 'strollers'. They're in a long line of entertainers, clowns, wandering thespians. Sissy's father, the clown, goes in, we're told twice, for 'chaste Shakespearean quips and retorts'. . . Circus life is a life of fictionality" (134). Auden may indeed have had Dickens in mind here in the Preface.

¹² Cf. above, Chapter 2, 102, footnote 19; see below, Chapter 4, for the way the "O" is a central figure to Auden's poetics.

as the "O" does at the end of the seventh line. The children laugh as the "lovely / Lady" is sliced in half -- the macabre dressed up to please -- but their "O" will one day come when the illusion of the trick is known. The performers themselves, however, side neither with the crying adults nor the laughing children; they are "nonchalant", waltzing with a sense of ease and diversion, "As if there were no death", as if there were not even a "hope of falling down".¹³ The performers are caught in the artifice of their performance, and as long as they are performing, as long as they are in the "as if", death is not an option (for death ends their performance), and no "hope" of escape is open to them. The audience, however, are outside the "as if", and must see both life and death in each performance: the tightrope walk (a death-defying feat of skill and bravery), the clown (duplicitous, punning comedy revealing the tragic), magic (the illusion, through smoke and mirrors, of conquering mortality). The Stage Manager's message, then, is evident from the first stanza: creation's "O" will always carry a death at its center, the void which the "O" circumferences. "Critics," he implies, "be aware that the circus (the circle or the ring) performs a dance of death."¹⁴

¹³ Cf. Jean-Luc Marion's discussion in *God Without Being* of "as if", 88-90, 126-128, particularly of the "as if" as suspension and "caducity" (>Latin, *cadere*, to fall), the state of being "liable to fall", or "not being able to avoid falling" (note 21, 222). Hans Vaihinger has worked out a philosophy of this suspension in *Philosophy of 'As if': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind* (trans. C.K. Ogden [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1924]), to which Iser devotes an entire section (130-157) in *The Fictive and the Imaginary*. See also further below, Chapter 4, 190 and footnote 24.

¹⁴ Auden had written a play in 1933 called "The Dance of Death" (*The Complete Works of W.H. Auden -- Plays 1928-1938*, ed. Edward Mendelson [London: Faber and Faber, 1989], 81-107). It is a tendentious play, with socialist politics emerging in the typically unabashed style that was common to Auden at this time (the play ends with the figure of Karl Marx appearing to deliver the final line). The play opens:

Announcer: We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class.

Chorus [behind curtain]: Middle class.

Announcer: Of how its members dream of a new life.

Chorus: We dream of new life.

Announcer: But secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them. We show you that death as a dancer.

Interestingly, Auden placed half of the performing actors not on stage, but in the auditorium, to deliver their lines as if part of the audience. The *Dancer* too first enters through the audience. A decade later, Auden would again explore the boundaries between stage and audience, but here with a much more refined sense of how the "stage", the "O", encompasses its beholders. Social politics have given way to the existential and religious problems behind creation and performance.

The "O" also begins the second stanza, and initiates a change in tone from the atmosphere of the circus to abstract questions of power and existence: "O what authority gives / Existence its surprise?" The surprises that accompany the events of a circus are broadened to encompass life's existence in general, an existence which is always short of certainty. Is there a source, a controlling power behind the vicissitudes of our existence? Modern science would like to think so, and is content to answer that all our internal problems, our psychological demons, are simply tricks played within ourselves, and thus curable through scientific methodologies which expose the tricks; that the great moments of human longing, desire, passion and bravado serve, according to science, as anodynes (taking *away* pains), and that thus our wounds are very often psychosomatic; that the surprises in our existence, those unplanned moments of song, sugar, fire, etc., are not simply contingent, but have careful explanations, a "genius for taking pains" that grounds them in our own will. "But", questions the narrator, "how does one think up a habit?" There seems to be something habitual, even inherent, in human existence which science cannot pin on human or psychological construct. Explanations for the things we most often encounter in surprise elude us. Our existence remains ambivalent: we stand in wonder, and yet in terror. The circus act is a transparent mask to the disquieting uncertainties beneath our acts of life.

The stage of art, as expressed in the third stanza, also exposes these uncertainties, as its "heroes roar and die" like the Shakespearean tragic heroes (Hamlet and Lear, for example) who wrestle with choice, particularly moral choice. Art opens "the fishiest eye"¹⁵ to our worldly struggles, and invites us to the heated chambers of its performance, as to a tragic catharsis in the Aristotelian sense. Wet with sympathetic tears,¹⁶ we sit before a completed performance, and wonder

how
Shall we satisfy when we meet,

¹⁵ An adumbration of Caliban, and his ability to see a wide spectrum? See above, Chapter 2, 111, and below, this chapter, 159ff.

¹⁶ Cf. ln.6, "the wounded cry"; so too ln.21, "the fishiest eye"; see also Derrida on tears and sight in *Memoirs of the Blind*, 122-129.

Between the Shall-I and I-will,
The lion's mouth whose hunger
No metaphor can fill?

In the state of uncertainty, between a questioning mind ("Shall-I") and a resolved mind (I-Will), how do we go about actively seeking and satisfying those moments which bring us before the dangers and terrors of this world, like a lion-tamer with his head in the maw of the beast? For no metaphors can fill that cavity -- language is at a loss before the jaws of the unknown and terrifying.¹⁷ Art forces us into the dark or fiery places where speech is inadequate but heroism required. How do we respond in such places? How do we prove able amid such terror? We hear again Brontë's echo: "*tell why I have chosen thee.*"

The *Preface's* final stanza attempts to answer this question, but with another question:

Well, who in his own backyard
Has not opened his heart to the smiling
Secret he cannot quote?

Who, back home from the circus tent or the theatre, has not stood honestly and nakedly before an ineffable experience, certain but untranslatable, and smiled in its face? The poet and dramatist come the closest to any translation, but even they must admit to their inadequacies. The stanza continues by telling us that "world of fact", as open to all, and as studied by the scientist, is in fact "insubstantial stuff", as Shakespeare well knew.¹⁸ Beyond this insubstantiality, on the other side of the wall where our existence confronts its non-existence, "the rest is silence" (*Hamlet*, V,ii,347). We meet that silence in the ripeness of our maturity, ready and prepared, as Edgar in *King Lear* states it (V,ii,9-11): "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither; / Ripeness is

¹⁷ Cf. Derrida's discussion of the Greek notion of *khōra* (place, spacing, receptacle) in "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", trans. Ken Frieden, *Languages of the Unsayable*, eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 34-38; and "*Khōra*", trans. Ian McLeod, *On The Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 88-127.

¹⁸ Prospero in *The Tempest*, IV,i, 146-163; Theseus' speech on imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V,i, 2-22; Jaques in *As You Like It*, II,vii, 139-166, e.g.

all." Our silence in non-existence stands ever present before us;¹⁹ our maturity is our ripeness within the silence, ready to fall to the unknown.²⁰

Auden has drawn directly from Kierkegaard in giving voice to the Stage Manager here. In a passage from *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard writes:

Thanks! And thanks again, to whoever holds out to one who has been assaulted and left naked by life's sorrows, holds out to him the leaf of the word with which to hide his misery. Thanks to you, great Shakespeare!, you who can say everything, everything, everything exactly as it is -- and yet why was this torment one you never gave voice to? Was it perhaps that you kept it to yourself, like the beloved whose name one still cannot bear the world to mention? For a poet buys this power to utter all the grim secrets of others at the cost of a little secret he himself cannot utter, and a poet is not an apostle, he casts devils out only by the power of the devil.²¹

So, as in the third stanza, art opens the eye to "the Flesh and the Devil", who provide the purging heat. And yet, paradoxically, good art leads us, by the aid of these demons, to a divine silence, to the other side of the stage's wall where language and articulation fall mute. Again Kierkegaard:

The tragic hero, the darling of ethics, is a purely human being, and is someone I can understand, someone all of whose undertakings are in the open. If I go further I always run up against a paradox, the divine and the demonic; for silence is both of these. It is the demon's lure, and the more silent one keeps the more terrible the demon becomes; but silence is also divinity's communion with the individual.²²

Auden's Stage Manager prepares the critics -- those who are out to make judgements -- to contemplate a journey which the play (*The Tempest*), but also the commentary (the rest of the poem *The Sea and the Mirror*), ultimately will lead us to: the journey beyond the wall of artifice, to the place where there can only be silence. This, Auden suggests, in concert with Kierkegaard, is a divine place. But it is well off the stage, well off the page. Or, it is in their interstices.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 289: "The 'ending' which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a *Beings-towards-the-end* [*Sein zum Ende*] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. 'As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die.' " See the entire section "Dasein's Possibility of Being-A-Whole, and Being-Towards-Death", 279-311.

²⁰ On Auden's use of the image of ripeness here, see Erica Riggs, "W.H. Auden as Seriocomic Critic", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 37: 2 (1991), 218-219.

²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1985), 90.

²² *Ibid.*, 114-115.

By beginning with a stage manager, Auden purposely situates his "commentary" behind the scenes, and challenges the critics, or the readers, to contemplate the line between artifice and the reality outside of it. "What Auden is asking us to do", writes Gerald Nelson, "is to be aware from the very beginning. . .of the possibilities inherent in the relationship between life and art, to be aware of the narrow boundary between illusion and reality."²³ By drawing attention to the curtain itself, and to the separating "wall" it creates between the performance and our own existence, Auden sets us up for the characters to follow, all of whom consider their existence after the play and away from the stage. Their thoughts are all contemplation, their musings all without action.²⁴ As critics in the audience, we become freed from the expectations of any theatrical outcome, and become "active participants in what is to come."²⁵

I -- Prospero to Ariel

What comes next is Prospero's considerations of his journey home to Milan. These he addresses to Ariel, his faithful but now free servant.

Stay with me, Ariel, while I pack, and with your first free act
Delight me leaving. . .

Prospero's tone is both reflective and sombre.²⁶ His own freedom to return home is fraught with uncertainty. Ariel's freedom has forced him to regard unequivocally the meaning of his unfettered condition: "I am glad I have freed you / So at last I can really believe I shall die." Ariel has been vital for him, a way to keep life active even amid death. Now, on his own, Prospero must face

²³ Nelson, 26.

²⁴ Anthony Hecht, *The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W.H. Auden* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 244.

²⁵ Nelson, 29.

²⁶ Many have attributed this tone to the autobiographical lament behind Prospero's entire speech: Auden's relationship to Chester Kallman, a relationship which, because of the latter's infidelities, had devastated Auden and his sense of having found the ideal lover or "spouse" -- Carpenter, 325-326; Davenport-Hines, 222-223. Though admitting the allusions to Kallman in Prospero's poem (Carpenter, 325), Auden himself would have found any stress on the autobiographical elements distasteful, for he viewed literary confessors as "contemptible, like beggars who exhibit their sores for money", adding, "but not so contemptible as the public that buys their books" (*DH*, 99).

the brunt of both his existence and, by extension, his non-existence, his self and his not-self. The animation and drapery of his art are behind him, and he is left to confront the existential nakedness of his being. Here, his crafts and devices are valueless:

But now all these heavy books are no use to me any more, for
 Where I go, words carry no weight: it is best,
 Then, I surrender their fascinating counsel
 To the silent dissolution of the sea
 Which misuses nothing because it values nothing;

Away from the stage, outside the margins of the text, there is only an economy of silence.²⁷ His books, holding currency and profitability at one time, must now disperse into the oblivion of the sea. For language ultimately "carries no weight": upon the waters of unbrokered existence, words are without coinage; weightless, they do not sink, but break up, float adrift, and dissolve into the mutability of the sea, an "afterword" to life's play. Prospero, who has traded on his books for a good while, first with his brother Alonso, leading to his banishment, then with Caliban, leading to his lordship, then with the whole of the shipwrecked party, leading to his reinstatement as duke, finds, "when he learns the price is pegged to his valuation", that "he is being ruined". All his overvaluing of his "gift in dealing with shadows" carries the heavy price of its cessation. The artifice comes to its boundary. And so too his very being ("at last I can really believe I shall die"). Upon the sea, to which he is preparing to go, his existence meets its devalued side, non-existence -- for the sea "values nothing". Into this self-silence he releases himself by his own demands, and by the help of the audience's (and Auden's) good hands.

In this released state, the aged Prospero has aged to existential awareness. "When I woke into my life . . . I was not what I seemed", he reflects. He was,

²⁷ See Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy", *Writing and Difference*, 262-273. Cf. also T.S. Eliot's "Death by Water" in "The Waste Land" (*The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1934-1971], 46):

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
 Forgot the cry of the gulls, and the deep sea swell
 And the profit and loss.

(lms. 312-314)

rather, a character in a Shakespearean drama, a dream, an illusion. But now individuality has marshalled its offence: "The gross insult of being a mere one among many."²⁸ Beyond the bounds of the play, he is forced to turn and face his self, to come to new awareness:

Now, Ariel, I am that I am, your late and lonely master,
Who knows now what magic is:--the power to enchant
That comes from disillusion.

"I am that I am", the great existential crisis, Descartes' *sum* substantiated with nothing other than *sum*, self mirrored in self. We cannot help but think of Prospero's God-like assumption here, for indeed Prospero has been God-like throughout *The Tempest*; but the "I am" is late and lonely now, and its sovereign power to enchant has proven dependent on the disillusion it now faces.²⁹ This is a sobering realization: the power of illusion comes only as illusion stands over against a clearly defined sense of reality. Actors must have an audience in order to be defined as actors (for actors acting by themselves are in no position to be judged as acting, and thus in no position to "capture" through performance).³⁰

²⁸ Cf. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1989), 115-120; *Postscript*, Vol. I, 585.

²⁹ Cf. Exodus, 3.13-14: "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'' (RSV). The critical literature on these verses is endless. What they suggest for Prospero is certainly some divine or sacred link, for Auden had elsewhere written: "The impression made upon the imagination by any sacred being is of an overwhelming but indefinable importance -- an unchangeable quality, an Identity, as Keats said: I-am-that-I-am is what every sacred being seems to say" (*DH*, 55). But it is in great irony that Prospero chooses his words here, for in all his own suggestion of divinity, he is no *more* than the reductive tautology of his rhetoric and self-naming, and no *less* than an "I am" who must relinquish his mastery and face his annulment (lms. 10-11). Thomas Altizer, in his provocative *Genesis and Apocalypse* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1990), offers the most radical theological assessment of Yahweh's self-naming, one appropriate to Prospero's condition here. He writes, for example: "If I AM is the self-naming of the absolutely new, that self-naming is the self-naming of death, the naming of that death which occurs in the revelation of I AM. . ." (42); or "[Incarnation is] a realization of the very center of the Godhead, and if that center is "I" and "I" alone, it is simultaneously "I AM NOT" and "I AM NOT" alone, a simultaneity which is actually realized in the incarnation. . ." (113). On other treatments of the possible negations in Exodus 3.14, see Marion, 73-74; Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 54 (as noted by Marion, 215); and Robert P. Carroll, "Strange Fire: Abstract of Presence Absent in the Text Meditations on Exodus 3", *JSOT*, 61 (1994), 45-58.

³⁰ As the theatre director Peter Brook writes in his eminent book on drama, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968): "The only thing that all forms of theatre have in common is the need for an audience. This is more than a truism: in the theatre the audience completes the steps of

The stage must be held separate from the spectators. The power to enchant only comes from disillusion since making art always brings with it its opposite, that which is unmade; since illusion must arise from somewhere, its obverse. The curtain must fall, the stage lights must blacken, and we the audience, who have been an audience in order for the play to be a play, must return home to our own selves. For every island there must be a Milan. The performance has only been an "echo" and a "mirror", and every echo and every mirror has a disillusioned source: the one shouting into the valley, the one standing before the mirror, the ticket holder. Art illusions, but by that very fact it also disillusions, and brings one to selfhood: "All we are not stares back at what we are."³¹ Being regards non-being. "*Hold up your mirror, boy*", Prospero says, for the truth will accompany it. The truth -- "I am that I am", the disenchanting self.

As Prospero becomes self-aware, he realizes that "*Nature as / In truth she is for ever*" is difficult to behold. The nakedness of our being, which art shows us by being, ironically, artificial (all we are not staring back at what we are), is something most tend to miss altogether ("*To those who are not true, / A statue with no figleaf has / A pornographic flavour*"), or to avoid by turning to neutral topics ("*Such as pictures in this room, / Religion or the Weather*"). But Prospero tells Ariel to "*Be frank about our heathen foe*", and not to dampen our dark, primitive side. The "*loud beast*" whom he refers to here is, of course, Caliban, whom Prospero sees as he stares in the "calm eyes" of Ariel's mirror. But it is a necessary beast, and one that, paradoxically, is critical for civilization.³² For even the "*Pope or Caesar*", both of whose worlds have since crumbled, does not know the full price of self-knowledge and awareness. Prospero is just beginning to see it. Caliban, for his part, has seen it all along.

creation" (142).

³¹ Recall Auden words in his collection of essays "The Well of Narcissus": "It is impossible consciously to approach a mirror without composing or 'making' a special face, and if we catch sight of our reflection unawares we rarely recognize ourselves. I cannot read my face in the mirror because I am already obvious to myself" (*DH*, 104 -- as quoted above, Chapter 1, 37, footnote 7). Cf. Lacan, above, Chapter 1, 79-82.

³² Cf. Nietzsche: "Oh this insane, pathetic beast -- man! What ideas he has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what *bestiality of thought* erupts as soon as he is prevented just a little from being a *beast in deed!*" (*On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 529).

As the address to Ariel continues in the second section of his speech, Prospero realizes his plight is not unique. All the players on the island, the "extravagant children", have come to face their "I am", have "been soundly hunted / By their own devils into their human selves". These we will hear speak in the second section of the poem, though *sotto voce*, that is, in undertones (for apart from Antonio, who claims to see clearly through the smoke, the others have not fully come to perceive the disillusionment). As the bedeviling selves haunt the island mortals, as these mortals have "swaggered out of the sea like gods" only to return to it as individuals fallen in their opposite, so even the island spirits have not escaped their counterpart. Prospero implicates Ariel in the disgraces of Caliban, for by giving in to the absolute devotion demanded by Prospero, Ariel helped to create the rebellion of the enslaved young Caliban.

We did it, Ariel, between us; you found on me a wish
 For absolute devotion; result -- his wreck
 That sprawls in the weeds and will not be repaired:
 My dignity discouraged by a pupil's curse,
 I shall go knowing and incompetent into my grave.

Prospero knows now his earlier weakness in succumbing to Ariel's "charm", knows Caliban has been treated with injustice, knows that appearances always belie a negative counterpart, that the "sound committee man / Has murder in this heart", and that Ariel will always have Caliban at his heels. But his address is still to Ariel, his self-awareness winking through the last gasps of partnership with the man of the mirror, and the man in the mirror, himself in the play. Prospero is one on the threshold of the self. He sees behind his own artifice, but still is tied in part to Ariel's makings, and to the characters of his previous world, *The Tempest*.

His own journey through his previous existence in the play can be seen in the three stanzas of the second refrain. The first stanza: "*Sing first that green remote Cockaigne*" -- literally, that (land of) sugar cake, an imaginary land of luxurious and idle living, the Island before Sycorax or perhaps Prospero inhabited it, an Island which, however, is still not perfect ("*sad young dogs and stomach aches*"). The second stanza: "*Tell then of witty angels who / Come only to the beasts*" -- tell, that is, of how the divine or preternatural realm has mixed

with the common, natural realm, and how the divine has not brought perfection. The third stanza: "*Wind up, though, on a moral note: -- / That Glory will go bang. . .*" -- that justice will be meted out in the end, whether poorly or well, despite all the duplicity. So in like manner have the events within *The Tempest* taken place, to which Ariel, upon departing, is to "*wink*", as if in acknowledgement of his hand in them, but also of their lighthearted, sporting treatment.

These three stanzas also can be read with Christianity in mind, as if to reflect the Christian story as it came to the Roman Empire (the Caesar and Rome of the previous refrain), or Christian theology as it has been seen throughout Western history (the Roman Pope of the previous refrain). Thus, the pre-Christian Rome was a land of growing dissipation ("*Cockaigne*"), until "*witty angels*" announced the arrival of a new kingdom ("*Heirs Apparent*"), which was quickly kicked out of shape by the masses ("*many a sore bottom*"), but which will right itself with a "*bang*", as it did when, ironically, the religious establishment ("*the sound committee man*") crucified the threatening Prophet ("*honest rogues*"). But such Christian reference is far from explicit, and Prospero sees it as a story to be viewed askance; should Ariel catch sight of "*a living eye*", one who has seen through all the hypocrisy and has survived its murderous intentions, he is simply to offer a playful, knowing wink. Art is not in the business of preaching or dogmatism. Human depravity is its better domain: "no one but you [Ariel] is reliably informative on hell".³³ There is in Prospero, as indeed in Auden, the idea that the divine we must face is acknowledged by art, "winked at" by art, but never directly expressed or manifested by art.³⁴

³³ Cf. William Blake's comment about Milton: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it" (from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", *Blake -- Complete Writings*, 150).

³⁴ Auden, "Postscript" Christianity and Art", *DH*, 458: "I sometimes wonder if there is not something a bit questionable, from a Christian point of view, about all works of art which make overt Christian references. They seem to assert that there is such a thing as a Christian culture, which there cannot be. Culture is one of Caesar' things." And, "The only kind of literature which has gospel authority is the parable, and parables are secular stories with no overt religious reference." For Auden's own parabolic and indirect approach, see below, Chapter 5, 202ff., and

The third and last section of the speech voices the sobering reality of the path to be forged ahead beyond the ideals, fancies or padding of art. The "tremendous journey" Prospero feels he has dreamt, where observations and imaginations have been stored up for the sake of art, has given way to the actual journey of hard and lonely ways. "And now," Prospero says, "in my old age, I wake, and this journey really exists." There *is* some kind of reality beyond his earlier fictionalizing, a journey to be taken "inch by inch, / Alone on foot",

Through a universe where time is not foreshortened,
No animals talk, and there is neither floating nor flying.

The boundary between what he has made and what he now discovers becomes blurred for Prospero, as what is yet to be made becomes a difficult excursion no longer holding the security of a previous set piece, Shakespeare's play. Prospero is thrown into the existential open, where if he is to survive, he must make things anew, though with the added palpable knowledge that behind all his making is a deathly silence ("disillusion"). His destination is Milan, a stubborn place, full of life's unbearables which demand bearing, lacking the ironies which softened the unspeakable, and where words are inadequate because words are part of the illusion of floating and flying. This then will be a silent place. And the journey there will be a lone one, sailing "out over seventy thousand fathoms"³⁵, with no form, no frame, no language to stabilize him, other than his own naked self, which itself is destabilized. For "if I speak", he fully realizes, "I shall sink without a sound / Into unmeaning abysses."³⁶ In an ironic twist to Peter walking on water towards the Master, reliance on the word becomes an abysmal fate. As if now over the poststructuralist waters of current literary

John G. Blair's chapter "The Poetics of Parable" in *The Poetic Art of W.H. Auden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 35-63.

³⁵ In regard to this phrase, Edward Callan (282) points out: "Auden, like Kierkegaard, commonly uses this metaphor of 'the peril of sailing on the deep' to symbolize the existentialist anxiety in contrast to unexamined assumptions of bourgeois complacency." Callan refers, as one of several examples, to a passage from *Concluding Scientific Postscript, Vol. I*, 204: "Without risk, no faith. . . I must continually. . . see to it that in the objective uncertainty I am 'out over 70,000 fathoms of water' and still have faith". See also *Postscript, Vol. I*, 140, 232, 288; for a comprehensive list of the reference, see *Vol. II*, 218, note 173.

³⁶ Cf. Altizer: "Nothing is more distinctive in the hearing of I AM than the hearing of an abyss, and if the actual hearing of abyss occurs only in the horizon of the self-naming of I AM, that is a horizon grounded in abyss, and grounded in an actually heard abyss, an abyss that here and here alone is fully and actually spoken" (49).

theory, words always give way under foot.³⁷ But the void to which one may sink is not a nihilistic one. It is in such a void that the divine may be encountered. And such a possibility is a new revelation for Prospero: "I never suspected the way of truth / Was a way of silence. . .". And Ariel gave no forewarning (though Caliban did, unheard). Prospero now must make his departure over such waters, alone. He leaves Ariel to sing out, but not merely with "smoother song": sing, he says, "Of separation, / Of bodies and death", sing to one anxious in love and out, as with fear and trembling Prospero makes his watery way home to the silent core of his being, the journey of self, made in the mirror, and unmade on the sea,

*The silent passage
Into discomfort.*

II -- The Supporting Cast, Sotto Voce

The middle section of the "commentary" involves "The Supporting Cast", all those who have stood in Prospero's circle of magic. If Prospero represents the threshold of a new discovery outside the bounds of artifice, the supporting cast, caught in the middle, represent the interior of those bounds. Because they have been enchanted, and in some sense still are enchanted, they speak "Sotto Voce", in a hushed or whispered voice. Their reflections are muted, as if speaking from within a sealed but transparent cage, from which they cannot escape. And thus their world is highly artificial: the second section becomes a cornucopia of poetic display, in which poetic forms of every sort spill forth, waxed and polished with precision as if to show distinctly that the fruit is indeed plastic but perfectly moulded. Of the ten poems that make up the section, each differs in length, style, form, meter, rhyme, diction and tone, relative to the characteristics of each speaker.

³⁷ Of the many analyses of poststructuralism within recent literary theory, or the more Derridean term, "deconstruction", see for example Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: theory and criticism after structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Brighton: Harvester's Press, 1985), 72-105; and Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: theory and practice* (London: Routledge, revised ed. 1991).

Their order is also highly significant. Antonio begins, and caps his poem with a formulaic refrain that will follow every other poem. After him is a succession of cast members alternating between a *courtly* figure and a "low" figure: *Ferdinand*, *Stephano*, *Gonzalo*, *Adrian* and *Francisco*, *Alonso*, *Master* and *Boatswain*, *Sebastian*, *Trinculo*, and *Miranda*. Antonio claims to stand outside this group, for reasons that will soon be evident, and so the group from *Ferdinand* to *Miranda* makes up a kind of circular arrangement, with *Alonso* at one half, and *Ferdinand* and *Miranda* at another half, though not yet joined (kept apart by Antonio). Lucy McDiarmid sees this circle as a suggestion of "the emotional community and aesthetic harmony of a wedding feast", where the wedding party and guests are joined in a ring of dance, much like the wedding masque in *The Tempest* itself.³⁸ But as Antonio's refrains act as links between each person, they also subvert each relation, and keep the characters apart from one another (much as the thought of Caliban disrupts the wedding masque in *The Tempest* -- IV, i, 139-142). Here, "Auden has his wedding cake and eats it: he includes a wedding feast, and he includes characters who undermine it."³⁹ But the image of the circle goes beyond that of the wedding feast. It relates to the circle of artifice which Auden has been describing and exemplifying throughout his "commentary", "*Creation's O*", as Antonio will describe it at the very end of the section. This circle, wrought from the stuff in the artists trunk, the stuff of play and performance, as we saw in the *Preface* with the circus "ring", is both complete and incomplete: complete in that its boundary encircles with closure, incomplete in that the centre of this boundary is a nullity, a void. It is Antonio, the foil of *The Tempest*, who claims a thorough and intimate knowledge of this nullity, as he continues to act the foil here in the "commentary" that follows. But Antonio's foil is provisional, inasmuch as he is equally a link as he is a severance. His pride at knowing the abyss and standing outside the circle is dampened by his always being, irrevocably and by necessity, within the circle (just as "The lion's mouth whose hunger / No metaphor can fill" of the *Preface* is, paradoxically, described by a metaphor of the lion's mouth). For all the

³⁸ McDiarmid, 106.

³⁹ Ibid.

heightened self-awareness Antonio boasts, his words are still "sotto voce", caught within artifice. He may wish to subvert, but in doing so he links as well. And he links not only the supporting cast; in his acknowledgement of the void outside of art, though acknowledged from within an extremely artificial space, Antonio also links Prospero, who reflects on the threshold of his art, with Caliban, who reflects outside of Prospero's art. It is natural, then, that Antonio should lead the middle section.

As all the pigs have turned back into men
And all the sky is auspicious and the sea
Calm as a clock, we can all go home again.

Antonio's terza rima sets the scene for the entire section: the cast are on the boat home to Italy, the weather is the very opposite of a tempest, calm and serene, and the travellers are all about the deck of the craft, meditative and at ease. There is no action to accompany their inner dialogues, only contemplative musing. The magic spells have worn off, the "pigs" have resumed their normal human form,⁴⁰ and thoughts turn back toward the island as much as they turn forward toward the sea journey. For Antonio, this picture is all too much a fairy tale, as the two lovers sit kissing, "silhouetted against the sails" like a grand Hollywood ending, as the comical fool (Trinculo) has gained some worth, as the stock butler (Stephano) has tidied himself, and as the courtly passengers (Alonso, Sebastian) have come off their high horse and learned humility. The microcosmic world of the Island, now the microcosmic world of the ship, is a neatly arranged vignette, perfect in its felicity and fortune.

⁴⁰ A clear allusion to Homer's Circe episode in Book X of *The Odyssey* (trans. Richmond Lattimore [New York: Harper & Row, 1965, 1967], 162):

'So I spoke, and Circe walked on out through the palace,
holding her wand in her hand, and opened the doors to the pigsty,
and drove them out. They looked like nine-year-old porkers. They stood
ranged and facing her, and she, making her way through their
ranks, anointed each of them with some other medicine,
and the bristles, grown upon them by the evil medicine Circe
had bestowed upon them before, now fell away from them,
and they turned back once more into men, younger than they had been
and taller for the eye to behold and handsomer by far.'

Antonio cannot help but be cynical, and as he turns to address his "Brother Prospero", he sneers at the seductive power with which the entire scene has come together: "given a few / Incomplete objects and a nice warm day, / What a lot a little music can do. . . Antonio, sweet brother, has to laugh." Prospero's artistic kingship has been won by producing the "ever-after", according to which all the cast members have found awareness of their own proper place through guilt, humility, thwarted schemes and folly, and for which they are now ever-grateful. But for someone like Antonio, who can see through the ruse, Prospero's clear manipulation of the outcome has invited his own demerits, and made his "peace" and "greatness" things rather to be scoffed at. He deserves no merit because, though a self-appointed magician, he has had no choice in his appointment: he is caught in his magic, bound to his artifice. His wand will always repair itself; incomplete objects will always come together in an appearance of wholeness; order will always emerge from the chaotic "sea", because the power and desire to create order are for Prospero irrepressible. And they are so because the likes of Antonio remain forever on the scene:

as long as I choose

To wear my fashion, whatever you wear
Is a magic robe; while I stand outside
Your circle, the will to charm is still there.⁴¹

Antonio, in his unrestrained egoism, claims that his will to undo order and let chaos reign governs all Prospero's actions and creations. The robes of disorder, rebellion, sedition and subversion will always trump the vestments of charm, even though charm may appear to win out in the end. The circle, though looking complete, remains broken (as Antonio's poem attempts to manifest by its careful placement among the rest). Still driven by a malicious envy, Antonio's one-upmanship finds expression here in his self-proclaimed role of the antithesis from which all charms gain their charm: "As I exist, so you shall be denied". Prospero, despite his claim to be free and no longer to need Ariel's freedom (*Prospero to Ariel*, ln.101), is, by Antonio's account, denied free-will and choice,

⁴¹ The prodigal son and elder brother theme (Luke 15.11-32) is certainly apparent here, with the "pigs" of the first line and the "robe" in these lines ("Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him" -- Luke 15.22).

especially to be anything other than the magic-maker, the "melancholy mentor", the knowing one who cannot participate in the game. Having "grown up" into the artist, having become "adult in his pride", the supposed parent of society, Prospero is caught in the negating space between fabricated order and inexorable disorder, between suspended time and real time. As with the circular face of a clock, he must watch the outer tip of the clock's hands, as on the one hand they outline the perfect circle, and on the other they manifest the relentless and ineluctable march of time. He can never rest unanxiously at the middle point which controls the hands, "the center / Time turns on when completely reconciled". That place is the sea when "Calm as a clock", as Antonio describes it in the opening stanza, the suspended time of art. But Prospero the adult knows too well that the sea can be a raging tempest. He knows too much ever to befit ("become") or enter the "green occluded pasture", the framed world of idyllic or idealized art, the "Cockaigne" of his own poem -- knows too much to enter it innocently or charmed. His brother Antonio is always there to remind him of unoccluded reality, the space outside the circle, which the hands of the clock point to beyond their perimeter.

Like the twelve stanzas of his poem, Antonio's refrains all address Prospero. Their framework is consistent: five lines, each ending in the same word or phrase -- "Prospero", "my own", "know", "Antonio", and "alone", and all ending, conveniently, on the rhymed vowel "O". Taken together, the words make up the essence of what each refrain is basically saying: "Prospero, [only does] my own [self] know Antonio alone". Neither you, nor any artistic construction, can know it or convey it. The refrains, then, respond cynically to the poems they follow. In the first refrain following his own poem, Antonio tries to further undercut his brother: "*Your all is partial, Prospero*". The world of art and making is always bound by frame, by the limitations of imagination, and thus to partiality (in all senses). Antonio's will, however, as he stands outside the circle, is all his own. Since Prospero's love (partiality) is towards the ordering of art, he shall never know Antonio, who, being in true existential independence, has the only freedom of will. "*I am I, Antonio*," he says, in response to Prospero's "I am that I am". Both remarks mirror a self-awareness;

but they also differ from each other. Prospero's version mirrors the whole unit of being, subject and verb together: "I am" what (or in order that) "I am". The emphasis is on existential being in the active (verbal) sense. Antonio's version mirrors simply the pronoun, using the verb as a mere copula: "I" am "I". The emphasis is on the subject, the ego, on existentiality in the less active (nominal) sense. This emphasis corresponds well to Antonio's selfish concern, his egotistical pride which does not let him see his own duplicity. For in all the talk of self-awareness, of freedom from constraint, of existential solitude, of self-determination -- "*By choice myself alone*" -- Antonio is still very much bound to the constraints of artifice he purports to stand apart from. His refrains, regular as poetry can be, belie his very claims. They may see behind the curtain veiling Prospero's tricks, and in front of the curtain dividing the stage from reality, but they themselves are not beyond the stage. They are caught up within the performance like all the rest; they are the black threads binding the supporting cast together. Antonio's weakness is in his hypocrisy: he is not self-conscious enough to realize or acknowledge his own complicity.⁴²

Ferdinand's poem is a Petrarchan sonnet, and, perhaps, most difficult in meaning. Its obscure qualities lie in its enigmatic syntax, where antecedents and appositions are questionable, carrying varied possibilities, where epithets confuse with other syntactical units, and where commas divide up words and phrases ambiguously. Such uncertainties are not the result of poor craftsmanship, however. They are intentionally designed to create the sense of a young person in love, whose mind is swimming with images that merge together and phrasings that overlap each other, a mind that can articulate only vaguely, with fluid, sometimes inaccessible meaning. Ferdinand is a prince smitten by the raptures

⁴² Gerald Nelson reads Auden as putting Prospero and Antonio in artistic opposition, where Prospero, having put aside art as "an attempt to be honest", now faces "life with no power but his own ignorance"; whereas Antonio, having picked up Prospero's magic cloak, now becomes "the actor who has gone mad and believes he is the role" (33-34). He sums up the two sides: "Prospero, the one-time artist who has begun to recognize the true value of both his art and himself, setting out on his silent quest for truth; and Antonio, the would-be artist, but in a totally negative sense, dependent on the attention of others to save him from really seeing himself" (34). However one takes Antonio's role, he is certainly more aware than all the others he is grouped with. His folly is not an inability to see the artistic stratagems, but to deny any alliance with them.

of romance. He cannot see past his loved one. Nor can he find meaningful words to adequately describe her. He begins with a mixture of nouns, pronouns and adjectives -- "Flesh, fair, unique and you" -- which lead, through a series of more modifiers, including his own physical expression ("that my kiss"), to "Miranda" in the second line. The first word of the poem is indicative of Ferdinand's initial passionate state -- "Flesh". He is caught by the sheer physicality of his feelings, even though he has previously sworn to uphold his and his lover's chastity: "I would smile at no other promise than touch, taste, sight." But Miranda soon becomes a "solitude / Where my omissions are", a strange phrase, and no more clarified standing on its own than connected to "retained as I do this" (and even less when connected to "still possible" and "still good"). For omissions to "be" or "be retained" is an oddly paradoxical notion, since omissions are things that are lacking. What lacking things are retained in the presence of his solitude, Miranda? The sonnet never fully tells us (a lack then of articulation, perhaps). If we take "omissions" as the failures to do as one should, then Ferdinand is confessing his dismissal of all his responsibilities in exchange for his love. But we can never be certain, as we can never be certain about numerous other lines and phrases in the poem ("as I do this", "as you enrich them", "my cause", "to bless as world is offered world", etc.). We do get a certain sense of epithets piled up upon epithets, and some of these are directly significant. Miranda is called "Dear Other", denoting that, unlike Narcissus, and probably Antonio, Ferdinand's love is directed at someone else, an important requirement, he seems to say, for any true love (self-love alone not being adequate or preferential). The final three capitalized epithets (if they are indeed meant as epithets to Miranda) in the last line show that Ferdinand has moved from carnal passions to a more abstract consideration of his lover, one where she becomes the perfect Time, the perfect Place, an ethereal Light to be seen by, warmed by, and perhaps illumined by.⁴³ She becomes, that is, a self-contained

⁴³ McDiarmid takes it further to suggest that "Ferdinand's vocatives show a clear sequence of ideas from erotic attraction to a metaphysical dependence on Miranda for completeness" (107). But a "metaphysical dependence" is certainly stretching matters. Moreover, his words hardly show a "clear sequence of ideas", however one construes them.

world, which the larger outside world pleads for, but which it cannot access, unless the two lovers together vouchsafe admission. We also get a sense of time itself being suspended in this inner self-contained world, as throughout the poem ("at all times", "moment to moment", "sudden", "for ever", "long ago", "to-night", and finally culminating in "The Right Required Time") temporality has shifted like liquid sands, reflecting perhaps the atemporal "centre / Time turns on when completely reconciled" (reconciled in love) that Antonio has earlier described.⁴⁴

Antonio, in his refrain, does not see this nebulous intensity of affection. In his mind, Ferdinand is driven by his lust. "*One bed is empty*", he tells Prospero, "*My Person is my own*": Antonio does not have a "Dear Other" to arouse him, but is his own object of intensity. Internal passion beyond ideal romantic ecstasy is an infernal void "*Hot Ferdinand*" will never know; the "Light" of artistic love turns to darkness, Antonio claims, when it steps outside the circle.

Stephano's ballade that follows is a "low" counterpart to Ferdinand's heightened passion. Where Ferdinand began with "flesh" and moved to intangible descriptions, a process of deepening his love through a continual renaming of it, Stephano, the gluttonous butler, begins with his belly and moves to questions of identity, a process of confusing his self through an inability to find any name. His opening line parodies Ferdinand's: "Embrace me, belly, like a bride"⁴⁵. He then attaches the vocative "Dear daughter" (as opposed to "Dear

⁴⁴ Whatever the precise content of Ferdinand's thoughts, his language suggests it is never fully accessible to translation. Auden was to later write a poem, "Dichtung and Wahrheit" (1959 -- *CP*, 647-663), which addressed this very topic: the inability of poetry to access or translate the original experience and motivating passion of love. The poem, in fact, is subtitled "An Unwritten Poem", is written in prose paragraphs, and ends: "This poem I wished to write was to have expressed exactly what I mean when I think the words *I love you*, but I cannot know exactly what I mean; it was to have been self-evidently true, but words cannot verify themselves" (663). Fifteen or so years earlier in Ferdinand's sonnet Auden tried to suggest what might happen if such words as *I love you* were to be true to their original passions: they necessarily would obscure, falter in coherence, or be reduced to a barely scrutable amalgam of epithets and private thoughts. The poem is still written, the framework remains distinct, and the words do carry some sense appropriate to its speaker, but the language proceeds as if in a cloud, just like the head of its young narrator.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Prospero to Ariel*, ln. 135-136: "Stephano is contracted to his belly, a minor / But prosperous kingdom".

Other"), as if his stomach was his own offspring, or as if to suggest pregnancy. But this daughter has been nurtured on "humble pie" and "swallowed pride" -- Stephano's admittance that he has been chastised appropriately. As bodily growth has been directly proportional to vanity's deflation, he tells his belly to "Believe the boast in which you grew", the boast of eating and drinking, but also the boast by which he was humbled and corrected, and by which he should thus have grown in character. Mind and matter come together here for Stephano, but unlike Ferdinand he has a difficult time distinguishing between the two, and deciding which ultimately reigns. He feels "both should woo" one another, his bodily passions ultimately married to his mind's thoughts, but realizes both are lost features of his self which together, and under inebriation ("the high play better"), can only seek mutual consolation: "A lost thing looks for a lost name." Though he is aware of his weakness and his lack, Stephano would rather pine in his liquor than attempt to overcome such deficiencies.

In the first stanza, "mind meets matter"; in the two stanzas that follow Stephano tries to make sense of their relationship. In the second stanza, matter is emphasized, taking the form of bathroom humour. In between urinating, excreting, and farting (the anus being "son" to the belly; the belly (or mind) then being a "Wise nanny" to the anus, helping him with his duties), the mind and the body exchange "cravings": when "disappointments" and "ghosts" escape, the mind craves comfort in the bottle; the belly and bladder then yearn for relief. Looked at in another way, it is largely the mind that craves alcohol, while it is the stomach that craves food, and both cravings result in a trip to the "loo". Thus both the mind's will and the body's functions "pursue / Alternately a single aim": they seek no more than a label for their misery.

In the third stanza, Stephano's mind abstracts as much as it ever will (or can), as it puzzles over the self's identity. Is identity made up from what the body dictates, or what the mind dictates? For the wills of either cannot exist independently of the other, Stephano reasons. So "Exhausted glasses [empty and worn out from much use] wonder who / Is self and sovereign, I [the mind which composes this poem] or You [the revered gut]? Who is "The real Stephano"? This question, which drives the entire poem, comes directly from *The Tempest*

itself, when, having been caught out by Prospero and taunted by Sebastian, Stephano says, "O touch me not! I am not Stephano, but a cramp" (V,i, 286 -- "cramp" an apparent slang term for stomach⁴⁶). But the real Stephano here is lost, and looks for a lost name. In the final shortened stanza, he offers two possibilities for a name, "Child" and "Mother", in keeping with the images of engendering and gestation. "Either grief will do", he says: neither label is any comfort, for a mother/child relationship still poses problems of identity and control, with which one forever lives in grief. Thus, "The need for pardon is the same, / The contradiction is not new". Pardon is still required, regardless which role is placed on which part of the self; Stephano, mind *and/or* body, mother *and/or* child (the age-old contradictions), still needs exoneration. As Prospero had dismissed him to his cell with the words "As you look / To have my pardon, trim it handsomely" (*The Tempest*, V,i, 293-294), Stephano now seems to take this as a reference to his distended abdomen, for which "trimming" has meant not a reducing in size, but a dressing up (with a label), or a dressing down (in a chiding). That Stephano has succeeded really in neither -- in the end a "lost thing" still "looks for a lost name" -- keeps his pardon, in addition to his paunch, outstanding.

Antonio, in his refrain, points not to Stephano's belly, but to the alcohol he habitually pours into it: "*One glass is untouched, Prospero, / My nature is my own.*" For Antonio, the confused nature of Stephano's self is a result of intoxication, which renders him "*Inert*". Antonio, for his part, fully owns his own nature, and is not divided between mind and body. At his private, internal feast he "*Toasts One and One alone.*"

Gonzalo, the next to speak, presents a thoughtful meditation in syllabic verse on the experiences of life that harken death. He opens with a line similar to Ferdinand's first line -- "Evening, grave, immense, clear" -- but one much more syntactically certain. His first word, too, marks his concern and sets his tone. As Antonio had indicated, the seas he now overlooks are calm, and encourage one last backward glance. The linking of "sea" and "silence" link

⁴⁶ From the textual notes by Northrop Frye in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 1395.

Gonzalo to Prospero here -- "Gonzalo is a variation on the Prospero-Antonio reaction of age to the preparation of death"⁴⁷ -- but where Prospero's sea demands poetic silence, Gonzalo's sea is a place of poetic writing. Clearly, Gonzalo's musings on death have not reached the more tempestuous seas beyond art. And so his natural gaze is back to "that island where / All our loves were altered". His prediction that all would survive⁴⁸ has come true, but he does not feel himself "justified" or in any way responsible. Rather, he is humbled, like Stephano -- yet differently, for his need of pardon is a result not of any cravings but of his own lack of self-honesty.

Truths to-day admitted, owe
Nothing to the councillor
In whose booming eloquence
Honesty became untrue.
Am I not Gonzalo who
By his self-reflection made
Consolation an offence?

Gonzalo's speeches and attempts to console the king were all untrue, for he himself could not fully believe or live up to his own ideals of innocence and optimism. So Gonzalo's "I am" equation is put into a question, requiring a negation: "Am I not Gonzalo. . .?" His poor self-reflection while on the island -- misapplied eloquence, threading a silver lining in every circumstance -- blurred the reality that all needed to face. For "There was nothing to explain", he now realizes. Instead of trying to justify every dire occurrence, he should have "trusted the Absurd", the unreasonable, inexplicable, insensible force behind the apparent misfortunes, should have abandoned himself to the raw realities, and not padded his songs with false notes.⁴⁹ Then each may have come a lot sooner to their own reform, and danced "Jigs of self-deliverance" in the light of truthful "Vision", as opposed to rationalized "idea". Only at the end did Gonzalo see that his ideals and colorations, his ordered, rational world, had betrayed a self-doubt and an "insufficient love".

⁴⁷ Nelson, 36.

⁴⁸ *The Tempest*, I,i, 26-31, 43-44, 54-56; V,i, 217-218.

⁴⁹ On the notion of the absurd, cf. Kierkegaard, e.g. *Postscript*, Vol. I, 210-212; Vol. II, 98-99; *Fear and Trembling*, 75-76: "On this the knight of faith is just as clear: all that can save him is the absurd; and this he grasps by faith. Accordingly he admits the impossibility and at the same time believes the absurd. . .".

The Island was, then, a commonwealth, a place of personal restoration, but not the kind Gonzalo first envisioned. Through the wreckage of implausible and dishonest ideas, self-realization, honesty, and visions of true love have come. There is now "nothing to forgive", because everyone has had their own private storms and self-reformations; all the flaws of the self and society have been repaired, and there is nothing *left* to forgive, a notion which betrays Gonzalo's lingering optimism and idealism.⁵⁰ In reminiscence, he can look back with some comfort, knowing his own storm has now passed. The image of the "ruined tower by the sea" is perfect for Gonzalo: an image of something which had once stood guard over "ambient troubles", has now become ineffectual through age, but draws comfort nevertheless. Gonzalo is such a tower, situated on the edge of the sea, watching Prospero sail out alone (as he did when he first sent Prospero and Miranda off to their fate), but himself now decaying on the shore. Having come through his own storm, he feels he can now face mortality with a "subjective passion"; in fact, death, "The Already There", can be a comfort, as it comes to the lonely and says " 'Here I am,' " and "To the anxious -- 'All is well' ". Unlike Prospero, who anticipates the seas of death in loneliness and anxiety, Gonzalo in the end finds consolation in the thought of the tolling bell. Despite all his talk of personal reform and honesty, then, he seems little more ahead of himself, still threading silver linings to black shrouds. We question his ability to comprehend the high seas of existential awareness. We hear rather his bell echo the tone of the artificer: all's well that ends well.

Antonio ridicules Gonzalo's eloquence and need for words: "*One tongue is silent, Prospero, / My language is my own.*" Antonio does not find comfort through speech, he claims. His noon shadow, the "Already There" looming in the "Not Yet", he is already in dialogue with, long before his sunset. This dialogue is a private, self-contained affair.

⁵⁰ And a notion which is ironic, for as Prospero has let us know in the Epilogue of *The Tempest*, in the illusions of artifice and ideal worlds there is *everything* to forgive -- above, Chapter 2, 103-104.

The side-line characters Adrian and Francisco offer a short side-line couplet. Sounding like a nursery rhyme for children, their thoughts are puerile and naive:

Good little sunbeams must learn to fly,
But it's madly ungay when the goldfish die.

The first line is directed at on-stage activity, as if to kids learning their peripheral part in a school play. The second line is directed at an off-stage occurrence, or at best a prop: a child's pet found floating upside down.⁵¹ Their basic thought: don't disrupt the wonderful little play, either on-stage or off. As Antonio sees, Adrian and Francisco are completely dependent on the stage for their existence, and thus they must keep its performance censored. Antonio, on the other hand, plays to no one but himself, a drama censored for psychological solitude. This is Antonio's "tragedy": that he is not a poet or a dramatist, that he has no audience, that his own drama cannot be played out against itself in self-reflection, and that he himself cannot ultimately "self-reflect" himself into some kind of reformation.⁵²

Alonso's 95-line poem is the longest of the section. Its length is due to its role as a pivot for the four poems on either side of it (excluding Antonio's), "a hinge of the symmetrical pairs" (Ferdinand/Miranda, Stephano/Trinculo, Gonzalo/Sebastian, Adrian and Francisco/Master and Boatswain), "whose speech is about the 'tightrope' or middle way between the sea and the desert, the 'temperate city' precariously balanced between opposite extremes".⁵³ The eight stanzas model a Horatian epistle in syllabic verse, and are addressed to Ferdinand, as the opening words "Dear Son" indicate (cf. Antonio's "sweet brother", Ferdinand's "Dear Other", Stephano's "Dear daughter", Gonzalo's "dear island", and Miranda's "Dear One"). The passing king begins by comparing the surface image of kingly rule with the disruptive realities that lie underneath it,

⁵¹ The thought of this being "madly ungay" matches Francisco's longest lines in *The Tempest* (II,i, 110-118), where he describes his witness of Ferdinand conquering the heavy seas, ending with "I doubt not / He came alive to land."

⁵² Such a notion of Antonio's "tragedy" is greatly indebted to several discussions with Dr. David Jasper.

⁵³ Lucy S. McDiarmid and John McDiarmid, "Artifice and Self-Consciousness in *The Sea and the Mirror*", in *W.H. Auden*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 78.

described by the picture of a sceptre penetrating the surface of the sea to reveal itself to uninterested or oblivious fish below (such as Caliban?). "Sit regal and erect", he also tells his heir,

But imagine the sands where a crown
Has the status of a broken-down
Sofa or a mutilated statue. . .

Remember that there is a sea (a "cold deep") and a desert (a "sunburnt superficial kingdom") adjacent to every supposedly stable ground. Edward Callan points out the contrast between the sea and the desert here as one between, in Auden own words, "primitive potential" and "actualized triviality", or as Nelson describes it in his words, between "the sea of too little consciousness" and "the desert of too much consciousness", both ideas coming from Auden's later essay about the Romantic use of the symbol of the sea, *The Enchafed Flood*.⁵⁴ The contrast between the king's public image and the reality he must try to rule continues in the second stanza with things controlled and made safe (a sense of "Progress", zoos, "synchronized" time) and things uncontrolled and dangerous (scorpions, sharks, octopuses, the "ocean flats" and the "desert plain"). In light of such contrasts, "Only the darkness can tell you what / A prince's ornate mirror dare not": the sea as a "primitive potential" brings the tyrannical ruler to ruin, while the desert as an "actualized triviality" brings the emperor to naked poverty. The primitive power goes amok and drowns, while the triviality is stripped to show the horrors beneath -- both are to be feared, but both, discovered in the darkness of one's dreams, can teach "what you lack". This lesson of psychology is in opposition to Ferdinand's own understanding that in Miranda is where his "omissions" lie; the father tells his son that "as your fears are", and not as your loves are, "so you must hope".

Alonso then uses the image introduced by the stage manager to describe the nature of a sovereign's rule: "The Way of Justice is a tightrope", negotiated between hope and fear -- just as Alonso's poem is a tightrope negotiated between poems motivated out of hope (Ferdinand, Gonzalo, Sebastian and Miranda --

⁵⁴ Callan, 196; Nelson, 37-38. Auden writes, "The sea. . . is the symbol of primitive potential power as contrasted with the desert of actualized triviality, of living barbarism versus lifeless decadence" (*The Enchafed Flood* [London: Faber and Faber, 1951, 1985], 27).

court life) and fear (Stephano, Adrian and Francisco, Master and Boatswain, and Trinculo -- low life). "The Way of Justice" also stands between the sea and the desert, between the left side of one's conscience where "the siren sings" temptingly of peaceful dark waters, and the right side where an evil demon ("efreet") dangles "a brilliant void" in which the mind feels clear and free from all constraint and limitation -- just as at the middle point of the poem (lines 47-48) the young prince must negotiate this narrow traverse, or failing, "soon disappear / To join all the unjust kings" in the abyss below.

In the second half of the letter, Alonso counsels Ferdinand not to trust the seeming permanencies of a kingdom, but to trust painful self-reflection (the "darkness" versus the "ornate mirror" of the first half). If he should prosper, he should suspect all the outward signs of the city's well-being, for all civilizations, no matter how prosperous, are precariously perched: "What griefs and convulsions startled Rome / Ecbatana, Babylon." He reiterates that the space between the sea and the desert, the "watery vagueness and / The triviality of the sand", is so very slight:

Remember that the fire and the ice
Are never more than one step away
From the temperate city; it is
But a moment to either.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ A similar idea runs through a poem Auden wrote a few years later in memory of Charles Williams, whose imagery of the city, such as in an essay entitled "The Image of the City in English Verse" (*Dublin Review*, July, 1940; reprinted in *The Image of the City and other essays* [London: Oxford University Press, 1958], 92-102) Auden drew from extensively. The poem, "Memorial For the City" (1949), substitutes the image of the tightrope here for that of the barbed wire:

. . . Across the plains
Between two hills, two villages, two trees, two friends,
The barbed wire runs which neither argues nor explains
But, where it likes, a place, a path, a railroad ends,
The humour, the cuisine, the rites, the taste,
The pattern of the City, are erased.

Across our sleep
The barbed wire also runs: It trips us so we fall
And white ships sail without us though others weep. . .

Behind the wire
Which is the mirror, our Image is the same
Awake or dreaming: It has no image to admire,
No age, no sex, no memory, no creed, no name,
It can be counted, multiplied, employed

If he should not prosper, and his conscience should hound him, he is advised to believe in the reality of his own pain, to be thankful for the desert heat that can dry up his lust and the sea's harshness that can dissolve his pride. Alonso here speaks of a kind of salvation that comes through turning to face one's inward conflicts, a purgatorial deluge where the flesh and the mind are restored and revitalized to some position of trustworthiness, as if they had come upon a "spring in the desert" or a "fruitful / Island in the sea". Alonso here reveals his belief that the experience on Prospero's Island, where each was convicted and changed, was absolutely necessary, and that, back in Naples, Ferdinand must remember this experience amid the finery of royal and social life.⁵⁶ This is his only real hope.

In the final stanza, the king presents his epistolary thoughts as an inheritance to his son, calling him to move forward in his new self-awareness. As "Death" welcomes Alonso, Ferdinand is to rejoice in a new kind of love, one that goes beyond the physical love of Miranda, a love that comes from the purging waters and "scorching rocks". He is to rejoice in a new kind of peace, one that the "siren's song" cannot deliver,⁵⁷ a peace that is hard-earned. For Ferdinand has now heard a more "solemn / Music" in the face of both his father's death and, through painful self-examination, his own death, a solemn music which does not create the perfect illusion as Antonio had criticized, but

In any place, at any time destroyed. . .

(CP, 594-595)

⁵⁶ This belief is one Auden believes Shakespeare himself held. In *The Enchafèd Flood* he writes: "In the last plays, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*. . . not only do the sea and the sea voyage play a much more important role, but also a different one [than the earlier plays]. The sea becomes a place of purgatorial suffering: through separation and apparent loss, the characters disordered by passion are brought to their senses and the world of music and marriage is made possible" (20).

⁵⁷ *The Odyssey of Homer*, Book XII, lns. 182-189:

. . . the swift ship as it drew nearer
 was seen by the Sirens, and they directed their sweet song toward us:
 "Come this way, honored Odysseus, great glory of the Achaians,
 and stay your ship, so that you can listen here to our singing;
 for no one else has ever sailed past this place in his black ship
 until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice that issues
 from our lips; then goes on, well pleased, knowing more than
 he did. . .

which strikes at the heart of one's inner struggle. He has seen then both the "mutilated statue" on the sand and now the pretended statue that has come to life: he has "seen the statue move", and like Leontes observing the "resurrected" Hermione at the end of *The Winter's Tale* (V,iii, 97-155), he is now called to do likewise and forgive the illusion. Become, Alonso beseeches, like Prospero at the end of the play (and not like Gonzalo, who sees no further need for any forgiveness); indeed become like Shakespeare himself in all of the last plays, and learn to forgive the played performance which has brought you to your reborn position of new power and new awareness. In fatherly, kingly counsel, Alonso entreats his successor to balance successfully on the thin strands that have been wound together by the tempest's (*The Tempest's*) ordeal.

Antonio, as in *The Tempest* itself, sees only the crown on Alonso's head: "*One crown is lacking Prospero, / My empire is my own*". For Antonio, the "*diadem*" does not rest on purgatorial reform, but on self-obsessive suffering.

The Master and the Boatswain offer a short, ditty-like poem in lilting tetrameter appropriate to a sailor's drinking tavern. They begin, in fact, with the names of two such ill-bred establishments, "Dirty Dick's" and "Sloppy Joe's", where liquor was consumed coarsely and town prostitutes plied their trade. In a perversion of Ferdinand and Miranda's matrimonial hopes,⁵⁸ animal lust ran rampant here, while "The homeless played at keeping house" -- a vulgar semblance of domestic stability parodied by whores and their patrons, an "upside down" artifice akin to the song of Browning's Caliban.⁵⁹ Amid such lascivious carousal, the speaker of the poem perceived the yearn of genuine love from two who had yet to find their man. But wandering sailor as he is, such espousal held no attraction: "I was not looking for a cage / In which to mope in my old age." The Master and the Boatswain undermine any happy ending where lovers embrace in marital bliss. For them, marriage is entrapment where love continually atrophies. Yet they also realize that their footloose desires are indicative of a more impoverished state, of an ungrounded self psychologically barren. So "nightingales are sobbing", as if like maudlin drunks, in the "orchards

⁵⁸ McDiarmid, 108.

⁵⁹ See above, Chapter 2, 114-115, and footnote 36.

of our mothers": a picture of the unmarried seafarer mourning his loneliness in maternal shadows, his only remaining source of real love.⁶⁰ Love as it comes night by night in concupiscence fills no voids; it simply creates more voids, like a disease passed on. Thus,

Tears are round, the sea is deep:
Roll them overboard and sleep.

For the Master and the Boatswain, sobbing and the sea are connected, but not in any redemptive way. Both are evidence of a loveless existence best anesthetized in drink-induced sleep, where "even sorrow is cut from expression".⁶¹

Antonio picks up on the Master and Boatswain's directionless drift. He calls them "Nostalgic sailors", those easily taken by sentiment who look to the past to cover up the lacking present. Antonio's compass, conversely, is his own, for he sails in private seas fully conscious and awake.

Sebastian's poem is an elaborate sestina in syllabic verse, with the line-ending words "dream", "sword", "day", "alive", "proof" and "crown" repeated per stanza in various orders. In direct contrast to the poem it follows, Sebastian's thoughts *come* to consciousness (not depart from it), as if woken from a sleep, and from an unrealizable dream. He is bluntly aware now "it is day", that his visions of overthrowing his brother's throne were clay idols, and that, those idols having crumbled, "Nothing has happened" and everyone is still alive. His self-consciousness ("I am. . .") is not a result of his redemption, nor is it towards redemption, but acknowledges the persistent reality of his depraved nature: "I am Sebastian, wicked still, my proof / Of Mercy that I wake without a crown." Crowns are for Sebastian, as they were in childhood, desires of dreams fulfilled; but unlike Prospero, who wakes to "unanswered wishes" as if waking from a dream of some "tremendous journey" only to find the "journey really exists", and must be taken alone, without the padding of illusion (*Prospero to Ariel*, lns. 176-188), Sebastian consigns himself to the failure of such crowns, to the loss of

⁶⁰ Of Auden himself, Davenport-Hines writes: "It was his mother supremely whom he would not treat as an ordinary being. It was her mythic influence that became almost an obsession. He identified 'landscape' with the maternal body, and elaborated great symbolic roles for all mothers" (28).

⁶¹ McDiarmid, 109.

wishful innocence, and does not move forward into that "real" dream of "Solitude and silence". His journey is simply to accept his error.

Sebastian is very much like a Cain figure. What his brother possessed and he did not ("the arrant jewel singing in the crown") persuaded him to take up the sword against his hated sibling (as did Antonio, of course, the "errant jewel"). He admits:

To think his death I thought myself alive
And stalked infected through the blooming day.

His thoughts were, he realizes now, a lie, goaded on by "Nothing" (cf. Gonzalo's "Absurd") which promised to those residing in the shadows that the light by which their very shadows exist can be successfully dispelled, and that murder is unjustified only when it is unconsummated. This "Nothing" appeals only to "want and weakness", to which Sebastian now admits. He is thankful that, unlike Cain, he was caught before the deed, exposed by "Failure", and pricked in his conscience. His self-awareness is not redeeming, but sparing, his hope not in moral improvement, but in shame:

I smile because I tremble, glad to-day
To be ashamed, not anxious, not a dream.

Like Cain, there is no hint of repentance; just gladness to have woken into reality, however hard the slap to the face.

As Sebastian looks about the boat, he is satisfied that the happy scene is "no lover's dream" -- his failure is proof enough, and he seems to think everyone else is convinced of it too. He sees no need for further improvement, but is content with "Just Now" and "Right Here". As Nelson perceives, "This world which Sebastian calls 'Right Here' is not Ferdinand's 'Real Right Place', but it exists nevertheless. It is not necessarily a happy place, but that is as it should be; Sebastian smiles *because* he trembles" (40). Sebastian sums up his thinking in the poem's envoi (as all the six repeated words come together): "dream", where "all sins are easy", is contrasted with "day", where "defeat gives proof we are alive"; it is through the suffering "sword" of self-inflicted wounds and naked exposure that we gain our real "crown". But Sebastian is no great moralist. He is simply happy to be alive.

Antonio calls his partner in arms "*Pallid Sebastian*", as if colourless with guilt and shame, or as if only half-alive, his life-blood unable to show.

Antonio's "*face cries nothing*", on the other hand; his "*conscience*" does not plague him with hollow compunction. In his dreams he retains his sword and "*Fights the white bull alone*", an internal adversary the weak-willed Sebastian could never know.

Trinculo the jester speaks next, his poem in symmetry with *his* partner in arms, Stephano. Although the six four-line trimetrical stanzas have a jocular feel, Trinculo speaks out of fear. He is a comic who cannot enjoy his own comedy. He warms society in all its different strata ("Mechanic, merchant, king"), but remains himself "the cold clown". He lives in an unreal life, having to amuse everyone else: by definition he cannot live the normal life, for his jokes and joke-making necessitate distance. He thus lives with his "head in the clouds", in a solitude where "quick dreams" have lifted him and keep him. Unlike Sebastian's dreams, his dreams are not delusions, but the sharp, fleeting humour which keeps people laughing because of humour's required connection to truth.

From his elevated perch, the clown looks down upon his childhood (as many of the speakers have done). He sees that even back then, he, as all jokers wish, stuck out from all the rest ("red roof") and was never taken with full seriousness ("Little Trinculo"). The solid world that everyone else experienced his "hands can never reach":

My history, my love,
Is but a choice of speech.

His whole existence has been turned into the butt of a joke, dependent on a pun, a punch-line, irony, etc. He is thus a "dehumanized man".⁶² "Terror" -- life's vicissitudes, fears and storms -- shakes his tree like a tempestuous wind, and like frightened birds, humour flies out. The scattered words in turn "shake" his hearers with laughter, but also with the terrifying truth they nevertheless carry. The comic invokes humour's "Wild images" to "come down" from even a colder height ("freezing sky") than where he sits, so that like all those beneath him he

⁶² Nelson, 40.

too may get his joke "and die" -- die laughing, but also die and leave the business of humour behind him for good. Unlike Prospero, who asks himself if he "Can learn to suffer / without saying something ironic or funny / On suffering" (*Prospero to Ariel*, lns. 202-204), Trinculo wants all suffering to end. His is the clown of the *Preface* who, wounded himself, wishes to leap through the "O" and into the lion's mouth.

Antonio hears the "jarring" note of Trinculo's strain, as it stands out of tune with the rest, like a humorous ditty whose melody is purposely ruined. Trinculo is "Tense", like the paradoxes and ironies he employs. Antonio, conversely, is not in the sky, but "in woods", in the apparent realities of *terra firma*. He is able to laugh at his own jokes, because for him "there is no universal joke",⁶³ only his own dark "paradox".⁶⁴ The paradox that he himself cannot even see, of course, or at least will not acknowledge, is the "jarring" note of his own refrains. Antonio is not alone, as he claims, but stuck in the grander artifice of the supporting cast, dependent on others as much as a joke is on an audience.

The final poem of the section, Miranda's, is the crowning gesture of this grand artifice. A villanelle, its form is contrived in extreme: five tercets and one quatrain in syllabic verse (11 syllables per line), with two entire lines (a¹ and a²) being repeated in a prescribed pattern (a¹ba², aba¹, aba², aba¹, aba², aba¹a²), and with a rhyme scheme where the first and third lines always rhyme with "sea"

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁴ Like "absurdity", "paradox" is a common theme of Kierkegaard's. Of his understanding of this term, Alastair Hannay writes: "According to Kierkegaard there are two ways in which a person aiming at religious satisfaction can react to the confrontation with the absolute paradox (and hence simply 'paradox'). One is to come to terms with it. This happy outcome involves, he says, the 'passion of faith'. . . The other involves a failure to come to this 'mutual understanding', and Kierkegaard calls this 'being affronted' or 'taking offence'. This is a fundamentally passive state of mind in which a person, critically or uncritically accepting human reason as the highest court of appeal, feels compelled to condemn the paradox as an absurdity. It is passive even if, instead of giving in to the paradox in dumb suffering, the affronted individual is emboldened to pour scorn on it. Whether the affront takes away 'the last crumb of comfort and joy' or makes one 'strong', the result is still a surrender to the superior strength of paradox" -- *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, 1991), 110. Antonio's laughter seems "to pour scorn" on paradox, as though, in his lack of passionate faith, he has been deprived of all "comfort and joy". Cf. also Altizer, 113, 174-176.

and the middle second line always with "king". The poem is a culmination of all the highly contrived forms that have gone before it.

The poem's first repeated line is its most important: "My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely." While Ferdinand, with his "Dear Other", objectifies his lover, Miranda, with her "Dear One", subjectifies and unifies hers. But, as McDiarmid states, "Both poems begin at the point where the ego ends, in a compassionate love" (107). This compassionate love is described by the complex image of a mirror. Mirrors are lonely without someone looking into them; and when someone is looking into them, that someone looks at his or herself. That a mirror is lonely suggests then that the someone is looking elsewhere, here Miranda looking directly at Ferdinand. The corollary of the image is that true love exists only outside or away from the mirror (or artifice: Auden's *Dichtung and Wahrheit*⁶⁵), that true love exists only while looking into *another* human's face (not our own, as Antonio does -- Antonio who, ironically, claims to be outside the mirror's frame⁶⁶). Miranda, with the mirror image, is trying to get at the core of her love. But of course her use of the simile links her all that much more with the image -- she in effect says, "The degree to which my lover and I are unified is mirrored in the degree to which mirrors are lonely." In this strange play of mirroring, she does not escape the mirror's artifice; but young and naive as she is, she cannot see this.⁶⁷

Her second simile speaks of the "poor and sad" being "real to the good king". As if speaking to her future husband, the future king, she believes that the just ruler treats the suffering citizens of his kingdom well. She does not have the wisdom of Alonso to know that "The Way of Justice is a tightrope" where the emperor can easily stand half-naked "While his diary is read by sneering / Beggars" (*Alonso*, lns. 38, 32-33). For her, blindly in love, Ferdinand

⁶⁵ See above, same chapter, footnote 44.

⁶⁶ In a paradoxical way, where a mirror becomes a-mirror, Antonio cannot see the mirror for looking at it. He cannot see his image in the eyes of the "other"; he can only see his image in his own eyes, his own mirror, which he cannot see. Antonio is then left as a mere image.

⁶⁷ Nelson adds: "But, of course, mirrors are not lonely, no matter how nice it may be to think so; mirrors are no more lonely than lovers are eternally true. After what has occurred in *The Sea and the Mirror*, Miranda's naïveté becomes all the more clear and her speech seems almost ironic" (41).

will be the good king, just as he is hers, or as "the high green hill sits always by the sea." Unlike Gonzalo's "ruined tower by the sea", Miranda's verdant hill is stable and permanent as it looks out over the chaotic waters. Time and decay do not figure in her thoughts.

Her simple view of the world is further seen as she describes her own experiences on the Island, the only world she knows. Caliban, "the Black Man", courts her by jumping out from behind his place of spying, turning a somersault -- his only known means of impressing⁶⁸ -- and running away shyly as he waves. Miranda is too innocent to know the foul and salacious intent that stood behind Caliban's actions. Even his wicked mother, Sycorax "The Witch", dissipated into air as if only ever a spectre, melting "into light as water leaves a spring" -- a quaint, nice image to describe the evaporation of a "venomous body". Miranda is not capable of sustained ill-will; she keeps with images of newness and life, even to picture death. Her father, "the Ancient", has been her model of virtue. Even at his "crossroads" from politics to art, from the city to the Island, his compassionate concern for her well-being was placed above his own. But her grand notions of selfless love do not allow her to see that Prospero's selfishness -- abandoning his people for his books -- was what sent him to the "crossroads" in the first place, and her along with him.

So her "Dear One" became her Prince Charming, who kissed her awake while those who looked on, having reconciled their differences, were neither envious, disagreeable or remorseful. Everything and everyone was blissful: "The sun shone on sails, eyes, pebbles, anything". In commemoration then of all that had happened on that Island, their place of paradise, where great changes took place (though never of the lapsarian kind -- evil remains out of the picture), the young bride-to-be sees them all joined as if in a hymeneal ring, "linked as children in a circle dancing", singing the immutable (and circular) refrains she herself has been singing throughout her poem:

My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely,
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

⁶⁸ Cf. Auden's later poem "The Ballad of Barnaby" (1968 -- *CP*, 824-827) and McDiarmid's analysis of it, 3-8.

She is unaware that this circle is equally the artificer's circle, where her charmed little innocence can have its run. It is "the place out of time", "the permanence of illusion".⁶⁹ But it is also the "O" whose centre is a void, a nullity, an abyss, the round speculum framing the crack, all of which she is blind to.

And she is also blind to Antonio, and to the circle's incompleteness that is a result of him: "*One link is missing, Prospero, / My magic is my own*". Without Antonio's poem at the outset, Miranda could join hands with her lover as the circle came round. But the play's chief antagonist stands in the way. He does not want to be part of the magical circle, or let others bring it to perfection. He does not let "*Happy Miranda*" have her happy way. He dances his own "*figure*", outside the happy "O", and inside the zeroed "O". It is a disruptive figure, out of step, as it adds a line to the usual pattern of his refrain: "*The only One, Creation's O*". In Antonio's mind, there is no "Dear Other" or "Dear One"; there is only "One", himself, "*Creation's O*"; and this figure, his "O", is a grave step: it "*Dances for Death Alone*." At the heart of all creation is the dance of death, which Antonio claims has been his movement all along.⁷⁰ In great egotistical cynicism, his song reads: Death is mine, Creation's "O"s, as mirrors are lonely. He brags that he is the only one possessing true self-reflection, the reflection of negation.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Nelson, 42.

⁷⁰ See above, 123-124 and footnote 14.

⁷¹ Here, we could again compare T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In "The Fire Sermon" we read:

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
 While I was fishing in the dull canal
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
 Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
 And on the king my father's death before him.

(Ins. 188-192)

As Eliot makes us aware in his own notes (*The Complete Poems and Plays -- 1909-1950*, 52), the last two lines are a direct reference to *The Tempest* (I,ii). Rats, wreckage, decadence and death are images linked here with both Antonio and Prospero. "The nymphs are departed", the poem earlier repeats (Ins. 175, 179), and we are left in a soiled "Unreal City" (Ins. 60, 207) full of rattling bones and scuttling rats. Antonio's dance of death later becomes a "Death by Water": "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers" (Ins. 315-316). The earlier section, "A Game of Chess", opens:

His brag, of course, has its own cracks. As we have seen all along, he does not acknowledge his own complicity in the very thing he excoriates. As "*Creation's O*" he is as bound to creation and artifice as anyone else, as his refrains well enough show. If he could see his own blindness, he might have been able to have the last word. But, blinded so darkly by his ego, he cannot recognize his oversight, his inability to self-reflect, and so does not get the last word. That goes to Caliban. Or to Ariel speaking as an echo of Caliban. Antonio remains *Creation's* foil. He is not, as he was not in the play, *Creation's* death.

III -- *Caliban to the Audience*

Caliban's long, elaborate speech is the rising climax of the "commentary", as, like the *Preface*, it turns to face the work of the playwright not from within the bounds of the stage but from without. So Caliban speaks "*to the Audience*", and not to the other characters in the play. The stage manager had spoken to the critics, those who must, because of their position as judges, be unwilling to

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
 Glowed on the marble, where the glass
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
 Reflecting light upon the table as
 The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
 From satin cases poured in rich profusion. . . [etc.]

(Ins.77-85)

This elaborate scene, with its rococo-like descriptions, is a pastiche of Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's room in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (II,ii, 190-219 -- Eliot's notes, 51), a pastiche whose florid manner will compare with Caliban's grandiloquent speech. Like Antonio, Eliot reflects the original scene cynically. Its artifice is a reflection of decadence -- moral and spiritual -- leaving us not in the luxuriance of Shakespeare's play but "in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (Ins. 115-116). Antonio's refrains, and especially the last, have had a similar undercutting effect. And his dance of death is prefigured in that significant line (ln. 128) of "A Game of Chess" -- "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag". Cf. Valentine Cunningham, 284-285. (The "dance of death" and the "game of chess" are two images the filmmaker Ingmar Bergman will later combine to powerful effect in *The Seventh Seal*, a film very much about artifice and pageantry in the face of negation. And Derrida uses the image of a "bottomless chessboard" in *Speech and Phenomena* [154] -- see David Couzins Hoy, *The Critical Circle* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], 77-89.)

suspend disbelief. Caliban speaks to the general public, those who not only are willing, but who have paid money, to suspend disbelief. Caliban moves the discussion off the stage, but the discussion is always and only about the stage, about "staginess". He attempts to point out clearly the boundary that sets apart the stage from the audience. He attempts to make the audience unmistakably aware of the two realms dividing the actors from the onlookers, "artifice" and "reality", "mirror" and "sea". And in doing so he deconstructs all of the "commentary" that has come before him.⁷² Caliban becomes, in an ironic twist, the grand artificer who builds up *and* tears down, the very figure we might normally associate with Prospero, if Prospero could get outside the bounds of his own creation, as he requests in the play's Epilogue. Why does Caliban succeed where Prospero does not? Why does Caliban receive the highest, the most self-conscious, the most self-reflective role, and not the other remaining voice we have yet to hear from, the one we might think is the better candidate next to Prospero -- Ariel? Caliban offers an answer to these very questions in this third section.

Caliban's speech, we have said earlier, mirrors the "commentary" as a whole: it contains a preface, three main sections, and a qualifying postscript, and each section correlates with the issues put forward in *The Sea and the Mirror's* three parts. In the preface, the first paragraph, Caliban announces himself as Prospero's best and only spokesman, and sets out the main concern to be dealt with, just as the stage manager sets out in the *Preface* the main questions to be "commented" on. In the first section, Caliban assumes the voice of the audience, as they in turn address the playwright, Shakespeare. Like Prospero in his speech, the audience make a clear distinction between their own "blancmange" world and the "Cockaigne" world of art, as they try to keep the two worlds separate.⁷³ In the second section, Caliban speaks to an apprenticing artist in the audience who has attended the performance to learn. Like Antonio

⁷² McDiarmid, 111.

⁷³ A distinction Lucy McDiarmid and John McDiarmid see as evidence of an increasing self-consciousness which grows from section to section, culminating in the third part of Caliban's speech (78-79).

in "The Supporting Cast", the young artist soon finds that art has a disturbing dark side. In the third section, Caliban speaks to the audience as a whole, mirroring his own entire speech in radical self-reflection. In the postscript, the final paragraph beginning with "Yet", Caliban speaks on behalf of all -- players, audience and himself alike -- as together everyone seeks to reach that which ultimately the performance cannot reach, the "Wholly Other Life". The point of the commentary, insofar as there is any propositional "point", is set forth in this final paragraph, before Ariel has one final sigh. Caliban then, in deconstructing the entire work, also reconstructs it, as he mirrors the mirror, and points to meaning outside the frame, but meaning which paradoxically can only be spoken of inside the frame -- his own reconstructed frame.⁷⁴

He begins with the final curtain lowered and the "hired impersonators" (all the previous speakers, except for the stage manager) having been dismissed. As he addresses the audience, who have called for Shakespeare to come forward, he exposes the impossibility of the playwright ever to appear, and presents himself as the only voice to answer their pressing question, their "bewildering cry", which concerns, as it must, the very presence of Caliban in the first place. So Caliban, stepping out of the play's confines and entering the seats of the viewing public, offers himself as the audience's echo, becoming the embodiment of this "bewildering cry" directed at the play's creator. In effect, Caliban is here saying that, as Ariel becomes the echo of Caliban in the *Postscript*, the echo

⁷⁴ Here we have Lyotard's notion of putting forward "the unrepresentable in presentation itself" as a condition of postmodernity (as quoted at the outset, Introduction, 2). What emerges out this term "unrepresentable", out of this *coincidentia oppositorum*, is of course of a theological nature: the God without being, for example, or as Marion's original title (*Dieu sans l'être*) allows, the God without being God (see Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", 64). Derrida himself, who has raised this issue of the "unrepresentable" often enough (especially in the concept of the *trait*), felt compelled to respond to the suggestions (or charges) of "negative theology" which have been directed at him from many quarters. This he does most explicitly in "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., *Semeia*, 23: 2 (1982), 63-69; "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials"; and "Sauf le Nom (Post-Scriptum), *On the Name*, 35-85. Jean-Luc Marion, who admits a proximity to Derrida (xxi), begins *God Without Being* by looking at the way both "idol" and "icon" signal the divine: "the manner of seeing decides what can be seen, or, at least negatively, decides what in any case could not be perceived of the divine" (9). Kevin Hart's excellent book *Trespass of the Sign* treats extensively the present overlap between deconstruction and "negative" theology, or theology in general, an overlap which Caliban exposes here in the final paragraph of his speech. See also Cunningham's excellent final chapter, "The Rabbins Take it Up One After Another", esp. 396-403; and below, Chapter 5.

generated from behind *The Tempest's* curtain, Caliban is the echo of the people *this* side of the curtain, the disturbing echo from another kind of stage, the stage we often consider "reality" but which, as Caliban wants to show, is always already caught up within its own artifice. As an "echo", Caliban manifests the artificiality of the audience's "real" world.

For the next twenty-one paragraphs, the audience speaks through the rhetorical flair of Caliban's ornate prose ("The whole point about the verbal style", Auden once explained, "is that, since Caliban is inarticulate, he has to borrow, from Ariel, the most artificial style possible, i.e. that of Henry James"⁷⁵). The audience demands a reckoning from the Bard: your personification of creativity, Prospero, has asked us for an indulgence, but how, the audience asks, could you have the gall to request such a thing after you have imprisoned us "in the doubtful mood" by introducing Caliban into the pages of your supposed farewell work. Theatre, they say, works by inviting everyone into its domain, by solidifying the rough waters of reality as if it were an ice pond, by skating "full tilt toward the forbidden incoherence" beyond the ice, but at the last minute, "on the shuddering edge of the bohemian standardless abyss", making a "breathtaking triumphant turn". Theatre cannot cross the boundary, for it will then ruin that "miraculous suspension" of reality by which the audience, novice and expert alike, become enraptured in the performance. It is appalling to see Caliban in such a performance, for he represents the clear crossing of the boundary, the manifestation of negation ("*not* sympathizing, *not* associating, *not* amusing"), the only child of "unrectored chaos". The native, public Muse has done all she can to shut such a creature out, for she knows the immense disruption of his intrusion: he would destroy the vision of love and justice, disturb the carefully ordered arrangements, and threaten the very purity of inspiration herself. Caliban, the negating side of artifice, would bring the entire house of cards down. How could Shakespeare knowingly let such a creature within his art, the audience demands to know?

⁷⁵ Carpenter, 328.

As Caliban voices the complaint, he grants to the audience the realization that they do not belong on the other side of the curtain, that they must remain foreign to the theatrical presentation.

Into that world of freedom without anxiety, sincerity without loss of vigour, feeling that loosens rather than ties the tongue, we are not, we reiterate, so blinded by presumption to our proper status and interest as to expect or even wish at any time to enter, far less to dwell there.

All the audience asks is a couple of hours of observance. It does not ask that the performance speak directly to them, as if it could fully understand them. Rather, the whole point is that the play *does not* speak directly to them, that it remain another world, where universals apply to all, time is elastic and uninhibiting, moral law is fixed, inner life is easily translatable, disorder always tidiable, problems solved with exactness, and everyone in the end arrives back from the journey "safe and sound in the best of health and spirits and without so much as a scratch or bruise." The theatrical stage is not, nor cannot be, our real domain; but it is a domain we all wish to be caught up in for the moment, as we momentarily suspend our disbelief in a world of "freedom without anxiety". Like Prospero, we call Ariel the "unanxious one"; the bastard son of anxious chaos does not belong at Ariel's side.

Caliban, still speaking on behalf of the audience, describes *our* real domain as always requiring a third person voice which necessarily stands outside the artist's circle. We live only ever in a segment of a circle, whose boundaries are defined either in terms of nature (the "river", as Caliban symbolizes it -- what we inherently feel is honest and sensible) or culturally/politically (the "railroad" -- what we feel is necessary for our standard of living). These become our defining yet "prohibitive frontiers". Of course we must live around some sense of a public whole -- our boundaries constructed around logic (the "railroad") and instinct (the "river") demand this -- but our private realms are where we make sense of this Whole in the first place, ie. in our internal visions and "local idioms". Thus our circle can never be complete and perfect: time

itself will always limit it.⁷⁶ We daily inhabit partial circles; we only visit the artificer's circles. Even Shakespeare must admit that had the fortunes of time outside his circle been less kind, a greater talent might have survived, and created greater circles into which we now choose to enter over his. *The Tempest* survives not because it is closer to the way we normally live, but because our lives, in all their fragmentations, and *because* of their fragmentations,⁷⁷ have found room for it. The "O" of the Globe offers a reprieve from the fragmented boundaries we are forced to live within.

So the echoing Caliban points to the one image which Shakespeare himself used to describe the relationship between the artist's circle and the audience's realm, the "mirror held up to nature".⁷⁸ Continuing to speak for the audience, he confronts Shakespeare with the metaphor:

You yourself, we seem to remember, have spoken of the conjured spectacle as "a mirror held up to nature," a phrase misleading in its aphoristic sweep but indicative at least of one aspect of the relation between the real and the imagined, their mutual reversal of value, for isn't the essential artistic strangeness to which your citation of the sinisterly biased image would point just this: that on the far side of the mirror the general will to compose, to form at all costs a felicitous pattern becomes the *necessary cause* of any particular effort to live or

⁷⁶ Knowledge of our world and its limitations in time are, of course, chief themes in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which has spawned many subsequent analyses since. One of these, David Hoy's *The Critical Circle*, points to the fact that Heidegger calls his project a "hermeneutical phenomenology" (2; *Being and Time*, 62), and Hoy quotes those famous passages that speak of the "vicious circle" at work in all interpretation that seeks pure or rigorous objectivity (2-3; *Being and Time*, 194-195). This "hermeneutical circle" is very much at work in *The Sea and the Mirror*, and comes to the fore here in Caliban's speech. The coordinates we establish within our private spheres give us the only bearings we have within the world. But they form only small segments of the larger circle in which the whole world revolves, a whole we can only know within our "existential constitution of Dasein", to use Heidegger's language (*Being and Time*, 195). We cannot get out of the whole circle to observe it objectively in its totality. Instead, we can only create smaller circles within the larger one, such as, notably, the circles of theatre and the stage ("The Globe"). But of course to be able to construct the smaller ones, or even to understand them, we must have some knowledge of the larger one, and hence the circular dilemma of our understanding, even for aesthetics. As Caliban later says of the "dedicated dramatist": ". . . the more truthfully he paints the condition [of estrangement from the truth], the less clearly can he indicate the truth from which it is estranged. . .". This is indeed a *circulus vitiosus*. Yet as Heidegger says, "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way" (*Being and Time*, 195). The "right way" for Caliban, as he will later indicate in his concluding remarks, is through a self-conscious making, through our "incorrigible staginess".

⁷⁷ Paul Tillich: "In its presence, even the very centre of our being is only a boundary and our highest level of accomplishment is fragmentary" -- *On the Boundary* (London: Collins, 1967), 98.

⁷⁸ See above, Chapter 2, 91.

act or love or triumph or vary, instead of being as, in so far as it emerges at all, it is on this side, their *accidental effect*?

Though the image of the mirror biases the "real" (nature) over the "imagined" (artifice), for the underlying assumption is that nature is somehow superior or more truthful than the mirror, the image at least shows that one is the reversal in value of the other. But for Caliban (or for the aware audience Caliban is speaking for) the reversal in value is not simply "real" versus "artificial", "substance" versus "spectre", but a reversal of precedence. The mirror shows the precedence of creativity, since on its far side the general desire to compose is the necessary *cause* of living; while on this side of the mirror, the general will to compose, inasmuch as it appears at all (and here Caliban is being sinisterly biased himself in a counter to Shakespeare), is an *accidental effect*.⁷⁹ Which takes precedence, the creating or the living, and by extension the creation or the nature we must live in, is not a matter of *truth*, but of *values*. The audience here, through Caliban, acknowledges the two sides of the mirror. But it *values* the two sides differently. The "spirit of reflection", Ariel who resides on the far side, must not invade our realm by calling attention to himself, for then all sense of public propriety (which depends on concealments) would dissolve. Ariel, that is, must not give away the magician's secrets. Caliban, whose proper place is on this side of the mirror, must not, on the other hand, be revealed on the far side of the mirror, for otherwise the performance could never maintain "universal reconciliation and peace", that picture-perfect finish. Allowing one to roam in the other's territory, allowing Caliban to combine with Ariel, simultaneously violates both worlds.⁸⁰ Shakespeare's audacity to allow such a thing ruins the

⁷⁹ See above, Introduction, 22.

⁸⁰ "Reality" is a violation of "artifice", just as, more importantly, "artifice" is a violation of "reality" -- a necessary violation, perhaps, or a *felix culpa*, in that the violent act becomes, to use René Girard's phrase in his influential *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. Patrick Gregory [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977], 316), a "generative event" which creates the possibility for future creations, as those in which the figure of Caliban appear, for example, and for the possibilities of a reemergent sacred or theological language or rite, as Girard maintains, and as we have seen with Auden's notion of poetry as a rite (above, Introduction, 29ff). We have also seen throughout how reflection and self-reflection can be a violence to or a violation upon the "self", fracturing its sense of wholeness. For the necessity of violence in philosophical thinking, see Derrida's essay "Violence and Metaphysics -- An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas", *Writing and Difference*, 79-153.

entire spell of his magic, and lets Caliban, the only one who can cross the stage's boundary, to return to the stage bolstered by the experience, knowing now his truest friends lie *this* side of the curtain. Worse, Shakespeare not only lets Caliban into the imaginary world, but lets Ariel go free into the real world. Caliban is unaccounted for at the play's end; but the intrusion of the "real" on the "imaginary" is nothing compared to that of the "imaginary" on the "real". Yes, the audience wonders where Caliban got to. But more seriously, what has Shakespeare done with Ariel? For if we dislike the severity of the "real" in our moments of performance, we surely do not want the extravagance of the "imaginary" in our everyday existence: "breaking down our picket fences in the name of fraternity, seducing our wives in the name of romance, and robbing us of our sacred pecuniary deposits in the name of justice."

What the audience demands is a separation of their drab, weary existence from art's colourful, careless existence. What Caliban subtly reveals, even as their mouthpiece, is that though there is a boundary between the stage of the "artistic" existence and the realm of the "real", both existences, the "mirror" and "nature" (the "sea"), are necessarily framed, are necessarily staged areas, and that the only real difference between the two "framings" is not in their closeness to "truth" but in the way we place value on them. The audience values art as an escape from the constrictions of time and anxiety. It values its everyday mortal life as the place of defining particularities, of "prohibitive frontiers" without which "we should never know who we were or what we wanted." As Prospero resigns himself to the sufferings of Milan, the audience too knows it must always resign itself to the world beyond the lights of the theatre. As Prospero leaves Ariel behind to take his homeward journey alone, so too must the audience. But to come to the theatre and find that Caliban and Ariel walk hand in hand -- our "real" world mucking about in our artifice, and our artifice dallying about in our "real" world -- this is an atrocity for which we are not prepared. We do not like our circles of existence confused.

In the second section of his speech, Caliban returns to his "*officially natural role*" and delivers a special message to the neophyte artist. The recurring image here is that of the magician, a conjuror creating illusions with an

"artistic contraption". The young artist has responded to Ariel's cry for help, and by releasing him from imprisonment, a "liberator's face" now congratulates him from the "shaving mirror every morning". Ariel, the "spirit of reflection", has brought not only self-reflection, but consciousness of the mirror, the tool by which the artist must now make magic. But as the artist/magician grows in competence with this tool (a competency owing completely to Ariel), the partnership with Ariel eventually begins to wane. Ariel becomes a maddening presence, whose obsequiousness turns to adamancy, so that when the artist finally asks him to leave for good, for the first time he defies the command. In the confrontation, the artist comes to a chilling realization:

Striding up to Him in fury, you glare into His unblinking eyes and stop dead, transfixed with horror at seeing reflected there, not what you had always expected to see, a conqueror smiling at a conqueror, both promising mountains and marvels, but a gibbering fist-clenched creature with which you are all too unfamiliar, for this is the first time indeed that you have met the only subject that you have, who is not a dream amenable to magic but the all too solid flesh you must acknowledge as your own; at last you have come face to face with me. . .

Ariel has become Caliban. The artist stares in the mirror and no longer finds his own conquering face staring back, but his own real ugliness, the gross unruliness of Caliban.⁸¹ As Antonio's refrains had echoed the nastiness of mortality, the "Dance of Death", after each of the highly stylized poems of *The Sea and the Mirror's* middle section, so the artist comes to see the Caliban beast in the eyes of Ariel here in this middle section of Caliban's speech. Reflection has turned on the artist: what was thought to be "a mirror held up to nature" is really a mirroring of Caliban, but Caliban mirroring art. Like some Borgesian labyrinth,⁸² a confined world of mirrors entraps the artist, so that Caliban and Ariel frame each other, the one dependent on the other, as with Antonio and

⁸¹ As does the King before the play in *Hamlet* (III,ii, 250-260). See above, Chapter 2, 93 and footnote 12. Cf. also Jorge Luis Borges' quote of Léon Bloy in "The Mirror of Enigmas" (*Labyrinths*, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby [London: Penguin, 1962, 1964], 246): "'A terrifying idea. . . about the text [of St. Paul's] *Per speculum*. The pleasures of this world would be the torments of Hell, seen backwards, in a mirror.' "

⁸² See for example "The Library of Babel" in Borges' *Labyrinths*: "In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Men usually infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite (if it really were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite. . ." (78). See also the short parable "Borges and I", 282-283.

Prospero ("as long as I choose / To wear my fashion, whatever you wear / Is a magic robe" -- *Antonio*, lns. 27-29).

Their negative but necessary relationship is described by a mathematical image. As a bracketed variable can reverse its status by the placement of a plus or minus sign before its bracket, so art can quickly shift from one extreme to the other (love to hate, e.g.) by Ariel's manipulation of the sign (he or Caliban) before art's boundaries. However, "the one exception, the sum no magic of His can ever transmute, is the indifferent zero." Once again the "O" of the stage manager and his circus ring, the "O" of Prospero as he contemplates his journey home, the "O" of Antonio, "*Creation's O*", returns. But here it is an "indifferent zero", a complete ignoring of Caliban's true potential, an "O" stuck within the brackets of art that can neither be positive nor negative. This "O" is not the abysmal "O" the others thought they had been referring to (especially Antonio), the void at the center of all boundaries of art. It is the "O" with additional brackets around it; it is Caliban as he mirrors art; it is "reality" as we perceive it in our self-reflective "staginess". Only if the artist had let Caliban go to complete dissipated chaos, only if the artist and Caliban had, like Jacob and the Angel, "wrestled through the long dark hours",⁸³ would the true abysmal "O" have come to the fore. But as it is, the artist always going for the "Good Right Subject" (in concert with Ferdinand's "Real Right Place" and "Right Required Time"), the "O" becomes little more than an extinguished afflatus, a magician with only stale, predictable tricks left in his bag. As Nelson describes it: "Caliban is telling the poet that because of the poet's delusion (convincing himself that he was choosing Ariel when actually he was in a sort of limbo between Ariel and Caliban), he now is faced with his life without his talent. . . with living with the self he never really wanted but did not know how to get rid of, while the self he always wanted (and, in fact, thought he was) now mocks him by its absence."⁸⁴ We hear echoes of Paul's own struggle with his sinful self

⁸³ Cf. Genesis 32.22-32. See Cunningham, 371ff., for the way this story has been assimilated into modernist and postmodernist texts and criticism, and has become emblematic "of (post)modernism's larger struggle with divine Other and the notion of ultimate signification."

⁸⁴ Nelson, 47.

in Romans 7 ("For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want. . ."), but in the artist's case there is no one to save him from his wretched situation.⁸⁵ The best either Caliban or the artist can hope for, says Caliban as he abruptly ends his message, is "to forgive and forget the past, and to keep our respective hopes for the future within moderate, very moderate, limits." The artist has no spiritual superiority here; in fact, caught as he is in his own tangle of magic and illusion, he has less.

With the first section of the speech establishing that frames exist around both the "sea" and the "mirror", and with the second section establishing that Ariel and Caliban are really two sides of the same coin, Caliban in the final part of the speech addresses, on behalf of *both* Ariel and himself, the "assorted, consorted specimens of the general popular type" -- the public audience. He does not reply to the audience's earlier questions, for, by being able to ask them, the audience clearly show they possess the answers. In fact, the ability to ask them shows they have moved from the "childish spell" in which they could see neither the mirror nor the magic, those "transparent globes of enchantment" which created the spell, to "the larger colder emptier room on this side of the mirror". In the bare, exposed space of this existential awareness, they can finally, as Caliban says, "recognise and reckon with the two of us", can "detect the irreconcilable difference between my reiterated affirmation of what your furnished circumstances categorically are, and His [Ariel's] successive propositions as to everything else which they conditionally might be." To take

⁸⁵ Romans 7.14-25. Cf. also Augustine: "I was much attracted by the theatre, because the plays reflected my own unhappy plight and were tinder to my fire. Why is it that men enjoy feeling sad at the sight of tragedy and suffering on the stage, although they would be most unhappy if they had to endure the same fate themselves? Yet they watch the plays because they hope to be made to feel sad, and the feeling of sorrow is what they enjoy. What miserable delirium this is!" (Book III, ii, *Confessions*, 55-56). For Augustine, art offered no mercy or grace: ". . . in those days I used to share the joy of the stage lovers and their sinful pleasure in each other even though it was all done in make-believe for the sake of entertainment. . . But now I feel more pity for a man who is happy in his sins than for one who has to endure the ordeal of forgoing some harmful pleasure or being deprived of some enjoyment which was really an affliction" (56-57). For Caliban also, art offers no mercy or grace. Prospero, in his Epilogue, had asked "indulgence" from the audience, but if he receives any, it is only of the pleasurable sort, not of the remissive sort. Prospero cannot escape himself and his Caliban. Art's end is not in and of itself salvific.

this first step is to move towards a more authentic understanding of the relationship between life and art, that is, one that is less delusive.

The place this side of the mirror Caliban calls the "Grandly Average Place". It is like a train station, where trains come and go. But the most significant experiences are not had while actually riding one of these trains to an imaginary "Somewhere". They are had while waiting for it in the waiting room of habitual "Nowhere", being occupied by the most mundane and forgettable tasks and thoughts. In the "Nowhere" we have a right to stagestruck hope, but the moment we leave, we enter a foreign and uncomfortable place where both Ariel and Caliban will be compelled to grant everything we ask and command, to our great detriment. Caliban suggests strongly we remain where we are, in the cold, dark, empty room. For in our hope we will still ask to be transported away, but our freedom lies in the hope, not in its realization.⁸⁶

Caliban and Ariel stand now as two poles which govern our desires, two guides to whom we will make a plea for release from our "Nowhere" position. The one pole is that which we "categorically are"; the other is that which we "conditionally might be". Both require a choice on our part; both lead to troubling destinations. We face a harrowing dilemma, since the way of truth lies beyond either of the poles.

The first described is the route we travel when Caliban is put in charge. "Release us from our minor roles", we ask him; our desire is that he take us back through nostalgia to our perception of more edenic times, where authority and responsibility recline easily amid an almost Romantic surge of unanxiousness, "those purring sites and amusing vistas where the fluctuating

⁸⁶ Such an idea suggests a "theology of hope", as put forward this century by the likes of Jürgen Moltmann and others. In *Theology of Hope* (trans. James W. Leitch [London: SCM Press, 1967], 18), Moltmann writes: "Present and future, experience and hope, stand in contradiction to each other in Christian eschatology, with the result that man is not brought into harmony and agreement with the given situation, but is drawn into the conflict between hope and experience" (cf. Romans 8.24, 25). In *The Crucified God* (trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden [London: SCM Press, 1974], 5), he writes: "Unless it apprehends *the pain of the negative*, Christian hope cannot be realistic and *liberating*" (as quoted by Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 418). The hope Caliban acknowledges here is a "stagestruck hope" -- it is never outside the circles of our making. To get outside such hope, he says, one must travel via the "foreign, uncomfortable, despotic". As Alonso counselled earlier (*Alonso*, ln. 37), "For as your fears are, so you must hope."

arabesques of sound, the continuous eruption of colours and scents, the whole rich incoherence of nature made up of gaps and asymmetrical events plead beautifully and bravely for our undistress." But this cry for deliverance will only lead, under Caliban's guidance, to the downright here and now, a bleak landscape, isolating in its "windless rarified atmosphere" and "secular stagnation", where we stand as the only subject whose questions fall to utter silence and tears to empty consolation. Here, at the end of our lonely journey, we see "Liberty" for what it truly is: thorough disinterestedness. We have reached a demythologized, passive, disordered aporia of uneasy awareness, our self now frightfully free "to choose its own meaning" in despair and silence, while "facts" and "values", the stuff of our existence's previous meaning, fall to the wayside. Caliban, in complying with our request to be delivered from "every anxious possibility", has no choice but to deliver us to precisely that, "every anxious possibility", a "state Auden has called a 'Hell of the Pure Deed' ".⁸⁷ Such is the way we would discover a truth that might set us truly free, a truth in predicament.

The second route is that taken under Ariel's guidance, requested mostly by those who have experienced success in life, and who feel Ariel's path is more "spiritual". In society's terms, these people have made improvements; but such terms are limited, and the world as a whole, they realize, has not advanced. They thus seek deliverance from the messy particularities of life which they can not tidy. They seek to be translated into "One Great Universal Generality", unhampered by time, space, motion, dependency, or mortality. What they get, however, as Ariel obliges their request, is anything but a static universal: they are led into a nightmare where "All voluntary movements are possible", all modes of transportation available -- action, that is, is supreme -- but where any sense of direction, origin or destination is completely lacking. Religion and culture tell them something is missing, but there is no way to isolate or universalize what that something is. Other selves exist, but there is no way of knowing who or what is genuine or not. Love can be performed, but true

⁸⁷ McDiarmid and McDiarmid, 82.

motives are forever uncertain, and the tongue is continually restrained by anxiety and reduced to babble. The only possible relief is to ride "toward a grey horizon of the bleaker vision", a dark hard place of personal breakdown, an agony where existence can find an unequivocal meaning only by losing itself in fear and despair. Such is the way they would discover a truth behind their "everlasting Not Yet".

By unveiling these alternative routes, Caliban reveals to us that their end points are the same, that we come ultimately to a place of existential dread. Caliban himself despairs, seeing that we, being the incorrigible humans that we are, will seek out our consolation and rescue through one of these two means regardless of his advance warnings. He concludes that we are thus better off blind and deaf. He also sees now the dilemma of Shakespeare ("the dedicated dramatist"): in trying to show us our "condition of estrangement from the truth", he necessarily fails, for the more truthful he is in its depiction, the less clear is the truth from which we are estranged; the brighter he shows truth in its order, justice and joy, the fainter his picture of our actual drab condition; the more true he is to his artistic gift (to show the gap between what we are and what we might become), the more, that is, he defines the estrangement itself, the more he must delude us "that an awareness of the gap is in itself a bridge", that looking at our "defects in his mirror" is an unshakable affirmation of ourselves.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Caliban's foregoing alternative routes, with all their language of selfhood and subjectivity, of anxiety and dread, of despair and estrangement, of "somewhere" and "nowhere", of generality and immediacy, of now and "not yet", of predicament and freedom, of irrelevance and meaning, of outward action and "infinite passivity", are unmistakably Kierkegaardian in their psychology and theology. The two options, "the facile-glad-handed highway or the virtuous averted track, by which the human effort to make its own fortune arrives all eager at its abruptly dreadful end", can be seen in the following passage of *The Sickness Unto Death*: "It is as far as possible from the truth that the common view is right which assumes that anyone who doesn't think or feel he is in despair is not in despair, and that only the person who says he is in despair is so. On the contrary, he who says without pretence that he despairs is, after all, a little nearer, a dialectical step nearer being cured than all those who are not regarded and who do not regard themselves as being in despair. But as most authorities on the psyche will concede, the normal situation is this: that most people live without being properly conscious of being characterized by spirit -- and to this one can trace *all the so-called security, contentment with life, etc., which is exactly despair*. People who, on the other hand, say they are in despair are as a rule either those who have so much more profound a nature that they are bound to become conscious of themselves as spirit, or those *who have been helped by painful experience and difficult decisions* to become conscious of themselves as spirit -- either one or the other, for very rare indeed is the one who in truth is not in despair" (56-57 -- italics added). By staring into the mirror in Caliban's "larger colder emptier

Caliban is describing a predicament which comes with the poetic endeavour itself. "Having learnt his language", he says, he can now see that the age-old gap between life as we are forced to live it and life as we would like to live it, between, ultimately, the human and the divine, is one which words in the end cannot express.⁸⁹ The best an artist can do is hope for "an unpredictable misting over of his glass or an absurd misprint in his text".⁹⁰ While attempting to recreate life, the artist must all the while hope that something will show up his recreation as false, yet so as not to erase the audience's disappointment (ie. so as not to continue to foster their delusion). By voicing this dilemma the way he does, Caliban assumes for himself the poetic "trumpery", and becomes the artist "Beating about for some large loose image to define the original drama" while hoping "some unforeseen mishap will intervene to ruin his effect". His thoughts here reflect his speech as a whole: the mishap of *The Tempest* in grand baroque language articulating an attempt to capture the original drama, but only by means of recreating it, by reflecting it anew. To this end, he realizes *both* sides of the mirror are recreations, that as much as the "original drama" was "original", it was still nevertheless "drama", that we are *all* actors on a "worldly stage" without a stage/audience distinction, and that our performance, the performance of "reality", where pains are felt and wounds leave scars, is "of the greatest grandest opera rendered by a very provincial touring company indeed." Our production and delivery has been appallingly bad, and as the curtain falls we all stand "down stage with red faces and no applause". Our play has been no dream. And to bring it to its end, Caliban returns us to the beginning of the

room", those who come from either circumstance -- "so-called security" or "painful experience" -- are forced into recognition of their despair, which is their first move towards overcoming it. At the heart of the entire commentary is Kierkegaard's dictum "the quest for faith begins in anxiety" (Hecht, 242). For a fuller expounding of Kierkegaard's concepts of anxiety and despair, see Hannay's chapter "Pathology of the Self" in *Kierkegaard*, 157-204, and George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 56-62. For Kierkegaard's influence on Auden's *For the Time Being*, written immediately before *The Sea and the Mirror*, see Callan, 180-188; for the influence on *The Age of Anxiety*, written immediately after *The Sea and the Mirror*, see John R. Boly, "The Romantic Tradition in *The Age of Anxiety*", in *W.H. Auden*, ed. Bloom, 139-140.

⁸⁹ See above, same chapter, footnote 74.

⁹⁰ Cf. I Corinthians 13. 12: "For now we see in a mirror dimly. . ." (RSV; "Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate. . ." -- Vulgate); Borges' "The Mirror of Enigmas", *Labyrinths*, 244-247.

"commentary", where the stage manager stood before the critics. Our production, with ourselves as our own silent audience, stands as an utter disaster, for which not a kind word is deserved from any critic. In complete self-reflection we show our incompetence. Caliban also returns us, then, even further back to the Brontë epigraph of the title page, where the poet had asked: "Am I wrong to worship where / Faith cannot doubt nor Hope despair / Since my own soul can grant my prayer?" The answer, Caliban now says, is an indubitable "Yes".

But all is not quite over. In his last paragraph, his postscript, Caliban speaks on behalf of and to everyone -- players, actors, critics, managers, artists, every kind of audience conceivable, Ariel, and himself. At this moment when we truly see ourselves as we are, hanging on the edge of a silent, unreasonable, inescapable abyss, -- "There is nothing to say. There never has been. . . There is no way out. There never was" -- then, and only then, can we hear the "Word" from the other side of the gap, "our only *raison d'être*". Our drab conditions have not improved, nor have we lost our "incurable staginess":

only now it is not in spite of them but with them that we are blessed by that Wholly Other Life from which we are separated by an essential emphatic gulf of which our contrived fissures of mirror and proscenium arch -- we understand them at last -- are feebly figurative signs, so that all our meanings are reversed and it is precisely in its negative image of Judgement that we can positively envisage Mercy; it is just here, among the ruins and the bones, that we may rejoice in the perfected Work which is not ours.

Caught on a stage we cannot leave, caught in the enfeebled signs of our language, we find "our meanings" in the reversals and negations, so that in the mirror image of judgement we find mercy and pardon.⁹¹ Artifice is not only all

⁹¹ Auden appears to have taken the notions that end Caliban's speech here directly from Reinhold Niebuhr's chapter "The Things That Are and the Things That are Not" in *Beyond Tragedy* (Salem, N.H.: Ayer, 1937, 1965), which itself ends: "For man cannot fight for his existence without morally justifying himself as the protagonist of values necessary to existence itself. Thus the "things that are" are persuaded into the vain defiance of the "things that are not." The defiance is vain because God is the author of the things that are not. They reveal his creative power as both judgement and mercy upon the things that are" (225). Cf. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*: "When objects are thrown into the shadow by the application of a brilliant light, we do not call the shadow light; nor should we when the light of the righteousness of God throws the works of men into darkness, call these works righteous. . . The great figures in history are classic figures, not because of their human creative power, but because they are under judgement. Their creative activity is severely limited; a limitation actually displayed by their

around us, but all that we have, imperfect as it is. Only "among the ruins and bones"⁹² of our creations and recreations can we envisage a "Work", a creation, that is perfected. And only in that "Work" can we reconcile with our "incorrigible staginess". Caliban's language here is clearly Christian, as it ends with the hope of reconciliation. But its theology is not couched in the soteriological and eschatological frames we might expect. Those frames Caliban only alludes to. He keeps his theology in the poetic frame, only to show that *all* frames must remain this side of the "essential emphatic gulf", and will break down by their "contrived fissures", only to be remade again.⁹³ Caliban's speech becomes one large contrived fissure on the mirror of the "commentary" as a whole, and one large contrived fissure on the proscenium arch of *The Tempest* it comments upon. It also becomes the poetic moment by which the fissure opens up to new vistas beyond either.

The Postscript

The final words are given to Ariel, Caliban's "spiritual" -- that is, ephemeral, insubstantial -- colleague. But Ariel's words are themselves ephemeral, for he has no substantial voice, having always to borrow from the

preeminent actions. Moreover, they are themselves aware that their creative genius is so precarious, relative, and arrested, that it provides no ground for boasting. Their positive, absolute, and sure greatness is known only to God, because it rests in Him" (119). Caliban concludes his speech with the very Barthian theology that grace and pure love are absolutely necessary, even, or *especially*, for the creative artist, since great art always reflects its own cracked state and demise. Of such a necessity Shakespeare's Prospero seems to be aware in his final request for grace and indulgence in *The Tempest's* last lines.

⁹² Cf. similar imagery in *The Waste Land*, "The Fire Sermon", lns. 173-195: "And bones cast in a little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year", e.g. (lms. 194-195; see also above, footnote 71).

⁹³ The notion of theology set forth within a poetic frame is a constant refrain throughout Altizer's *Genesis and Apocalypse* and the subsequent *The Genesis of God* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), particularly within the lineage of Dante, Milton, Blake and Joyce. In the former he writes: "While nothing is so isolated and apart in our given theological thinking than genesis and apocalypse, genesis and apocalypse are essentially and integrally conjoined in the epic visions of Milton, Blake, and Joyce, just as they are in the philosophical thinking of Hegel and Nietzsche, and the very conjunction may yet prove to be a decisive way for a theological recovery of the Bible, and for a rebirth of theology itself" (10).

natural realm.⁹⁴ He has, in fact, no self, and so cannot even voice the one word which announces selfhood -- "I". The "I", the echo that follows each of three refrains, must be said by the "Prompter", the one who stands in the wings and cues the speechless actors. We are reminded again of the Narcissus myth, and of Narcissus' lover Echo who could only repeat the last lines she had just heard. The Prompter becomes like the thwarted lover repeating the last lines of the Narcissus-like Ariel as he stares into the reflecting pool and sees his image, or, more accurately, sees Caliban. But the Prompter, like the Stage Manager at the outset, is not part of the play. His "I" is simply the framing bookend of the poem's or "commentary's" script. Or the Prompter is an offstage stone thrown into the reflecting pool, with the result that Ariel as an image disappears.

The three ten-line stanzas of the poem are spoken directly to Caliban, and each begins with a command, as if Ariel now had the power to give out orders, and not just receive them. But the commands are all negative -- "Weep no more. . .", "Wish for nothing. . .", "Never hope. . ." -- as if he recognized clearly the negative image his counterpart represents. Ariel, however, does not direct them to the Caliban of *The Sea and the Mirror* who has just spoken, but to the Caliban of *The Tempest*. As the "Fleet persistent shadow cast" by Caliban's lameness, Ariel feels he must tell Caliban that he, Ariel, is the worse off of the two, and begins by saying, don't weep for yourself, but pity me instead. In a strange reversal of *The Tempest*, Ariel becomes the darkness amid light, as he is "cast" by being thrown from Caliban's effulgence, but also "cast" in a role of the play from which he, unlike Caliban, cannot escape. He is thus "caught", but also now caught "helplessly in love" with Caliban, "Fascinated by / Drab mortality". He asks Caliban to be true to this mortality, to his "faults", to his "official natural role", and to voice the very word Ariel cannot -- "I". Caliban, of course, knows all this already, and has, in effect, voiced an immensely extended and

⁹⁴ In "Balaam and His Ass" (*DH*, 132-133), Auden writes: "Over and against Caliban, the embodiment of the natural, stands the invisible spirit of imagination, Ariel. (In a stage production, Caliban should be as monstrously conspicuous as possible, and, indeed, suggest, as far as decency permits, the phallic. Ariel, on the other hand, except when he assumes a specific disguise at Prospero's orders, e.g., when he appear as a harpy, should, ideally, be invisible, a disembodied voice, an ideal which, in these days of microphones and loud-speakers, should be realizable.)"

eloquent "I" in his preceding self-conscious speech. It is no accident that there are three "I"s in Ariel's poem, reflecting the tripartite structure of Caliban's speech, and indeed the poem/commentary as a whole.

In the second stanza Ariel realizes he needs to remain the inverse of Caliban: "only / As I am can I / Love you as you are". Ariel's "I am" is contingent on what Caliban represents, substantiality and flesh. Without such he is nothing, completely at the mercy of Caliban's will -- "the power to enchant / That comes from disillusion" (*Prospero*, lns. 50-51). Yet he asks Caliban to wish for nothing other than what he, Ariel, already is, lest the perfection be marred. Again, Caliban knows that the perfection is always already marred, and thus admits in his concluding thoughts that "our wills chuck in their hands". Ariel is not as aware. He can only sing in response to Caliban's crying presence, on which he is utterly dependent. As Auden has described Ariel in an essay on "Music in Shakespeare":

". . . Ariel is neither a singer, that is to say, a human being whose vocal gifts provide him with a social function, nor a nonmusical person who in certain moods feels like singing. Ariel *is* song; when he is truly himself, he sings. . . Yet Ariel. . . cannot express any human feelings because he has none. The kind of voice he requires is exactly the kind that opera does not want, a voice which is as lacking in the personal and erotic and as like an instrument as possible."⁹⁵

Caliban possesses all the human qualities Ariel lacks. Thus, it is only after Caliban's cry that Ariel can be heard.

In the final stanza, Ariel comes as close to the understanding of Caliban as he can. Both Ariel and Caliban together boundary on, and so demarcate, the region of despair and silence beyond art, marked by "Heaven's kindness" and "earth's frankly brutal drum". When their falsehoods (Ariel's illusions of art, Caliban's ruining of art's effects) are divided, they shall both become "nothing". Ariel, for his part, will become an "evaporating sigh", as if he is the last gasp of life's breath, extinguished into nothing, thoroughly dematerialized. So the final "I" is not his own, but the echo of someone offstage, an echo dissipating into a nullity, the self, the "I", without, finally, the "am". Ariel has got his wish for freedom from art. The result: not an "I", but an O.

⁹⁵ *DH*, 524-525.

Chapter 4

The mirror-play of the world is the round dance of appropriating.

-- Martin Heidegger¹

With the foregoing analysis of *The Sea and the Mirror*, we are now in a position to clarify more distinctly the boundaries of Auden's poetics. Where, in all the vastness and intricacy of the poem/commentary we have just looked at, do we educe such a poetics? Auden gives us a clue in the Preface, initiating a tropic gesture that will echo, like Narcissus' lover, throughout the tripartite structure of the overall work: the figure of the "O". This trope (>Greek τροπος or τροπή, a turn, turning, turning around or return) is indeed an encompassing figure, surrounding the entire work just as the work, in turn, circumnavigates *The Tempest*.² As we have seen, Auden puts the "O" to work on many levels. It is the marked arena of action, the circus ring, the island, the stage, the "Globe"; it is the artificer's magical circle, the circumscribed place in which, like Prospero's kin (V,i), we are charmed; it is the Dance of Death, the nullifying zero, the cipher, the bordered void; it is the framed mirror we peer into not only to see Shakespeare and Auden, but to see ourselves; and thus it is the hermeneutical circle we must, at some point in its circularity, enter, if we are to engage with the text, with all the other texts this text opens up to us, and with ultimately the text we call ourselves, "I". The "O" becomes the opening into Auden's poetics, but also the breath breathed into his words that we read -- something, that is, that we too must draw. Reflected in the "O", then, is reflection itself, a continual

¹ *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 180.

² A trope was also a textual or musical interpolation within the authorized liturgy of the medieval Roman rite. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says the trope "functions as an amplification, embellishment, or intercalation in the official text but in no way changes the identity of the text itself. Neither is the material of the addition, although a new creation in both text and music, capable of an artistic existence separate from the liturgical text whose handmaid it was intended to be". Later, the trope "continued to contribute to a number of independent forms, especially those that, like the drama, were related to the audience as listeners and viewers" (E. Leahy, "Trope", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed.). Given this definition, we might say the whole of *The Sea and the Mirror* is trope upon *The Tempest*.

"bending back" of all that we have been circumscribing so far, from the philosophy of reflection to Auden's *magnum opus*, a continual "bending back" of, indeed, our gaze itself.

A poetics suggested by the "O" becomes a cooperative effort between the text and the reader, between the action of the stage and the audience. For all the emphasis in *The Sea and the Mirror* on the supposed strict divide between these two realms, between this side of the curtain (the sea) and the side of the stage (the mirror), we have seen a continual breaking down of that divide throughout the poem/commentary, culminating in Caliban's speech. There, audience and actor, manager and playwright, critic and novice, all occupy the same space. "Gentle breath of yours my sails / Must fill, or else my project fails", Prospero had said in *The Tempest's* Epilogue (11-12), and it is as if Caliban now draws out this breath by crossing over and, thereby, breaking down the boundary of *The Tempest's* stage, and by not simply, as Prospero did before him, addressing the audience, but also speaking on their behalf. This move suggests that the poetics at work here cannot be described with the kind of extrinsic stance a critic might assume, who purports to observe the action in complete detachment and without any stake in the play's success. As the Stage Manager in the Preface has shown, such critical "objectivity" kills surprise, and it is surprise just as much as sympathy which draws performer and audience together, and keeps existence from petrifying into "habit" (Preface, lns. 11-20). Surprise depends completely upon the notion of expectation, or its absence, both of which lie first and foremost with the viewer. To "objectify" performance is to claim that all one's expectations are predetermined, that every element of one's existence is in some way anticipated or accounted for -- even the "expectation" to be surprised. Philosophical reflection, we have seen, works in this manner, by claiming it can speculate on existence disinterestedly.³ But this claim can never be fully true, because the surprise which truly involves us, which draws out the involuntary exclamation "O!", and all that it does and *does not* carry, is that which invokes "our wonder, our terror" of something we *cannot* account for, but something

³ See above, Chapter 1, 58-59, e.g.

which thoroughly *interests* us (is *among our being*, as the Latin etymology of this word suggests) -- our non-existence. Kierkegaard went to great lengths to drive home this very point: that only in the subjective does true existence lie, because only there does our positive existence confront our negative existence, the touchstone of true existence.⁴ Objectivity only circumvents existence by standing at a remove. The critics job, then, is self-defeating, inasmuch as it tries to quote (objectify) the "smiling / Secret" (subjective existence/nonexistence) it "cannot quote". Similarly, the poetics that emerges from *The Sea and the Mirror* cannot be objectively described as something static, fixed, or systematic, for to do so is precisely to do the very opposite of what this poetics suggests, and demands of us. This poetics is always an *active* creation, and we do it most harm if we passively or disinterestedly objectify it. Admittedly, our exegesis in the previous chapter has run a dangerous line towards this objectification. Such a line is inevitable, and even necessary. But to play on Caliban's image of skating full tilt towards the "standardless abyss" and then effecting a "breathtaking triumphant turn", we must now take our breath, and effect this turn away from a strictly critical objectification and towards rather that abyss where the subject/object distinction is as shadowy as the audience/stage distinction. Only then can we begin to understand where such a poetics might lead us.⁵

Let us, then, look more intently and engagingly at, and into, Auden's "O". At an initial level, the "O" represents that artificiality which has come to be associated with the perfect circle. There is no such reality as a "perfect circle" in nature, Kepler had stated, as he advanced his theory of the ellipse; the beauty

⁴ E.g. *Unscientific Postscript, Vol. 1*: "The subjective existing thinker who has the infinite in his soul has it always, and therefore his form is continually negative. When this is the case, when he, actually existing, renders the form of existence [*Tilværelse*] in his own existence [*Existents*], he, existing, is continually just as negative as positive, *for his positivity consists in the continued inward deepening in which he is cognizant of the negative*" (84, italics added).

⁵ The crossing and breaking down of traditional distinctions such as subject/object is a deconstructive move that is closely connected with language's signifier/signified distinction. As Kevin Hart points out, the signifier or sign crosses over or does away with its own boundaries separating it with what is signified by it: "the sign trespasses over its assigned limits, thereby blurring any qualitative distinction between the concept and the sign. And this 'trespass of the sign', as I have called it, is one instance of the general mode of critique known today as 'deconstruction'. According to this critique, there is not a fall *from* full presence but, as it were, a fall *within* presence, an inability of 'presence' to fulfil its promise of being able to form a ground" -- *The Trespass of the Sign*, 14.

of the "perfect circle" is an aesthetic creation.⁶ The "O" that is the whole of *The Sea and the Mirror* is likewise a consciously contrived, *self*-consciously contrived, aesthetic creation displaying -- we might even say flaunting -- its sheer craftsmanship at all points. Structurally, the poem/commentary is painstakingly balanced and symmetrical, not only internally with respect to all its parts (its tripartite form, for example), but externally, with *The Tempest* as its template. This balance between "internal" and "external" is carefully wrought, placed in such an equilibrium, on such a level plain, that their distinction begins to blur. What is "internal", the "poem" with all its parts linked together, and what is external, the object of the "commentary" and all its references, are carefully fused, so that at any point we say Auden is commenting on Shakespeare's play, we can also say, without any stretching of the text, the poem is speaking about itself in a thoroughly self-contained and autonomous manner. As we proceed through each section, we see a growing artificiality -- that is, a growing *emphasis* on artificiality -- so that by the time we reach Caliban's speech, even the prose by which he speaks is so highly fabricated, so florid and rococo (no one, we say thankfully, *speaks* like that -- one has a hard enough time reading it), that even though he is specifically speaking about Shakespeare, or on behalf of him, he is speaking his own meticulously wrought poem. To make prose so contrived is, in a sense, more emphatic than the most contrived poetic form (Miranda's villanelle, say), for prose by its very nature (and by its

⁶ "For if it was only a question of the beauty of the circle, the spirit would decide with good reason for it, and the circle would be suitable for all bodies, principally for celestial bodies, since bodies participate in quantity, and the circle is the most beautiful form of quantity. But since it was necessary to rely not only on the spirit but also on natural and animal faculties to create motion, these faculties followed their own inclination, and they were not accomplished according to the dictates of spirit, which they did not perceive, but through material necessity. It is therefore not astonishing that these faculties, mixed together, did not fully reach perfection" (Johannes Kepler, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. W. Von Dyck, M. Caspar, *et al.* [Munich: Beck, 1938 *et seq.*], Vol.7, 330 -- as quoted by Hallyn, 213). Hallyn also reminds us how much Renaissance artists were taken with the symmetry of the circle, with the "aesthetics of geometry", pointing out as an example that: ". . . Renaissance art generally sought to unify the representation of the human body in terms of the circle, that with the Vitruvian drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, Dürer, and others, a kind of grammar was sometimes constructed, according to which the parts of the body were subjected, as they completed the most varied movements, to circular units of measurement" (114). Cf. also Derrida's short essay "Ellipsis", *Writing and Difference*, 294-300.

etymology) is a more direct form of speech.⁷ Caliban, previously the most "natural" and primitive of characters, ironically becomes artifice at its most amplified, even as his speech amplifies the structure of the entire artifice. The "O"'s circumferencing line has been made by Caliban as bold as it can. We cannot mistake its deliberate, delimiting outer frame.

As a set outer limit, as the mark of distinct artificiality, the "O" is then a *fait accompli*, a finished work, whose structure must necessarily exclude the immediate "life" it purports to convey.⁸ Auden purposely sets his poem/commentary *after* the events of *The Tempest* to drive home the fact that the play cannot present "life" as we are forced to live it -- that is, *immediately*. The play can only *mediate* that life through its closed structure, and in so doing, render it anything but "life". This is Caliban's point as he voices the audience's complaint about Shakespeare's use of the stage: "we are not, we reiterate, so blinded by presumption to our proper status and interest as to expect or even wish at any time to enter, far less to dwell there." So the events after the play are really non-events, long meditations with no action. But this exclusion of immediacy also goes for Caliban's own words, for they too are a *fait accompli*. We can no more enter or dwell on Caliban's stage in *The Sea and the Mirror* than we can *The Tempest's* stage. Both "O"'s are ones in which we must forfeit all attempts to capture any sense of "truth" as we must live it in our daily routine existence. This is the lesson, if there is any lesson, to be had from artifice, Auden would have us believe (the artist's dilemma: "the more truthfully he paints our condition, the less clearly can he indicate the truth from which it is estranged").

But Auden has also said, we have seen, that "without conscious artifice we die",⁹ a point Caliban corroborates in the phrase "our incorrigible staginess".

⁷ The Latin *prosa*, direct or straightforward speech, derives from *prorsus*, forward or right onward, which itself derives the prefix *pro* and the verb *versare* or *vertere*, to turn, from which we get "verse" (Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1879, rpt. 1966]). Prose, then, is verse turned out forwardly, directly. Both prose and verse derive from the same root, from a turning, a fact that works nicely into Caliban's speech, and Auden's "O".

⁸ See above, Introduction, 23-24.

⁹ See above, Introduction, 24.

How can Auden say we live separately from the artifice we create, and yet that without such artifice we cannot live? Has he painted us into a corner from which we cannot escape? In one sense, yes. As Caliban has tried to articulate, all of our so-called "life" is made up of artificial constructs, small sections of a circle with two co-ordinates, our "prohibitive frontiers", without which "we should never know who we were or what we wanted". We create things because by creating we help define ourselves. "Life" is present in the *doing* of art, in the making and constructing of boundaries, by which we gauge ourselves and put form to the very thing we call our "life" (as though we were putting inverted commas around "life" to give it its borders, as if to say, "our life or our reality is defined within *these* limits"). Even in our immediacy we are building structures of mediation, through which we lend our life meaning. If we cannot escape from our corner, it is because the moment we cease painting, we have nothing by which to define ourselves. To escape from our corner is to escape from "life", as it is immediately being mediated.¹⁰

The paradox of this situation -- to experience our everyday existence (Heidegger's *Dasein*) in a pure, unmediated, "at hand" manner, only *by means of* structures we create for ourselves¹¹ -- returns us to our earlier question above about the precedence of *being* or *creating*: does our will to create arise out of our experiences in life, or do our experiences in life arise from our will to create?¹² As Caliban manifests it, the difference between the *being* and the *creating* which stand behind our "general will to compose" is very slight, and is

¹⁰ Peter Brook, in his discussion of the stage in *The Empty Space*, describes the experiment led by Julian Beck and Judith Malina known as the "Living Theatre", a communal group which exemplifies in a striking, if radical, manner the point Auden is trying to make here through Caliban. This group, he writes, "provides a complete way of life for every one of its members, some thirty men and women who live and work together; they make love, produce children, act, invent plays, do physical and spiritual exercises, share and discuss everything that comes their way. Above all, they are a community; but they are only a community because they have one special function which gives their communal existence its meaning. This function is acting. Without acting, this group would run dry: they perform because the act and fact of performing corresponds to a great shared need. They are in search of meaning in their lives, and in a sense even if there were no audiences, they would still have to perform, because the theatrical event is the climax and center of their search" (69-70).

¹¹ Heidegger: "Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is the fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won" ("The Origin of the Work of Art", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 55).

¹² See above, Introduction, 22ff.

only a matter of *value*. Being and creating are, effectively, one and the same act. This the later Heidegger came to see, as is evident in his reading of Hölderlin's phrase ". . . poetically man dwells. . .": "Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being."¹³ For Caliban, as for Ariel, to be is not simply to be created, but also, quite *literally*, to create in turn; to dwell anywhere is to dwell in artifice. So too with every other character: their "*I am*. . ." expressions dwell only ever poetically. So too with us: to be "at hand" in the world is to dwell poetically within our own created constructs, or within our creative ability and potential to create those constructs. Any route we choose, Caliban or Ariel, necessarily forces our creative hand. "Human beings are, necessarily, actors who cannot become something before they have pretended to be it".¹⁴

"Our incorrigible staginess", then, lies in our very nature being intrinsically creative, and not just in the sense that we as humans will always be inclined to some creative expression, but that *to be* in the world is *to create* the world around us. All the world is a stage. And on this stage are being played out performances of creation which, once they have become a *fait accompli*, generate new performances, so that a perpetual creative motion, propelled by the active *being*, maintains our sense of a lived and living "life". In this sense, *The Sea and the Mirror* is equally both "commentary" and "poetry", for it comments about something which has preceded it only by recreating it anew.¹⁵ It comments about "life" and "reality" only by recreating them anew. It states matter-of-factly, prosaically, by means of the poetic. It expounds the circle of *The Tempest* only by putting a larger circle around it, like the expanding, reverberating waves created on a pool's surface by a stone, a stone which distorts the image reflected on that surface, but never does away with it completely. If such an encircling is how we can only ever describe what we see and experience, whether in "art" or in "life", then even our attempts here to expound how Auden

¹³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 227.

¹⁴ Auden, "Age of Anxiety" -- see above, Introduction, 25.

¹⁵ "Commentary", we note, comes from the Latin *commentum*, an invention, and *comminisci*, to contrive or devise.

encircles the circle is nothing more than placing a further circle around his attempt. By dealing critically or uncritically with the text, our articulations must themselves be acts of creation, further reflections, further texts. This encircling, of course, inscribes a hermeneutical circle, whereby we interpret texts (or the world) only by creating new texts (or a new world), which themselves must be (self-)interpreted. "Reflection on the partiality of past interpretations demands reflection on the partiality of the present."¹⁶ These reflections are not in any way imitative, but creative, a continual redefining of ourselves and our world within the "prison house" of our forms.¹⁷

¹⁶ David Hoy, 167.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur's understanding of hermeneutics and interpretation is significant here. Werner G. Jeanrond, in his *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking* (trans. Thomas J. Wilson [New York: Crossroads, 1988], 38-39), writes of Ricoeur: "Reflection is the locus of hermeneutics in the process of Ricoeur's philosophy. It is not the concern of the reflection to justify science and duty but rather 'to re-appropriate our effort to exist'. Reflection accordingly is a task: 'We have to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self in all the density of its works' [Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretations*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 45]. Ricoeur sums up, by way of definition, that the reflection is not intuition but rather

. . . the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and that desire. That is why reflection is more than a mere critique of knowledge and even more than a mere critique of moral judgement; prior to every critique of judgement it reflects upon the act of existing that we deploy in effort and desire.

And for this reason reflection must develop into interpretation

. . . because I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world. That is why reflective philosophy must include the results, methods and presuppositions of all sciences that try to decipher and interpret the signs of man [*Freud and Philosophy*, 46].

As a consequence, reflection is accomplished as interpretation of the signs through which man mediates himself to himself. 'Every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others' [Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretation*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 17]." Jeanrond's concise analysis here shows how Ricoeur's understanding of reflection is proactive: it requires an interpretive involvement by which self and other (the text) are continually refashioned. Thus Anthony Thiselton can write: "Ricoeur insists that fiction has the power to 're-make' reality, by ordering otherwise scattered aspects of the world into new configurations" (*New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 357). And Gerald L. Bruns can draw the link with Aristotle's notion of *mimêsis* that we looked at above (Chapter 1, 44-47): "It seems to me that what we have here is a basic Aristotelian theory of the text, and what is Aristotelian about it is the way the text is saved or justified by being systematized and then reconnected to reality according to an up-to-date conception of mimesis -- a looking glass theory of mimesis that is, so to speak, *beyond representation*" (*Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992],

We can also look at the "O" then as a figurative opening into which the work of art invites us as necessary participants. Within the circumference of the circle there is space. Within the bounds of a text there are gaps in which to maneuver. As readers, we find as we enter these gaps that we encounter a world of multiplicities -- grammatical, syntactical, logical, intentional, connotative, analogous, metaphorical, intertextual, etc. -- which require connection in some way, that is, require interpretation. Caliban tries to get at this sense of flexible space when he describes for the audience their fascination with the stage's performance (*CP*, 425-426):

"...our one desire has always been that she should preserve for ever her old high strangeness, for what delights us about her world is just that it neither is nor possibly could become one in which we could breathe or behave, that in her house the right of innocent passage should remain so universal that the same neutral space accommodates the conspirator and his victim; the generals of both armies, the chorus of patriots and the choir of nuns, palace and farmyard, cathedral and smugglers' cave, that time should never revert to that intransigent element we are so ineluctably and only too familiarly in, but remain the passive good-natured creature she and her friends can by common consent do anything they like with. . ."

Art offers the "neutral space" in which a cross-section of meanings operate, some together, some against each other. The audience would like to feel they are simply observing all this "high strangeness", a place in which they cannot rightly "breathe" because of its neutrality. But as Caliban will say later *to* (and not on *behalf of*) the audience, their sense of distinction between the staged performance they think they observe and their own performance in "reality" is exaggerated, if not misleading (*CP*, 443):

"Beating about for some large loose image to define the original drama which aroused his imitative passion, the first performance in which the players were their own audience, the worldly stage on which their behaving flesh was really sore and sorry. . . the fancy immediately

239 -- italics added). As Jeanron, Thiselton, and Bruns all agree, however, Ricoeur still wishes to maintain a sense of reference outside the text which we appropriate as readers, still wishes to maintain a difference between poetry and speculative discourse, dialectical though these two modes are (Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 313). All is not purely relativized by individual imagination. Ricoeur himself distills for us his thoughts on the matter: "In short, we must restore to the fine word *invent* its twofold sense of both discovery and creation" (*Rule of Metaphor*, 306). Among the many other books written by and about Ricoeur's ideas of hermeneutics and interpretation, see in particular *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991).

Temptations always to endanger it.

Of course, each time we move into the space of this "O" we are being confined and defined by its parameters. And as we carry our own "O"s with us, and create new "O"s, we are conscious that no "O" is independent of the other. The "neutral space" we thought we had discovered is no more than a series of "O"s reworked from other texts, from our own texts, and from the text immediately before us, so that, unlike what Antonio believes, we never stand outside of a circle.¹⁹ A hermeneutical circle once again encloses us: to enter into one circle necessitates that we bring our own; but our own circles have been shaped by entering into previous circles, and will now be reshaped by entering into this circle; and this circle, in turn, will be reshaped by our circles, etc. At no point can we begin from a blank page. We are always already encircled by our interpretive boundaries. Within these enclosures, *being* and *creating* merge into one. Again, Heidegger: "In every understanding of the world, existence is understood with it, and *vice versa*. . . Any interpretation which is to contribute to understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted. . . The 'circle' in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein -- that is, in the understanding which interprets."²⁰ What it means *to be*, *to exist*, is rooted in interpretation, and *vice versa* -- or, as Heidegger will later say, is rooted in creation, and *vice versa*. To be caught within a boundary, then, is not a confining, restricting position that suppresses our being or our creating -- again, Heidegger: "A boundary is not that at which something stops, but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*."²¹ Caliban also recognizes the "opening" of the closed boundary: for to be caught

¹⁹ See the above footnote on *intertextuality*, Chapter 3, 119, footnote 4.

²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 194-195. Cf. Ricoeur: "If we can no longer define hermeneutics in terms of the search for psychological intentions of another person which are concealed *behind* the text, and if we do not want to reduce interpretation to the dismantling of structures, then what remains to be interpreted? I shall say: to interpret is to explicate the type of being-in-the-world unfolded *in front of the text*" ("What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 141 -- as quoted by Bruns, 238).

²¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 154.

in the hermeneutical circle is to find ourselves in positions of creativity. Having been imprisoned in the jail house of language by Prospero, Caliban can now see better the ironic bind of all creators (*CP*, 442-443):

Our unfortunate dramatist, therefore, is placed in the unseemly predicament of having to give all his passion, all his skill, all his time to the task of "doing" life. . . yet of having at the same time to hope that some unforeseen mishap will intervene to ruin the effect. . ."

To "ruin the effect" means to open up the space in which we can maneuver with our own circles. It means to acknowledge the hermeneutical circle that operates in every text and to let that circle both bind and free us. If Auden has done anything in the poem/commentary of *The Sea and the Mirror*, it has been to let Caliban into the hermeneutical circle, a creature simultaneously interpreted and interpreting. *By implication*, we the readers of Caliban join his circle, only to read its sign over the entrance: "There is no way out. There never was."

The moment we are implicated in the imprisoning structures of language, we begin to see, as Prospero, Antonio and Caliban all, in their own way, have seen, that there is something beyond the walls of the prison. Something which language, as such, cannot reach. A truth from which we are yet estranged. The "O" is an orifice opening up to new space, but it is also, as the stage manager reminds from the outset, the "lion's mouth whose hunger / No metaphors can fill". There is a silent realm which language can allude to but never, by virtue of its inherent non-silence, gain access. We only get an allusion, an obfuscated reflection, of this realm in the poetic use of "O" found throughout *The Sea and the Mirror*: an exclamatory interjection as semantically empty as is possible for any word. The final stanza of Prospero's poem gives a sense of where this insubstantial "O" leads:

*O brilliantly, lightly,
Of separation,
Of bodies and death,
Unanxious one, sing
To man, meaning me.
As now, meaning always,
In love or out,
Whatever that mean,
Trembling he takes
The silent passage
Into discomfort.*

The first line begins with the "O" and follows with the adverbs "brilliantly" and "lightly", suggesting something amorphous. The second line begins with the letter "O", and speaks of separation. The third line, beginning as the second, makes manifest this separation in the words "bodies and death". Together the first three lines reverberate with the rarefied atmosphere of the unsayable beyond the body of language.²² Within that body stands "man, meaning me", and "now, meaning always". Outside that body, "Whatever that mean", is only a "silent passage". "All the rest is silence / On the other side of the wall", as the stage manager has forewarned, echoing Hamlet. Ariel, in transgressing the other side of the wall in the poem/commentary's Epilogue, meets this silence head-on, and subsequently disappears into thin air. Caliban knows his existence depends on language, and though he ends his speech alluding to the other side of the wall, the "Wholly Other Life", he wags an admonishing finger to the majority caught in "stagestruck hope", warning that to go to this other side is "to plunge headlong into despair and fall through silence fathomless and dry". This other side does not sit in opposition to artistic speech alone, as the audience believes in comparing Shakespeare's language with their own, thinking theirs does not "enjoy an infinitely indicative mood" like art's, but requires "the whole inflected gamut of an alien third". But as Auden writes later in "Dichtung and Wahrheit", the main defect of artistic language is precisely that it lacks an "Indicative Mood"²³. Language both sides of the curtain is, in some sense, always in the subjunctive mood, always conditional, as it conditionally alludes -- with an ever-present "as if"²⁴ -- to the realm beyond which it cannot directly indicate. The

²² Cf. *Languages of the Unsayable*, eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser.

²³ *CP*, 650-651: "As an artistic language, Speech has many advantages -- three persons, three tenses (Music and Painting only have the Present Tense), both the active and the passive voice -- but it has one serious defect: it lacks the Indicative Mood. All its statements are in the subjunctive and only possibly true until verified (which is not always possible) by non verbal evidence."

²⁴ Derrida, for one, is continually aware of the presiding "as if" in discourses about language's limits. In speaking of Plato's use of *khōra* ("mother", "womb", "nurse", "receptacle", or "imprint-bearer") in the *Timaeus* as a myth within a myth, an "open abyss within the general myth", he writes: "The abyss does not open all at once, at the moment when the general theme of *khōra* receives its name, right in the middle of the book. It all seems to happen just *as if* -- and the *as if* is important to us here -- the fracture of this abyss were announced in a muted and subterranean way, preparing and propagating in advance the simulacra and *mises en abyme*: a series of mythic fictions embedded mutually in each other" (*On the Name*, 113). Like so many

creative, interpretive process must always move forward in a space that cannot encompass the "Whole" or the "Other". For all of Caliban's rhetoric, it indicates, ironically, no more than its own limitations and incapacities.

The "O", then, is as much the empty numerical figure, the cipher, as it is a marking or boundary "from which something begins its presencing." The very presence of the defining circumference brings with it its opposite, a non-defining nullity. If art is delimitation, then at the core of its very structure lies the non-presence from which it has emerged. To move into the space of the "O" is to encounter, eventually, the void which lurks in opposition to any created order. If we consider *The Sea and the Mirror* a round portal through which we journey, our successive encounters will be with a growing sense of an abyss hovering beneath each section. The Preface has succinctly charted this course for us, as it moves from the circus ring to the secret one "cannot quote",²⁵ the ripe silence on the far side of "this world of fact". Prospero's journey carries us more elaborately from Ariel's magical companionship to "unmeaning abysses" where the way of truth has become a discomfiting way of silence. By his final stanza, we cannot separate the circle's bold perimeter from the void at its center. In the center section of the supporting cast, "*Creation's O*" becomes, with each refrain of Antonio's, a Dance of Death, which, though it never obliterates any of the poems -- on the contrary, it defines them all the more -- does make the contrast between art's lines and the dead space beyond or within those lines that much starker. "As I exist, so you shall be denied", Antonio reminds Prospero. Caliban's speech forces us to turn and face the abyss directly, though in the end, to remain *in speech*, we must make our "breathtaking triumphant turn". But this turn, or trope, is made only after we have come "one vast important stretch nearer the Nowhere", glimpsing "infinite passivity and purely arithmetical

other of Plato's terms Derrida fixes on (*pharmakon, hymen, etc.*), the *khōra's* inability to indicate precisely and fixedly its reference reveals the very conditional nature of all language and metaphor. As Derrida concludes: "Philosophy cannot speak directly, whether in the mode of vigilance or of truth (true or probable), about what these figures approach. The dream is between the two, neither one nor the other" (126). See also "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", 35ff; above, Chapter 3, 124, footnote 13; and Brook, 157: ". . . in the theatre 'if' is the truth."

²⁵ On the notion of "the secret" behind the unsayable in language, see below, Chapter 5, 205ff.

disorder" by "swaying out on the ultimate wind-whipped cornice that over hangs the unabiding void", that "essential emphatic gulf" separating us from the "Wholly Other Life" (*CP*, 444). All of Caliban's language has tried to hint at this otherness at the center of artifice. It does so by hinting at the nothingness behind art's form, the double-sided presence and absence of the artificer's circle. The entire *The Sea and the Mirror* is bound by this double-sidedness. The stage manager's circus ring acts as the appropriate opening image for this duality (*CP*, 403):

The wounded cry as the clown
Doubles his meaning, and O
How the little children laugh. . .

The middle line here, when isolated, gives us the double-meaning "O": the drawn circle, and the central nothingness. Ariel's admission at the close of the work ends the poem/commentary on a passage that moves from this drawn circle to nothingness (*CP*, 445):

Both of us know why,
Can, alas, foretell,
When our falsehoods are divided,
What we shall become,
One evaporating sigh. . .

When Ariel and Caliban's falsehoods -- Ariel's: the illusions of art; Caliban's: the ruining of these illusions -- are split apart, when illusion tries to exist separately from disillusion, both must perish. To have neither illusion nor disillusion is to live on the other side of the gulf, the "Wholly Other Life".²⁶ This is a life beyond the confines of art, and beyond the confines of everyday "life". This is the place we can only allude to, a "perfected Work which is not ours".

In the creative, poetic moment as we are here describing it, there resides then a double irony. Everything that we can say "speaks" also of something we cannot say. We put "speaks" in inverted commas because, like so many other words we have bound by inverted commas ("life", "reality", "truth", "natural", "art", etc.), the word says something other than what on the surface it denotes.

²⁶ On the "wholly other", cf. Derrida's reading of Heidegger's *dem ganz anderen Ort* (the wholly other place) in "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", 54-55.

Language "speaks" the unsayable by not speaking even as it speaks.²⁷ As writing is an inscribing, an excavation or displacement of material to make words (stone is removed from the stone tablet, e.g.), so any form of language, as any form of art, is a placing of boundaries to mark *both* the lines of articulation and, by extension, the lines of inarticulation. So the very construction of something carries the possibility of deconstruction. Creation is at heart ironic because, on the one hand, though the consummation of creation is a *fait accompli*, it is not a "given" or absolute -- being made into existence, it can be taken away. But on the other hand, for *us* to take it away, that is, to deconstruct it, is *not* to leave an empty void, as Antonio mistakenly thinks. It is to create something in its stead. The something new created will always carry with it its negative counterpart, just like the deconstructed part. But the dismantling does not place either the dismantler or the dismantled in an abyssal nothingness. That would be to jump the gap to a side beyond any kind of articulation, whether material or phonic. Deconstruction remains, as it must, this side of the gap, and thus is as much creation as construction itself. To enter into the circle, hermeneutical or artistic -- they are now one and the same, like commentary and poem -- is to enter a space where both construction and deconstruction have their play. Irony, the potential to deconstruct, comes to the fore when the language or the art manifests its own potential. Caliban's speech is one long rhetorical display of such irony at work -- or at play -- as it deconstructs *The Tempest*, the preceding two sections it follows in *The Sea and the Mirror*, and, most ironically, itself.

The double meaning "O", always endangered by its opposite or by something "other", is, finally, the mirror we look into as we read *The Sea and*

²⁷ "At the moment when the question 'how to avoid speaking?' is raised and articulates itself in all its modalities -- whether in rhetorical or logical forms of saying, or in the simple fact of speaking -- it is already, so to speak, *too late*. There is no long any question of not speaking. Even if one speaks and says nothing, even if apophatic discourse deprives itself of meaning or of an object, it takes place. That which committed or rendered it possible *has taken place*. The possible absence of a referent still beckons, if not toward the thing of which one speaks (such as God, who is nothing because He takes place, *without place, beyond Being*), at least toward the other (other than Being) who calls or to whom this speech is addressed -- even if it speaks only in order to speak, or to say nothing. . . The most negative discourse, even beyond all nihilisms and negative dialectics, preserves a trace of the other" -- Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", 27-28.

the Mirror. Mirrors, of course, double; they bring a second into existence. We see another self, a copy of our self, as we look into its frame. But we also may see the "contrived fissures of mirror" which carry us into unknown spaces within that frame, unabiding voids which ruin the effect of the mirror's imitation and force us, sometimes in despair, sometimes in delight, to create something anew. Caliban is a persistent fissure in *The Tempest*, moving from one side of its frame to the other, and never coming to any resolve by the play's end. Exploiting this irresolution, Auden makes Caliban a glaring, self-conscious, self-reflective fissure in *The Sea and the Mirror*. Ironically, for all the supposed harmony and tidiness of the artistic Muse he speaks about, Auden's mirror is always cracked. It is cracked and it mirrors cracks, its own and others. Order reflects disorder -- the mirror *and* the sea, as the title reflects. Following Caliban's dark passage inward we are led along corridors of disillusion, our "transparent globes of enchantment" shattering one by one, until we reach that empty room where our "existence is indeed free at last to choose its own meaning". Here is where we truly self-reflect, as we stare over the precipice and into the abyss in dreadful silence, and then turn back upon ourselves in creative reaction, choosing, as we must, our own meaning. The mirror becomes our great image of irony, as it doubles our meaning, as it multiplies our choice.

Of course to "see" into the contrived fissures requires a certain blindness -- so again we must cloak our word with inverted commas.²⁸ Having described the two alternative routes our existence takes, "the glad-handed highway" of Caliban or "the virtuous averted track" of Ariel, Caliban finds that our "open eye and attentive ear will always interpret any sight and any sound" to our advantage, and miss his entire point about the desperate end of both alternative routes. Resigned to the fact, he thus hopes he has "had the futile honour of addressing the blind and the deaf." Caliban's hope is heightened irony. For to

²⁸ "Curiously enough," writes Paul de Man in *Blindness and Insight*, "it seems to be only in describing a mode of language which does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means" (*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983], 211). De Man's essays in this volume are evidence of both a critical and a fictional language continually under inverted commas, and of this provisional blindness leading to insight. See Cunningham's *In the Reading Gaol*, particularly the first chapter (4-79), for a critique of the limits of de Man's insight.

be blind is, in a sense, the only possible way to see Caliban's point. So Browning had the insight to blind his Caliban. In such a blindness there is not a depravity but a magnification, a blindness dependent on sight. Heidegger has seen this: "For a man to be blind, he must remain a being by nature endowed with sight. . . . But when man goes blind, there always remains the question whether his blindness derives from some defect and loss or lies in an abundance and excess. In the same poem that meditates on the measure for all measuring, Hölderlin says. . . : 'King Oedipus has perhaps one eye too many.'"²⁹ Derrida, too, has seen this, when he explains why a draftsman is always interested by the blind: ". . . they are his very interest, for he is an interested party, which is to say, he is engaged and works *among them*. He belongs to their society, taking up in turn the figures of the seeing blind man, the visionary blind man, the healer or the sacrificer -- by which I mean someone who takes away sight in order finally to show or allow seeing and to bear witness to the light."³⁰ Thus the blind who see better than the seeing remains a common theme in Western art. For Caliban, we could extend this theme to the deaf who hear better than the hearing, and the speechless who speak better than the speaking. These paradoxes are the collective themes of the "O", the "O" in all its representations -- including now the empty eye socket, and the voiceless phoneme -- which together become the "feebly figurative signs" where "all our meanings are reversed". So Ariel's final "I" (the "eye" of self-reflection) disappears into the void of Caliban's "O" (the blank looking glass), and the poem/commentary expires.

But the final note brings us around full circle, back to the poem/commentary's beginning. Ariel's last "I", like the sighing, echoing breath it is, obscures the mirror, and the reflection is no more. But the breath on the mirror fades as we go to the first words of the *Preface*: "The aged catch their breath". Here at the outset the breath is withheld, and the reflection begins to return. The poem/commentary is like a long suspension of life's breath to effect reflection ("what delights us about her world is just that it neither is nor possibly

²⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 228.

³⁰ Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 20.

could become one in which we could breathe. . ." -- *CP*, 426), until, in one last "breathtaking turn", Ariel's final gasp clouds the mirror. Yet the poem/commentary is also one long release of art's breath, giving artistic life to the characters and their words. And this breath, as Prospero had told us in *The Tempest's* Epilogue, is something *we* must exhale into the work if, as readers, we are in any way to participate in its world. So we must suspend and release breath at the same time, suspending "life's" breath, while expiring "art's" breath. Our breathing obfuscates the very line between "life" and "art". The breath we breathe is part of the creative process, just as in the creation accounts of Genesis the *wind* of God hovering over the formless and empty abyss sets the stage for the six days of creation to follow, while later humanity comes alive by *being breathed into*.³¹ We breathe as created beings, and in breathing we create. All our "O"s are the aspirations of the creative act.

Do we aspire then to the Godhead in this act? We miss Caliban's final point if we think so. We always remain "among the ruins and the bones", separated from the "Wholly Other Life" by an "essential emphatic gulf". We can hear the "real Word" only when we have come to the point of pure self-reflection, when our self's existence and non-existence meet in the unabiding void, the ironic "O" of our being and creating, as this Word "speaks through our muffling banks of artificial flowers". Only in the "negative image" can we "positively envisage". We do not aspire to divinity by creating; we rather open ourselves to its "sounded note". And by doing so, our *poiêsis* moves into theological territory.³² For it is among the "ruins" and abysses of our self's

³¹ Genesis 1.3, 2.7. Cf. Marion, 125-126.

³² The obvious deconstructive overtones in this theological territory, this negativity within positivity, this "sounded note" of silence, is what Kevin Hart explores in depth in *The Trespass of the Sign*. For Hart, deconstruction and theology share a *structural* relationship (not *thematic* -- 64) in that both clear the ground, so to speak, for a discourse about God. Deconstruction clears not only within metaphysics, but metaphysics itself: "Deconstruction is an attempt to find a place from which to question metaphysics, a place that is itself not simply within metaphysics. Such an attempt can be launched from within discourse on God, in those writings which put metaphysics in question in order to speak of God" (42). Auden, in his own way, is also trying to find a place in which a discourse of God might arise. But he launches his attempt from within a poetic "discourse", a *poiêsis*, which very clearly has, and acknowledges, its limitations. Caliban, we find here, questions metaphysics, inasmuch as he knows the "real Word" lies outside the metaphysics of our language. The discourse of God he leads us to is a silent discourse: "the sounded note is the restored relation" he concludes, and we might add, of speech and silence, of

creativity that we "envisage" the divine "I am".³³ So Derrida calls all drawing a "ruin", and necessarily theological:

The memory of the *drawings of the blind*. . . opens up like a God memory. It is theological through and through, to the point, sometimes included, sometimes excluded, where the self-eclipsing *trait* cannot even be spoken about, cannot even say itself in the present, since it is not gathered, since it does not gather itself, into any present, "I am who I am" (a formula whose original grammatical form, as we know, implies the future). The outline or tracing separates and separates itself; it retraces only borderlines, intervals, a spacing grid with no possible appropriation. The *experience* or *experimenting* of drawing (and experimenting, as its name indicates, always consists in journeying beyond limits) at once crosses and institutes these borders, invents the *Shibboleth* of the passages. . .³⁴

The Sea and the Mirror has been Auden's *Shibboleth*, aspirated and unaspirated one and the same.³⁵ Even further, it is, as Auden himself had said, about a "Christian conception of Art".³⁶

negation and affirmation. As Marion says, ". . . theological writing always transgresses itself, just as theological speech feeds on the silence which, at last, it speaks correctly" (*God Without Being*, 1). See immediately below, Chapter 5, for fuller discussion of Auden's theological approach.

³³ Cf. Altizer in *Genesis and Apocalypse*: "Nothing is more distinctive in hearing the I AM than the hearing of abyss, and if the actual hearing of abyss occurs only in the horizon of the self-naming of I AM, that is a horizon grounded in abyss, and grounded in an actually heard abyss, an abyss that here and here alone is fully and actually spoken" (49).

³⁴ Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 54. See also Derrida's "Shibboleth" in *Midrash and Literature*, eds. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, 319ff.

³⁵ See Judges 12.4-6: the test of whether or not one was allowed to "cross over" the Jordan was how they pronounced "Shibboleth" -- with, or without, the "h". Cf. Cunningham, 43-44.

³⁶ Carpenter, 325.

Chapter 5

Love is not spoken, in the end, it is made. Only then can discourse be reborn, but as an enjoyment, a jubilation, a praise.

-- Jean-Luc Marion¹

If *The Sea and the Mirror* is as Auden claims, a Christian conception of art, we need to make more explicit this conception. In the Introduction we saw how a doctrine of creation might arise out of Auden's approach to *poiêsis*, and in the previous chapter we saw how Auden's *poiêsis* might give rise to theological concerns. Auden's poetics and theology are, then, inextricable, and we need now to expound the intricacies of this correlation. For it is in the merging of poetics with theology, and theology with poetics, that Auden most informs our present postmodern situation, and brings us to a place where we might discover new strategies of both theory and practice. This place is situated well within the history of reflection we have been considering, yet situated in such a way that reflection does not render us within a nihilistic or aporetic state of aphasia and ataxia, speechless and immobile to move beyond the four mirrored walls and ceiling that so ineffaceably enclose us, but allows us a continual movement by which the mirrors keep changing and their reverse sides, their tains, keep suggesting something quite imperceptibly "other" to our own image.

Auden's belief

Auden's overtly espoused theology, that which he might have stood up to defend apologetically, is not easily discovered. It remains, as it was to most of his peers, something of an enigma. For unlike his contemporary C.S. Lewis, for example, Auden was little concerned with apologetics.² Belief was first and

¹ *God Without Being*, 107.

² Auden did not undermine other Christian apologists, however. In one of his most affirming statements on apologists in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, he writes of their influence on his own adolescence: "Writers did and do exist who, if not always, perhaps, completely orthodox, are effective Christian apologists, capable of showing the meaning and relevance of Christian dogmas

foremost a personal matter, about which Auden wrote and spoke few words directly. When he did address religion from the point of view of personal experience, more often it was in compromising language. His lifestyle, moreover, seemed the height of compromise: he was an avowed homosexual, a regular cavorter with unchurched intelligentsia and artists, an avid drinker and smoker, and seemed the least concerned with personal piety, factors which, though they may not seem extreme to present minds, did not bode well within the general Anglo/American theological conservatism of the mid-century. To the public at the time, Auden seemed a typical artiste flirting unconvincingly with religion. To the Church, he was a dubious spokesman never enthusiastically encouraged.³ To his fellow artists and critics, he had sold out on the great new movement he had helped spawn in the thirties, of which he was the leading voice, and had become an idiosyncratic if not eccentric Christian, whom added years would make an "inflexible old fogey"⁴. That is, Auden did not receive any venerable labels. Even today, with his reputation as a poet solidified within the great literary canon of academia, he is often met with ambivalence. As a religious thinker, most seem unsure how and where to place him. He did, after all, become a Christian during a period when the leading cultural voices said one should not have become a Christian. Is Auden simply a lesser Eliot, returning to the traditions of an inherited religion, yet crippled by the confusions of war? Or does his muted religion say something about the way theology was moving into the latter half of this century?

to secular thought and action, but I never heard of them. I sometimes wonder, for example, what would have happened if, when I was at school or university, a godparent or a friend had given me the works of Kierkegaard or Rudolf Kassner, both of whom were, later in my life, destined to play a great part. The only theological writer I knew of at the time whom I found readable and disturbing to my complacency was Pascal" (36). That Kierkegaard should be considered here among the great apologists shows the general sympathy with indirection which most attracted Auden. See below.

³ Davenport-Hines cites Ursula Niebuhr's thoughts on the general perception of Auden: "His public interest in theology intrigued some academics and clergy, 'but they were puzzled by his free use of theological categories. . . For them these were supposed to be kept in their proper place, in their pigeon-holes, or indexed in their files, in the same way that the clothes that they wore to church on Sunday were kept for their proper use. But Wystan was taking them out, and scattering the terms -- and was wearing Sunday clothes on weekdays' " (Davenport-Hines, 203, quoting from Ursula Niebuhr in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, ed. Stephen Spender [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975], 106).

⁴ Osborne, 203.

We can say this much about Auden's expressed Christianity. His coming to belief in the late thirties, or his return to the Anglo-Catholicism on which he was reared, was a complex result of many factors, chief among which were a disaffection with liberal humanism (particularly in the form of Freudianism and Marxism) and a strong moral conviction which the rising Nazism had forced into relief. As he writes in his most explicit account of his conversion, *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*: "Unless one was prepared to take a relativist view that all values are a matter of personal taste, one could hardly avoid asking the question: 'If, as I am convinced, the Nazis are wrong, and we are right, what is it that validates our values and invalidates theirs?'"⁵ He had been reading Charles Williams, an author whom he had met several years earlier through the publishing business, and who had left a great impression,⁶ and at Williams' introduction, he began reading the writings of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard would also leave a great impression, for it was his understanding of individual decision, grounded in despair, that most shaped Auden's return to theological and spiritual awareness. Auden began attending an Episcopalian church in America, first experimentally, then with regularity and conviction, so that by the end of 1940 his even-tempered conversion was all but complete. As his biographer Carpenter writes:

The last stage of his conversion had simply been a quiet and gradual decision to accept Christianity as a true premise. The experience had

⁵ *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, 40. This moral conviction was also, as we have noted (above, Introduction, 20, footnote 45), spurred by the events of the Spanish Civil War.

⁶ One might wonder what attracted Auden to Williams. Auden wrote that when he first met Williams, he felt himself "in the presence of personal sanctity": "I had met many good people before who made me feel ashamed of my own shortcomings, but in the presence of the man -- we never discussed anything but literary bushiness -- I did not feel ashamed. I felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving" (*Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, 41). But as Davenport-Hines points out, Auden may also have been attracted to Williams' sense of play, which C.S. Lewis had noted -- the enjoyment of "high pomps" but always "as a game: not a silly game, to be laid aside in private, but a glorious game, well worth playing. This two-edged attitude, banked down under the deliberate casualness of the modern fashion, produced his actual manners, which were liked by most, extremely disliked by a few. . . Williams' manners implied a complete offer of intimacy without the slightest imposition of intimacy. He threw down all his barriers without even implying that you should lower yours" (C.S. Lewis, "Preface" in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* [London: Oxford University Press, 1947], ix-x, as quoted by Davenport-Hines, 170). On the influence of Williams' thought and writing on Auden, see for example Gordon Wakefield, "God and Some English Poets -- 7, W.H. Auden", *The Expository Times*, 105: 9 (1994), 265-269.

been undramatic, even rather dry. Certainly there was, to use Kierkegaard's term, a "leap of faith"; but Auden had come to the conclusion that such leaps are made in all spheres of life, and that, as he put it, "when the ground crumbles under their feet, [people] *have* to leap even into uncertainty if they are to avoid certain destruction."⁷

To his critics, and even to his closest friends, this conversion appeared more intellectual than anything else. He kept up on modern theology, reading Bultmann, Barth, Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, whom he later befriended, Bonhoeffer and others, and at one stage in the forties described himself as a "Neo-Calvinist (ie. Barthian)",⁸ yet this, together with his seemingly unchanged lifestyle, seemed to corroborate the view that his religion was merely cerebral, the ideological underpinning for his poetry he had searched for in vain all his youth. At times he could seem intellectually uncommitted to any form or creed. Osborne writes: "Asked solemnly by a friend to state his theological position, Auden replied, 'Liturgically, I am a Anglo-Catholic though not too spiky, I hope. As for forms of church organization, I don't know what to think. I am inclined to agree with de Rougemont that it will be back to the catacombs for all of us. As organizations, none of the churches look too hot, do they? But what organization ever does?'"⁹ Despite his adherence to the Anglo-Catholic liturgy, his theological understanding never adhered to any one system. And this is telling. Auden felt great sympathies with much Catholic doctrine, particularly its sacramentalism, but he concludes his contribution in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims* with very revealing words: "Into the question of why I should have returned to Canterbury instead of proceeding to Rome, I have no wish to go in print. The scandal of Christian disunity is too serious."¹⁰ This last sentence can be read in a highly suggestive way, for we can take it to encapsulate Auden's theology as a whole: the scandalous disunities within Christianity (and not just ecclesiastically, but, more importantly, metaphysically) are too serious for words.

⁷ Carpenter, 297.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁹ Osborne, 203, quoting from Ursula Niebuhr's recollections in *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*.

¹⁰ *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, 43.

We thus turn aside from further biographical conjectures into which theological doctrines Auden may or may not have given credence to, or what forms of private piety he may or may not have subscribed to, and turn our attention to the more significant import of this last admission, or evasion. In doing so, we turn back to Auden's poetics, whose shape and tenor only properly emerge following his conversion. For it is in this turn of poetics that we discover what contributions and suggestions Auden retains for our present postmodern complex. This is not a historically critical detour, but the necessary way, and only way, into the radical theological shift Auden has helped define.

"The scandal of Christian disunity is too serious."

Let us isolate this sentence and allow it to act as a delta to all that we have been dealing with, a sedimentation formed of all the various issues that have been stirred up by our treatment of poetics, philosophy, reflection, and now theology. Let us isolate each part as its own estuarial bank, working backwards with each syntactical unit. Let us begin with

1. ". . . *too serious*". For Auden, that which is truly serious resides beyond what language and artifice is capable of expressing or making distinct. It is *too serious* for words, and thus words are left out, elliptically. But words are all Auden, as a poet, has at his disposal. He can choose to be silent, as he is above, in not committing to words his reasons for electing Canterbury over Rome. But as a poet, he cannot, and does not, remain silent.¹¹ Rather, he makes his artifice into an arena for play, a play of which language is perfectly capable.¹² But this play is hardly trivial, and hardly for its own sake. Auden's arena is not an arena of pure formalism. For in play, in the self-reflection of words and images, lies a

¹¹ Auden might say with his fellow "poet" Kierkegaard: "Silence hid in silence is suspicious, arouses mistrust, it is just as though one were to betray something, at least betrayed that one was keeping silence. But silence concealed by *a decided talent for conversation* -- as true as ever I live -- that is silence" (*The Journals of Kierkegaard*, 245 -- italics added).

¹² Cf. Heidegger's notion of earth as a *Spielraum*, "a space in which to play", as George Steiner describes it in *Heidegger* (Sussex: The Harvester Press/Fontana Books, 1978), 142.

great seriousness. We have seen this seriousness reflected in *The Sea and the Mirror*, as Caliban's words end their extravagance and prolixity on a note of reverential homage. The words, however, are muted, and quickly give way to silence (Caliban's speech comes to its end). They can only approach this seriousness through obliquity, before they must retract or disperse into nothingness. This dilemma -- to speak about what cannot be spoken of -- we have seen residing deeply within Auden's poetics, the figure of the "O". The play of the circle leads by way of indirection to a central, speechless nothingness, or, and here now we can be more positive, to the God Christian theology desires to speak about.

In an important late essay entitled "Words and the Word" given as part of the T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures in 1967, and published as *Secondary Worlds*, Auden is his most straightforward in describing his view of the relation between spoken words and the divine Word. He writes that "God is not an object but a person, not a concept but a name", but quickly adds a quote from Ferdinand Ebner: " 'To speak of God except in a context of prayer is to take His name in vain.' "¹³ Auden goes on to say that

the Christian theologian is placed in the difficult position of having to use words, which by their nature are anthropomorphic, to refute anthropomorphic conceptions of God. Yet when such anthropomorphic conceptions are verbally asserted, he must speak: he cannot refute them by silence. Dogmatic theological statements are to be comprehended neither as logical propositions nor as poetic utterances: they are to be taken, rather, as shaggy-dog stories: they have a point, but he who tries too hard to get it will miss it.

Dogmatic theology here is hardly given the seriousness it is accustomed to.

Clearly, for Auden God is well beyond dogma. He continues:

The poet, who is concerned not with the Creator but with his creatures, is in a less awkward position, but for him too the relation between words and the truth is problematical. One might say that for Truth the word 'silence' is the least inadequate metaphor, and that words can bear witness to silence only as shadows bear witness to light. Sooner or later every poet discovers the truth of Max Picard's remark: 'The language of the child is silence transformed into sound: the language of the adult is sound that seeks for silence.'

¹³ W.H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 117.

The only witness to the living God, that is to say, which poetry can bear is indirect and negative.¹⁴

Indirection then becomes the first "prominent" -- we can only say this paradoxically -- feature of Auden's theological approach. As John Tinsley phrases it in his article "Tell It Slant" (the title of which comes from the first line of Emily Dickinson's poem "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant"), Auden's later work was continually "taking the mickey out of serious subjects in order to create seriousness."¹⁵ We have noted how Auden's sense of frivolity carries with it something profound.¹⁶ Here Tinsley's phrasing takes us further and suggests that it *creates* this profundity, that it opens up the space, the deep void, in which the Nameless can be confronted -- namely, God. Like Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorships, whose limited and comical perspectives "nevertheless point the way further", as Alastair Hannay says, frivolity can break open a new

¹⁴ Ibid., 119-120. Cf. Auden in *DH*, 458: "The only kind of literature that has gospel authority is the parable, and parables are secular stories with no overt religious reference." Cf. also Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 141: "No, the way to begin is to deny direct communication -- that is earnestness."

¹⁵ John Tinsley, "Tell It Slant", *Theology*, 83: 693 (1980), 166. Dickinson's short but significant poem reads:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant --
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Child eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind --

(from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson [London: Faber and Faber, 1970], 506-507)

¹⁶ See above, Introduction, 28-30. Cf. also Nietzsche, *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 683: "Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial -- *out of profundity*. And is this not precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there -- we who have looked *down* from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, or words? And therefore -- *artists?*"

path toward the unknown abyss where God is confronted.¹⁷ Caliban has taken us to this very abyss. But he pulls us back, if only to stay within the circle of artifice and articulation. "Those of us who have the nerve to call ourselves Christians will do well to be extremely reticent on the subject", Auden had said in a sermon delivered in Westminster Abbey many years after his conversion.¹⁸ This statement of course echoes the ending of "The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning", where "truth in any *serious* sense, / Like orthodoxy, is a reticence". The poem's title, a quote from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (III,iii,16), also reflects a quote from *Hamlet*: ". . .by indirection find directions out" (II,ii, 63).¹⁹ Like Shakespeare before him, Auden moves in an oblique way towards the "smiling / Secret he cannot quote". And for Auden, this "Secret" is ultimately God, a very serious matter.

The secrecy of God is something Auden feels compelled to keep from words. Compelled, that is, to keep a secret. It is too profound. He may try to gaze upon it, allude to it, but he cannot grasp it with language. Jacques Derrida, in his recent *The Gift of Death*, a book concerned with, among many things, "the history of secrecy"²⁰, reminds us what such a secret gaze has been called in the Christian tradition: "The dissymmetry of the gaze, this disproportion that relates me, and whatever concerns me, to a gaze that I don't see and that remains a secret from me although it commands me, is, according to [Czech writer Jan] Patočka, what is identified in Christian mystery as the frightening, terrifying

¹⁷ Hannay, 83. In *Unscientific Postscript, Vol.1*, Kierkegaard says: "That subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, is my thesis; that the pseudonymous authors relate themselves to it is easy enough to see, if in no other way, than in their eye for the comic. The comic is always a sign of maturity, and then the essential thing is only that a new shoot emerges in this maturity, that the *vis comica* [comic force] does not suffocate pathos but merely indicates that a new pathos is beginning" (281).

¹⁸ Carpenter, 298n. Auden's views here reflect a traditional "doctrine of reserve" or a kind of secrecy stemming back to the gospels (Mark, in particular -- 3.12, 4.11-12, 9.9, etc.) and the early church, by which the Christian faith was regarded as what later came to be known as the "*disciplina arcani*" -- see Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1972), 50-54.

¹⁹ Tinsley, 165.

²⁰ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 13. See also Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials", 16-26.

mystery, the *mysterium tremendum*.²¹ We will return to Derrida's dissymmetrical gaze below, but for the moment let us focus our gaze on the notion of this secret and mysterious *tremendum*. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard, or more significantly, Johannes *de Silentio*, meditates on the "experience of a secret, hidden, separate, absent, or mysterious God, the one who decides, without revealing his reasons, to demand of Abraham that most cruel, impossible, and untenable gesture: to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. All that goes on in secret. God keeps silent about his reasons. Abraham does also, and the book is not signed by Kierkegaard, but by Johannes de Silentio ('a poetic person who only exists among poets,' Kierkegaard writes in the margin of his text. . .)." ²² As Derrida points out, Kierkegaard keeps himself in the margins, so as not to betray the secret. It is the *poet* who speaks, but he speaks paradoxically as "de Silentio". Does he *speak* of the *mysterium tremendum*, then, at least in the normal sense of the word "speak"? "Can one witness in silence? By silence?," Derrida asks.²³ He responds later: "A secret can be transmitted, but in transmitting a secret as a secret that remains a secret, has one transmitted at all? Does it amount to history, to a story? Yes and no. The epilogue of *Fear and Trembling* repeats, in sentence after sentence, that the highest passion that is faith must be started over by each generation. Each generation must begin again to involve itself in it without counting on the generation before. It thus describes the non-history of absolute beginnings which are repeated, and the very historicity that presupposes a tradition to be reinvented each step of the

²¹ Ibid., 27. On the difference between the secrecy of the *mysterium tremendum*, and the orgiastic or demonic secrecy of Greek thinking, see 6ff. Derrida quotes Patočka later: "No more the orgiastic, which remains not only subordinated but, in certain extreme cases, completely repressed; instead, a *mysterium tremendum*. *Tremendum* because responsibility resides henceforth not in an essence that is accessible to the human gaze, that of the Good and the One, but in the relation to a supreme, absolute and inaccessible being that holds us in check not by exterior but interior force" (31).

²² Ibid., 58.

²³ Ibid., 73: "The ideas of secrecy and exclusivity [*non-partage*] are essential here, as is Abraham's silence. He doesn't speak, he doesn't tell his secret to his loved ones. He is, like the knight of faith, a witness and not a teacher (*Fear and Trembling*, 80 [Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong's translation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)]) and it is true that this witness enters into an absolute relation with the absolute, but he doesn't witness to it in the sense that to witness means to show, teach, illustrate, manifest to others the truth that one can precisely attest to. Abraham is a witness of the absolute faith that cannot witness before men. He must keep his secret. But his silence is not just any silence."

way, in this incessant repetition of the absolute beginning."²⁴ Derrida claims that the secret, *the passion of faith* (the *mysterium tremendum*, which Derrida avoids turning into a presence), must be completely found anew, as if it has not been and could not have been betrayed by previous generations, but that in finding it anew, one reinvents the traditions which the passing on of the secret presupposes.²⁵ This is precisely what Auden does in *The Sea and the Mirror*. Prospero finds the passion of faith only by breaking with the past, his "imaginary landscapes", to face in fear and trembling the "silent passage" of individual, solitary, and secret discomfort.²⁶ But his alter ego, Caliban (that is, Caliban/Ariel), reinvents the entire play of which he was a part, reinvents Shakespeare and his tradition, reinvents, that is, the history from which the secret is passed on, in the long self-reflective prose speech. There, the secret is both withheld and furthered. The secret is transmitted *qua* secret, without betrayal, through reinvention, creation, *poiêsis*, just as the poet "de Silentio" speaks out what cannot be said, speaks out as if he is, to take a phrase Kierkegaard employs in a similar fashion elsewhere, an "ingenious secret agent".²⁷

The secret is *too serious*. But as the Stage Manager reminds us, it is also a "smiling / Secret". It smiles itself into play, into the play of words, words which of course cannot express it should it remain a secret. The transmission of

²⁴ Ibid., 80.

²⁵ Cf. Thomas Altizer's *Genesis and Apocalypse*. For example: "That unnam[ing] [the self-naming of eternal recurrence in I AM] is a repetition and renewal of a once and for all beginning, and not an eternal repetition which reverses the irreversibility of that beginning, but rather a repetition which renews that irreversibility, and renews it so as to give it an ultimate and final identity or name. I AM is the name for us of a once and for all and irreversible beginning, a beginning that is an ultimate and final beginning, and therefore a new creation, and not only a new creation but a new eternity, and an eternity that can only be evoked for us by the name of I AM" (38).

²⁶ Prospero's words now carry their full weight:

. . . shall I ever be able
 To stop myself from telling them what I am doing,--
 Sailing alone, out over seventy thousand fathoms--?
 Yet if I speak, I shall sink without a sound
 Into unmeaning abysses. Can I learn to suffer
 Without saying something ironic or funny
 On suffering? I never suspected the way of truth
 Was a way of silence. . .

(Prospero to Ariel, 198-205, *CP*, 409)

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 133.

this secret then is fundamentally ironic. Derrida writes, with Kierkegaard still guiding him: "Speaking in order not to say anything or to say something other than what one thinks, speaking in such a way as to intrigue, disconcert, question, or have someone or something else speak (the lawyer, the law [we might add Caliban]), means speaking ironically. . . *Eirōneia* dissimulates, it is the act of questioning by feigning ignorance, by pretending."²⁸ Clearly, Caliban is a great ironist, as he intrigues, disconcerts, questions, and speaks on behalf of others. Derrida goes on to quote Kierkegaard: "But a final word by Abraham has been preserved, and insofar as I can understand the paradox, I can also understand Abraham's total presence in that word. First and foremost, he does not say anything, and in that form he says what he has to say. His response to Isaac is in the form of irony, for it is always irony when I say something and still do not say anything."²⁹ So *The Sea and the Mirror* -- which, under the hand of Caliban, takes us to the unquotable secret by way of indirection and irony, which is synonymous with saying by way of creating anew, for *poiēsis* is precisely how indirection and irony are not only initiated but maintained.³⁰ One does not encounter the *mysterium tremendum* in this *poiēsis*, nor give voice to it, yet one may, by opening up a silent space for it through speech, participate in its mystery by virtue of indirection. But as Kierkegaard says, and demonstrates, such participation, dependent on speech as it is, is hard pressed to escape irony, even to the point where the God we desire to encounter may Himself become ironic:

²⁸ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-77, quoting *Fear and Trembling*, Hong and Hong's translation, 118. Cf. here also Jill Robbins' reading of Kafka and Kierkegaard, and of Kafka's reading of Kierkegaard reading the Abraham story of Genesis 22 in *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 89-99.

³⁰ Among the many quotes one could take from Kierkegaard on this matter, one from the chapter on "The Aesthetic Works" in *The Point of View* is particularly apt, given all that we have been dealing with here: "But from the point of view of my whole activity as an author, integrally conceived, the aesthetic work is a deception, and herein is to be found the deeper significance of the use of pseudonyms. A deception, however, is a rather ugly thing. To this I would make answer: One must not let oneself be deceived by the word 'deception'. One can deceive a person for the truth's sake, and (to recall old Socrates) one can deceive a person into the truth. Indeed, it only by this means, i.e. by deceiving him, that it is possible to bring into the truth one who is in illusion" (39-40). Cf. again Auden (*DH*, 27): "Poetry is not magic. In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate."

With the help of speech every man participates in the highest -- but to participate in the highest with the help of speech, by talking nonsense about it, is just as ironical as to participate in a royal banquet, as a spectator from the gallery.

Were I a pagan I would say: an ironical deity gave mankind the gift of speech in order to have the amusement of watching that self-deception.

From a Christian point of view of course it is out of love that God gave man the gift of speech, and thereby made it possible for every one really to grasp the highest -- oh, with what sorrow must God look upon the result.³¹

2. ". . .of Christian disunity. . ." The disunity Auden meant in the original context was that between Catholicism and Protestantism, a disunity he tried to overcome in re-adopting Anglo-Catholicism. But we have seen a more profound disunity emerging from *The Sea and the Mirror* than that of sectarianism. It is, of course, the disunity associated with the metaphor of the mirror, or reflection. The silence on "the other side of the wall" of the Stage Manager, the "separation" of Prospero, the lonely mirrors of Miranda's poem, the "Wholly Other Place" and the "essential emphatic gulf" of Caliban, the divided falsehoods of Ariel -- all these point to the function of the mirror as it both doubles and divides. The gaze of each character into the mirror is both revealing and disconcerting, for the gaze reveals an "other", one not in concert with oneself, just as Hamlet's "mirror" catches out the King. The mirror reveals the secret of the "other", the secret "other", a returning gaze that is not oneself, even when it is oneself. Here we return to the dissymmetrical gaze that Derrida associates with the *mysterium tremendum*. He writes: "When Kierkegaard-de Silentio makes a barely veiled reference to the Gospel of Matthew, the allusion to 'your father who sees in secret (*qui videt in abscondito / ho blepōn on tō kryptō*)' echoes across the reach of these limits." "These limits" of Derrida's (the limits of the invisible) we can here extend to the limits we have been drawing throughout our discussion. Derrida continues:

³¹ Kierkegaard, *The Journals*, 250. Cf. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 609: "If one were to look for signs that an ironical divinity has its fingers in the great play of the world, one would find no small support in the *tremendous question mark* called Christianity."

In the first place the allusion describes a relation to the wholly other, hence an absolute dissymmetry. It is all that suffices to provoke the *mysterium tremendum*, inscribing itself within the order of the gaze. God sees me, he looks into me in secret, but I don't see him, I don't see him looking at me. . . It is dissymmetrical: this gaze that sees me without seeing it looking at me. It knows my very secret even when I myself don't see it and even though the Socratic "Know thyself" seems to install the philosophical lure of reflexivity, in the disavowal of a secret that is always for me alone, that is to say *for the other: for me* who never sees anything in it, and hence *for the other* alone to whom, through dissymmetry, a secret is revealed.³²

Philosophical reflexivity cannot inscribe the secret, the *mysterium tremendum*. It disavows it, for the secret will not allow itself to be totalized, will not allow the knower to refer back to him or herself as the knower who knows in plenitude, who knows without remainder this secret. For the secret remains always other. "By disavowing the secret, philosophy would have come to reside in a misunderstanding of what there is to know, namely, that there is secrecy and that it is incommensurable with knowing, with knowledge, and with objectivity, as in the incommensurable 'subjective interiority' that Kierkegaard extracts from every knowledge relation of the subject/object type."³³ The metaphor of the mirror reflects this incommensurability, for in reflecting an apparent subject/object split, which is the basis of philosophical knowledge, it also obscures the boundary between subject and object, by making the subject object, and the object subject. Reflection is at once us, and at once not us. As we saw in Chapter 1, the mirror metaphor is inherently unstable since it reflects the initial division (the Many) by which it claims unity (the One).³⁴ All metaphors are unstable, are "feebly figurative signs", as both Auden and Derrida claim.³⁵ And so the *object* of philosophy is not, nor can be, the secret other, as the object is always and irretrievably caught up in metaphor, which annuls the secret. The secret is something quite other to the unity, and disunity, of philosophy's reflexive thought.

³² Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 91.

³³ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁴ See above, Chapter 1, 37 and 49, for example.

³⁵ See, for example, Derrida's claim as noted above, Chapter 1, 86.

For Auden, the Christian secret is nevertheless still one of disunity. "One does not reflect oneself into being a Christian", says Kierkegaard, "but out of *another thing* in order to become a Christian."³⁶ As *The Sea and the Mirror* tries to show, the disunities within the mirror bring us to the abyss where we might encounter this *other thing*, but the mirror ceases to be a mirror if the *other* should ever be encountered. Reflection is, in Derrida's words, "incapable of inscribing (comprehending) what is outside it otherwise than through the appropriating of a negative image of it, and dissemination is written on the back -- the *tain* -- of that mirror."³⁷ Thus the second prominent feature of Auden's theological and poetic approach, a feature in partnership with indirection, is that of negation or negativity. The poetics which Auden's work lends itself to is framed by or within a negative theology. But by "negative theology" we do not mean an atheistic or nihilistic understanding of the divine realm, at least not in the way such understandings are generally conceived. We mean something more akin to Kevin Hart's definition in *The Trespass of the Sign*: a "discourse which reflects upon positive theology by denying that its language and concepts are adequate to God."³⁸ This God, for Auden, is the great Christian disunity which is too serious for words, but which words must nevertheless approach, negatively. The poet is *not* "one whose words are equal to his divine subjects"; for the "coming of Christ in the form of a servant who cannot be recognized by

³⁶ *The Point of View*, 96, italics added; see above, Chapter 1, 72, footnote 76.

³⁷ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 33; see above Chapter 1, 87, footnote 118.

³⁸ Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 176. Cf. Derrida's understanding of "negative theology" in "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials", 7ff., which assumes some "hyperessentiality", and therefore keeps Derrida from adopting the label in any way: "No, I would hesitate to inscribe what I put forward under the familiar heading of negative theology, precisely because of that ontological wager of hyperessentiality that one finds at work both in Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart, for example. . ." (8). He adds a little later on: "What *differance*, the *trace*, and so on "mean" -- which hence *does not mean anything* -- is 'before' the concept, the name, the word, 'something that would be nothing', that no longer arises from Being, from the presence or from the presence of the present, nor even from absence, and even less from some hyperessentiality" (9). But Hart responds to Derrida by pointing out the use of the Greek word in Dionysius, *hyperousios*: "The English word [the translated word 'superessential'], when used to describe God, suggests that God is the highest being, that he exists yet in a way that transcends finite beings. The Greek word, however, makes no such claim; indeed, the prefix '*hyper*' has a negative rather than a positive force. To say that God is *hyperousios* is to deny that God is a being of any kind, even the highest or original being. . . Given this, Derrida is wrong to say that negative theology reserves a supreme being beyond the category of being" (*The Trespass of the Sign*, 202).

the eye of flesh and blood, only by the eye of faith, puts an end to all such claims."³⁹ The poet can only say of God "If He exists, He cannot be the abstract God of the philosophers."⁴⁰ And so too, by extension, of the theologian. And this apophasis which is at the heart of the dissymmetrical gaze accords with the notion seen above, that if the sign of language is the sign of the Fall, then all signs, as signifiers, are in some sense negative images.⁴¹ Thus it is the "negative image" of Caliban that brings us closest to the "Wholly Other Place", the blind Caliban of Browning who envisions the supreme "Quiet", trembling before it.⁴²

3. "*The scandal. . .*" Kierkegaard entered into his *Journals*:

The moment I take Christianity as a doctrine and so indulge my cleverness or profundity or my eloquence or my imaginative powers in depicting it: people are very pleased; I am looked upon as a serious Christian.

The moment I begin to express existentially what I say, and consequently to bring Christianity into reality: it is just as though I had exploded existence -- the *scandal* is there at once.⁴³

The great disunity of human existence before God which is too serious for serious dogmatic words is thus outright scandalous, scandalous even for the "serious" Christian. No one knew this scandal better than the early Karl Barth, whom, given Auden's professed Barthianism, it should now be appropriate to summon. For indeed, the great secret which resides on the other side of the "essential emphatic gulf" has had from the outset a very Barthian feel to it, with its radical transcendent divide. In his influential *The Epistle to the Romans* (influential now more than ever), a book which invokes Kierkegaard throughout, Barth writes:

The revelation which is in Jesus, because it is the revelation of the righteousness of God, must be the most complete veiling of His incomprehensibility. In Jesus, God becomes veritably a *secret*: He is made know as the Unknown, *speaking in eternal silence*; He protects himself from every intimate companionship and from all the impertinence of religion. He becomes a *scandal* to the Jews and to the

³⁹ Auden, *Secondary Worlds*, 120-121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 120.

⁴¹ Above, Chapter 1, 85-86; see also Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, 4, 15.

⁴² Above, Chapter 2, 114.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 174.

Greeks foolishness. In Jesus the communication of God begins with a *rebuff*, with the exposure of a *vast chasm*, with the clear revelation of a great stumbling block.⁴⁴

And Barth goes on to quote Kierkegaard, the great defender of "offensive Christianity". Here in this early work, we can see Barth drawing from the pool of "negative theology" as Hart has defined it for us above, knowing that even the Christian Church must stumble over the gap that resides between the word and the Word: "The people of Christ, His community, know that no sacred word or work or thing exists in its own right: they know only those words and works and things which by their negation are sign-posts to the Holy One."⁴⁵ The disunity between word and Word is the great scandal, requiring a negative, indirect approach. Poetics becomes this approach, for only in a poetics can indirection be maintained. Only a continual remaking, with its shifting "ground" of possibility, can allow the movement of non-propositional, non-dogmatic, paradoxical, and ironic speech about God to take place and be sustained. Direct speech will always cement such a movement, and keep one, idolatrously, this side of the gap. Barth, of course, did not himself sustain the movement he laid out so significantly in his treatment of Romans, choosing rather the a-poetical route of dogmatic theology laid out in the voluminous *Church Dogmatics*. Barth, it appears, could not resist reflection, or at least the desire that the tain of the mirror somehow "break in" to the full view of the mirror's surface. As Barth says himself in a late essay, "In the mirror of this humanity of Jesus Christ the humanity of God enclosed in his deity reveals itself", drawing from this incarnational emphasis the conclusion that "the *sense* and *sound* of our word must be fundamentally *positive*. . . To open up again the abyss closed in Jesus Christ cannot be our task."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the sixth ed. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1968), 98, italics added.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 36; also 130: "Circumcision, Religion, the Church, do not possess positive content: they are tokens and signs which must be understood negatively, and they are established only in so far as their independent significance diminishes and finally dies."

⁴⁶ Karl Barth, "The Humanity of God", in *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960), 51, 59-60. Expanding this, Barth writes: "Thus through all the centuries theology was, and also today is, given its subject-matter -- its theme -- and, along with this, instruction in the scholarly and practical objectivity appropriate to it. Theology must hold fast to this objectivity in its exegesis; in its investigation, presentation, and interpretation of the

Can we dismiss so easily Barth's emphasis on the Incarnation here? Is not the great scandal of Christianity precisely that the *mysterium tremendum* should come into the finiteness of this world in the form of flesh and blood? Was this not the great blasphemy for the Johannine Jews (John 10. 25-39)? And does not this scandal *close*, rather than, as we have been arguing so far, *open*, the abyss, the disunity between the word and the Word, allowing us to be *positive* in our theological approach and tasks, and giving art its true theological basis?⁴⁷ We have invoked the names of Kierkegaard and Derrida alongside Auden; let us also invoke here the name of Jean-Luc Marion in response. In *God Without Being*, Marion is concerned with tracing how God gives Himself to be known, not however according to the idolatrous horizon of metaphysics, nor even according to the idolatrous horizon of Being, but "according to a more radical horizon", that of the "gift".⁴⁸ The God of this more radical horizon is represented by being crossed out: GXd. Echoing Auden, Marion writes: The GXd who reveals himself has nothing in common. . . with the "God" of the philosophers, of the learned, and, eventually, of the poet."⁴⁹ Aligned then with thread we have been following, Marion addresses at length the issue raised by the later Barth, the issue of the Incarnated Word:

The Word is not said in any tongue, since he transgresses language itself, seeing that, Word in flesh and bone, he is given as indissolubly speaker, sign and referent. The referent, which here becomes the

Christian past and present; in its dogmatics and ethics; and in its preaching, instruction and pastoral ministry. This objectivity means that without allowing itself to be enticed into error, either toward the right or the left, theology must attempt to see, to understand, and to put into language the intercourse of God with man in which there comes about intercourse of man with God. It means that theology will deal with the word and act of the grace of God and the word and act of the human gratitude challenged, awakened, and nourished through it. The first will not be considered without the second nor the second without the first, and both will be approached in the sequence, distinction, and unity given by the deity and thus the humanity of God. When it stays with this theme, it is also in its most modest form good -- let us say for once 'cultivated' -- theology" (55-56).

⁴⁷ Recall Auden's line in *For the Time Being*: "Because in Him the Flesh is united to the Word without magical transformation, Imagination is redeemed from promiscuous fornication with her own images" (CP, 388 -- see also above, Introduction, 24-25).

⁴⁸ Marion, xxiv. Derrida's *The Gift of Death* is indebted heavily to Marion, as the earlier essay of similar themes, "How To Avoid Speaking: Denials", attests (see especially the endnotes, 63-70). See also Rodolphe Gasché's *Inventions of Difference*, 94-99, 152ff.

⁴⁹ Marion, 52.

locutor, even if he speaks our words, is not said in them according to our manner of speaking. He proffers himself in them, but not because he says them; he proffers himself in them because he exposes himself in them; and exposes himself less as one exposes an opinion than as one exposes oneself to a danger: he exposes himself by incarnating himself. Thus speaking our words, the Word redoubles his incarnation, or rather accomplishes it absolutely, since language constitutes us more carnally than our flesh. . . Incarnate in our words, the Word acquires in them a new unspeakableness, since he can be spoken in them only by the movement of incarnation that is, so to speak, anterior to the words, which he speaks and which he lets speak him. Any speech that speaks only from this side of language hence cannot reach the referent, which, alone and in lordly manner, comes nevertheless, in language, to meet us . . . What is unheard of in the Word stems from the fact that he only says [himself] unspeakably (gap Word/words), but that in the very unspeakableness he is said nevertheless perfectly (the gap traversed by redoubled incarnation).⁵⁰

The Word, redoubly (absolutely) incarnated in our language, transgresses this language by being all of speaker, sign and referent together, one and the same. It cannot, then, be rightly spoken, at least by our manner of speaking, since none of our words precede the Word (precedence being required for reference). Incarnation does not overcome the Word/word gap; it only institutes a new unspeakableness. This unspeakableness is overcome not by us and our words but only by the Word speaking first, coming "to meet us". How is this any different than Barth's in-breaking God? As David Tracy says in his introduction to Marion, is not Barth a "natural ally" here?⁵¹ The early Barth, indeed. But whereas the later Barth puts great stock in *theology*, in the ability of words this side of the gap to marshal objectivity and dogmatics, Marion downplays logocentric categories, stressing rather a *theology* which only ever comes as a gift or excess.⁵² When the Word is truly incarnate (that is, redoubly so, exposed to both our flesh and the fallen limits of our language), "one could not do a 'theology of the Word', because if a *logos* pretends to precede the *Logos*, this

⁵⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁵¹ Ibid., xii.

⁵² Though by his own admittance, Marion does take recourse in the last sections of his book to "a dogmatic way", "a pure and simple description of two emblematic figures of the gift", the Eucharist and the confession of faith (xxiv; see especially his "Hors-Texte", 161ff.). If one were to mount a sustained critique of Marion's *theological* enterprise, we can suspect that these sections would provide the main starting point. For an unsustained example, see Gasché, *Inventions of Difference*, 153-154.

logos blasphemes the Word (of) GXd."⁵³ The scandal of Christian disunity, the gap, indeed remains too serious for words.

Marion wishes to keep the theological endeavour, the *theological* endeavour, open and free, free from closure and fixity. He therefore speaks of a "multiplicity of theologies" ensuing "from the unspeakable infinity of the Word", or an "absolutely infinite unfolding of possibilities already realized in the Word".⁵⁴ In this way he speaks using the image of travelling through the mirror to the beyond, of not having our gaze frozen on the surface of the mirror, but having it "lost in the invisible gaze that visibly envisages" us.⁵⁵ We return to Derrida's dissymmetrical gaze, and the inability of reflection's symmetry to capture the God beyond the mirror. This dissymmetry, this radical otherness, keeps the field of play open, keeps the modes most resistant to closure, indirection and irony, in force. And though neither the early Barth nor Marion adopt it, it keeps a poetics in demand.

There is yet one further aspect to the scandal we need to address. For the *skandalon* in I Corinthians 1.23 is of course not that of the distant God, nor that of the incarnated God, but that of the *crucified* God. God's death is the great affront to theological sense. Jürgen Moltmann writes in *The Crucified God* that the "incarnation of the Logos is completed on the cross. . . There can be no theology of the incarnation which does not become a theology of the cross."⁵⁶ The Logos itself becomes emptied of itself in a kenosis on the cross, a self-emptying by which both the Word and all logocentricity are put to death. For this reason Moltmann claims that Christian theology cannot be a "pure theory" of God, that is, a reflective theory which knows the true and eternal Logos through contemplation.⁵⁷ Christian theology must become a "*critical theory of God*", that is, must put to death theory and logocentricity in a theology of the cross which "can only be polemical, dialectical, antithetical, and critical theory". Taking it even further, Moltmann adds that this "theology is 'itself crucified theology and

⁵³ Marion, 143.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 157, 158.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁵⁶ *The Crucified God*, 204-205.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

speaks only of the cross' (K. Rahner). It is a crucifying theology, and is thereby a liberating theology."⁵⁸ The scandal of such a *theologia crucis* is that theology is itself crucified along with the Logos, liberating us through death.

Such liberation through death is of course premised on the notion of a resurrection that follows, and Moltmann goes on to speak of the centre of Christian theology being occupied by "*the resurrection of the crucified Christ*".⁵⁹ But if the Logos is simply resurrected as it was, and with it all that accompanies the theology which the early Barth, Derrida and Marion have striven against, has the cross been the scandal we think? Let us here bring to the surface one more name that has been carried beneath the flow of our discussion so far, Thomas Altizer. Known as a "Death of God" theologian for his work during the 1960s, Altizer continues to put forth a "scandalous" notion in his radicalizing of a kenotic theology where the self-emptying or absolute self-negating of God *on the cross* becomes the moment where the absolute realization of the self-embodiment of God takes place. For Altizer, only in a radical apocalypse of negation can genesis bring forth the *absolutely new* speech or *logos*. In language fully consonant with Kierkegaard, the early Barth, Derrida, and Marion, Altizer says: "Only when God disappears as object, or as "God", does God fully speak."⁶⁰ For Altizer, the full consequence of the death of God means a genesis of God, or as David Jasper writes, the death of God becomes a "movement from speech to silence, and silence as a total emptiness from which the genesis of speech occurs. Only pure silence can be heard as silence, and only in such silence is speech totally present because totally absent."⁶¹ Altizer's understanding of apocalypse and genesis radicalizes our notion of "negative theology" in that it takes negation and nothingness as more than the result of an inadequate language to speak of God -- they become the ground for the very remaking of God. For Altizer, traditional theologians have not had vision to consider, or the capabilities to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 204

⁶⁰ Altizer, *The Self-Embodiment of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 19, as quoted by David Jasper in "The Death of God -- A Live Issue?", unpublished, 3.

⁶¹ Jasper, "The Death of God -- A Live Issue?", 3. Cf. Moltmann's understanding of the "word of the cross", *The Crucified God*, 73-75.

realize, the "absolutely new" that true genesis entails.⁶² Only the poets have succeeded in this. And for Altizer chief among those poets are Dante, Milton, and especially Blake, Nietzsche, and Joyce. As Jasper asserts in this regard, "The true poet is, indeed, a maker, engaging in an activity as close as anything human to the divine act of creation. . . Thus the true poet is scandalously close to the apocalyptic moment which is both the genesis and the death of God, the infinite I AM. The speech of the true poet, in its imaginative enactment, is utter kenosis -- a self-emptying into silence which is a realisation of all speech."⁶³ Such a radical *poiêsis* subverts theology as it is normally conceived, but as Altizer has written most recently in *Genesis of God*, "Such subversion is necessary and essential to what the Christian most deeply knows as faith, even as offense is necessary to that faith, an offense that inevitably occurs in a proclamation of the Christian faith."⁶⁴ With Altizer we see the scandal of Christian disunity brought to serious new heights.⁶⁵

We find then that Auden's predominant theological reticence is not an indication of furthered secularism invading twentieth century poets and thinkers, but a profoundly and seriously reverent quietism and concern for a Christian God who stands beyond or behind the mirror. This concern stands in line with those creative thinkers we have here convened, those thinkers who generally stand

⁶² "Barth and Tillich, alone among our theologians, were open to that nothingness, and that is certainly a decisive source of their theological power, but neither of them were able to realize that nothingness dogmatically or systematically, and were unable to do so if only because neither of them could name that nothingness theologically or grasp it as a ground or a potency that is inseparable from the uniquely Christian God" -- Altizer, *Genesis and Apocalypse*, 21. An example of Tillich's "negative" understanding can be found in his *Courage to Be* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 180: "The courage to take up the anxiety of meaninglessness upon oneself is the boundary line up to which the courage to be can go. Beyond it is mere non-being. Within it all form of courage are re-established in the power of the God of theism. *The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.*"

⁶³ Jasper, "The Death of God -- A Live Issue?", 5.

⁶⁴ Altizer, *Genesis of God*, 4.

⁶⁵ Cf. Moltmann's section "The 'Death of God' as the Origin of Christian Theology?" in *The Crucified God*, 200-207. Moltmann is unwilling to go as far as Altizer's notion of a radical self-negation of the Godhead itself, saying: "Jesus' death cannot be understood 'as the death of God', but only as death *in* God. The 'death of God' cannot be designated the origin of Christian theology, even if the phrase has an element of truth in it; the origin of Christian theology is only the death on the cross in God and God in Jesus' death" (207).

outside the accepted limits of orthodoxy or traditional view: Kierkegaard, early Barth, Derrida, Marion, and Altizer (and we could expand the list and the discussion by adding both Nietzsche and Heidegger). With such a company of thinkers and practitioners, the notions of poet, philosopher and theologian are confluent. A poetics emerges which is necessarily a syncretism of the disciplines traditional practice wishes to hold apart, or at least keep clearly defined. But this poetics always requires a making or remaking, whose very enactment will threaten clearly defined boundaries, or build the boundaries anew. For all Auden's *stating* the limitations of art, his *practice* shows the close alignment, or the realignment, of art with theology at the very level of creation -- praxis or *poiêsis* -- itself. Let us once again turn then to Auden's poetry to see how the sedimentation of all we have discussed is reformed and resculptured in engagement with the poetical text.

"Friday's Child"

We have seen *The Sea and the Mirror* give way to a theological understanding grounded in *poiêsis*, even though the poem/commentary has no explicit, or has purposely veiled, theological references. Of the few Auden poems that do make Christian themes dominant and explicit, the best known are lengthy works which require extended detail approaching that of *The Sea and the Mirror*. *For the Time Being* (1941-1942 -- CP, 347-400) is subtitled "A Christmas Oratorio" and deals with Incarnated Christ and the impact of His incarnation on Time and choice.⁶⁶ *Horae Canonicae* (1949-1954 -- CP, 627-642) is a collection of poems written around the liturgical hours and deals with the necessity of sacrifice for the civic society ordered within a fallen world.⁶⁷ But

⁶⁶ For fuller treatments of this work, see for example McDiarmid, 86-98; Nelson, 56-76; Callan, 180-190; Monroe K. Spears, "For The Time Being", in *Auden -- A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Monroe K. Spears (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), 160-171; Stan Smith, *W.H. Auden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 161-165; John R. Boly, *Reading Auden -- The Returns of Caliban* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 136-139.

⁶⁷ For fuller treatments of this work, see for example Peter Walker, "Horae Canonicae: Auden's Vision of a Rood -- A Study in Coherence", in *Images of Belief in Literature*, ed. David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1984), 52-80; McDiarmid, 148-153; Nelson, 123-133; Smith, 181-186.

let us look at a shorter, more neglected, more pertinent poem written in the late 1950s, *Friday's Child* (CP, 675-676). Though about suffering and martyrdom -- the poem is subtitled "In memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred at Flossenburg, April 9th, 1945" -- indirection and ironic play still function significantly within the poem's twelve stanzas, giving us a concentrated example of the poetics, and its constituent features, that we have been defining throughout. The poem begins:

He told us we were free to choose
 But, children as we were, we thought --
 "Paternal Love will only use
 Force in the last resort

On those too bumptious too repent." --
 Accustomed to religious dread,
 It never crossed our minds He meant
 Exactly what He said.

Perhaps He frowns, perhaps He grieves,
 But it seems idle to discuss
 If anger or compassion leaves
 The bigger bangs to us.

If we return to the title, we find Auden has joined two words, "Friday" and "Child", which we might immediately associate with the popular rhyme describing the character of a child born on respective days of the week: Friday's child, we may recall, "is loving and giving". Given the opening stanzas, we may also associate "Friday" with Good Friday, the traditional commemoration of Christ's crucifixion.⁶⁸ In this context, however, we don't usually associate the word "Child". The Christ Child commemoration comes some four months earlier in the liturgical calendar. But by joining the two words, Auden keeps the Incarnation in view, as if to screen the redemptive themes he himself felt inappropriate to art.⁶⁹ He even keeps the figure of Christ in the background. He is not named either in the title or in the poem, and is dissimulated even further by the *in memoriam* directly following the title. Is the "He" of the opening first

⁶⁸ Cf. "Terce" of *Horae Canonicae*, particularly the last stanza: "It is only our victim who. . . knows that by sundown / We shall have a good Friday" (CP, 629).

⁶⁹ "With God a Redeemer, it [a work of art] has, so far as I can see, little if anything to do" (DH, 57 -- see above, Introduction, 29).

line actually Christ, or is it Bonhoeffer? For Bonhoeffer had also told us we were free to choose. Auden deliberately plays down any christology or soteriology.

By now this should not surprise us. Auden is not concerned poetically with the traditional categories of theology. In one of his last publications near the end of his life, Auden defined his position even further: "Christmas and Easter can be subjects for poetry, but Good Friday, like Auschwitz, cannot. The reality is so horrible, it is not surprising that people should have found it a stumbling block to faith."⁷⁰ These words echo not just the scandal of the death of God, but the greatest scandal of the twentieth century, the Holocaust, which prompted Theodor Adorno's earlier and now famous statement that, after Auschwitz, no poetry is possible. But Auden wrote these later words well aware that he had penned "Friday's Child", and had penned it in the memory of one who had died at the hands of the Nazis. Such words, then, are not without their irony. But they ought to be taken with a certain degree of seriousness nevertheless, for if Christ is at all the subject of *Friday's Child*, He is not faced squarely, being too serious for words.

By the second line, we have a clue as to where Auden is going. He now calls "us", that is, humanity, "children", thereby linking us directly with the person of the title. Christ's suffering and death may indeed be no subject for a poem, but when it is just as much we who hang on the cross as the supposed deity, the possibilities now open up. Universally it may be Christ who looks down from the cross, but generally it is humanity, and specifically the likes of someone like Bonhoeffer. This of course is an old theological idea, one which Bonhoeffer himself had made explicit in *The Cost of Discipleship*, for example.⁷¹

⁷⁰ W.H. Auden, *A Certain World*, 168. Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 232: "In the face of the torture of a child, of the death of love which is Friday, even the greatest art and poetry are almost helpless. In the Utopia of the Sunday, the aesthetic will, presumably, no longer have logic or necessity."

⁷¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller, revised Irmgard Booth (New York: Macmillan, 1959, rpt. 1961), 337-344. For instance: "This is the suffering of Christ which all his disciples on earth must undergo. A few, but only a few, of his followers are accounted worthy of the closest fellowship with his sufferings -- the blessed martyrs. No other Christian is so closely identified with the form of Christ crucified. When Christians are exposed to public insult, when they suffer and die for his sake, Christ takes on visible form in his Church."

Can we accuse Auden of dissembling, of disguising traditional incarnational and substitutionary theology under the artifice of rhyme? We need to suspend our judgement, lest we fall victim to further ironic snares.

The first two stanzas show the common assumptions of those long under religious authority. The offer of choice is viewed querulously, as it so often becomes anything but choice. One can even hear the purported "Paternal Love" of Nazism in these lines. But the martyr meant exactly what He said: we were free to choose. The matter of the will, of decision, is a clear matter: we all must choose. However, *what* we exactly choose, and the implications of our choice, are anything but clear, and Auden knows this. The only exact message from the cross is "decision"; nothing else is explicated. And this deciding moment is what we so often miss, or as in the dream of Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov, what we do not want.⁷²

By the third stanza, any christology is even further diluted with the double "perhaps". Was it justice (frowning) or mercy (grieving) which ultimately brought about Good Friday? For Auden the question is not worth discussing, since "the bigger bangs", our own fallenness and destruction, our much greater social executions, which make a crucifixion seem small stuff -- and with the date "1945" at the top, we know what the term "bang" is alluding to -- all this continues to persist. A precise doctrine of the cross gives way to humankind's ongoing struggle with its fallenness.⁷³

The great incarnational question is then posed in stanza four.

What reverence is rightly paid
To a Divinity so odd
He lets the Adam whom He made
Perform the Acts of God?

Here we see the divine image created anew through the power of Christ crucified" (342).

⁷² See the famous "Grand Inquisitor" passage in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin, 1958), 288-311.

⁷³ This emphasis on humanness fallenness in the shadow of the cross occurs also in *For The Time Being*, particularly in Mary's speech (CP, 379-380), as Brian Conniff explains in "Auden, Niebuhr, and *For the Time Being*", *Christianity and Literature*, 44: 2 (1995), 141-143.

How can we rightly worship a God who would deign to assume this depraved humanity?⁷⁴ Auden's boldness in posing the question is carried far enough to call such a Divinity odd. A playfulness creeps in ever so subtly here, though not quite irreverently. Auden then borrows Paul's theological analogy in Romans and I Corinthians⁷⁵ of Christ as the Second Adam, a borrowing not to corroborate Pauline christology, but to highlight human limitation: if we are to refer to this odd Divinity, we must do so in as human terms as possible. Our links with that Divinity lie in the Incarnation, in -- mark the emphasis -- performing, acting, making; that is, in the creative moment, which for Auden becomes the incarnational moment, a moment of will ("free to choose"). Auden's doctrine of creation is compacted into this one stanza; appropriately, too, it ends with a question mark.

Another question follows.

It might be jolly if we felt
Awe at this Universal Man
(When kings were local, people knelt);
Some try, but who can?

Like the words "reverence" and "odd", "jolly" and "awe" are foisted together, a tandem even more at odds. The Adam has now become Universal Man, and as such, who can rightly bow to him? "Jolly" seems a deliberately light and inappropriate word to use for a suffering Divinity. To whom then do the poem's capitalized terms refer more, Christ or humanity?

⁷⁴ Or would allow a divine act to be performed by humanity. The echo of Coleridge's famed distinction between the "Primary" and "Secondary" imaginations, and the definition of the "Primary" imagination as "the repetition of the finite mind in the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* [London: J.M. Dent, 1906, rpt.1993], 167), certainly rings here. Auden employs Coleridge's terms in the same essay in which he claims art has little to do with "God a Redeemer" (above, same chapter, footnote 69), the essay entitled "Making, Knowing and Judging". But for Auden the Primary imagination, being concerned with sacred beings and sacred events, is something passive, for the "sacred is that to which it is obliged to respond" (*DH*, 54). The Secondary imagination, on the other hand, being concerned with the profane, is something active (*DH*, 56). "Both kinds of imaginations are essential to the health of the mind", Auden claims, and the "impulse to create a work of art is felt when the passive awe provoked by the sacred beings or events is transformed into a desire to express that awe in a rite of worship of homage", such as the verbal rite of poetry (*DH*, 57). Auden's question in *Friday's Child* about "What reverence is rightly paid", is thus answered here: it is rightly paid in a *rite*, in an act, a making, a *poiésis* ("rite" and "art" come from the same etymological root, the OED informs us). However, as the succeeding lines show, the verbal rite is always tempered with indirection and irony. See also above, Introduction, 28-30.

⁷⁵ Romans 5.12-19; I Corinthians 15.22, 45.

The self-observed observing Mind
 We meet when we observe at all
 Is not alarming or unkind
 But utterly banal.

Though instruments at Its command
 Make wish and counterwish come true,
 It clearly cannot understand
 What It can clearly do.

By the sixth stanza, the poem's middle, Christ and humanity have merged into one, as if sacramentally,⁷⁶ though the weight now begins to shift towards humanity with the use of the capitalized "Mind". Paul's statement in I Corinthians 2, "we have the mind of Christ", is certainly at work here, and Auden's statement in the second stanza, "It never crossed our minds", takes on new meaning in light of it. But the greater emphasis is placed on our reflexive Mind, that mirror-like surface which can only reflect itself, having cut off the divine realm by the very nature of its self-reflection. When we observe now with this Mind, we observe the banality of ourselves, not a kingly gaze. This sixth stanza acts like a mirror reflecting the supposed "Acts of God", inferred from all the previous capitalized nouns, onto a very human surface.

This surface of reflection, our Mind, has proven an untrustworthy surface. Instrumental, disengaged reason has tried to place much under its command,⁷⁷ but both what it desires and it does *not* desire come true. We recall *The Sea and the Mirror*, with Ariel and Caliban as mirror images of one another, a "mutual reversal of value", and Antonio's claim to Prospero, "As I exist so you shall be denied".⁷⁸ In *Friday's Child* Auden keeps the theological connotations of such *coincidentia oppositorum* much closer the surface. Paul's struggle in Romans 7

⁷⁶ Auden's sympathies with sacramentalism can be seen in a passage from *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*: "All Catholic doctrines, such as the unity of the Two Natures, the special veneration due to the *Theotokos*, the Real Presence of Christ in the Mass, and Catholic practice, such as the liturgical use of the sensible -- vestments, lights, incense -- and the emphasis upon auricular confession, stress the physical reality of the flesh into which the Word was made. Admittedly, this can and at times has led to an obscuring of the Word behind the splendors of the flesh, reduction of the spiritual life to a mechanical and automatic routine of physical acts against which the Reformers were fully justified in protesting, but their consequent denial of the value of anything visible and objective made the Christian Faith into something even more difficult than it is" (42-43).

⁷⁷ See above, Chapter 1, 56-59.

⁷⁸ See above, Chapter 3, 138 and 176-177.

rings distinctly -- "that which I wish to do I do not do . . .", etc. And the ironic statement that the Mind "clearly cannot understand / What it can clearly do" is not only an echo of the first two stanzas, but seems to be wryly answering Paul's question in I Corinthians 2.11: "For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him?"

The next two stanzas again bring Auden's theological and aesthetic approach to a concentrated fore.

Since the analogies are rot
Our senses based belief upon,
We have no means of learning what
Is really going on,

And must put up with having learned
All proofs or disproofs that we tender
Of His existence are returned
Unopened to the sender.

Since the analogies on which our senses base their belief are basically nonsense ("rot" denoting rubbish, but also decay, depravity, a fallen state), and since they are *no more* than analogies, we have no means of fully accessing the realms beyond our senses. Those analogies include, perhaps first and foremost, the analogies necessary to art.⁷⁹ And so, as in this poem, we can only search the beyond indirectly. Ultimately, we must accept that neither our reflexive minds nor our art can, on their own accord, bring us face to face with the beyond.⁸⁰ All our attempts, bound to the "carnality" (Marion) of language and letters, are returned "Unopened to the sender." If Auden's sacrament makes present, if the sense of the sacred at all enters the text, it does so only in irony, ambiguity,

⁷⁹ In "Words and the Word", Auden writes: "We are always intimately related to non-human natures, and unless we try to understand and relate to what we are not, we shall never understand what we are. The poet has to preserve and express by art what primitive people knew instinctively, namely, that for man nature is a realm of sacramental analogies" (*Secondary Worlds*, 114). See also above, Introduction, 26.

⁸⁰ Hence Marion's, and Derrida's, notion of "the gift" of the other. Or, more theologically, we might say, of "grace". Marion: ". . . men cannot render to the Word the homage of an adequate denomination; if they can -- by exceptional grace -- sometimes confess him as "Son of God", they do not manage (nor ever will manage) to say him as he says himself" (140-141). Or again, Auden: "Rejoice, dear love, in Love's peremptory word; / All chance, all love, all logic, you and I / Exist by grace of the Absurd" (*CP*, 319).

paradox, silence, or distance. Concrete dialogue with this odd Beyond is in the form of a sealed letter.⁸¹

The poem concludes:

Now, did He really break the seal
And rise again? We dare not say;
But conscious unbelievers feel
Quite sure of Judgement Day.

Meanwhile, a silence on the cross,
As dead as we shall ever be,
Speaks of some total gain or loss,
And you and I are free

To guess from the insulted face
Just what Appearances He saves
By suffering in a public place
A death reserved for slaves.

Can soteriological theology offer us any help? Can we truly determine whether Good Friday leads to an actual resurrection? Other than the doctrine of creation that we ourselves have pieced together from earlier texts, Auden's only doctrinal response is a doctrine of reserve: "We dare not say". All we can go on are hints, and one strong hint for Auden is a seemingly unsuppressible sense of morality in believers and unbelievers alike. But it is simply a hint, and we dare not draw definitive conclusions from it. Or dare we? Auden returns to Friday and the silent cross. There we find ourselves "dead as we shall ever be", and our silence "speaks" of some kind of result, a *total* gain, or a *total* loss. Which is it, we shall never know; it may be, paradoxically and in league with Milton, Blake, and indeed Altizer, both. But whatever the result, "you and I are free". Now, had Auden ended his poem here, the previous ironies would have

⁸¹ Cf. Derrida in "Des Tours de Babel" (trans. Joseph F. Graham, in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985], 204): "What comes to pass in a sacred text is the occurrence of a *pas de sens*. And this event is also the one starting from which it is possible to think the poetic or literary text which tries to redeem the lost sacred and there translates itself as in its model. *Pas de sens* -- that does not signify poverty of meaning but no meaning that would be itself, meaning, beyond any "literality". And right there is the sacred. The sacred would be nothing without translation, and translation would not take place without the sacred; the one and the other are inseparable. In the sacred text "the meaning has ceased to be the divide for the flow of language and for the flow of revelation." It is the absolute text because in its event it communicates nothing, it says nothing that would make sense beyond the event itself" (as quoted by Cunningham, 384). On translation, cf. Auden (*Secondary Worlds*, 109): "Every dialogue is a feat of translation."

all culminated in a great theological statement of triumph: our freedom as secured by the cross. And all the ironies would have dissipated. But it does not end here. How are we free? We are free to *guess*. And the ironies return hundredfold. Just when a stable theological pillar seemed to arise, it is immediately knocked down, and we are left wondering what it is we are wondering about. What "Appearances" are saved?⁸² These "Appearances" are capitalized, linking them with all the previous words of Incarnation. Perhaps we should add, *whose* appearances are saved? Exactly who or what has the Incarnated Child rescued by suffering on a cross? Or what has Bonhoeffer's martyrdom accomplished? The poem doesn't answer for us. It can't. It can only return us to the opening line, and say that we must choose. But it can tell us that our choice will have to be made in suffering. And that suffering may be first and foremost one of not-knowing. As Peter Walker says: "The point is that you must be open to the irony of God's presence with us in the world, in the silence and in Christ's *incognito*."⁸³

In going back to the poem's beginning, we are forced to confront once again Dietrich Bonhoeffer. We find however that the poem is consistent with Bonhoeffer's own theology of "cheap grace" versus "costly grace", where "Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system", and "Costly grace is the Incarnation of God".⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer writes further:

But we are concerned not with ideals, duties or values, but with a recognition and acceptance of a *fait accompli*, namely of the person of the Mediator himself who has come between us and the world. There can only be a complete breach

⁸² The term "saving the appearances" is of course a term from astronomy, designating the attempt to account for the deviations from the theoretical symmetry, equality or perfect circularity that were observed in the heavens. Like Kepler before him, Auden's elliptical approach shifts the entire paradigm of theological discourse, altering the "center point" from which God's "appearance" is viewed, and changing our understanding of what exactly needs to be "saved". We could extend the astronomical metaphor to our entire discussion of philosophy and poetics: in "metaphysical geometry, the ellipse is incontestably a figure of inferior order, a mixture of curve and straight line that cannot be constructed with a ruler and compass. . . In a geometry of the line and compass, the ellipse is an irrational figure"; but under the new paradigm, "irrational proportions, supposing an infinite mediation, define precisely, as Kepler said with respect to the squaring of the circle, the relation of the creature to the Creator" (Hallyn, 214). Cf. Derrida's understanding of metaphysical geometry and its limits in his essay "Force and Signification" in *Writing and Difference*, 3-30.

⁸³ Peter Walker, "Auden Thoughts", *Theology*, November (1977), 435.

⁸⁴ Bonhoeffer, 45, 48.

with the immediacies of life: the call of Christ brings us as individuals face to face with the Mediator.⁸⁵

Discipleship means following Christ into the world through a "hidden righteousness",⁸⁶ through a "religionless Christianity", in Bonhoeffer's more famous words, and in kinship with Barth. It is confronting the *fait accompli*, the Incarnation, not through principles, but through the very stuff of life, in both suffering and joy, and in a way that is not fully comprehending. As Bonhoeffer quotes Luther: "Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge."⁸⁷ *Friday's Child* becomes an acknowledgement of, even an homage to, such bewilderment.

Affirmation

Notwithstanding the sublime topic and the final image of the "insulted face", *Friday's Child* nevertheless retains ironic, playful undertones.⁸⁸ Or perhaps we might better describe it as a "playing down", a quiet celebration of that about which the poem cannot ultimately speak. It is a profoundly Christian poem, certainly, but its profundity comes in its ironies, in its being less than what it may at first seem, and thus in its being more. By playing with the Appearances, it has saved the Appearances, elliptically, obliquely, tacitly, for all there can ever be are only appearances of the One we tremble before. In its own way, Auden's poem has been a celebration of sacrament, a sacramental rite.

This rite, together with the "play" *The Sea and the Mirror*, shows us that what we have called "negative theology" need not be negative in the sense of non-affirmative. The ineluctable gap between Word and word need not result in

⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer, 107-108. Also, from his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. Eberhard Bethge (London: Collins, 1953), 125: "It is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe. One must abandon every attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, a converted sinner, a churchman (the priestly type, so-called!) a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. This is what I mean by worldliness -- taking life in one's stride . . . It is in such a life that we throw ourselves utterly into the arms of God and participate in his sufferings in the world . . ."

⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 172ff.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸⁸ Auden: "What no critic seems to see in my work are its comic undertones. Only through comedy can one be serious." -- Osborne, 323.

an "anti-religious negation".⁸⁹ For the creative, hermeneutical *poiêsis* that circumscribes the gap with its limits becomes an almost liturgical rite which praises "what it can for being and happening" without attempting to fix *what is* or *what has happened*, or to divulge the secret of the *mysterium tremendum*. Auden's personal religion may have been self-effacing. Yet it was strictly tied to order, to ritual, to liturgy, to discipline -- when Auden went to church, it was for mass, never for the sermon. To him the sermon inclined towards that cheaper kind of grace. He was more interested in the grace that came through the mediacy of artifice, through liturgy, through sacrament, through incarnation. The ironic comments he once said about his technical craft could apply just as easily to his religion: "Blessed be all the metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, force us to have second thoughts, free us from the fetters of the Self."⁹⁰ Unlike the nihilistic tendencies which the postmodern stress on the ludic has brought in recent times, there is something always affirming about Auden's irony. Peter Walker, who was Auden's celebrant at Christ's Church Cathedral during the last years of Auden's life, notes that his poetry is filled both with a compassion and with a joy, and that these two work hand in hand amid the irony: "To have glimpsed the pity and the joy together is to be able to say Yes to life -- the quest of Auden, it might well be said . . . [is] a pilgrimage along the Affirmative Way."⁹¹ This Affirmative Way bears with it an embracing acceptance of life, with all life's greatness *and* limitations. It also bears with it a profound sense of humanity, one never immodest, one never congratulatory, but one always grateful.

This affirmation works to recover or *uncover* what has been generally eclipsed in our post-Nietzschean age, Nietzsche's own spirit of "yea-saying" he called Dionysian: "Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types".⁹² The Dionysian has transferred into this century more

⁸⁹ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 136.

⁹⁰ From "Shorts II", *CP*, 856.

⁹¹ Walker, "Auden Thoughts", 436. See also Charles Williams, "The Affirmative Way" in *Image of the City and other essays*, 154-158.

⁹² Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 562.

through the extremity of "joy in destroying".⁹³ Auden, even through the most destructive years of the Second World War, not only consistently said Yes, as if in an echo to Joyce's Molly Bloom, but as Nietzsche said of Raphael, he "*did* Yes".⁹⁴ And unlike Nietzsche's judgment of Raphael, Auden did so as a Christian. His theological poetics is not merely a "relentless destruction of everything that was degenerating and parasitical"⁹⁵ but an affirmative remaking of the very traditions which pass on the secret of the dissymmetrical gaze, a remaking that becomes a rite in all its artificiality and saving of appearances. It is a celebration of the created perfect circle "O" which becomes stage and cipher one and the same. It is a mirror which does not obscure or block reflection but multiplies reflection all the more, to the point where the reverse side of the mirror becomes known by or through its opposite. This is not *a/theology* which, in Mark C. Taylor's own description, wanders neither here nor there, hoping only to clear the ground for posteriorly "reinterpreting the notion of the divine".⁹⁶ The poetics that Auden manifests becomes the ground in and of itself, from which theology is continually reborn, from which reinterpretation is already and necessarily enacted.

Making, doing, performing, acting -- *poiêsis* in all its manifoldness -- offers itself as the negotiable route through the cynicism and nihilism characteristic of our present situation, our new "coming of age", to recast Bonhoeffer's phrase. Auden, though highly ironic, was never cynical, and his affirming stand reopens possibilities for a postmodern theology, in what ever dress those possibilities may eventually take -- neo-Romantic, neo-Barthian, neo-sacramental, etc. . The present reemphasis on "negative theology", though taking much of its impetus from a Hebraic understanding, and having been restamped with the generic label

⁹³ Ibid., 563.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 519. The final words of Molly Bloom's long stream-of-consciousness monologue which end James Joyce's *Ulysses* (ed. Hans Walter Gabler [London: Penguin, 1986]) read: ". . .and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (644).

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 730.

⁹⁶ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring -- A Postmodern A/theology*, 12, 15.

of "deconstruction", is no less Christian, as Cunningham points out in the final pages of *In the Reading Gaol*: "Deconstructionism is not some awful spectre to be banished if possible from the Table of the Lord. Theology needs the reminders of deconstruction as much as deconstruction depends on theology's. But, of course, as Derrida is foremost in recognizing, theology has never, ever, not dealt in the aporetic, the desert experience, the *via negativa*. Aporia infects the very ecstasy of the believer. It's what the mystery of the faith includes; it's always been at the very heart of the mystical 'marriage' of Christ and the believer".⁹⁷ Perhaps Auden's unique Anglo-Catholic religious sense provides an alternative for those long caught in the deep-seeded tradition of Hellenized Christianity. Perhaps it is within the celebration of our Christian rituals that we can ultimately affirm what we cannot ultimately articulate, what we cannot sustain in formulation or principle. Auden's theological approach points, indirectly, in this direction. It is a theology of making, a theology of reenacting, a theology of memorializing and paying homage, but all done in depths of irony. In the end it is a theology that relies on the Incarnational possibilities preserved and substantiated by *poiêsis*. Auden's Jewish contemporaries of the mid-century, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, offer an excellent summation of Auden's own theological outlook in their influential book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Artifice is the means by which the adventuring self loses itself in order to preserve itself."⁹⁸ Christianized, this statement becomes Auden's quest, and a profoundly new ground for individual and collective belief at the close of this century.

⁹⁷ Cunningham, 402. For the affirmative character in deconstruction, see also Gasché, 154; and Hart, 40-70

⁹⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 48.

Conclusion

*I am, I think; to exist, for me, is to think; I exist in as much as I think.
Since this truth cannot be verified like a fact, nor deduced like a
conclusion, it has to posit itself in reflection; its self-positing is
reflection. . .*

-- Paul Ricoeur¹

We began by speaking of poetics as a certain understanding or affirmation of the creative process,² and this understanding has turned in course on the concept and metaphor of reflection. Throughout reflection's history within our Western philosophical tradition we have seen fissures persistently emerge, cracks which ruin the symmetry of the metaphor and call into question the unity, totalization, and legitimation of philosophy's projects which rely on the metaphor. It is also within those cracks that we have seen the shadows of a theology, or better, the possibilities for a theological approach which affirms that which cannot be properly viewed or spoken of. Reflection, through its artificial enclosures and frames, yet presents, in Derrida's words, "the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed".³ If the critique of postmodernism has brought us anywhere, it has brought us to a more vivid realization of this "unnameable", and thus, as we have tried to show, to a reevaluation of our theological discourse and its limits. We began with Lyotard's understanding of postmodernity as inventing "allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented."⁴ It is appropriate here to return to Lyotard once again as we seek out signposts for our present condition and for our future strategies. "What is Postmodernism?", Lyotard had asked, as far back as 1979. He responds:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of

¹ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, 43; cited by Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics* (London: SCM Press, 1991, 1994), 70.

² Above, Introduction, 7.

³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 14.

⁴ Above, Introduction, 2.

good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.⁵

Lyotard's words are still relevant almost twenty years later, but we could now add to them: a postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a *theologian*, inasmuch as both the artist and the theologian are searching for new presentations of the unrepresentable, as both are seeking out and rewriting the rules and categories as they go. In this sense, a postmodern poetics conflates artist, philosopher and theologian, and sets them upon the same path.

Reflection, problematic as it may be within metaphysics, nevertheless becomes a critical and defining feature of this poetics. For it is only through the artifice of reflection that new vistas open up to the possible and the unnameable outside of metaphysics. We return to Kevin Hart's analysis of "negative theology" and its "double bind" by which God says "Represent me, but on no account represent me." Hart's expounding of this double bind is particularly descriptive for a poetics of reflection: "Representation is usually thought as derived from presence, but when the distinction between presence and representation is deconstructed we must think representation otherwise, *as that from which presence is derived.*"⁶ If we substitute Derrida's matrix of presence/absence here with that of another of Derrida's, the matrix of reflected/reflection, we may say reflection is that from which the reflected is derived. We could equally substitute into this formula many other binaries: reality/artifice, truth/fiction, original/copy, or Auden's sea/mirror -- those terms, that is, which we have found necessary throughout to enclose in inverted commas. These reversals, the first term *being derived* from the second, are not simply anti-essentialist moves which seek to do away with a philosophy and a theology that traditionally have *given privilege* to the first term over the second.

⁵ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 81.

⁶ Hart, 185, italics added.

Nor are they moves designed to entrap us in a nihilistic or formalistic house of mirrors with its *mise en abyme*.⁷ Rather, they point to the dependence of what the West has hitherto considered as "givens" upon what we have been calling *poiêsis*, the dependence of the concept (philosophical, metaphysical, theological, etc.) upon creation.⁸ Under such a matrix we might then speak of reflection in the same way as Derrida speaks of writing. Reflection, we have seen, carries a double legacy: it stands for our notion of a duplicated or reduplicated image, while at the same time it stands for our notion of inward, self-directed thought. The one is not separable from the other, for the mind's reflection requires the same sense of doubling as the mirror's reflection, and thus both notions are susceptible to internal division. The impasse to which this division leads is the same as that which Derrida has tried to show in the relation between speech and writing. Where we have always considered speech primary to writing, inasmuch as speech is closer to the consciousness of the speaker, and thus less prone to misinterpretation than writing, Derrida shows us that our whole concept of speech relies on the metaphor of inscription, so that writing is inherent in speech and is no less primary. This is Derrida's notion of *arche-writing*.⁹ Insofar as our concept of the reflected relies on the metaphor of the mirror, we could also then speak of an *arche-reflection*, in the sense of imitation, doubling, or mirror-imaging being necessarily part of our understanding of what is "given" or "true". It is on the basis of such *arche-reflection*, which becomes the condition of possibility for both reflection and the reflected, that new theological insights can begin to take place within postmodernism. Here is also Kevin Hart's "negative

⁷ This term coined by André Gide, and its employment within literature, are extensively treated in Lucien Dällenbach's *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989).

⁸ Ray L. Hart, writing as far back as the late 1960's, had seen the problem of the "given" for theology when he noted in *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968): "That the given evades (seems not to give itself in speech with power), and/or that response is infertile, so that theology is apparently without issue -- without a son to bear the name, except perhaps another bastard, which she wearies of bearing -- this is the most profound problem before theology today" (40). He goes on to say that theology must come to terms with both the "mediation" (tradition and linguistic heritage, e.g.) and the "immediacy" (scripture, e.g.) of its given, and ultimately with the "modulation of that given" (40-42), a modulation which, we note, is always a creative instance.

⁹ See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 56ff, e.g.; Gasché, 271-278.

theology", qualified thus: "we do not need a third theology, one neither positive nor negative -- a theology of paradox -- for negative theology, properly understood, *is* that theology: a discourse which works at once inside and outside onto-theology, submitting its images of God to deconstruction."¹⁰ A poetics of reflection is such a discourse put into practice, engaging artist, philosopher and theologian alike, and bringing new possibilities to bear upon old notions of God and of His created realm.

As Auden's own approach informs us, a poetics of reflection for the postmodern world allows us to think about Christianity and all its traditions under a paradigm of ongoing creation, where "creation" is at once theoretical and practical, the boundary fully erased. It does not close the book on religious or theological thinking, but opens it up to a continual rediscovery. As Auden reflects Shakespeare and *The Tempest* through a complete reworking and recontextualizing, a reflective or reflexive sequel, so to speak, in *The Sea and the Mirror*, and by doing so pays homage to "The Wholly Other Life" that runs as a fissure between the real (Caliban) and artifice (Ariel), so the Christian tradition and its Bible stand to be reappropriated in the affirmations of creative encounter.

Yet those of us who stand before the great mirror of Christianity have a responsibility towards it. Such responsibility is not, as it was once conceived, to uphold its changeless nature, as if there were ever such a thing. This great mirror is a reflection of our changing selves, collectively and individually. And so Auden says: "We shall be judged, not by the kind of mirrors found on us, but by the use we have made of it, by our *riposte* to our reflection."¹¹ Our *riposte* must guard against the idolatry of metaphysical reflection; as Derrida exhorts us in concluding pages of *The Gift of Death*:

We should stop thinking about God as someone, over there, way up there, transcendent, and, what is more -- into the bargain, precisely -- capable, more than any satellite orbiting in space, of seeing into the most secret of the most interior places. It is perhaps necessary, if we are to follow the traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic injunction, but also at the risk of turning it against that tradition, to think of God and of the name of God without such idolatrous stereotyping or representation. Then we

¹⁰ Kevin Hart, 186.

¹¹ "Hic et Ille", *DH*, 94.

might say: God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior.¹²

But at the same time we cannot remain idle, narcissistically fixed before our own gaze. For idleness, as much as idolatry, marks Narcissus' demise, as he pines away before his own fleeting image (*simulacra fugica*) in repudiation of all others.¹³ And the "idle word" stands just as much before judgement (Matthew 12.36 -- ῥήμα ἀργόν / *verbum otiosum*) as the idolatrous word or the "wordless idol" (I Corinthians 12.2 -- εἰδωλα ἄφωνα / *simulacra muta*). For both idle words and idolatrous words can act, in Marion's words, to "silence God", as opposed to oneself "keeping silent".¹⁴ Words *must* be employed, but responsibly, without idleness or idolatry. This dilemma and paradox, where "theological speech feeds on the silence in which, at last, it speaks correctly",¹⁵ forces us into the same position as Abraham before the altar with Isaac, where we must act out of the silent secret of faith. Perhaps here, just as Abraham is called to sacrifice Isaac, we must offer our words as a sacrifice, an active, living sacrifice (Romans 12.1) which "renounces all sense and all property" -- and perhaps, as Derrida says, it is here "where the responsibility of absolute duty begins."¹⁶ Perhaps the one who renounces his words as a sacrifice, "expecting nothing that can be *given back* to him, nothing what will *come back* to him. . . sees that God gives back to him, in the instant of absolute renunciation, the very thing that he had already, in

¹² Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 108-109.

¹³ Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, III, 432-436 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936):

*credula, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?
quod petis, est nusquam; quod amas, avertere, perdes.
ista repercussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est.
nil habet ista sui; tecum venitque manetque,
tecum discedet, si tu discedere possis.*

[Credulous boy, why do you grasp in vain at a fleeing spectre?
What you seek is in no place. Be averted from what you so love,
or you will perish. What you make out before you is only a semblance
of your reflected image. It possesses nothing in and of itself. It comes
and stays with you, and it will depart with you, if you are at all able to
depart.]

¹⁴ Marion, 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 96. In Romans 12, it is the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice (θεσπτόν ζῶσαν) which is our reasonable and spiritual (λογικῆν) service or worship (λατρεῖαν).

the same instant, decided to sacrifice."¹⁷ Perhaps this sacrificial gift refunds our notion of a "given" in a world where "givens" have lost their stable currency, and allows us to move forward responsibly on the basis of an absolute grace of the other as gift giver. And perhaps it is the poet who, ultimately, best refunds the given "word" and "world", the poet who, as Kierkegaard says, "buys this power of words to utter all the grim secrets of others at the cost of a little secret he himself cannot utter. . ."¹⁸ We would not be remiss then to join Auden's chorus in response to the incarnated Word: "*Safe in His silence, our songs are at play.*"¹⁹ However refunded, though, our management has its limits, even as it manages, ironically and self-reflectively, these limits; alongside Auden's stage manager we can only conclude:

All the rest is silence
On the other side of the wall;
And the silence ripeness,
And the ripeness all.

¹⁷ Ibid., 96-97.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay, 90.

¹⁹ "For the Time Being", *CP*, 389.

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