

A poetics of The Spindle Tree is needed in order to forestall misreading the poetry. It is to miss the fact that the story line—characters, setting, action—occludes an exposition of the force of its own poetic creation. Its actual intent is to exhibit or even perform the creative impulse of the work, or perhaps of the work of art in general. The poetics attempts to bring the hidden movement of the poetry into view.

Wind Hollow

A call that swallows itself, a charm
for that great sorrow

Two lines in this short, twelve line poem speak to the powerful thought of appearing by disappearing. The preposition does not express the complex relation between visibility and invisibility (palpability and impalpability) which lies at the heart of the question. The thought derives from Heidegger's reworking of Kant who distinguished what shows itself from what remains unmanifested. The ensuing difficulty of establishing an identity underlying the two substantives forces Kant to rely on the concept of continuity. The 'manifold' of sense stimulation that radiates from an unknowable thing triggers a receptivity that is active on our part. Through memory and association, the stimulus calls up an appropriate (appropriative) synthesizing concept that yields a conceptual identity for the event. The identity is a function of language. It serves to bind together the multiplicity that is the sensory event unto the unity of perception. Meaning, force, and substance derive from the successful synthesis. Never mind that the problem of the synthetic *a priori* is assumed rather than resolved, and that modern empiricism is thus grounded in a dogma (actually, two). The relation of emergence or genesis (how an unknown *x* can be correlated with object *y*) is left for future struggles; Husserl battles the same monster at the end of his writing.

Heidegger's advance is to reverse the problematic. Language maps a movement from the seen to the unseen. The thing's identity can be ascertained when it is present before us and tracked as one after another of its indications or indices is lost to view. The movement is essentially deconstructive. At an initial point, it takes the thought-construction, the 'object of possible experience' (in Kant's language), and, stripping it of marks, returns it to its trace nature. Beyond knowledge, it exerts an influence on what we can undergo while it remains 'in itself', what it is without the unavoidable distortion of human receptivity. Kant would say, we cannot perceive like God, whose perceptions are creative, but like a creature, whose perception derives from synthesis and its demand for unity. That 'the clasp is the thing's release' ascribes the deconstruction by inversion. To open the hand and release its grip gives a figure of emancipation whereby a perceived entity is freed to be (again) what it is and always already has been.

But a thing 'in itself' is not a substantive. It is evental, which means that our presumption of self-subsidence and 'independent existence' is off base. Heidegger goes further still. He wants to say that things lack a place (space, coordinates, time) until they take place, and then, for now, they are over. The thing is not there, it has no 'there'. Yet its being is real. Everyday language is poor at expressing it. The flaw (if it is one) is that language turns on instrumentality. It supplies a handle on things that allows us to manipulate them like equipment. In the current 'age' of being, the frame through which reality appears is usefulness or use-value. Inasmuch as the world is the totality of objects, Heidegger ends in the same vicinity as Kant.

In his reworking, Heidegger also adds dynamism to the relation between world and thing, object and being-in-itself. Earth, the repository of things, supports existents, but always from the other side. It is other to the world, a placeless place (the *khora* of the *Timaeus*), resistant to disclosure yet influencing the visible. While Merleau-Ponty will make the relation more interactive, for Heidegger, earth's recalcitrance expresses a strange and alien character that prevents revelation. By refusal to appear as such or by dissimulation to appear as something it is not, earth leaves an uncanny trace wherever the thing is granted release. Art—that is, poetry—is tasked with the record of tracings. It is responsible for bringing the appearance of withdrawal (earth's movement) to light, an impossible task since the least effort to make or produce such a record engages the clasp. In the background, one can hear Blanchot: ‘the language of the poem is nothing but the retention, the transmission of its own impossibility.’

Nonetheless, the poet tries (untries) to be responsible. The unclasping that must accompany the clasp is imperceptible ('moves too sparingly') and is missed. It is recessive, the grip dominates, and so, the thing's return—to itself, its own way of being—remains occulted. The generosity of what is given does not extend beyond the world's limits. In a Heideggerian vein, it is human destiny never to see the otherness but to be startled, stunned, disturbed, astonished, or set to awe and wonder by it. Yet the poet tries by listening, craning the ear in an obscure direction, guided by an unknowable orientation. That which is heard is muffled, throttled, or cut off as it retreats from reception. As if it were intimidated by presence or reticent to sounding itself, and preferred concealment and absence above all else. ‘Self-sheltering’ is Heidegger’s word for its shunning the light of disclosure. There, beyond determination, there is a call to put a name on the thing, but ‘a call that swallows itself.’ The name remains secret, secreted apart from everyday life and speaking. It is a ‘charm’—it possesses power, enchantment, magic—that could transform the sadness of being human into joy. But it is not available to us, lost to quotidian ‘pleasures you do not forbid.’ Are those pleasures a test, trial, or temptation to a stoical disposition, or part of a destiny of always to be looking away?

Prairie Rose

What is the gift
if it leaves you dumbstruck?

The poem initiates us into the perplexity of naming, the power and accomplishment of the act. It is naïve to think that to name is to attach a label that serves to pick the object out for whatever purpose. What is needed is a ‘right concept of language.’ Commonly we think language is confined to deployment in the world, where it functions to objectify and denote the furniture of the environment, Heidegger’s presence to hand: ‘The nature of language does not exhaust itself in signifying, nor is it merely something that has the character of sign or cipher’. Language is infected with an earth-element that must be taken into account. Mystery and enigma enter into expression, and what can be said of the world contains a muffled endorsement of this alien materiality. For practical purposes, the extraneous something can be overlooked. Ordinary language serves the ordinary ends of humanity: goal-directed achievement. When a different quality of care reigns, the influence of earth lies in the disruption of linguistical business as usual. Language embraces poetry and the poem exercises earth’s astonishing powers, dormant in the everyday. There may be no higher valence in poetry’s language but speech in the marketplace is ‘a forgotten and therefore used-up poem.’ Whether as a primordial or an essential spark buried in language, a force of the real announces the advent of poetry. The pronouncement can be by the presence of that scintilla.

The power to name is great power, Adam’s to name the creatures in Edenic times. His act figures the ‘fitting’ of the name to the named. It becomes the tag for human domination whereby objects become pieces of equipment. Names are technical terms that establish meaning in terms of a technology, a way of production. Objects are brought within a specific frame (*En-stellung*, for Heidegger) through which the world is viewed. This closure of language may be necessitated by practical concerns but is counter to a creative impulse. It may yield a system of differential significations or definite descriptions but occults a relation to the real. Only sensitivity to a word’s mystery can penetrate to the name inherent in the thing, the secret name. Such a name enables a momentary disclosure, a form hidden in the formless, and bring it to wordedness. ‘Only this naming nominates beings *to* their being *from out of* their being.’ It is the creative act *par excellence*.

Naming is not an elevation or an eminence that uplifts what is low. Where the poem says ‘The ladder must meet earth,’ we must not imagine Jacob’s ladder on which people and nations ply between heaven and earth. The ladder does not extend upward from the immaterial to worldly matter. Yet it is true that movement between the two exists. Or rather, art and in particular, poetry, exist because there is. That possibility is given by the ladder. It permits the ingress of earth into a region whose ‘game is known.’ The effect is to break open the game, that is, upset rules, undermine strategies, and revise

meanings. Then, as Heidegger would say, ‘everything is other than usual.’ Words like ‘cup,’ ‘boot’, or ‘tear’ tremble in their referential function, smudging the contours of representation and disturbing their worldly relations. Becoming emancipated from the heaviness of being this or that object, they flirt with the possibility of being things, that is, particles of earth. Sound bursts, letter shapes, placements of black lines on white: they are inoperative. They serve the function of meaning no more than ‘the murmur of your mind’ serves the function of thought. They have died to the world, and without our awareness, have returned to another, unprivileged setting.

Thus naming does not promote a world, augmenting the population with fresh revelations of being. That would be to revert to an early thought of Heidegger, that the poem brought being into a clearing. There one could dwell poetically. Now, that which the impossible task of poetry brings to openness is otherwise than being and beyond essence. Unfamiliar, estranged from the familiar, we meet the object reduced by the withdrawal of earth-material—as if this were a phenomenological reduction gone wild, with the ‘natural attitude’ suspended and no longer in play. This is a disaster in ordinary terms but a strange one in that (as Blanchot says) it leaves everything intact. The world is not depopulated or destroyed (nothing is destroyed) but an uncanny aura surrounds each object, as if its name were uncertain of the call to name. Or, as if it were ambivalent about its attachment to the named.

No surprise that naming ‘leaves you dumbstruck’. It preserves a sublimity of the extraordinary, its assault on established order and exigency for a new life. In an indirect way, it transmits its difficult freedom: responsibility to name the *terra incognita*. The poet is fairly immobilized in front of the imperative to speak. Although ‘dawn comes in words,’ the pre-dawn experience—dream or sleep or thoughts of the *Nachlass*—reduces his linguistic ability to mere reading of mute signs. Do they add up to anything like a picture of reality, as if language worked like Wittgenstein’s picture theory? Probably not if the mind is attuned only to the murmurous sound of failed calculation.

New Snow

I am late to learn the other

Who is the one, Cam, able to find ‘the tracings’? For the tracings are really tracings of tracings and are hidden—beyond discovery—as are all things sacred and of the earth. They are hidden in the backlog of language, a dark reserve that can never be brought to light—the essential silence of voice. Like dark matter in the cosmos, the sacred unspeakable is (if it could be said) more extensive, more voluminous, than the visible universe. Neither live nor dead, eschewing the life-death polarity, these infinitesimal residues (singularities) dwell in a perpetual winter. They are virtualities that await actualization. This is the moment of creation, which should not be considered as ‘having been made by a great artist’, but as an accord between the needs of the historical time, the striving between earth and world, and the attitude of the reader. When destiny calls, the unstable borderline that marks truth from untruth yields an artwork that, when graced by a right reading, illuminates what is. What is this right reading? As Heidegger puts it, ‘Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created by the work be that it is.’

Createdness is necessarily of new work that augments being with further refinement of life. An interplay of visible and invisible brings forth a purified materiality whose time is brief. Its vitality, suppleness, and friability do not last, any more than the crumpled body of the snow owl’s prey. That quickly stiffens before the eye. The work doesn’t entirely disappear: it appears in disappearing and in its place leaves a representable object. The thing of it has withdrawn to the non-manifest and the eviscerated form (the thing ‘reduced’) remains—for use in museum or private display. The work is returned to origin and replaced with a dissimulation hung in a frame or placed on a pedestal. In this sense, the poem announces a homecoming. The creative impulse—the urge or urgency of strife—has brought novelty to the world. It has implicated something of estrangement in the everyday, thereby enriching history by that uncanny quality. But since it also ‘wants the strike to take the breath away’, since it desires to grasp and make it its own, death is provoked. Hegel saw how naming performs its sacred duty through ritual murder. To say ‘this woman’ is to kill her in the flesh and blood and substitute for breath and sinew the linguistic marker, the word. At the same time, she of earth is returned to herself. The owl’s prey, both literally and ‘philosophically’ killed, is similarly returned to earth. Its ‘crumpled body’ is offered a place with the placeless. Having actualized an art object, this poem, it reenters the virtual realm to winter in the earth.

It would seem that earth is inherently humble, ‘passive more than passivity’, and unable to attack or defend. Its availability is absolute yet it must answer to time and season, cultural vagaries, and possibly destiny. Its otherness makes it unwanted. The part that shows itself is often unappealing since it wears the mask of the sublime. When it ‘cowers only’, what is its prayer? Here, it is difficult to say. Can we assume it is simply to become? For earth is a-swirl with virtuals that enjoy benefits of relationless nonexistence. Its untruth lies in its lack of being. It demands a force of vitality, an *élan vital*, to acquire being and undergo the belonging that signifies ‘world.’ That that body be granted form—that its formal application to be said be fulfilled—is the general

structure of the prayer. From our standpoint, the virtual (which is not the imaginary) has an inclination toward actualization. The palm opens to receive the tracing. The tracing given is of death itself.

To live is to feel the impatience of life and its exigencies. Prime among them is to be with a world. To be without one, outside, is ‘to cut all ties with human beings.’ It is to exalt in the Not, the negative that knows no opposition, Bataille’s ‘unemployable negation.’ In exile, to live nomadically, to embrace a messianic attitude (for what is to come answers to the enigma of work), one lives ‘without a why.’ Patience is the name of the other orientation. An impulse to ‘strike to take the breath away’ must be met by restraint, not a clench or grip, but a letting go. Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* opens feeling to vulnerability. Quelling its reaction, the heart grows susceptible to the other, that is without power or possibility. To say that it exists is to enlarge the domain of being to include virtuality, whose body is necessarily unclaimed because there is nothing to grasp. Nonetheless, it is lawful that only through impatience does patience operate. Desire, inclination, and preference are springs of action in the world that move history along its errant path. They also provide a frame through which the poem speaks—though in a direction counter to production of objects. The force behind ‘the strike’ comes from them. Everyday language together with its good sense derives precisely from this blow. Does its unavoidability make all language tragic?

Hemlock

I ask for ordinary things,
love, light, life

How is truth possible? The poem attests to the poet's inherent weakness, 'for words.' Words gratify the urge to signify or communicate, and also to express a contact with an otherness. When it is the last thing, 'the lie' is exposed by a kind of backlighting. Lying involves an intentional distortion of truth, not just a misfit by happenstance. Lying supposes an awareness of going astray, of errancy. The poet is one who is mindful of the open question, who speaks of the impossibility of truth, and who finds herself caught in the web of representation. Mindfulness redounds to the petition for 'ordinary things', as the poet asks. But everything ordinary, the entire world, fails to contain a single *thing*. Thingliness, an odd term, belongs to the hither side of meaning. Between lies sense whose function annihilates the thing and imprisons the speaker in substitutes, facsimiles, copies, or replicas. Truth cannot destroy the prison but does free the poem to distinguish the two, world and otherwise. Both guide poetry but differently. Understood precisely, there is but a single guide, the difference (in kind) between the two. Truth guides by lighting the clearing and drawing the thing to it. It is the light of the sun. Untruth, a dark light that borders on the light in the darkness, guides uncannily. It is 'scarcely more than a shadow' and then is visible only to total abandon. Then it is seen in the way that the invisible is, 'when the eyelids curl back.' In contrast to a well-lit object, untruth offers a pathless path. It is a movement across a desert, without goal or attainment. 'Just keep moving, there is nowhere to get to.'

Thus is the possibility of truth wedded to that of untruth. Only this formulation is misleading because untruth is impossible. The miracle marriage gives rise to the twin aspects of duplicity and enigma of the poem 'there in the vacancy.' The use of language may dupe one into extracting meaning or applying analysis but the resistance speaks otherwise. What is resisted? One may want to say it is the good sense of the poem, but an intractability goes deeper. If the resistance can 'take my breath away', the adversity of untruth is directed against life. To meet vitality with morbidity, inertia, or 'worklessness' (Blanchot's idea) speaks to an encounter with the death drive, a problematic concept of Freud's. It is imprecise to claim that the poem is 'about death.' Instead, the second, shadowy light of language has no concern with life or the living. In a short-hand way, it is the land of the dead, the underworld into which Odysseus descends to a dramatic meeting with Tiresias. Life ceases to be supported by language; the assumption of linguisticality is called into question—where it is named 'en-framing' [*Ge-stellung*] by Heidegger. Speaking never ceases but does cease to be comprehensible to humans. Language speaks, *qua* language, as if the universe continued to madly babble on, without thread of sense and dizzy with confusion—to have tuned out. Natural language is user-friendly but the language of earth and things has a different operating system, or operates without need of one.

Still, it is in neither truth nor untruth—both events—that the poem originates. Like Athena who leaps from Zeus' head, the poem springs from the split, the difference. As the history of Western metaphysics comes to an end, its founding concept, identity, morphs into difference. Lines of class membership that once were thought to contain tokens of an identity are now conceived as shared differences. Differences are shared in the way that each side comes to its side of the line and stops. Now think of the line as a middle that the two, truth and untruth, traverse. Take another step and don't think of a middle as a linear designation, but that the two interpenetrate each other in great intimacy. The sharing remains mysterious, the wedding, mystical or alchemical. Truth and its other possess an unassignable mutuality. In the paradoxical movement that lifts ‘the sky closer to me,’ the narrator discovers a remoteness that is not the opposite of contact, contact at a distance. Without applying the Romantic notion of a fructification (because conception here is no different from contraception), the poem springs from there. It is tempting to recall Heidegger’s single foray into the organic when he speaks of the antagonism of truth with untruth as pain. Pain separates its bearer from the others and at the same time, gathers everything else to its experience. That the poem arises from pain of separation is not meant as another flight toward Romanticism. Instead, untruth’s withdrawal from the meaning-game is not imperceptible. It leaves a trace within the field that shows as an abuse of meaning. As the faint discord of a counter-life, the poem is heard in that matrix.

The Spindle Tree

That spindle of fire
was the Euonymus tree
that would not root in your earth.

The spindle tree belongs to the genus *Euonymus*, which means ‘well-named’. Presumably well-named is named properly, which is to say that the name calls truly to the nomination that brings its being forth from the abyss. The abyss, the *Abgrund*, is not the groundless hole into which objects endlessly fall, but from which they are carried aloft by an updraft that originates there. The well-named rises to our world as it juts into featureless earth, and leads the pack. By virtue of the fit or propriety of designation, it is exemplar, a paradigm of worldly being. It is among the most upright as it traverses the space of difference, the pain of strife that must persist between world and other, being there and absolute estrangement.

It is thus figured as the tree of pain. The historical fact is that the cross on which Jesus was crucified was constructed of its wood. It is an accomplice to the murder of the man-God, the messenger who came to tell of our human ‘misdirection of things.’ The well-named spindle tree, as guardian of the realm between truth and untruth, being and otherwise than essence, shares in the guilt of human unmindfulness. Insensitivity to the call from beyond life at the same time is a deafness to life’s call, its need to have objects so named that humanity’s place in the real can be remembered. Only then can humans serve their destiny ‘under the stars’—to engage thought to where it coincides with what really takes place. This is a Heraclitean idea, that reason is common to all but our over-active subjectivities cut us off from it. The guilt that bears endlessly down on limbs and trunk leaves the tree susceptible to the onslaught of nature. The harsh winter world inflicts a wound that is reparation. The destiny of the well-named underscores the life’s vulnerability; it will no longer be upright in reach toward the heavens.

Wood of the crucifix and complicity in murder, the spindle tree is image of death. With help of Roman centurions, it inflicts the mortal wound on the body divine. It is not the sword that kills but anoxia, death by suffocation, a long, slow, tortuous dying. Similarly, the tree dies slowly: first crippled by frost, then repaired unsuccessfully, then condemned to the flames, then kindling set in place, and finally, the match. The event turns a spindle of wood to one of fire. The well-named speaks most essentially in that element. It does so because it is closest to language, that is, a language without human ways. In the ephemeral state, the well-named can resolve to be transformed. It then has renounced the name as well as the call to name or be named, and participates in language’s speaking, the universal mother tongue. It would seek renunciation not for its good name (which apparently it lacks) but for the good of the all. That good is served when suffering existence is lightened. This occurs when sadness is lessened and converted to a joyous embrace of human folly.

Euonymus does not root in earth. Earth provides no shelter for what is of the world. Yet because of the perfection of its name, Euonymus conveys—more than other objects at hand—the logic of the other. From the very midst of the pain of strife, in the design that simultaneously emerges from discordant struggle, the nature of language that ‘does not exhaust itself in signifying’ is tendered. It is affiliated with another element, fire. An incandescence that consumes a dwelling place constituted by ‘inner worldly objects’ replaces wood’s familiar stability. The spindle tree becomes fire and is no longer fit for use as decorative planting or winding skeins of thread. The transformation intimates that with respect to the otherwise than language, different laws now have authority. There (if one could use the demonstrative) is not a lawless realm, anarchical in all things, but of regulation beyond reason, *ratio*. Expended in burning is the refusal of the refusal: the attachment to an order blind to dissimulations of the resistant earth. Only through the double negation can poetry—the thought heard in the exchange—come to be. Only a receptivity to the end of concealment yields such thought. Inasmuch as the conflagration (like the lightning bolt) figures the evolutionary stance, the narrator too proclaims her renunciation of forgetting. She is thrust into a position to listen to its annunciation of work.

The Holly Bush

the earth dearly wants
my step to press it and leave mark
you could then read and praise.

From where does the need for the poem arise? —an echo of a more famous question, what are poets for in destitute times? That poetry is essential for world-building, for the ever more inclusive disclosure of what is, is insufficient. Once, to live in the ‘house of being’ meant to dwell poetically with a truth co-emergent with the light. That placed the authoritative impulse on this side of the intervening chasm. It would have made the poet master of her words, invoking them in response to her heart’s concerns. The field of meaning then vibrated with an exigency within as it spoke words already passing before her mind, as if to a soul’s inner urgings. However appealing the view (in its orphic or Romantic guise), it leaves off where the other begins. That is ‘in the black mirror’, in a mirror that looks darkly and reflects the imageless. To reflect the imageless is to indicate the door or window to ‘an open field’. There, an enchanted place waits in which things are returned to themselves and offer their venture into singularity to the one who dares accept. The return is no homecoming (return to being) but a sojourn outside. The poet’s vocation is not to heal the oblivion of being—which would be presumptuous—but to remind us that homelessness is no consolation. Unlike Wallace Stevens’ man with the blue guitar, the uncanny encounters with things as they are in themselves interrupt the poet’s sensible habitude and her reliance on the symbolic order. It raises the temperature of feeling. Only a higher tonality alerts her to a different operation of thought. With inner hearing sensitized, the call to let the name be named—the thing to be be-thinged—can be heard. Then one comprehends that the earth too needs poetry to come into existence.

The need is the valence that the dark has. It must be understood with precision. The other has no need for expression, for meaning brought to light. Nothing is there, hence, no founding or grounding in meaning is possible. The call to name, however, is for the impossible—the impossible name, the impossible response, the impossible movement that rends the semantic field. As great a law-giver as Moses isn’t capable of it. It is impossible to name what subsides beyond naming but like a silent intimation of the secret, it is named. An enigmatic transaction takes place in feeling. Because the heart records in minute detail that which concerns it, the poem arises thoughtfully. The poet is able to project the one thing beyond the world that is needful. Poetry is herald of the outside.

To walk the pathless path—meander through the desert of thought—is praiseworthy. It takes effort and courage, to be sure, but more to the point, sensitivity to the space before words. There, found together with forgetfulness of being, a ‘void as a dream’, is something other than an abyss that empties everything of everything and leaves only the

shambles. Instead, an intimacy exists that issues permits without restriction for what is to be. It provides a release that at the same time respects where the world ‘divides itself cleanly and remains separated.’ The difference of disruption is the leaping effect of beginning, always a beginning again. The poem makes manifest the fact that repetition is creative. It produces the same but differently. The difference is not simply a numerical one, but of kind or nature. To mark the (same) trace by allowing one’s step to leave an impression is worthy of praise. The laudable event is the allowance. An encounter with intimacy awakens a heightened listening in whose receptivity a sounding of impossibility is heard: a sound impossible to bring to audibility. Heidegger calls it stillness [*das Stillen*]. Loosening her grip on the world, the poet grows intimate with the other as well as the difference that resonates between. Thus manifested is an event with the power to still—like the space of a great cathedral, the might of nature, or a timely admonition. The poem takes place in a language of palpable arrest.

The still point of the turning world is a moment of extreme struggle. World is most insistent, earth most resistant. Drawn in both directions, the poet must adopt an attitude of waiting ('by the window/if near, if not, by an open field'). It is not a posture of her subjectivity in which she waits *for* this or that, fame, fortune, happiness, and so forth. To wait is not a transitive verb. She waits for nothing. She attends (waits on) that which is about to take place in the barren space, womb of the poem. This marks the occurrence of language, perhaps Language with a capital. As language thoughtfully occurs and the poem brought to the light of the world, the poetic function is clarified. Because the poet’s work is that of mid-wife or doula, Plato was worried that the philosopher, lover of wisdom, would be out of a job. When it came time to populate his just city, he accordingly prohibited poets from entering. Yet the line that separates one from the other, poet from philosopher, is of doubtful construction. Certainly, philosophy requires the frontier to be distinctly marked so as to avoid overextending the understanding (as Descartes put it) and falling into error. For him, identity rules forever. Poetry, by contrast, follows the path of errancy, which is the path of thought. Errancy has always already thrown its hands up to limit. It is subliminal. It can ‘never withhold’ because its grasp is a released one. The poet can never be Moses, giver of law. There is no mosaic to the poem, no pattern, hymn, or liturgy to its resounding echo of nothing, an echo that comes prior to the sound. The poem is always an overreaching.

Witch Hazel

the angel of terror, for instance

In the role of scribe, the artist, the poet, listens intently for a precursor to language. In the silence before words, her ear opens to the solicitation of an inaudible resonance.

Listening, she inscribes. The difference between the inscription and the activity of the labyrinthine canals of hearing is another difference. Roughly, it parallels the difference between world and earth. The letters inscribed (the syllables pronounced) should not be conceived as translating sentences whispered by the muse, naked to perusal by an elevated soul. Suchlike don't exist. Nothing exists in earth, sepulchre of virtuality. All there (if that can be said) awaits actualization. The crossing of the line is announced by the createdness of the poem. It is record and register of the poem's seizure, its taking hold of what offers itself to the naming while within the very act of retaining its offer. Generosity, not niggardliness, prompts the retention. The gift that reduces earth's self-closure at the same time restrains its intensity to a tolerable level. What is the name of the gift so bestowed to the poet? The poem clearly names it: terror.

In its flight upward over the abyss, the adventurous venture with earth reveals to the poet that no power or possession exists to buffer the experience. Language in itself is a rawness of being without being. As with Rilke's thought, the angel that speaks it 'with a flaming sword' is terrifying. Perhaps earth shelters itself from life in order to shield the hapless creature. Its speaking is muteness to the human ear. Otherwise, madness and self-destruction would be the norm of humanity on this planet. [Perhaps earth speaks in a stage-whisper that is more or less audible.] The work of transcription of terror or its translation into speakable fragments runs counter to that generous spirit. Terror is an excess, a maturation of sublimity. Poetry continues a struggle 'to love the eternal point', a magisterial impossibility. It teaches love of the exceptional and unique.

Singularity ineluctably wears the gown of terror. In escape from categories and predicates, the poem gives voice to bare being, to what Levinas calls the *il y a*, the 'there is.' An inhuman rustling of purposeless conspiracy whose multiple meanings cancel one another, being as such 'speaks', on its own and derivatively through a series of recovered traces. Though there is no singing school, poetry is an assembly of monuments to the trace. Mark of the singular, each poem raids the inarticulate to speak the same lesson —'this is not mine.' Singularity cannot be owned; it is inappropriable and offends all manners of propriety. This fact lies at the heart of the paradox. For the experiences most near and dear, 'a leaf caul/crisping underfoot, birdsong above/scent of pepperweed' remain most remote. Earth protects itself. It enlists an urging toward discourse. Signification and communication follow. The self-protection shields the terror but leaves only the name behind, 'empty.'

A danger lies in turning away from excess. It is to put on 'a cloth of complacency', that dulls acuity and imposes limits. It blunts the difference by proceeding 'as if earth

replicated heaven.' More original than the origin of art, earth is double of nothing. Its chaotic disharmonies can yield parodies of its unconditionality but there can be no copying the unbespoken. Earth attaches to no thing. And the things of earth, for which the poem speaks, cling 'heedlessly' and fall away at the slightest breath. They are seeds in which life is suspended, temporarily put out of play, and partake equally of the living and the dead. Their appearance in the world is celebrated with joyous anxiety, joy in their beauty, anxiety in how death clings to them. For all beings, none is too young to die. This poignancy belongs essentially to the poem.

The fervent human wish is for home. The great circle of Odysseus's journey repeats itself with each heartbeat, in the very circulation of the blood. Since homecoming must be put aside, the poet is abandoned to a strange land. Far from her birthplace, undocumented in atlases, without a database, the poet takes 'the road below' and follows its itinerary. A disciple of an errant way, she studies lessons given in hint and happenstance. Hunger of course, but appetite and instinct are no guarantee. An unexpected rush of intensity—that alien music—can alert the ear turned inward. But what will put the world sufficiently on hold that the reverberation is caught? It is an odd way to put it but 'a cloth of complacency'—inasmuch as it recalls the Stoic indifference to the indifferent—might serve. When care turns from interest in the world but without engaging nihilism, thought is responsive to the impossible, the event that surpasses expectation. Such responsiveness (or responsibility) does not seek an answer but cherishes being with a why. As Levinas says, it is 'the experience of something absolutely foreign, a pure "knowledge", or "experience", a *traumatism of astonishment*.'

The fact of responsibility clarifies how the essential act of the poet is renunciation. What comes into view is an ancient affiliation with the priest, the person of a religious orientation. To abandon earthly possession and to embrace dispossession by spirit are shared pursuits. Is it too much to say that both seek an experience of singularity? That both respect the terrifying nimbus that safeguards the singular. That both are willing to pay the price of attendance. Partly, the cost involves a block on our conventional and self-assured production of discourse. Partly, it requires giving up power, the world-making power inhering in language. And partly, it means an encounter with what remains alien to life. Yet the terrifying angel (as Rilke says) supplies a purgative for freedom. This is not a freedom of action but of restraint. The poem recollects how there is no place to get to. Consequently it has nothing on its own to say. Poised on the rim, the poet as scribe can wait for that which is given to be said.

Vespers [Over my left shoulder]

a body
reborn with a silver spoon
as it hides behind its own silhouette

Is an ineffable duality the constant obsession of poetry? Does the poem remember a forgotten world, of enchantment or horror, in order to recall us to it? What does the twosomeness that drives the poem—the ‘second light that casts two shadows’—mean? One thing is clear: the work does not lie in a Romantic disclosure of the coincidence of opposites. The point at which polarity becomes complementarity and transcendently surpassing is not the objective. The second world is not this world’s other half, in relation with which a wholeness is re-cemented. This world has no second world behind, beyond, or above it, in a Platonic sense. If secondness has meaning in this context, it is estrangement. Because the world is the totality of all that is, the otherwise cannot exist. Nor can we rightly say it lacks existence or is excluded from being since the very saying attributes that which is simultaneously denied. In terms of world, counter-world is paradox and enigma. It cannot be brought within the confines of knowledge (or any confines) because it behaves like anti-matter. Contact of anti-matter with matter is explosive. Similarly, the other is perceptible only in how it abuses this world. It afflicts the world-making apparatus of language with inoperability. We cannot open to a view about which we can speak. There is no ‘competent someone/with things.’ Perhaps to consider a ‘second light’ that radiates from a source other than our worldly lighting suggests a flaw in our counting system, in numbering itself.

To fail the exam in the numbering game, as the narrator acknowledges, exposes an insensitivity to the alien. There are, after all, two shadows: one at home and one in hiding. The concealment is irreversible. Derived from refusal, it is related to hearth and home, the familiar and ordinary. There is a special power that belongs to place; Greek thought associated it with immortals, gods, nymphs, or genii. In our more skeptical age, it can be traced to the need for fixity. Without a device like a pushpin to ‘fix each thing in place,’ permanence cannot be had. Stability in human life means pinning objects down, in defiance of earth’s ephemeral nature. The smooth operation of concepts is the guarantor. When that is disturbed, even momentarily, the terror of chaos threatens. To prevent breakdown, language must be a totalizing experience. If there is escape, it must be so subtle as to almost preclude discovery. The hiding place must be as secure as hiding ‘behind its own silhouette’, or jumping over one’s own shadow. At the same time, human life is short on constancy ‘firm and planted’. It is sublunary in mood. Within a changeful milieu, the outside presents itself through excess. Over-abundance is relegated to an errant remainder assigned to neither location nor time. To the familiar, it is alien. To the ordinary, it is extraordinary. It is desert sand strewn over well known everyday pathways in order to obliterate them.

The narrator does come to confess his inadequacy to cope with the duality. The confession verges on making a virtue of a necessity. The light that enters a leaky roof serves ‘only to multiply your glory.’ However, does a ‘competent someone/with things’ really exist? Here one has to imagine a conversation with a whirlwind from which God speaks, or with a madman with his ungrammatical ramblings. With things, no means of verification exists. Each singular remains beyond the pale of language. In that case, language would operate as with rumor, always claiming truth while flaunting uncertainty, always incontestable, always already said beforehand. Lacking a horizon, language would cease serving meaningful communication. Totally labile, its plasticity would echo the space before speaking, when the rush of sense accelerates to pure senselessness. There, prior to representation and knowledge, its shock leaves the would-be speaker at a loss for words. With meaning-making suspended, in the brush with anoxia, her experience is a rare one; it is of language. Not of a sovereign possession that bespeaks of everyday fluency, but of a hopeless insanity. The poem suffers that poignancy, when success in expression drops to zero and dreams—that ‘an ocean encircles earth’ by which to navigate the interstices—evaporate.

Contact with the silent space is no placid lingering. The poet finds herself in the midst of a mystery, not of the detective book variety but rather, the *mysterious tremendum* that Rudolf Otto discovers. Openness to exposure brings blindness, confusion, and vulnerability. A trembling reaches to the cells of the body, exempting nothing. Life itself is only a tremor of protoplasm. A right presence of mind recalls the promise implicit in that ‘slow-fall’ back into the everyday mode, namely, that one is to be addressed. Address and response together belong with relation. The null space harbors the promise: language will be available to ears that hear. An ecclesiastic or messianic message, moreover, is not invoked. It is more simply to avow that language exists and is given. Inasmuch as the poem performs an avowal, it tends to ring in our ears, an excess, a haunting, a tinnitus that won’t be silenced. The content is found not so much in the words (‘Captain, my captain’) but with a resonance. This paralinguistics is the event (or advent) of poetry.

Crocus

I cannot be missed, I cannot hide.

It is a riddle. The I is so subtle, so evanescent, that concealment is out of the question. How can the poem not be hidden if it is the gossamer of infinity? And cannot be held by the web of language, which is the web of human life? There is a special ‘ring of invisibility’ that it wears. Plato makes reference to the ring (as does Tolkien) but misrepresents its function. For Gyges, Plato’s character, its power serves his self-interest in how it renders him unperceived whenever he wishes to overcome an adversary. It inflates his ego. He is invincible. It is otherwise with the poem. It is more like the child in her hiding place ‘behind your heavy drapes.’ Innocence protects from knowing eyes what can’t be hidden or come to revelation. The philosopher would speak of the conditions that make possible the visible. But really, the child’s mind persists in relation to the outside, neither seen nor invisible, present nor absent, in nor out of being. The rich brocade of the world that holds fast our minds occludes for her very little of the ‘color, tint, and hues’ of things. The child remains in contact with what Heidegger calls the clearing—the effectuality of lighting—and takes in the secret name of each as it is called again into being.

The poem is lit in the relation between, the difference, that for which concealment is impossible since it conditions all world-making and -unmaking. One could speak in the acoustic register (as Heidegger) or return to the default one, the optical. When we turn clear-sighted to the world, vision becomes an aperture, an open portal through which nothing moves in and nothing moves out. Then this seepage from outside in itself is poiesis, the creative impulse that fabricates what comes forth: artwork. The future is advent of the poem’s creative vision once actualized in and through language. Simply put, the living edge of human speaking is everywhere that the outside has been disseminated. Where is that? To each and every entry into every where. So it is that this nothing—not to be confused with our not-yes—is the very matrix of our language.

The aperture is placed where desire meets non-desire. It is openness qualified by resistance to openness. The realized form, imbued with novelty, is an accomplishment that includes its impossibility, the seed that rejected the sowing. The creative advance toward the future—the ‘command to bear fruit’—is repeatedly undercut and forced to move in a non-linear, explosive rhythm. The light that makes manifest, the *lux fiat*—is anathema to it, as if the outside were repulsed by the command to ‘become light that gives itself away.’ Its wish is to keep to itself, inert to the living matrix that would confabulate exploits that do or do not come to pass. This said, one must acknowledge the poem—even the most ‘authentic’ poetry—is only a sketch of the real situation. The sketch is another name for the rift, the difference figured as aperture. It is helpful, however, to imagine a field-reversal, white for black, black for white. Then, imagine the sheet of paper seen from above, then from below. From above, it is the design for some

further and more evolved piece. From below, it is the white paper crisscrossed by lines of division that separate adjoining parts.

It may be appropriate to linger with this thought. Otherwise, one is driven to suppose that with thinking, there is somewhere to get to. On the contrary, a movement that calls for thought takes place by itself once recognition dawns that there is no such place. Everything that exists is here, in the thinking that accompanies what is taking place. Thought takes part in a larger event, the presencing of being. The desiring of it is thinking. This is not the same as saying that thinking makes designs, which is true. Rather: thinking is the designer part that includes remembering design counts. Poor design can be fatal.

To return to the rift once more, in fascination of the difference, a post-modern fascination. Image a line drawing of a house.

The sketch is a work in how to divide the sheet of paper into two things, figure and background, whereas before it was one thing, all whiteness. The rift/sketch or the *Gestalt*—both unwork the formless nature of the precursor—energy. That undoing is the inverse of the usual direction of the voiding event. It so to say voids voidness, from which human createdness can proceed. The trace of absolute emptiness, as well as the virtual field of marks that it leaves, bequeath poetry to us, and all the luminous art that arises with its nimbus. To work with such unworking (Blanchot's *desoeuvrement*) is, in the words of *Crocus* to be ‘among those who counsel seeks.’